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Earth – a “Noble Star” or the “Faeces of all Things”

(Cusanus – Patricius/Petrić)*

Abstract

The starting point of this treatise is the fact that both Nicholas of Cusa and Franciscus Patricius/Frane Petrić (the XVIth century thinker from Cres in Croatia), belong to that stream of Renaissance Thought, which propagate the thesis of the infinity of the universe. It is of great interest, considering their basic agreement about the universe, to explore the reasons of their disagreement about the position of the Earth in the universe and especially about evaluation of her position. While for Cusanus the Earth is “stella nobilis”, i. e. “the noble star”, for Petrić it is “faex omnium rerum”, i. e. “faeces of all things”. The treatise represents an attempt to find out the reason of the difference in the views about the Earth in the philosophy of the two Renaissance thinkers.

Key Words

Cusanus – Patricius, universe, Earth, Renaissance, *the noble star*

“The shape of Earth is noble and spherical, and its motion circular...” and “it is not the case that this Earth is the most ignoble and lowest...”

“The blackness of Earth is also not proof of its insignificance...”

“Earth is, thus, a noble star (stella nobilis) that possesses light, heat and an influence which is different from that of all the other stars, just as any star differs from the others with its light, nature and influence.”

Just like all the other “stars”, Earth is in motion, since there is neither absolute rest nor absolute motion in the universe.

“Moreover, if one were outside the region of fire, at the circumference of this region Earth would seem like a bright star, much like the Sun seems to us on the outskirts of its region.”

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This text is a somewhat modified version of a paper presented at the “The Legacy of the Renaissance: Philosophy – Science – Art”

symposium, organised by Matrix Croatica and held between 4–8 October 2005 in Orebić, Croatia.

Being not in the least less worthy than the other stars, Earth – as one of the stars – exerts influence over not just the Sun, but also the other stars. In other words, all stars influence each other.

The aforesaid statements on Earth are Nicolaus Cusanus’s and are excerpted from his most significant work entitled *De docta ignorantia* (Of Learned Ignorance).¹ From these excerpts, it is clear that Cusanus does not care about some mere astronomical facts or cosmology alone. What he also cares about are *value judgements*. Cusanus, thus, makes Earth – which he holds to be not just one of the stars, but a “noble” star – be on an equal footing with the other stars. What this does is “rehabilitate” Earth in relation to the traditional standpoint on the insignificance of Earth.

What “traditional” here refers to – in relation to Cusanus and the novelty he introduces – is the Aristotelian-Christian worldview as far as it is a world-view, which is more than just an astronomical model. In addition to mathematical calculations of the position of the celestial bodies, which attempt to “preserve phenomena”, it also includes value judgements on phenomena in the hierarchically structured world/universe. Such value judgements, particularly in respect of Earth and its position in the totality of all things – the position of Earth being, in actual fact, the position of man in the totality of all things – were not unambiguous. The astronomical model, on which the aforesaid worldview rests, is founded on Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology, according to which Earth is in the very centre of the world. This worldview implied certain value judgements already in antiquity. According to such interpretations of phenomena, the sub-lunar region significantly differs from the supra-lunar region. The two regions differ in many respects: the former is the region of the temporal while the latter the region of the eternal, the former is the region of the decayable and changeable while the latter the region of the unchangeable, the region of divine beings, who move circularly. These regions are judged (according to Aristotle) as the *lower* and *higher* spheres of the world, in which the lower depends on the higher, and the lower has its causes in the higher. In other words, both spheres are spoken of as the lower and higher not only in the sense of space, but also in the sense of value.

Somewhat later, the above interpretation continued with Neo-Platonic evaluations based on an ontological hierarchy of beings. The lowest stratum of the hierarchical ladder of beings – i.e. matter – is tied to Earth as the heaviest part of the world, which lies in the centre since it tends downwards, while the highest intelligible stratum lies beyond the material, visible world, which Medieval illustrations of the world used to represent as the ninth sphere, above which lied the tenth reserved for the unmoved mover or God.

