

ETF, letní (1999-)2000 – po 13.30-15.00 [S 1]

## **The Problem of Philosophical Theology**

ETF, 14.2.00 01

Theology as an intellectual discipline was an invention of old Greek thinkers. It was so from the very first beginning, as we shall see (since Thales). After old Hebrew thinkers met the Greek culture, they were partly influenced, but partly they were cautious, critical and sometimes polemical, but they were also prepared for exercising an influence of their own on the culture and thinking of many other nations able to understand the Greek language (for them, they translated their „sacred writings“, the so called LXX). Any way, they prepared a qualitatively new situation for the first generations of Christians who were confronted with the Greek culture of the Hellenistic Rome.

02

For the first Christians, philosophy was only something which had to be overcome or, perhaps, made better a used for their own purposes. St. Paul, as you know, had no problem to cite a pagan poem and reinterpret its non-Christian formulations for using them as a starting point for his gospel (good news about the Christ). Many Christians, especially protestants, are convinced that St. Paul refused the whole philosophy and that he warned before it. But it is not correct, as we can see in Col 2,8, but we have to read it cautiously and precisely: *See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (Revised Standard Version, p. 1429.)* The translation is not quite correct: in the original, the word FILOSOFIA is used together with the words KENÉ APATÉ (DIA TÉS FILOSOFIAS KAI KENÉS APATÉS, and both of them together are interpreted by being oriented to human tradition (PARADOSIS) or to the elements of the world (STOICHEIA TOY KOSMOY). The meaning of St. Paul's criticism is that it is a philosophy which is not oriented to the Christ (KAI OY KATA XRISTON). And the same author of the Letter to the Colossians (1,18) speaks about the Christ as ARCHÉ (it was usually translated as "head", but the word had important philosophical connotations, and apostle Paul speaks many times about ARCHAI KAI EXOYSIAI, too, but he speaks about Christ as HÉ KEFALÉ PASÉS ARCHÉS KAI EXOYSIAS, which was interpreted more than translated in a following way: who is the head of all rule and authority – 2,10). So, we see apostle Paul to use common philosophical termini such as philosophy, principle, (spiritual) power etc., as well as citations of pagan poets. The same we see later in the text of the St. John's Gospel: ARCHÉ, LOGOS, ZOÉ, ALÉTHEIA etc. The only difference, I see, is that John (or better: the author of the Fourth Gospel) is more (even if after all not enough) conscious of the divergence of the Greek way of thinking, in comparison with the Hebrew one.

03

Later, the history of the Christianity is to be characterised as the way the Gospel was going on to be more and more hellenised, i.e. influenced by the Greeks in its own way of thinking. Nevertheless, in the same time, we can find many forms of criticism within the Church against this development. Most of the dogmatic struggles during the first centuries as well as later on were based on a deep feeling how the Hebrew tradition cannot be suspended and how the Greek conceptuality remains in some ways the very condition of any precise Christian thinking, as well. The important result of this conscious confrontation of the Hebrew as well as of the Greek basis of the Christian thinking was the rise of a Christian theology no more observed as a philosophical discipline but as a new discipline using philosophy and its methods under auspices, but also under control of non-philosophic, but not necessarily anti-philosophical principles. Philosophy was observed as a welcomed introduction to theology, but as a

discipline it should remain a highly estimated servant of theology. So it was and remained through all Medieval Ages, but with a rise of the New Age this relation had to undergo relevant changes.

04

The whole historical development can be evaluated first as an emancipation of the theology from the very intensive impact of the Greek philosophy, whereas in the later period (after Renaissance) as an emancipation of the new philosophy from the superior control, overpower and overcare of the theology. It is, of course, a vision from outside, only. It is merely a matter of fact, but we have to make conclusions from this development, and it depends on our evaluating it. And so, we have really to start with some points of the actual discussions as far as this theme is concerned, in our times. The very important point of the new development, for us, is the fact that philosophy itself changed profoundly under the influence of theological thinking. In the first period, philosophers wanted to go back to the original Greek way of thinking, but later it was clear that it is impossible (in history, it is never possible to go back to the past).

