

UDK 11:27

27-247(091)

316.7(4)

<https://doi.org/10.53745/bs.93.5.6>

Received: 2. 5. 2022

Accepted: 21. 6. 2022

Original scientific paper

## METAPHYSICAL TURMOIL

Alojz ĆUBELIĆ

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb  
Vlaška 38, p.p. 5, HR – 10 000 Zagreb  
alozj@dominikanci.hr

### Abstract

In the article, we present, comment and analyse some elements of our cultural and evangelical history, which have been marked by numerous philosophers and theologians starting from the ancient Church to the present day. Closing into the present actually means a ban on living. Present life has its roots in the past and offers its promises, expectations and courage to the future. History exists, and man can dwell in history, without which there is no creative culture, only when three dimensions of time are lived organically. In this context, we also observe the contribution of an immense procession of thinkers like St Thomas Aquinas in successive historical periods. In the article, we explore the possible contribution of metaphysics to the questions posed to the modern man. The evangelical influence on culture, which is a complex phenomenon, should certainly be shed light on. Furthermore, it can be more or less deep. It can be hidden, more or less conscious. It is not always strongly present where it is most required, it is not real where it is explicitly ordered. In addition to authentic fruits, one should also be aware of counterfeits and hypocritical activities. In short, its paths are different and manifold. It seems important to point this out so that we could evaluate this influence, which is authenticated and credibly confirmed in the eyes of Christian orthodoxy, and which establishes piety. Certain errors, exaggerations and deviations are not imaginable outside the Christian horizon, which unmask it or wage a battle with it.

*Key words:* philosophy, theology, gospel, faith, reason, revelation, influence, Christianity, European culture.

### Introduction

At the very beginning of the research, we remove the possibility of a comprehensive presentation and analysis of the polyphonic culture in Europe, for

that would be a presumptuous and above all an unrealistic attempt. For that reason, we limit ourselves to those areas of spiritual and intellectual history into which numerous thinkers have woven themselves in their own way, starting from the Middle Ages as a kind of model for thinking about the entire reality. Initially, we present some elements of the relationship between faith and reason that have been burdened by different approaches throughout the history. Rationalism and Enlightenment are presented as the completion of a long process, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the Middle Ages.. Starting with St Thomas Aquinas's doctrine, we engage in some metaphysical questions that lead us to wonder whether metaphysics is still a possible and completed science. Afterwards, we probe several objections to the idea of God by the most prominent representatives of atheism in contemporary philosophy and culture. The paradox is in the fact that even the anti-Christian elements bear the seal of the influence of the Gospels, regardless of the fact that the widespread »positivist« mentality denies the possibility of metaphysical and religious principles. In the times that are all but unexciting, we look back at the epochal changes that we bear witness to, repeatedly searching for the return to the true principles that were an inexhaustible source for the life and culture of any man.

### 1. The example of St Thomas Aquinas

The conflict between faith and reason seems to have been at the common centre of doctrinal struggles in the Middle Ages. In that context, it suffices to recall different approaches to philosophy and the possible contribution of reason in theological reflections of the Church fathers. Origen and Tertullian<sup>1</sup>, for instance, serve as antipodes. This is undoubtedly true if theologians of that time are not imagined as those being particularly preoccupied with discussions of epistemological order or with critical reflections such as Kant. We should emphasize that in the Middle Ages there was no explicit division into »autonomous philosophy« on the one hand and »theology« on the other.<sup>2</sup> Pointing out the conflict between faith and reason, the first historians of medieval philosophy entirely elude the rationalistic and critical atmosphere they felt, and contemplate the past through their personal philosophical field.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marijan CIPRA, *Spoznajna teorija*, Zagreb 2007, 64-104.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Joël BIARD, *Langage, sciences, philosophie au XII e siècle*, Paris, 1999. Paradoxically, this putting things into a historical prospective, or this philosophical environment, proves to be productive for contemporary philosophical reflection.

Rationalism seems to have been a mere completion of a long process, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the Middle Ages. In that sense, the teaching that stands out is the one of Thomas Aquinas, which demonstrated a certain toughness and resilience as opposed to those »philosophies« that have an extremely negative approach to the possibility of reaching metaphysical truths.<sup>3</sup> This constancy of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is primarily manifested in his methodology which bears a seal of permanence, that is, it is applicable at any time. Notwithstanding, the advance of historical studies and transformations within the philosophical world convince us that the conflict between reason and faith is to be placed within a broader phenomenon. Certain laws seem to have been included in both the physical and the spiritual world, enabling man on both a theoretical and practical level to face directly the problems posed by reality. Given that the Middle Ages came to know theological discussions on its own, its physiognomy indisputably arises from a culture that relies on its own sources of human nature. One of those endeavours comprises a peril of certain naturalism, indifference, even hostility regarding the revelation and the Christian civilisation. The very historical sequence is a true testimony of it.<sup>4</sup> Great theologians of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century were aware of this peril. By means of this sharpened sense of the energy of nature in general, as well as of human nature, the Middle Ages in particular, and especially the 13<sup>th</sup> century, can be compared to the period which arose in Greece and spread the classical culture and its philosophy.<sup>5</sup> The influence of Aristotle's naturalism on the medieval west has been interpreted as a certain kinship between one cultural period and another, despite various documents and works that show continuity. If it is true that man by means of his reason becomes aware of his autonomy as opposed to reality, knowledge does not establish the only connection between man and reality. Man is neither merely mind, nor will, nor affectivity, nevertheless, the connections between him and the beings surrounding him are no less real or important in the founding of culture.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the discovery of nature is to be positioned in the Middle

