

Theology and the Limits of Philosophical Reason

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The revival of philosophical interest in the phenomenon of religion is an interesting aspect of contemporary culture. As with any revival, it carries within itself both classical themes and the potential for a new reading of them. In connection with this, Arne Grøn's thesis on the possibility of an approach to the philosophy of religion as the *philosophy* of religion seems to me to be extremely timely and fruitful. It contains at least two theoretically significant nuances: firstly, the idea of the presence of philosophically interesting aspects within the phenomenon (of religion); and secondly the thesis that religion is or can be a theoretical challenge in relation to philosophy as a whole or to a particular philosophical paradigm.

One of the serious problems in this context is the question of the definition and localization of religion. Grøn proposes an approach, emphasizing that «religion speaks of the world by speaking of something *other* than the world». This approach is highly useful, for it provides a theoretical paradigm for analysis in which the degree of abstraction satisfies a philosopher's taste. At the same time, the complexity of localizing the phenomenon under analysis arises: it is difficult to conceive of every religion challenging every philosophy in the same way, even if it is described in philosophical and abstract terms. Is there an alternative, harmonizing advantage of an abstract level with the possibility of historical recognition? In his analysis of the philosophically significant aspects of religion, Grøn draws on an interpretation of the history of philosophy in its relation to the phenomenon of religion.

Would it not be more fruitful to speak instead of the relationship between philosophical and theological tradition? I believe that the potential of Grøn's thesis will be expanded if the analysis is defined as one of the relationship between (Western) philosophy and (Western) theology, in which both phenomena are examined as theoretical developments within the framework of a single dialectical process.

In his analysis of the relationship between religion and philosophy, Grøn places emphasis on the problem of rationality – the issue that has been historically relevant in almost every philosophically interesting encounter with religion. The author defines «challenge» entirely correctly as «the question of the perspective nature of human rationality». Grøn also emphasizes the necessity of reformulating this challenge with an account of the current level of scientific knowledge and diversity of experience of our time. The question regarding the limits, or absence of limits, of the human perspective is an «eternal» one. How can we formulate it today?

I agree with Grøn that «a prevalent feature of modern philosophy is that it takes finitude as *conditio humana*, maybe itself becoming a direct philosophy of finitude». Is there a theologically inspired alternative to this philosophy of finitude? Can it stand up to serious philosophical criticism?

In the example of «the line of thought from Kant, through Hegel to Kierkegaard», Grøn demonstrates how philosophical models of subjectivity (limited perspective) are enriched by entering into contact with a religious paradigm

that presupposes the possibility of removing all limitation. The usefulness of these models may be evaluated on the basis of philosophical study, which exceeds the framework of our discussion. My argument for the necessity of such a discussion is founded on the telling resonance of Grøn's ideas with certain aspects of the Russian religious-philosophical tradition, within which the problem of the limits of philosophical rationality occupies a central place. Russian philosophical thought (of the 19th century) aimed at a study of the so-called «transrational» model in direct dialogue with two players: classical German philosophy and Christian theology. It is interesting that the result of this «dialogue» was precisely that displacement of accents that is noted in Grøn's analysis. In accordance with the Russian tradition, we should speak not of rationalism and irrationalism, but of the limits of rationality and of overcoming these limits. The dependence of the Russian discussion on this philosophical line, analysed by Grøn, is obvious. At the same time it should be noted that the Russian philosophical project, which is sometimes called the «Eros of the impossible», comprises a certain originality. This originality consists in the fact that the critique of philosophical rationality is above all a critique of a moral-theological character: the Russian philosopher locates the roots of philosophical rationalism as well as its organic nature not in epistemology, but in normativity.

Kant's philosophy is often identified with the essence of Western philosophical rationalism and becomes the object of the Russian critique. Within the framework of the Russian religious-philosophical tradition, Kant's primary contribution is considered to be his tireless attention to differentiating the spheres of theoretical and practical reason and his thesis that «the ought is a category of consciousness, a form that cannot be derived from some particular «material» content».¹ But Kant later destroys the potential of his own idea when he describes the ought in his categorical imperative, subordinating it to the theoretical criteria of universal applicability. Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out that within the con-

text of Kant's paradigm, only a theoretical transcription of the act, i.e. a description of its content abstracted from the volitional tone, is possible. Philosophical rationalism, understood in this way, contains a number of shortcomings. For example, it cannot grasp such an important aspect of the normative tension of individual subjectivity (the will) as its direction in/toward the future. The theoretical transcription (transcription into content) lacks a language for conveying future time: the future disappears or becomes the past when described in the grammar of rationalistic philosophy. Does theology contain an alternative to the theoretical limitation of philosophical language?

In Russian theology Christian symbols are interpreted as a means of expression of the difference in levels between reason and morality.² Reason is the paradigm of the possible, morality the paradigm of the demand (the willed and the ought). Christian symbols witness not of an opposition between reason and faith, but of the tension of the relationship between the possible (given) and the demand. The philosophy of young Bakhtin was an attempt to find an adequate philosophical language for this intuition. From this point of view, the opposition of reason and will must be described as the architectonics of individual subjectivity: the relationship between «myself for myself» and «myself for others». Within the framework of this architectonics, the supratheoreticality of normativity is perceptible – in its very radicalness, consisting not in the content of the act but in the character of the demand.

