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Demythologizing Christian Philosophy: An Outline

1. Introduction

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In this paper I investigate the tradition of "philosophy" and "philosopher" with respect to their importance in Christianity. I argue that the meaning of the traditional notion of philosophy as an abstract science has importantly changed. The reason for this is that the "cosmo-theological" character of traditional philosophy proved to be untenable. If this pattern is not valid in our days, then the question arises if the role of philosophy, as conceived during the Christian centuries, can be continued in and beyond our age. My answer has two aspects: on the one hand, the cosmo-theological character of philosophy needs to be explored or "demythologized;" on the other hand, Christian thought still has the potential to open itself to a future renewal. Thinking philosophically is a fundamental human feature, and I suggest that "trying to become wise," the striving for the discovery and realization of the meaningfulness of reality is still the main concern of human beings reflecting on their historical existence today. In this sense, the encyclical letter of *Fides et ratio* by John Paul II offers guidance, inasmuch as its author calls for "courage" in thinking. Following this call, the present

paper contends that the three mains tasks of a Christian philosophy today are as follows: 1. A sufficient understanding of the tradition determined by cosmo-theology; 2. A sufficient understanding of the importance of the trauma of totalitarianism of the twentieth century as the dividing line between tradition and contemporary reflections; and 3. A sufficient understanding of human beings striving to grasp the meaning of personhood in an open universe on the basis of the meaningfulness of reality.

2. What is Philosophy?

If one asks what philosophy is, one faces first of all a linguistic problem. The word "philosophy" comes from the Greek and its meaning is not very clear from the outset. There is a grammatical and semantic difference between "philosophy" and "philosopher," because the latter refers to the lover of the "wise one" (*sophos*), while the former is about the lover of "wisdom" (*sophia*).[1] This difference between philosophy and philosopher is important, because it shows that the activity of the philosopher, that is "the love for the wise one," may not be reduced to the abstract term of "philosophy." The activity of the philosopher, according to its original setting, is closer to a personal relationship, as the basis of community, than to the abstract intellectual procedures of philosophy as we tend to understand this term today.

In the most important first documents of Greek philosophy, the writings of Plato and Aristotle, "wisdom" cannot be detached from "being wise" or "the wise one," because the overall direction of these archaic forms of thought is in a sense theistic or, as we would put it with a later Greek expression, "metaphysical." Their theism or metaphysical character is relatively indistinct, and this is more so in Plato than in Aristotle. However, these authors appear to agree in the point that the philosopher

[1] Pythagoras called himself φιλόσοφος, not σοφός, and here the "philosopher" clearly means "the lover of the wise one." This "wise one" can be understood as identical with divine providence or divinity itself. See the parallel expressions: φιλόβιβλος, lover of book, φιλόξεινος, lover of guest, φιλόδημος, lover of people etc.

investigates nature and culture *not* for the sake of a self-contained abstract science, and not for the sake of technological expertise, but rather in the interest of a metaphysical aim. This aim, as both Plato and Aristotle seem to agree, is divinization, the exact content of which cannot be precisely determined on the basis of their writings.[2]

On the other hand, these writings contain an encyclopedia of then cutting-edge knowledge about so different fields as politics and cosmology, morals and civic law, mathematics and logic, biology and geography.[3] These writers and their followers conceived philosophy not only metaphysically but encyclopedically as well. Philosophy, in other words, used to be the name of all-encompassing knowledge which tried to synthesize various scientific branches with metaphysics. At the same time, as among others Pierre Hadot explained it, the center of philosophy after the post-Platonic and Post-Aristotelian periods was a certain way of life,

[2] As Socrates says, "Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise" *(Theaetetus* 176 b). And Aristotle: "Therefore if, as they say, men become gods by excess of virtue, of this kind must evidently be the state opposed to the brutish state; for as a brute has no vice or virtue, so neither has a god […]" (*Nicomachean Ethics,* 1145 a). "The escape from the earth to the dwelling of the gods" is a mythological figure of speech in the framework of cosmo-theology (about which see further the main text).

[3] In the *Republic,* Plato offers a list of the sciences: arithmetic, geometry, physical or optical astronomy, mental astronomy, physical harmonics, mental harmonics, and finally dialectics (525–532). We can speak of Plato's ethics and politics (in many parts of the *Republic)*, law (in the *Laws)*, literature and music (in the *Republic,* the *Laws* and in many other dialogues), anatomy *(Timaeus* 61 ff.), and geography *(Phaedo* 109 ff.; *Timaeus* 22–26; *Critias* 3). Systematically, the passage in the *Republic* offers a synthetic view in which astronomy, and especially mental astronomy, occupies the second highest place, and dialectics, that is to say the investigation of the hierarchy of the sciences on the basis of "conversation" is on the top of all sciences. — Aristotle's theory of the sciences is put forward in his various works under the appropriate title, such as ethics, physics, cosmology, meteorology, rhetoric, metaphysics etc. In the *Metaphysics,* Aristotle offers a hierarchy of the sciences in which the theoretical sciences (mathematics, physics and theology) are placed higher than their relatives in the practical realm (geometry, astronomy) and they are all opposed to the accidental sciences about categories and the distinctions between possibilities and actualities. Theoretical sciences fundamentally differ from the practical and productive sciences (or arts); and "there is no science of the accidental […]; for all science is either of that which is always or of that which is for the most part" (1025 a–1027 a).

an ascetic *Lebensführung* which renounced culture and civilization and entrusted itself to the universal spirit of divine providence.[4]

Plato and Aristotle did not appear to be strongly distinct thinkers in Antiquity. In Neo-Platonism, Plato represented the omniscient master and Aristotle the ingenious disciple; Plato offered the general framework, Aristotle was to be thanked for the fill in details.[5] Their difference, however, became more evident especially in Arab thought and, following the influence of Muslim scholarship in the West, in European Christianity as well.[6] Appropriate investigations uncovered their different approaches to reality, and their methodologies were subsequently distinguished along the lines of the difference between a significantly theoretical and a rather practical kind of reasoning. While this difference is detectable in their writings, it was only in the Italian Renaissance that certain thinkers recognized this difference as emblematic. Raphael's famous fresco, "The School of Athens" of 1511 expressed this understanding.[7] On the fresco in the Vatican Museums, Plato and Aristotle are facing the observer and one of them, Plato, points upwards to the sky with his right forefinger, while Aristotle makes a gesture of a downward grasp equally with his right hand. Plato holds the *Timaeus*, the central book of ancient cosmology, and Aristotle carries his *Ethics* as a reference to practical wisdom. Raphael's message is obvious: Plato represents the knowledge of the

[4] Hadot, Pierre: *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Paris 1996. – We find clear traces of this ascetic way of life in what we know about Socrates from Plato. For instance, in the *Symposium* we read: "One morning he was thinking about something which he could not resolve; he would not give it up, but continued thinking from early dawn until noon –there he stood fixed in thought; and at noon attention was drawn to him, and the rumor ran through the wondering crowd that Socrates had been standing and thinking about something ever since the break of day. At last, in the evening after supper, some Ionians out of curiosity (I should explain that this was not in winter but in summer), brought out their mats and slept in the open air that they might watch him and see whether he would stand all night. There he stood until the following morning; and with the return of light he offered up a prayer to the sun, and went his way" (*Symposium,* 220 c–d).

[5] We find this approach for instance in Plotinus' works.

[6] *The Classical Heritage in Islam,* ed. and trans. F. Rosenthal, Berkeley 1975; M. Maróth, *Die Araber und die antike Wissenschaftstheorie*, Leiden, New York 1994.

[7] Raphael's typology nevertheless follows Aristotle's classification of the sciences into theoretical and practical in the *Metaphysics* (1025 a *ff.).*

cosmos, the "skies," the "things on high," while Aristotle stands for pragmatic knowledge of moral action. One kind of knowledge is theoretical, the other is practical, one is speculative, the other is constructive. This typology is apt to be represented artistically while it discloses a philosophical insight as well. Raphael obviously created a symbol of the most fundamental typology in the history of philosophy, a typology influencing deeply the subsequent centuries.[8]

From the philosophical point of view, Raphael's distinction seems to be generalizing. We do find the outlines of a systematic metaphysics in Aristotle and, on the other hand, Plato reveals an intimate knowledge of the empirical sciences, such as astronomy, geography, or biology. Still, the history of philosophy after Plato and Aristotle can be comfortably seen as belonging to the one or the other type. This interpretation permeates Western philosophy at least up to the nineteenth century when the difference between German transcendentalism and Anglo-American pragmatism expressed a strong antagonism reminiscent of the divergence depicted in *The School of Athens*. In our days, we still find the Raphaelite-looking distinction between Continental philosophies on the one hand, and Anglo-American kinds of thought on the other hand.