Furthermore, during the Middle Ages the cosmological stratum, founded on the aforesaid astronomical model, continued with the stratum that centres on man and his status in the totality of things in accord with the Biblical report, according to which everything in the world is subordinate to man. The standpoint on the central position of Earth was accepted in respect of the standpoint that Earth was the stage of the crucial historical event – i.e. the incarnation of God – as well as in respect of the standpoint that Earth is man’s abode. The twofold evaluation of Earth, thus, follows from its twofold definition – on the one hand it is a body in the cosmic order, and on the other it is the place of God’s revelation. In reference to the above, the following question is posed first: what does the novelty of Cusanus’s conception rest on, particularly his *different evaluation of Earth*? The novelty must be considered within the framework of an entire set of rather radical standpoints with which Cusanus abolishes the traditional worldview (this refers to his abolishing the thesis on

the finality of the universe, to his invalidating the hiatus between the supra-lunar and sub-lunar regions, to his refuting the view that the celestial bodies are fixed to crystalline spheres, to his nullifying the theory of the natural place and hierarchical constitution of the universe with Earth in its centre as one of the poles of cosmic events and the sphere of fixed stars as the other, to his expressing the idea that other worlds are also inhabited, to his view that Earth is not stationary, etc.). Yet, all of the above statements on the world/universe can, one way or another, be brought into relation with the view on the infinity of the universe/totality (of all things).

In the second half of the 16th century another two important Renaissance philosophers defended the thesis on the infinity of the world/universe – namely, Giordano Bruno and Frane Petrić (Franciscus Patricius). While it is beyond any doubt that Bruno founds his interpretation of the world on Cusanus’s fundamental statements – from which the infinity thesis is the most significant one – the situation with Petrić is somewhat different.²

I shall here concentrate on precisely the comparison between Cusanus and Petrić’s views on Earth, which is fascinating in a number of ways. Besides the many other views the two philosophers have in common, what Cusanus and Petrić share is, first and foremost, the thesis on the infinity of the world/universe. It is interesting to note, however, that their respective theses on Earth in such a world/universe – more specifically, their *evaluations* of its place and importance in the totality (of all things) – are significantly different.

In other words, according to Petrić, Earth is “the lowest of things”, “*rerum omnium feces*” (“the faeces of all things”), “the lowest of the incorporeality” and “the least pure” (*crassissima*).³ Having first examined the essence, properties, forces, afflictions, quantity and place of Earth in great detail in the fourth section of his *Nova de universis philosophia* – i.e. in *Pancosmia* – he then substantiates the “filth of its nature” (*naturae suae spurcicia*). Hence the question: considering that Cusanus had already succeeded in securing the “equality” of Earth with the other celestial bodies, why does Petrić return to the thesis on Earth being the centre of the world and “the faeces of all things” irrespective of having already adopted the position on the infinity of the world/universe?⁴

This question is most closely related to the question of the relation between the view on the infinity of the world/universe and determining the position of Earth, and finally its evaluation. The most important question is whether these standpoints are necessarily in relation, and if so, what kind of relation are they in? This, on the other hand, presupposes an answer to the question whether – with respect to the difference between Cusanus and Petrić’s value

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Nikolaus von Kues, *Philosophisch-theologische Werke*, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 2002 (this bilingual Latin-German edition was edited in accordance with the critical Heidelberg edition of Cusanus’s *Opera omnia*).

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The fact that Bruno was acquainted with Cusanus and his work is evident from Bruno’s work, particularly his *De l’infinito universo et Mondi*, in which a great number of pages is dedicated to Cusanus. On the other hand, there is no direct evidence that Petrić was familiar with Cusanus’s statements. Nonetheless, from his views on infinity one can indeed

infer that he was acquainted with Cusanus indirectly, perhaps *via* Bruno. It must, however, be noted that Bruno’s influence on Petrić and *vice versa* is yet to be researched in detail.

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All quotations are from Frane Petrić, *Nova de universis philosophia/Nova sveopća filozofija* (Latin-Croatian edition), Liber, Zagreb 1979.

4

It must be noted that this was also the case with some other Renaissance thinkers (e.g. A. O. Lovejoy in his *Chain of Being* cites the example of M. Montaigne, amongst others).

judgements on Earth (the former’s Earth is a noble star, while the latter’s Earth is the residuum of things) – the presuppositions and starting points of the cosmologies of the two philosophers are the same?

