OBJECTIVE FAITH AND WEAK TRUTH

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Abstract

Religious faith is linked to the belief that such faith is bound to the truth. Truth gives meaning to the conduct of a believer; it gives him certainty that he is not mistaken. The believer needs to understand the truths of faith, because truth is transcendent in nature and beyond human intellectual possibilities. Man is not exempt from the obligation to seek the truth, because the search for truth is the search for God in the life of an individual. Objective faith relies on the mediation of the truth, which is defined in the teaching of a particular religion and it is convinced of its own infallibility. This leads the believer to formalism, in which the daily search for God is replaced by performing prescribed rituals without seeking an immediate relationship between man and transcendence. Moreover, confrontation between religions raises a question of whether we can talk about one genuine religion with a corresponding objective faith. If we question the absolute authenticity of religion, what possibilities for infallibility and authenticity of the faith of the individual remain?

Keywords: objective, faith, week truth, postmodern, condition

1. Setting out the problem

The history of European thinking unfolded from Greek philosophical tradition, which, in its grounding, incorporated the concept of truth as the aim of our search and action. There are several reasons why we are focused on seeking the truth. In the ancient context, the truth is liberating; man does not only know, but as a wise being also understands why and how things are happening around him. The recognition of truth enables him to understand what the aim of his existence is; truth gives him the answer regarding what he should do and what rules he should follow. Truth became a key term, not only because it gave meaning to human existence, but also provided an instrument to assert oneself among those who do not know the truth [1]. Actions based on the truth were reasonable and wise, and they brought success to the man. Ancient ontology (considering Aristotle's thinking) was convinced about the unity of good, truth and beauty. If something was real, it was also good and beautiful. A belief was settled during historical development that the mind is governed by logical rules

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and achieves the truth, which is beyond Physics, and it will act according to this truth.

Reality and practice have not always proved this belief to be right. On the one hand, there were holders of power who adjusted the truth to their needs, and on the other hand, there were many ordinary people in whom the passion for eudemonia was never awakened. Seeking the truth was perceived as a dignified, necessary job. However, it was limited to those with intellectual abilities and time. Others were assigned either to rule or to carry out common daily duties. In a better scenario, the ruler surrounded himself with wise men to whom he listened; in a worse scenario, he followed his own desires to reinforce and expand his power. As pointed out by Machiavelli, morality is one of the tools used by a ruler to control his people. However, such short-term thinking does not reflect the historical dimensions of the existence of man and his civilized and ontological anchoring. As Palitefka points out, the simplicity and transitory nature of solutions may lead to a breakdown of civilization. The collapse is caused by the absence of moral principles [2].

2. Objective vs. subjective

Even though force followed the rules, from the beginning it sought a way to get legitimized, thus convincing others that it was justified to hold the power. If the ruler derived his power from force, i.e., taking control of the country and using force to maintain order, he was seen as a barbarian who, as a result, could expect nothing but resistance. If he presented himself as a ruler by God's will or an agent of God on Earth, then undoubtedly he would be obeyed. The connection of power to transcendence ensured respect and also some obedience. After the fall of the Roman Empire, such a reign was not a problem because a strong bond between the secular power of state and the Church was established in Europe. Popes blessed the rulers, or even crowned them, establishing a religious nature of state governance. On the other hand, it was absolutely inevitable for the people of one ruler to follow the same religion; without it, appealing to the religious nature of the power would have been pointless. The metaphysics of one truth worked as a linking element in society. World, nature and mankind were ordered in hierarchy, and knowing the truth flowed through individual levels from God to the Pope, clergy, and rulers to ordinary human beings. Lyotard calls this model a big story that was created as a simplified model of everything. It is a great narration in which everyone has his place and role. From the philosophical point of view, it is a metaphysical interpretation in which every action is set into a historical context. Mankind developed from the age of unreason to reason, from the state of sin to redemption. This historical context was adopted by Hegel and later by Marx [3]. Great historical stories, however, do not reflect the need for the presence of moral values and self-transcendence of the human being. Valčo, Králik and Barett point out that a person's transcendence into history does not reflect his autonomy, and thus he becomes a subject of history [4].