05

Before we start with analysing our problem, we have to say something very short about the termini used in this case. Since the Medieval Ages, the philosophy functioning as an introduction to theology was often described as "natural theology" (= physical philosophy, philosophy of FYSIS) whereas the "full" discipline called theology was understood as a "meta-physical" discipline oriented to "super-natural" and founded on Revelation. So "natural theology" meant and means the same as the "philosophical theology", but there are some serious problems connected with this first term, and therefore I prefer not to use it. I don't think there is anything like "natural thinking", because natural is not to think. Thinking is something definitely un-natural; and within the realm of such an unnatural thinking, no natural theology is possible. Many theologians, however, speak and write about the problem of "natural theology", does not matter if positively or negatively. You surely heard about the sharp criticism with which Karl Barth attacked one of his former fellows within the "dialectical school", namely Emil Brunner. He underlined (stressed) the fundamental discrepancy of both of them in understanding the role and value of this "natural theology". It is really Karl Barth, who is enormously important in this direction, and we shall spend the time of our next lecture with him and some of his views.

*ETF, 21.2.00 – Sybe Schaap*

*ETF, 28.2.00*

06

In 1960, a collection of papers was published (in German) in honour of Heinrich Barth, a philosopher, brother of Karl Barth, entitled "Philosophie und christliche Existenz" (Philosophy and the Christian Existence). In this valuable "Festschrift", we find a contribution of Karl Barth, too. In this time, 15 years after the war, the problem of natural philosophy" were no more so actual as in the 30ies, and so the formulations of Karl Barth are less polemic. . He underlines that philosophy and theology are not only struggling one against the other, but that they are living together, too ("ihr Gegeneinander ist jedenfalls auch ein Miteinander" – 93), because the problems of their research and theory are the same – only with a difference in their order and succession. They have common problems, but they differ as far as the question of their primacy (primacy of the problems). Karl Barth goes so far that he accepts different terms used by philosophers instead of terms used by theologians. His contribution is addressed to a philosopher, and so he -as theologian, i.e. non-philosopher, wants to be allowed to use his own language, namely the theologian one. („Dem Theologen, der hier redet, ist es erlaubt und geboten, sich ... seiner eigenen, der theologischen

Sprache ... zu bedienen“ – 95-96.) It is especially the term „Creator“ (and „creation“). But he does not want to start any struggle of words, only. He accepts that a philosopher may use other terms, if it is to mean the same, if we can see and understand an equity of meaning and orientation or aim (eigentliche Meinung und Absicht – 97), an equivalence of the sense. He does not want to exclude prejudicially an ideal possibility of such an equivalence (97). But his conception is, nevertheless, based on an other prejudice, as we shall see.

07

Barth is convinced that any conceiving of a priority of the living Creator who is oriented to his living creation is basically a theological one. He interprets this priority e.g. as the priority of Heaven before the Earth (94), of the up before the down, of the Idea before the phenomenon, of the Being before the being-here (Sein – Dasein), of the Logos before the Reason, of the transcendence before the existence, (99) etc., and he accepts, that a philosopher may express it in other words and use other notions or concepts. He accepts even the possibility that a philosopher or a theologian may speak under certain conditions „unauthentically“ (uneigentlich – 97), which means a theologian speaking philosophically or a philosopher speaking theologically. It is not so important which language is used by whom. What really matters is the problem of priority. And now, Barth expresses his conviction, that even a philosopher speaking philosophically and not theologically, but accepting the priority of the „creator“ (called otherwise, of course), before the creation is to be observed as a „crypto-theologian“ (99). If we shall express it in our own words, philosophy is unable, according to Barth, to conceive the relation between „up“ and „down“ otherwise than an elevation (99) of the lower to the higher, but never as a coming down of a higher to the lower. – Now, we have to evaluate critically this interesting but problematic conception of Karl Barth.

08

In my view, this criterion of the philosophical or theological character of a sort – or better of a way – of thinking is unacceptable because both of these ways are well known since thousands of years in the history of philosophy, and even before any impact of Christianity or Judaism. Take e.g. the basic physical fact of both of these trends or tendencies in our Universe, the entropic and the negentropic one. Of course no entropy is possible if there is no higher level making the „fall down“ possible.

09

But I see something like an element of „natural theology“ in Barth's conception in something which was expressed by some of his critics and even disciples (e.g. Bonhoeffer) as the so called „positivism of revelation“ (Offenbarungspositivismus). Barth is conceiving the „upper“ or „higher“ as already given, as something existing previously, „pre-existing“, shortly as something which *is* before the „lower“ and which is definitely preceding the lower. And this position, this presupposition is fundamentally philosophical, and not only that, it is a special, specifically metaphysical prejudice.