In order to be able to answer these questions, we must first briefly examine the underlying standpoints in the cosmologies of the two philosophers in general and those on Earth in particular. It must, firstly, be stated that (I already substantiated this through a comparative analysis of their respective views),⁵ as far as their cosmologies are concerned, what we are dealing with are cosmologies founded on metaphysics and not astronomical models (as some interpreters have recently been claiming in their interpretations of Cusanus and Petrić). This, in actual fact, means the following: all their statements on the world, including their determining the essence, position and properties of Earth, primarily serve the function of their determining the principle or God, and the relations between God and the world.

However, considering that in both Cusanus and Petrić the infinity thesis is the very key of their respective cosmologies, it is necessary to first scrutinise the presuppositions of this thesis in their respective philosophies. Cusanus’s universe is infinite inasmuch as it is the effect of God – the absolute maximum – who is absolutely infinite. The world/universe is not, however, absolutely but only relatively (derivatively) infinite. In fact, it is more accurate to say that it is un-limited and un-determined rather than limitless. What limits the world is its finality or its very own nature. In other words, neither anything in the universe nor the universe as a whole is the greatest itself (*maximum*). It is limited, above all, because of the matter, which cannot extend beyond itself. This means that both the world and all the things in it exist in a contracted – i.e. limited and determinate rather than absolute – way. According to Cusanus, contractedness (*contractio*) is the “limitedness” (of omnipotent power) to a certain determinate and concrete thing”. Indeed, the universe/totality is a contracted image of the absolutely greatest or God.

God is, thus, “negatively” infinite, since He is all that can be at all, while the world/universe is only “privatively” infinite. God as the absolute and the world/universe relate to each other as the Creator and the created. God’s all-mightiness as absolute infinity transcends the infinity of the world/universe. In accordance with Cusanus’s starting attitude on learned ignorance (as the determination of the possibility of gaining insight into that which is the highest or God), infinity should always be thought of in relation to the possibility – or more precisely the impossibility – of human cognition. In such a universe, which is one (as the oneness of the many), all beings mirror the structure of the entire universe.

A whole set of cosmological statements (mentioned above) “overthrowing” the traditional worldview – particularly the *hierarchical constitution* of the universe to some degree – logically follow from Cusanus’s view on the infinity of the universe. “To some degree” because Cusanus himself holds that all that exists in degrees. This is expressed by the *magis* and *minus*, which are determinative of the world. These statements also cancel the possibility of determining some absolute points of reference or loci – first and foremost, the centre and circumference of the totality (of all things). In other words, absolute precision of determination is impossible in the world/universe. Thus, according to Cusanus, *only God is the centre and circumference*. The metaphysical foundation of his cosmology is perhaps most evident in this standpoint of his. In relation to God or the absolute, the world is the realm of the relative, in which each individual thing is determined in relation to all the other things. This relativisation peculiar to the world also reflects in the evaluations of both Earth and its position in the totality.

While Cusanus infers his thesis on the infinity of the world/universe from the thesis on God’s infinity that manifests (explicates, develops) itself in the world, Petrić’s theses on infinity pertain exclusively and primarily to space, and only then to the universe (the totality, *universitas*). According to Petrić, space – as the principle of the material world – is that which is the first to issue from the depths of the Father and is the condition for something to exist at all. Being incorporeal and corporeal, space is the condition for that which is invisible, incorporeal to manifest itself.

Petrić holds that space is finite-infinite.⁶ He, thus, does not speak of absolutely infinite space. While the visible world is housed in finite space, that which is invisible to one’s bodily eyes – i.e. that which is intelligible – lies in infinite space, which extends beyond the limits of the visible world. Yet, even in Petrić the infinity of space is conditioned by his conception of the principle or God and His relation to the totality (of all things). God is, namely, all beings and all non-beings.