Philosophy, in our sense today, appears to be a Janus-faced tradition, the significance of which is now challenged from two important sides. On the one hand, authors like Martin Heidegger claimed that philosophy in the classical sense had reached its end, because it dissolved in the various branches of the sciences, natural, mathematical, or social.[9] On the other hand, scientists, such as Richard Hawking, recently claimed that philosophy lost its relevance to our contemporary culture, because it did not have an answer to the challenges of scientific

[8] According to A. N. Whitehead, "It was Plato who formulated most of philosophy's basic questions–and doubts. It was Aristotle who laid the foundation for most of the answers. Thereafter, the record of their duel is the record of man's long struggle to deny and surrender or to uphold and assert the validity of his particular mode of consciousness" (Whitehead, Review of J. H. Randall's *Aristotle*. *The Objectivist Newsletter*, May 1963, p. 18).

[9] M. Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, [in:] idem, *Basic Writings,* ed. D. Farrell Krell, San Francisco 1993.

development.[10] Moreover, certain theological schools, especially that of Karl Barth, revisited the earlier thesis of Protestant theology about the ambivalent role of philosophy as opposed to faith and gave their antagonism a new momentum.[11]

3. The Cosmo-Theological View

The works of Classical philosophers, and many of their followers, are indeed a goldmine for anyone interested in old forms of human thought. However, there are some fundamental features entailed in these philosophies, features which determine the entire tradition of philosophy and may appear today as weird or even plainly unacceptable. I do not only mean such points as Plato's description of the inner organs of the human body, because besides its symbolic purpose, the description is childish for today's readers.[12] Or I do not mean merely Aristotle's apparent logical conclusion to the water-like nature of the human eye, as opposed to its supposed light-emissive nature, which he verified by observing the decomposing of eyeballs.[13] Similar descriptions and *prima facie* verifications belong to the collection of ancient grotesqueries.

Nevertheless, there is an incomparably more important feature of the works of ancient philosophers, namely the overall pre-Copernican character of their world-view. Plato's meditations on the role of the blood in human bodies betray the author's ignorance of circulation, but this

[10] S. Hawking, *The Grand Design*, co-authored by Leonard Mlodinov, New York 2010.

[11] There are well argued views according to which Barth considered philosophy in a more positive way, cf. K. Oakes, *Karl Barth on Philosophy and Theology,* Oxford 2012.

[12] One example: "The spleen which is situated in the neighborhood, on the left side, keeps the liver bright and clean, as a napkin does a mirror, and the evacuations of the liver are received into it; and being a hollow tissue it is for a time swollen with these impurities, but when the body is purged it returns to its natural size" (*Timaeus* 72 c).

[13] "True, then, the visual organ proper is composed of water, yet vision appertains to it not because it is so composed, but because it is translucent – a property common alike to water and to air. But water is more easily confined and more easily condensed than air; wherefore it is that the pupil, i.e. the eye proper, consists of water" (Aristotle, *De sensu,* transl. by J. I. Beare, see: www.ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/sense [28.03.2013]).

failure did not influence other parts of his philosophy.[14] Yet the pre-Copernican view of the universe offered an understanding of the cosmos as an organic unity in which human beings possess a central place in order that they can view the circulation of the stellar bodies and accommodate their entire life to these movements. This universal understanding indeed permeates the whole attitude, general features and particular views of these authors so that no important part of these philosophies can be understood without taking into account the pre-Copernican view. I emphasize that this view is not merely "astronomical" in our sense today, but rather an overarching mystical perspective in which the origin and end of human beings, the meaning of the universe itself, the role of history, societies, and the sciences are conceived as forming a meaningful whole, which is described precisely by what they called "philosophy". One of the most succinct summaries of this view can be found in Cicero's famous *Scipio's Dream.*[15]

[14] *Timaeus* 79 e. Plato conjectured that the blood is in motion in the body, but he did not recognize the role of the heart.

[15] In Cicero's *Republic* we read "Men are created under these terms, that they are to look after that globe which you see in the middle of this precinct, which is called earth; and they are given a soul from those eternal fires which you call constellations and stars, which are spherical globes endowed with divine minds and accomplish their rotations and revolutions with amazing speed. And so, Publius, both you and all pious people must keep your soul in the guardianship of the body, and you must not depart from human life without the order of him who gave you your soul: you must not seem to run away from the human duty assigned by the god. […] That way of life is the way to the heavens and to this gathering of those who have ceased to live and after having been released from the body now inhabit the place you see' (it was a bright circle shining among the stars with a most radiant whiteness), 'which you have learned from the Greeks to name the Milky Way.' And from that point, as I studied everything, it all seemed to me glorious and marvelous. There were stars which we never see from this place, and their size was such as we have never suspected; the smallest one was the one furthest from the heavens and closest to earth and shone with borrowed light" (Cicero, *On the Commonwealth. On the Law,* ed. by James E. G. Zetzel, Cambridge, CUP, 1999, p. 97). – See also Plato's *Republic* where we find a description which highlights the relationship between naked eye observation of the starry heavens and the mental image of perfect heavenly circulations and order. "The starry heaven which we behold is wrought upon a visible ground, and therefore, although the fairest and most perfect of visible things, must necessarily be deemed inferior far to the true motions of absolute swiftness and absolute slowness, which are relative to each other, and carry with them that which is contained in them, in the true number and in every true figure. Now, these are to be apprehended by reason and intelligence, but not by sight. […] The spangled heavens should be used as a pattern and with a view to that high-

I term this perspective "cosmo-theology." I am aware of various uses of this expression,[16] yet the phrase still does what I mean by it: it points out

er knowledge; their beauty is like the beauty of figures or pictures excellently wrought by the hand of Daedalus, or some other great artist, which we may chance to behold; any geometrician who saw them would appreciate the exquisiteness of their workmanship, but he would never dream of thinking that in them he could find the true equal or the true double, or the truth of any other proportion. […] And will not a true astronomer have the same feeling when he looks at the movements of the stars? Will he not think that heaven and the things in heaven are framed by the Creator of them in the most perfect manner? But he will never imagine that the proportions of night and day, or of both to the month, or of the month to the year, or of the stars to these and to one another, and any other things that are material and visible can also be eternal and subject to no deviation – that would be absurd; and it is equally absurd to take so much pains in investigating their exact truth" (529–530). See also the famous passage in the *Timaeus*: "The sight in my opinion is the source of the greatest benefit to us, for had we never seen the stars, and the sun, and the heaven, none of the words which we have spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered. But now the sight of day and night, and the months and the revolutions of the years, have created number, and have given us a conception of time, and the power of enquiring about the nature of the universe; and from this source we have derived philosophy, than which no greater good ever was or will be given by the gods to mortal man. This is the greatest boon of sight: and of the lesser benefits why should I speak? Even the ordinary man if he were deprived of them would bewail his loss, but in vain. Thus much let me say however: God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed; and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries" *(Timaeus* 47 b–c).

[16] My expression of cosmo-theology originates in the term "cosmo-theism" coined by Lamoignon de Malesherbes and applied in our time by Helmuth von Glasenapp and Jan Assmann. An alternative origin of the term can be traced back to Kant's distinction between "cosmotheology" and "ontotheology" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 659/A 631). Assmann uses the "cosmotheism" in his various writings, such as in *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997, 142). According to my understanding of *cosmo-theology,* the term refers to this: The basic structures of reality become accessible especially in the phenomena of the sky (sun, moon, planets, stars, constellations etc.), that is in their movements and relationships. The cosmo-theological pattern determines theistic and monotheistic schemes of earlier and later religious forms, to some extent those of Christianity as well, and thus imbues human consciousness in a fashion which remains effective in various ways even in the age of science. As to the history of the content of this notion, one must refer to Charles-Francois Dupuis (1742–1809) whose monumental *Origin de tous les cultes* (1795) demonstrated – however also distorted – the importance of cosmic experience in the emergence of religious beliefs. Dupuis was a genius who tended to misinterpret his own important discoveries. Franz Cumont describes the content of cosmo-theology (in his words "cosmic emotion") as follows: "The resplendent stars, which eternally pursue their silent course above us, are divinities endowed with personality and animated feelings. On the other hand, the soul is a particle detached from the cosmic fires. The warmth which animates the human microcosm is part of the same substance which vivifies the universe, the reason which guides us,

that the ancient authors considered the universe as the expression of a divine entity and human beings as expressions of important, perhaps even decisive, moments of this universe. Cosmo-theologians were thinking in universal terms, because they aimed at the whole of a pre-Copernican cosmos and sought, in some way, to influence it; and they were theologians, because they considered the cosmos divine and saw human beings as moments of the divine functioning of the universe. That is, this view considered the cosmos and human beings as forming a living whole produced and directed by a divine being immanent in, or in some sense transcendent to, the universe. Physical nature, especially astronomical objects, was seen as the central expression of the cosmo-theological character of reality, which shaped nature, culture, and history. The human mind, as already Plato suggested, should be adapted to the movements of the "intelligences in the heaven," that is to the planetary and stellar movements, in order that human beings may become harmonized with the universe and thus, through the correction of the error of physical nature, with the godhead.[17]

Inasmuch as this approach to reality was shared by the most influential philosophers not only of the Hellenic era but even for many centuries after it, including the Christian centuries, we can securely say that their worldview was magical or even plainly mythological.[18] While it is often claimed

partakes of the nature of those luminaries which enlighten it. Itself a fiery essence, it is a kin to the gods which glitter in the firmament. Thus contemplation of the heaven becomes a communion" (F. Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans,* New York 1960, p. 79–80).

