

Metaphilosophical Appropriation of Religious Methods: Prayer and Heresy

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Abstract

The main purpose of the article is a metaphilosophical analysis of prayer from the point of view of the problem of the development of philosophical methodology. The problem of the nature of philosophy is considered by the authors as the problem of the implementation of philosophical thinking. Theology acts as an area outside of philosophical knowledge, from which the clarification of possible ways of philosophizing is carried out. The author of the article, analyzing the theological understanding of prayer, formulates the methodological principles of philosophical thinking. Prayer is understood in a broad sense as a way and form of a believer's existence. The article notes the complex nature of prayer, which reflects all aspects of faith.

Exploring the teachings of the Church Fathers about prayer, the author comes to the conclusion that remembrance is the central and formative act of prayer. Based on the views of Augustine of Hippo, the author discovers the special role of memory (*memoria*) in the process of thinking and prayer. Memory is considered by Augustine as an active ability of the mind to restore and retain a special thought in the process of thinking (and other activities). Prayer can be considered as a special kind of remembrance of God.

According to the author prayer practice cannot be accepted by philosophy without a significant transformation. A special procedure of methodological secularization is required, which would make it possible to separate purely theological components from prayer practice. Such a procedure was found in the philosophy program of the French philosopher François Laruelle.

The philosophical method, which will include the characteristics of prayer, will be a special way of carrying out thinking. The characteristics of prayer define a reflective method that can be described as thinking in the context of the held memory of the absolute. This method is both an intellectual technique and a special kind of philosophical practice that holistically includes various areas of philosophy (ontology, theory of knowledge, ethics, axiology, etc.).

Key words: prayer, heresy, metaphilosophy, philosophy, non-philosophy, method, method of philosophy, thinking, reflection, memory

Introduction

The nature and development of philosophy is the central metaphilosophical problem. Despite the fact that the essence of philosophy is problematized immediately from the moment of its origin, metaphilosophy formed as a separate area of research relatively recently [1]. Metaphilosophy can be defined as the field of philosophical reflection, in which the methods of philosophical analysis are applied to philosophy itself. It is easy to see that here lies the danger of the paradox *ad infinitum*, when the clarification of the nature of philosophical methodology requires the use of philosophical tools, which in turn must also be clarified again using philosophical methods. It is possible to prevent vicious circle in the development of philosophy if methods of non-philosophical fields are used as means of meta investigations. In other words, a productive expansion of philosophical methodology is possible with a metaphilosophical consideration of non-philosophical methods. We call this the metaphilosophical appropriation of non-philosophical methods.

Historical examples show that philosophy often receives a new impulse of development in mutual enrichment with related fields. Thus, in the Middle Ages, ancient philosophical thought significantly enriched Christian theology. However, philosophy also gains much benefit from such symbioses. Some forms of purely religious thinking can be very useful for philosophical methodology and provide a deeper understanding of the process of philosophical thinking. Prayer is one of these forms of non-philosophical thinking, which is an integral part of religious consciousness. However, if prayer practice is purified by the secular method of metaphilosophy, then it can be realized as a form of philosophical thought. The way of metaphilosophical purification we can find in the program of Non-Philosophy of the French philosopher François Laruelle, in the concept of Heresy in particular.

Prayer As A Form Of Religious Thought And Existence

According to Thomas Aquinas the prayer is reason speaking with God: «Now in the present instance we are speaking of prayer as signifying a beseeching or petition, in which sense Augustine says that «prayer is a petition», and Damascene states that «to pray is to ask becoming things of God». Accordingly, it is evident that prayer, as we speak of it now, is an act of reason» [2, II, Q83, A1]. Aquinas specifically emphasized that prayer not just act of speaking, it's an action of reason. Prayer is a special kind of intellectual activity but it's something more than thinking about God. Prayer primarily carries a message of repentance, and in its action has a complex form of acceptance of the ontological, epistemological and ethical truths of faith. This expresses the word *amen* at the end of the prayer, which is a symbol of acceptance and staying in faith: « a full *amen* can lead to sanctity and contemplation (!) leading up to the full expression of Trinitarian life in the Church» [3, p.14]. It requires from the praying full acceptance of the Christian world, which, at the same time, is impossible without preparing oneself for this world. Thus, prayer is a way of organizing thinking and at the same time a way of life for a believer.

Prayer requires not only an intellectual and declarative acceptance of the Christian world, but also to be worthy of this world. Genuine prayer is unthinkable without spiritual purification. But it is not the word of prayer itself that clean out from sinfulness, but rather the purifying striving for the good divine nature finds its expression in a prayer appeal. Prayer is a constant mental act of conversion and an existential act of being human in openness to divine

truths: «The point is not in words, but in faith, contrition and surrender to the Lord. With these feelings, you can stand before the Lord without words ... and it will be a prayer» [4, p.223]. In this case, prayer is likened to the state of the very life of a Christian, which flows in constant remembrance of God. This is the activity of the believing consciousness, in which all other spiritual, intellectual and everyday actions are carried out, including speaking with God in the ordinary sense. Basil of Caesarea gives the following broad understanding of prayer: «That it is necessary not to conclude prayer in words, but, on the contrary, to supply more power of prayer in spiritual will and in virtuous deeds, continuously continued through a whole life» [5, p.619]. Therefore, prayer is not only an appeal to God, but also aspiration to God in every deed. Every thought, every action is carried out in the constancy of holding the thought of God. Therefore, they themselves become the expression of this thought, they become a prayer of whole life. For example, if you think about an apple, you need to think about God at the same time. The thought about an apple is given through the prism of the thought about an absolute object, i.e., God. The ideal of saint life, when the thought of anything is the thought of God, and every action (even any simple one) is an expression of the thought of God.