---

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is no wonder that even today it appears to be miraculous and constructive due to the capacity of its receptiveness.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Recent studies on the history and future of Christianity in Europe. René RÉMONT – Marc LÉBOUCHER, *Le Christianisme En Accusation*, Albin MICHEL (ed.), Paris, 2005, Jean DELUMEAU, *Un christianisme pour demain, Guetter l'aurore, Le christianisme va-t-il mourir?*, Paris, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jean JOLIVET, *Philosophie médiévale arabe et latine*, Paris, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ivan DODLEK – Nenad MALOVIĆ, *Otisci suvremene kulture*, Zagreb, 2023. The book reflects on contemporary culture.

Ages alongside the problems of the relationship between natural knowledge and religious knowledge. It is a complex issue that was of a particular interest to St Thomas Aquinas, who in his works takes interest in psychology, morals, literature, mysticism, in brief, the whole of reality. This demonstrates that his teaching was appropriate not only for the 13<sup>th</sup> century but that it was, in its own way, used also by some eminent Croatian thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including Tomo Vereš, Hijacint Bošković and Jordan Kuničić. In the long line of authors dealing with the Thomistic heritage, they devotedly got to work, which had been particularly encouraged by popes Leo XIII,<sup>7</sup> Paul VI<sup>8</sup>, St John Paul II,<sup>9</sup> and persistently confirmed and promoted by the Second Vatican Council. Among numerous statements, we outline one by Pope Pius XI, who in his encyclical *Studiorum ducem* proclaims Thomas Aquinas in the title »The Master of study« ordering all teaching in the Church to do so in accordance with Thomas's teaching.<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Aquinas brought the intellectual dimension of Christian culture of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to its pinnacle by using the entire heritage of the Church fathers and teachers who had preceded him. From the first one among them, St Irenaeus, all the way to his own teacher, St Albert the Great, from the Fathers of the East to the Fathers of the West.<sup>11</sup> Rather than merely creating a kind of a synthesis, Thomas wanted to provide a complete and well-rounded science of Christian wisdom and theology.

It would not be true to the fact to state that these sciences were put to a halt by Thomas's death, thus remaining within the framework of his teaching. In that sense, it has been questioned whether he was originally a philosopher or whether it is the *sacra doctrina* (sacred doctrine) that predominates in

<sup>7</sup> Cf. The Encyclical of His Holiness Pope LEO XIII, *Aeterni patris*, *Katolički list*, XXX, no. 37, p. 289-291; no. 39, p. 305-307; no. 40, p. 313-315. Zagreb, 1879. Pope LEO XIII, *To eternal memory*, breve by which Holy Father proclaims Saint Thomas Aquinas the patron saint of all Catholic Colleges, *Katolički list*, XXXI, no. 38, p. 299-300, Zagreb, 1880.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, *Svjeto Crkve (Lumen Ecclesiae)*, epistle to the general of the Order of Friars Preachers, Vinko de Couesnongle, on the occasion of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St. Thomas Aquinas, *Kršćanska sadašnjost*, Zagreb, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Speech about St Thomas Aquinas on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the »Aeterni patris«, in: *Obnovljeni život*, 35 (1980) 3-4, 281-288, JOHN PAUL II, *Naučitelj čovječnosti – Doctor humanitatis i drugi spisi o suvremenosti sv. Tome Akvinskoga*, Zagreb, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> POPE PIUS XI, On the sixth anniversary of the canonization of St. Thomas Aquinas, *Studiorum Ducem* (encyclical), in: *Vrhbosna* (Sarajevo) 37 (1923), 15-16, 113-120.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Alojz ČUBELIĆ, Neki vidovi traženja istine kod svetog Tome Akvinskog, in: Ivan DODLEK – Nenad MALOVIĆ – Željko PAVIĆ (ed.), *Religija između Hermeneutike i fenomenologije*, Zagreb, 2018, 67-78.

his work, given that he does not use the word theology.<sup>12</sup> It would be difficult to explain why Thomas, apart from all of his teaching duties, was able and willing to deal solely with the works of philosophical nature. Nonetheless, Thomas was also a theologian who used philosophy extensively. The Papal encyclical of John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*<sup>13</sup>, demonstrates that the Church does not solely and exclusively adhere to a single privileged philosophical system.

The remark would be of value if Thomas's philosophy was taken as an enclosed system. However, not being confined is the exact feature of the philosophy of St Thomas. Philosophical systems are characterised by certain truth, a particular way of understanding reality. The entire reality is considered, and interpreted by philosophers in a particular way. For that purpose, they create a system. Thus, they inevitably condemn themselves to overlooking other aspects of reality and falling into misapprehension. Later, new philosophers came, directing their attention towards aspects of reality disregarded by others. They also strived to reduce everything to new aspects and interpret everything through those very aspects. They created a system that seems to be in opposition to everything that had preceded it. This is actually how opposing systems in the history of philosophy are created.<sup>14</sup> However, Thomas's philosophy is characterised by openness towards all partial truths that complement one other in various philosophies and towards everything that was known by the human mind as truth, regardless of its provenance or its location. That was precisely what the Second Vatican Council claimed by declaring that Church was willing to acknowledge anything that is true and genuinely religious in every religion. Therefore, Thomas Aquinas possesses a comprehensive power of accumulating everything that human thought can discover as truthful, regardless of its provenance.<sup>15</sup> This comprehensive power of accumulation truly becomes all-inclusive, which, in fact, means (etym.) »universal«. This comprehensive power of accumulation was particularly evident in the works of French Thomists from the 20<sup>th</sup> century (among others: Garrigou-Lagrange,

<sup>12</sup> See a comprehensive study on Thomas's understanding of philosophy: Ruedi IMBACH – Adriano OLIVA, *La philosophie de Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris, 2009, 177.