[17] As to the harmony between the stars and the mind, see again *Timaeus* 47 b–c. The problem of transcendence is raised by the passages in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1072–73) where it seems that the unmoved mover of the universe has to have a substance in order to produce physical movement. On the other hand, the expression "κινεῖ δὴ ὡς ἐρώμενον" (1072 b) seems to suggest that the *way* this ultimate principle moves the universe is emotional.

[18] C. S. Lewis' *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) is a faithful summary of the manifold influence of cosmo-theology throughout and beyond the Middle Ages; he calls this view "The Model." Nevertheless, C. S. Lewis is interested rather in the literary monuments of "the Model" and did not scrutinize its overall philosophical and theological significance. Accordingly, he underestimates the epoch-making significance of cosmo-theology and does not properly evaluate its philosophical and theological consequences for our understanding of reality today. Nevertheless, along the lines of authors, such as Dupuis, Cumon, Drews, and Assmann, S. C. Lewis belongs to the important discoverers of cosmo-theology.

that philosophy introduced the rule of "logos" after the epoch of "myth," the fact is that this "logos" of the philosophers was often closer to mythology than to our rationality today. The difference between a mythological and a cosmo-theological approach to reality consists in their levels of precision: the mythological view is closer to the world of fairy tales, while always disclosing some moral, sometimes even cosmo-theological insights. The cosmo-theological view, nevertheless, presupposed a more accurate knowledge of nature, mathematics, and astronomy, so that its premises and conclusions could be understood as scientific and used for formulating fairly precise inferences. It must be however emphatically added that the cosmo-theological view substantially changed in Christian thought: while in Cicero we find an animated and divine universe, with the earth and human beings in its center, the center of reality for Christianity is God himself; and the universe comes to the fore only as an expression of God's free creating act. Nevertheless, as we can see in many authors from St. Augustine to St. Thomas or Dante, the cosmo-theological view possessed a deep influence on Christian philosophy, theology, and art.[19]

Even though some trends in traditional philosophy became specialized in the problems of physics, logic, rhetoric, morals, or even biology, the overall cosmo-theological pattern determined its fundamental concepts and procedures. The hierarchical view of the cosmos served as the pattern of a moral and political hierarchy; logical relations were seen as expressed to some extent by the observable relations among stellar objects, all considered as embodying a rational living being. Theology was shaped in accordance with "the teachings of the heavens," so that even the notion of an unmoved mover could be conceived on the basis of the

[19] See Thomas, *Summa theologiae,* I, 70, 3: "One being may be nobler than another absolutely, but not in a particular respect. While, then, it is not conceded that the souls of heavenly bodies are nobler than the souls of animals absolutely, it must be conceded that they are superior to them with regard to their respective forms, since their form perfects their matter entirely, which is not in potentiality to other forms; whereas a soul does not do this. Also as regards movement the power that moves the heavenly bodies is of a nobler kind." – Widespread doubts about the soul-filled character of stars (even in the sense of Thomas) were confirmed by the discovery of the telescope and Galileo's investigations presented in *The Starry Messenger* of 1610. However, way beyond this time the conviction that the stars are living beings in a certain sense could be found even among leading scientists.

only apparently motionless point on the Northern sky, the Polaris.[20] Certainly, it would be a mistake to say that the cosmo-theological view of the universe was a simple copy of optical experience. Cosmo-theologians were sophisticated thinkers, as for instance Plato shows, and they never dared to identify the ultimate truth with optical or any kind of sensual perception. As Plato writes, we "need to suffer of the things in the heavens" if we want "to have a part in the true science of astronomy."[21] That is, we need optical experience, but without mental work (and without a kind of mystical experience) we cannot have an insight into truth. On the other hand it would be an exaggeration to say that logic, mathematics, morality, politics etc. were nothing more than just replicas of "the teachings of the heavens." In all these fields, genuine and specific discoveries were made and used for further arguments and conjectures. However, the overall pattern of cosmo-theology determined the framework and the main structures of a conceptual world in which philosophy lived, moved, and existed; and the sight of the heavenly bodies, the stars and the planets, the seasons and vegetation offered a schema without which "philosophy" would have been meaningless.

The most important features of the cosmo-theological view are as follows:

- The notion of lower nature as fundamentally moldable by higher or divine nature;
- The notion of nature as containing structures reproducible in particular products of human action;
- The notions of objectivity and subjectivity;
- Imitation as the essence of human action;

[20] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1073 a: "The first principle and primary reality is immovable, both essentially and accidentally, but it excites the primary motion, which is one and eternal." As it appears from the text, the first mover must be of a sort of substance which is able to move other substances, such as the spheres, the stars, and the planets.

[21] The expression of "to suffer of the things in the heavens" (τὰ δ' ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἐάσομεν) is translated as "to leave the things in the heavens alone." This version is based on the double meaning of ἐάω: let be and let alone. Most probably, the author of the Platonic text used this ambiguous formula with the intention of offering two possible readings: one for the interested and another for the disinterested. See also *Republic* 530 b-c.

- Human beings conceived along the lines of the "intelligences of the heavens;"
- The lack of the notion of genuine difference and genuine newness;
- History as a cyclical process.

"Nature" in the sense characteristic of the "Earth" is by its essence open to formation by cosmic influences, the rules of the "heavens." Based on this notion of nature, "phusis" or "natura" became understood as the target of modification, influence, and exploitation. Higher nature is eternal and cannot be changed; lower nature is receptive to higher nature and follows the latter inasmuch as possible. Human beings are free to follow or unfollow higher nature; and they are able to reach the ultimate source of reality and participate in the overall configuration of the universe.[22] Moreover, humans can imitate the heavens in that they produce things which are new to nature yet use natural processes as their principles, such as simple or more complicated machines. It seems that the main intention of machine-building in Antiquity may have been the production of a replica of the world, such as Plato's μίμημα *(Timaeus* 40 d) and similar planetariums. Engineers, such as Heron of Alexandria produced more particular machines as well. For instance, as Claudian describes, cleverly arranged magnets were used to set in motion sacred sculptures in the temple of Mars and Venus to create the scene of a sexual union of the two deities during liturgy.[23] These efforts were dependent on the view of nature's nature as governed by higher influences; and of human beings as mediators of such influences. Humans, nevertheless, were conceived themselves as replicas of higher entities, such as planets and starts, and thus their shadow-like being did not allow the emergence of the notion of genuine subjectivity.[24]

[22] See especially Aristotle's description of the ultimate principles of the heavens in *Metaphysics* 1072 ff. Plato speaks of ταὐτόν and θάτερον (the Same and the Other: the sphere of the fixed stars, and the sphere of the planets) in *Timaeus* 35, 37, 44.

[23] C. Claudianus, *Works,* London 1922, vol. 2, p. 234 ff.

[24] Plato famously claimed *(Timaeus* 41) that there are exactly as many stars in the heavens as many souls, some of them living on the on Earth. This parallelism shows that human beings are actually stellar objects in an earthly modification.

The ancient notion of objectivity, as embodying the eternal and valid structures of reality, was modeled above all on the "skies" and their apparent regular movements. It is beyond question that everyday objectivity of sense-perception helps the emergence of a massive feel of objectivity; but precisely this latter is most importantly represented by the impression the "eternal movements" of the stars.[25] In the framework of cosmo-theology, the notion of objectivity was reinforced by the experience of the movements of the "heavens." I stress that the main faculty related to the cosmo-theological experience is vision. It belongs to the nature of human sight that, even though its contents are determined by the optical mechanisms of the eye, its production appears preeminently "objective." The cosmo-theological view of reality was based on naked eye observation and thus the overwhelming nature of the cosmo-theological experience received an additional support from the objectivity characteristic of human vision. Subjectivity was defined in accordance with this objectivity: In this framework, the subject was conceived as the complementary pole, *the negative* of objectivity. Thus subjectivity became an *optical subjectivity* which is capable of the sight of the universe and defined accordingly as an integral part of it. Subjectivity was defined objectively.[26]

As a consequence of the objective view of the universe, the main activity of human individuals, their societies, and even history had to be conceived as imitations or replicas of the objective order of the heavens. From times immemorial, the main feasts of developed societies have been determined in accordance with the movements and constellations of heavenly bodies, most importantly the Sun and the Moon. Even Christianity

[25] Kant famously referred to the "starry sky" as the most important external source of wonder: "Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* part 2, Conclusion: http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5683/pg5683.html [28.03.2013]).