“In other words, all things were in Him: both beings and all non-beings; beings He revealed, while non-beings – as Hermes states – He kept within himself....”⁷

He bears these non-beings from within Himself “whenever He wants”. It is from this conception that the necessity of space issues, in which the still-un-existent beings that God kept within Himself are to emerge. Space is, thus, the presupposition of God’s manifestation, i.e. of the world which is God’s manifestation. Considering that the above expounds the very groundwork of Petrić’s conception of the world or universe, what remains is the question of the difference between Petrić’s and Cusanus’s respective value judgements on Earth. In order to be able to answer this question, I must first examine their outlooks and statements on Earth – more specifically, the presuppositions of their outlooks on Earth – in more detail.

Cusanus’s position on Earth

As has already been expressed, Cusanus derives his views on Earth and his thesis on Earth’s equality with the other stars from his underlying statement on the relations between the created – as the region of the relative, the realm that “more” and “less” apply to – and God the Creator as the absolutely greatest. In fact, Cusanus arrives at his outlook on Earth *via negativa*. That is to say, his viewpoint that Earth is not the centre of the universe results from his insight that nothing in the universe is absolute or perfect, inclusive of absolute or perfect spheres, from which it follows that the universe does not contain a point which would be its centre. Accordingly, Earth cannot be the centre of the universe (although it is near it).

The same argument is applicable to his attitude towards the motion of Earth – Earth is in motion just like the other celestial bodies. From this it follows

⁵ Cf. my “Ontoteologijske pretpostavke i implikacije koncepcije beskonačnog u Nikole Kuzanskog, Giordana Bruna i Frane Petrića” (“The Onto-Theological Presuppositions and Implications of the Concept of Infinity in Nicolaus Cusanus, Giordano Bruno and Frane Petrić”), *Prilozi za istraživanje hrvatske filozofske baštine* 41–42/1995, pp. 37–56, and also in *Petrićev put*, Institut za filozofiju, Zagreb 2001.

⁶ In his case, it is justified to use the term infinite, since he holds that space as a whole does have a centre but no limits.

⁷ *NUP*, Panarchia VIII, 16 v.

that his viewpoint on the position of Earth is but a side effect of his viewpoint on the infinity of the universe.

The analysis of Cusanus’s work reveals that his thesis that Earth is *stella nobilis* is not primarily the result of his reflections on the nature and laws of occurrences in the material universe. What lies at the very foundation of his thesis that Earth is a noble star, as well as his further theses with which he equates Earth with the other stars (e.g. the motion of Earth, the inhabitedness of other stars, etc.), is his view on the *relativity of the created* in relation to the absolute, and his view on the omni-presence of God, which renders all beings equal in reference to a single central point (this is, in actual fact, the meaning of his claim that God is the centre and circumference of the totality).⁸

It must be noted that – in addition to accentuating the equality of Earth, obviously attempting to cushion the criticism that may have been coming his way once the ultimate consequences of his views were considered, particularly in respect of Earth as the place of God’s incarnation, and man’s privileged status in the totality of beings – in the second book of his *Of Learned Ignorance* Cusanus, nevertheless, highlights that intelligent nature – a nature that “abides on this Earth” – is the very pinnacle of creation as such. Moreover, “although the inhabitants of other planets are of a different kind, it appears that there cannot be a nature either more elevated or more perfect than that which is intelligent”.

Petrić’s position on Earth

In accordance with his conception of the ensoulment of the totality, Petrić holds that Earth is also endowed with a soul and mind. On the basis of this he ascribes motion to Earth, since everything in the universe is in motion due to the omni-presence of the soul as the principle of motion. Petrić opts for the thesis on the motion of Earth once he has carefully scrutinised the standpoints of philosophers and astronomers from Aristotle to Copernicus on the motion of Earth.⁹ He holds that Earth is actually set in motion by its very own nature,

“... which is the offspring of the soul, much like the soul is the offspring of the mind, and the mind the offspring of the Creator’s mind”.¹⁰

Just like the birthing of the soul and the mind, to which circular motion is peculiar, the motion of Earth is also circular. However, Earth revolves eastwards, in contrast to the stars that revolve westwards. The question is: why is there this difference in the direction of motion? In answering this question, Petrić reaches for his favourite formula:

“Because God the Creator wanted everything in the totality of beings to consist of contrasts, with which He evinced both His wisdom and His might more potently.”¹¹