<sup>13</sup> This year we will have the opportunity to read it 25 years after publication. On the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical, an international scientific meeting was organised at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb entitled: *Encyclical Fides et ratio – faith and reason. An updated reading 20 years later*, which took place on 14.IX.2018.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. for example, a very interesting and uncommon approach to philosophy in the Middle Ages: Kurt FLASCH, *Einführung in die Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Léo J. ELDERS, *Thomas d'Aquin, Une introduction à sa vie et à sa pensée*, Paris, 2013, and the same author: *Thomas d'Aquin et ses prédécesseurs*, Paris, 2015.

Charles Journet, Jean-Pierre Torrell<sup>16</sup>, Servais-Théodore Pinckaers, Jacques Maritain<sup>17</sup>. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were numerous Thomas's true disciples. In Croatian domains, we have mentioned, among others, Toma Vereš<sup>18</sup>, Hijać Bošković and Jordan Kuničić.

If St Thomas Aquinas remains a teacher in philosophy for the many even nowadays, it is so because for him the purpose of knowledge was truth in the light of the natural mind. This, however, is not a system. On the other hand, Thomas Aquinas engaged in philosophy with the purpose of using it in theological thinking, which is actually a reflection of faith on all content as to imbue the entire Christian thought. For such a reflection theology is in need of a reliable and appropriate philosophical tool. Thomas's theology certainly is a theological science. Like any true theology, it is not founded on philosophy that was used as an aid, but on the very faith and on the sources of the faith found in the Word of God. Theology is theology to the extent that its foundation and source is in the Word of God. This is the case with Thomas. When his theological work is being studied, not a single article that is not based on a biblical text can be found. In case one observes the actual space taken by his work in libraries, it is noticeable that the major part belongs to the *Commentaries* on the New Testament.

Those who are not sufficiently initiated into his thought are inclined, like many of our contemporaries, to simplify things and thus, perhaps inadvertently, distort Thomas's thought. For instance, this can be easily perceived in case we claim St Augustine to be a disciple of Plato, and Thomas Aquinas a disciple of Aristotle. This simplification, in fact, leads them to be opposed to each other. The truth is really the opposite. They are successive and complement each other just like the other doctors of the Church.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, we can claim that neither Augustine was Plato's disciple nor Thomas was Aristotle's. They both have but one Teacher, Jesus Christ.

At one time, Blaise Pascal posed the famous question: Is the God of philosophers identical to the biblical God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? He does not even seem to be identical in the thought of St Thomas. We are, in a way, already accustomed to thinking that it is above all Aristotle's God

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jean-Pierre TORRELL, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, maître spirituel*, Fribourg, 1996, 575.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jacques MARITAIN, *Andeoski naučitelj*, Zagreb, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Collection on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the death of St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974*, Dominican Provincial, Zagreb, 1974; Anto GAVRIĆ (ed.), *Love for the truth*, Collection in honour of Thomas Vereš OP on the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and 50 years of religious vows, Zagreb, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Léo J. ELDERS, *Thomas d'Aquin et ses prédécesseurs*, Paris, 2015.

whom he calls, in his philosophical terminology, »pure act«. However, we have to add that, ultimately, the God of St Thomas Aquinas is actually Jesus Christ. In that sense, it is understandably demonstrated that, being Christians, both Thomas Aquinas and Aurelius Augustine are on the same path of faith and theology – theology being an extension of faith – having but one teacher, Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> It is also necessary to emphasise that St Thomas was not the initiator of theological research, because it was the Church fathers who had engaged in it long before him, but he was rather the initiator of a complete and comprehensive theological science.

A philosophical system regularly dies with the death of its founder. Those who remain are the disciples, better or weaker commentators. Neither Thomas's philosophy nor his theology did by any means end with his death. Likewise, they were not limited by what he had thought and written during his lifetime. It is a genuine Christian philosophical and theological science. Their power of accumulating is open to all the advancement of human thought, from Thomas until the present day, to the entire contribution of the development of the science in any respect. There is no doubt that the loyalty to Thomas consists in being open towards any truth in philosophical research that has followed after his time as well as towards the advancement of other sciences.<sup>21</sup> Thomas's disciples have made an effort to open the master's teaching to any contribution of contemporary thought and modern sciences, consequently, enriching it with countless opportunities. When the Church recommends Thomas's philosophical and theological teaching, it does not do so in order to set up a barrier to be stopped by, but for us to be aware of a beacon casting light on any progress, so that we are able to adopt the contribution of an enhanced human thought. That is precisely what can be called Thomas's contemporaneity. Here we have briefly indicated Thomas's philosophy and theology as being rich and burdened with the meaning. Additionally, we have outlined how Thomas's thought can be enriched by various contributions of contemporary sciences and how it can cast its own light upon them.

