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Preface

The 10-th issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* (May 2022) presents scientific and theoretical articles on various aspects, all of them centred on the area of Philosophy, Theology, and Science.

In the first article: *DESCARTES AND SPINOZA ON THE PERFECTION OF GOD: A CONTRAST*, Prof. Ph.D. Rocco A. ASTORE explains how Descartes establishes God's existence via the argument of perfection, and how this perfection of God reinforces the existence of such a supreme entity. After that, although Spinoza's understanding of God's perfection in his Ethics Book I and II may appear akin to Descartes, it would be incorrect to fully understand either philosopher's views on God's perfection as being entirely the same.

The next work is called: *'THERE IS NOTHING BUT BLIND, PITILESS INDIFFERENCE IN THE UNIVERSE: EVOLUTION AND DIVINE PURPOSE'* and it belongs to Ph.D. David O. BROWN. This study presents questions of theological interpretations of evolution that seem to fall into two categories: those who see evolution as a part of God's purposes and those who see evolution as a counter to God's purposes for creation.

The next study, by Prof. Ph.D. Gheorghe F. ANGHELESCU, presents *THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE ABOUT THE CREATION EX NIHILO IN THE WORKS OF GREEK APOLOGISTS*. The aim of our author examination of this topic is twofold: 1) to examine the approaches to the theme of creation in the Christian apologetic writings of the second century; 2) to analyze their philosophical support, the concepts substantiating the expression of this theory on the origin of the universe.

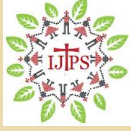
THE DISPUTE OVER UNIVERSALS AND ANSELMIAN REALISM is the article presented by Georgiana-Cerasela NIȚU. Anselm was concerned with an inductive legitimation, of the determined being (of the second being), towards the determining being. This premise of the inductance of reason appears in Anselmian realism when trying to identify certain concepts called universals, with the essence of reality.

THE HOLY EMPRESS PULCHERIA IN LIGHT OF RECENT RESEARCH is the scientific research presented by Prof. Ph.D. Gheorghe F. ANGHELESCU. This research paper presents that Empress Pulcheria of Byzantium played a remarkable role in the Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries.

SAINT LAZAROS OF MOUNT GALESION – HEAVENLY MAN OR EARTHLY ANGEL is the final article of the volume presented by Ph.D. Rodica Elena SOARE (GHEORGHIU). Saint Lazaros, as a monk, ascetic stylite, confessor, and founder of monasteries, is an emblematic saint of the eleventh century, his life written and lived describing in detail all these struggles and human dilemmas.

The scientific content presented in the current issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* distinguishes the opportunity of examining altogether truth-claims found in Theology, Philosophy, and Science, as well as the methods laid out by every discipline and the meanings derived from them. This is the aim and also the scientific task of IFIASA International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science.

Prof. Ph.D. Marian BUGIULESCU,
IFIASA, ROMANIA



DESCARTES AND SPINOZA ON THE PERFECTION OF GOD: A CONTRAST

Prof. Ph.D. Rocco A. ASTORE,

Adjunct Instructor of Philosophy St. John's University,
USA,

Email: astorer@stjohns.edu

ABSTRACT

After repeatedly reading Descartes's Meditations on First Philosophy, what still stands out most to this present essayist is Descartes's notion of God's perfection and how the perfection of the Divine includes the existence of the Almighty. Similarly, if we look to Spinoza's Ethics Book I and the beginnings of Book II, we find comparable claims; namely, that the Almighty's essence necessarily involves existence, and that this is a perfection of God alone. First, this article will detail how Descartes establishes God's existence via the argument from perfection, and how this perfection of God reinforces the existence of such a supreme entity. Next, this piece will treat Spinoza's understanding of God as that which must exist, and how this mandatory existence is solely of the perfection of God. Lastly, this paper will show that although Spinoza's understanding of God's perfection in his Ethics Book I and II may appear akin to Descartes, it would be incorrect to fully understand either philosopher's views on God's perfection as being entirely the same.

Keywords: *History of Philosophy; Descartes; Spinoza; Perfection; Meditations on First Philosophy, Ethics;*

1. DESCARTES'S PRELUDE TO THE ARGUMENT FROM PERFECTION AND THE ARGUMENT FROM PERFECTION AS FOUND IN THE *MEDITATIONS*

Upon entering Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, we encounter what we know to be as Cartesian Doubt, or Descartes's methodical use of doubt, to be sure that we are sure that we know what we know in a way that is beyond mere opinion, or belief.¹ In other words, Descartes opens what is perhaps his most famous work by regarding everything that he can doubt as being that which must be cast aside, to make room for what is true to emerge most prominently.² For, as Descartes states:

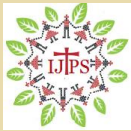
"...and it is a mark of prudence never to place complete trust in those who have deceived us even once."³

I.e., we find in Descartes's words that just as we cannot claim what invites doubt to be completely true, we cannot trust that which leads us astray from truth. So, what are some

¹ Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy Vol. IV: Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Leibniz* (New York: Doubleday., 1994)., 74-75 & Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998)., 54.

² Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998)., 54.

³ *Ibid.*, 60.



sources by which doubt would always arise, and thus truth never achieved? As understood by Descartes, these foundations for total uncertainty include the possibility that we are dreaming reality, as well as the possibility that a maniacal genius is constantly tricking us into believing that a deluded reality is real.⁴

However, Descartes starts to provide us with certainty by denying the possibility of either the fact that we are dreaming reality or that an evil omnipotent omniscience is deceiving us constantly. Now, regarding the chance that we are dreaming reality, we find Descartes denying this probability through the following:

“Nevertheless, it surely must be admitted that things seen during slumber are, as it were, like painted images, which can only be produced in the likeness of true things, and that therefore at least these general things—eyes, head, hands, and the whole body—are not imaginary things, but are true and exist.”⁵

In other words, regarding the possibility that we are dreaming a fictitious reality fails when we consider Descartes’s view that the more, we abstract from particulars, the more we are left with truths that appear in waking and dreaming life, which are thus universally valid.⁶ That is, to Descartes, when we dream, we tend to dream distortions of reality, while what we assign these distortions to nonetheless display characteristics that are never absent in either waking or dreaming life.

Let us take for example the idea of dreaming that a pink dachshund is at the foot of our bed. Now, when we dream of such a chimerical being, we must admit that elements of what we regard as the pink dachshund remain the same in waking life. Such elements include the extension, shape, place, and duration of our pink dachshund. In other words, if we peel away the pink element of the dachshund, a particularity, and even other individual peculiarities that we may dream of this dog breed, we cannot deny that this breed of canine possesses universal commonalities between itself as a breed. Thus, permanencies that remain in the realm of waking and sleeping life helps demonstrate that reality is not merely fantastical, rendering truth a valid pursuit and not deadened by dreamlife being the only reality that is certain.

From this, Descartes then has us consider perhaps we undergo deception in another way; namely, by a being who is nefarious and supreme, an evil genius, i.e., God as deceiver.⁷ That is, to Descartes, another path that would always lead us to unsurety and never truth, would be if a god of evil were deceiving us always, such that we believe in a reality that amounts to be only falsehoods and fictions. However, such a misleading divinity cannot be so. For, as Descartes declares:

“God, I say, the same being the idea of whom is in me: a being having all those perfections that I cannot comprehend, but can somehow touch with my thought, and a being subject to no defects whatever. From these considerations it is quite obvious that he [God] cannot be a deceiver, for it is manifest by the light of nature that all fraud and deception depend on some defect.”⁸

In other words, Descartes believes that since we possess an idea of self, for we cannot deny that we are the source that exercises the power of denial, when we engage in

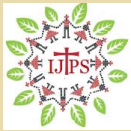
⁴ Ibid., 60-63.

⁵ Ibid., 60-61.

⁶ Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster., 1972)., 563.

⁷ Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998)., 62-63.

⁸ Ibid., 80.



denying, we must also possess the idea of the cause of this inescapable awareness of self. Such origin to Descartes is God.⁹ For, knowing the self is a perfection, for knowledge outshines ignorance, and what we possess the potential to further know must come from a source in which all knowledge is already actual.¹⁰ Thus, if knowledge is a perfection, and the actuality of all knowledge is the sum of all perfections, then there must be a perfect being who harbors and can bestow its perfections on to us, i.e., God.¹¹ Accordingly, if God holds all perfections, God must be perfect and as perfect no deprivation of perfection can pertain to God.¹²

Consequently, such infallibility renders God to never be a deceiver because even if God's perfect power would be on display if God were to fool us always, it would remain that God is being immoral by being deceptive.¹³ Thus, there would be an imperfection that would pertain to God which is an impossibility to Descartes. One reason for Descartes believing that God can never be imperfect is that we cannot cause ourselves to exist since we would never deprive ourselves of any perfections, if we were self-causal, and hence our perfections, again must issue from the Divine who contains all perfections.¹⁴ Or, as Descartes affirms:

“For nothing more perfect than God, or even as perfect as God, can be thought or imagined. But if I got my being from myself, I would not doubt, nor would I desire, nor would I lack anything at all. For I would have given myself all perfections of which I have some idea; in doing so, I myself would be God!”¹⁵

Now, upon encountering Meditation V of Descartes's *Meditations*, we begin to find Descartes unpacking the idea that God's perfection includes God's existence, through the following:

“What I believe must be considered above all here is the fact that I find within me countless ideas of certain things, that, even if perhaps they do not exist anywhere outside me, still cannot be said to be nothing. And although, in a sense, I think them at will, nevertheless they are not something I have fabricated; rather they have their own true and immutable natures.”¹⁶

I.e., to Descartes, there are indeed things that exist outside of the mind, and that do not rely upon the mind, such as Descartes's own example of the independence of a triangle's existence even if no triangle is in sight.¹⁷ In other words, if we imagine a triangle to exist, we are imagining something rather than nothing, or something that “still has a certain and determinate nature, essence, or form which is unchangeable and eternal.”¹⁸

Accordingly, to Descartes, we can even demonstrate the independence of something such as our imagined triangle from our minds by acknowledging that the essence of a triangle involves that all triangles share the angular sum of one-hundred-eighty degrees and that this angular sum equals the sum of two right angles. Therefore, because these properties of a triangle are inseparable from a triangle, regardless of our will to accept or deny these qualities, we find that there is a separation between ourselves and something such as a

⁹ Ibid., 76-79.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 71; 81-82.

¹⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷ Ibid., 88-89.

¹⁸ Ibid., 88.



triangle.¹⁹ Lastly, this distinction renders at least one thing to exist outside of us rather than a world in which we can only validate the existence of ourselves.

Consequently, Descartes continues Meditation V by showing how it is that God is inseparable from existing.²⁰ That is because, existence, a power, or perfection, if absent from God, would render God imperfect so much so that Descartes draws us to consider the link between a mountain and a valley as just as undivorceable as is God from existing.²¹ That is, just as we always find mountains and valleys conjoined, in a way that neither would exist in the same way without the other, God links to existence in a way that utterly reinforces our idea of God as “a certain substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent and supremely powerful, and that created me along with everything else that exists...”²²

Thus, since the idea of God arises from consciously demonstrating that such a being must be real, as the source of all perfections of which we both contain and contain only potentially, and because our status as something existing, which is a perfection that surpasses non-existing, implies that we come from a being who must exist perfectly.²³ Simply put, this being that must exist, as the common ground of all perfections, as understood by Descartes, is none other than God.²⁴ Finally, let us now examine Spinoza’s take on God, and how God’s necessary existence is a perfection of the Deity, alone.

2. KEY ELEMENTS OF SPINOZA’S GOD AND SPINOZA’S ARGUMENT FOR GOD’S NECESSARY EXISTENCE AS PERFECTION

As understood by Spinoza, God alone is perfect, or that which is reality itself.²⁵ For as Spinoza states:

“D6: By reality and perfection I understand the same thing.”²⁶

That is, God, to Spinoza, by being a substance, or that which alone is the cause of itself, which need no other essence for its conceivability is “free,” or limitless in all ways as reality.²⁷ For, that which need no other concept for its thinkability aside from itself, must be that which no concept can precede.²⁸ Thus, to Spinoza, God as first in the sequence of reality must be eternal.²⁹ That is because from the vantage of God to existence, God engenders existence by necessarily being that which exudes existence, to explain the existence of existence.

At the same time, from the vantage of we who exists to God, we can trace ourselves back to God as our ultimate cause, or common origin. Thus, Spinoza’s God is immanent, or that which is always present throughout existence.³⁰ Consequently, by being both first and ultimate cause that nothing can precede or outlast, God’s perfection rest in that nothing can

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 89-90.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 76.

²³ Ibid., 89-90.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 32.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 2; 32.

²⁸ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁹ Ibid., 2, 13, & 14-16.

³⁰ Ibid., 16.



inhibit God from expressing itself, in part, as the various modifications of God's Thought, or individual thinking things insofar as we consider them as essences.³¹

In other words, the necessity of God's essence involving existence leads Spinoza to assert the perfection of God for no other being is requisite for the continuity of all reality as is God.³² An example to portray this idea regarding the necessary existence of God is akin to the definition of a square as that shape, enclosed by four equal lines in which each side is of the same length, equaling an angular sum of three-hundred-sixty degrees. That is, the essence of a square as conveyed by its definition includes both its immaterial and formal reality as always equaling the angular sum of three-hundred-sixty degrees.

Now, this definition parallels the existence of a square as that which possesses an area enclosed by four equal lines, since such a figure contains four ninety-degree angles adding to three-hundred-sixty degrees in total. Thus, God, as that which harbors an essence that involves existence, and as that which alone is self-causal as well as that which needs no other concept for its thinkability must exist.³³ That is because just like the immaterial angular sum of all squares resulting in three-hundred-sixty degrees, matching four equally enclosed lines of ninety degrees each, God as that sole eternal domain of all reality can only exist as infinite Nature.³⁴

For, it is only the infinite universe that can correspond to God as that which alone possesses an essence that involves what is requisite for all existence, neverendingly. Lastly, because the definition of God matches the existence of God, Spinoza finds that God, or Nature are inextricably in sync and thus are in unity, or oneness. For, as Spinoza states:

*"P20: God's existence and his [God's] essence are one and the same"*³⁵

And:

*"D6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence
Exp.: I say absolutely infinite, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it [NS: (i.e., we can conceive infinite attributes which do not pertain to its nature)]; but if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence."*³⁶

As well as:

*"P11: God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists."*³⁷

In other words, God as a being that is infinite, is that which harbors in itself the attribute of extension, or the unlimited expanse of the natural order and as the expressor of this eternal and infinite attribute, God involves no negation, or deprivation of what is verily real, or any perfection findable in Nature.³⁸ Thus, God, by being that which affirms all of existence through its eternal and infinite essence, is that which is perfect alone; for, we

³¹ Ibid., 2, 13, 14-16, & 33.

³² Ibid., 1-2; 10-13.

³³ Ibid., 1-2.

³⁴ Ibid., 2; 16.

³⁵ Ibid., 16.

³⁶ Ibid., 2.

³⁷ Ibid., 7.

³⁸ Ibid., 2; 7.



cannot attribute all perfections to any other being aside from God.³⁹ That is because two or more substance of the same attribute cannot exist, or that there cannot be a duplicate Almighty since only God is necessarily self-causal.⁴⁰

Accordingly, God alone is unique, or distinct and hence if there were two or more substances of the same attributes, we would be embracing the idea that God both is and is not God at one and the same time. That is because if there were multiple substances of the same attributes, we would be asserting that two entities are the same while simultaneously unique, or distinct, which is contradictory. In other words, for something to be a one of a kind it can only be singular, and since there cannot be two or more one of a kind, we find that the only substance is God, and as the sole substance, only God as the eternality of reality can handle the infinitude of the infinite natural order.

Furthermore, regarding the above quoted proposition eleven of Spinoza's *Ethics* Book I, we find another crucial element regarding how it is that God's necessary existence is a perfection of the Deity alone.⁴¹ That is, if we envision God, or that which possesses an essence that involves existence, we find that there must be a reason for the reality of the Almighty as well as a reason why such a being would be unable to exist.⁴² In other words, God must be the cause of itself on the grounds that nothing can take away the existence of God, since by nothing preceding God, nothing can compel God to be other than God.⁴³

Also, even if there were something that can exceed God, that would lead us back to the idea that God both is and is not concurrently, leaving us only with a contradictory, and thus untrue idea of God. That is because if something were able to overtake God, that being itself would be God, and thus we would be considering two substances, that although unique, cannot each be substances. Now, the reason why neither entities can be substances at one and the same time is that if each were a uniquely self-causal entity, each would be incompatible with the other, and hence, to maintain the unity of reality and existence, one would necessarily be in the other.⁴⁴

As such, Spinoza asserts that "whatever is, is either in itself or in another" or that a substance alone is in itself whereas a mode is in a substance, and thus if something took away, or overtook God's existence, God would then fall into being a mode, or a finite and limited being that ultimately requires another for its existence and conceivability.⁴⁵

Thus, regardless of affirming or denying God, we always fall back to the idea of a necessary substance, that is God, and hence because there is no logical reason that can compel God from not existing, God must exist, which is a perfection that only God possesses.⁴⁶ For, all that is other than God are "in another" as well as "...can be conceived as not existing." i.e., what is not a substance must be a variety of a substance's modes.⁴⁷

³⁹ Ibid., 7-9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1-3.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1-3; 32-33.

⁴² Ibid., 7-9.

⁴³ Ibid., 7-9; 13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1-2; 3-4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 7-9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1-2.



3. CONTRASTING DESCARTES'S AND SPINOZA'S VIEWS ON THE PERFECTION OF GOD

Now, although it may appear that Descartes and Spinoza share a common view of God's perfection, we should refrain from asserting this opinion fully. One reason as to why Descartes and Spinoza, albeit both affirming that God is perfect differ in their understanding of God's perfection is that each philosopher understands God's existence differently. For example, to Spinoza "P17: *God acts by the necessity of his [God's] nature alone, and is compelled by no one*" and does not will in the way in which Descartes understands how the will operates in connection to a supreme substance who is "independent and complete."⁴⁸ In other words, Descartes understands God as a being that is limitlessly free, while also that which always chooses or wills what is best, whereas to Spinoza:

"D7: That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner."⁴⁹

I.e., God, to Spinoza is not free in the way we people believe ourselves to be free.⁵⁰ Instead, God is a necessary being, without limits, of which nothing that is, is or can exist prior or exterior to.⁵¹ Hence, because nothing can exert an influence over God, to compel God, God possesses the liberty to express its perfection of being as that which alone is at the greatest degree of reality, or that which alone contains an essence that involves existence.⁵²

In other words, unlike Descartes, who believes that God could be a deceiver, but never would be since that would imply that God lacks the perfection of moral uprightness, Spinoza believes that it is not of the perfection of God to be morally caring.⁵³ That is because if God's will bent, to favor anyone, the whole order and connection of reality and being would shift to serve the need of one at the expense of the well-being of all others.⁵⁴ As such, this absurd vision of how the will of God operates, Spinoza would never support, and instead Spinoza sees there to be a perfection in God's immutable constancy.⁵⁵

However, from Descartes's vantage it seems to be that there is a more intimate connection between God's perfection and our privations, or lack of perfections that we do not possess as well as each of our existences as individuals.⁵⁶ For example, we find that God creates and crafts the human mind, specifically, to be in its image and likeness.⁵⁷ Yet, we should recall that Descartes also declares that the mind is finite in comparison to God's all-knowingness, or infinite knowledge.⁵⁸ As such, it is because that we know that we know we

⁴⁸ Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998), 81 & Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996), 13.

⁴⁹ Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998), 81-82 & Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996), 2; 13.

⁵⁰ Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996), 28-29.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 32; 1-2.

⁵³ Ibid., 29-31.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 26-28.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 22-25.

⁵⁶ Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998), 77-78.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 83-84.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 76-77.



are imperfect that the idea of what is infinitely perfect, or the idea of God emerges out of such self-awareness.⁵⁹ That is because our awareness of our imperfections implies that there is a greater degree of perfection that we know must be endlessly perfect.⁶⁰ For as Descartes asserts:

“First, while it is true that my knowledge is gradually being increased and that there are many things in me potentially that are not yet actual, nevertheless, none of these pertains to the idea of God, in which there is nothing whatever that is potential. Indeed this gradual increase is itself a most certain proof of imperfection.”⁶¹

Furthermore, another difference between Descartes’s and Spinoza’s understanding of God’s perfection rests in how Descartes understands himself to be a finite substance, or a being that understands itself to be the cause of its actions in an immediate way.⁶² Oppositely, to Spinoza we are not substances, but rather modes, or beings that utterly depend on God, so much so that our conceivability and nature not only relies on God but also that we are ultimately set by God.⁶³ That is, God fixes, or determines us to be that which can channel God’s effects, in a manner that we cannot refuse to communicate such determination within the confines of the one substance *Deus sive Natura*.⁶⁴

In other words, to Spinoza we are not independent in the way Descartes understands us to be. That is because God is not separate from existence, and the perfection of God does not consist in perfections that God can grant or imbed in us as separate substances.⁶⁵ Instead, from Spinoza’s view, God as the only substance is that which alone determines the nature of all things that follow from God’s perfection as the only being that possesses an essence that involves existence.⁶⁶ For as Spinoza asserts:

“A7: If a thing be conceived as not existing, its essence does not involve existence”⁶⁷

As well as: “P27: A thing which has been determined by God to produce an effect, cannot render itself undetermined.”⁶⁸

And lastly: “P28: Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has no determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to produce an effect by another cause...”⁶⁹

Also, another dissimilarity between Descartes’s and Spinoza’s accounts of God’s perfection includes how it is that Descartes maintains that God and existence, like a mountain to a valley, are in sync, yet not the same, whereas to Spinoza, God’s perfection rests in the fact that God and Nature are one and the same.⁷⁰ In other words, to Descartes, we may indeed understand God as being in unity with existence, but not the all-out domain of existence in which we exist, as does Spinoza. That is, to Spinoza, we may understand that

⁵⁹ Ibid., 77-78.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 77.

⁶² Ibid., 76-77.

⁶³ Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 19.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2; 19.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2; 16.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1-2; 19.

⁷⁰ Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998)., 89-90 & Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 16.



God also exists as the extended, or infinite universe and not merely that the essence of material things, or the concept of extension belongs ultimately to God.⁷¹ That is because to Descartes, God, who as an infinite substance surpasses our level of being, transmits its infinitude on to creation, which reflects as the endless, or infinite universe.

Oppositely, to Spinoza, God, as an infinite substance is equally that which we can conceive to be the greatest entity, or the perfection of reality as well as that which exists as infinite Nature, or that which is endless corporeal substance.⁷² In other words, it is not that God alone possesses the attribute of Extension, or that God facilitates extended being to be possible, as we find in Descartes, rather, to Spinoza God is additionally Extension itself when we understand God in a strictly corporeal manner.⁷³ Thus, it is safe to assert that to Descartes God and existence are akin in that God reflects as existence, but only God is totally aware of this as an omniscient, supreme, and infinite substance.⁷⁴

However, to Spinoza, God is the unity of an infinity of attributes including our participation in Thought, or idealized Nature and Extension, or materialized God. Finally, that is because to Spinoza these attributes of God are that which we can intellectually sense as being of the essence of something that nothing else can entirely possess.⁷⁵ As such, this exclusive power to harbor attributes renders God's infinite existence to be a necessary perfection of eternal reality, which is also under the rubric of substance, or God via the lens of Spinoza.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

The initial purpose of this essay was to depict how it is that Descartes and Spinoza understand God's perfection as entailing the existence of the supreme being. First, this article outlined Descartes's views regarding the embrace of methodical doubt, the impossibility of dreaming reality, and the affirmation of God as a perfect substance and not a deceiver. Next, this piece invited readers to better understand how it is that Descartes believes God connects to existence, to set the stage for Spinoza's similar although distinct ideas regarding the perfection of God as involving the existence of the Deity. Afterward this essay analyzed why it is that Spinoza believes God's necessary existence is ultimately a perfection of the Almighty alone. Lastly, it was the final intent of this article to examine how it is that Descartes's and Spinoza's views of God's perfection are not merely duplicates.