The metaphysical concept of history disrespects individuals and their needs. On the contrary, an individual is always incorporated into a whole that is truthful, which leads him to a completion of his own existence. This great metaphysical story became a starting point of modernism and modern thinking, which was marked by one big change: a transition from faith to reason, or a return to senses. The return of faith to reason was an attempt to restore the logical, empirical, and especially scientific explanation of the world and the place of man in it. What remained unchanged was the preservation of duality, which in the previous periods was seen and interpreted in connection with faith. Everything in harmony with religious teaching was good. What was not in accordance with the teaching of the Church was wrong and had to be rejected and condemned. Modernism also followed a similar philosophy. Truth that established the legitimacy of modernism was represented by the enlightened reason and stood in a sharp contrast to the irrational and often the religious. Faith was seen as a step back, because it was based on improvable and unscientific certainties. Therefore, it was often pushed aside. Modernism equally held the idea of progress that was thought of as historical events moving forwards. As in ancient times, the truth of reason was to liberate mankind. Freedom in ancient times, as well as in the New Testament times, was symbolized by doing good. But freedom of modernism was associated with moral relativism. The new moral was to be scientific and modern and should not lead man to self-renunciation, humbleness and modesty. On the other hand, as demanded by Francis Bacon, it was reasonable to control nature and conquer it as a tool to satisfy one's needs. Instead of a spiritual life, individual and Social ethics, Psychology and Sociology appear as scientific tools that reflect the functioning of the human soul and society [5]. With the help of scientific tools we can make a person happy and a society functional.

Modern society initially did not function as a whole — at least in the context of Europe. It was constantly confronted with polarization, which the society wanted to overcome dialectically. Otherness was a subject of mockery and also a source of danger that needed to be eliminated. Despite new ideals of freedom, equality and brotherhood, modernism reached its peak in the form of the world wars. Idealism and the belief that humans had good sense changed into ideologies that outwardly seemed rational but inside had meaningless essence. Despite being rejected by the Enlightenment and the growing secularization, religious faith kept its original position against what was different, and believed that what contradicts faith leads to a different faith. Religious faith and enlightened reason had the same basis, which opposed the different, rejecting it, or at least subordinating the different to its own logic. Postmodernism comes with various solutions; some of them are further discussed in this article. In the19[th] century, a long time before the emergence of postmodern thinking, S. Kierkegaard appeared and from the position of existentialism rejected the structure of modern knowledge and modern faith [6-8]. He suggested solutions that were accepted, though not explicitly by postmodern writers.

3. Postmodern Kierkegaard

The starting point of Kierkegaard's criticism is formalism, which is a typical attitude for the mass experience of faith that is bound to an institution and also the external acts associated with practice of faith. As already mentioned, this attitude was not exceptional at all, because the beliefs of faith were so complicated that they defied orientation. People did not have time to think about God's words. Instead, they listened to teachers and followed their instructions. As a result, their intimate relationship with God faded away and faith became a cultural issue, a mere membership in a group without any authentic relationship to God. Actually, Kierkegaard criticizes faith that is too close to the metaphysical concept of truth created by Modernism. The truth of reason can rescue us; science, technology and progress will solve all our problems, and we will wait for the right moment when all this happens.

In relation to Kierkegaard's criticism of Christianity, Králik and Török talk about a scandal [9], which Repar describes as a scandal of decision, and thus the inevitability of choice a person faces, which puts him in various existential situations. This inevitability of existential choice is associated with uncertainty, which may lead to fear. However, fear cannot be effectively integrated into the future, which is built on scientific knowledge and progress.