Augustine fully expresses the essence of prayer through a special property of the human mind. He describes the existential characteristic of being constantly in the state of consciousness of the thought of God using the concept of memory. In his treatise «On the Gift of Perseverance», Augustine writes: «Further, since it is obvious that God gives one thing even to those who do not pray, such as the beginning of faith, and other things he has prepared only for those who pray, such as perseverance to the end, it is clear that he who believes that he has this from himself does not at all pray to have it» [6, p. 421]. Prayer appears as a conscious effort to keep oneself or a constant return to the divine gift of faith. This is a special kind of memory, when the restored thought is not discarded in order to give place for the next one, but, on the contrary, is preserved. Then the remembered thought serves as a common space for each subsequent thought. Therefore, prayer has a special practical meaning, because it is not just a process of thinking or speaking, but a way of life for a believer in a particular state of mind.

In form of prayer, according to Augustine, the central function of the soul is embodied. It is no coincidence that he assigns a special place among the functions of the soul to memory (*memoria*). Memory is a special ability of the soul because it embraces all other abilities. Without memory, a holistic perception of an object is impossible, because integrity is created as a memory about previous perceptions of an object. In this sense, memory is a way to move from single acts of the perception of objects in sensory experience to integral speculative phenomena. Therefore, according to Augustine, thinking (*cogito*) is directly dependent on memory, since it is derived from the ability to keep previous and current thoughts about the subject in a holistic state of consciousness: «And how many things of this kind does my memory bear which have been already found out, and as I said, placed as it were at hand, which we are said to have learned and come to know which were I for some short space of time to cease to call to mind, they are again so buried, and glide back, as it were, into the deeper recesses, that they must again, as if new, be thought out thence, for other abode they have none: but they must be drawn together again, that they may be known; that is to say, they must as it were be collected together from their dispersion: whence the word «*cogitation*» is derived» [7, p.247].

Thus, memory according to Augustine is a fundamental intellectual function. Memory is a kind of foundation on the basis of which all other abilities of the soul are realized. Just as prayer in a broad sense is the essence of saint soul's life, memory in Augustine's theology is

the thinking essence of the soul in general. We can say that prayer is a special kind of memory. The subject of mental reconstruction is the thought of God, more precisely, the state of consciousness of thinking about God is restored. The very idea of God is already contained in the memory, but not as the result of sensory experience or logical conclusion, but as an undoubted truth bestowed by God himself. Prayer is a special form of timeless memory due to a special subject. The usual act of remembering is aimed at restoring in the imagination some event of the past. In this sense, memory always refers to some moment in the past, which we strive to re-imagine as it was. Such memory inevitably is tied by subjective experience, since it is always relative to the lifetime of the individual himself. In contrast, the object remembered in the act of prayer has no such relativism, since it is not a memory of a moment in the past. The subject of prayerful memory is not given in the time and is not the experience of the life of the rememberer. The subject of memory in prayer is absolute in the sense that it is reconstructed without any aspect of time. Prayer as a kind of memoria is not a memory of the past, since the thought of God does not send the rememberer to an earlier moment in his life. God is transcendent to time and human life, so prayer is a timeless remembrance of an absolute subject. A similar example of recollection that transcends individual life is Plato's ἀνάμνησις.

The following fundamental methodological principles can be distinguished from the described essence of prayer:

- 1) prayer is a state of mind of active remembrance;
- 2) the subject of the reconstructed thought is a certain transcendent absolute;
- 3) the thought of the absolute as a general idea, in reference to which any other idea can become meaningful;
- 4) prayer is the perseverance of being in a state of remembrance of the absolute;
- 5) prayer is the believer's way of existence.

Heresy As A Method Of Non-Philosophy

The given characteristics of religious prayer practice clearly demonstrate that it can be used as a specific way of implementing philosophical thinking. Appropriation by philosophy of this form of practical work with thinking can contribute to the development of methodological tools. However, it is clear that prayer practice cannot be accepted by philosophy without a significant transformation. A special procedure of methodological secularization is required, which would make it possible to separate purely theological components from prayer practice. This requires a metaposition outside the religious and philosophical consideration of prayer. Such a metapoint of view can be provided by Francois Laruelle's concept of Non-Philosophy.