In the 32nd book of *Pancosmia* Petrić places Earth in the very centre of the infinite world (“Terra haec, quae in medio infiniti mundi posita...”; irrespective of the fact that the universe is infinite, it does have a centre, around which Earth is positioned). Nevertheless, the centre of Earth does not correspond with the centre of the universe. In actual fact, Earth revolves around this centre. Although Petrić highlights that some of the ancients refer to Earth as a star since “it is suspended in the air much like the Moon is in ether, and is just as round as the Moon”,¹² his view is that Earth is *not one of the celestial bodies*, i.e. a star. It is in this that his views significantly differ from Cusanus’s.

By contrast to the Moon which is an ethereal body, Earth is a *material sphere*¹³ (which shines not with its own light, but with the light it receives from the

Sun). Actually, it is petrified fluid or condensed cosmic matter. Being the most compact part of cosmic matter, Earth is, at the same time, the least perfect of the bodies, the *residuum of elementary matter* (fex elementorum) and *the last of the residua* (fecium postrema), which he also qualifies as the filth of matter.

I shall now inquire into what Petrić grounds his view and value judgement on Earth on (which is what differentiates him from Cusanus). Regardless of his claim that the universe is one and infinite, which is found not only in *Pancosmia* but also in other sections of his *Nova de universis philosophia*, Petrić, nevertheless, differentiates between certain parts of the totality – he preserves the idea of the centre of the universe around which Earth revolves as the fundamental reference point. What is of most interest to the topic at hand is the fact that he ranks these parts according to their value. As has already been underlined a number of times, his cosmology is founded on ontology, which means the following: it is in ontology that Petrić conceives the totality of beings (universitas) as a Neo-Platonically conceived ladder that comprises ten genera of beings. These beings range from the principle of the totality or One (unum), through the soul and nature to corporeality. The totality of beings, on the other hand, comprises two significant constituents – the corporeal and incorporeal, which he distinguishes between as that which is independent (*authipostaton*) and that which is by the other (*heterostaton*). Furthermore, only the incorporeal is that which is active and independent. Even though the principle of the totality or One is, according to Petrić, in the function of verifying the oneness of the totality, and even though the primary intention of Petrić’s onto-theology is substantiating that the corporeal is but the manifestation of the incorporeal (in *Panaugia*, for example, that which is visible is visible to us by that which is invisible by itself), he, nonetheless, strictly differentiates between and – more essentially – valorises the corporeal and incorporeal *significantly differently*. Yet on the other hand, the key constituents of the system are the principles of the material world, whose nature is *dual*, i.e. both corporeal and incorporeal (such as space, light, heat and fluid) and which, in reality, link the opposite.

Petrić transposes the ontological hierarchy of beings into his cosmology as the differentiation between the regions of the universe. What makes the regions or realms of the universe different is the degree of the density or dilution of the cosmic matter or fluid, which is itself both corporeal and incorporeal. At the same time, the ontological ranking of beings manifests itself in the visible, material universe as the ladder of the elements – from earth, water, air and fire to ether and the intelligible – with Petrić persistently emphasising the linking role of the inter-regions, i.e. the fact that their nature embraces within itself both the lower and the higher properties of the regions it links. Cosmic

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This is perhaps easiest to understand with the help of his symbolic (i.e. mathematical) illustration, which learned ignorance uses in attaining the truth. He depicts the relations between the greatest, the maximum or the absolute and each of the particulars as the relations between each individual line and the infinite line. The infinite line, which is indivisible, is present as a whole in each line, but is not any of the final lines.

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NUP, *Pancosmia* XVII, 103.

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Ibid., 104.

11

Ibid., 104 v.

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NUP, *Pancosmia* XX, 112 v.; the fact that Petrić does not mention Cusanus in reference to this view, perhaps suggests that he was not directly familiar with Cusanus’s work.

13

Ibid., 112.

matter is least dense in the region that transcends the visible world, i.e. in infinite space, which is where the eternal blessed beings abide. This realm which lies beyond the ‘empyreum’ relates to the visible part of the universe much like the principle does to that which is by the principle. Naturally, the Creator himself is incorporeal. Petrić’s value classification is evident from the following claim:

“Those things amongst the bodies which are closer to the incorporeal are also closer to the Creator. Higher incorporealities are less dense and closer to the Creator!”