Accordingly, it is with genuine hope that this present essayist suggest that more research may arise, to assist in establishing a greater divide between Descartes's philosophy as well as that of Spinoza, not so that we may understand each philosopher in isolation. Rather, it was the intent of this present author to consider Descartes and Spinoza as being distinct so that the uniqueness of each's theories may stand out even more.

⁷¹ Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster., 1972)., 566 & Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 7-9, 16, & 33.

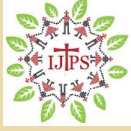
⁷² Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 1-2, 16, & 32-33.

⁷³ Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998)., 92-93, Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster., 1972)., 565-566, & Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 16, 32-33.

⁷⁴ Descartes, René. Donald A. Cress trans., *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998)., 76.

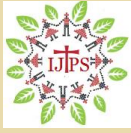
⁷⁵ Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 1-2, 7-13, & 16.

⁷⁶ Spinoza, Benedict De. Edwin Curley trans., *Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books., 1996)., 4-6, 10-13, 16, 25, & 31-33.



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‘THERE IS NOTHING BUT BLIND, PITILESS INDIFFERENCE IN THE UNIVERSE:’ EVOLUTION AND DIVINE PURPOSE

Ph.D. David O. BROWN,
Queen's University Belfast,
UNITED KINGDOM,
Email: davidbrown27@me.com

ABSTRACT

Questions of theological interpretations of evolution seem to fall into two categories: those who see evolution as a part of God's purposes and those who see evolution as counter to God's purposes for creation. Invariably, these interpretations of evolution emphasise one or more commonly held aspects of evolution: either evolution is genuinely creative - so part of God's purposes - or suffering and death are inherent parts of evolution (natural selection) - so counter to God's purposes. However, drawing on Thomas Aquinas, this paper will argue that a third theological interpretation of evolution is possible in which God is neutral towards evolution, that is, it is neither creative and nor does it inherently contain suffering and death. This will lead to the suggestion that theology is at least reconcilable with evolutionary positions that emphasise its 'purposelessness,' if not that theology is more favourable to those positions.

Keywords: Evolution; Thomism; Divine Purpose; Participation; Theodicy;

INTRODUCTION

In *River Out of Eden*, Richard Dawkins writes that '[t]he universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.'¹ For Dawkins, evolution is an entirely neutral phenomenon, which serves no purpose. This is not the same as claiming that there is no progress in evolution. Dawkins affirms that one can detect a directed progress in evolution (such as the arms race), but this serves no purpose. Thus, one can have progress without purpose.² This essay is concerned with whether or not evolution serves a purpose, not whether evolution leads to biological progress. Most theologians would disagree with Dawkins here. Some argue that sentiments such as these expressed by Dawkins are philosophical luxuries,³ and not reflective of evolutionary science, which allows that evolution is creative and so consonant with divine purposes. On the other hand, others hold that evolution is destructive and so counter to divine purposes. For those, evolution is not the way that God creates, but God's act of creation must eventually overcome evolution.

Yet, there is another option that might offer greater scope for dialogue with modern biological approaches to evolution: God is neutral to whether evolution happens or not, and

¹ Richard Dawkins *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (London: Phoenix, 1996), p.155

² Michael Ruse *Monad to Man* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.21

³ See Christoph Schönborn *Chance or Purpose* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), p.28; Edward Feser *Scholastic Metaphysics* (Heusenstamm: editiones scholasticae, 2014), pp.158-9



indifferent to what the ‘outcome’ of evolution might be. Perhaps overly anxious with being labelled as deist - which has made western theologians quasi-instinctively phobic of any suggestion of a denial of special providence⁴ - theologians either see evolution as being explicitly part of God’s plan for creation (and in many instances identified as the mechanism through which God realises that plan for creation) or as being explicitly counter to God’s plan for creation. God is either for or against evolution.

However, if God’s purposes are understood as something akin to the Thomistic principle of ‘willing the good’⁵ or Paul Tillich’s principle that ‘the purpose of creation is the exercise of [God’s] creativity, which has no purpose beyond itself because the divine life is essentially creative’⁶ then it is possible to hold that God is not a ‘detached and impotent God,’⁷ but yet who nevertheless does not design the world to be a specific way or achieve a specific end. That is, it is possible to hold that God wills that there is a creation and that this creation is good, without also holding that God constrains that a particular creation is good in a specific way. In doing so, this paper will defend two ideas: (a) that creation has nothing to do with evolution - i.e. that the doctrine of creation is not the physical ‘generation’ and ‘manipulation’ of atoms in order to produce a specific arrangement or state of affairs - but is concerned with ontological dependence; and (b) that suffering, death, and destruction are not *inherent* to evolution, and so the theologian is not obliged to offer a defence/theodicy for it. Thus, against those who argue that evolution is how God creates, this paper will point to a nuanced Thomistic/scholastic account of creation in which God’s act of creation is not identified with the Big Bang and subsequent natural processes of the world. Further, against those who argue that evolution is counter to God’s purposes, this paper will show that, at least in a Darwinian/neo-Darwinian paradigm, suffering is not inherent to evolution as is so often supposed.

In defending the idea that God can be neutral to evolution this paper does not pretend to refute those theologies that argue either that God creates through evolution or that God saves creatures from evolution; it simply intends to show that a third position is possible, one in which a coherent theology can be held together with Dawkins’ claim that evolution serves no purpose. Moreover, while Dawkins was used as a way into this conversation, drawing on his characterisation of evolution as entirely ‘neutral’ and/or ‘purposeless,’ this essay will not pay any particular attention to his particular theory of evolution. Certainly, he could be seen as representative of the neo-Darwinian perspective given his profile, however, this paper is concerned with showing only that it is theologically defensible to agree with Dawkins on *this particular* issue - i.e. that evolution serves no purpose and is theologically neutral - not that one can construct a viable theology in sustained conversation with Dawkins’ work.

1. EVOLUTION IS INTENDED BY GOD

Perhaps quite obviously, those who are quite content to see evolution as entirely congruent with the divine will, the divine character, and Christian values are more likely

⁴ See Christopher C. Knight ‘Divine Action and the Laws of Nature: An Orthodox Perspective on Miracles’, in Daniel Buxhoeveden & Gayle Woloschak *Science and the Eastern Orthodox Church*, Abingdon: Routledge (2016), p.43

⁵ *ST* 1, 19

⁶ Paul Tillich *Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp.263-4

⁷ Nicholas Saunders *Divine Action & Modern Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.100



than not to see evolution as synonymous with creation. Evolution provides the theologian with a more scientifically sophisticated ‘gloss’ on the Genesis narrative.

The most obvious exponent of this view is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. While a book-length treatise would be necessary to explore the many complex elements of Teilhard’s unique evolutionary theology and understand the many confusing neologisms he utilises throughout his corpus, for him, evolution is the process whereby all of creation is becoming more complex and united, eventually producing one maximally united body - the body of Christ - so that the end of evolution is coincident with the pleroma and parousia. For Teilhard, evolution is, quite simply, how God creates. Teilhard equates increased complexity with increased consciousness and, crucially, with increased ‘spirituality.’ The more complex that matter becomes, the more conscious it is and so the more spiritual, that is, the closer to God that it is. Moreover, Teilhard assumes what he calls a ‘metaphysics of union,’⁸ by which he means that ‘to be’ is ‘to be united.’ This means that creation is a process of unification. If ‘fuller being is closer union’⁹ then ‘to create is for God to unite,’¹⁰ and so ‘[t]he whole of evolution’ is ‘reduced to a process of union (communion) with God.’¹¹ Thus, he writes that ‘[we] can see only one way in which it is possible for God to create – and that is evolutively, by process of unification’¹² and this means that ‘evolution is holy,’¹³ no matter how ‘material’ or ‘biological’ evolution is, it serves a spiritual purpose: unity with God. Another important attempt to see evolution as being intended by God is made by Christopher Southgate, who argues that a process such as evolution - one that involves genuine jeopardy and suffering - is the ‘only way’ that God can cultivate those attributes and values that are most desirable: one cannot truly sacrifice if there is not genuine loss. Southgate writes that while the question of ‘[w]hy did God not create a world free from all this suffering and struggle?’ might ultimately remain beyond human knowledge, ‘a starting presumption must be that the formation of the sorts of life forms represented in the biosphere *required* an evolutionary process.’¹⁴ In this way, even though ‘[p]rocesses intrinsic to evolution give rise to harms,’ they ‘are also *instrumental* in enhancing values,’¹⁵ which means that ‘the evolutionary struggle of creation can be read as being the “travail” to which God subjected creation in hope that the values of complex life, and ultimately freely choosing creatures such as ourselves would emerge.’¹⁶ In a later essay, Southgate clarifies that one must ‘concede the disvalues associated with evolutionary suffering as a necessary element in God’s creation of an evolving biosphere’ because ‘[t]he values are not obtained without the disvalues. End of story.’ Thus, ‘a loving God would only have created in this way if it were the only way.’¹⁷ Importantly, Southgate recognises that this suffering through which God subjects creation is only temporary and so qualifies his theology by claiming that

⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *The Heart of the Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), p.144

⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York NY: Harper & Row, 1959), p.31

¹⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *Activation of Energy* (London: Harvest, 1978), pp.262-3

¹¹ Teilhard de Chardin *The Heart of the Matter*, p.144

¹² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *Towards the Future* (London: Harvest, 1975), p.198

¹³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *Writings in the Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), p.59

¹⁴ Christopher Southgate *The Groaning of Creation* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p.47

¹⁵ Southgate *The Groaning of Creation*, p.44

¹⁶ Southgate *The Groaning of Creation*, p.95

¹⁷ Christopher Southgate ‘Re-Reading Genesis, John and Job: A Christian Response to Darwinism’, in *Zygon: A Journal of Religion and Science* Vol. 46 No. 2 (2011), p.388



‘I believe in God’s eventual healing of creation, and that humans have a part to play in that healing.’¹⁸

Of course, Teilhard and Southgate do not exhaust theological attempts to include evolution as part of the divine purpose, normally as a way of replacing a literal reading of Genesis, and so seeing evolution as part of (if not the whole of) a doctrine of creation. No mention has been made of theologians such as John Haught,¹⁹ John Polkinghorne,²⁰ and Arthur Peacocke,²¹ who find value in theologies such as process theology, panentheism or *creatio continua* as a way of accommodating evolution in theology. Space prevents a fuller treatment of the broad range of theologies that see evolution as part of God’s purposes; it is not important to discuss the various and diverse ways that theologians have attempted to show that evolution is part of God’s purposes, only that it has been attempted.

2. EVOLUTION IS AGAINST GOD’S PURPOSES

While Southgate is optimistic about the presence of suffering, others argue that the ‘happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain and horror’ in evolution suggests a ‘careless, indifferent, almost diabolical’ God, certainly not ‘the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.’²² This is not the same as those, such as young earth creationists, who flatly deny that evolution is a real phenomenon (for whatever reason). Rather, exponents who fall into this category accept the reality of evolution, but see it as running counter to divine purposes in creation.

There are a number of reasons why theologians might take this position. Most often, there is an appeal to the revelation of God’s character in the Bible, especially in Christ, who came for sinners, not the righteous.²³ Rik Peels (although he eventually concludes that it is possible to positively reconcile Christian theology with evolution) notes that there is a sharp tension between the Biblical image of God, who is consistently and unwaveringly pictured as siding with the small, the weak, and the poor over and against the big, the strong, and the rich,²⁴ and the Darwinian picture, which ‘favours those who are well adapted and even those that are best adapted.’²⁵

Neil Messer has also recently offered an attempt to argue that evolution is counter to God’s purposes. Drawing on the theology of Karl Barth, Messer writes that ‘[t]he fact that suffering and destruction are intrinsic to the evolutionary process in this world should be recognized as an aspect of evil, opposed to God’s good purposes.’²⁶ Responding to Southgate, Messer argues that the Christian claim that creation is ‘very good’ should be a lens through which evolution is interpreted, and that if evolution leads to suffering - and

¹⁸ Southgate *The Groaning of Creation*, p.116

¹⁹ John Haught *God After Darwin* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2000); John Haught *Making Sense of Evolution* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010)

²⁰ John Polkinghorne *Science and Creation* (London: SPCK, 1988); John Polkinghorne *Science and Providence* (London: SPCK, 1989)

²¹ Arthur Peacocke *Theology For A Scientific Age* (London: SCM Press, 1993); Arthur Peacocke *Paths from Science Towards God* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2001)

²² David Hull ‘The God of the Galapagos’, in *Nature Vol. 352* (1991), p.486

²³ Lk 5: 32

²⁴ Rik Peels ‘Does Evolution Conflict with God’s Character?’ in *Modern Theology Vol. 34 No. 4* (2018), pp.550-1

²⁵ Peels ‘Does Evolution Conflict with God’s Character?’, p.548

²⁶ Neil Messer ‘Evolution and Theodicy: How (not) to do Science and Theology’, in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science Vol. 53 No. 3* (2018), p.828



suffering can hardly have a part in anything ‘very good’ - then evolution cannot be part of God’s intentions.²⁷

Jürgen Moltmann is perhaps the most famous exponent of this position. Reacting to what he perceives to be significant problems with Teilhard de Chardin’s own evolutionary theology, Moltmann argues that Teilhard turns Christ into a saviour of the ‘victors’ of evolution, rather than of the ‘losers.’ By so fixating on the progress that Teilhard thought he saw inherent in the process of evolution, ‘Teilhard does seem to have overlooked the ambiguity of evolution itself, and therefore to have paid no attention to evolution’s victims.’²⁸ For Moltmann, Teilhard’s Christ is not the *Christus evolutor*, but the *Christus selector*.²⁹ Christ must not be relevant only to those who win the evolutionary game, he must also be relevant - indeed, one might say *primarily* relevant - to those who lose. Christ as redeemer must primarily be that who redeems creation from the entire paradigm of evolution. Thus, Moltmann writes that ‘the various processes of evolution in nature and humanity can only be brought into positive relationship to Christ, the perfecter of creation, if Christ is perceived as a victim among evolution’s other victims.’³⁰ If Christ must identify with ‘victims’ or ‘losers’ of evolution, rather than the ‘winners,’ then evolution cannot be part of the original intentions or purposes behind creation. Moreover, Moltmann argues that identifying the new creation with natural processes seems to destroy the radicality of redemption; there is no ‘meaningful hope’ for the ‘losers’ of evolution unless ‘the victims of evolution experience justice through the resurrection of nature.’³¹ Of course, there is more to Moltmann’s theology of evolution than can be presented in such a short space. It has not engaged with some of Moltmann’s other work, such as *God in Creation*.³² However, focusing on Moltmann’s presentation of evolution in *The Way of Jesus Christ* shows most clearly how he fits into this category.

3. EVOLUTION AND GOD’S NEUTRALITY

Here then are two ways of looking at evolution: its creative ability and the inherent nature of suffering. Emphasise the former and it appears consonant with divine purpose; emphasise the latter and it appears counter to divine purpose. However, it will now be shown that another interpretation is possible. Against the first emphasis, it will be argued that theology need not equate creation with natural processes. Against the second emphasis, it will be argued that suffering is not inherent to evolution and it is possible to interpret natural selection without suffering. Thus, God can be entirely neutral towards evolution.

3.1. Selection and Suffering

Turning to the second emphasis first, ignoring questions about whether natural selection is a genuinely active evolutionary mechanism or whether it is nothing more than a statistical observation (important though they may be), many biologists have recognised that it is *reproduction* that is the central aspect, not suffering. That is, ‘[n]atural selection simply means this kind of differential reproduction,’ which means ‘saying that a certain genotype

²⁷ Messer ‘Evolution and Theodicy: How (not) to do Science and Theology’, p.830

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p.294

²⁹ Moltmann *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p.294

³⁰ Moltmann *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p.296

³¹ Moltmann *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p.297; see also Denis Edwards *The God of Evolution* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), p.110

³² Jürgen Moltmann *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1993), pp.185ff.



has a high fitness or is naturally selected just means that it is more successful than other genotypes in leaving copies of itself in succeeding generations.³³ Jacques Monod, too, writes that ‘the decisive factor in natural selection is not the struggle for life, but – within a given species – the differential rate of reproduction.’³⁴ As some have noted, even a reproductive differential of 1% can be effective;³⁵ leaving 1% more progeny than another means evolutionary success.

Here is the crucial point. Quite often, as outlined above, theological reservations about natural selection revolve around the necessity of suffering: God could not possibly have intended something that causes so much suffering.³⁶ Yet, if natural selection is (at least, primarily) concerned with reproduction, rather than survival, then it is not clear that suffering is inherent to the evolutionary process. This does not ignore the fact that predation and death are clearly real phenomena - speed and talons would not have become ‘successful’ if they did not offer a real evolutionary advantage. Questions of predation notwithstanding, dwelling on survival - ‘red in tooth and claw’ - misses the point somewhat: it is reproduction that is the crucial factor, not survival. It does not particularly matter (evolutionarily speaking) whether the gazelle is caught by the cheetah if the gazelle has already reproduced. Certainly one can claim that a slower gazelle has fewer opportunities to reproduce than a faster gazelle (or a faster giraffe, zebra, etc.) if it is predated by the cheetah and this contributes (which it surely would) to it producing 1% fewer progeny, but this is exactly the point. It is not the survival that is evolutionarily effective, but the reproduction; the faster gazelle is not evolutionarily successful because it is faster, but because (presumably, but by no means definitely) it leaves more progeny; a slow fecund gazelle will be evolutionary more successful than a fast chaste gazelle, or, as Michael Ruse puts the same point, ‘[i]t is not good (from an evolutionary point of view) to have the physique of Tarzan if you have the sexual drive of a philosopher.’³⁷ Richard Dawkins also speculates that ‘[a] gene that is lethal in an older body,’ such as those that cause the development of cancer or senile decay, ‘may still be successful in the gene pool, provided that its lethal effect does not show itself until after the body has had time to do at least some reproducing.’ The startling implication is that it seems impossible (without conscious eugenic interventions) for age-related infirmities and even death (through decay) itself to be evolutionarily overcome because humans will always breed before they take effect.³⁸ Unless immunity to disease and decay gave any *reproductive* advantage it would never become evolutionarily successful, and since (presumably most) creatures reproduce *before* they become susceptible to age-related infirmities and death, that will never happen.

³³ Burton Guttman, Anthony Griffiths, David Suzuki, and Tara Cullis *Genetics* (Oxford: One World, 2002), p.258

³⁴ Jacques Monod *Chance and Necessity* (London: Collins, 1972), p.115; see also R.J. Berry *Neo-Darwinism* (London: Edward Arnold Limited, 1982), p.57; Richard Dawkins *The Blind WatchMaker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.50

³⁵ Sean Carroll *Endless Forms Most Beautiful: The New Science of Evo Devo and the Making of the Animal Kingdom* (New York NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), pp.245-7

³⁶ As Emily Qureshi-Hurst and Christopher T. Bennett argue, the same arguments could be used against mutations, claiming that the suggestion that God can influence particular mutations necessarily raises the question of why God does not prevent those which lead to genetic disease etc. (Emily Qureshi-Hurst & Christopher T. Bennett ‘Outstanding Issues with Robert Russell’s NIODA Concerning Quantum Biology and Theistic Evolution’, in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* (forthcoming)).

³⁷ Michael Ruse *Darwin and Design: Does Evolution Have a Purpose?* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.100

³⁸ Richard Dawkins *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.40-2



Crucially, one can hardly claim that a creature *suffers* simply by leaving slightly fewer progeny. Even if it has left fewer progeny *because* it has suffered, the fact of leaving fewer progeny does not contribute to its suffering. Survival - important though it is - is only a means to an end; the longer one survives, the more progeny one has the opportunity to produce, but it is in no way the case that surviving longer *guarantees* one will leave more progeny. Looking at human populations, barriers to reproduction do not appear to be due to suffering and death (although of course many die before reaching reproductive age or have debilitating disease etc.) and, while it is of course irresponsible to extrapolate human behaviour into non-human populations, many other animal populations exhibit behaviours which afford very few opportunities to mate for many individuals (e.g. populations with an alpha male who controls access to a harem). That an individual which has very little opportunity to mate anyway suffers and/or is predated makes very little difference to reproductive differentials and so has no evolutionary significance. (Of course, the situation is vastly more complex than outlined here, but the point should be clear.)³⁹

In other words, death and suffering are not an *inherent* part of evolution. They are a part of life because we live in a world in which there is limited space, limited mates, and limited resources. These limits sharpen the effects of differential reproduction, but they do not cause the differential reproduction. Even in a world with unlimited resources and unlimited space, creatures would still (presumably) potentially leave different numbers of progeny and so there would still be differing levels of fluctuating populations. This is not to say that suffering never impacts reproduction differentials, but it can only ever be a catalyst; they would still be present without suffering. One could speculate that in a hypothetical world in which there are unlimited resources and mates, it is possible that evolution would still happen - i.e. genes would still mutate - but the tension involved in competition over limited resources and mates would not be present. Evolution would still happen, but it would not necessarily lead to suffering. As Theodosius Dobzhansky writes, '[a]lthough we cannot close our eyes to competition, war, famine and death in nature, natural selection does not ineluctably depend on any of these things,' rather '[n]atural selection may also take place...when resources are not limiting, if the carriers of some genes possess greater reproductive potentials than the carriers of other genes.'⁴⁰ This is not to argue that it is possible, counterfactually, to imagine a world in which selection occurs but includes no pain or suffering, as if one could have selection without suffering but in *this* world suffering is inherent to selection,⁴¹ but to argue that suffering is incidental to selection in *all* counterfactual worlds. That is, suffering and death only affects the particular historical counterfactual path that evolutionary history might take, it in no way affects the functional or operational effectiveness of selection itself. Even if biological death were not a feature of the world we inhabit, presumably, genetic mutation would still occur and there would still be differential reproduction of those various mutations.

Of course, postulating the idea of a world without death and without limitations is a fiction. Darwin's theory of natural selection is based entirely on the fact that there *are* limitations, and, as already noted above, the presence of claws, teeth, and carnivorous digestive systems show quite clearly that predation and death are a necessary part of the

³⁹ Perhaps here the classic example of the Ichneumonidae (the parasitic wasp) is so forcefully relevant due to the fact that its reproductive cycle itself is so bound up with suffering. No doubt there are difficulties here, but the Ichneumonidae provides problems for many theological interpretations.

⁴⁰ Theodosius Dobzhansky *Mankind Evolving* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1962), p.129

⁴¹ cf. Peels 'Does Evolution Conflict with God's Character?', pp.547-8



evolutionary ‘process.’ The point that this section is ultimately trying to make is that all of this - limited resources and space, predation, death etc. - must only be a means to an end; they are only a catalyst for a particular path. The *real* element must always be reproduction, because if there is no reproduction then what (evolutionary) use is there in winning the biological ‘arms race’? A world in which there is no suffering but no reproduction will contain no evolution, yet a world in which there is no suffering but differential reproduction will. Likewise, a world with limited resources but no reproduction will lead to no evolutionary change, but a world with unlimited resources but differential reproduction will. It is true that predation has given rise to certain values,⁴² but predation is more like the ‘steering wheel’ that guides the particular path evolution takes; it is differential reproduction that ‘propels’ it. Limited resources and suffering (predation) influences which path selection might take (and which values emerge), but without differential reproduction, that suffering is (evolutionarily) impotent. That is, the actual particular history of evolution includes suffering and limited resources, but this does not change the fact that it is reproduction that is at the heart of selection; without suffering selection would still occur, yet without reproduction selection would never occur. The point is to show that predation, death, and suffering are not inherent to evolution, but are only arbitrary features of evolution in *this particular world*. That being the case, it is reasonable to suggest that the presence of suffering in evolution is not an indication that evolution itself is against the purposes of God.

Theologians (particularly those keen on emphasising Biblical themes) might still want to retain the sense that biological death and suffering are not a (natural) part of God’s creation, and if God’s purpose is understood as being for ‘good’ then one might wish to agree with Messer that suffering and death hardly seem ‘good,’ but the point here is that, even if it is held that biological death and suffering are counter to God’s purposes, this does not oblige the theologian to oppose the presence of evolution in the world, because suffering and biological death are not inherent to evolution. Suffering and death might change what counts as ‘fitness’ - i.e. the presence of competition over resources ‘favours’ speed and sharpness of talons when lack of competition might favour something else - but it is by no means an integral part of evolution.