ETF, 13.3.00 – Sybe Schaap

ETF, 20.3.00

10

We can accept, I am convinced, Karl Barth's position in using different terms by philosophers. Theology cannot be defined by using the word THEOS, God, only. Not words, but concepts, or more, conceptual structures and buildings are important. The real historical beginning of philosophical theology in old Greece can be understood as a reinterpretation of the word „god“ or „gods“, as we have already seen. In all different ways philosophers tried to conceive gods or one

single god, there were something in common, because the whole philosophical movement used the "geometrical" way of thinking – with one single exception, of course, which however had no followers (Heraclite). Any new concept of "god" aimed to construct an intentional object which was deprived of any change, any movement and even any form of life. It could be criticised, therefore, not to be acceptable for any use for Christians and for Christian theology, especially. This criticism is relatively recent and it is based on important changes in the way of European thinking in general, but before all in philosophy. So, we can ask, in which direction things changed to make new reinterpretations not only possible, but even hopeful from the philosophical and perhaps also theological point of view.

11

The problem of „promise“: what is the ontological status of the promised land? (= the land of promise). We understand any promise we can speak of as something present, even if we know, that the promised thing is not present, at least not yet. We are therefore able to think about anything of promise as about something which will be present in the future, only. We are not used – and perhaps not able – to think about the future as about a special realm of „things“ the status of which is not only similar – or better equivalent – to the status of any given, stating, existing thing but which is prior to everything which already is or was.

12

Karl Rahner and his „absolute future“. „Christianity is the religion of the absolute future.“ It is a contradiction in the adjective: to all religions, one basic thing is in common, namely their orientation to some given images, the so called „archetypes“: to be religious means for me to be bound by such archetypes and to see the only one way how to escape the final corruption and annihilation in imitating pre-given archetypes. And this orientation of all human activities and of the whole human life was evidently oriented to the past, or better: to the super-past which could always be renewed and re-presented, i.e. made (to be) present. The presence, the actual present time was understood as an actualisation of something already happened and therefore eternally present. The future was observed not only as a vague, plain, not existing nothing, but as a most dangerous abyss.

13

Gods of all religions were observed as coming from the past: they were the first ones, they were prior to all men not only in the hierarchical sense, but timely, too. The gods preceded the men, and the world of gods preceded the human world. And now, Rahner started to speak about a religion of absolute future, and he understood this absolute future as the God himself. Of course, he was criticised and had to stop further speaking and writing about it. But this is not our interest; we have to understand and analyse his idea properly and see if it is corresponding to prophets and to Jesus, or in contradiction to them. It seems to me that no contradiction like that could be found, but surely a contradiction to our traditional European ways of thinking. I am prepared, therefore, to accept Rahner's idea of "absolute future" as an excellent invention which should be followed and elaborated in further details.

*ETF, 27.3.00*

14

If we take earnestly enough Barth's positive accepting philosophers using different terms than theologians but aiming to conceive philosophically the true orientation as far as the priority of the creator before his creation, we have to follow this idea further till its conclusions: we need not to interpret theology as a discipline of God (about God), and so to hold to the name "theology". It is therefore, perhaps, why Barth understands such a philosopher more as a crypto-

theologian, even if he is not declaring himself as such. I am convinced this idea is wrong in one way, namely in seeing the decisive difference between theology and philosophy in the mentioned priority of the higher before the lower. But it does not mean the whole idea is wrong: I accept a part of it, namely that it is not necessary to use the word "God". I told you, already, about the old Czech tradition (based in the much older Hebrew tradition) of using an alternative term instead, namely "Truth". (LOGOS, HODOS, ALÉTHEIA, ZÓÉ in St. John, ARCHÉ or KEFALÉ of all ARCHAI in St. Paul, ALPHA or ARCHÉ in Revelation, etc.)

15

If we choose the term "Truth" out of all other already used or only possible terms, we can speak about "alethology" instead of theology. In a sense, we have done it in the winter semester. Our problem today is if it was really a crypto-theological experiment, as it would be probably seen by Karl Barth, or if we can observe it as a true philosophy. If you remember, I stated that a philosophical alethology is unacceptable for me till we shall be able to change our minds, or better: our way of thinking. In as far we understand alethology as a scientific discipline about truth (as we find it in Aristotle, Met II, 993 b – EPISTÉMÉ TÉS ALÉTHEIAS = a knowledge of truth). Any LOGOS (in the Greek sense) about Truth makes the Truth to a thing, to an object, to something which is, which is given and so something past, and when coming, so coming from the past.