---

<sup>20</sup> In that sense, professors Danijel Tolvajčić and Alojz Čubelić held a lecture at the international scientific symposium »Komunikacije istine u post-globalnom svijetu«, which took place in Zagreb on 10.VI.2022, entitled »Razumijevanje istine kod Augustina i Tome Akvinskog«.

<sup>21</sup> Here we wish to emphasise that our intention is by no means an »ideological« cheer for Thomas Aquinas, but rather a mere indication of some traits of his philosophy and theology which bear a stamp of permanence.

### 1.1. *Is metaphysics a fulfilled and completed knowledge?*

This question cannot be answered if metaphysics is envisaged as a theory of given and factual knowledge starting from a modern paradigm of »objectivity«. In case the metaphysics wants to pursue the path most frequently taken by sciences, then, as it were, its fate is sealed. It is a matter of a certain metaphysical defeat. »Metaphysics precedes the theory of knowledge since the question of Being is primary to the question of knowledge, that question which in itself already comprises a certain type of knowledge, namely, that Being is, and non-Being is not, and that it is not possible for being not to be, because if all being would collapse into nothingness, the very Being of a being, Being as a being necessary is and it cannot not be. Being itself cannot disappear or collapse, for it necessary is, and it is independent of this or that being that is not a necessary but only a possible being. Being can be without a being; however, a being cannot be without Being.«<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, from its very beginning metaphysics wanted to elude any risk of completion or an exact definition. Its very distinctiveness is that what steps away from being exact and certain. According to Kant »we are unable to know the Being of things, because that what we know is always and just an appearance – a phainomenon, and not the Being-in-itself – noumenon, so that Being, that 'is' in everything that exists, remains principally unknown and unknowable«.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to what is evident and certain there is an overabundance of meaning which calls for an entirely different practice of thinking. Thus, metaphysics begins where we reach some concrete, visible and measurable reality. From the experience of subjectivity to a form of artistic, economic, political or moral creativity. From the religious domain to self-awareness, from the relationship to our own carnality to what becomes the subject of our everyday thinking. It is a matter of a different set of experiences which do not allow reduction to the dimension of objectivity. Furthermore, we are talking about experiential areas that represent an ever-renewing abundance to the subject, consequently, making metaphysics an ever-open discipline.<sup>24</sup> As it were, metaphysical strictness is its openness to the possibility of being ever-new and its availability to repeat creatively its fundamental questions, because what is

<sup>22</sup> Marijan CIPRA, *Spoznajna teorija*, 38. Kant's hesitancy regarding synthetic judgments a priori is well known, which includes the pre-initial question of the first philosophy, that is, metaphysics.

<sup>23</sup> Marijan CIPRA, *Temelji ontologije*, Zagreb, 2003, 127.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. In this context, a very interesting and creative approach to: PIERRE – MARIE EMONET, *Une metaphysique pour les simples*, Chambray-lès Tours, 1993, 158.



given as overabundance does not accept definitive renewal into concepts and demands to be always thought in a state of possibility. Therefore, metaphysical tradition, since its Greek origins, all to the present day, have not allowed for the equivalence of knowledge, certainty and the object. Metaphysics is actually imposed as a possible science because it has nothing in common with a scientific research program in the modern sense of the word. It is not focused on a comprehensive understanding of Being as an object or as objectivity. »Being is unlimited and illimitable, it is neither concluded nor conclusive, but infinite and limitless.«

If it does not fit any definition, it then eludes every opinion that moves discursively and in time going from predicate to predicate, for Being is neither a predicate, nor a category, nor an attribute. Consistently, Being is unthinkable, and yet, all the thinking moves in that »is« and »is not« and without affirmation and negation, there is no thinking. Being is, in that sense, closest to our thinking, but it is also, as Being-in-itself, the furthest and the most elusive for all thinking.<sup>25</sup>

Overabundance of Being, which remains to be understood in the form of a paradox possibility, enables metaphysics to have its historically and methodologically open character. The history of metaphysics possesses a plural dimension, wherein the idea of that discipline is being continually multiplied and discerned, every time questioning its tradition, its methods, forms and purpose.<sup>26</sup>

Unless the history of metaphysics is a simple cross-section of thinking, for there always remains something that is permanent and disputed, this tradition cannot be denied as some kind of fate. The meaning of metaphysics is neither unique nor definitive, therefore the discussion of the history of metaphysics must take into account its plural background. For that reason, it keeps reappearing, as in Aristotle's time, as the most sublime science. Given that we want to respect that unpredictable and plural historical meaning, we cannot reduce the history of metaphysics to determinism. In this unique vision of its history, metaphysics is presented as a kind of a project which is being realised, wherein all possible meaning is rooted. The metaphysical tradition shows that the distinction of the idea of »first philosophy« is knowledge that

---

<sup>25</sup> Marijan CIPRA, *Misli o etici*, Zagreb, 1999, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Here we are addressing a certain pluralistic vision of the history of philosophy, such as is contained, for example, in the work of Jean-Luc Marion. Cf. Philippe CAPELLE – DUMONT, *Philosophie de Jean-Luc Marion, Phénoménologie, théologie, métaphysique*, Paris, 2015.