The figures of Ivan and Aleksei Karamazov are a kind of icon of (the) two paradigms of rationality. Ivan rejects God because he cannot understand (through reason) and accept his world; Aleksei experiences his faith as a form of paradoxical responsibility for the world. This paradox consists in the experience of responsibility beyond the possibility for control. Prince Myshkin is another well-known figure of the very same paradigm of *responsibility for all*.

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. University of Texas Press, Austin 1993, p. 25.

² The most interesting works in this field are those of Nikolai Lossky (1870-1965) and Boris Vysheslavtsev (1877-1954).

The search for a philosophical language capable of conveying the experience of responsibility of a radical nature is in no way an exclusively Russian project. The overcoming of the possible, and of the limits of every human per-

spective, is a theme in many philosophical traditions. In the history of European thought, this theme is one of the encounter between the philosophy of reason and the theology of the Christian church.

LITTERATUR

Olle Larsson och Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre: *Reformationstiden — Kultur och samhällsliv i Luthers Europa*. 264 sid. Studentlitteratur, Lund 2001. — Berndt T. Oftestad: *Tro og politikk — En reformasjonshistorie*. 240 sid. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 2001.

Denna anmälan avser två böcker om reformationstiden. Om den första säger baksidestexten: «Boken riktar sig främst till studenter vid universitet och högskolor i ämnen som historia, idéhistoria, religion och tyska, men är givande för alla med intresse för denna tid». Om man bortser från forskare inom fältet tror jag detta stämmer. Boken är lättläst och populärt hållen. Ingen av författarna är teolog. Olle Larsson är historiker och Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre germanist (språkvetare som sysslar med tyska). Detta märks på framställningen. Inte så att felet är fler men frågeställningarna är delvis andra. Ett av de grövsta felet är f.ö. rent historiskt: det är sammanblandningen av Maria Tudor och Maria Stuart (s. 62). Den förra var drottning av England 1553–1558, den senare drottning av Skottland 1542–1567. Båda var romerska katoliker och alltså motståndare till reformationen, men i övrigt hade de inte mycket mer än namn och kön gemensamt. Felet återkommer i den kronologiska översikten ss. 74–77, som annars ger en god bild av aktörerna i skeendet under trehundra år (c:a 1320–1633).

Halva boken består av en historisk genomgång av den europeiska och svenska reformationen. Också motreformationen eller den katolska reformen behandlas. På Harvard University Press utkom nyligen: *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*, ett värdefullt bidrag till diskussionen om hur man rätteligen bör benämna denna fas i kyrkans historia. Vilket namn man väljer vittnar ofta om en bedömning av företeelsen. Författaren, John W O'Malley, förespråkar «tidigmodern katolicism», då det innefattar alla aspekter: motreformation, katolsk reform, tridentinsk era och konfessionell era. Mötet i Trient var inte bara en reaktion på reformationen utan också på det kyrkliga förfallet. Därför kan det vara bra att

använda en mer neutral term. Jag instämmer i detta och accepterar termen. Tyvärr har boken inte beaktats här, trots att tre av O'Malleys böcker finns med bland lästipsen. En stor förtjänst med boken är annars just dessa lästips till varje avsnitt. Dessutom avslutas boken med en tredje del, tjugofem sidor källor och litteratur. Den intresserade får alltså god hjälp att söka sig vidare, trots att boken saknar notapparater. Del 2 är en samling texter från 1500-talet av blandad karaktär. Där finns avsnitt ur reformatorn Bucers skrifter, delar av 1571 års kyrkoordning och en visitationsordning för Växjö stift från 1596 (tryckt 1605) samt folkläsnings som «Boken för resor med vagn» och «Historien om doktor Johann Faust». Dessa texter ökar bokens värde avsevärt.

Berndt T. Oftestad, den nyligen till katolicismen konverterade kyrkohistorieprofessorn vid Menighetsfakultetet, har skrivit en bok av helt annat slag. Det går inte att ta miste på att det är en teolog som för pennan. I sitt förord tackar Oftestad sina inspiratörer. Bland dessa spelar Bengt Hägglund en framträdande roll. Boken är tillägnad Oftestads tidigare kollega Åge Holter, som också tackas i förordet. I sin inledning tecknar Oftestad kortfattat händelseförloppet och ger därefter en forskningsöversikt i populär form (namnen finns i noterna längst bak i boken). Kapitel 2 behandlar «Reformasjonen — budskap och förändring». Oftestad påminner om att ropen om reformation ljöd från många håll vid den nya tidens ingång. Att återvända till det ursprungliga uppfattades som en nödvändig förnyelse. Redan tiggardordnarnas framväxt på 1200-talet med det «apostoliska» fattigdomsidealet var ett uttryck för detta. När Luther framträdde strax före 1520 blev frågorna om auktoritet och legitimitet brännande. Alla försök att återupprätta enheten misslyckades och Västeuropa hade inte längre en «religion» utan flera, som bekämpade varandra. Konfessionalismens tid var inne. Det är vägen dit som Oftestad skildrar. Framställningen är i huvudsak kronologisk. Oftestad betonar genomgående att reformatörerna med Luther i spetsen inte menade sig komma med något nytt. För Luther var det lika viktigt att distansera sig från den