Repar adds that if we follow Kierkegaard's ideas, we are accepting a truth and a lie at the same time. We are inexplicably intertwined into the social, political, ethical and religious context. It is the bipolarity of human beings that is characteristic for a position of man in being-in-the-world [10]. Rationality gets into conflict with faith, as it was in the case of Abraham, who has to face the dilemma of reason and faith. God promised him progeny and then asked him to sacrifice his only son. Such an irrational requirement is in contrast to reason and experience. In modern church and modern Christianity, irrationality is accepted only with difficulty. Rational discourse, which from scholasticism is intertwined with Christianity, builds almost all faith on rationality and moves toward science. The life of an individual, however, is not a science. Kierkegaard was not distracted by the vision of a simple living of existence, which would be rationally justified. He did not accept the discourse of Science, which can solve all the problems of man. On the contrary, his stance is based on awe of the transcendent, which we cannot penetrate with reason [11].

Science offers a mechanical picture of the world in which everything works like a well-programed machine. Positivism wanted to program both man and human society. Sociology aimed to reveal rules on the basis of which changes happen in human society and govern people. The church of Kierkegaard's time acted similarly, and it is not so rare for the contemporary church, either. Ritualization of religious life has become formal. Rituals are repetitive actions that have become matters of culture rather than a living faith or an authentic relationship with God. Rationalization of faith did not lead only to an attempt to understand God, but also to understand his plans for us. Something like this was impossible for Abraham. God's will is beyond all understanding,

and it cannot be assumed what his plans are for us [12]. However, in a traditional church there is a repetition of liturgical cycles and rituals. A linear existence of man, in which God's will is reflected, thus becomes a cyclic repetition of liturgics that copies the rhythm of nature. However, repetition of cycles is not a repetition of which Kierkegaard talked. Repetition of liturgical cycles is not progressive; the man constantly falls into sin and constantly gets out of it. Church as an intermediator in this process is seen as a barrier between God and the man. The living of this God-man relationship is mediated, ritualized and impersonal.

As already mentioned, the ritualization of spiritual life is in a certain way connected with the tendency of modern science to mechanize the world. Mechanization and automation of spiritual life lead to the production of mass society, despite being based on religious principles. Kierkegaard almost prophetically points out the danger that could become a real problem not only in churches, but also in secular societies. This danger is a society based on non-authentic individuals. Such an individual is led by a given course of events, and society solves all his problems. Just as church ensures salvation, society ensures the pension and medical care. The individual is taken care of perfectly in a mass society. It is very important that he does not have control of his life and does not see things differently, so he would not bring a new dimension of his own subjectivity into the mass society. The critics of mass society have a lot in common with religious rebels like Kierkegaard. This rebellion is based on an attempt to break free from the automatic performance of ritual acts and to seek the truth that is subjective. However, subjective faith has no place in Kierkegaard's philosophy.

4. Weak thought

As Kierkegaard reflects automatic faith and formal religion, Vattimo similarly reflects the problem of absolute and generally valid truth [13]. As mentioned earlier in this article, modern thinking is bound up with absolute truth, which is the only one and indubitable; it is the truth of reason, which all the people have to accept. Vattimo points out that truth which we accept through faith also has the same nature. Both ways of seeking the absolute truth lead to the building of a metaphysical system that would provide the absolute description of all. In the name of truth, we can pursue, condemn, conquer, or eliminate others. The modern image of truth exists in the premise that it would be acceptable for all people in the world, all people will abide by it, and all people will boast that they are cosmopolitan because they are governed by truth. History has shown that pursuing the concept of one truth has failed. It has failed to achieve a general acceptance of truth, but it has managed to achieve the creation of several systems of totalitarian regimes that enforce their own versions of truth. There was no mutual communication between these regimes, but instead an on-going ideological struggle. Resignation to the truth of ideology has caused the emergence of postmodern subjectivism [14].

