

Reviews

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Book review: Tomasz Kraj, *Catholic Attitude in Respect to Ethical Pluralism: the Example of Bioethics. A Study in Moral Theology*, Myśl Teologiczna Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2023, pp. 209

Among many societies of the recent times certain signs of ethical pluralism (or value pluralism) can be observed. This is expressed mainly through diverse solutions to the same moral issue. What causes problem is that particular viewpoints compete with one another or even stand opposed. And yet they come acceptable. It is claimed that ethical pluralism conditions the existence of democracy. Also, the phenomenon of ethical pluralism corresponds with rising anthropological narratives referring to the same moral issue. Thus the question emerges: Who is on the right side? Where is the truth? Are supporters of traditional morality based on natural moral law in accordance with the truth or rather those who choose new solutions? Catholics will be deeply concerned about the above questions as practising one's faith is closely related to moral life which is built on particular moral choices and their realisation.

As an answer to these inquiries, Rev. T. Kraj comes with his recent publication entitled *Catholic Attitude in Respect to Ethical Pluralism: the Example of Bioethics. A Study in Moral Theology*. Since 1999 he has been lecturing at the Papal

Academy of Theology (now Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow). Apart from the issues connected with fundamental moral theology, which the contents of this very book are part of, his field of scientific interest includes the issues related to the development of genetics. In 2010, the Author published *Accepted limits of genetic enhancement in humans* (Kraków 2010), responding to the query on where exactly nontherapeutic undertakings should come to an end.

The objective of the evaluated publication is to show the root of value pluralism in today's western culture, which not long ago stayed relatively homogeneous thanks to its relation to the Christian revelation. Relevantly for his purpose, the author chose bioethics to exemplify the presence of value pluralism in association with moral questions. Following the introductory part, which includes the mentioned objective of the written work (i.e. describing a Catholic's attitude towards ethical pluralism), the topics covered in the first chapter include numerous philosophical views in the field of bioethics (referred to as bioethical models). Although the work is strictly related to theology (fundamental moral theology), the author is conscious that the issue in question cannot be explained without making reference to philosophy. In this very context the role of philosophy is defined in theological reasoning.

In the second chapter the Author points out the factors that contributed to establishing western ethical pluralism. The views held by D. Hume played a vital role in this process. His most famous *Guillotine* is worth mentioning here, according to which there is no justification for moving away from descriptive statements ("is" statements) to prescriptive ones ("ought" statements). Rigid interpretation of the above mentioned thesis leads to conclusion that morality is a subjective matter only and that it relies on subjective assumptions and emotions rather than objective and rational statements. Such thinking had considerable influence on the shape of ethical thinking. However, at the end of the twentieth century it faced severe criticism from authorities like A. MacIntyre. It was then that the question on prior ethical reasoning—the reasoning questioned by modern philosophy—was raised which, by the way, contributed to a renewal of Aristotelian and Thomistic mode of thinking in the field of ethics (lasting in the Catholic theology in its main feature throughout the centuries). Additionally, chapter two explains the framework of ethical thinking, which relates to practical syllogism. The author, however, identifies the problematic issue which can be seen with Aristotle as well as with Saint Thomas Aquinas. It is also expressed by D. Hume, though not fully relevantly: how to move from the contents constituting a description of the reality (theoretical reason)

to moral prescription (practical reason)? What is the correlation between the two reasoning functions, descriptive and prescriptive ones? It was Aristotle who first claimed that moral normatives are not the result of theoretical activity of human reason. As to practical syllogism, the author shows that there is space for both theoretical and practical "reasons" to meet. It is called *nous* which stands for intellectual intuition, a form of metaphysical cognition. Taking into consideration the minor premise of syllogism, *nous* allows a man to introspect about the nature, aim, sense and value of the object in moral question. The ability to undertake such introspection has been undermined by modern philosophy.

Before the author explains the circumstances of the mentioned phenomenon, chapter three describes the perceptual model that can be found in classical epistemology which is: what and how a human reason gets knowledge from reality. The *form* of the perceived object plays a key role. Thus the author points out the cognitive activity of theoretical reason. He reminds the fundamental notion of the truth of things. In the epistemology of Saint Thomas Aquinas the notion of the truth of things relates to the possibility to know every existing entity. Objects are intelligible as they exist and so they are in reach of a man's knowing and understanding, who thus is able to investigate their nature, aim, meaning or value. The knowledge of things does not limit itself to the substance being researched into by empirical sciences, namely phenomenological insights. The author elaborates on the mentioned topic in the fourth chapter of his work.