3.2. Mutation and Ontology

Suffering is not inherent to evolution, so evolution does not run counter to God’s purposes. Turning now to the first emphasis, it can also be shown that evolution is not creative in a theological sense, so is not consonant with God’s purposes.

Geneticists are more or less unanimous that all genetic mutations - which are the raw material of selection - can only be judged within the particular environment in which they occur. Theodosius Dobzhansky was clear that ‘classification of mutations into favourable and harmful ones is meaningless if the nature of the environment is not stated,’⁴³ which means that a particular mutation might be ‘deleterious’ or ‘destructive’ to the gene, but it might provide the organism with some advantage.⁴⁴ Other biologists agree with this

⁴² As Christopher Southgate argues (see also Holmes Rolston III ‘Disvalues in Nature’, in *The Monist Vol. 75 No. 2* (1992))

⁴³ Theodosius Dobzhansky *Genetics and the Origin of Species* (New York NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.23

⁴⁴ Likewise, the comparison of the ‘adaptiveness’ of mutations can only be made ‘provided they exploit similar or overlapping adaptive niches, or compete for the same food or other resources.’ (Theodosius Dobzhansky ‘Chance and Creativity in Evolution’, in Francisco Ayala & Theodosius Dobzhansky (eds.) *Studies in the Philosophy of Biology* (London: MacMillan Press, 1974), p.322)



assessment. Ronald Fisher writes that what constitutes ‘fitness’ or ‘evolutionary success’ is ‘qualitatively different for every different organism.’⁴⁵ Ronald Cole-Turner, makes much the same observation, noting that as ‘the environment changes, its selection criteria will change,’⁴⁶ suggesting that one cannot make objective judgements on whether a particular variation will be successful or not without information relating to the environment. Richard Dawkins even goes so far as to call it a tautology, so that ‘natural selection is defined as the survival of the fittest, and the fittest are defined as those that survive;’⁴⁷ whatever survives survives because it has survived. Even Charles Darwin himself argued that, while ‘[t]here has been much discussion whether recent forms are more highly developed than ancient...naturalists have not as yet defined to each other's satisfaction what is meant by high and low forms.’⁴⁸ There is no such thing as an objectively good or bad mutation. Some mutations will provide their possessor with a reproductive advantage, but it depends on the environment in which that mutation happens; one cannot say that any particular mutation - not even that which leads to self-conscious intelligence - will always lead to progress or regress.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that which mutations occur and when they occur are entirely random and accidental. Again, Dobzhansky writes that ‘the organism is not endowed with a providential ability to respond to the requirements of the environment by producing hereditary changes consonant with these requirements’⁴⁹ and so ‘[m]utations arise regardless whether they are useful to the organism when and where they arise or ever.’⁵⁰ Not only is it not clear whether any mutation will prove costly or beneficial to the individual, but there is no causal relationship between the environment and the individual; mutations arise whether the individual ‘needs’ them or not.

Of course, increasingly, biologists are reacting against this ‘statistical’ Modern Synthesis typified by Dobzhansky. Peter Corning gives expression to the ‘growing constituency among biologists and other evolutionary theorists these days’ that the Modern Synthesis is becoming outdated and that biology now ‘goes far beyond and sometimes even contradicts’ that Modern Synthesis.⁵¹ Eva Jablonka and Gal Raz also speak for many biologists in the twenty-first century when they write that ‘it seems that a new extended theory, informed by developmental studies and epigenetic inheritance, and incorporating Darwinian, Lamarckian, and saltational frameworks, is going to replace the Modern Synthesis version of evolution.’⁵² That is, if Dobzhansky and the Modern Synthesists felt evolution was random and accidental, Jablonka and her colleagues feel that they might very well be some discernible direction to evolution.

⁴⁵ Ronald Fisher *The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p.37

⁴⁶ Ronald Cole-Turner *The New Genesis: Theology and the Genetic Revolution* (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p.43

⁴⁷ Richard Dawkins *The Extended Phenotype* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.181

⁴⁸ Charles Darwin *Origin of Species* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), p.297

⁴⁹ Dobzhansky *Genetics and the Origin of Species*, p.120

⁵⁰ Dobzhansky *Mankind Evolving*, p.47; see also Theodosius Dobzhansky *Biology of Ultimate Concern* (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1969), p.41

⁵¹ Peter Corning ‘Beyond the modern synthesis: A framework for a more inclusive biological synthesis’, in *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology Vol. 153* (2020), p.5

⁵² Eva Jablonka & Gal Raz ‘Transgenerational Epigenetic Inheritance: Prevalence, Mechanisms, and Implications for the Study of Heredity and Evolution’, in *The Quarterly Review of Biology Vol. 84 No. 2* (2009), p.168



Following this, theologians might argue that consciousness or self-consciousness should be given pride of place, as does Teilhard de Chardin, who believes ‘it is better, no matter what the cost, to be more conscious than less conscious’ and so makes consciousness ‘the absolute condition of the world’s existence.’⁵³ Thus, *contra* the biologists just quoted, theologians might agree on what constitutes a good mutation. Mariusz Tabaczek, while not explicitly pointing to consciousness, seems to accept something similar. Tabaczek is careful to distinguish between ‘species’ and ‘essence,’ so that ‘metaphysical categories of “higher” and “lower” should not be equated with biological concepts describing organisms as “more complex” and “better adapted.”’⁵⁴ However, this, Tabaczek clarifies, means that the theologian is not obliged to argue that an ant (as an example of a creature that is clearly evolutionarily successful) is on the same metaphysical footing as Neanderthals (as an example of an evolutionary unsuccessful creature).⁵⁵ In other words, Tabaczek argues, just because a creature is evolutionarily well-adapted does not mean that it is metaphysically superior. While biologists might bicker over what (if anything) is ‘meant by high and low forms,’ theologians are adamant.

However, it is not entirely clear that theologians are bound to argue that anything (including consciousness) makes creatures metaphysically superior. Perhaps more prevalent in eastern theology, there is a tendency among some to emphasise humanity’s solidarity with the rest of creation, rather than argue for its superiority. Andrew Louth, drawing on Gregory Nazianzen, writes that ‘nothing is nearer or further away from God by virtue of the constitution of its being...the most exalted archangel is, in metaphysical terms, no closer to God than a stone: God transcends all creatures infinitely.’⁵⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius also held a similar view. While he is perhaps remembered mostly for his theology of hierarchy, it is often not emphasised enough that, for him, ‘divinization occurs in the hierarchy not by moving up the hierarchy...but rather existing in one’s hierarchic rank...in a divinely ordained and divinely communicative way in relation to others.’⁵⁷ Thus, Pseudo-Dionysius writes that, while all creatures ‘yearn’ for God, ‘[e]verything with mind and reason seeks to know [God], everything sentient yearns to perceive [God], everything lacking perception has a living and instinctive longing for [God], and everything lifeless and merely existent turns, in its own fashion, for a share of [God]’⁵⁸ That is, the difference between ‘everything with mind and reason’ and ‘everything lifeless’ is simply the way in which they yearn for God; there is no suggestion that one is inherently ‘better’ than the other. In other words, it is impossible for a human (who seeks God through ‘mind and reason’) to be closer to God (who ‘transcends all creatures infinitely’) than a tree (who ‘only’ seeks God through ‘instinctive longing’). What is important is that the individual fulfills their ‘role,’ not that one moves through the

⁵³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *Christianity and Evolution* (London: Harvest, 1971), p.108

⁵⁴ Mariusz Tabaczek ‘An Aristotelian Account of Evolution and the Contemporary Philosophy of Biology’, in *Dialogo Vol. 1 No. 1* (2014), p.60

⁵⁵ Biologists and evolutionary historians may want to question whether Neanderthal’s should rightly be considered ‘unsuccessful.’ I take it that their extinction is evidence that, as successful as they may have been, they are no longer. While I accept there may be disagreements here, the purpose in using them as an example is to contrast them with ants as an extinct but, presumably for Tabaczek, ‘metaphysically’ superior creature.

⁵⁶ Andrew Louth ‘The Cosmic Vision of Saint Maximos the Confessor’, in Philip Clayton & Arthur Peacocke *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), p.191

⁵⁷ Ashely Purpura *God, Hierarchy, and Power: Orthodox Theologies of Authority from Byzantium* (New York NY.: Fordham University Press, 2018), pp.29-30; see also Louise Nelstrop *Christian Mysticism* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), p.109

⁵⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), DN 4.4.



hierarchy. Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, the theologian in the Dionysian vein has more in common with ‘statistical’ Modern Synthesis; there is no biological mutation which makes any creature metaphysically better.

Herein lies the problem with Tabaczek’s claim that humanity is metaphysically superior to ants. Important though it might be to distinguish metaphysical categories from biological concepts, if it is undeniable that consciousness and self-consciousness are *biological* concepts - i.e. they emerged through evolution (as many biologists and theologians would agree, although some - such as Teilhard de Chardin - might question) - then separating biological concepts from metaphysical categories prevents consciousness from being a marker of metaphysical superiority. One cannot claim both that the metaphysical is separate from biology and then select biological pointers to distinguish metaphysically. Rather, all creatures are metaphysically equal regardless of whatever biological concepts describe/distinguish them. Self-consciousness is just one evolutionary successful ‘strategy,’ it is by no means superior.

Perhaps, alternatively, human superiority could be found in ‘the capacity to seek a relationship with the personal creator God,’⁵⁹ but, again, there is a sense in which explaining humanity’s capacity for relationship with God consists of postulating the presence of a number of biological concepts (e.g. consciousness, lateral thinking, language, memory, morality), which are also found in other, non-human creatures.⁶⁰ Perhaps one could point to the presence of a soul uniquely in humanity (as does Tabaczek),⁶¹ which God creates directly and immediately and infuses into a human body at birth (or conception).⁶² Yet, there are problems here. Certainly, the appeal to the presence of a soul in the anthropological dualist/Cartesian sense is unhelpful, in which case one is forced to argue for something akin to soul as ‘emergent personality,’ that the soul is ‘engendered by the experiences of *personal relatedness*,’ which in turn is ‘an emergent property of certain critical *human cognitive capacities*.’⁶³ Yet, here one is forced into the same admission: that there is no *human* capacity that is not possessed by other non-human creatures. Warren Brown seems to recognise this when he almost immediately undermines his argument for the soul as ‘emergent personality’ by claiming that, ultimately, relationship ‘would be up to God to determine,’ so that ‘God may also relate to whom he [sic] chooses within his current

⁵⁹ Paul Rosenblum ‘Seeking Purpose in Creation and Evolution: The Agapic Principle’, in *Theology and Science Vol. 18 No. 1* (2020), p.88

⁶⁰ As Ron Cole-Turner has argued, recent biological and anthropological evidence confirms that *Homo Sapiens* did not come into existence either biologically or genetically, ‘with any sort of abruptness’ and neither is there a comparable ‘cultural Big Bang’ or ‘sudden lights-on moment’ of culture (e.g. art, music, religion etc.), lending more support to the Darwinian accumulation thesis (Ron Cole-Turner ‘New Perspectives on Human Origins: Three Challenges for Christian Theology’, *Theology and Science Vol. 18 No. 4* (2020), p.530). Perhaps more pertinent is that this leads Cole-Turner to acknowledge that the theological claim of human uniqueness ‘continues to lose its meaning and coherence’ (Cole-Turner ‘New Perspectives on Human Origins: Three Challenges for Christian Theology’, p.531; see also Lucas Mix & Joanna Masel ‘Chance, Purpose, and Progress in Evolution and Christianity’, in *Evolution Vol. 68 No. 8* (2014), p.2444).

⁶¹ Mariusz Tabaczek ‘The Metaphysics of Evolution: From Aquinas’s Interpretation of Augustine’s Concept of Rationes Seminales to the Contemporary Thomistic Account of Species Transformism’, in *Nova et vetera Vol. 18 No. 3* (2020), p.971

⁶² *Humani Generis*, 36; See Christopher Haw ‘The Human Soul and Evolution: A Mimetic Perspective’, in *New Blackfriars Vol. 102 No. 1097* (2021)

⁶³ Warren Brown ‘Cognitive Contributions to Soul’, in Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy & H. Newton Malony (eds.) *Whatever Happened to the Soul: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), p.103



creation, allowing for one form of relatedness that is not dependent on human capacity.’⁶⁴ If the possession of a soul does not bestow on humanity a unique ability to be in relationship with God, what purpose does it serve?

Thus, referring back to Tabaczek’s distinguishing of metaphysical categories from biological concepts and Pseudo-Dionysius’ hierarchy, it is unacceptably anthropocentric to suppose that only humans can have relationship with God - the purpose behind creation according to Tillich - because only they are self-conscious. Self-consciousness might be one way to be in relationship with God, but it is reminiscent of the labourers who complained of being paid the same wage to ask why God should consider relationship with unconscious trees equal to relationship with self-conscious humans; Thomas Merton’s tree, who ‘imitates God by being a tree,’⁶⁵ becomes the widow’s mite that is looked down upon by the ‘riches’ of humanity, but favourably appreciated by God.

Readers might counter that the absence of a particular unique capacity in humanity does not rule out uniqueness, and that the degree to which humanity experiences self-consciousness and symbolic language can lead to a unique role of humanity among other creatures, a role that might be described as ‘caretaker.’ This is undoubtedly important. It is undeniable that, however much humanity shares capacities and attributes with other creatures, they have manipulated their world in ways that no other animal has been able or could be able. Yet, the point here is not to deny that there is something (biologically) unique about humanity or that they contribute something valuable that would be lacking without them, but it is to deny that whatever uniqueness or value they do possess *does not equate to ontological superiority*. Brown’s admission that whether or not humanity possesses a soul or ‘emergent personality’ ‘God may also relate to whom he [sic] chooses within his current creation, allowing for one form of relatedness that is not dependent on human capacity’⁶⁶ is exactly the point here: self-consciousness does not confer ontological superiority if God can and does relate to all creatures. The point is not to deny human *uniqueness*, but to deny human *superiority*; it is not that there is nothing biologically unique about humanity, but that any such *biological* uniqueness cannot point to *metaphysical* superiority.

Here, then, is where it can be shown that a proper appreciation of Thomistic/scholastic accounts of creation create problems for seeing evolution as coincident with divine creation. Simply, to understand that God uses natural processes to create - that God works in, with, and through natural process as panentheists might put it⁶⁷ - is to confuse ‘creation’ with ‘generation.’⁶⁸ As Tabaczek has already been criticised, one cannot acknowledge that metaphysical categories are distinct from biological concepts and then suggest that one creature is metaphysically superior because of its biological constitution.

⁶⁴ Brown ‘Cognitive Contributions to Soul’, p.123

⁶⁵ Thomas Merton *New Seeds of Contemplation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1961), p.30 ; cf. Rosenblum ‘Seeking Purpose in Creation and Evolution: The Agapic Principle’, p.93

⁶⁶ Brown ‘Cognitive Contributions to Soul’, p.123

⁶⁷ e.g. Paul Davies ‘Teleology without Teleology: Purpose Through Emergent Complexity’, in Philip Clayton & Arthur Peacocke (eds.) *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p.99

⁶⁸ Andrzej Maryniarczyk ‘Philosophical Creationism: Thomas Aquinas’ Metaphysics of *Creatio ex Nihilo*’, in *Studia Gilsoniana Vol. 5 No. 1* (2016), p.238



It is impossible to expound Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of creation in such little space. Whole books have been dedicated to the subject.⁶⁹ This paper will limit itself to a few comments. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between *creatio* and *mutatio* (and, specifically for the purposes of this paper, *generatio*, which is a type of *mutatio*). While *mutatio* and *generatio* might be 'creative' in a certain sense, they are not *creatio*, which is something entirely different.⁷⁰ Describing this distinction, Étienne Gilson writes that, Thomas Aquinas' teacher 'Albert the Great emphatically stressed the distinction of two types of causality corresponding to two different types of effects produced.' These can be described thusly:

The first is a change properly speaking, that is to say, a change of state. Every change of this kind is the effect of a movement, whether we are dealing with the production of a new quality in an already existing substance, or of that of a new substance starting from already existing matter, the instrument of production is a moment, and the cause is the point of departure or the point of origin of this movement. That kind of production must be distinguished from the one whose result is the very being of the effect produced.⁷¹

As a result, Aquinas understands that *creatio* is not part of the causal nexus, but is the bringing into being of that nexus: 'what infinite agency causes simply is the system of secondary causality.'⁷² This leads Aquinas to claim that it is entirely possible for there to be an infinite regress of changes leading into the past. According to Aquinas, the universe can be eternal (i.e. have infinite temporal duration) and created;⁷³ *creatio* is not the first *mutatio*. Gavin Kerr describes this argument as a distinction between 'beginning' and 'creation.' He writes that '[t]he beginning of a thing signifies the time at which it came into existence, but the creation of a thing signifies the mode of its coming into existence.'⁷⁴ Thus, Kerr continues, it is quite possible to have a creation without a beginning, but it is impossible to have a beginning without a creation. *Creatio* is not about how something 'comes into being' - that is *generatio* - but about the dependence on God for being. Gilson, quoted above, also explicitly acknowledged that *generatio* is 'the point of origin of movement,' and distinguished this from what is meant by *creatio*. Thus, Andrew Davison can write that *creatio ex nihilo* is not 'some putative first moment in the past' but is 'primarily about derivation of all things from God.'⁷⁵ To put it bluntly, 'God's creative action *just is* creation's dependence on God for its existence,'⁷⁶ creation is not an 'act' or 'event' (however, long that act endures or however often it is repeated, as with modern exponents of *creatio continua*),⁷⁷ but a relationship of dependence, that is, participation.

Others make the same distinction using different language. Caleb Cohoe describes this tension as between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' relations,⁷⁸ indicating that *creatio* is not

⁶⁹ For the most recent, see Gavin Kerr *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

⁷⁰ *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2. 17; see also Maryniarczyk 'Philosophical Creationism: Thomas Aquinas' *Metaphysics of Creatio ex Nihilo*', p.238

⁷¹ Étienne Gilson *Medieval Essays* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2011), p.156

⁷² Rowan Williams *Christ: The Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum 2018), p.5

⁷³ Thomas Aquinas *De Aeternitate Mundi*, in Thomas Gilby (trans.) *Philosophical Texts* (Durham NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1982), pp.142-7; See Gilson *Medieval Essays*, p.170

⁷⁴ Gavin Kerr 'A Thomistic metaphysics of creation', in *Religious Studies Vol. 48* (2012), p.340

⁷⁵ Andrew Davison *Participation in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.26

⁷⁶ John Bishop & Ken Perszyk 'The Divine Attributes and Non-personal Conceptions of God', in *Topoi Vol.36* (2017), p.614

⁷⁷ e.g. John Haight, John Polkinghorne, and Arthur Peacocke

⁷⁸ Caleb Cohoe, 'There must be a First: Why Thomas Aquinas Rejects Infinite, Essentially Ordered, Causal Series', in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy Vol. 21 No. 5* (2013), p.841



understood in what might be called a ‘mechanical’ sense, but in a ‘hierarchical’ sense. Others have also made use of this ‘vertical’ imagery. Philip Sherrard writes that ‘[t]o speak of what is “prior” to creation is not, therefore, to refer to a time that precedes creation...It is to refer to the ontological and pre-ontological realms of the divine that stand, in a vertical hierarchy, prior to the realm of creation.’⁷⁹ Here, perhaps the word ‘primary’ is better than ‘prior;’ God’s activity is not ‘prior’ to creation, but more ‘primary.’ The point is that creation is a metaphysical category (unrelated to time and space), and so has nothing to do with historical - including biological - changes, whether those changes are progressive or not. Crucially, Torstein Tollefsen explicitly relates this notion of ‘vertical’ causality to Pseudo-Dionysius, writing that ‘all causes...are...vertically dependent on God as the final..., efficient..., and paradigmatic...principle or source.’⁸⁰ The link with Pseudo-Dionysius helpfully connects this discussion with that above: metaphysically, all are equal - biological changes do not affect metaphysical valuation.

Here, then, is the crucial point: precisely because evolution is about ‘the production of a new quality in an already existing substance, or of that of a new substance starting from already existing matter,’⁸¹ so evolution can only ever be a series of *mutatio* or *generatio* and can never be about *creatio*. Thus, returning to Tabaczek’s helpful caution to distinguish metaphysical categories from biological concepts, it can now be claimed that creation is concerned *only* with the former; whatever biological ‘progress’ might happen is properly only *mutatio*, and so is of no consequence to *creatio*.

Of course, Tabaczek, as a Thomist, accepts this distinction between ‘*creatio*’ and ‘*generatio*,’⁸² but he also claims that creation happens *through* evolution, implying that he does not see them as being mutually exclusive, but as being complementary. *Creatio*, for Tabaczek (and other Thomists), happens through *mutatio*. In other words, it seems that Tabaczek sees *mutatio* and/or *generatio* as a ‘type’ of *creatio*, or sees *mutatio* and/or *generatio* as producing the ‘same type of effect’ (as Gilson would put it). It appears, then, that Tabaczek sees *creatio* as the bringing about new/better aggregations of atoms, rather than ‘the investigation of the dependence of all that is on God,’ that is, ‘dependence in the order of being.’⁸³

Again, this does not mean that *mutatio* cannot be creative in a certain sense, but it is not what the theologian means by divine creation. Tabaczek seems to assume that *creatio* is a temporal process that starts in the beginning and culminates in humanity,⁸⁴ rather than an atemporal hierarchy of ontological dependence. Tabaczek still situates himself in the first category - evolution is creative in a theological sense - and sees creation as physical

⁷⁹ Philip Sherrard *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p.239; See also Andrew Davison ‘Looking Back Towards the Origin: Scientific Cosmology as Creation *ex nihilo* Considered “From the Inside”’, in Gary A. Anderson & Markus Bockmuehl (eds.) *Creation Ex Nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary Challenges* (Notre Dame IL.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), p.371ff.

⁸⁰ Torstein Theodor Tollefsen *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.113

⁸¹ Gilson *Medieval Essays*, p.156

⁸² e.g. Mariusz Tabaczek ‘What Do God and Creatures Really Do in an Evolutionary Change? Causal Analysis of Biological Transformism from the Thomistic Perspective’, in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 93 No. 3 (2019), p.23

⁸³ Steven Baldner & William Carroll (trans.) *Aquinas on Creation* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), p.4

⁸⁴ e.g. Tabaczek ‘What Do God and Creatures Really Do in an Evolutionary Change? Causal Analysis of Biological Transformism from the Thomistic Perspective’, p.17, p.37; thus, if Gavin Kerr is correct to separate ‘creation’ and ‘origins,’ then Tabaczek seems to confuse them.



construction, not ontological investigation. If creation genuinely is about ontological dependence as distinct from any change that happens in the world, then it is clear that evolution cannot be *creatio*. If metaphysical categories are to be distinguished from biological concepts, as Tabaczek claims, then it seems difficult, as just expounded, to also claim that biological concepts are the source of one's metaphysical valuation; it seems difficult to hold that metaphysical progress is achieved through biological changes.

Put differently, if divine purpose is about intending good - and this is understood in a metaphysical sense - then, biological improvement (if there is any) has no bearing on increasing metaphysical good. '[A]ll created natures are just ways of imperfectly imitating God,'⁸⁵ if God 'transcends all creatures infinitely' (or, if 'between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them,'⁸⁶ as Lateran IV put it) then humanity imitates God just as imperfectly as a tree - that one is conscious is incidental and does not make it a 'better' imitation.