[26] Here we can mention one of the central views of the main representative of biocentricm, Robert Lanza. As he repeatedly writes, the "external world" is derived mainly from optical experience, but quantum theory does not confirm the well-grounded nature of our optical experience. I add: in cosmo-theology, the extreme objectification intrinsic in visual perception serves as the basis of an entire system the remnants of which still determines our world-views, especially physics.

continued this tradition so that, among other feasts, Christmas and Easter are still settled on by characteristic stellar times—the shortest day of the year (in accordance with the per-modern calendar) for Christmas, and the first full moon after the spring equinox for Easter.[27] Human individuals were called to imitate the heavenly movements, stellar and planetary relations; and even the notion of an "imitatio Christi" continued this tradition of a cosmic simulation put into an allegorical context. That is, imitation of the skies, the will of the gods or God, the imitation of great prophets, kings, and heroes all belonged to the essence of the cosmo-theological view. Thereby human beings became replicas or reflections of paramount personalities, even mythical ones with stellar connotations, such like Hercules or Perseus. The notion of human personhood, in the sense we know it today, could not have its rightful place in the mind of the ancients. Imitation as the central feature of human activity — a feature which did not exclude, merely determined, the notion of free will — hampered the insight into the value of genuine newness in the realms of human action or history. More importantly, the universal hierarchy of analogies blocked the perception of the value of genuine difference, the power of "the totally other" as we meet this expression today in philosophy as well as in theology.[28]

Similarly, history could not be seen otherwise than a reflection of the "eternal circulations" of the heavenly bodies. Historical epochs, the fall and rise of political powers were considered too as reflections of goings-on

[27] Dupuis, *Origine de tous les Cultes,* vol. V. Dupuis realized that the fundamental texts of Christianity reflect the cosmo-theological view. He misinterpreted, however, his own discovery inasmuch as he concluded that the figure of Christ was a literary fiction based on the experience of the Sun. This is a non sequitur. While these texts are clearly determined by the cosmo-theological pattern, their authors saw this pattern as materialized in real occurrences on Earth. The essence of the cosmo-theological pattern is precisely this that real occurrences reveal it; and the task of a biographer, such as an evangelist, was to show this pattern as realized in real goings-on in everyday circumstances. In other words, Dupuis was seriously mistaken to believe that the figure of Christ was not real; he was right nevertheless in showing that the figure of Christ was seen as revealing a higher order of things as conceived in the natural experience of the sky.

[28] The modern use of the expression "totaliter aliter" originates in Rudolf Otto's *The Holy* of 1917 and was subsequently applied by Karl Barth in a characteristic sense to point out the absolute difference between the human world and divine reality.

in the sky, even if it must have been very difficult to establish the precise correspondences in concrete cases.[29] Nevertheless, a "cyclical" view of history did not possess a perfect pattern on the sky: as it was evident for the ancient astronomers, celestial orbits did not represent a perfect circle. A "cyclical" notion of history could not be conceived, accordingly, as the realization of an eternal cyclical pattern in which the same things recur forever. The cosmo-theological view contained the recognition that the human eye could not see perfect circulations, only imperfect ones. That was the reason why Plato advised his readers to concentrate on *mental* astronomy, based on the imperfect optical astronomy, since the latter only approximated abstract arithmetical structures. Nevertheless, the supposition that a perfect formula can be spelled out, or at least that the mystically perfect circle can be realized, was a sufficient ground for the cosmo-theologians to ponder about the cause of the difference between the observable imperfect cosmos and the perfect formula. The explanation we have is ingenious: as Plato expounds in the myth of the "chariot allegory," the once perfect circulation of the heavens was broken by a destructive principle, embodied in the black horse of the chariot.[30] We can interpret this allegory as an explanation of a catastrophe of a cosmic dimension, which had to have three kinds of consequences: First, this catastrophe leads to the unraveling of the various heavenly spheres, each corresponding to a certain level of perfection or imperfection. Second, the catastrophe launches the

[29] Virgil, nevertheless, connected the rule of Augustus to a new planetary situation in the Fourth Eclogue:

"Now the last age by Cumae's Sibyl sung
has come and gone, and the majestic roll
of circling centuries begins anew:
justice returns, returns old Saturn's reign,
with a new breed of men sent down from heaven.
Only do thou, at the boy's birth in whom
the iron shall cease, the golden race arise,
befriend him, chaste Lucina; 'tis thine own
Apollo reigns."
(Transl. by J. B. Greenough)

[30] *Phaedrus* 246 a–254 e.

cosmic wandering of souls which leads from the star-form to human and subhuman existences, and then back to the stellar form again. Thirdly, the catastrophe is the beginning of a historical process of decline and renewal. As can be seen, the cyclical nature of history could well fit in with a notion of history of fall and redemption and did not necessitate a uniform return of selfsame structures.[31]

4. Departing from Cosmo-Theology

What I attempted to delineate briefly above leads us to realize two things: First, the Western tradition of philosophy was fundamentally determined by the cosmo-theological understanding of the universe. Second, this understanding was not merely peripheral or negligible, but defined the whole conceptual schema of philosophy, its fundamental notions, relations, objectives, and most importantly philosophy's understanding of human beings. It is an understandable endeavor to flesh out the meaning of many of our philosophical concepts by going back to the very sources, especially to Greek and Latin philosophy. However, it is a serious mistake to believe that such a return could replace the more important task of clarifying the fundamental structures of the cosmo-theological worldview and its relation to our traditional philosophical notions. A "re-Hellenization" of philosophy, as well as a return to Aristotle in order to find a sound notion of reason or moral virtue, are important philosophical proposals, yet they remain insufficient: we need to see not only the original meaning of certain conceptions, but their overall position as well in the cosmo-theological view.[32] And we need to see the development by which these notions became abstracted from their original matrix and acquired a meaning in which the cosmo-theological layer was still present. The notion of a virtue is certainly one of

[31] Plato remains silent about the *meaning* of the process of fall and redemption. Sometimes he hints at an aim, namely the self-contained life of the universe. Fall and redemption are necessary for the purification not only of the souls but also of the godhead, since the universe as a perfect and eternal whole has "his own waste providing his own food" *(Timaeus* 33 c).

[32] B. Mezei, *Reason and Revelation after Auschwitz,* New York 2013, p. 269–284.

these important concepts in which the original cosmo-theological nucleus of "ἕξις" — the capacity of producing action in a fashion analogous to the intelligible and "habitual" movements of stars — became blurred, individualized, and structured in a moral system in which forgetfulness gradually suppressed the cosmo-theological pattern.[33]

Modern philosophy could not fundamentally detach from this tradition of cosmo-theology, because the possibility was not yet given to face the tradition in its entirety and to explore its essential structures.[34] However, the slow demythologization of philosophy had a strong beginning already in the texts of Plato and Aristotle. While in these authors the cosmo-theological background is often obvious, in many passages of their writings the pattern remains hidden. The reader may have the impression that this latency is the result of tactful editorial work. For instance, Plato would have been able to spell out the philosophical relevance of the Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* in clear astronomical terms, yet he chose an obscure mythical form. Similarly, Aristotle's concise style is able to hide that his dry way of writing even on apparently specific subjects presupposes the cosmo-theological framework of the *De coelo* and other cosmological writings. Christian writers followed this path of an imperfect demythologization, while on the metaphysical and religious level the influence of cosmo-theology remained in force.[35]

[33] Aristotle's discussions point to the astronomical dimension at crucial points. For instance, in the *Nicomachian Ethics,* one discussion on "sophia" leads to the conclusion that "sophia" cannot be identical with politics or government, because human beings are not the most perfect beings in reality, "since there exist other things far more divine in their nature than man, for instance, to mention the most visible, the things of which the celestial system is composed" (1141 a–b). This is a reference to stellar entities which Aristotle considers "gods" (*Metaphysics* 1026 a; 1074 b).

[34] I need to mention Dupuis again, for he produced an overall analysis of the cosmo-theological pattern. However, his superficial naturalism and logical non-sequiturs hindered a deeper reception of his work during the subsequent decades after 1795, the publication of *Origine de tous les Cultes.*

[35] Already the New Testament is full with cosmo-theological allusions beginning with the Star of Bethlehem through the heavy Hellenistic astrological symbolism in John's *Revelations* to Jesus' words referring to the signs in the heavens (Luk 21:11), or to "heavens" in the plural *(en tois ouranois)* in Our Father, a hint to the spherical notion of the universe. A systematic exploration of the cosmo-theological character of the New Testament was offered by Arthur Drews; however, because of the exaggerations of the author's interpretations, his discovery of the cosmo-theological pattern did not have its due recognition.

However, a more substantial wave of demythologizing became possible with the new emphasis on the human subject, the modern principle of the "ego cogito." With this principle — which had been known again to some ancient authors, such as Augustine — the master role of the heavenly pattern began to decline; instead, the fundamental role of the human subject as an "I" came to the fore. By this change, the possibility was given for an overall reassessment of the cosmo-theological pattern. Nevertheless, the "res extensa" of the Cartesian philosophy of nature was still a *natural* entity in its traditional meaning, an entity which could be considered as open to human manipulation. And the notion of the human subject as "res cogitans" did not properly express the character of human personhood except in its relation to the external world as a mathematical-geometrical entity. The way to a gradually emerging new view of reality was opened, however, by the more proper understanding of human subjectivity and personhood, which happened in several steps after Descartes, most importantly in German transcendental philosophies. In the latter tradition, which originated in Kant's famous *Critiques,* the recognition of the genuine nature of human subjectivity smoothed the path to a new, non-cosmo-theological understanding of reality. Reality began to lose its connection to the archaic notion of nature and became more and more emphatically bound up with the human person as its core.