16

Absolute future is coming to us in various forms of different actual events which finally all are transformed (or are transforming themselves) into the past. But the Truth itself is never transforming itself either to any present or past form of „being“. So there it is impossible to found any "science", any discipline about the Truth as a "whole". The only way we can choose is indirect: we can analyse the conditions of our accepting and understanding the Truth, and enlarge our knowledge of various relations between different forms of our relative knowledge of truth. So we really can understand Karl Rahner's Absolute Future not only as God, but as Truth, too. Absolute future is always coming, only, but it never "is" already present, and it never "is" passing and changing into something "past".

*ETF, 3.4.00*

17

So we found a view which makes "philosophical theology" possible but under certain conditions: 1) we have to elaborate a new thinking approach to "realities" which are not "real" (no things), namely a non-objective (precisely: a non-objectifying) way of thinking; 2) we need not necessarily use the word "god" (or "God"), because it is no holy name (and which is more important, it is unnecessarily connected with religious and even mythical connotations); there is an equal possibility of using other, quite different terms (as we can find it in the Bible already); 3) therefore we need not speak about "philosophical theology", but it will remain any way one important part of philosophy, one of the most important philosophical disciplines. And so, we need a new name, new term how to call this new discipline.

18

Remembering Aristotle, we can start with his understanding of physics: it is one single theoretical philosophical discipline dealing with what is manifold and changing. We can adopt Whitehead's idea of "events" as basic "beings" constituting the Universe. So we can first search for a discipline dealing with results or relics of such events which arose, proceeded on, and finally ended (i.e. stopped to be). (Such relics can overlive the end of their own event as products of reactions of some other events, only.) In such a form, they represent something which exists behind (or which comes after) their event: behind = META. If physics is interested in events, the discipline dealing with what is coming

after the end of such events, but from the point of view of such events, can be called "metaphysics". Metaphysics understood in this form deals with "objectifications" necessarily connected with reactions of different other events (which are able to react). Such ability to react we call reactivity; the reactivity of different events produces such objectifications on different levels. Metaphysics concentrates its interest to "realities" objectified, but has no instruments for a broad approach to events themselves as wholes.

19

But there are not only relics or consequences of finished events, but also prerequisites or preconditions which necessarily precede the beginnings of those events. These preconditions must not be reduced to past events, only, because past events can have some consequences on the basis of reactivity of other, namely further events. The most important problem is the beginning of every event. Such a beginning cannot be objectified, but it is "real" (even if no "res", no thing). So, this realm of preconditions which cannot be objectified but which are necessary for any start of an event, have to be dealt with by an other philosophical discipline. We can call this discipline prophysics, because it is dealing with what is preceding the start of an event, what is before this start – in Greek: PRO (e.g. PROBALLEIN – METABALLEIN). It is quite clear, I hope, that the "absolute future", as conceived by Karl Rahner, cannot be understood as any objectification and so as a metaphysical object. It is a pure prophysical non-object.

20

As we see, it is not only a new theme, new realm of ideas, new way of thinking we lack, but a new discipline which would be able to treat those new themes, new ideas, but to solve some quite new problems as well. For such a solution we have to elaborate new methods and new strategical procedures, too. To make some first critical steps in this direction, we shall use some ideas of Charles Hartshorn in the last chapter of his small book *A Natural Theology for Our Time* published in 1967 (p. 126 ff). He starts with Bultmann's denying any attributing of something like 'historicity' to God. *"Only something extremely abstract can be purely eternal, and all concrete reality, even divine, is in broad sense historical, As Berdyaev, Heidegger, Barth, and many others have said or hinted, there is something like a 'divine time'."* (126) – My first remark: I am not convinced we can speak about anything as "being abstract" but about our concepts, i.e. never about our conceptual models (constructs). Nevertheless, only our conceptual models (= intentional objects) can be "purely eternal", nothing else (i.e. under no circumstances our concepts which do represent certain concrete structures of our thinking acts). My first criticism, therefore, is addressed to the false presupposition of existence of abstract realities. Abstraction is possible in thinking, only, and represents a quality of concepts, not of realities.

21

My second remark: if God is to be understood as timely (something like that must not be understood as "historicity", but we shall comment it later), we have to avoid some misinterpretations. Hartshorn is going on: *"Of course God is unborn and immortal. This is part of his being 'unsurpassable by another', which is far the best simple explication of 'God', in addition to the 'the one worshipped'. Only beginningless and endless duration is unsurpassable duration."* (127) Every being is timely in two ways: it 'has' its own time, but at the same moment it is – together with its own time – within a more general time, i.e. it has some time relations to other beings, past, present and future ones.