Laruelle considers heresy as a way to transcend the boundaries of a particular religious system into the metaspace of Non-religion. He uses the example of the origin of the Gnostic heresy. According to Laruelle, gnosis as a form of religious heresy, borrowing philosophical ontology, supplements it with a mythological component. The insufficiency of the borrowed ontology is complemented by allegorical plots that transform it into an object of faith, i.e. realizing ontology already in the context of a religious system: «The religious forms of heresy, gnosis, had only the ontological instrument of philosophy at their disposal so they compensated for this inadequacy with a profusion of myths and for which they were often reproached and came to swell the record of indictments» [8, p.68].

Initial insufficiency is a hallmark of heresy, it begins with a fundamental dissatisfaction with the existing voids in the system of knowledge or belief: «Heresy is less a total knowing disguising a philosophical faith than a theory determined by an unlearned knowing» [8, p 68].

Heresy as a method is rebellion against the insufficiency of the existing system. Heresy begins as a vision of voids in the existing system of explanation and the filling of this insufficiency. The difference between dogma and heresy, therefore, according to Laruelle, is that dogma has a sense of intellectual contentment and sufficiency against which heresy revolts. In turn, heresy, satisfied with its rebellion, becomes dogmatized, so rebellion and dissatisfaction must be constant: «Heresy is formally distinct from the various types of decision with which it tends to be confused. But it is capable of making possible their genealogy without being by definition commutable with them» [9, p. 266].

It is necessary to distinguish between particular religious systems, which are called heresies in relation to a conditionally chosen stationary point of dogmatic statements, and heresy as a path of pure separation. Heresy in its purest form, according to Laruelle, is «The Separated-without-separation» [9, p. 271], i.e., transition without the formation of a relative opposition dogma-heresy. Further, we will refer to this understanding as the term «heretization» in order to distinguish it from specific religious systems, which are called heresies regarding conditional dogma. Heretization as a method is separation as such, i.e. regardless of what it is separate from. Heresy as a specific religious belief system is always set in a system of relative intellectual coordinates, it is a heresy in relation to what is supposed to be true. In this situation, the heresy-dogma relationship is relative, the opposite point of view, considered as false knowledge (in the act of first decision, in Laruelle's terminology), is called heresy, and one's own position is dogmatized as the truth-in-last-instance. For example, the dogmatic teaching of Clement of Alexandria on true gnosis is no less heresy from the point of view of the Valentinianism.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above:

- 1) any heresy can become a dogma if it is satisfied with the result of its rebellion;
- 2) at the basis of any dogmatic system lies the original heretization as a pure act of the rebellion against all intellectual insufficiency
- 3) heretization is always the position of a non-religion, i.e., outside of any religious system;
- 4) hereticization can provide a secular context for the consideration of prayer, in which it will reveal its possible metaphilosophical significance.

Summary

We have determined that prayer is a form of work with memory in which the thought of the absolute is restored. In religious sense, prayer is a way of dogmatization, representing a special practice of repeated affirmation and acceptance of religious truths. Rhythmic reproduction of unchanging positions of faith is the organizing principle of religious thinking and life, protecting it from change. Such remembrance is related to the past, since the truths of a particular religious system can only be learned through memorizing of the past, such as the past deeds of God or saints. Paradoxically, this dogmatic understanding of prayer is the opposite of Augustine's *memoria* and Plato's *ἀνάμνησις*. The act of remembering for Augustine is the reconstruction of the timeless absolute, in other words, it is not what was, but what exist

regardless of history and time. According to Laruelle, this type of remembering can be called memory-without-past. Dogmatic memory-prayer is aimed not at the reconstruction of the absolute in one's own thinking, but at the absolutization of the past understanding. The idea of the absolute in a religious system becomes the truth-in-the-last-instance, since the subject of thinking is not the absolute, but a historical fact raised to the absolute. We can say that a substitution occurs when, instead of an intellectual search for the absolute, a particular representation is absolutized. Satisfaction of a religious system with given representation creates a dogmatic religious system as a set of truths-in-last-instance. It is possible to secularize the dogmatic idea of prayer with the help of its hereticization, after which it can be considered as a philosophical method.

Conclusion

Hereticization restores intellectual dissatisfaction, and therefore heretical prayer will restore the absolute not with a dogmatic sense of truth-in-last-instance, but with gaps of obscurity. The Absolute in this act will always be given as a content-indefinite intuition, the fullness of which inevitably eludes any dogmatic truth. The Absolute as the subject of such thinking is always greater than any concrete representation given in this act of thinking. Therefore, the dark mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa is closer to heresy than to dogma, since the pathos of nescience of God is extremely strong.

The philosophical method, which will include the characteristics of prayer appeal described above, will be a special way of implementation of thinking. The above characteristics define the reflective method, which can be described as thinking in the context of the held memory of the absolute. This method is both an intellectual technique and a special kind of philosophical practice, which holistically includes various areas of philosophy: ontology, epistemology, axiology, etc. Such a holistic way of philosophical thinking can be perceived as a way of the philosopher's existence, since the memory held in this special act of rebellious reflection can be used as an organizing principle of a person's daily existence.

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