Space is the least, while Earth is the most corporeal from all the corporealities. Earth is, at the same time, the densest and most complex composed body. *Earth is, thus, the furthest away from the Creator.*

According to Petrić, each region also comprises a part that represents the residuum of the region (hence, the Moon is the residuum of the ethereal part). Moreover, “in the material part of the world all the residua poured onto this one Earth of ours”.¹⁴ Considering that Earth is in the centre, it is also the *residuum* or *faeces* of the entire world. Yet, in respect of this, a crucial question arises.

Considering that incorporealities are the principles of occurrences in the material, visible world, the influences from the “upper” regions descend towards Earth. Cosmologically speaking, this means that, according to Petrić, ideas – or onenesses (unitates) – as seeds carried by fluid or heat, pour over the stars into the material world. They are being “embodied” in a way, which natural philosophy portrays as the process of fluid condensing. Yet, for Petrić, it is highly unlikely that all the stars were created only to pour light and seeds into the material world, and solely for the sake of Earth.¹⁵

Nevertheless, owing to this conception of the influences, all of which are directed towards the centre, i.e. the material world and Earth, he must accept that the stars pour heat and light onto Earth. They, however, do so through the Sun and the Moon, which are closer to the “regions of birthing”. The fact that the very last thing that Petrić discusses in *Pancosmia* is Earth speaks volumes about the way in which he sees and judges Earth. The 31st and 32nd books of *Pancosmia* are expressly dedicated to Earth – the very end of his reflections on the totality of all things. The introduction to the 31st book states that:

“... by the degrees of the natural order we have finally traversed from the highest to the lowest things: from the uppermost to the lowermost, from the incorporeal to the most corporeal, from the least dense to the coarsest, from the purest to the faeces of all things, that is: to Earth itself”.

Earth’s position in the centre of the universe was decided by God Himself because He “desired for the faeces of things (*faex rerum*) to be as distant as possible from the purest of things”. Moreover,

“God the Creator wanted to separate the residua of this material world (as the coarsest and darkest of all things) as much as possible from all the higher things, as the least worthy, not only to prevent their mutual mingling, but also to avert the slightest possible contact between the two. (...) Hence, Earth is the most separated from all the things and it cannot be more separated than it already is.”¹⁶

Petrić expressly claims that Earth is in the very centre of the universe not because of its weight as some have thought, but because of the “filth of its nature”. In sum, Earth is “the most faecal faeces” (*fex foeculentissima*). *In other words, it is precisely this value judgement that conditions Earth’s cosmological determination!*

Conclusion

Our search for an answer to the question of why there is a difference between Cusanus and Petrić’s respective views on the position of Earth and a difference between their value judgements on this position has led us to the following conclusion: although both philosophers set forth from defining the relations between God and the world, and the world as the manifestation of God in their respective interpretations of the world, the presuppositions of the two philosophers are somewhat different – as regarding the thesis on the infinity of the world/universe, so regarding their standpoints on the position of Earth inclusive of its evaluation.

There is a difference already in the very groundwork of their respective cosmologies. The thesis according to which God is in every point, the centre and circumference of the totality (the consequent application of this view in cosmology is later to be found in Bruno, who claims that each and every point in the universe is potentially a centre) is crucial for Cusanus’s cosmology.

The thesis on the infinity of the world/universe is only indirectly related to the view on the position of Earth and its evaluation. Cusanus’s decentralising Earth is the result of his reflections on the relations between God and the creatures, in which Cusanus – from a distinctly *Christian* position – advocates the equality of all the creatures in relation to God (even if only in the negative sense – i.e. all the creatures are *equal* in relation to the absolute by their incapability to attain Him as creatures).¹⁷

In fact, the most accurate thing to say is that, for Cusanus, the position of Earth in the totality is actually irrelevant. In reality, he does not define it more precisely. It is simply deduced from the view that relativity is determinative of the world. Cusanus’s “positive” value judgement of Earth is entirely onto-theologically conditioned, and is arrived at “negatively” (by denying absoluteness to all things created, i.e. by accentuating the absence of absolute precision in the region of the relative). By rendering all creatures equal in relation to the unattainable God, Cusanus eliminates value judgements from cosmology in some way. “In some way” because he does not entirely eliminate ontological degrees, which are, in some measure, accompanied by ranks according to value. Yet, in reference to this, I must remind that the fundamental insight on which his philosophy rests is the correspondence of opposites, which neutralises the above degrees in some way. Besides, the ontological degrees in Cusanus are not directly transposed into his cosmology.