3.3. Ontogeny and Phylogeny

Drawing on this distinction, and particularly Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchy in which the point is to fulfill one's role not progress through the hierarchy, then the point here is that God can be entirely concerned with the *personal* or 'spiritual' fulfillment of each and every creature, without constraining how many progeny they leave, or whether one changes into the other. Or, while there is obviously not a 'one-to-one' coincidence between the two (i.e. what biologists means by ontogeny is not exactly what is meant here as 'vertical' or 'hierarchical' fulfillment), God is concerned with ontogeny, not phylogeny. God is not concerned with historical and/or biological progress, but with the metaphysical 'fulfillment' of each creature, and biological concepts have no bearing on it. Consciousness does not mean that humanity has an advantage in metaphysical 'fulfillment,' it only means that they achieve that in a different way to a tree, who 'imitates God by being a tree.'⁸⁷ Humans achieve metaphysical fulfillment through 'mind and reason,' trees through 'instinctive longing,'⁸⁸ but one is not better than the other.

This leads to the conclusion that evolution is theologically irrelevant. Arguing that God is indifferent to evolution is ultimately to claim that God is indifferent to whether an organism's progeny has a specific mutation that improves their ability to leave more progeny or whether they have any progeny at all.⁸⁹ This is very different to saying that God is indifferent to the 'personal' or 'spiritual' fulfillment of those organisms. In biological language, claiming that God is indifferent to phylogeny does not mean that God is indifferent to ontogeny. To say that God desires and wills for each creature to fulfill themselves 'ontogenetically' in no way implies that God has 'phylogenetic purposes.' This

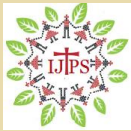
⁸⁵ Marilyn McCord Adams *What Sort of Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology* (Milwaukee WI: Marquette University Press, 1999), p.29; see also Mark Jordan 'The Intelligibility of the World and the Divine Ideas in Aquinas', in *The Review of Metaphysics Vol. 38 No. 1* (1984), pp.20-1; Junius Johnson 'The One and the Many in Bonaventure Exemplarity Explained', in *Religions Vol. 7 No. 144* (2016), p.12; Joshua C. Benson 'Structure and Meaning in St. Bonaventure's "*Quaestiones Disputatae de Scientia Christi*"', in *Franciscan Studies Vo. 62* (2004), p.74

⁸⁶ Constitutions of the Fourth Lateran Council, 2

⁸⁷ Merton *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p.30

⁸⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, DN 4.4.

⁸⁹ Although God does enjoin Noah at least to 'be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it' (Gen 9:7).



could be put differently: ‘*what* I am’ is irrelevant to God,⁹⁰ ‘*that* I fulfill it’ is. Alfred Freddoso seems to support this distinction between ‘*that* something is’ and ‘*what* something is.’ In his introduction to the theology of Francisco Suarez, he writes that ‘a newly conceived armadillo is from God insofar as it is something rather than nothing and from its parents insofar as it is an animal of the specious *armadillo* rather than some other sort of effect.’⁹¹ There is clearly the same distinction between metaphysics and biology. *What* an armadillo is, what its biological make-up is, is incidental to the fact *that* it is. The latter is *creatio* and the former is *mutatio/generatio*. Moreover, the former does not impinge upon the latter, by which is meant that *what* something is does not mean *that* it is to a greater or deeper extent; one cannot be more or less created on the basis of *what* it is. If ‘nothing is nearer or further away from God by virtue of the constitution of its being’⁹² then evolution simply explains how humans are different from other creatures (through accumulation of minor, insignificant *changes*), it does not mean that humans are more *created* than others. In other words, *creatio* is an absolute - one is either created or not - whereas *mutatio* is gradated - one can have more or fewer ‘changes’ - and therefore, the number of changes that one goes through - ‘*what* something is’ - can have no impact on whether one is more or less created - ‘*that* something is’ - because something can only be created or not, it cannot be more or less created. One is either created or not, one cannot be *more* created because of a particular biological form.⁹³

Ruth Page offers a similar interpretation. She writes that evolution and history are not divinely designed,⁹⁴ and so God does not ‘[set] up the initial conditions with the express design to produce complexity and human consciousness,’ but God ‘[lets] be whatever would and could emerge from that freedom, and enjoy[s] *all* responses of *all* kinds as they have occurred from the beginning of time, with their various qualities, of which intelligence is only one.’⁹⁵ It is crucial that Page explicitly notes that intelligence is only one way of responding to God, it is not better than any other. Seen through the Dionysian lens, God is not interested in what creatures are, or how many progeny they leave, but that they fulfill

⁹⁰ There are different ‘what I am’s because, not being God, creatures are susceptible to difference and so there are different ways of participating or imitating God, but, if Tabaczek is right, then none of these different ‘what I am’s leads to a greater participation or closer imitation. That is, ‘what’ something is cannot mean ‘that’ it is greater or better.

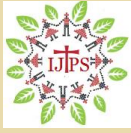
⁹¹ Alfred Freddoso ‘Introduction’, in Francisco Suarez *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence* (Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), p.lxxxviii

⁹² Andrew Louth ‘The Cosmic Vision of Saint Maximos the Confessor’, in Philip Clayton & Arthur Peacocke (eds.) *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), p.191

⁹³ The reader might argue that, of course, there are instances where ‘being’ is not absolute, where ‘being’ is gradated, and it is precisely ‘*what* something is’ that determines ‘*that* something is’ more and/or to a greater extent, namely, God. God, as the creator, must ‘be’ to a greater extent than creatures because God has ‘being’ necessarily and fully, whereas creatures only participate in being, and so having it derivatively and less fully. However, this is an incorrect understanding of participation. God does not ‘have being’ - that would make God another individual being to whom certain things can be attributed. To paraphrase Erich Przywara, this would make ‘being’ a ‘third thing’ (Erich Przywara *Analogia Entis* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), p.233) that exists alongside both God and creatures and so both God and creatures participate in ‘being.’ In other words, this would lead to the univocity of being. God is not another being, another individual who has ‘being’ to a greater extent or degree; God *is* being, God is the ground of being, in which creatures participate in order to have ‘being.’ As Pseudo-Dionysius writes, God ‘falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being’ and ‘is beyond assertion and denial’ (Pseudo-Dionysius *The Mystical Theology*, 5); God neither ‘is’ nor ‘is not,’

⁹⁴ Ruth Page *The Web of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1996), p.8

⁹⁵ Page *The Web of Creation*, p.80



their relationship with God, whatever that relationship might look like. Each individual creature, whether they be human or tree, wherever they appear on the ‘hierarchy of being,’ can ‘respond’ to God and achieve spiritual fulfillment. (Again, anyone who complains that (self-)consciousness is required for ‘responding,’ excluding a tree from relationship with God, is like the labourer who complains of another being paid the same wage for ‘less work;’ the tree’s ‘biological inferiority’ is like the widow’s mite.) Humans are not *better* at imitating God than trees; they are just different ways of imitating God.

John C. Green also hints at such a conclusion when he asks, in a letter to Dobzhansky, ‘why should we regard the modern horse as better than Eohippus?’ and answers that ‘I would think that the two creatures were equally happy and equally valuable in God’s sight,’ reasoning that “[b]etter” in evolutionary lingo is somewhat like “better” in modern advertising - the indefinite comparative. Our product is “better.” Better than what? Better for whom?’⁹⁶ Evolution cannot be better for the Eohippus, who is not around long enough to benefit from it, but neither can it be better for God, who ‘[lets] be whatever would and could emerge from that freedom, and enjoy[s] *all* responses of *all* kinds.’

In this way, even if it were conclusively proven beyond all doubt that there is real genuine biological direction and progress in evolution, or that there are certain and/or particular mutations that are objectively biologically more valuable, this would not change the doctrine of creation because none of these things have anything to do with what the theologian means by creation. The point of this essay is not to refute the *biological* claim that evolution can be viewed as exhibiting direction (in whatever way that is understood), but that, if creation is understood *theologically* not as ‘the title of a story’ but as ‘the classical formula which expresses the *relation* between God and the world,’⁹⁷ then it is irrelevant whether evolution is directed or not. Michael Ruse hints at this conclusion. He writes that ‘[w]e have forgotten our Plato: purpose occurs when *values* are at stake:’⁹⁸ if God does not place any particular value in *what* the creature is - if God enjoys all responses of all kinds - then God does not need to place any purpose in evolution. If God enjoys all responses, and places no value on any particular response, then the apparent randomness and chance in Darwinism no longer presents the theologian with a problem. To put that differently, if the theologian is not obliged to see any greater value in humanity (because their biological apparatus does not afford them any metaphysical superiority), then the theologian has no need to see evolution directed towards a particular outcome, least of all an evolutionary process constrained by God.

It is pertinent that Southgate criticises Page. While he acknowledges that there are ‘many points of contact between Page’s thought and the view presented [in his book],’ Southgate is ultimately critical of Page because he feels that ‘she never avoids the ontological aspect of the problem: God still bears responsibility for all that to which God has given rise.’⁹⁹ In other words, for all Page is applauded for removing God from ‘using pain, suffering, death, and extinction to realize other ends,’ ultimately God must still be responsible ‘for the existence of the world in which the suffering takes place.’¹⁰⁰ Indeed, it is

⁹⁶ John C. Greene & Michael Ruse ‘On the Nature of the Evolutionary Process: The Correspondence between Theodosius Dobzhansky and John C. Greene’, in *Biology and Philosophy* Vol. 11 (1996), p.460

⁹⁷ Tillich *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1, p.254 (*italics added*)

⁹⁸ Michael Ruse *Darwin and Design: Does Evolution Have a Purpose* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.264 (*italics in original*)

⁹⁹ Southgate *The Groaning of Creation*, p.49

¹⁰⁰ Southgate *The Groaning of Creation*, p.70



the fact that God is ultimately responsible for the existence of the world in which suffering takes place that leads Southgate to argue that God must ‘use’ it in some way to ensure that certain values are cultivated. However, while Southgate’s criticisms of Page might be valid, the point here is that Southgate is only interested in ‘phylogenetic fulfillment.’ For Southgate, suffering leads to fulfillment in a *future reality*. That is why he is critical of ‘Page’s rigorous rejection of long-term divine ends’ and questions whether ‘freedom of natural processes is a good, in the absence of divine goals.’¹⁰¹ Yet, for Page and Green (and for this essay), that fulfillment must be ‘ontogenetic’ or it cannot really be fulfillment at all. Put differently, if ‘the purpose of creation is the exercise of [God’s] creativity, which has no purpose beyond itself because the divine life is essentially creative’¹⁰² then the fulfillment of that creation is simply to be in relation with God, not for a specific aggregation of atoms or state of affairs to occur. Or, differently still, if creation is about ontological dependency and participation, then divine purpose must be concerned with the participation of all creatures in God (which has ‘no reference to temporality’¹⁰³), not ‘long-term’ - i.e., future - goals. This might lead to the suggestion that God is ‘essentially irrelevant to the actual physical workings of th[e] universe,’¹⁰⁴ but so be it.

Thus, if creation is about participation in God, which is a ‘metaphysical investigation’ and has ‘no reference to temporality,’ then purpose in creation must be about fulfillment of participation in God not the realisation of a specific state of affairs. That is, divine purpose in creation must be ontological, not historical. Of course, the *experience* of participation must be spatial and temporal/historical *for creatures*, otherwise it cannot be a genuine creaturely experience, but it is very different to say that the *experience* of participation is historical *for creatures* but atemporal *for God* than it is to say that God has specific desires that God acts to realise *in and through* history (i.e., through evolution).

If this is the case, then the theologian can find more common ground with Richard Dawkins than might first be thought possible. From a phylogenetic point of view, evolution is purposeless; God’s purpose is ontogenetically experienced - it is the fulfillment of each individual, not the fulfillment of history. Evolution becomes, then, not a process utilised by God to create, nor an unnatural or alien condition forced upon creation as a result of the introduction of evil (and certainly not a dualist force operating in creation to thwart God’s intentions), but the neutral ‘accidental’ or ‘incidental’ *effect* of difference. In this way, evolution is neither *creative* (understood theologically) nor *destructive*, but ‘neutral’ in the sense that it serves no theological purpose.

4. A BIBLICAL REACTION

There might be some who see what is speculatively put forward in this paper as lacking in consideration of Biblical themes. By overplaying the sharp distinction between *creatio* and *mutatio*, one seems to be moving towards seeing the relationship between science and religion as NOMA, and/or of flirting with deism and so ignoring the God presented in the Bible, who interacts (in whatever way one wishes to explain) with God’s

¹⁰¹ Christopher Southgate ‘“Free-Process” and “Only Way” Arguments’, in Stanley P. Rosenberg (ed.) *Finding Ourselves After Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2018), p.298

¹⁰² Paul Tillich *Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp.263-4

¹⁰³ Baldner & Carroll (trans.) *Aquinas on Creation*, p.16

¹⁰⁴ Richard Grigg ‘Religion, Science, and Evolution: Paul Tillich’s Fourth Way’, *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science Vol. 38 No. 4* (2003), p.953



creatures and providentially guides them. Subscribers to such an outlook will argue (along with Teilhard) that there is plenty of Biblical support for the notion that humanity should be imbued with greater theological value. They might point to the idea that God - who is at least in some sense temporal - purposefully works through nature to bring about beings who can respond to God with equal purposiveness. They might also wish to retain the importance of the soul, and argue that there is a qualitative difference between humans and non-humans, for which a soul is necessary to explain. No doubt, they would see biological progress (assuming there is any) as irrefutable proof of God's guiding hand. They would be correct to point out that Thomas Aquinas - whom this paper has used in support of its position - also drew heavily on the Bible and could hardly have understood his theory of creation as ontological dependency in the context of an evolutionary worldview, least of all one such as Dawkins'.

Readers who are sympathetic to this theological outlook will no doubt point out that the Bible and much of theological history - including Thomas Aquinas himself - has presented an outlook of the universe and the role of humanity within it that seems to be at odds with the approach outlined in this paper. These readers might suggest that Biblical themes seem to lend themselves more to an interpretation of evolution such as Teilhard or Moltmann. Surely, they might suggest, the point of creation is God's desire for creatures that are capable of worship of God and response to the incarnation, hence a theological interpretation that might favour Teilhard. Or, perhaps, surely the teaching of Jesus - expounded in the Sermon on the Mount - shows that a world in which random mutation and 'blind' neutral reproduction differentials are hardly the intention of God for God's creation, hence of a theological interpretation of evolution that might favour Moltmann.

These are valid concerns, and it falls outside the scope of this paper to respond to them fully. However, importantly, this paper has not pretended to refute beyond all reasonable doubt the coherence of positions similar to Teilhard or Moltmann; it is concerned with showing that a third alternative is possible. Nevertheless, it is important to note that some modern theologians argue that the Biblical idea of God should be seen within its historical place, and that there might be valid reasons for drawing on other ideas. Philip Clayton, for example, notes that the Bible represents a theological development from polytheism, through henotheism, before finally settled on monotheism,¹⁰⁵ and that despite the fact that Biblical authors professed strict monotheism 'remnants of polytheism [or, more accurately, henotheism] remained in the picture of God and God's action.'¹⁰⁶ In this way, although Christian theologians 'moved away from many gods to one God...they have often continued to conceive of God as a being who stands alongside the world, which becomes a "handiwork" he has crafted.'¹⁰⁷ Some see this as a tension between what might be called 'theistic personalism' or 'monopolytheism' and 'traditional theism.'¹⁰⁸ That is, between a God who is ontologically transcendent of the world and 'a view of God not conspicuously different from the polytheistic picture of the gods as merely very powerful discrete entities who possess a variety of distinct attributes that lesser entities also possess, if in smaller

¹⁰⁵ Philip Clayton *God and Contemporary Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.83ff.; see also Davison *Participation in God*, p.137

¹⁰⁶ Clayton *God and Contemporary Science*, p.86

¹⁰⁷ Clayton *God and Contemporary Science*, p.86

¹⁰⁸ See David Bentley Hart *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), p.127; and Brian Davies *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.1-20



measure.’¹⁰⁹ It might be suggested that a God who purposely creates through natural processes to bring about a creature - humans - that God values more than others is a God who is ‘not conspicuously different from the polytheistic picture of the gods.’ If that is that case, then it is somewhat ironic (given Biblical Fundamentalism’s unapologetic rejection of evolution in every guise) that it will be the reader who is most unwilling to abandon this (Biblical) picture of God as temporal being who acts in and through natural processes to providentially guide creation to a specific end who finds the speculative suggestion that evolution is theologically irrelevant most problematic.

These readers might also disagree with the weight given to Dawkins, and protest that there are other ways of looking at evolution that do not necessarily lead to the outlook that this paper takes as its starting point. Evo-Devo and Epigenetics might represent important biological developments that do exactly this,¹¹⁰ that is, seriously question the popular Dawkins position. Certainly, there is much to be said for these alternative biological viewpoints that may very well lend themselves much to the theological positions (such as Teilhard’s) that this paper has dismissed. This paper has not denied such biological alternatives are available, but has suggested that even if it were conclusively proven beyond all doubt that there is real genuine biological direction and progress in evolution, or that there are certain and/or particular mutations that are objectively biologically more valuable, there might still be theological reasons why such conclusions might be irrelevant to what the theologian means by creation. In other words, it cannot be stressed enough that if Thomas Aquinas’ theory of creation as ontological dependency is correct then *no* theory of *biological* evolution is *theologically* relevant. Creation is about participation in God, not the emergence of a particular biological form. Thus, it is not that Dawkins’ particular theory of evolution becomes more attractive to the theologian, but that there is no theological reason why the theologian should discard it for another. As Paul Tillich warns, the theologian should not prefer one scientific theory over any others *by theological reasons alone*.¹¹¹ That is, the point here is not to deny that those theological values that led Teilhard and Moltmann (and others that share their outlook) to view evolution in a particular way are wrong, but that none of those theological values should lead to the preference of one theory of evolution over another *if* creation is about participation and not biological emergence. Again, the point of this paper is not to suggest that Dawkins’ position is the only genuine biological position, but that it is not completely adverse to theological interpretation and, further, that certain theological interpretations might find Dawkins’ position theologically valuable.

Christians concerned with themes such as human capacity for response to and relationship with God or the emergence of a world in which the morality of the Sermon on the Mount is central might have reasons to disagree with Dawkins’ ‘blind pitiless indifference.’ Likewise, the Bible presents a God who is hardly indifferent to the plight of God’s creatures, and actively involves Godself in their lives. Such sentiments are perfectly understandable. The point this paper has tried to show is that such sentiments should not lead to the preference of one theory of evolution over another, especially if Aquinas is correct to see creation as participation.

¹⁰⁹ Hart *The Experience of God*, p.127

¹¹⁰ e.g., Eva Jablonka & Gal Raz ‘Transgenerational Epigenetic Inheritance: Prevalence, Mechanisms, and Implications for the Study of Heredity and Evolution’, in *The Quarterly Review of Biology* Vol. 84 No. 2 (2009)

¹¹¹ Tillich *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1, p.130



CONCLUSION

If one should remain (objectively) neutral towards mutations, and selection can be 'reduced' to nothing more than a question of differential rates of reproduction (which does not reject or ignore that suffering happens, but disagrees that it is an *inherent* part of evolution), then one can reach a third position: evolution is neither part of God's intentions nor does it run counter to or thwart God's intentions or purposes. This in no way implies that evolution cannot be considered 'creative' (in a certain sense), nor does it deny the very obvious reality of pain, suffering and death, but it argues that neither of these are theologically significant or relevant. Evolution is neither (*contra* Teilhard, Southgate *et al*) creative (in a theological sense), nor (*contra* Messer, Moltmann *et al*) does it *inherently* cause suffering. This points towards the conclusion that God is entirely neutral about whether evolution happens or not.

Creation, at least for the Thomist, is 'the investigation of the dependence of all that is on God,' that is, 'dependence in the order of being,'¹¹² or, put differently, 'God's creative action *just is* creation's dependence on God for its existence.'¹¹³ *Creatio* is not the process through which a specific aggregation of atoms or state of affairs is realised, but is simply the fact that such a universe has 'being.' More importantly, this means that *creatio* is not gradated; all creatures are metaphysically equal before God. A specific biological *mutatio* does not make one metaphysically superior. Put as simply as possible, why there is something rather than nothing is a uniquely theological question (metaphysical category) and it requires a uniquely theological answer (creation). On the other hand, why a particular something is the particular thing it is, is a uniquely scientific question (biological concept) and it requires a uniquely scientific answer (origins/evolution). Ultimately, God can be seen as being unconcerned with '*what*' things are - God '[lets] be whatever would and could emerge' - God is only concerned '*that*' things are, and that those things, '*whatever*' they are, fulfill '*that*' which they are. In other words, '*what*' something is cannot mean '*that*' it is to a greater extent.

Of course, there will be those who find what has been written here problematic. A suggestion of what a response to those criticisms has been tentatively made. Yet, importantly, this paper has not wished to say that positions similar to Teilhard and Moltmann are unequivocally wrong, or that Dawkins is the only biologist worthy of consideration; it has simply tried to point out that there is a significant theological reason why one might wish to disagree that evolution can be theologically creative, and there is an important biological reason why one might wish to disagree that evolution inherently causes suffering. If one considers these notions seriously, then it is entirely possible for theologians to agree with Dawkins: there is no purpose *in evolution*.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE ABOUT THE CREATION EX NIHILO IN THE WORKS OF GREEK APOLOGISTS

Ph.D. Gheorghe F. ANGHELESCU,

Ovidius University of Constanța,
ROMANIA.

Email: anghelescug@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of our examination into this topic is twofold: 1) to examine the approaches of the theme of creation in the Christian apologetic writings of the second century; 2) to analyze their philosophical support, the concepts substantiating the expression of this theory on the origin of the universe. In methodological terms, we would like to focus on the cosmological ideas of four patristic personalities: Justin the Martyr, Athenagoras of Athens, Tatian the Syrian, and Theophilus of Antioch. An attentive examination highlights a progress in the Christian thinking regarding the origin of the world, which occurred during a relatively brief period of time. We can notice, during a first stage, a cohabitation of the apologists with the Greek philosophical tradition, and, afterward, a gradual, yet decisive, breakup with the Hellenic vision regarding the way of understanding the relation between God and creation.

Keywords: *Creation; time; Middle Platonism; apology; Christianity;*

INTRODUCTION

The concept *ex nihilo*, although only implied in the Hebrew *Scriptures*¹ (Psalms 33:6; Isaiah 44:24; Wisdom 1:14; 2 Maccabees 7:28),² developed a quasi-independent history in the Christian environments outside Palestine. The concept was invoked here by the Christian apologists who initially used it on the background of the doctrinal debates with the pagan and the Christian (heretic) philosophical schools of Rome,³ and of other important cities of the Roman Empire during the 2nd century A.D. Its usefulness was proved in the fact that it helped delineate a conclusive answer to at least two cosmological positions competing with that of Christianity: the traditional, namely the Greek-Roman one, which by the

¹ Ian Alexander McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*, Presbyterian Publishing Corp, 2014, xiii.

² For a more detailed vision of Judaism regarding the *ex nihilo* doctrine, see Seymour Feldman, "In the Beginning God Created the Heavens and the earth': A Neo-Platonic Midrash," in *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel: Defender of the Faith*, Roudledge Curzon, London and New York, 2003, pp. 176-183; "The Problem of the Creation of the World in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity before the Gnostic Crisis in the Second Century," in Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A.S. Worrall, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 1-38 and Norbert M. Samelson, *Judaism and the Doctrine of Creation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

³ Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo...*, pp. 150-151.



syntagm *ex nihilo nihil fit*⁴ affirmed the co-eternity of matter with the Divine; and that of later date, Marcionite and Gnostic, supporting a subordinatianist vision of the Creator Logos in quality of mediator between the Divinity and creation. Drafted in order to support the cause of the Christians who were unjustly and illegally persecuted, the Christian writers' apologies served, therefore, as a way to enlighten the public opinion concerning the Christian faith and teaching, especially the educated layers of society. These writings also provided for posterity the first attempts of expressing the revealed teaching in the conceptual language of the world of the Antiquity.

Before discussing the meaning of "creation" as used in the modern Christian theological context, having the connotation that the Universe came into existence "out of nothing" by a free act of God,⁵ the Christian cosmology had a more sinewy trajectory to cover, not so much out of an absence of this conviction from the original Christian mental state, but, especially out of the absence of the necessity to make this firm statement until then.