On the other hand, the emphasis on human personhood disclosed the possibility of subjectivism, even solipsism, which degraded human personhood to a worldly entity and blocked the way again to an overall evaluation of the cosmo-theological heritage. In Kant's system, a defective notion of human perception or in Hegel's thought the notion of the universal history of the spirit lacked important features which did not allow an overall revision of the traditional pattern. Kant remained a sensualist in terms of experience, and Hegel did not recognize the Platonic, thus cosmo-theological, roots of an idealizing speculation.[36] Moreover,

[36] Many criticisms of Hegel, such as those of Schelling or Voegelin, emphasized "positive" philosophy of reality as a whole (Schelling), or reality as an objective history of symbolic forms (Voegelin), in contrast to Hegel's merely conceptual or even "Gnostic" speculation.

without a systematic exploration of the fundamental structures of the philosophical tradition, these philosophers and their followers were not able to overcome the defects originating in the centaur-like combination of new insights and traditional structures. The great philosophical rebels of the nineteenth century, such as Kierkegaard or Nietzsche, clearly recognized the insufficiency of transcendentalism as a view open to a subjectivist interpretation of reality and human persons, that is to say, as an approach in which remnants of the old structures of cosmo-theology survived. Kierkegaard emphasized the notion of the godhead as "absolutely different" from what the human mind can conceive; and Nietzsche, far from being a representative of a "philosophical bestiary,"[37] desperately tried to overcome the obscured remnants of a traditional view of morality, politics, culture, and metaphysics. Their criticisms did not reach its aim, because these philosophers lacked the recognition of the importance of a systematic and historical demythologization of philosophy.

In the twentieth century, Husserl's experiential idealism or Heidegger's existential ontology were important steps to unmask the cosmo-theological tradition. However, these thinkers did not recognize the necessity of a historical and formal analysis of this heritage.[38] They did offer a "destruction" of the philosophical tradition. While, both Husserl and Heidegger used this expression in slightly different meanings, they lacked the most important tool for a sufficient "destruction," namely the recognition of the mythical origin and contents of most of the

[37] A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press 1984, p. 22.

[38] In spite of the enormous literature on Plato and other Classical authors, the determining factor of the cosmo-theological view of the universe has not been clearly recognized. The main reason for this is that most of the authors did not see the prevalent nature of the mystical view of the universe. Among the few authors who nevertheless realized the importance of the cosmo-theological view we find the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. As Patočka explains, Plato first developed the notion of the ideas and then identified the ideas with planets and stars. While this chronology is clearly mistaken, Patočka did recognize the role of cosmo-theology in Plato, while he did not elaborate this recognition. See Jan Patočka's *Negative Platonism: Reflections concerning the Rise, the Scope and the Demise of Metaphysics—and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It*, [in:] idem, *Philosophy and Selected Writings,* ed. and transl. E. Kohák, Chicago–London 1989, p. 175–206.

philosophical vocabulary, that is, they did not recognize the cosmo-theological framework. What Husserl wrote on the history of philosophy did not go beyond Kant's schema of a struggle between "dogmatism" and "critical philosophy." What Heidegger offered, most importantly in *Plato's Doctrine of Truth,* was an important criticism of fundamental Platonic notions, mainly the role of the idea as "the yoke" of Being. Heidegger, nevertheless, did not see the importance of the cosmo-theological framework in Plato. Neither Husserl, nor Heidegger realized that not only the history of Western philosophy was "a footnote to Plato," as Whitehead famously remarked,[39] but the basic conceptions of this philosophical tradition had been determined by the hidden pattern of the cosmo-theological view. Due to this deficiency, the phenomenological and existential-ontological attempts to overcome the cosmo-theological tradition lacked a systematic point of view and remained, in their main structures, attached to transcendentalism.[40]

As a reaction to transcendentalism, several waves of historical criticism emerged which focused on the history of the forms of human thought, such as those of Dilthey, Jaspers, Cassirer, or Voegelin. In fact, the philosophers of symbolic forms added a very important correction to transcendentalism, namely the component of an encompassing historical criticism of the forms of human thinking. In this way, the possibility of an overall criticism of philosophy as it became determined by cosmo-theology was already given. Yet no philosopher so far has endeavored successfully to map out the range and importance of this criticism in the historical as well as transcendental terms. Philosophy had reached the limit of its classical European development by the mid-twentieth century and subsequently

[39] "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology,* New York 1979, p. 39).

[40] Heidegger's term of "onto-theology" expresses a criticism different from my criticism of cosmo-theology. Onto-theology is a Heideggerian term for a metaphysical use of the logical mistake of "pars pro toto:" Being is seen in terms of beings, the whole is reduced to the level of its parts. The criticism of cosmo-theology, however, is a form of historical criticism. Nevertheless, this criticism points to our insufficient understanding of reality in its entirety and historicity.

it lived on the past results by offering various interpretations, corrections, and reconsiderations. In contrast, academic philosophy in the Anglo-American world rarely recognizes the initial character and the natural limits of its heritage. Instead, it concentrates merely on certain perspectives in which the cosmo-theological tradition is not identified and therefore its conceptual schema remains caught up in a philosophical naïveté. As a consequence, in contemporary thought we have a range of philosophies which analyze various aspects of this tradition without recognizing the underlying role of an ancient view of reality, a view determining the self-reflection of mankind for many thousands years.

5. The Role of Christian Philosophy

The mere question whether there is "Christian philosophy" at all may seem to be a kind of academic hypocrisy. For already by raising such a question we logically acknowledge a certain possibility of Christian philosophy inasmuch as the two terms — "Christianity" and "philosophy" — are not mutually exclusive and their combination does not entail any apparent contradiction. The counter-argument to the effect, that the talk of "Christian philosophy" is analogous to the talk of "Christian mathematics" or "Christian physics," misses the point. The very idea of an eternal and objective philosophy, which Christianity could use for its purposes, is a remnant of the cosmo-theological pattern. In spite of the admonitions of Plato and Aristotle, some philosophers of the subsequent centuries did not see the distinction between special sciences and philosophy as an architectonic kind of knowledge.[41] Philosophy has never been an objective science in the sense of the particular, cosmo-theologically determined sciences, but rather a universal way of experiencing, understanding, and contributing to the life of the universe. From the Christian point of view, Christianity was a correction added to pre-Christian thought, and philosophy was fulfilled and perfected in the Christian conception of reality.

[41] As for instance Aristotle suggests, *Nicomachian Ethics,* 1094 a.

Philosophy, in this sense, was a corollary to the sciences and pointed to the realm of theology properly so called.[42]

As opposed to various modern philosophies, Christian philosophy has two important advantages: First, traditional Christian philosophy has carefully kept the tradition of the cosmo-theological view. Second, it was Christianity and its philosophical reflections from St. Augustine to contemporary attempts which slowly changed the cosmo-theological pattern and secured an appropriate place for an absolutely transcendent God on the one hand and for the importance of human beings as ultimate persons, persons stemming from the free and divine act of creation on the other hand. These two emphases were going through a long process of articulation, in which the beginnings are massively determined by the externalist cosmo-theological view, but later on, as a result of the efforts of the greatest minds of the Christian centuries, genuine changes occurred: the articulation of God's unique absoluteness and the unique ultimacy of human personhood.[43]

What is often mentioned as the archaism of the tradition of Christian philosophy, namely its closeness to Platonism, Aristotelianism, and especially the presence of Thomism in many of its branches, is in my view an advantage in our philosophical situation. The great philosophical revolutions of modernity — Cartesianism and transcendentalism, to name only the two main trends — have proved to be important yet failed attempts to overcome the robust tradition of cosmo-theology. Christian philosophy, in contrast, has always emphasized a certain balance between continuity and change, and thus it never attempted to dismantle its foundations. In fact, Christian philosophy has always followed a "Tychonic" way. As is known, the famous astronomer of the sixteenth century, Tycho Brahe sought to combine what he saw the geometrical benefits of the Copernican system with the theological benefits of the Ptolemaic system

[42] About the famous French debate on the possibility of Christian Philosophy, see especially Gilson's statement in his *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (transl. A. H. C. Downes, University of Notre Dame Press 1991).

[43] See Mezei, *op. cit*., 193–177.

into his view of the universe. What he proposed was a combination of old and new, the philosophical framework of the cosmo-theological view of Ptolemy enriched with the results and consequences of observations of which Tycho was an important practitioner. Let me consider this well-adjusted combination of old and new a *model*. I claim that Christian philosophy used this model in its renewals and reformations: it aspired to keep the framework of the ancient view and improved it with elements of new philosophical discoveries and perspectives throughout the Middle Ages and modernity up to our day.[44]

The Tychonic nature of Christian philosophy has been pervasive: just think of such different authors as Origen, Augustine, Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, Fénelon, the Neo-Aristotelianism and Neo-Thomism of the nineteenth century and, in our age, the various philosophical proposals by Maritain, Gilson, Rahner, von Balthasar, or Jean-Luc Marion, to name only some of the most influential thinkers. The Tychonic model has been applied variously in the works of these authors. It is nevertheless safe to claim without simplification that in all these cases the massive presence of the traditional view has been fundamentally maintained and, at the same time, improved by new thoughts and perspectives. This has taken place, chronologically, in Platonism, Aristotelianism, rationalism, transcendentalism, existentialism, Protestant anti-philosophism, and in our time in the methodologies of philosophical scientism.[45] The reason for the dominance of the Tychonic model

[44] The tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius has determined Greek Orthodox theology and philosophy in such a measure that philosophy in the Western sense has not developed in Orthodox countries. In the West, nevertheless, the fragmented traditions of Greek philosophy led to the emergence of autonomous attempts to improve the tradition. The condition of possibility of the non-cosmo-theological development in Western philosophy was precisely the fragmented and insufficient knowledge of the tradition and the reaction to this situation by ingenious thinkers, such as Augustine, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas etc. Once this kind of creative philosophizing began, the spell of cosmo-theology became weaker until it was broken – yet not fully unmasked – in the emergence of subjectivist philosophies of modernity.