remains open to radical change. It is a matter of restless knowledge that transcends and keeps eluding some grounded, objective and definitive content. Therefore, »questioning the limits of metaphysics« and »observing its possible transgression« is in effect the most faithful to the call of every first philosophy.<sup>27</sup> As long as it differs from all limited and pre-given knowledge, metaphysics is the knowledge, open and restless, of what remains infinitely possible. It is the knowledge of the inexhaustible wealth of the overabundance of Being. The »first philosophy« is knowledge that is open to what is given in the state of overabundance. Metaphysics is a possible science and knowledge of the possible, it does not allow for a definitive conclusion or fulfilment. From Kant onwards, the concept of metaphysics as a never completely actualised science has prevailed. Given that all sciences aspire to realization, metaphysics, opposite to that, remains aporetic. Metaphysics is an ascent towards an idea, that is to say, towards that which never becomes a concept remaining, therefore, a source of tension. Kant »performed the destruction of traditional metaphysics like no one had done before him, and philosophy will have to take a completely new path after Kant if it wants to give an answer to permanent and constant metaphysical questions«.<sup>28</sup>

Rationality, at its most sublime level, is not identified with a definitive content, but remains a knowledge of possibilities. The fact that reason cannot find a solution to its final problems requires a complete change in the meaning of research, which becomes the appalling task of leaving an open and free access to the possible. In our view, for this reason, metaphysics is considered to be an unfinished science, the science of what never completely transforms into the known. Metaphysics can never be done with its work, because its job is to leave the possibility of novelty open. Here the novum is what resurrects from the possibilities which can be experimented by the reason, as its deepest passion, yet which cannot be reached by its own forces. In that context, we could remember famous Kant's questions about what one can know, what is one to do, and what is one to hope for. This question of hope reveals that metaphysical reason in itself is the openness towards something that can neither be predicted nor dominated. In that sense, hope is, genuinely, a strive of a metaphysical reason, for as Plato wrote »we are full of hope for all our lives«.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc MARION, *Au-delà de soi*, Paris 2008, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Marijan CIPRA, *Temelji ontologije*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> PLATON, *Fileb*, 39e 5-6. in: Platon, *Fileb / Teetet*, Zagreb, 1979.

If the first metaphysical question raises a question about the power of knowledge – what can I know?, the second turns to responsibility, what must I do? The third question eludes rational control and power, because it is not based on security. In Kantian perspective, the question of hope is the heart of all rationality.<sup>30</sup> Reason is presented as openness from the beginning. In it a possibility is more deeply rooted than any presence. Therefore, at the beginning of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant discusses the »fate« of reason, namely, its mission. Fate is not something that would be given as defined, but it is creative because it includes freedom and responsibility that are not being exhausted.

Metaphysics, therefore, needs to remain open, unfulfilled in its essence, knowledge that cannot and does not want to fully reach certainty. It needs to remain a science open to its own possibility, unfulfilled in its essence, knowledge that cannot and does not want to arrive at certainty. Therein lies the turn between metaphysics and other knowledge. Metaphysics remains open to an event of possible content. It is always new in itself, for its renewal is a way to remain faithful to its own essence and credibility.

From its beginning, this appalling and unknown science called metaphysics – which remains systematically and historically incomplete, because it can never be presented in the form of a completed discourse, has been characterized by a qualitative difference in relation to other knowledge. Aristotle clearly wrote: »There is a science that observes Being as Being and its existence in itself. It is not equal to any of the partial sciences, because none of them study Being in general and as Being, but by cutting off one part of it, observe it as the phenomenon of the mind like the mathematical sciences.«<sup>31</sup> Metaphysics, consequently, requires a departure and a break without which its true mission can never be understood. Every partial science, has as its object something that can be defined and identified simply and obviously, unlike metaphysics, which is disturbed by the infinite nature of its own subjects. »The science of being insofar as it is a being« was for Aristotle »the science of research«, that is to say, it remains in an aporetic and open state. Partial sciences have the privilege of knowing their content, there where the first science has the role of preserving the ever-possible and structured field that is emerging. Specifically, metaphysics is a completely open knowledge ready to change its content and yet again articulate its categories. »It is obvious, namely, that if the

<sup>30</sup> Immanuel KANT, *Kritika čistog uma*, Zagreb, 2021, 520.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. ARISTOTEL, *Metafizika*, Zagreb, 1988, 1003a 21-25, p. 75.

divine is present anywhere, it is present in such a nature; and the most honourable of sciences is to deal with the most honourable kind.«<sup>32</sup> As knowledge of that which is given merely as a possibility, metaphysics is, undoubtedly, the most desirable and the most eminent science. Metaphysics remains knowledge to be renewed, which is created historically, in time, because it cannot exhaust its possible content. If, from its beginning, the first philosophy has the need to listen to its past and to create a genealogy – and to create endlessly anew, as always, a contemporary work – it is because it never stops. Aristotelian call to philosophers from the past at the beginning of *Metaphysics*, thus, takes on a new and perhaps deeper meaning: »And even though we have done enough research on this in the books *On Nature*, still, let us also help ourselves with those who before us had been explaining about beings and reasoning about laws and causes. Therefore, the current research will profit from considering them as well. Namely, this is how we will discover some other kind of cause, or else, we will rely more on the ones just mentioned.«<sup>33</sup> That listening is, in fact, the necessity for metaphysics to feel that it looms over the past, to form an identity by confronting the past and, thus, to create a tradition. When metaphysics observes its past, it does so because it wants to direct itself towards a future that has not been tried yet. If it is a science of the possible, metaphysics remains an uncertain science in its status, topic and history. It is always disturbed by self-doubt. Thanks to this uncertainty, metaphysics in its abundance remains always new. The expression »if metaphysics is possible« is the first formula of any metaphysics for it begins with an uncertainty which opens its subject. For that reason, all metaphysical discourse begins anew, and it cannot be presented as a definite understanding of content that has been either given or acquired. The history of metaphysics is continually demonstrating this openness and pluralism, which calls for an effort and constant renewal. As in the original Aristotelian version, metaphysics is extraordinary because it abstracts from every natural knowledge. This model of philosophy and science that was established as such by Aristotle with his first philosophy remained a classical role model of philosophical thinking and scientific knowledge for centuries until the revolution of science and technology in the Modern Age.