It must be mentioned, at the same time, that the apologists' speculation regarding the origin of the world occasionally followed their attempts to reject the accusations of atheism directed against the Christians, being occasioned by the criticism they were pointing, in their turn, at Greek-Roman mythology and philosophy. If in the beginning, the image of a God modelling matter appeared as a bridge between the two cultures and religions, and was used by the apologists irenically, their subsequent answers are marked by a strict delimitation between the eternal divine nature and the contingent world brought into existence in time, in an obviously polemical approach. At the same time, while initially the ontological distinction between God and creation, in this literal sense, was expressed in more figurative terms, being slightly attenuated, it gradually focused on the explicit articulation of the *ex nihilo* doctrine, which we inherited to this day.⁶

We find, therefore, with the patristic writers we are dealing with, a clear-cut ontological distinction between God and matter or, more precisely, between God and all the changing, corruptible reality. For each of them, God is the uncreated, the unbegotten (similar in attributes with the Divinity of the Platonic philosophers), but, at the same time, also the

⁴ For an incursion into the history of this axiom of the philosophy of Antiquity, see Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted, and Its Impossibility Demonstrated*, vol. 1, Oxford, D.A., Talboys, 1829, pp. 125-136. This syntagm is specific of the philosophers of Antiquity, both theists (Parmenides, Melissos, Zenon, Xenophanes, Anaxagoras and Empedocles), and atomists (Democrit, Epicurus, Lucretius), the latter group reaching the conclusion that a world that could not come from nothing exists since eternity, as it would not make sense for it to come into existence at a certain moment, given that it comes from the same elements (different from nothing). The major difference between the Christian vision and that of Antiquity, as it will be highlighted, consists in the fact that the God of the *Scripture* (especially of the *New Testament*, if we think of John 1:3) cohabitates with the creation, being involved in its coming into existence (even since its most undetermined state – matter) without suffering any diminution of His transcendence and impassivity and continuing to remain its cause and its target in quality of its Creator, Almighty, Savior and Perfector.

⁵ Sfântul Iustin Martirul și Filosoful, *Dialog cu iudeul Trifon*, in col. "Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești" ("P.S.B."), vol. 2, *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, translation and notes by Olimp N. Căciulă, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (E.I.B.M.B.O.R.), București, 1980, pp. 98-99; Atenagora Atenianul, *Solie în favoarea creștinilor*, IV, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, pp. 376-377; Teofil al Antiohiei, *Trei Cărți către Autolic*, Cartea I, IV, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, p. 284.

⁶ As the medieval Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides showed, this teaching is the only one in common among Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism. See Janet M. Soskice, "Creatio ex Nihilo: Its Jewish and Christian foundations," in *Creation and the Gold of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 24.



direct causal Principle for everything that exists. In this respect, they are all deeply monotheistic, rejecting any possibility of existence of a second, or of several gods,⁷ yet without excluding God's tripersonal quality.

1. THE CREATION OUT OF UNSHAPED MATTER – A CHRISTIAN ATTEMPT AT COHABITATION WITH THE MIDDLE PLATONIST VISION

Justin the Martyr and Athenagoras the Athenian, although Christians (the first up to martyrdom), present a certain hesitation in their writings concerning this radical vision regarding the origin of the world. It is, as we will see, a hesitation that is due, on the one hand, to the environment they were formed in (without a very intimate contact with the Jewish thinking), and, on the other hand, to their attempt at providing the pagan world with a familiar cosmological vision, with Christian emphasis. The fact that they had left behind the traditional Greek-Roman mentality, after their conversion to Christianity, results from the fact that they put the accent on God's sovereignty in contrast with the radical contingency of the Universe. However, as they endeavor to keep a dialogue with their non-Christian interlocutors, both of these writers in their cosmology rely, to a certain extent, on the Hellenist notion of the creation out of unshaped matter. Justin provides the most evident affirmation along this line of thought in his comment regarding the meanings of *Genesis*, in his first *Apology*: "And we were taught that, being good, God created, in the beginning, from the unshaped matter, everything, for man..."⁸ This affirmation is completed by his famous assertion from *Apologies* that "Plato plagiarized from Moses' writings" when he affirmed that God changed the unshaped matter and created the world.⁹ Justin replied that, based on this teaching, Plato and his disciples (but also the Christians) learnt that God by His Spirit created the entire world from the substratum, as Moses had previously demonstrated.¹⁰

Athenagoras presents a similar viewpoint regarding the beginning and the constitution of the creation in several contexts. The most striking expression is found in the tenth chapter of his *Embassy for the Christians*, in a discussion on the divine creation by means of the Spirit. "El [Logosul] emerged," Athenagoras claims, "to serve as the Ideal Form and energy-giving Power for everything that is of material nature and which lies at the basis of things as an entity without qualities."¹¹ This imagery operates in *Embassy...* (Chap. 15) where Athenagoras underlines the accessory relation between matter and God by means of an analogy with clear Platonic connotations: God and matter are connected like the artisan and his materials. In this context, matter is in relation to God like the effect is with its cause, subordinated to him to exert his craft.¹² Similarly, matter, which is open to all the modifications, depends on the Demiurge-God to acquire structure, form, and order.

The preceding affirmations must be considered in light of what we encounter of these patristic authors in other writings. Justin the Martyr, in *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*

⁷ Iustin Martirul, *Dialog...*, XI, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, pp. 102-104; Atenagora Atenianul, *Solie...*, IV, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, pp. 376-377; Teofil al Antiohiei, *Trei Cărți...*, I, 7 and II, 4, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, pp. 286, 295.

⁸ Iustin Martirul, *Apologia întâia în favoarea creștinilor*, I, 10, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, p.31.

⁹ Iustin Martirul, *Apologia întâia în favoarea creștinilor*, I, 59, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰ Iustin Martirul, *Apologia întâia în favoarea creștinilor*, I, 67, in "P.S.B.", vol. 2, p. 71.

¹¹ Athénagore, *Supplique au sujet des chrétiens*, X, in col. "Sources Chrétiennes" ("S.C."), vol. 3, introduction et traduction de Gustave Bardy, Édition du Cerf, Paris, 1943, p. 92. See, in the introduction to the same volume, the detailed presentation of the doctrine of creation and of the emergence of time in the vision of the Athenian apologist (pp. 1-69).

¹² Athénagore, *Supplique au sujet des chrétiens*, XV, in col. "S.C.", vol. 3, pp. 103-104.



affirms that “the world was made” and that “only God is immortal and uncorruptible and this is precisely why He is God, while all the others, which come after Him, are born and corruptible.”¹³ Athenagoras the Athenian identifies God explicitly with the Existence, while the created things are associated with the non-existence. We find, in other words, the two realities, eternal and temporal, dealt with comparatively in one passage. Athenagoras characterizes matter itself as being created and perishable.¹⁴

Such teachings clearly dismiss any accusation that these patristic authors would have accepted the notion of a material substratum eternally coexisting with God. However, their references to the creation out of the unshaped matter, although comparatively few in number, raise a crucial question: how firmly were Justin the Martyr and Athenagoras of Athens attached to the doctrine of the creation *ex nihilo*? The case of Justin seems quite problematic because of his use of the expression “εκ ἀμορφῆς ὕλης.”¹⁵ Opinions are divided, however: some researchers characterized him as Platonist or dualist in his cosmological conception, whereas others argue that, from what he affirms, it is possible to draw up a theory of creation.¹⁶ We can also advance the hypothesis that Justin the Martyr developed a criticism of Plato mirroring the teachings of the Scripture. From this perspective, even his adhesion to the idea of the preexistent matter does not exclude implicitly the doctrine of the creation *ex nihilo*. God could have created matter “out of nothing” before forming or ordering it. The support for this thesis relies on those texts of Justin the Martyr that describe God alternatively as Creator and as “ordering” or “adorning” the Universe.

2. GOD – THE CREATOR OF MATTER

But, except for the affirmations presented above, none of these writers, from the beginnings of classical patristical literature, offers any detailed presentation of the creation of matter. Consequently, it seems that the attempts to derive a doctrine of the creation *ex nihilo* from their writings needs to rely, as we have seen, on isolated sentences and interpretations, rather than on systematic analyses.

Tatian, Justin’s disciple, is the one providing clarity in this matter, possibly at his magister’s suggestions.¹⁷ The notion of sequential creation, only vaguely suggested by Justin and Athenagoras, is articulated explicitly by Tatian in his work *Address to the Greeks* (*Oratio ad Graecos*). Tatian postulates two distinct stages of creation: the first,¹⁸ the initial stage, comprises the making of matter by means of the Word (the Logos);¹⁹ the second,²⁰ the one in which matter is separated in parts and put in order, simultaneously to the beginning of the precise and irreversible flight of time. Despite his clear assertion that matter is created, he does not explain, explicitly, in technical terms, the creation of matter “out of nothing,” but continues, like his predecessors, to rely on Plato’s model of creation, namely that of the form imprinted on the raw material substratum. Although Tatian oscillates between clean faith and heresy, without establishing his firm ground in either of them, the idea he advanced that matter was created directly by God must not be associated with Gnosticism, except in the

¹³ Iustin Martirul, *Dialog...*, 5, in “P.S.B.”, vol. 2, pp. 98-99.

¹⁴ Athénagore, *Supplique...*, VIII, X, XV, in col. “S.C.”, vol. 3, pp. 90, 92, 103.

¹⁵ Iustin Martirul, *Dialog...*, 59, in “P.S.B.”, vol. 2, p. 64.

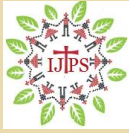
¹⁶ Atenagora Atenianul, *Solie în favoarea creștinilor*, IV, 2, in “P.S.B.”, vol. 2, pp. 376-377.

¹⁷ Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo...*, p. 150.

¹⁸ Tatien, *Le discours aux grecs*, V in Aimé Puech, *Recherches sur Le discours aux grecs de Tatien*, Felix Alcan, Editeur, Paris, 1903 p. 113.

¹⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1968, pp. 95-101.

²⁰ Tatien, *Le discours...*, XII, pp. 123-124.



sense that it was expressed in the controversies that the Christian apologist had with the Gnostic theologians.

3. THE CREATION *EX NIHILO* – THE SEPARATION FROM PLATO’S VISION

A significant distance from these approaches can be found in the writings of Theophilus of Antioch, who for the first time affirms categorically the creation *ex nihilo*. His way of expressing this teaching has its source in a discussion on the various manners of addressing God.²¹ All the names in question indicate God’s efficacy who “made everything from what does not exist, giving it existence.”²²

Theophilus relies his affirmation on *2 Macabees* 7:28, pronouncing in his turn unequivocally the creation “out of nothing.” The way he understands God as supreme Creator, in the fullest sense of the word, differs from that of the Platonism, showing critical spirit to the affirmations in *Timaeus* 28 (which supported the paradox of the world’s coeternity with its Maker). He shows that if God and matter are both uncreated, eternal and immutable, then this contradiction compromises absolute divine sovereignty. Theophilus shows the same intransigence to the Platonist idea of the modelling of matter by a Demiurge, when he asks himself rhetorically: what would be so remarkable if God made the world out of preexistent matter?²³

CONCLUSIONS

When the Christians began entering into speculations about the origin of the Universe, they had the possibility to rely on the philosophical analyses and the argumentation surrounding a vibrant, continual discussion, in the circles of Middle Platonism. But they were faced, as well, with a serious semantic variation concerning certain elements of the vocabulary, concepts and intellectual premises. This disparity is particularly evident in concerns with the notion of “creation”. Although interpretations varied from thinker to thinker, the Platonists’ approach to the topic of creation was identified with “a putting in order” of an already existing substratum. The Christian thinkers, on the other

²¹ Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* I, 4, p. 7: “He has no beginning because He is uncreated; He is immutable because He is immortal. He is called God because he established everything on His own *steadfastness* [Ps. 103: 5] and because He runs; the word ‘run’ means to run and set in motion and energize and nourish and provide and govern everything and to make everything alive. He is Lord because He is master of the universe, Father because He is before the universe, Demiurge and Maker because He is creator and maker of the universe, Most High because He is above everything, Almighty because He controls and surrounds everything. For *the heights* of the heavens and the depths of the abysses and *the end* of the world are *in His hand* [Ps. 94: 4], and there is no *place of His rest* [Isa. 66: 1]. The heavens are His work, earth is His creation, the sea is of His making, man is fabrication and image, sun and moon and stars are His elements, created *for signs and for seasons and for days and for years* [Gen. 1: 14], for service and *slavery to men* [Ps. 103: 14; 146: 8]. *God made everything out of what did not exist* [2 Macc. 7: 28], bringing it into existence so that his greatness might be known and apprehended through His works.”

²² Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* II, 10, p. 40-41: “In the first place, in complete harmony they taught us that He made everything out of the non-existent. For there was nothing coeval with God; He was His own locus; He lacked nothing; He *existed before the ages* [Ps. 54: 20]. He wished to make man so that He might be known by him; for him, then, He prepared the world. For he who is created has needs, but He who is uncreated lacks nothing. Therefore God, having His own Logos innate in His own bowels [cf. Ps. 109: 3], generated Him together with His own Sophia, *vomiting Him forth* [Ps. 44: 2] before everything else. He used this Logos as His servant in the things created by Him, and through Him He made all things [cf. John 1: 3]. He is called Beginning because He leads and dominates everything fashioned through Him.”

²³ Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* II, 4, p. 27.



hand, worked within the limits of the Scriptural tradition which conceived “the creation” literally, namely not only as a temporal (or atemporal) ordering, but as a “bringing into existence from nothing”.

This consideration is highlighted when we evaluate the possible limits of the Platonist influence on early Christian theories regarding the origins of the cosmos and of time. Although, at the surface, Justin the Martyr seems to overlook the radical difference between the Christian creation and the creation in a Platonist sense, supposing that the revealed text (*Genesis*) and Plato (*Timaeus*) presented similar teachings, it is more probable that his approach reflects rather his apologetic interests than his philosophic alliances. It is in a similar way that one should interpret the fact that Athenagoras does not refer at all to the approach of the creation from *Genesis*: as an intentional avoidance of the difficulties of aligning the Christian teaching to the Platonist thinking (vision).

From a methodological perspective, Tatian presents a greater grasp of the significance of the creation *ex nihilo* and of its philosophical implications. He insists on the created character of matter, although he continues to follow the cosmological ideas of Antiquity regarding the modelling of matter by a demiurgical act. Theophilus, in exchange, totally rids himself of the references to matter (excepting the critical terms). With him, we can observe the formation of a truly independent Christian understanding. Paradoxically, using the dialectical tools of Greek philosophy, he gets to structure a vision of creation quite alien to the intellectual tradition of Hellada.

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THE DISPUTE OVER UNIVERSALS AND ANSELMIAN REALISM

Georgiana-Cerasela NIȚU,

Ph.D. student at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest,
ROMANIA.

Email: adela_cerasela2001@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The use of reason in the act of knowing God, led to the secularization of Western theological doctrine and its emergence in the eleventh century (and the beginning of the second Christian millennium), and the use of reason in understanding faith, with the introduction of the well-known Anselmian phrase understand what you think. Through Anselm's rational approach, philosophical speculation became an instrument for explaining the dogmas of faith. Anselm starts from the date of faith, encountered in his works by the fact that God exists and that nothing greater can be conceived. Faith is the essential premise for asserting the existence of God, having no empirical means to scientifically prove something so complex and almost impossible to understand. Anselm conceives a meditation on the reason of faith and thus demonstrates the existence of God, through what would later be called Immanuel Kant, the ontological argument. According to the definition offered by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, Anselm was concerned with an inductive legitimation, of the determined being (of the second being), towards the determining being. This premise of the inductance of reason, appears in Anselmian realism, when trying to identify certain concepts called universals, with the essence of reality.

Keywords: universal quarrel; Anselmian; realism; nominalism: determined being: ontological bargain; Monologue;

INTRODUCTION. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The present research aims to analyze some essential points from the scholastic period, namely the moment of the dispute of the universals (or the quarrel between the nominalists and the realists) and the influence that realism had on the Anselmian work. The main aspects that will be tried to answer, during this research, are related to the influence of the Anselmian philosophy in the theology of that period. Therefore, a series of questions will be presented, which will be answered during the paper, as follows: What are universals? Did universals appear in the medieval period, or is this issue discussed since the Greek period? What is realism? What is nominalism? What is the difference between Platonic universals and Anselmian universals? What is Anselm's contribution to the triumph of realism? Why for Anselm, nominalist thinking is not worth following? What is the thinking of the Church from that period for?

The dispute over universals emerged as a reiteration of its aeropay and their (leading to the truth) dialectic. In this sense, towards the end of the Middle Ages it had the intention of returning to antiquity and to the values of the ancient worlds. Religiously, the



Protestant Reformation¹ emerged, as a tendency to return to early primary Christianity and to the methods of approach and interpretation present in Greek philosophers. The renaissance current makes its presence felt in art (literary languages appear in literature, based on substantiated and logically elaborated dialectics). In the dispute of universals, the chronology of time is blurred, being put *face to face* the perennial values of philosophy, as if they existed in a universal crucible, of the same historical time. The goal was to extract and share the cognitive values of all philosophers who transcend their time, in order to reach a common summon of values, put at the service of universal human knowledge and to reach the perennial values of humanity.

1. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE APPEARANCE OF UNIVERSALS IN THE GREEK PERIOD

The problem of universals has been present since the time of Greek philosophy. Given the context of the emergence of universals in ancient times, the first to address this issue were Thales, Heraclitus and Parmenides, through the concept of meaning², which was attributed to common nouns such as man, tree and white. This concept was also taken over by Anselm in the work *De grammatico*, where he considers the paronyms and their double meaning, highlighted by the words *per se* and *per aliud*. Ancient philosophers asked themselves about the logic of things represented by words, the difference between work and concept and an issue that is taken up in Anselmian philosophy, namely the concepts of being in reality and being in the mind. From the point of view of Platonic philosophy, this so perennial phrase seems to be extrapolated from physical things (the sensible world) to abstract Ideas (the world of Ideas). But in Aristotelian philosophy, the emphasis is on the concept of the general to that of the particular. But in order to understand the Anselmian problem, it is considered necessary to bring into question the concept of Platonic realism but also that of Aristotelian realism.

Thus, Platonic realism (or the main form of knowledge in Plato) considers the existence of universes in forms and ideas, or as it is generically called in Platonic idealism by ideal forms.³ The theory of Platonic forms had in mind that this material world is a copy of the real world. Plato spoke of forms when he tried to explain the notion of universals. Thus, Platonic forms are abstract representations of things that later became universal in his philosophy. In Plato, forms acquire a degree of reality (like the Anselmian concept of the divine essence), by the fact that forms are perfect and unchanged. The world of forms, in Plato, is somehow differentiated from the sensible world (or the world of substances) present in Aristotelian philosophy.

An interpretation of Platonic realism (of ideas) defines Plato as the one who opposes nominalism, but in this case it is controversial by Aristotelian realism. Instead, Aristotelian realism (of substances) is then to be criticized by idealism. Aristotleism is in this sense, a realistic critique of Platonic realism, a problematization that decisively influenced the entire period of the Middle Ages.

¹ The Protestant Reformation appears in the sixteenth century through Martin Luther, in an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church (through the 95 theses on the practice of Catholic indulgences).

² Since ancient times, they have tried to barely consider the hermeneutics of the word.

³ These from the Platonic point of view are the eternal and immutable truths, and these eternal truths were part of the object of knowledge (or what the intelligible world of Ideas represented).



2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE APPEARANCE OF UNIVERSALS (REALISM VERSUS NOMINALISM) IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Within the history of medieval philosophy, the dialectical dispute between nominalists and realists emerges. Thus, the problem that arose in the Middle Ages is that of the status of universals. The theme of the philosophical dispute of the universals was present, both in the Greek period (especially in Plato and Aristotle), and in the scholastic and medieval period. The medievalists, in the work *The Quarrel of Universals*, wondered whether universals are names, things, or concepts.⁴ But before the medievalists wondered whether universals were things, names, or concepts, the Neoplatonists had wondered why Aristotle's universals were beings, names, vocal and sounds.⁵ Thus, in this case, the transfer was made from the Aristotelian to the universal categories.

In the medieval period, the realists had in mind the existence of only two types of entities and particularities, which would resemble the universals. Particularities are similar to each other because they share the universal. Also, universals can be similar, by substituting them with other universals, for example in this case, wisdom and generosity are similar to each other in that they are both virtues. The most important problem in this medieval period, not dark but full of ontological turmoil, is that which unites the late scholastic philosophy with the Latin medieval philosophy. This lies in the interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*, from the premise of the problem of universals. This medieval problem did not develop on the basis of Porphyry's Isagogy⁶, but rather in connection with the works of Aristotle. The terms that Aristotle uses in his work begin to have certain hermeneutical fluctuations in the medieval period. The Aristotelian categories had as a stake the fixing of the intelligibility *ratio* of one work in relation to another work. On the issue of categories, it was debated by the philosopher Pierre Abélard who considered the notion of substance. Abélard considered that Aristotle proposed two divisions of substance, namely: the first substance and the second substance. But although this can be interpreted as a distinction about things, to the detriment of the distinction between words, over time various interpretations of what the notion of substance means can be found. Anselm takes this concept in his work *Monologion*, thereby referring to the divine being. Anselm tries to prove the existence of God, referring to an ideal or a universal, because God must exist both in reality and in mind or thought. (because if God existed only in thought, there could be the assumption that another being greater than God could also be conceived, which would be wrong).

The historical context in which the problem of universals appears is one conducive to highlighting the metaphysical corpus, which brings with it the constitution of the ideational context, about God from late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. The corpus of theological writings (of the Church Fathers and of the church writers) and philosophical writings on God, set out two orientations, one specific to the east and another to the Christian west. Respectively, the Platonic and neo-Platonic orientation towards Eastern theology and the Aristotelian orientation (especially after the first millennium), towards Western theology.

⁴ Alain de Libera, *The Quarrel of the Universals*, from Plato to the End of the Middle Ages, Amarcord Publishing House, Timișoara, 1998, p. 10.

⁵ Ibidem, p.10

⁶ The cultural concepts of the modern world were born from the quarrel of universals, and this quarrel came from a wrong isagogy (Εἰσαγωγή or Interpretation) of Aristotle's "Categories", expounded by the Phoenician Porphyry (a disciple of the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus). Lycopolis). However, sometimes a hermeneutics different from the original meaning of the text can paradoxically produce a leap in the history of thought.



Therefore, Eastern theology emphasizes affectivity and ascetic-mystical experience, while in Western theology the emphasis is on reason and the practical manifestation of good. In this sense, the quintessence of universals is a historical record, combined between Aristotelianism and Platonism.

This controversy in the philosophical history of universals, begins with the late antiquity, in parallel with the effort of theologians, to bring together the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian exegetical methods. Thus agreeing two founding corpora of theology and philosophy (exegetical and dogmatic), one Latin or Aristotelian and the other Greek or Neo-Platonic.⁷ In this case it is necessary to differentiate two problems of thinking, specific to universals, namely the other texts transmitted and those of the doctrinal system of thought itself. Regarding the transmitted texts, there are accidents of updating the texts in time, in the sense of *traduttore, traditore*,⁸ but without knowing the original, the thinker of the Middle Ages could think Aristotelian terms, without knowing the historical context and thus the meaning of these concepts. Regarding the (doctrinal) system of thought, the thinker of the late Middle Ages, reproduces Aristotelianism and bases it on new conceptual supports (considering the theory of *supositio*).⁹

Therefore, the term quarrel of universals is very comprehensive, but it also contains, among others, a reference to some issues that refer to the interpretation of the universal, in the singular (of the objective in the subjective, of the general in particular). During this period, the emphasis is on the critical relationship between essence and existence, having as a starting point the concept of Aristotelian substance. Through this concept, medievalists (like Anselm) try to reprobate abstract notions from antiquity.