[45] Cosmo-theology can be detected even in such authors as e. g. Marion, especially when he applies the tradition of negative theology in his thought. A famous representative of scientism in Christian philosophy is Bernard Lonergan.

was the effort to maintain and reinforce the traditional Christian view of reality. And while the latter view has been subjected to several waves of "demythologization" throughout the centuries, Christian philosophy escorted these changes without offering too much or too less. After the Alexandrian age, Christian philosophy followed an improved version of Platonism; in Augustine's work, it created an existential Platonism; in the first Scholasticism it produced Christian Aristotelianism; in the second Scholasticism, Christian rationalism; in the nineteenth century, Christian philosophy continued to follow the Aristotelian path with a new emphasis on the importance of common sense realism and technical knowledge. In the twentieth century, Christian philosophy absorbed some results of transcendentalism, existentialism, hermeneutics, structuralism and, in our age, some of its important representatives follow the ideal of a scientific philosophy, others the developments of Continental thought with its emphasis on the paradoxical, the negative, and the inconceivable.[46]

The advantage of Christian philosophy's keeping the traditional, cosmo-theological view in its fundamental structures, or else the advantage of avoiding of an overall demythologization of its traditions, can be expressed as follows. First, it is in Christian philosophy in which we possess a clear example of the cosmo-theological influences. Fundamental notions of Christian philosophy, such as "nature," "substance," "person," "knowledge," "metaphysics," "morals," "virtue," "society," "teleology," "certainty" and so on maintain their close connection to ancient antecedents; and the latter are safely embedded in the cosmo-theological view. The advantage here consists in that a Christian philosopher, being aware of the significance of the cosmo-theological character of the ancient views, can study, explain, and reinterpret the cosmo-theological roots of our basic philosophical notions. Second, the Christian philosopher becomes thus able to launch an overall demythologizing

[46] See for instance John Haldane's works for a sober and analytical approach to Thomism. And see especially the works of Michel Henry or Jean-Luc Marion for a Continental version of Christian philosophy which absorbed phenomenology and hermeneutics.

of philosophy, his own philosophical traditions included. Third, on the basis of such a demythologization, the Christian philosopher can search for a new understanding of his place in the universe, the significance of his traditions, and a new perspective in which he still can be called a philosopher and a Christian at the same time.

At this point we need to answer the following questions:

- What does exactly mean the expression "demythologizing" in this context?
- What is the motive of a Christian philosopher for demythologizing the philosophical traditions?
- What kind of assistance can a Christian philosopher receive for his work from the philosophical tradition or from contemporary developments?
- What are the fundamental structures of a demythologized Christian philosophy?

6. The Vocation of a Christian Philosopher

As explained briefly above, the most important task of Christian philosophy is a clarification of its fundamental philosophical notions. Possible examples abound, but here I focus only on the notion of human personhood. The original notion of personhood is rooted in the optical experience of the external appearance of an individual or a thing.[47] It lasted several centuries until the corresponding Hebrew, Greek and Latin terms assumed a meaning relatively close to our understanding today. Still, even in this notion of a "prosopon" and "persona," the external appearance remained decisive as the basic background in the semantic circle of the term.[48] During the Trinitarian debates of the first

[47] Mezei, *op. cit.,* 129.

[48] In resurrection, as Paul explains in 1 Cor 15:40 ff., human bodies rise just as heavenly bodies rise, and human bodies will possess a spiritual body, just as the Sun, the Moon and other stars possess their own appropriate glorious bodies. In resurrection, moreover, the first living soul of Adam is changed into the life-giving soul of the resurrected. In the background, ancient beliefs of cosmo-theological kind are clearly recognizable, such as that stellar entities are life-creating beings.

Christian centuries and the related dogmatic discussions in the subsequent epochs made it possible to form a notion of personhood equally applicable to every human person and the divine persons; and it was Thomas Aquinas who endeavored to attribute personhood not only to the persons of the Trinity but also to human individuals.[49] The "revolution of personhood" in modern philosophy, most importantly in the work of Kant, led to the realization of the unique "dignity" (internal worth, *Würde)* of human persons, a decisive step on the way leading off the courses of cosmo-theological thinking.[50] However, Western philosophical vocabularies still used versions of the Latin form of "persona" and still kept its rootedness in the ancient world-view in a more or less latent fashion. I believe that this latent connection is responsible for our lack of an obvious distinction between personhood as a *sui generis* entity and personhood as an individual substance in the universe.[51] What a Christian philosopher needs to do in this case is a clarification of the difference between human personhood *sui generis* and personhood as a cosmo-theologically determined individual. For this aim, a Christian philosopher needs to study the documents about the origins of this notion, analyze its historic development, and see the philosophical distinction between "dignity" in a hierarchical universe, and *Würde* as inner value, as the basis of personal unity, non-reducibility, and irreplaceability.[52]

In this context, "demythologization" means above all the exploration of the latent remnants of an earlier view of reality in our notions today. Just as Alasdair MacIntyre offered a clarification of the

[49] Thomas, *Summa theologiae, op. cit.*, I, 30, 4.

[50] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* transl. M. Gregor, Cambridge 1998, p. 42. It is important to see that the Latin "dignitas" and its derivations in contemporary languages do not properly express the notion of an "inner value" or "end itself" as Kant defined them. Dignity comes from the Latin "dignus" the meaning of which is "worthy *of* something," "deserving *something.*" "Dignus" cannot articulate worth as an end in itself. "Dignitas" basically means merit, worthiness (of something), hence authority, official rank, power.

[51] See R. Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something',* Oxford–New York 2006.

[52] J. F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers,* Washington 2004, p. 26.

fundamental notions of moral philosophy by referring to their Aristotelian origin,[53] we need to clarify the origins of our philosophical notions not only in individual authors of the past but rather in their general view of reality, in the structures of the cosmo-theological thinking, and in the concrete examples of the traces of such structures in the original meaning of these terms. On the other hand, it is not enough to return merely to these ancient authors in order to acquire a proper understanding of our philosophical terms; we need to see the development of the cosmo-theological structures in the philosophical context, the change of the meaning of the fundamental terms of philosophy, the historical process of abstraction in which the cosmo-theological character becomes blurred and, after a certain time, hardly recognizable. This process of abstraction is crucial in *maintaining* the original character of our central notions, because we tend to believe that once a term is used in an abstract sense, its original meaning disappears.[54] The fact of the matter is different: the more abstract a notion becomes the more obstinately it maintains its connection, already latent, to its original semantic environment. Demythologization is not only about a distinct period of the past, but about the semantic development in which our notions slowly change their meaning and keep their origins in a concealed fashion.[55]

[53] A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory,* University of Notre Dame Press 1984.

[54] One of my favorite examples is Thomas' description of contemplation as containing three movements: "These movements are of three kinds; for there is the 'circular' movement, by which a thing moves uniformly round one point as center, another is the 'straight' movement, by which a thing goes from one point to another; the third is 'oblique,' being imposed as it were of both the others" (Thomas, *Summa theologiae,* op. cit., II–II, 180, 6). The expressions applied here are of astronomical origin and point back, via Pseudo-Dionysius, to Aristotle.

[55] As an example, see the history of our alphabet. We still use letters which originate in proto-Phoenician signs which possessed a concrete meaning, such as bull ("aleph," "a"), house ("beth," "b") or camel, stick ("gamil", "g") etc. Normally, we do not recognize that the system of signs we use to express our concepts in a written form points back to an ancient system of symbols; if we nevertheless realize this connection and study the emergence of modern Western alphabets, we understand more properly the system in which we express our notions and which is so different, for example, from the Chinese approach to conceive and express mental objects in a written form.

By determining of the main lines of the process of a philosophical demythologization, we still don't know why a philosopher, especially a Christian philosopher, should embark on such an obviously complicated procedure. If philosophers avoid facing the fundamental character of the tradition of philosophy, they risk the danger of getting caught in a philosophical naïveté and lose the ability of understanding their discipline, its vocabulary and methodologies on a sufficient level of clarity. It is a commonplace to say that if we use a certain expression in a philosophical sense, it is important to know its origins, its range of meaning, and its historical development. In a general sense the same can be said about the entire spectrum of philosophical terms, or even more of philosophy itself as it evolved from its Greek origins.