Petrić’s worldview is also conditioned by his definition of the relations between God and the creatures. His thesis on the infinity of the universe/space is primarily conditioned by his reflections on God, who is “both all beings and all non-beings” and who can, thus, infinitely manifest Himself. Yet, in Petrić’s worldview, his insistence on the gradation of beings is much more

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Ibid.

¹⁵
“Indeed, reason dares not either to claim or believe that God the Creator created such massive bodies, much larger than Earth, so innumerable and so beautiful for the sake of a single body, which is as minuscule and as hideous as Earth.” (NUP, *Pancosmia XXI*, 116)

¹⁶
NUP, *Pancosmia XXXI*, 150.

¹⁷
This is substantiated by Cusanus in book III (Ch. 1) of his *De docta ignorantia*, where he states the following: “God is the beginning, the middle, the end and each member of the totality, so that all things, whether ascending, descending or aspiring after the centre, can near God.”

pronounced and is the result of his projecting a Neo-Platonically conceived ladder of beings into his worldview. Regardless of his fundamental aspiration after the oneness of everything based on the principle which is *Unomnia*, it seems that in his reflections on the totality Petrić actually insists on opposites, particularly in respect of highlighting the “filth” and hideousness of Earth. Hence, one extreme of the totality houses the least corporeal and the other extreme the most corporeal, while God is the furthest away from Earth (from which it follows that, in reality, God and Earth represent the two opposed poles of cosmic events).

The above, however, is not in accordance with his philosophy as a whole, which primarily strives to depict the totality as a unity (even as a sphere!), in which the material world is considered to be the manifestation of the principle (Petrić expresses this within the framework of his onto-theological inferences in *Panarchia* by “All is created by God in order that you may recognise Him in all”). If we accept Petrić’s basic intentions, then his views on Earth as faeces and residuum come across as greatly astonishing. What particularly astounds is his resolve to detach that which he wishes to consider as a whole.

The material or visible is validated precisely by God’s intent to reveal, disclose Himself to man (expressed by “All is created by God in order that you may recognise Him in all”), and Earth – regardless of being the “residuum” of the totality – contributes to the harmony and perfection of the universe. The underlying principle that Petrić’s entire philosophy of nature rests on is as follows: if one opposite is given in nature then the other must also be given. Accordingly, for the purpose of preserving balance and harmony, the subsistence of two extremes – one of which is Earth – is absolutely necessary. This is explicitly highlighted in *Pancosmia*:

“It (sc. Earth) is here (sc. in the centre), in obedience to the Creator, and contributes with its parts to the perfection of the universe.”¹⁸

The following question arises here: in giving prominence to the filth of Earth, what does Petrić care more about – is it highlighting the unity of everything or is it, perhaps, highlighting the opposites, which then also includes highlighting the hideousness and lowliness of Earth? The answer to this question is key to understanding the fundamental bearing of his philosophy – namely, his position on the visible and material world, and the way of our being in it. It seems, however, that Petrić’s response is not unambiguous.

Irrespective of both Cusanus and Petrić having adopted the view on the infinity of the universe as fundamental, it is, nevertheless, a fact that both philosophers perceive the universe as a sphere, in which they both call on the pseudo-Hermetic view that “Deus est sphaera, cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam”. Yet, while in Cusanus this view functions more like a metaphorical or symbolic illustration of God (which is in accordance with his use of mathematics for the purpose of symbolically portraying the divine), in Petrić this view indeed functions as his “image of the world” (“The world is a solid sphere...”), miraculously brought into relation to his view on the infinity of the universe. It appears that what also comes to the fore in Petrić is an underlying ambiguity in views so peculiar to all Neo-Platonic philosophemes (i.e. insisting on dualities and simultaneously striving to reflect on them in their unity).