If »partial sciences« work effortlessly, the concept of effort is central in metaphysics. In addition to the features traditionally attributed to the word

<sup>32</sup> »The most honourable philosophy« is, naturally, Aristotle's expression. Cf. ARISTOTEL, *Metafizika*, 1026a 21, p. 151.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 983b 2-5, p. 10.

first philosophy, the goal of metaphysics here becomes a sign of its openness to what is not given, to the simple possibility of its subject and status.

### *1.2. Criticism of the idea of God*

These ideas and concepts lead us towards those thinkers who deny both the possibility of metaphysical claims, as well as religious assumptions. This is best manifested in the criticism of the idea of God by some of the most famous representatives of atheism, such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche or Sigmund Freud.<sup>34</sup> This criticism happens indirectly. It is previously undertaken with regard to questions about God. This question, they claim, arises in separate social or psychological situations. It appears in the depths of the human spirit as such. Refutation is not primarily about answering a question. The problem of God was rejected as not credible.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, it is not the terms of the problem that are examined in themselves. The question is not whether the statements are true or false, whether to agree with yes or no to the arguments that assess the statement of what is. It tends to settle at the previous stage before the question appears. That stage is actually the act of the subject who sets it up. Furthermore, the question itself is dubious. Why, with what right did it appear? Consequently, it will establish its genealogy. And the history of the question will show its untrustworthy character. Thus, the problem of God has the value of a sign, like a hint. The reality of the level of some metaphysical being and the possibility of the human spirit to reach it are denied. Setting that level means being a victim of some illusion. The one who studies the problem of God is similar to a semiologist, that is, to the one who studies the behaviour of different signs within society. What is being examined is the pathology of the spirit. The statement of the problem is not to rely on the object it indicates, but on the subject who raises the scaffolding of the building to the extent that he is ill. In addition, if the problem of God is expressed by a subject, this expression is not direct and immediate. It does not arise from the intention to manifest itself, but rather to hide. We are dealing with a lie, and the real problem is to find out what motives the subject has for saying that type of lie. We should add

<sup>34</sup> Paul RICOEUR, speaking of these three thinkers, utters a clever formulation: »teachers of doubt«.

<sup>35</sup> The basic tenets of positivism, and then neo-positivism, can be seen there, which deny the value of metaphysical, aesthetic, moral and religious judgments or reduces them to some psychological states. The attitudes of »neo-positivism« are similar to the agnostic attitude towards God and religiosity. It is simply not possible to discuss it because it is not possible to »know« anything about it.

that this lie is not the result of a conscious will to deceive the other person. Its roots are unconscious, and the subject who utters them is the first to be deceived. Hence, we will find out its meaning indirectly. Knowledge should happen cunningly in order to reveal in the background what the speech clearly says. That which is clear and distinct is deceptive as such. The lie is what matters most. Apart from that, our authors diverge more or less on this point. In contrast to the supposed truth of the world of ideology, of which religion and philosophy are the leaders, Marx sets the criterion of the »scientific nature« of historical materialism and its truth.<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche is more radical: truth is a belated concept, and nothing assures us that by nature our spirit is made for truth rather than for lie. As a philosopher, Freud oscillates between two positions. He is sceptical of the nature of the orientation of our spirit towards truth and confirms the value of psychological science in deep research.

The problem of God is presented as an important place for the sick man to be exposed in order to deceive himself about his evil and to find compensation in the illusion that helps him endure. A philosopher armed with »methodical distrust« would have to show relentless courage so as to break the strong armour and approach the anatomy of the ideological organism.

The problem of God is included in the existential dynamism of practice (praxis) or »life«. Man, individual or social, is an animal that fights for life. The first drive of his activity and representative service is vital interest. The problem of God is presented as a means in the service of life. Schopenhauer also expressed the idea that is the foundation of these conceptions when he promoted the sunset of that invention of the Greeks, taken over by Christianity: the primacy of the mind over the will.<sup>37</sup>

The first examination of the position we are reporting on shows us the assumptions. In the foundation we find a materialistic or positivist conception of man, in the sense of positivism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The influence of Darwin, or at least the acknowledged kinship with his thought, is particularly noticeable here. It is from there that the emphasis was placed on the idea of the struggle for life in both Nietzsche and Freud. Thus, man is understood as