Christian philosophers share this motive to understand their philosophical tradition. However, they have additional reasons. It is a common characteristic of Christianity that fundamental historical events compelled its representatives to reinvestigate the meaning and role of their identity as Christian thinkers in the new context which emerged in the aftermath of such occurrences. One of the famous examples is Augustine's *City of God* which was composed as a response to the sack of Rome in 410.[56] The fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 or the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century offered new contexts in which Christianity, and especially Christian philosophy, had to redefine its meaning and character. It should be the subject of a specific study to explore the reactions to these and similar events in Christian thought; however, so much can already

[56] See, among other sources, the letters of Jerome, for instance CXXVIII: "The world sinks into ruin: yes! But shameful to say our sins still live and flourish. The renowned city, the capital of the Roman Empire, is swallowed up in one tremendous fire; and there is no part of the earth where Romans are not in exile. Churches once held sacred are now but heaps of dust and ashes; and yet we have our minds set on the desire of gain. We live as though we are going to die tomorrow; yet we build as though we are going to live always in this world. Our walls shine with gold, our ceilings also and the capitals of our pillars; yet Christ dies before our doors naked and hungry in the persons of His poor" *(The letters of St. Jerome* at: http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0347–0420,_Hieronymus,_Epistolae_%5BSchaff%5D,_EN.pdf [28.03.2013]).

be seen that historical events of exceptional character did influence or even importantly determine the course of Christian reflection.[57]

The most important occurrence in this series of exceptional events, however, is what we refer to as "Auschwitz." In Auschwitz, the Chosen People of the Holy Scriptures was sentenced to annihilation; and this event has a peculiar importance in a tradition the center of which has been precisely the relationship between "Jews" and "Christians." As I explained it in detail in another work, Auschwitz is the most important motivation for a Christian philosopher to reexamine its philosophical tradition, its origins and developments, and to attempt to transcend the limits of this tradition. Auschwitz is a "watershed" not only in the context of some centuries but with respect to the entire Christian tradition. For Auschwitz questioned not merely the millennia of Christian thought, but the very foundations of Christianity as well in which the role of the Chosen People had been considered crucial. Auschwitz invalidates many of our earlier convictions and calls for a thoroughgoing reassessment. One result is what I term here the demythologization of philosophy, especially Christian philosophy — not with the purpose of "destruction" but with the purpose of a sufficient understanding of our tradition and opening a perspective, in which this tradition can be explored, understood, and properly assessed.[58]

The Christian philosopher is not without assistance in this task. First, we have the tradition of overall reassessments throughout the centuries. Second, in the tradition of Christian philosophy, the Tychonic methodology has an important place. This methodology consists precisely in the attentive perception of "the signs of the times," that is the perception of historicity as the most important layer in Christian thought. Thomas Aquinas reacted to the popularity of Aristotle's

[57] Among the authors that are especially important in this respect we find Nicholas of Cusa, Leibniz, Goethe, Burke, and Schiller.

[58] See B. Mezei, *Reason and Revelation…*; also J. B. Metz, *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft,* Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2006. Moreover *Wrestling with God. Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust,* eds. S. T. Katz, S. Biderman, G. Greenberg, Oxford 2007.

writings with his universal synthesis. Ficino, Cusanus and other Renaissance philosophers responded to the fundamental changes in their time with broadening their perspectives in a radical way. Malebranche and other rationalistic philosophers used Cartesianism ingeniously and contributed to the modernization of Christian thought. We can witness similar changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with altering accents; the neo-realism and scientific awareness of the nineteenth century cannot be forgotten, just as the existential sensitivity of such thinkers as Gilson or von Balthasar in the twentieth century. And it is not merely the generally Tychonic characteristic which counts here; in the particular cases we observe, and can explore, sophisticated and well-informed attempts to understand tradition in the light of the new historical developments.

7. *Fides et ratio*

One of the most important documents of the application of a Tychonic methodology in philosophy is the encyclical letter *Fides et ratio* by John Paul II. The letter should be seen in a historical context. As the second papal document issued on the problem of philosophy, *Fides et ratio* continues the tradition laid down by the encyclical letter *Aeterni patris* of 1879 issued by Pope Leo XIII. At the same time, *Fides et ratio* characteristically differs from some of the main features of its antecedent. *Aeterni patris* aspires to reach the *restoration* of Christian philosophy by turning the readers' attention to the work of Thomas Aquinas. The main merit of the work of Thomas, according to *Aeterni patris,* is not its succinct character, its clarity, its systematic nature, but first of all its openness to the "physical sciences" which cannot "suffer detriment, but find very great assistance in the restoration of the ancient philosophy."[59] *Fides et ratio* still considers the work of Thomas Aquinas crucial; yet it

[59] Encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* of Pope Leo XIII On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy, 1879. See: www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html (§ 29).

emphasizes a general openness to various philosophical approaches and systems, even Catholic philosophies of the nineteenth century which did not find approval in the time of *Aeterni patris*.[60] *Fides et ratio* offers an encompassing analysis of the philosophical tradition and mentions its positive and negative developments; most importantly, it *encourages* philosophers to return to the original task of philosophy to rise to the horizon of metaphysics and ask "radical questions about the meaning and ultimate foundation of human, personal and social existence." (§ 5) This encyclical combines the due respect for the richness of traditional philosophy with a call for "boldness" and "courage" to develop new approaches. The text often distinguishes negative and positive philosophy and urges its readers to refute atheism, nihilism, scientism, historicism; it advises us not to remain content "with partial and provisional truths" (§ 5), "with ancient myths" (§ 36), or "with more modest tasks such as the simple interpretation of facts or an enquiry into restricted fields of human knowing or its structures." (§ 55) In other words, the general direction of the encyclical clearly points to a new understanding of philosophy which critically examines its past, continues its valuable insights and understandings, and becomes open to radically new approaches to philosophy. While *Aeterni patris* was about the *restitution* of philosophy on the basis of a tradition, *Fides et ratio* proposes a *renewal* with respect to the future: the renewal of Christian philosophy.

8. The Fundamental Structures of a Renewed Christian Philosophy

I want to emphasize the critical role of philosophy with respect to itself. It is especially Christian philosophy that, as demonstrated splendidly by *Fides et ratio,* is capable of realizing historical self-reflection,

[60] John Paul II, Pope: Encyclical Letter FIDES ET RATIO of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason, Rome 1998: www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html (29.03.2013), § 59.

clarification, and openness to new developments. What I term in this text the demythologizing of philosophy is indeed a corollary of the main conclusions of *Fides et ratio*.

To say that the task of demythologizing philosophy would lead to a kind of neglect or destruction of the traditional structures of philosophy is contradictory in more than one sense. It is contradictory, because any destructive understanding of demythologization must be based on philosophical insights dependent on earlier philosophical developments; thus indistinctly refuting these developments equals to nullifying the philosophical basis on which demythologizing would take place. Moreover, the above understanding is contradictory, because it does not give us the principles on the basis of which we are justified to reject the philosophical tradition as a whole. In contrast, the task of demythologizing philosophy is to be understood as a result of the innermost developments of the philosophical tradition and thus it goes hand in hand with a critical yet deep appreciation of these traditions. This task, moreover, is not for its own sake; it serves the understanding of the historical change in which we find ourselves in the context of philosophy, especially Christian philosophy, and in which it becomes possible to build a more appropriate understanding of the human situation, its history and future perspectives. Demythologizing philosophy is in this sense a positive and edifying endeavor which is called to build, not to destroy. The mapping out of the semantic contents and philosophical consequences of the cosmo-theological view is anything else than just a one-sided criticism. The cosmo-theological criticism is actually a radical approach to the tradition of philosophy; it contains a series of radical questions we need to ask with respect to this tradition, its original semantic framework.

I believe that the field is sufficiently prepared for offering now a summary of the main features of a renewed Christian philosophy. I wish to consider this philosophy, the Christian philosophy for the twenty-first century, in three clusters: Methodology, Content, and Unity.

Methodology. The main method Christian philosophy needs to apply is historical criticism. Most importantly, a critical investigation is

needed of the cosmo-theological framework of ancient philosophical concepts, notions, and overall views of the universe, human beings, and societies. Concretely we have to analyze the relevant texts and other monuments, such as for example the *mimema,* the ancient planetarium which is mentioned by many authors, including Plato. The investigation of the significance of findings such as the so-called Antikythera Mechanism is highly relevant here.[61] This historical criticism aims at projecting the outlines and contents of the cosmo-theological view with respect to the fundamental philosophical notions; for this endeavor we need to analyze positive evidences, such as astronomical writings, and indirect evidences, such as the role of astronomy in scientific texts. Moreover, the nature of the cosmo-theological view makes it necessary to determine the symbolical and metaphorical presence of cosmo-theology in philosophical texts. For instance, as Eva Brann demonstrated, the philosopher in Plato's understanding shows a close resemblance to the mythical hero Hercules, a hero obviously possessing a cosmo-theological significance not only in his divinization but already in the epic deeds he carried out. These deeds, just like the events in the myth of the Golden Fleece, have obvious astronomical relevance.[62]

Christian philosophy inherited most of the philosophical vocabulary and with it its cosmo-theological character. It is the task of historical criticism to determine the close connection between pre-Christian and Christian cosmo-theological views. In Christianity, the presence of cosmo-theology is evident in many writings, symbols, and cultural phenomena; and the general effect of cosmo-theology can be verified far beyond the beginning of modernity. Christian philosophy uncritically received and applied many of such views; and in order to have a clear

[61] See http://www.antikythera-mechanism.com (29.03.2013). Moreover G. Betegh, *Le problème des représentations visuelles dans la cosmologie présocratique: pour une histoire de la modélisation*', [in:] *Qu'est-ce que la Philosophie Présocratique?/What is Presocratic Philosophy?*, ed. A. Laks, C. Louget, Lille 2002, p. 381–415.