In relation to the above mentioned transition to postmodern subjectivism, Vattimo talks about weak thought [13]. Weak thought is opposite to the metaphysics that represents strong thought. Strong thought is characterized as not admitting any doubt about its truth and it is convinced that the truth has a general validity. It settles not only the metaphysical concepts of its time, but also the authoritative regimes and attitudes that present themselves as an alternative. The uniqueness of a weak thought consists of refusing to substitute the totality of metaphysical discourse with a totalitarian discourse, refusing to accept that marginal becomes central, thus what was once refused becomes a new centre, new truth or new religion. Vattimo connects weak thought with nihilism that has its root in Nietzsche's philosophy. The aim of his nihilism is not professing anything as the essence of the world or resignation on seeking the truth. It is an active nihilism that questions the certainty of absolute truth in the field of science and religion as well. Vattimo, in the spirit of postmodern relativization, critically approaches not only the modern way of thinking, but also the modern expressions Christian faith and its interpretation. A reason for this critical attitude is the link between faith and reason in relation to the metaphysical system that underlies the strong truth of modernism. A strong truth is one that refuses any doubt and alternatives. Everything different is considered to be bad and wrong. Infallible truth cannot accept anything other than a variant to its own perfection. The other cannot be tolerated; it must be denied, humiliated, and refused [14].

Similarly, religious faith does not admit any doubt, because a doubt is contrary to the absolute being of God and the belief in his perfection and infallibility. The problem, as Vattimo suggests, is that God — not our reason — is infallible. Like Abraham, we believe in God without any doubt about the legitimacy of his will and his plans for us. But our faith in God is transferred to an institution that represents God which, in turn, makes our faith equally indisputable. There also remains the danger of formalism. Faith is not to be bound to the truth, because faith can exceed reason, which is why we do not have to understand, as Augustine says [4, p. 107]. God is true in and of himself, but he shows himself to man in terms that one is able to understand. Faith in God is not based on one's understanding of God's revelation through logic, but faith comes through the feelings of despair, irony, and anger and that is incomprehensible to man [9, p. 49].

5. Conclusions

Vattimo and Kierkegaard share some common features. They admit the presence of irrational attitudes as ways to understand the man and the world. Their irrationalism, however, is not in refusing reason as a tool of knowledge, but in questioning its absolute requirements. It means that neither modern understanding nor religious faith can be a reason for suppressing the freedom of another man. In the background of seeking the truth, there is always some doubt;

we are not able to find an objective truth. Both authors refer to the subjective truth, which is not the goal, but a tool in the search for the transcendent.

Vattimo and Kierkegaard share a number of common beliefs. They admit the presence of irrational attitudes as part of knowing the truth. Their irrationalism, however, is not in refusing reason as a tool of knowledge, but in questioning its absolute requirements. It means that neither modern understanding nor religious faith can be a reason for suppressing the freedom of another man. In the background of seeking the truth, there is always some doubt; we are not able to find an objective truth. Both authors refer to subjective truth, which is not the goal, but a tool in the search for the transcendent. Vattimo is convinced that faith may not rely on reason, because with our reason we try to understand that which transcends it. Our reason tries to understand what is incomprehensible, but it is impossible. Therefore, modern reason must abandon its ambition of creating a metaphysical concept of universal truth. Modern reason must respect its limits and accept the idea of a weak truth, which is tied to the cultural, historical and social conditions in which it was formulated. A model of world religion that would be able to unite diverse rationalities is a utopian model. The dynamics of religious and cultural confrontation are now so strong that the idea of world religion seems utopian. Therefore, Vattimo speaks about a weak truth that does not see religion as a phenomenon based on the possession of truth, but one based on real acts. Faith is, therefore, not held by the believer, but it is an invitation to the act of love. A believer does good for the sake of it. The basic motivation of Christian action is love.

Vattimo, like Kierkegaard, believes that the fruit of human faith is action. It is the most important message that Christ has left for Christians and the humanity. Formalism in religion and the metaphysical concept of truth lead, according to both authors, to religious rituals that do not lead the believers to love their neighbours, but only to a formal renunciation. The repetition of prayers, human performance of prescribed activities or the reciting of phrases from the catechism, which may be often incomprehensible, do not usually lead a person to faith-based actions [15].

Abraham was determined to bring his son as a sacrifice to God. If governed by a strong truth, he would have refused to fulfil his role. Perhaps, he would have become wise and virtuous in history, but no longer would he have been a model of real faith. Faith does not follow logic, as God's calls are often incomprehensible. Acting in the name of faith often does not make any sense, and that is why it becomes a manifestation of a unique aspect of faith: man's relationship to something that exceeds him, and which he cannot understand.

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