3. THE PROBLEM OF REALISM IN ANSELMIAN PHILOSOPHY

During the school period (from Anselm's time) we can consider two important aspects. The first aspect is determined by the opponents of that time, who were not philosophers or logicians, but people of the Church, and the second aspect concerns philosophy, which was also made by people of the Church, because they represented authority and thus enjoyed of knowing the world, from a scientific point of view. In the work *The Quarrel of the Universals*, Alain de Libera exposes the philosophy of the three Persons, of Roscelin de Compiègne which is harshly criticized by Anselm. Roscelin de Compiègne considers that the definitions of the three Persons are the following: *tres usie, id est tres substantie*,¹⁰ although he considers canonical (according to the Ecumenical Councils), that the Trinity is a single Being (ουσια; substance) but tripled in Persons (προσωπειον;) distinct in a perihoresis (περιχώρησις; rotation. The term appeared in St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Gregory of the Nazianzen) or exemplary trinity communion life. Anselm challenged this name of the three Persons, arguing that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct

⁷ It is also about the sequencing of the writings of the Holy Fathers of Latin origin and of those of Greek origin, in the volume Latin Patrology and Greek Patrology. This common patristic work of Christian patrology is a monumental sum of the writings of the Church Fathers and church writers, systematized and recovered by the Catholic prelate Jacques-Paul Migne between 1841 and 1855

⁸ This concept refers to the possibility of changing the original meaning of the text, through translation, with all the effort of updating the original text. Therefore, the scientific research of a text must start from the study of the original text, in its original language.

⁹ Alain de Libera, *The Quarrel of Universals*, p. 452. (suppositio comes from Latin, a concept that means underweight).

¹⁰ The quarrel of universals, p.127. (three beings which are three substances)



concepts, and that from a theological point of view the *Father was incarnate at the same time as the Son*.¹¹

The problem of realism in Anselmian argumentation is determined by a historical condition that refers to the opposition between Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy. The importance of the Anselmian argument lies in the ontological order, of the two ontological concepts that refer to the divine being, and this aims at the transition from “being in the mind” to “being in reality”, a syllogism preceding Cartesianism. These phrases are taken both in the Hegelian philosophy and in the philosophy of Abbot Gaunilon of Marmoutier and priest of Tours as well as in the philosophy of Rene Descartes.

In the work *Phenomenology of the Spirit* by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the Anselmian opposite of the relationship between being in the mind and being in reality, is formulated from certainty to reality¹², from what is directly to reality itself. But what is the form of reasoning to be in the mind and to be in reality, expounded by the abbot Gaunilon, to the Anselmian philosophy? Is this argument valid? The main claim of Gaunilon's answer to Anselm is stated in the statement that Anselm's argument for the existence of God is real, and then a valid argument can be inferred (exemplifying that for Anselm's argument to exist, the largest island should be imaginable to exist both in reality, and not just in the mind). Why does Abbot Gaunilon think this? In his work, Abbot Gaunilon considers, by logically exemplifying by reduction to the absurd, that there is an ocean on an island, but which due to the difficulty (or rather the impossibility) of finding what does not exist, has become an example which has been called by to some philosophers The *Lost Island*. So the story of the *Lost Island*, which is blessed with riches and delights in abundance and is superior everywhere in its abundance to all others lands inhabited by humans. The reasoning goes on to say that if someone says that it really is so, then it will be easy to understand what is being said, because nothing is difficult in the mind, but it can even be impossible in reality. But if this above example should continue to be deduced, as if it were a logical consequence of this: “you can no longer doubt that this island, which is better than all other countries, exists with true somewhere in reality, than you can doubt it is in the mind; and because it is better to exist not only in the mind but also in reality, therefore, it must be the fact that it exists. For if it did not exist, any other land existing in reality would be better than it, and thus this island, already conceived by you as better than others, will not be better.”¹³

René Descartes in *Third meditation* wrote that the *a posteriori* argument regarding the existence of God is constructed. But is it necessary to prove the existence of God? It is necessary to prove the existence of God, to be sure that what is perceived as true, even exists in reality. God is the guarantor of the correspondence of the idea of a thing with that thing. Ideas are mediators between human consciousness and reality, because there is no intelligible access to how reality actually “looks”. The ideas of sensitive objects are aroused by the fact that we are affected by those / objects. The idea itself is known to exist, it cannot

¹¹ Ibidem. (Anselm continues Blessed Augustine, in the subordinationist sense, of understanding the relationship between the Three Trinity Persons and not the coortinationist of the status of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity or God; -Catholic, precisely because only the premises of reason sola ratione and not of Holy Scripture sola scripturae were considered, which mentioned only that the Holy Spirit “the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth ... proceeds from the Father” - John 15, 26) .

¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, p. 134

¹³ Gaunilo, *Liber pro insipiente*, (Basic writings; Proslogium; Monologium; Cur Deus homo; Gaunilo's In behalf of the fool / (La Salle, IL: Open Court, c.1962, also by Saint Anselm, S. N. Deane, Saint Anselm, Saint Anselm, and Saint Anselm (page images at HathiTrust), 1962, p. 40



be said that people have no ideas. But, a clear and distinct idea of an object, is that idea, which appears as presenting an obvious thing, which is presented only with its properties, namely without being mixed with other perceptions and ideas about other things. Ideas can be born, received from the outside (ideas of perceived objects) or made by man. Inborn ideas are in man as a given and refer either to substances (for example to God), or to accidents. Those relating to substances have more objective reality than the others (ie they have a correspondent in reality; formal reality is the reality of the idea itself). The qualities possessed by an effect must also be found in the cause of that effect. Thus, the phrase of being in the mind and being in reality is also rediscovered in modernity, the emphasis being placed on the concept of the existence of reality, which can be taken into account by an ideal or a universal. Anselm argues that if God is the supreme being, he must exist both in reality and in thought (because, if he existed only in thought, another higher existence could be conceived).

In the work *The Teaching on Salvation to St. Athanasius the Great and Anselm of Canterbury*, by Stephen Lucian Thomas, the dialectic between nominalism (universals are only a name) and realism (universals are real)¹⁴ is exposed. The concept of universals represents a symbol of the notions of medieval and scholastic philosophy. These general terms as well as their nature, during the universals, later led to the appearance of the three currents: realism, nominalism and conceptualism. Realism uses concepts from the field of reality, or what may correspond to reality, although these concepts are framed in a dimension superior to human reality, a dimension that is transcendent to this reality. Realism in Anselm's work is reduced to what is real in ideas.

These ideas are based on the concept of perfection, which Anselm exposes in *Monologion* and the concept of greatness in *Proslogion*, concepts that demonstrate the existence of a being to whom these concepts are attributed, although this problem has its origins in antiquity. Thus, in the work *Introduction to Philosophy. Medieval and modern philosophy*,¹⁵ Gh. Cazan considers that the *axis of solstice is the quarrel of universals*¹⁶ and draws attention to the origin of this problem that begins with Plato. Plato was concerned with the existence of ideas, which are by their nature separate from the sensible world (ideas have objective reality, and the sensible world exists only insofar as they participate in these ideas) and Aristotle considers that the existence of universals lies in things. In his work *On Categories*, Aristotle distinguishes between the concept of general and species, and in his work *Metaphysics*, Aristotle draws a parallel between the particular and the general, where he mentions that *the general exists in the particular*¹⁷. In order to understand the two currents I will work with during the research, I consider it necessary to define the terms. Thus, realism is “an orientation that admits and tries to prove that universals (concepts) are real and have substantiality existing by themselves, and nominalism represents universality (concept and idea) do not have an independence, it is not independent, the only one there is in reality the individual”¹⁸ Realism was defined as an orientation that admitted and tried to prove that universals (concepts; categories) are real, that is, they have substantiality existing

¹⁴ Ștefan Lucian Toma, *The teaching about salvation at St. Athanasius the Great and Anselm De Canterbury*, Andreiana Publishing House, Sibiu, 2011, p. 154

¹⁵ Cazan Gh. Al, *Introduction to philosophy. Medieval and modern philosophy*, Actani Publishing House, Bucharest 1996

¹⁶ Ibidem, p.31

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Univers Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, p. 21.

¹⁸ Ibide, p.155



by themselves. According to this concept and through it or with the concept, as a theoretical foundation, the representatives of realism wanted to argue the substantiality of the Christian Church, the reality of God as well as of the Trinity. Unlike realism, nominalism considers that the universal (concept, idea) has no independence, because it is not in itself a perfect, substantial state, but is only a name (lotus vocis) of general and species. The only one who has reality (existence) is the individual, because the individual has life. The concept (universal, idea, reason) exists only in the human mind, as a product of it, as the nominalists admitted. Nominalism is more inclined to real life and experience. That is why nominalism was appreciated as representing the modern way of life.

Those who represented realism in the medieval period tried to argue in favor of the existence of God, the Christian Church and the Trinity. Instead, the representatives of nominalism researched the areas of absolutist theology, which could lead to heresy. Anselm considered that nominalist thinking was not worth following, because the concepts used by nominalists were logically inconsistent and meaningless. Anselm points out that this thinking, which can lead to heresy, is not worth following. However, the main dispute arises between Anselm and Roscelin de Compiègne. Roscelin de Compiègne is generically named as the founder of nominalism. In this controversy over Roscelin de Compiègne, Anselm argues against nominalism that if a thinker declares *God to be universal, an abstraction, but the three persons God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are individual, he thinks as a nominalist and has three Gods, but if the universal, God is reality itself, God is One and the three persons are the forms of One.*¹⁹

Karl Jaspers believes that in the historical period of Anselm, the Church had a tendency to open to realism because this reaffirms the success that Anselm had, by rationalizing thought and rationally demonstrating the existence of God. The essential idea of K. Jaspers is that Anselm was aware that realism could always be defeated by realism and that his philosophy could be forgotten. In the book *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*,²⁰ Eugene Fairweather poses an essential problem for universals, namely a phrase that Anselm expounds in his philosophy. This phrase can be summarized in the following words: How can someone who still does not understand how a few people are a man in species, understand how, in the greatest mystery and in high nature, a few people, each of Those is God, one God . Thus, in Anselmian philosophy the question is aimed at and not necessarily the answer and that is why Anselm's philosophical argument means highlighting the fact that the question is the main element in problematization. It problematizes the very idea of God and his existence in both human and divine nature. As a father of scholasticism, Anselm highlighted in his philosophy the Platonic idealism, which he placed in the service of the Catholic Church. Anselm argues in favor of the existence of God and deals with the field of logic and syllogisms in *De grammatico*. Anselm is also considered the theorist of realism and the concept of universals, which are inspired by Aristotle's philosophy. Anselm also considers that "universals have an existence in themselves, they do not refer to individuals, but to things in themselves, realism being transcendental."²¹

¹⁹ Ștefan Lucian Toma, *The teaching about salvation at St. Athanasius the Great and Anselm of Canterbury*, Andreiana Publishing House, Sibiu, 2011, p. 157.

²⁰ Fairweather Eurigene, *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, The Westminster Pres, Philadelphia Friend, W.H.C, The Rise of Christianity, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, p. 99.(

²¹ Ștefan Lucian Toma, *The teaching about salvation at St. Athanasius the Great and Anselm of Canterbury*, Andreiana Publishing House, Sibiu, 2011, p. 154.



Anselm's preoccupation goes in the direction of the problem of universals, from the works *Monologion* (VII), where he discusses universality and in the work about truth (VII), where he discusses the problem of the truth of the being of things. Anselm mentioned to the ancient Greeks that they conceive of matter reducible to "earth, water, fire, and air,"²² and these elements are individualized by explaining the forms of things by themselves. In the work *A History of Philosophical Ideas*, Gheorghe Vlăduțescu identifies the Anselmian problem in an ontological mediation but rested in a precarious metaphysics.

As for Anselmian philosophy, universals refer to an absolute being which means that they are ante rem. This person is distinct from the existence of things that are in re. Therefore, universals retain their status of authority through the very ontological interpretation of being. The initial formulation of the argument for proving the existence of God, from the history of Christian philosophy made in the "classical version", belongs to the theologian and scholastic philosopher Anselm of Canterbury, who by assuming the Augustinian perspective, in relation to the relationship faith-understanding, aims to formulate a logical argument, by which the human intellect "understands what it believes."²³ "Faith in search of the intellect" is the Anselmian ideal, confessed by him many times in "*Proslogion*", it directs and offers a deep spiritual meaning to his entire philosophical approach to argumentation. Anselm presents his exposition in the form of a prayer - a style also preferred by Blessed Augustine in his "Confessions" - and Anselm, being the "father of scholasticism", confesses by himself this way of expression, that the One whose existence he argues is not only an object of philosophical reflection, but, first of all, the Supreme Person and the object of faith. In Anselm's view, the purpose of argument is not to justify and thus substantiate the acceptance of God's existence, but the very rational understanding of an assumed truth, through an act of unconditional faith. "I do not try, Lord, to enter into Your height, for I cannot measure it with my intellect, but I only want, as far as possible, to understand the truth in which my heart believes, and which it loves. For I do not search to understand, but I believe to understand; and I still don't think I could understand if I didn't believe."²⁴

The ontological argument - it is a perfect form of unlimited confidence, which Anselm had in man's cognitive capacity - presupposes precisely the transition from being in the mind to being in reality, in an attempt to arrive at a statement, above all doubt and thereby to a compelling proof. Anselm justified his speculations by the statement, as did Descartes later, that his intention was only to submit to evidence, which seemed doubtful (*dubium probare*), that is, to see that something - understood on the basis of a knowledge already present in the intellect - "it exists only in the imagination, like all false things, or in reality, like the true ones".²⁵ In *Monologion*, Chapter VII, Anselm discusses the problem of the universal. In his work, Anselm uses the term *de universalis* and designates a quality of the creature, in relation to the Creator, but in his text the term may lose its contact and no longer refers to the whole. Thus, following Aristotelian thesis, Anselm considers that "if the universality of things, whether visible or invisible, comes from a certain matter, no doubt

²² Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, *A History of Philosophical Ideas*, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1990, p.35

²³ Anselm, *Proslogion*, Bilingual Edition, Latin Translation, Afterword and Notes by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, p.25.

²⁴ Anselm, *Proslogion*, Bilingual Edition, Latin Translation, Afterword and Notes by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, p.10

²⁵ Anselm, *Proslogion*, Bilingual Edition, Latin Translation, Afterword and Notes by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, p.10



they cannot even exist, nor can they be called, as being of a certain matter outside the supreme nature, either of itself or of the third essence."²⁶

In Chapter III of the *Proslogion*, Anselm considers that "if any mind could think any better than you, the creature would rise above the creator and judge the creator." The appellation of relationship could be translated in the following phrase: it would formulate judgments having as subject the creator. Jean-Luc Marion uses the Anselmian concept of the negativity of divine transcendence, suggesting an approximation to the Kantian approach, by the following argument which aims in terms of transcendent-thinking rather than in the transcendental experience of the limits of thought itself. Therefore, I will expose the three aspects of modernity on the ontological-anselmian argument. The first aspect is exposed in the Kantian argument, through the example of thalers that can take the example of the divine nature, but it is conceived by reason as a finite thing.

In an attempt to find out the determinations about God, Anselm considers that, "I properly understand that he made them all out of nothing." In this part of Anselm's work, the problem of nothingness appears (*ex nihilo*).²⁷ Although Anselm tries to avoid the problem of nothingness, which does not lead to the idea of something existing and predictable, either the report is made to a negative approach to something that is, or the report is made to the hypostasis of nothing. Thus the problem of nothingness is an *aporia* (a problem without solution or without solution), because it is difficult or even impossible to give an essentialist definition to such a notion, like nothing, not that it would limit nothing by definition, but would be ontologically impossible to anyone to define anything essentialist.

Chapter nine, from *Monologion*, is also found in the work *On Truth*, but is also present in both texts, thus resuming the Augustinian theme of the divine being, which contains the divine (cataphatic) archetypes of the creator. But different theses are also problematized between the two texts. The first text tries to prove the existence of things before creation, (it is a difficult thesis, because anything that existed before creation, or the current existence of the Universe - because it was not even anything - would have been something eternal like God, and the difficulty is thus, the exclusive demonstration only of the divine existence - first of all - before (creation) and in what second text will be argued the concept of rectitude (*rectitudo*), in terms of the essence of things.

4. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE THEORY OF UNIVERSALS IN THE THEORY OF B. GOEBEL

In work *Anselm's Theory of Reconsidered Universals*, a new solution to the ontological nature of universals is presented. If in Platonic philosophy, universals referred to things, in Platonic philosophy and in Anselmian philosophy, universals acquire an ontological value and refer to the divine being (to God). B. Goedel proposes a new interpretation of Anselmian universals. It considers the different forms of realism, in terms of the existence of universals and how they can be combined to highlight the realism to which Anselmian philosophy refers. As for the reconstruction of the Anselmian argument, it uses a sum of objective or pan-realistic ideas. B. Goebel considers that the core of the Anselmian ontology can be characterized by an ontology of the five categories. B. Goebel, considered Aristotle's Categories, in order to be able to observe the way in which Anselm related to them. B. Goebel also considers that in Anselmian realism, the stake is the

²⁶ Ibidem, p.26.

²⁷ Ibidem, p.28.



ontological value of being, therefore "the essence of universal theory is a three-level account of reality, in which entities at different levels vary in degree of existence and essence."²⁸ Although Anselm used the universal as immanent, and his philosophy is of neo-Platonic origin, he still considers the categories set forth in Aristotelian philosophy. Anselm does not discuss the problem of universals in the terms proposed by Boethius or the Phoenician Porphyry, but considers the ontological dimension, of universal entities and its properties. The universal theory refers to the famous Anselmian phrase "the existence of something greater"²⁹, which thus gives it ontologically, the status of divine being (of God). Anselm starts from this phrase, to render the presence of a universal category.

B. Goebel considers here the ontological analysis of individual substances, from Aristotelian philosophy, although Anselm shows a special interest in the ontological analysis of universal substances, given the concept of perfection and greatness, the quality of good and truth. Therefore, as far as universal substances are concerned, Anselm thus has a fully elaborated metaphysical theory. B. Goebel considers that from the point of view of contemporary nominalism, which considers the concept of universal substance, Anselm successfully falls into this current, because he also considers the divine substance. Anselm's universal theory, however, cannot be divided in two, based on a preconceived (anachronistic) division between a philosophical Anselm and a theological Anselm. In fact, there is no evidence in *Monologion* that Anselm relates to a single method (theological or philosophical), because theology is the systematic discourse on the divine, as Anselm conceives it in most of his works. Theology is thus a middle position between scholastic theology and logical philosophy. In the work *Monologion*, which is called "meditation on faith" (on the essence of the divine and the rational basis of faith), without resorting to the authority of the scriptures, Anselm lets the necessity of reason flow. Mr Goebel also considers that the argument put forward by Anselm is made up in its entirety, for a priori reasons, so that the truth has its convincing and sufficient clarity.

CONCLUSIONS

Given this analysis of Anselmian realism, we note that both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy influenced both the Middle Ages and Anselmian philosophy, especially the term substance, ex nihilo, the reality of being in the mind and being in reality. Although, over time, Anselm was considered a supporter and defender of realism, B. Goebel believes that he did not consider the term divine being (ontologically), but metaphysically related to the being, taking over the term substance of the Aristotelian Categories.

The realistic metaphysics set forth in Anselm's argument attributes to God the following degrees of perfection such as, *supreme truth*, and the perfect being whose place and ontological task are taken from natural or rational theology. Platonic forms play an important role in Anselm's construction because Plato considers, like Anselm, that universals are real, although Plato considers ideal forms. Anselm considers ontological mediation in

²⁸ The essentialist definition seeks to capture the nature of the defined thing, being one of the most difficult possible definitions that could exist. It is very difficult to capture the essence of things, the very answer to the question What is it? Goebel, B, Anselm's Theory of Universal Reconsidered, Institute of Advanced Study, Volume 2, 2009, pp. 4. <http://web.dfc.unibo.it/buzzetti/SFMcorso2011-12lm/materiali/Goebel.pdf>

²⁹ Righteousness currently has a sense of justice and sincerity. But here Anselm directs the dialectic of finding truth to the definition of "rectitude only perceptible to the mind" (*rectitudo mente sola perceptibilis*), and Thomas Aquinas includes this definition as that given to truth. And rectitude of the will (*rectitudo voluntatis*), problematized in the dialogue On the freedom of choice, has a role in delimiting the theories of will of the Franciscan theologians of the thirteenth centuries.



ephemeral metaphysics. Universals perform the function in the fact that the being itself is God (divinity). From this point of view, universals fulfill their function absolutely. Thus Anselmian realism was perfected in the modern period in the philosophy of Rene Descartes.

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THE HOLY EMPRESS PULCHERIA IN LIGHT OF RECENT RESEARCH

Prof. Ph.D. Gheorghe F. ANGHELESCU,
Ovidius University of Constanța,
ROMANIA.
Email: anghelescug@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

As an image of virginity and a model of Augusta, Empress Pulcheria of Byzantium played a remarkable role in the Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries, being a witness to the rejection of Nestorianism at the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431), and equally of Eutichianism (Monophysitism) at the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451) where she also participated. According to modern research, her feminine profile is complex, although the Church has kept a pious memory of her, dedicating two days of homage in the Synaxarion to her, on February 17, along with her husband, Emperor Marcian, and on September 10.

Keywords: *Pulcheria, Mother of God, Virgin, Nestorianism, Chalcedon*

INTRODUCTION

Aelia¹ Pulcheria (January 19, 399 – ca. July/September 10, 453), first child and eldest daughter of Emperor Arcadius and Empress Eudoxia, has remained in memory as a “guardian” of Emperor Theodosius II (402-450)², her brother, and a strong supporter of the Orthodox faith.³ Although too young to have known the ascetic Archbishop John

¹ “Aelia” is the name used by Byzantine empresses, as a tribute to Aelia Flavia Flacilla, the honored wife of Theodosius I.

² Until Pulcheria took over this role, regent was the “praetorian prefect, Anthemius, the university professor, Troilus the sophist, and the new archbishop, Atticus, who served as spiritual director and confessor to the imperial family.” (Cf. Nicholas P. Constatas, “Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3.2 (1995), p. 171). Anthemius had contributed in quality of *comes sacrarum largitionum (senior fiscal official)* to the reinforcement of the relations with the Persian kings. Another close companion of the Sassanian king Yazdgerd I (399-420), eunuch Antiochus will become Theodosius II's pedagogue and guarantor of his succession to the throne, following the political agreement between Yazdgerd I and Arcadius. (Cf. Greatrex, Geoffrey, and Jonathan Bardill, “Antiochus the «Praepositus»: A Persian Eunuch at the Court of Theodosius II”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50 (1996), pp. 171-173).

³ Ryan S. Swanson, in his Diss. *Aelia Pulcheria and Mary Theotokos: Fenestra et Speculum* (Utah State University, Logan, Utah, 2003), advances the idea that the promotion of Mariology during the first half of the fifth century is directly related to Augusta Pulcheria's intention to extend her own fame and authority, in the context of a society very impressionable by religious aspects. We think that things should be perceived in a bit more nuanced manner, religion representing a constant of the Byzantine world, even for the imperial family, an evident fact in Pulcheria's life, who embraces virginity from an early age. Her choice needs to be perceived rather in relation to the recommendations made to her by Archbishop Atticus, author of a treaty on faith and virginity dedicated to Pulcheria and her sisters. See: Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1982, pp. 138-139.



Chrysostom (exiled twice at the pressures of Eudoxia and of the accomplice council led by Theophilus of Alexandria, in 403; and, definitively, in 404 A.D.),⁴ except probably that she must have known his appreciated writings, the young child who became motherless when she was just five and also fatherless at the age of just ten. She grew in an atmosphere still impregnated by the ascetic spirit promoted by the memorable aristocratic deaconess Olympiada, her aunt, who was exiled in Nicomedia for the “crime” of having supported the losing cause of the Archbishop of Constantinople.