22

And so, God is not all-surpassing, because he is never passing. The past is not his own "time": he is never present as given, his presence is in his coming, only. No

underlining of deficiencies of our human time can prevent our faulty analysing the difference of past and future in man and in God. In God, there is no past at all. That is the main argument against idolatry identifying God with anything give, anything real, especially with anything past. So, even the idea that God is surpassable by himself, only (128), is basically wrong, because he could surpass himself as past, and he is never passing, he has no past. Hartshorne writes that his idea of God can be derived in two ways, the first of which is from the understanding of surpassable by others and from mere negation of this surpassability (128). And his new idea – in comparison with old authors – is that God is able to surpass himself (so that he is changing in some way). He is convinced that "Yet this idea of being unsurpassable by another has not been shown to yield antinomies, and for all we know is not absurd" (129). I can agree that in this conception there are no inner antinomies. As far as „absurdity“ is concerned, it is a feeling which depends on our everyday life (or traditional, old etc.) prejudices. Hartshornes conception is based on a very old prejudice, namely that God is a special, highest or mosr honorable beeing. And just this prejudice is a relic of paganisme, of the worship of false gods.

23

In our view – I underline: our philosophical view, with all reservations we made – God is never being, „he“ is no being, we have no other experience about his „nature“ but about his coming to us personally, i.e. to usas persons, as individuals. And so we have to draw necessary consequences of that experience: God is always comin, but never being. So he is coming to us out of the future. And because the coming future is the general precondition of all events, of all coming and passing away, we can dacide if we conceive God as identical with the Future, or if we shall go a little further and conceive God as the source or creator of Future, or – according to Rahner – as the Absolute Future. Anyway, God has no „nature“, no FYSIS, he is „pre-natural“, he is a pro-physical „existence“, who is not in-sisting in himself, but ex-sisting outside of himself by coming to us.

ETF, 29.5.00

24

Now, we have to approach the problem of this „Divine Future“ (instead of the „Divine Historicity“) far nearer. First: the term „god“ is of pagan origin, and it was re-interpreted, only. This term is nothing holy, we are free to use other terms, of course again with necessary re-interpretations. So the term „theology“ is based on a historically contingent use of an old word which had to be reintepreted. We are not fatally dependent on this old use. Event our term „philosophical theology“ is not necessary, and we can choose another one. Second: we have to change our views and especially all our conceptuality to be able to explore step by step the conditions of the world of future, of the realm of coming „realities“ (which are no „res“, no „things“, but not nothing). We have to accept the orientation of this realm of future: it is oriented tu us, to all men, but also to all living beings, perhaps (and most probably) to all true beings at all. Every true being is starting ist existence by being not yet, i.e. directly in the future. We have to deny the Greek idea of causality, where every effect is caused by a past cause, which is at the same time an effect of afurther past cause, etc. in infinitum. Last causes (or = first causes) of every being are no „causes“, because they do not yet exist in the moment when they „cause“ starting of a being. In its establishing its real existence, only, every being uses different relics of various past (or present) events for building ist own way of existence, its own way of being. The whole world (and we do not know, if the world is really a whole, a unity of all events which are „immanently“ part of it – of course, no real or true event is any immanent part of the world, because of its „not-yet-being“ origins) would not exist and would not be able to continue existing if „true beings“ or „true events“

would not start to exist. And no event would be able to start to exist and to continue in its existence without the Future which is always coming.

25

*ETF, 10.4.00 – Sybe Schaap*

*17.4. – 28.4. velikonoční prázdniny*

*ETF, 15.5.00 – Sybe Schaap*

*ETF, 22.5.00*

*ETF, 29.5.00 – Sybe Schaap*

**The Problem of Philosophical Theology** po 11.00 – 12.30

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*14.2.2000*

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ETF, 21.2.00

ETF, 28.2.00 – Sybe Schaap

ETF, 6.3.00

ETF, 13.3.00 – Sybe Schaap

ETF, 20.3.00

ETF, 27.3.00

ETF, 3.4.00 – Sybe Schaap

ETF. 10.4.00

velikonoční prázdniny – ETF, 17.4.00

velikonoční prázdniny – ETF, 15.5.00

ETF, 22.5.00

ETF, 29.5.00 – Sybe Schaap