Truth is an essential trait that characterises human knowing. In human mind each truth is measured by correlating it with the objective reality. This dependence refers to the process of cognition. However, classical philosophy also dealt with creation order which briefly referred to the idea that every created being (if true, it matches) its creator's design. The creator places his design into a given being and it may be referred to as true as long as there is a correlation between the being and its creator's design. Through a created thing and thanks to the truth contained in it, it is possible for people to know a creator's idea behind a given created object. It happens though that certain things and beings are created by God and through investigating into the truth of things (beings) one is able to discover God's design and intention inscribed in His creations, such as people, nature, human life, sexuality and so forth. All those relationships and possibilities are in the field of interest of classical metaphysics which was rejected as part of modern philosophy. Moreover, cognitive abilities were

negated, which was what classical metaphysics paid attention to. On the basis of J. Pieper's analysis, in the last part of the mentioned fourth chapter, Rev. Kraj shows how it came to the negation of getting knowledgeable about the reality and what grounded such negation.

The last chapter introduces the effects of negation, not excluding theological implications, which are significant to a Catholic. One of the first consequences was a new branch of philosophy—ontology—that replaced the rejected metaphysics. There is a huge difference between ontology and metaphysics. Metaphysics researches into being whereas ontology reflects on the conditions of existing. The latter one relates to human reason, which is obviously limited and yet it remains accurate point of reference to each and every being that a human may encounter. Here it turns out that ontology tends to take place of the rejected metaphysics, trying at the same time to redefine existing entities. What it means in practice is that new structures, aims, a new sense or value of a given being replace the existing descriptive meanings, which have, been considered unrecognisable. Here, though, they are defined by a human being, often making it his autonomous idea of the description of a given reality. The author explains how it is done. At the same time, he perceives it as one of the main thresholds of the present cultural pluralism, including ethical pluralism which derives itself from a process of attaching a new "label" (different from the original one) to entities that already exist. The concise conclusion, the bibliography and the index of names constitute the last part of the work of the Cracovian thinker.

One of the advantages of the author's work is that it strives to account for the reasons of the existence of serious moral dilemmas that a Polish Catholic (and other Catholics too) are facing at present times. It is worth mentioning that the author does not use stereotypes or other common thinking. Quite the opposite. What the mainstream trends would refuse nowadays, the Cracovian theologian makes one of his manners of thinking through which he communicates with the reader, which is rather sharing thoughts and opinions that may be perceived as unfamiliar with today's Aeropagus, and yet, as the reviewed book presents, much useful as far as an explanation of the subject matter is concerned, and still remaining in accord with the Church teaching. It seems that the book would be of greater value if it included an index of topics and a summary in English or other foreign language (although the lack of the above mentioned translation shows itself as the characteristic for the prestigious "Myśl teologiczna" series). Such translation would enable a non-Polish reader to know at least the main stream of the author's discourse.

One of the many qualities of the publication is the author's openness to the argumentation other than coming from theological studies. Thus it is not a repetition or yet another articulation of "Church" statements but an authentic challenge given to doctrinal adversaries on the basis of a clear and coherent approach to reality. In this way a vast part of his study, although taken up within the frames of moral theology, deals with philosophical thinking as an open domain for dialogue with those who do not share the Catholic views as well as with some of the Catholics claiming that theological argumentation is no longer convincing in today's world. In this manner the author proves that Catholic moral theology is efficient in disputing diverse topics, including complex matters, and it is ready to deal with different viewpoints and philosophical arguments.

In the reviewed publication, Rev. Kraj reveals the weakness of some of the arguments articulated by modern philosophy. As the author underlines, modern philosophy has rejected classical metaphysics and its key understanding of the truth as a property of things without indicating its lack of logic, incoherence or other weak points. In fact, what has been rejected is not the truth itself but a wrong concept of the truth that modern philosophy has invented. Nevertheless, the rejection effects in serious theological consequences, as shown by the author. It is also proved that there are at least two reasons standing for the importance and value of the knowledge of classical metaphysics. Namely, classical metaphysics acknowledges a human being's capacity to know the whole of the truth about being. This is of crucial importance to classical ethics, for a man furnished with complete knowledge on being will prove to be capable of making conscious decisions, as well as adequate moral choices. Moreover, the understanding of classical metaphysics goes well with theology, a branch applying to God the Creator, who has inscribed His intention in all of His creation, making a man able to recognise His design (which does not mean it comes with no effort). In this way it is possible for Catholics to live their moral life according to the Creator's will. Refusing to welcome this truth gives "theoretical" grounds for imposing on many entities a new and often strange meaning, leading to "create" a new (pluralistic) world, which all in all remains just an illusion of the existing reality.