Her responsibility as elder sister drew a few lines of her personality, which were going to characterize her whole life: maturity in thinking, power of decision and of pursuing a cause, preoccupation to rise to the level of being worthy of imperial leadership (both as a regent from the age of 15, and as a trainer of her brother, designated as Augustus from the age of 8-9 months),⁵ and also piety to the Saviour Christ and His Mother. To what extent her holding of power and her manifestation of her influence affected her good intentions, this is a matter on which historians continue to debate. However, lately, a more positive reception of the Augusta⁶ has been taking shape, in unison with the favourable image transmitted to posterity through the historian Sozomen⁷ and the memory of the Church.

1. THE VOW OF VIRGINITY – A GUARANTEE FOR STABILITY OF THE EMPIRE OR A RELIGIOUS CHOICE?

The premature death of her mother, in the aftermath of two extrauterine pregnancies, the latter, fatal,⁸ must have left in Pulcheria’s memory at least a shadow of concern regarding the risk that a descendant of Eve’s can expose herself to, being destined, in the post-Edenic conditions, to give birth in pain. Maybe also this detail, unexplored by historians, exerted a certain influence when the young regent decided to take a public vow of virginity, to which she exhorted her younger sisters, Arcadia and Marina, and convinced them to adhere to it as well. Certainly, primordial in her taking of this decision may have been the wise desire to eliminate any internal danger to the safety of the reign of her brother, Theodosius II, and, according to some historians, her own desideratum of leading herself with a strong hand, from the shadow of regency and of the status of pedagogue-sister, the imperial affairs, which were quite demanding and hard to manage by her brother. However, an even more credible and stronger motivation in maintaining this difficult trajectory of

⁴ The rewriting of his name in diptychs (423 A.D.) and the bringing of his holy relics to Constantinople to be honoured properly (438), were going to be two welcome and necessary stages both in the rehabilitation of the memory of his person accused of heresy (Origenism), and for re-establishing the communion with the *Joannites*, the Christians who had remained faithful to the martyr-archbishop.

⁵ Geoffrey Greatrex and Jonathan Bardill, “Antiochus the «Praepositus»...”, p. 172.

⁶ Pulcheria was raised to this imperial rank in July 414, at the age of 15.

⁷ Sozomen IX, I, p. 419: “This princess was not yet fifteen years of age, but had received a mind most wise and divine above her years. (...) After quietly resuming the care of the state, she governed the Roman empire excellently and with great orderliness; she concerted her measures so well that the affairs to be carried out were quickly decreed and completed. She was able to write and to converse with perfect accuracy in the Greek and Latin languages. (...) She provided zealously and wisely that religion might not be endangered by the innovation of spurious dogmas. That new heresies have not prevailed in our times, we shall find to be due especially to her, as we shall subsequently see. With how much fear she worshipped God, it would take long for any one to say; and how many houses of prayer she built magnificently, and how many hostelries and monastic communities she established, the arrangement for the expenses for their perpetual support, and the provision for the inmates.”.

⁸ Jennifer Barry, “Diagnosing Heresy: Ps.-Martyrius's Funerary Speech for John Chrysostom”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24.3 (2016), p. 400.



virginity should also be considered:⁹ the profound religious formation of Pulcheria,¹⁰ her sincere belief in Christ, the man-God Saviour, and in the Virgin Mary, His Mother, mother of all orphans and feminine representative of virginity by excellence.

What the historical sources transmit is the fact that Pulcheria permanently manifested a special piety to the cult of the Mother of the Lord, in a marked development after the Great Council of Nicaea (325), which had consecrated her major contribution to the humanization of the Logos consubstantial with the Father, following the virginal conception “of the Holy Spirit”. We also find out that the Augusta, since her adolescence in the imperial palace, promoted a quasi-monastic manner of living by taking on, along with virginity (together with her sisters), the practice of the virtues of philanthropy, prayer, and the actions of support for the edification of places of worship. The young emperor, in his turn, was educated in a spirit of respect and piety to the Shepherds of the Church and, although of a less determined nature, he was trained to have sufficiently developed preoccupations to maintain the true faith and to generalize it in the capital and the Empire.

Although Pulcheria’s authoritarian position was going to undergo a gradual diminution, following the tensions emerged after her brother’s marriage with the young lady of simple origins, yet erudite and quite full of personality, Athenais (future Eudochia, through Baptism and the reception of the dignity of Augusta),¹¹ this did not decrease the sister-Augusta’s piety and zeal toward honouring the Theotokos.

A day of celebration had already been established immediately after that of the Birth of the Lord, through which the virgins were celebrating, on December 26, Mary, the Virgin worthy to give birth, with human body, to the Son of God.¹² The young Augusta’s amazement was great (according to others, frustration or shock), when Nestorius, the new Archbishop of Constantinople formed at the literal exegetic school of Antioch, expressed an open reservation regarding the cult of Mary and the privileges claimed by the Augusta-Virgin concerning her communing along with the clergy and the emperor.¹³ What at first had looked

⁹ For a political motivation of the vote of virginity in the case of Pulcheria and her sisters, see: Geoffrey Greatrex and Jonathan Bardill, “Antiochus the «Praepositus...”, pp. 191-193.

¹⁰ After the terrifying death of Empress Eudoxia, the attitude of the Imperial Court toward Saint John Chrysostom changed, as a reparative form being brought back to the Court persons from Saint John’s entourage, one of them being Salvina who would function along with a niece of Olimpyada’s, Olympia, as “adoptive mother” and spiritual guide for Pulcheria and her sisters. Cf. Judith Mary Foster, *Giving birth to God: the virgin empress Pulcheria and imitation of Mary in early Christian Greek and Syriac traditions*, Diss., Concordia University, 2008, p. 47, where he cites the historians Socrates 7.22 4-5; Soz. 9.1.10-11,3.1-2; Theod. *Hist eccl.* 5. 36.4: “At canonical hours day and night the emperor and his sisters came together to chant antiphons and to recite passages of Scripture learned by heart. They fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, and the young women, following the precepts of church fathers, gave up such vanities as cosmetics, luxurious apparel, and the usual idleness of aristocratic females, to devote themselves to time at the loom and other household occupations suitable for “admirable” women and especially on works of charity, founding oratories, houses for the poor and destitute and monasteries and supporting inmates from their personal incomes.”

¹¹ For a reevaluation of Eudocia’s biography and intellectual profile, see the studies by Tatyana Alexandrova: “The Empress Athenais Eudocia: the Path to the Throne/ Императрица Афинаида-Евдокия: путь к трону.” *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1 (55) (2017), pp. 75-87”; “Eve, Helena, Eudocia... Pulcheria? Revisiting the Question of Intertextual Allusions in the Homeric Cento”, *Культура и текст* №3.34 (2018), pp. 185-195.

¹² The one credited with the introduction of this Marian feast is Atticus, St. John Chrysostom’s successor to the Archiepiscopal See of Constantinopol. See: Nicholas P. Constatas, “Weaving the Body of God...”, p. 172.

¹³ Ally Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women: Hidden Leadership*, Springer Nature, 2019, pp. 163-164.



like a personal problem, between the inconsiderate archbishop¹⁴ and the self-assured Augusta, was going to become a political-religious confrontation of ecumenical level and with provisions valid for the entire Church.

The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, which took place in 431, was going to proclaim, although not without some reversals of situation,¹⁵ and amends needed to re-establish ecclesiastical peace,¹⁶ the unique quality of the Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*, as the one who gave birth to Emmanuel, the Only-Begotten embodied Son of God. It was a victory of the right-glorifying faith, but also a personal victory for Pulcheria, who, affirming to Nestorius about the Virgin that she gave birth to God, associated to virginity a distinct status among Christians, a position (almost) equal to that of the high-ranking clergy. This victory of *Orthodoxy* was due to a sum of factors, but all those involved admitted – at least formally – to the sister-Augusta, a power of influence on the emperor worthy of a true *basileia*.¹⁷

2. EMPRESS AND VIRGIN – TWO INCOMPATIBLE ATTRIBUTES?

The animosities between the two sisters-in-law from the imperial court were going to be propelled by the undesired appearance, in the entourage of the unsure and uncertain emperor, of the eunuch Crysaphius, an advisor with strong power of persuasion on Theodosius II, but also on his wife, Aelia Eudocia. What Bishop Nestorius had intended unsuccessfully in his too direct and inconsiderate manner, namely to reduce Pulcheria's influence on political matters and on her brother's decisions, this man, skilled, yet not without cruelty, was going to succeed almost fully. After having unsuccessfully tried to undermine the sister-Augusta's status by determining Eudocia to request from the emperor for herself the privileged place in the leadership of administrative imperial matters,¹⁸ Crysaphius did not shy away from suggesting to Theodosius II to go out and meet Pulcheria's desire to live in virginity, by making her join the rank of deaconess, a position which would have limited and closed almost entirely her access to the requirements of an affirmation on the political level.

¹⁴ Kathryn Chew, "Virgins and eunuchs: Pulcheria, politics and the death of Emperor Theodosius II", *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* H. 2 (2006), pp. 217-218.

¹⁵ From possibly accused before Nestorius and the Emperor Theodosius II, for some administrative excesses and dogmatic inaccuracies (Cf. Paul Gavrilyuk, "Theopatheia: Nestorius's main charge against Cyril of Alexandria", *Scottish journal of theology* 56.2 (2003), pp. 190-207), the Archbishop of Alexandria, Cyril, will become president over the Council of Ephesus I (3rd Ecumenical Council, 431) where he will condemn Nestorius for the heresy of Dioprosopism. However, despite this advantage, the emperor initially rejects the Council members' decisions and condemns together the principal opponents: Nestorius, Cyril and Memnon of Ephesus. It is only a few months later (October), through supporters from the Imperial Court, that St. Cyril of Alexandria is freed again and returns victorious, Nestorius being condemned as heretic and deposed from the archiepiscopal see.

¹⁶ At the expressed demand of Emperor Theodosius II the dialogue between the Alexandrians (St. Cyril of Alexandria) and Antiochans (John of Antioch) continued, leading to a common formula of faith in the year 433.

¹⁷ In this sense we point to a series of letters of St. Cyril prior to the Council of Ephesus of 431 addressed to the Emperor's sisters (and personally to Augusta Pulcheria), and a letter of Pope Leo I to Pulcheria of the year 449 where she was being asked, again, to intervene to Emperor Theodosius II, with the confidence that the victory on Eutyches, the new heresiarch, depends very much on her (Cf. Joan M. Ferrante, "«Licet longinquis regionibus corpore separati»: Letters as a Link in and to the Middle Ages", *Speculum* 76.4 (2001), p. 881).

¹⁸ Eudocia's request of having her own *praeposita Augustae* was met with a refusal, in favor of Pulcheria's expertise. (Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses...*, p. 192)



However, the respect that the sister-Augusta had won toward herself and her inborn tact¹⁹ helped her overcome also this trap wrought by the shameless eunuch thirsty for power. Warned by Proclus, the new archbishop of the city, Pulcheria withdrew to a more peripheral area of the capital, avoiding in this way the fatal “meeting” with the Archbishop, who had been ordered to officiate her entry into a cone of grey or her definitive monastic withdrawal. Pulcheria’s withdrawal and patience did not remain unrewarded, as she filled her time expressing even more actively her piety to the Virgin Mary by the intensification of her support for the projects of edification of new places of worship dedicated to the protection of the Mother of God, the Empress and Lady of the world.²⁰

The accidental death of Theodosius II in 450 A.D. allowed Augusta Pulcheria to return in an authoritative position. The formal marriage with general Marcian, a good strategist and supporter absolutely necessary to reject the increasingly numerous assaults from the periphery of the Empire, secured her success and the position she had not hoped for, of Empress, which she had exerted until then rather indirectly or with great persuasive efforts. The elimination of uninvited and bold adversaries like Crysaphius, took place by itself, in the spirit of the Byzantine and Roman policy with tradition in such common matters.

Once more, Pulcheria was going to bring her support and contribution to the defence and proclamation of the true faith, this time taking part, in quality of imperial couple, along with her husband, in the final meeting of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). This Council marked a historical moment in the affirmation of the union without confusion, without change, indivisible and inseparable, of the two natures, Divine and human, and the unique divine-human hypostasis of the embodied Son of God. The ovations of the Council members and participants confirmed to Pulcheria, at the highest level, the authority, providential role, and virtue conferred by maintaining virginity also “after marriage”. Her comparison with Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, was going to be a strong argument in her future canonization, precipitated by Pulcheria’s relatively unexpected passage into eternity just two years later, at the age of 54.

CONCLUSION

The impact of the two Ecumenical Councils that she actively witnessed, assured for Pulcheria an indelible place in memory, and especially that of the Church. Her pure image, of moral authority and as an inspired leader, remained a model difficult to attain and zealously desired by the ladies who succeeded her at the imperial court over the centuries.

¹⁹ Wendy Mayer, in *De imperatoribus Romanis. An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Emperors*, expresses the opinion of Pulcheria’s continued participation in religious matters, inherited from her mother: “It is also probable that, through establishing a model for the engagement of imperial women of the east at a high level in the ecclesiastical sphere, she paved the way for her daughter, Pulcheria.”

²⁰ K. A. Zafeiris, *The Synopsis Chronike and its place in the Byzantine Chronicle tradition: its sources (Creation–1081 CE)*, D.Phil. Univ. St. Andrews, 2007, p. 104; Maria Vaiou, “Byzantine churches built in Constantinople by the Theodosian dynasty (379–457)”, *Journal of religious culture* 283 (2021), pp. 9-38. The following places of worship are known to have been edified by Queen Pulcheria: St. Lawrence at *Pulcherianai*; St. Stephen in *Zeugma* (Unkapani) or *Konsta*; Church and monastery of *Theotokos ton Hodegon*, Oratory of St. Stephen in the palace of *Daphne*; Forty martyrs; *Theotokos Chalkoprataia* (‘Our Lady in the Coppermarket’); St. Mary of the *Blachernae* or the *Hagiasma* of the *Blachernaei*. Other churches built together with her husband, Emperor Marcian: St. Menas in *Acropolis*, Church and monastery of St. Mocius; St. Isaias.



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SAINT LAZAROS OF MOUNT GALESION – HEAVENLY MAN OR EARTHLY ANGEL

Rodica Elena SOARE (GHEORGHIU),

Ph.D. Student “Ovidius” University of Constanța,
ROMANIA,

E-mail: rodicagheorghiu12@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

During the thousand years of Christianity, the institution of monasticism interacted with the other Byzantine institutions, being absorbed into the societal life. In the eleventh century, ordinary Byzantines or of the aristocratic class still recognized the superiority of monasticism as a model to follow for achieving the ideal of salvation. What attracted, producing admiration, was the asceticism of the monks along with the benefits that flowed from it for the people. At the same time, the more extraordinary asceticisms were, the more they became the target of criticism. First of all, they were aroused by the misunderstanding of the extraordinary power of a man to control his bodily urges so that the soul would free itself from the bondage of passions. Secondly, the asceticism of some highlighted neglect in the case of others, clerics or even monks, who were too much preoccupied with material interests. Saint Lazaros, as a monk, ascetic stylite, confessor, founder of monasteries, is an emblematic saint for the eleventh century, his life written and lived describing in detail all these struggles and human dilemmas. His asceticism fits perfectly between the two reference axes of the Orthodox system of holiness: heavenly man and earthly angel.¹

Keywords: Asceticism; Eleventh century; Miracles; Pillar; Angels;

INTRODUCTION

To make Saint Lazaros known is both easy and difficult. It is easy because his good deeds and wonders, which we so desperately need, have some ease of transmission due to the beauty and hope that accompany them. At the same time it is difficult, because it involves understanding the depth and complexity of the personality of such a man, these being the rock from which the former spring. Saint Lazaros of Mount Galesion is undoubtedly representative of the monasticism of the eleventh century from several points of view², one of these being asceticism.

The importance of asceticism, which transcends time and space due to its primacy as a divine command to perfection³, it resides in its intrinsic connection with the mysterious union with God towards which the human being is oriented. Coming in the closest approach

¹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia despre pocăință*, translated by Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, Ediție Electronică Apologeticum, 2005, “Omilia a II-a”, p. 17.

²Rodica Elena Soare, “Sfântul Cuvios Lazăr din Muntele Galesion, reprezentant al monahismului bizantin din secolul al XI-lea”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în timpul patriarhului Nicodim Munteanu: cultură, pastorație și filantropie*, Conferința internațională „Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească”, ediția a II-a, Constanța, 28 oct. 2019, ed.: Constantin Claudiu Cotan, Editura Universitară, București, 2020, p. 185.

³ Genesis 16:16-17.



to us, to show us the Way, the Son of Man was the ascetic example he also taught. The first Christians lived intuitively ascetic lives, with the living memory of the model seen in Christ and under the imminence of His second coming, for which they "trained" like athletes, according to the advice of the Apostle Paul. The momentum of the ascension of the soul towards the kingdom of heaven has placed in the background the pleasures of the material world that rule the body and that Christians have begun to give up. Clement of Alexandria and Origen used for the first time the name of asceticism, ἄσκησις, for the abstinence practiced by Christians⁴.

From the primary Christian communities were detached those who wanted to dedicate themselves entirely to God by practicing with more zeal the asceticism and thus monasticism was born. Asceticism was practiced and sublimated in the monastic way of life, becoming iconic for monasticism, being also the guarantor of holiness in general and for the saints among the monks especially.⁵

Ordinary asceticism implied fasting, abstinence from intimate approaches, renunciation of possessions, wearing the necessary minimum of clothing, vigils, keeping the commandments, permanent control of thoughts, continuous prayer. Passed through the prism of the local cultural, spiritual and social background, asceticism presented other unusual manifestations of the mortification of the body, such as retreating in tombs, hollows, caves, trees or pillars or living only under the open sky. Other ascetics adopted a behavior of "fool" for Christ or wore iron objects on the body. Even ordinary abstinence had a more drastic character: giving up rest or resting on a special chair or especially harsh fasting. Their variety and novelty led to the need for explanations and guidance for their use for the benefit of spiritual perfection. The subject of asceticism occupies an important place in the library of Christian writings, being amply treated by saints such as: Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius the Great, Nilus the Ascetic of Mount Sinai, Basil the Great, Simeon Stylites the Older, Diadochus of Photike, John Cassian etc on the basis of personal experience.

1. THE ASCETICISM IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

In the eleventh century, the asceticism preserves the two perspectives acquired since the Christian beginnings of its practice: the internal one, oriented towards God, which directly concerns the ascetic who practices it from the desire of his own perfection, and the external one, directed to the people, through which they indirectly use the charismas acquired by the ascetic. Asceticism is thus a way of manifesting the divine providence, which acts through a man, who willingly gave up the world in order to regain it for Christ.

The ascetics, took over this "war" not as a purpose, but were engaged by society in solving human problems and pains. The characteristic of this relationship of the ascetic with the world is the contradiction with the desire of the ascetic to isolate himself and the fervor with which he is sought and "brought" back into the world by believers. Monasticism was born as a result of this interaction, passing from particular asceticism to institutional form. Asceticism continued to manifest itself within the institutional framework through extraordinary forms and, especially, from purely personal initiative, provoking the perpetual attempts of monasticism as institution subordinated to the Church, to integrate, standardize and sometimes even combat these asceticisms. However, the roles as dogmatic authority, economic engine, provider of social, medical, spiritual assistance, keeper and transmitter of

⁴Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă – Ascetica și mistica*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1992, p. 7.

⁵Peter Charanis, "The monk as an element of Byzantine society", *Dumbarton Oaks papers*, vol. 25, 1971, p. 63.



religious traditions, which monasticism has played in society, are strictly due to the holiness acquired through extraordinary asceticism.⁶ These roles provided monasticism with an important status among the Byzantine institutions. Institutional credibility, along with the personal one, strengthened the authority and appreciation of the ascetic monk in society, adding in the eleventh century a final role, the political one.⁷

From the end of the tenth century, emperors' affinity for ascetic monks developed as a result of accepting the role of official mediator to God for the imperial family and Empire too, as it had been until then for the common population.⁸ As a result, the emperors founded the imperial monasteries, providing the necessary conditions for the monks for the ascension of prayers and, at the same time, preparing their place of eternal rest. These monasteries were endowed with movable and immovable property, enjoyed tax exemptions and annual annuity. The eleventh century is the century in which most monasteries were founded under imperial patronage, endowed accordingly, architecturally lavish, and privileges were granted to those who were not imperial.⁹ The tradition of the imperial monasteries was perpetuated, so they kept this status even after the death of the founder, the privileges being reconfirmed by the next emperor. Even in cases when the emperor in office was the usurper of the founder emperor, the imperial status of the monastery was respected with holiness, the privileges not being abolished, but only adjusted.¹⁰

The relationship between monks and emperors surpassed the material aspect, becoming one of spiritual kinship, father – son. Based on the trust thus consolidated, the monk also became a counselor in political matters¹¹, or accompanied the emperor in battles, facilitating the victory.¹² In fact, according to this model, not only the emperors, but also the officials and aristocrats visited the ascetic monk, asking for advice on very diverse issues, from spiritual problems to a possible ascension to the throne.¹³ Thus, the prestige of the monks in front of the laity, regardless of the social class to which they belonged, reached its peak in the eleventh century.

The respect they enjoyed throughout Byzantine society and their involvement in all areas of life, however, also had negative effects. On the one hand, the rich gifts of emperors and aristocrats offered for spiritual services, on the other hand, the territorial losses of Asia Minor, attracted to cities, especially to Constantinople, gyrovague monks and false ascetics who had no connection with monastic life. They wandered on the streets of the

⁶Rodica Elena Soare, “Monahismul răsăritean, de la asceza particulară la forma instituțională”, in: *Istorie, cultură și mărturisire creștină în societatea europeană*, Conferința internațională „Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească”, ediția a III-a, Constanța, 24-25 mai 2021, ed.: Constantin Claudiu Cotan, Editura Universitară, București, 2021, p. 82.

⁷Rosemary Morris, “The Political Saint of the Eleventh Century”, in: *The Byzantine Saint, Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Sergei HACKEL (ed.), St Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 50.

⁸*Actes de Lavra. Première partie: des origines à 1204*, Paul Lemerle, André Guillou, Nicolas Svoronos, Denise Papachryssanthou (eds.), Édition P. Lethielleux, Paris, 1970, pp. 113 and 250.

⁹Cyril Mango, “Les monuments de l'architecture du XI^e siècle et leur signification historique et sociale”, in: *Travaux et mémoires 6, Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1976, p. 352.

¹⁰Alan Harvey, *Economic expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 82-84.

¹¹Michael Psellus, *Chronographia*, translated by E.R.A Sewter, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1953, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/psellus-chrono07.asp>, p. 257.

¹²Barbara Crostini, “The Emperor Basil II's cultural life”, in: *Byzantion* vol. 66 – 1, 1996, p. 78.

¹³Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh Century Pillar Saint*, in *Byzantine Saints' lives in translation*, Washington D.C., 2000, Ch. 230, p. 579.



Great City selling expensively their prophecies to those who wanted good news and exalted themselves on their praises.

On the other hand, the participation of monasteries in economic activities through their wealth, especially agricultural land, also the practice of chartistike, favored the penetration into the monasteries of the worldly spirit of material cares. Some of the monks less steadfast in ascetic practice allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by it, leaning rather towards activities and behaviors specific to the laity.

Criticism of false ascetics and “worldly” monks emerged quickly. A text about asceticism belonging to an anonymous monk from the eleventh century, *Logos peri askēseōs*¹⁴, presents non-compliant situations of ascetic practice compared to what he considered a genuine practice. The text begins with a definition of asceticism as “meditation and toil,” based on “abstention from unspeakable deeds and care for the commandments of the Lord”. Only after the fulfillment of these commandments, the ascetic monk could switch to the outer forms of asceticism such as “living in the mountains, retreating into deserted places, closing in houses, eating once a day or even a week, as well as abstaining altogether from bread and water, wearing sackcloth, chaining with iron chains, walking without sandals, lying on the floor and refusing many meetings”.

