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The Cause of Evil in the Philosophy of Bonaventure of
Bagnoregio

– summary of the Ph.D. thesis –

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Theme and argument of the Ph.D. thesis

Defining the cause of evil by means of referring to the frames offered by the medieval philosophy of the 13th century, according to the interpretation of Bonaventure, by means of placing the origin of evil in the faulty application of conscience of the principles of good possible either by an error of reasoning or by ignorance, or by a will that renders evil in an assumed manner represents the theme of the Ph.D. thesis. Human nature seen through the spectrum of Christian medieval philosophy is oriented in all its actions by the moral precepts and by the will to accomplish good being completed by the intervention of the divine grace that does not have a limitative role, but extensive both in knowledge, as well as in exercising the freedom to decide and to act at a practical level.

Bonaventure considers that philosophy represents more than an analysis of reality shaped in the light of reasoning because it transposes the human being in a continuous search of wisdom as a necessary step for establishing a spiritual itinerary according to a way of life oriented towards the knowledge of God, as supreme wisdom. In the hierarchy of sciences, philosophy is the one that meditates the way of sciences towards theology, thus making the base between reason and faith. Bonaventure clearly distinguishes philosophy from theology as heteronomous science, having a method of argumentation and personal principles to state that all arts and sciences converge towards the end of the mind's orientation towards God.

Bonaventure's philosophy can be noticed only through referring to a pre-modern understanding of philosophy that is in a relation of subordination to the divine revelation in an attempt to reconcile authority and reasoning in order to reflect true wisdom. Almost every time Bonaventure reads and interprets Aristotle's writings, the hermeneutic filter is Augustinian and Neo-Platonism through the attempt to harmonize them with Plato's works. Nevertheless, Aristotle's reading done by Bonaventure in the works from the beginning, such as *Commentary to the Sentences of Petrus Lombardus*, having a neutral tempt, is changing gaining a critical tendency in late works, such as *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*.

The fundamental questions of Christianity come back on the conditions of possibility of manifestation of evil in the world and are the following: *If human nature has been created good by God, and He is good, right and merciful, from where does evil occur? Which is the cause of evil? Does evil really exists in itself, does it represent a principle or can it be perceived only through men's unjust actions from a moral point of view?* These questions are assumed by me and represent the starting point for the present theoretic paper.

Argument. Purpose and goals of the Ph.D. thesis

The cause of evil in the philosophy of Bonaventure represents the main direction of study that I chose to study further after the Bachelor's studies and the Master studies. I believe that the study of the ideas of this medieval author is relevant for generating an integrator perspective on medieval philosophy, according to the way in which it was perceived in the Romanian scientific space, considering the fact that so far the researches on the Augustinian tradition (ergo from which Bonaventure himself is) are not as advanced as those referring to the Aristotelian tradition of medieval philosophy, represented by Thomas d'Aquino.

Another reason for which I have chosen to study further the work of Bonaventure is the one referring to way in which he reflects the ancient philosophical resources in a Christian manner: themes taken from Plato, Aristotle, Plotin or Neo-Platonic writers are thought from the perspective of rediscovering some works translated and commented by Arabian interpreters. Bonaventure makes, through his work, a synthesis of the philosophical and theological resources studied in the 13th century at the University from Paris. Among the discussed themes one can find the hierarchy of the world and of the faculties of knowledge, the issue of the world's eternity, the knowledge of the first principles, the definition of the concepts *being*, *essence*, *good*, the ontological argument of divine existence, the doctrine of divine illumination and the thesis of plurality of forms, but one of the most difficult problems and that tends to arouse a special interest in the directions of contemporary international research is the issue of evil.

Thus, I considered it to be a natural step the further study of the issue of evil by means of a research materialized in the Ph.D. thesis, as a continuation to the research on the human faculties of theoretic knowledge (intellect) and practice (conscience) completed by the papers for the Bachelor's studies and Master studies. By means of the Ph.D. thesis I want to highlight the way in which a classical theme is defined in the history of philosophy, the cause of evil, by the author that I have previously studied, considering his papers as a base for the configuration of a personal approach in shaping an answer regarding the question on the reason for which evil is allowed to manifest itself in a world lead by the principles of good dictated by God, the Supreme Good.

The research on the way in which Bonaventure understands the cause of evil is favorable in this moment for the Romanian scientific space, considering the fact that there are not many papers that deal with this subject, as well as Bonaventure's work, translated or written in the Romanian language, although the theme reflects an occurrent concern in the program of contemporary international research. In the present context of redefining the moral principles and

the way these can be accepted by the contemporary society I consider that the research on the cause of evil is beneficial in reestablishing a hierarchy of the true values and in illustrating their positive influence on the human behavior.

The study is both for the specialized researchers in the fields such as medieval philosophy, theology, anthropology, psychology, as well as for those that try to understand the mechanisms of human nature and the inerrant aspects that determines its behavior, to those that want to educate their will and to practice the conscience by means of the correct and efficient application of moral principles. The paper defines specific and general aspects of the human nature, the way in which the faculties of practical knowledge can be practiced and streamlined for the optimization of life in society or in community.

One of the objectives of the research is that of offering a model, a direction of research in the medieval ethics considering the observation of the possibility that certain aspects, ideas, can be recovered in the definition of ethics and contemporary philosophical anthropology. Also, another objective refers to the definition of the concept of *evil*, evaluated in the strict frame of practical philosophy of a certain type of negative human behavior.