While in Cusanus the “rehabilitation” of Earth logically follows from his “relativisation” of the phenomenal world/universe, in Petrić the question of how he actually perceives Earth, inclusive of the question of man’s position in the

totality, remains unanswered. The thesis on Earth being the least perfect body or the faeces of the universe was most certainly not in accordance with either the Biblical view on man or the Hermetic view on man-the other god (*homo-secundus deus*), which Petrić enthusiastically reaches for in other places.

Finally, this yet again demonstrates that the very core of this “novel” cosmology actually rests on metaphysical solutions, and that the differences between Petrić and Cusanus’s perceptions of and value judgements on Earth are grounded on the differences we unveil in their respective onto-theological beliefs.

It is a widely accepted view that the modern scientific approach to phenomena is divested of the problems this text has dealt with – i.e. the problem of *value judgements* conditioning worldviews – and that this approach has been established, at least in part, exactly due to such problems having been eliminated in the first place, which has, according to A. Koyre, resulted in the “devaluation of being”. I have here only attempted to warn, yet again, of the possible need to rethink this conviction.

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Zemlja – »plemenita zvijezda« ili
»izmet svih stvari«

(Kuzanski/Petrić)

Sažetak

U tekstu se polazi od uvida da Nikola Kuzanski i Frane Petrić pripadaju onim renesansnim misliocima koji zastupaju stav o beskonačnosti svemira. S obzirom na to zajedničko polazište, zanimljivo je njihovo neslaganje i štoviše oprečnost stavova vezanih uz položaj Zemlje u svemiru i njeno vrednovanje. Dok je za Kuzanskog ona »stella nobilis«, tj. plemenita zvijezda, za Petrića je »faex omnium rerum«, izmet svijui stvari. U tekstu se pokušava istražiti što je razlog tog razmimoilaženja u stavovima oko Zemlje dvojice renesansnih mislilaca.

Ključne riječi

Kuzanski – Petrić, svijet, Zemlja, renesansa, plemenita zvijezda

Erna Banić-Pajnić

Die Erde – ein „edler Stern“ oder
die „Jauche aller Dinge“

(Cusanus – Patricius/Petrić)

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel geht von der Einsicht aus, dass N. Cusanus und F. Patricius/Petrić zu jenen Renaissancedenkern gehören, die die Unendlichkeit des Weltalls vertreten. Im Hinblick auf diesen von ihnen geteilten Standpunkt ist es umso interessanter, ihre abweichenden, ja gegensätzlichen Meinungen bezüglich der Stellung der Erde im All und ihrer Bewertung zu verfolgen. Während

sie für Cusanus eine „stella nobilis“, ein edler Stern ist, stellt sie für Petrić die „faex omnium rerum“, die Jauche aller Dinge dar. Im Text wird versucht herauszufinden, was der Grund für die gegensätzlichen Standpunkte der beiden Renaissancephilosophen sein könnte.

Schlüsselbegriffe

Cusanus – Patricius, Erde, Renaissance, *edler Stern*

Erna Banić-Pajnić

La Terre – « stella nobilis » ou
« déjection de toutes choses »

(Nicolas de Cues – Patricius/Petrić)

Résumé

Le texte part du fait que Nicolas de Cues ainsi que Franciscus Patricius (Petrić), philosophe croate du XVI^e siècle, font partie d'un courant de penseurs de la Renaissance ayant défendu l'hypothèse de l'infini de l'univers. Il est intéressant de voir comment, malgré ce point de départ commun, leurs théories sur la position de la Terre dans l'univers divergent. Si pour Nicolas de Cues, la Terre est une « stella nobilis », c'est-à-dire une étoile noble, Petrić la considère comme « faex omnium rerum », déjection de toutes choses. Le texte tente de trouver l'origine de cette divergence entre les deux philosophes.

Mots-clés

Cusanus – Patricius, univers, la Terre, Renaissance, *stella nobilis*