There were regarded as human traditions and occupying the second place. The author reckoned that those who were preoccupied with practicing external physical asceticisms did so only for praise and rich donations¹⁵, producing envy, gossip and rivalry among fellows.¹⁶ The anonymous monk presents the entire list of sins that some of the monks of that time were guilty of: the love of silver, unclean business, the search for women's company, drunkenness or walking through fairs and markets. The author concludes that he would like the monks to refrain from the evil deeds and keep the commandments of God, only in this way could this state of affairs be straightened out.¹⁷

Out of professional envy, as Professor Paul Magdalino calls it and with the aim of shaking the authority of the ascetics¹⁸, criticism continued in the same tone in the twelfth century: ascetics were characterized as “fraudulent, greedy and superfluous”.¹⁹ Public figures, writers, historians, bishops or canonists, such as Theodore Prodromos, John Tzetis, Niketas Choniates, Eustace of Thessalonica, Theodore Balsamon launched the idea of the need for a reform of monasticism, embedding the life of “extremist” ascetics in common monasteries and the repression of eccentric asceticisms.

History has shown that this analysis of ascetic monks was not entirely justified, generalization being a willful exaggeration. With all the attempts of control applied by church clergy, authentic asceticism continued to be practiced in its superhuman exercises in the eleventh and subsequent centuries, remaining an important component of Byzantine life in general and the foundation of monasticism. The ascet remained unchanged being more or less visible in historical epochs, depending on the publicity that society itself made to him.

¹⁴Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză – un surprinzător tratat în Bizanțul Comnenilor”, in: *Revista Teologică*, 1/2016, Editura Andreiana, Sibiu, 2017, p. 248.

¹⁵Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză ...”, p. 252.

¹⁶Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză ...”, p. 258.

¹⁷Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză ...”, pp. 258-260.

¹⁸Paul Magdalino, “*The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century*”, in: *The Byzantine Saint*, Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Sergei HACKEL (ed.), St Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 56.

¹⁹Paul Magdalino, “*The Byzantine Holy Man ...*”, p. 54.



2. SAINT LAZAROS – HEAVENLY MAN

Venerable Lazaros of Mount Galesion (968-1054) is the last pillar saint in the long line of stylites, opened by Saint Simeon Stylites the Elder (390-459). He was born in Asia Minor at Magnesia on the Meander, and practiced this type of asceticism in the same area, on Mount Galesion. Before that, he spent his entire youth in the Holy Land, thus preparing and accumulating ascetic experience. On the way to Jerusalem, he lingered for a while at Attaleia on the advice of an old monk met on the mountain, from which he also received the monastic garb. Also at Attaleia he experienced eremitism in a cave, “fasting, watching and (...) other ascetic, <practices> which he not only fulfilled himself, well pleasing to the Lord, but he also taught the brethren who were with him”.²⁰ Arriving in the Holy Land and entering the Monastery of Saint Sabas, he practiced, following the model of the monks over there, the retreat into the wilderness during the Great Lent.²¹

On his return to his native places from the divine command, he joined the brothers in a small hermitage, Saint Marina asking them to build him a pillar. There is no doubt that this choice was not spontaneous, but long thought out and ordained by the divine prophecy. The old monk from Attaleia, from whom he received advice and the monastic garb, was a stylite. His friend, the monk Paul climbed on a pillar near Laodicea when they parted ways on their return from Jerusalem²², to which followed the pilgrimage of Saint Lazaros to the pillar of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger of the Admirable Mount.

In search of hesychia, Saint Lazaros left the monastery of Saint Marina and settled as a stylite on Mount Galesion, where he lived on 3 pillars for 40 years. Initially in solitude, a group of disciples gathered around him, and for the small community that grew up, the saint founded a monastery. After this pattern, the three monasteries on Mount Galesion were founded, dedicated to the Savior, the Mother of God and the Resurrection.

Although he was not the only stylite on the mountain or in history, the appearance of Saint Lazaros on his pillar must have been overwhelming for the Byzantines, and for the people of our times, certainly incomprehensible. Only staying on the pillar strikes the human mind, which stops primarily at the implications of the bodily needs – food, rest, shelter, physical movement, not being able to understand the power that marks the ascet on the stone column. And staying on the uncovered pillar, as a seen manifestation of asceticism, itself very difficult, was only a part of the whole ascetism, to which others were added. Like the other ascetics, Saint Lazaros fasted, vigilated, refused any physical comfort and added other extreme asceticisms.

The fasting

Ever since he was at Monastery Saint Sabas, Venerable Lazaros did not drink wine and did not consume oil or cheese. When Saint Lazaros climbed the pillar of Saint Marina, his disciple Gregory the Cellarer mentioned that he ate only legumes soaked in water and sometimes vegetables, always cooked without oil, and three years before he had also given up to the only kind of bread he ate, the barley bread.²³ As a drink, after climbing the pillar of the Monastery of the Resurrection, only because he was old in age did he accept a warm drink sweetened with honey or grape syrup besides the water, once a day, in the evening. On Wednesdays and Fridays he did not eat at all, as in all days of the week of the great fasts ordained by the Church, accepting food only on Saturdays and Sundays, after having initially

²⁰Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 14, p. 92.

²¹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 18, p. 100.

²²Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 24, p. 109.

²³Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch.17, p. 99; Ch. 35, p. 122.



wanted to fast completely during the entire Great Lent.²⁴ While he was on the pillar of the Resurrection, it often happened that even in the days ordained to eat, he could not do it, because the devil spilled his dishes with food and drink, and Saint Lazaros did not accept to receive others instead.²⁵

The resting

Begining with his time at Saint Sabas at Jerusalem, Father Lazaros did not sleep lying down, but rested from time to time in a special little chair. In fact, on the entire mountain there were only two beds in the true sense of the word, and those were prepared only for the lay visitors. All the monks rested on ground and only in cases of illness on a stone bed that did not provide special comfort, but only protection from soil moisture.²⁶ Saint Lazaros did not sleep in the true sense, but only briefly awakened, vigil at night, alone or with brothers and praying, so “that the sun set behind him when the vigil began and he sat <there> singing until he saw him again in front of him”²⁷, like saints Arsenios the Great and Simeon Stylites the Elder.

The other types of asceticisms

Saint Lazaros wore iron belts on his body and a harsh tunic of hair that he hardly accepted to be replaced after 12 years of wearing,²⁸ and on earth he walked barefoot.²⁹ Another time, finding out about a sylite woman that she had hung her legs outside the pillar through a hole, he wanted to do the same, considering it was his duty as an ascetic man, to do even more difficult things than a woman. It was hard for his disciples and his mother, the nun Eupraxia to persuade him to give up his plan.³⁰ He also allowed insects such as lice, cockroaches and ants to feed on his body, although they multiplied beyond measure and tormented him very much. Because of this, his disciples cut down the tree on which the ants climbed the pillar even against the will of the Father.³¹ Even when he was sick he did not accept a minimum of comfort, like the cushion that the disciples asked him to use.³²

Through the ascetic exercises, the body of Saint Lazaros regained the transparency of the Edenic human bodies and, with him, the nature around him, showing in all the gifts and words offered by God to human kind and making them visible to all.³³

3. SAINT LAZAROS – EARTHLY ANGEL

The meaning of mortification of the body through sacrifices, renunciations, sufferings is the one given by the Savior Jesus Christ Himself, that of redemption. Like the other ascetics, Saint Lazaros persevered in asceticism for the atonement of his sins and for the cutting off of any tendency to sin. Thus he attained steadfastness for good, like angels,

²⁴Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 8, p.169; Ch. 82, p. 171.

²⁵Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 81, p 169.

²⁶Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch.162, p.252.

²⁷Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 318, p 225.

²⁸Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 82, p.171.

²⁹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 79, p.168.

³⁰Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 59, p.146.

³¹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 222, p.316.

³²Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 208, p. 302.

³³Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă(I)*, Ediția a IV-a, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2010, pp. 428-429.



with whom entering into communion he partook of the knowledge of God³⁴ and imitated them in their main work, that of supporting people in their approach to spiritualization.³⁵

Saint Lazaros's connection with the world of angels defines his entire life, having multiple meanings. The light, characteristic of the angels, marked the beginning and end of the life of the Venerable Lazaros. "A marvelous light shone forth from heaven, and filled the whole house with unspeakable glimpses and glimmers"³⁶ at the birth of the saint, and at his death, "fire descending from heaven like lightning (...) surrounded the church and the pillar; the flame gathered in a <globe> and flowing like water, entered the pillar".³⁷ The light accompanied him throughout his life, showing to the people around him his kinship with the angelic world: the monk Nichiphorus saw "a lightning bolt from the heavens. He turned to the east and saw the church spire that it seemed surrounded by fire; the fire then leaked from there like water, and entered into the Father's pillar"³⁸, Roman, named Skleros who was the *strategos* of the region, saw the father "as a fire when he pulled his head out the window and finding it difficult for him to bear this sight he almost fainted".

The saint's piety and love for the angels was evident: on leaving his native place and on his return he visited the Church of St. Michael the Archangel at Chonae; the teaching he gave to his disciples, commanding them to hold vigils for the Holy Angels; right in front of his pillar were the icons of the Holy Archangels.³⁹ Responding to this love, the Holy Archangels and probably, the entire angelic assembly, accompanied Saint Lazaros in his passage from earth to heaven, this taking place, not by chance, on November 7, the day before their celebration.

The angelic powers of which the Venerable Lazaros was worthy are evident in the struggle he waged against the devil, who often came upon himself and his disciples, trying to stop them from good deeds and deceiving in various ways in order to lose them. The theme of unseen warfare occupies the most of *Life* of the Saint Lazaros. He himself was pursued by the devil in the form of a dog on the way back to his homeland, and in the church of St. Michael the Archangel at Chonae devil tempted him. In order to fool Saint Lazaros, devil often took various forms: as a true angel, a serpent or an old woman who had come to heal him. The devil exhorted the lay people to evil deeds or brought them diseases or possessed them. Nor the monks were exempted from devilish attacks. Some were deceived into having extraordinary charismas, others were pushed to commit great sins. Many were led into dangerous places, endangering their lives. While others were fooled by the thought of accepting easier asceticism at the monastery of Bessai. The power of prayer or even of a single spoken word, the sign of the Holy Cross, the thought and invocation of the help of Saint Lazaros, defeated devil, as once upon a time Archstrategist Michael fought against the power of darkness.

From the same love for people springs the wisdom of his pedagogy, gentle as a whisper of an angel. An example is that of a poor man who came to Father and whom he overwhelmed with mercy, giving him at his request so much that he could not carry them. Seeing himself in this situation, the man understood that he was greedy and that was wrong. On the other hand, the monks were angry with Father Lazaros, because he gave him so much

³⁴Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă* ..., p. 440.

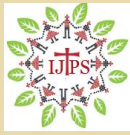
³⁵Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă* ..., p. 464.

³⁶Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 2, p. 77.

³⁷Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 252, p. 361.

³⁸Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 86, p. 177.

³⁹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 253, p. 363.



of the resources of the monastery, and judged the poor man for his avidity. But Saint Lazaros rebuked them by telling that it would be better to help him carry all those things than judge him, because the man had suffered greatly because of poverty. He also reminded them the judgment belongs to Lord not to the man. In fact, his monks accused him many other times for decisions that displeased their human reason, regarding the immeasurable mercy of the Father. They were also upset for Saint Lazaros imposed the careful observance of the requirements of the monastic life. Monks couldn't understand his forgiveness high as the divine one, or perseverance on the mountain despite all the adversity. But the consequences of these decisions have shown that the souls of those forgiven many times have been saved by this method, otherwise they were in danger of being lost.

Thus, Saint Lazaros reached the level of love devoid of any passion, sincere, delicate as that of angels, pouring it out on people in various ministries: mercy, forgiveness of sins, advice, healings, prayers, exorcisms, intercession to God and great miracles.

4. CONTESTING THE ASCETIC PRACTICES OF SAINT LAZAROS

The asceticism of Saint Lazaros, due to the superhuman character and context of the eleventh century, was misunderstood and, therefore, sometimes disliked by his contemporaries: on the one hand by the clergy of Ephesus, on the other hand by some of the monks who were disciples of the saint.

The Metropolitan of Ephesus, in whose diocesan jurisdiction Mount Galesion was located, sent various people on several occasions to investigate Saint Lazaros. The subject of this research was the very asceticism of the saint whose possible deviation would have been a good reason to remove him from the mountain. The Metropolitan of Ephesus wanted to force him to move to the Bessai monastery located in a circulated and easily accessible area to attract more pilgrims. But the examination made by these envoys did nothing but confirm the orthodoxy of his ascetism. This was later strengthened by a "distinguished monk" who came from Constantinople at the very moment of the death of Saint Lazaros. Being present at the descent of the saint's body from the pillar and the preparation for burial, he saw the father's body, the coat of hair and the irons with which he had been girded, and he affirmed the authenticity and greatness of his asceticism.

Accusations were also made against Saint Lazaros from a certain monk who had returned from Jerusalem. He told another monk, Photios, who wanted to visit Father Lazaros, lies reinforced with a "stream of insults"⁴⁰ about Father, almost persuading him to turn out of the way. The monk Fotie, disobeying his first impulse to give up, nevertheless went to see Venerable Lazaros. There he was impressed by the sight of the Saint and his holiness. For this perseverance he was even worthy of a wonderful vision of Father Lazaros, who climbed and descended between two great ensembles of buildings, arranged one above the other, which imagined his monasteries on one side and the heaven on the other side. Monk Photios saw how Father Lazaros was welcomed into the buildings that imagined heaven, but he always returned to the people, his words being like honey for them.

Perhaps the heaviest blame was that of his fasting. Father Lazaros was suspected that, although he refused to eat bread, he still received at Holy Communion the larger parts of bread. By coming to monastery, monk Photios above mentioned wanted to convince himself of this first of all. Even some of the monks in the monastery urged the priest who performed the Holy Sacrifice to put Father Lazaros the largest parts in the vessel with which

⁴⁰Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 84, p. 173.



the Holy Body and Blood was taken to him. Some of the monks did this out of superficial compassion, believing that they were doing a good deed. But others did it only so that they could later say that Saint Lazaros was bloated with bread.

Because he often asked his monks for the gold coins they had from donations or from their own inheritances, Father Lazaros was accused of standing on his pillar on a mountain of gold. Although they never lacked anything, but because of the austere life that the Venerable Lazaros imposed in his monasteries, some of the monks accused him of not spending any of this money on monasteries. In fact, the Saint gave this money to the poor of the many who came to ask for his help, at the same time helping his monks to observe with great care the vote of poverty.

His vigil was questioned too. The young monk Neilos, who often fell asleep during vigils, was hit with the palm by other monks to wake up. Being angry because of this, he protested vehemently in front of Father Lazaros, saying that he often saw him sleeping during the service, through the common window between the church and the pillar. With great wisdom and gentleness, Father applied another method to help Neilos practice the exercise of attention for vigil. He allowed the young monk to poke him with a pole whenever he saw him sleeping. Thus, in order to lurk Saint Lazaros, Neilos was awake the entire vigil.

Saint Lazaros argued the mortification of the body and the ascetic practices towards his disciples by quoting the models of the ascetics of ancient times who validated these practices by acquiring the holiness canonically recognized by the Church. An example is resting on the special stool and not lying in bed. Saint Lazaros taught his disciples that it was practiced from the very beginning by the Egyptian monks, according to the angelic inspiration received by Saint Pachomius.⁴¹

5. CONFIRMATION OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF SAINT LAZAROS ASCETISM

Asceticism achieves its goal when the virtues acquired from its practice lead and merge into love. Although its character is primarily spiritual, love acquires consistency through deeds, especially those that show participation in the life of one's neighbor.⁴² Although asceticism implies eremitism, it does not exclude contact between the saint and his fellows, monks and laymen alike. The model of the hermit, which returns after a period of solitude and spiritual growth and founds monasteries for the disciples who inevitably gather around it, is consecrated since the beginning of monastic asceticism. Thus, the asceticism hidden by hermitism becomes visible, not ostentatiously displayed, but revealing itself in its effects.

One of these effects is the acquired grace of miracle-working, of which Saint Lazaros was also worthy. The most common miracles concern the provision of people's food needs. Following the Savior's model, Father Lazaros multiplied bread, wine, cheese or peas in times of shortage. It increased the harvest of beans on the land beside the road when the disciple monks complained that the people who passed by were picking all the beans. Saint Lazaros commanded them to leave those who needed to take, and they hardly let themselves persuaded to go and collect what was left, being sure that there was nothing left in the field. But the harvest was much richer compared to the best years or the situation in which the field was guarded and nobody would take any beans.

⁴¹Paladie, *Istoria Lausiacă*, translated by Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2007, p. 72.

⁴²Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă* ..., pp. 24-26.



From the miracles directed to people there is no lack of bodily or spiritual healings. A man who had suffered an attack from the devil fell paralyzed to the ground. After being taken to the nearby church and sleeping there, as was the custom in such cases, and after being anointed with holy oil, the man recovered, even began to speak, but one hand remained paralyzed and so twisted that his fingers passed through his palm, protruding on the other side. Saint Lazaros healed him in a dream after the man had visited him a few days before at the monastery asking for his help.

Saint Lazaros also showed up to speakers with the saints, even daring to emotionally “blackmail” Saint George. When one of the horses of the monastery was stolen and the feast of St. George was approaching, Father Lazaros told the monks who went to a nearby metochion where they usually celebrated St. George, to tell him that if he does not make the horse appear, they will not celebrate his feast. The next day the horse was found on the pasture near the metoch.

Another miracle on nature was that of the diversion of a very large boulder deployed from the mountain, apparently also by the devilish power, which risked to tear down the cells or the other buildings in the monastery while the monks were inside. At the cry of Father Lazaros, the boulder bypassed the buildings, passing through the monastery without doing any damage.

Following the rescue from the shipwreck of a ship for the prayers through which one of the travelers called the aid of Saint Lazaros, another traveler came on pilgrimage to Mount Galesion to meet the saint, also becoming a believer with a truly Christian life. Saint Lazaros even received the power to prolong the life of one of the monks. Being a person who loved poverty and obedience, he received an extra day of life, wanting to celebrate once again the Baptism of the Lord.

The greatest miracle, as Gregory the Cellarer records, is that of the foundation of the three monasteries made of the dry stone of the arid and inhospitable mountain. Father Lazaros, persevering in the most difficult conditions of life and resisting the devilish attacks, attracted like a magnet those who sought salvation, illuminating their path like a beacon to the monastery. Many of those helped or healed received the monastic robe, others becoming true Christians and living as an example to those around them. The foundation of the monasteries is confirmed as wonderful by the Venerable Lazaros himself, who confessed that it was made following the divine inspiration.⁴³

The foundation of the monasteries is the one that confirms the fulfillment of the purpose of the asceticism of Saint Lazaros, because through these monasteries he has directed his care, attention, love of people not only to his monks, but to all those who have ever asked him in one way or another for help. He remained faithful to his determination to be merciful, a virtue with which he adorned himself from the very beginning. He endured beatings and strife from his uncle and from the notary at the Monastery Strobelion, at the age of 12, for giving to the poor what the two avariciously collected. Later, he did the same with the bread and money received in his travels, annoying the monks who accompanied him. Even his monks did not fully understand that the purpose of asceticism is to discover and increase love for one's neighbor, often reproaching him for the fact that the resources of the monasteries were shared with all those who came to the monastery to receive the blessing. Father Lazaros received these insults and reproaches with the grace specific to his deep

⁴³Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 346, p. 247.



humility and with a joy as intense as his flight from praise from men, humility that fully confirms the authenticity of his asceticism.

The asceticism of Saint Lazaros is closely related to his status as a monk. He himself supported the chinovial model for his monasteries, the emergence and growth of the congregations of disciples around his pillars, supporting this view. Even though stylitism was one of the criticized types of asceticism, Saint Lazaros could practice it in the middle of the community, although it should not be lost sight of the fact that his successive move from one pillar to another was made in order to acquire the tranquility of solitude. Due to its construction and shape, the pillar was built in a demi hermitage in which the saint had a few moments of “removal” from people, without really leaving them. In monasteries, the ascetic rhythm was imposed only by the emphasis on respecting monastic votes, seemingly easy to keep compared to the asceticisms practiced by Father Lazaros himself. However, he constantly reminded the monks that the observance of the votes had to be done with great exactitude. The monks did not have to own absolutely nothing personal, money, working utensils, two pieces of clothes or even icons in their cells, being forced to participate in the absolutely all public activities of prayer, meal, work. However, the monks had the freedom to act according to their will, but they quickly found out on their own skin that the advice given by Father anticipated the consequences of their actions, thus convincing themselves that obedience protected them from many falls. Obedience was cultivated with care and delicacy by Saint Lazaros. The absolutely austere regime in the monasteries was not aimed at leveling the personality of the monks from any point of view. The less trained were encouraged to excel in the work of their hands, and those educated to praise the Lord singing or in prayers, without considering themselves spiritually superior.⁴⁴ Prodigal sons, the monks who had received the robe out of an interest and not from the call and who left the monastery under various pretexts, were seated at the table with those who had not left Father Lazaros. This annoyed them just as in the parable of the prodigal son, but Saint Lazaros turned these happenings into true spiritual lessons.

The freedom to practice asceticism within the monastery was also respected. Saint Lazaros did not impose a harsh asceticism on those who he knew they could not practice, nor did he restrict the truly willing monks.⁴⁵ Although he stopped the extreme asceticisms, his monks found various ways of needing each other, adding them to the obedience they had to fulfill. One walked barefoot in the winter, bringing the water from the spring, and when the Father commanded him to wear shoes, he wore it only a part of road, taking off the shoes again when he was not seen; also, having a long beard, he let it get wet by the water from the spring and freeze, being then ripped off by the wind. Another monk, very much wanting to climb on a pillar and being very young, first received the ascetic test of silence. For this he used to hold stones in his mouth or pretend to be insane, enduring various physical punishments from others. Another monk never sat down, but stood only standing at church services, and in his cell he built a harness to keep him standing if he fell asleep at prayer.

In addition to the cenobitic model agreed by the Venerable Lazaros, he nevertheless allowed some monks to practice hermitism accompanied by a harsher asceticism, similar to his own. After a thorough training in the monastery and long observation, they received the blessing to climb on the pillars according to the model of their Father.

⁴⁴Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 182, p. 274.

⁴⁵Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 181, p. 273.



CONCLUSION

Holiness is humanity's most fascinating achievement, and it cannot be fulfilled outside of asceticism. The anonymous monk seems to forget that keeping the commandments and steadfastness in the good thought that he considered the true ascetic practice, is due to the external asceticisms to which the body is subjected. In Saint Lazaros we have such a typical model of a saint who practiced extreme asceticism on the pillar. The superhuman needs through which he subjected his bodily urges to the soul, at the limit of immaterialization, show the Venerable Lazaros as belonging to the spiritual world to the same extent as the material one. His accession to the celestial heights as an ambassador of mankind reveals him as a householder and “forerunner” of angels in the service of human kind. The name of the *isangelos* given to the monastic life acquires in the case of Saint Lazaros double brightness through the familiarity and piety of the saint towards the angels. Standing on the pillar, between heaven and earth, Venerable Lazaros unites not only angels with people, but also people among themselves in understanding, compassion and love: the coveting monks with the less ascetic, the monks with the poor laymen who come to the monastery for food under the pretext of blessing. By allowing his body to be food for insects and living under the open sky, he also fulfilled the command given to man to spiritualize the entire creation, becoming his master again. Also, the presence of the pillars of Saint Lazaros in the midst of the monasteries demonstrated that the cenobitic model and extreme asceticism are not incompatible according to the criticisms of the age. In fact, none of the other criticisms of extreme asceticism are justified. The resemblance of ascetics to suicides, by considering this type asceticism as unnatural, is forced given that almost all known stylists lived over 80 years, Saint Lazaros dying at the age of 86.

The accusation of vain glory is also unfounded given that genuine ascetics in general preferred solitude over gatherings of people who would have witnessed their miracles and praising them. The Venerable Lazaros even fought a fierce battle to remain on the unfriendly and barren Mount Galesion when the Metropolitan of Ephesus tried to transfer him to the monastery of Bessai, more comfortable, but exposed to the large flow of pilgrims. The most important revelation, however, brought by the superhuman asceticism, is that of the human nature brought by Saint Lazaros close to perfection, adorned with gentleness, warmth, compassion, understanding, forgiveness and an sacrificial and endless love for people.



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