<sup>36</sup> »Marx, Nietzsche and Freud are supporters of the naturalistic image of man. It mostly distances itself from the Christian view of man and is most often associated with one form of atheism or another. It is characteristic that this concept has also developed a certain ethics, which, however, is reduced to biological, material, vital or subconscious values and tends to reduce man to fundamentally lower forms of his personality«. Marijan CIPRA, *Misli o etici*, 101.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Among other works Arthur SCHOPENHAUER, *Savjeti i načela*, revised and supplemented by Natalija Topić Popović, Zagreb, 2005, 158.

a biological living being whose social life is governed by a defensive struggle, against a hostile world, for his vital interests. Reason appears as a subordinate element in the service of life. It is a weapon of battle, and its primary service consists of being cunning. It is no longer a matter of selfless knowledge. In addition to the deep contradictions dividing them, we find what is common to the philosophers we have focused on. The first criticism is, therefore, raised on an anthropological level. It will show what are the particularities, the breadth and the object of reason in man, who is consequently irreducible to an animal.

Simultaneously, with the autonomy of the metaphysical mind, what is disputed is the selfless character of speculative knowledge. The fundamental questioning is of an ethical order. When Marx draws attention to the interest of a social group, when Nietzsche, as a genius psychologist, establishes the genealogy of moral feeling starting from the instinct of cunning and domination, when, finally, Freud projects the light of his analysis on the unconscious roots of conscious activities, these thinkers mark in our reflection so many forms of conditioning of the life of the spirit. This conditioning is tied to two initial poles: the biological instincts of man, or the species, and social life. The interpretation of the facts that we are presented with, suggests the importance of the philosophy of culture in relation to the problem of God. In metaphysics we establish that the human mind is capable, by means of its own light, of reaching a certain knowledge of God.<sup>38</sup> Such proof is essentially placed on the level of human nature observed in itself. It is here that the human ability of knowing is considered, insofar as it is proportional to its object.<sup>39</sup>

However, the problem is to be taken at the level of the practice. The mind cannot permanently and in the long-term develop its initial possibilities without acquiring a habitus, that is, a stable mood, and this cannot happen in the subject without education and cultural exchange.<sup>40</sup> Apart from that, on the level of the habitus, and although it is a matter of intellectual habitus, a fact is to be taken into account that intellectual life develops in the complete dynamism of the subject's life in search of a purpose. A reasoning practice refers to

---

<sup>38</sup> »While it is possible to reach the philosophical knowledge of God, the philosophers' God, in a natural way, the revealed God can only be understood based on revelation and accepting its truths in faith.« Marijan CIPRA, *Spoznajna teorija*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> In the third thesis the professor presents, comments and analyses, »The analogy of human knowledge, which brings to light the analogous structure of reality itself. Based on Being, the analogy requires a systematic distinction of the ontological laws of being, according to the spirit of classical metaphysics.« Josip ČURIĆ, Study entitled *Ontologija*, Zagreb, 1984, in manuscript, 13-25.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A very interesting and intriguing book was published by Neven SESARDIĆ, *Konsenzus bez pokrića*, Zagreb, 2020, especially 128-178.

the whole of personal activities and thus has an ethical value. Speculative orientation towards the object is inscribed in the nature of the mind. Performing speculative activity is to be evaluated in the service of the subject's progress towards his good. According to this ethical detour, knowledge of God, insofar as it represents the pinnacle of speculative knowledge, becomes a cultural problem. The ethics of that act requires a necessary awareness of one's sociological and psychological presumptions, as well as their correction. At the level of a cultural situation that is given, it is not in vain to ask the question of why the ethics of practicing metaphysics? From the point of view at which we position ourselves, that which is inscribed as an initial need in the nature of the mind must be taken up at the level of conscious and voluntary activity as well. Rediscovering at the cultural level, that which is postulated in the nature of the spirit, involves a critical awareness of the conditions to which that spirit is subject. These conditionings, moreover, are not homogenous. In the psychological field, we pay attention to the cunning of the instinct, which, using the spirit for escape or sublimation, attacks the purity and independence of the theoretical view. Here, critical attention refers to the ethics of knowledge and the asceticism which precedes its execution.

In the social area, we try to determine which elements determine the free exercise of thought, which are the prevailing ideas in confronting the language of the interests of political or economic power, as well as the activities of the mass media. This time, critical attention refers to the problems of the sociology of knowledge.

If the initial mission of the reason is to inquire about Being and its foundation, the existential situation wherein this mission is performed will be the gradual acquisition of culture. Amid a world of interests and conflicts, philosophers as representatives of a given culture are to reach a state of selflessness where the purest reflection of metaphysical theory will shine.

### **Closing insights**

At one time, Luigi Pareyson fiercely opposed the logic that motivated most of the contemporary philosophers in their research and the outcome of that search. »I have always been amazed at the fact that immediately after the war, philosophies devoted exclusively to technical problems of extreme abstraction and subtlety spread widely, while humanity was barely getting out of the abyss of evil and pain into which it had plunged. How is it possible, I wondered, for philosophy to turn a blind eye to the triumph of evil, to the ab-