[62] E. T. H. Brann, *The Music of the Republic: Essays on Socrates' Conversations and Plato's Writings,* Philadelphia 2004.

picture of the effects of this reception we cannot simply disregard some views of the ancient authors, embarrassing in the light of modern science, and concentrate on an abstract interpretation of these authors. We need to see such views as constitutive in the works of these authors if we really want to understand them, their thinking, and the relevance of this thinking in our time. Thereby we become able to grasp the marvelous development Christian philosophy had gone through before the twentieth century: beginning with quite externalists understandings to the proper conception of crucial philosophical terms and contents, even theological contents.[63]

As mentioned, the most important motive behind the task of historical criticism is history's sudden changes, catastrophes, and breakthroughs. It is especially the role of a historical catastrophe which merits particular attention, because it is verified that such catastrophes may lead to fundamental changes in our perception of reality. I repeat here that the catastrophe of "Auschwitz" offers indeed a new beginning for our reflections. It is by the trauma of Auschwitz that we perceive the need for an overall reassessment of our heritage, its contents, and its historical development. Without going into detail in this respect let me point out that Auschwitz in this sense may be seen as a direct consequence of an uncritically received an applied cosmo-theology in which a proper perception of human personhood was not possible. We still live in the aftermath of this occurrence and have not yet assessed appropriately its general significance and concrete consequences for the understanding of our traditions, present situation, and future.

The most important presupposition behind historical criticism is that history is a structured whole in which "change" has a number of well-defined meanings in the context of an overall and meaningful modification of history. The meaningfulness of history cannot be denied, because otherwise the possibility of historical criticism is denied as well. And if the meaningfulness of history is explored, then

[63] Needless to say that for instance the so important changes of the notion of personhood is relevant to important theological tenets as well.

the importance of historical criticism can be defined as an opening of a meaningful perspective in the future of Christian philosophy. Whether we call this thinking "philosophy," or apply a different name, is not relevant here; we need to see however, that philosophy as an encompassing, critical and future-oriented thinking, a *sui generis* activity of our human personhood, remains central to the understanding of history. In this sense, "Christian philosophy" is openness to the future, to a deeper understanding of our past, and to a perspective in which meaningfulness is the most important and overall framework of our personal activity. The traditional distinction between reason and faith remains valid, because human knowledge cannot but presuppose meaningfulness as an absolute given.[64] *Denying meaningfulness is confirming it.* The human mind cannot produce meaningfulness in its general sense and cannot be detached from it in the same sense; human knowledge is dependent on the fact of a meaningful history of the universe and mankind.

Contents. As to the contents of a demythologized Christian philosophy, I already mentioned the importance of a revision of fundamental terms. Among innumerable examples let me mention again the importance of the notion of a person, because, in my understanding, personhood should be the center of a new Christian philosophy. The proper understanding of personhood must be contrasted with earlier views in which personhood was not yet grasped properly in its unity, irreplaceability, and non-reducibility. The fundamental problem is not fully conceived if we think that the non-genuine understanding of personhood consists in seeing the person as a substance in the world in line with the material substances of our external experience. Rather, the fundamental problem is that reality itself is seen commonsensically on the level of our external experience of material substances and so we easily fail to perceive the genuine nature of reality which is closer to personal existence than to the rigid material beings given in our external sensation.

[64] See B. Mezei, *Faith and Reason* (forthcoming in: Ayres, Lewis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook for Catholic Theology,* Oxford 2013).

Personhood is a basic mode of existence and human beings are genuine embodiments of this basic mode. At the same time, personal existence is always existence in a community, and a community has an ultimate source in which the possibility of the community of human existence is organically rooted.[65]

It belongs to the perspective of the demythologizing of Christian philosophy that a new terminology is to be created. In the past, there have been several similar attempts, beginning with the first Alexandrian theologians through the creative genius of Pseudo-Dionysius in the sixth century or the Scholastic innovations in the Middle Ages up to the revolutionary changes in Catholic rationalism and romanticism. In the recent past, the works of Erich Przywara, Hans Urs von Balthasar or Karl Rahner are excellent examples of a philosophical and theological renovation in which the vocabulary changes as well. In philosophy, we see many examples of such a partial or even extensive change of the vocabulary in the works of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, or Lévinas. The reason for such a change is always the perceived inability of earlier terms to express new insights properly. In my perspective of a demythologized Christian philosophy, the need for a significant vocabulary change is perhaps even more urgent than in many other cases. "After Auschwitz" we do not only need to reassess our traditional ideas and expressions, but we have to attempt to create new expressions for our new understandings as well.

Unity. A demythologized Christian philosophy has to reassess the massive tradition of cosmo-theology in general philosophy as well as in Christian thought. Such a Christian thought recognizes history as its overall meaningful framework. History, however, is general and relative openness to the future. Christian philosophy needs to embody a general and relative openness to the future too. It needs to have a general

[65] This understanding of reality can be interpreted as a philosophical corollary to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory; in the present perspective, it is not centrally important if one follows Heisenberg or Bohr in explaining the contents of this interpretation. On a more general level, see Lanza's paper on biocentrism at: http://www.robertlanzabiocentrism.com/biocentrism-how-life-creates-the-universe/ (02.04.2013).

openness, because its own history teaches it to endeavor fundamental changes at certain points; and it needs to have a relative openness, because Christian philosophy remains bound to the tradition precisely as the critical reassessment of this tradition. In this relative openness, we can focus on non-fundamental changes, such as those of Platonism in Augustine's work, or fundamental changes, such as the consequences of Auschwitz. The relative openness of Christian philosophy is rooted in its general openness which can be described as its "Marian character." As *Fides et ratio* points out, "philosophari in Maria" implies a fundamental faithfulness to the ultimate meaning of history. "Philosophari in Maria," on the other hand, means a kind of thinking which points to the future with the clear recognition of the necessity of a general renewal of Christian thought.[66]

Most centrally, however, the general renewal of Christian philosophy may explore the distinction I mentioned at the beginning of my essay between "philosophia" and "philosophos." Christian philosophy needs to be that of the "philosophos," the "lover of the wise one," and build a genuinely personal relationship between the intellectual work and its substantive basis, reality. In the perspective of historical criticism, we cannot consider reality merely in terms of a cosmo-theologically determined objectivity, such as the one we still find in many vistas of our sciences and philosophical reflections today. While earlier notions of objectivity and subjectivity were based on the perception of a closed universe, the notion of an open universe has in its core human personhood as *openness:* openness to reality in its entirety and openness to history in its past, present and future dimensions. On the other hand, personal openness entails the openness of the universe, that is the

[66] In Prudence Allen's article, we have a systematic approach to the notion of "philosophari in Maria." (http://www.secondspring.co.uk/articles/Mary%20and%20Philos%20by%20Prudence%20Allen.pdf [29.03.2013]). Sister Prudence focuses on the main phases of Mary's life and explains their significance one after the other from the philosophical point of view, always with reference to important theologians and philosophers. There is only one scene that is missing in her list: The Birth of the Savior. In my approach, "philosophari in Maria" has the central event of preparing and accomplishing the birth of the fully other.

openness of reality as such. The changing structures of our universe, as we can now already see, correspond to the historical change in which human persons find themselves; and these forms of change are rooted in the fundamental openness of human personhood as the main feature of reality. Thus, in our perception, reality has a personal character in the sense of the personhood we possess today, and thus a personal relationship between the Christian philosopher and its subject matter, reality, needs to be established. The Christian "philosophos" is called to open himself to "the wise one," the meaningful framework of our existence, which cannot be derived from our efforts.[67]

[67] An interesting theory of personal openness in an infinite future can be found in the works of the famous mathematician-priest of the nineteenth century, Bernard Bolzano of the Czech Lands. See especially his *Athanasia; oder, Gründe für die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, Frankfurt am Main 1970. Bolzano held that the life of human persons on the Earth is only the beginning of a universal evolution at the end of which we find ourselves in the community of the blessed; human personhood on the Earth is openness to this development. In contemporary science, the "Goldilocks" or "anthropic" principle asserts that the universe is tailor-made for us, human beings. Following these investigations, we may overcome the cosmo-theological pattern *not* on the basis of one of its consequences (such as the aspect of rigid objectivity or an objectively conceived subjectivity), but with respect to a new whole.