solutely diabolical nature of certain forms of wickedness?»<sup>41</sup> And we appear to be facing precisely such challenges. It would be best or perhaps simplest to remain silent in the face of suffering and violence, or to shake the dust off our sandals with indifference, because while guns, drones, rockets and tanks roar, the muses are silent. Those who consciously or unconsciously cherish words and dialogue suddenly find themselves in a deadlock, because they have to practice silence, any reflection, regardless of how much it may be the result of a long and systematic research, seems to be useless and does not help with understanding the current situation. Furthermore, various »authorities« are not acknowledged, therefore any theodicy, and metaphysics in the background, seems to be meaningless and redundant, as they fail to help those who have been exposed to the greatest of perils for months. Of course, we would not wish to lecture Ukrainians, Russians and those who are directly or indirectly involved in the vicious cycle of violence, but we cannot be dispensed from thinking about major events that affect the fabric of the entire humanity. Therefore, it seems, nowadays we must return to large and urgent theodicy meditations, reconsider what has actually happened, is happening, and why the spiral of evil seems to be defeating the principles of dialogue and truth. Jean Lacroix says: »Dialogizing does not mean either refuting the other's thought or simply integrating it into one's own, but questioning oneself in order to improve contact with others or to accept the perspective of moving forward thanks to the other«.<sup>42</sup> When we decide to take such a step, the situation becomes very difficult, especially when it comes to the content of faith, for every religion has the intention of absolutizing its own credo and excluding that of the other. The Second Vatican Council showed Catholics the way by finding the essential thought of the Gospel message. We do not own the truth: we are embraced and encouraged by it to ever deeper discovery. We need one another in order to access the whole truth. Certainly, this claim is not to be understood in the manner of contemporary ideological relativism, which goes so far as to deny the very existence of truth, and consequently, the possibility of reaching it. In current conflicts, it can be said that there is no real dialogue because everyone sticks to their own tactics of evangelization. It is not enough to say, love each other and do it as though differences and fear do not exist. It is not enough even to condemn violence. Living in this globalized world, we know the difficulty of being tempted to retreat into ourselves, the difficulty of

---

<sup>41</sup> Luigi PAREYSON, *Pensiero ermeneutico e pensiero tragico*, in: J. JACOBELI (a cura di), *Dove va la filosofia italiana?*, Bari, 1986, 137.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Jean LACROIX, *Le sens du dialogue*, Neuchatel, 1944, 2nd edition, 15.

understanding and valuing each other. We can fully measure the abyss that divides. We cannot cross the chasm that divides us alone. Yet, God in Jesus allows us to measure the length, breadth, depth and extension of his love. If, in fact, we think that we in the Catholic Church are the absolute holders of the truth or that we speak on behalf of the whole of humanity, then we fall into totalitarianism and exclusion. No one owns the truth; everyone is searching for it. Obviously, there is objective truth, but it transcends us all. This path towards truth can only be approached by taking a long journey and put that truth back together, by finding it in other cultures, in other types of humanity, what others have also reached, sought on their own journey towards truth.<sup>43</sup> We are believers, we believe that there is one God, but we have no claim to own that God, neither according to Jesus who is revealed to us, nor according to religious dogmas. We do not own God. We do not possess the truth and we do need the truth of others. This is the experience we wish to share today with those who slaughter one other, and these are the questions asked by all of us.

### *Sažetak*

### **METAFIZIČKA PREVIRANJA**

Alojz ĆUBELIĆ

Katolički bogoslovni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu  
Vlaška 38, p.p. 5, HR – 10 000 Zagreb  
alozj@dominikanci.hr

*U članku predstavljamo, komentiramo i analiziramo neke elemente naše kulturne i evanđeoske povijesti kojima su svoj pečat dali brojni filozofi i teolozi počevši od drevne Crkve do današnjega vremena. Zatvaranje u sadašnjost zapravo znači zabranu življenja. Životna sadašnjost pruža svoje korijenje u prošlosti a budućnosti nudi svoja obećanja, očekivanja i smjelost. Samo tamo gdje su tri dimenzije vremena organički življene postoji povijest i čovjek može boraviti u povijesti bez koje nema stvaralačke kulture. U tom kontekstu vidimo i doprinos neizmjerne povorke mislilaca, poput svetog Tome Akvinskog, za susljedna povijesna razdoblja. U članku smo istraživali moguću doprinos metafizike za pitanja koja se postavljaju suvremenom čovjeku. Svakako bi trebalo rasvijetliti i evanđeoski utjecaj na kulturu, što je složen fenomen. Doprinos*

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Current and above all inspired books: BENOÎT XVI, *L'Europe, ses fondement, aujourd'hui et demain*, Milano, 2005, 137 and KURT KOCH, *Chrétiens en Europe, Nouvelle évangélisation et transmission des valeurs*, Basel – Wien, 1993, 165.

*metafizike ili evanđeoski utjecaj) nadalje može biti više ili manje dubok. On može biti skrovit, više ili manje svjestan. On nije snažno prisutan uvijek ondje gdje se najviše iziskuje, nije stvaran tamo gdje se izrijetkom nalaže. Uz vjerodostojne plodove treba računati na krivotvorine i licemjerne djelatnosti. Ukratko putovi metafizike su različiti i mnogostruki. Čini se važnim to istaknuti kako bismo mogli vrednovati taj utjecaj, koji se ovjerooljuje i vjerodostojno potvrđuje u očima kršćanske ortodoksije, a utemeljuje pobožnost. Određene pogreške, pretjeranosti i zastranjenja nisu zamisliva izvan kršćanskog obzorja, koja ga razobličuju ili s njime vode bitku.*

*Ključne riječi: filozofija, teologija, evanđelje, vjera, um, objava, utjecaj, kršćanstvo, europska kultura.*