Rediscovering an occurrent anthropological approach in the medieval philosophy in order to suggest a model of fundamental moral education on the balance of the relation of human faculties (conscience – will) as expression of the moral rectitude represents a secondary objective. From a social point of view, the finality of the study on human nature, following the frames of medieval practical philosophy, is understanding and assumption of the transfiguration of a simple person determined in its actions by instincts, compulsions, ambitions, vanity; his transformation in a correct person that guides his life according to the moral principles that are at the level of conscience and that acts by means of his will that is in consensus with divine will. It represents the materialization of the hope to live in a society where people are good and orient themselves in their actions according to the rational principles for the purpose of uniting them and dividing them as it happens when it acts according to some wishes and principles that are not subject to a process of self-reflexivity.

Also, from a scientific point of view, the finality of the research represents offering a landmark in crossing through the work of Bonaventure by means of the clarification of some concepts and theories specific to the tradition of Franciscan thinking, but also the suggestion of a new research direction in the Romanian medieval philosophy according to some lines of thinking focused on the interpretation of practical philosophy of the author.

Methodology of the doctoral research

The arguments that are the base of the suggested thesis are presented in an analytical manner by means of the interpretation of the causes and of the effects of a certain type of moral knowledge presented in a practical context by means of the positive or negative human behavior. The method of systematic analysis implies the observation in detail, the interpretation of frames, respectively of articulations, as well as of the logical structure of the arguments presented by the author in order to establish the occurrent connections that appear among the faculties of knowledge and the behavior of the moral agent.

The historical perspective is noticed at the level of the synthesis of certain philosophical and theological resources made by the medieval author in his work, also considering other works of his contemporaries, especially the approach of Thomas d'Aquino regarding the issue of evil, following at the same time the evolution of certain concepts used by Bonaventure to shape his work, the way in which they are transformed and are defined by the contemporary philosophy of moral. In making this analysis it is necessary to turn to a hierarchy or an order that implies the laying out of arguments from simple to complex, thus, the method is efficiently applied if the formulated arguments for the support of the thesis are thought in an unitary manner for its substantiation.

I chose a structure that reflects the deductive method of formulation and analysis of the presented arguments: from the general frame of Christian anthropology observed in the first chapter that classifies the different forms of manifestation of evil to the particular case of defining the cause of evil in medieval philosophy instantiated in the work of Bonaventure in the second chapter, to reach in the end at the delimitation and definition of the problem of weakness of human will as main cause of the moral active evil in the hope of shaping a possible solution regarding the reduction of the manifestation of evil at the human level after the education of will.

The analysis is noticed in the definition of constitutive elements of the balance of human faculties, so that by means of synthesis it is also presented the system of practical philosophy presented by Bonaventure in his writings, such as *Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, *Breviloquium*, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, *De reductione artium ad theologiam*. The secondary bibliographical sources used are represented by texts (studies, articles) included in the literature of specialty written in English, French and Italian.

The compared analysis made between the way of defining the issue of evil presented by Bonaventure and the one shaped by Thomas d'Aquino intends to observe the similarities and differences defined by the two approaches regarding the behavior of the moral agent.

Also, by means of the demarche of the synthesis applied to the practical philosophy made by Bonaventure, I intend to highlight the way in which the moral rectitude and the balance conscience-will includes the unitary idea of its ethical system included at a theoretic level in *Commentary to the Sentences of Petrus Lombardus* and in *Breviloquium*, and at a practical level in the treatise *The Journey of the Mind into God* and *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*.

By means of the methods of work used, one can find also the analysis of linguistic type necessary for the interpretation of main bibliographical sources written in Latin with the help of dictionaries and of encyclopedia of specialty.

Conclusions

After the analysis made regarding the definition of the cause of evil in Bonaventure's philosophy, it has been noticed the fact that evil occurs when will suffers from a natural weakness or one of intemperance. To this situation also contributes the faulty application of primary principles of good done by conscience in different contexts of issues from a moral point of view, due to ignorance. Even if evil is defined as being metaphysical, moral and physical, the only authentic form of evil is the moral one, especially the active one.

The metaphysical evil does not represent a real form of evil because the imperfection of creation is given by the way in which the world was created, from nothing and not from God, as such in its potentiality can be to the same extent both good, as well as evil, the upgrade being given by the conditions that regard most of the times the human behavior. At a metaphysical level, evil expresses a defect of the being measured according to the way in which it approaches or goes further more or less from the supreme good according to the theory of causes taken from Aristotle. The defect of being is correlated to the existence of multiplicity, of the diversity of entities that come from God and are created by Him, as such it is necessary a recognition of the presence of evil in the world because the existence of the universe in itself implies a distance more or less significant of the different entities that are in a connection identifiable with the First Principle.

The physical evil is just a consequence of the mistake or of the active moral evil, being also named passive moral evil because it appears as punishment of the sins committed. Although apparent, its cause is God because He is the one that decides correctly who must be punished and in what way for their mistakes, the origin is also in the negative human behavior which, had it not been wrong, it would have not determine any punishment. The finality of the punishment is yet not sufferance, but the redress of the one that made a moral mistake in order to be able to enjoy once again a good will, perfect in order to be able to shape a happy life. The punishment has the role to reestablish the order affected in the universe by means of sin according to the principle of justice: if sin alters order and justice pre-established in the universe, the balance can be given back only through the correction of the error made and of the one that made it.

The active moral evil or mistake is the real evil because only this one manifests itself as a free choice from man that assumes its making, either because he has a weak will from nature or weakened after the previous sins, or because from intemperance and ignorance, man starts believing that he made evil to the expense of other people, for his personal good it represents the real path by means of which one can reach self content and happiness.

Throughout the history that appears after the fall into sin, man reached to justify in different ways the existence of evil in his life and the possibility of coexistence of a good and just God with the pain present at the level of the world. Thus, there were different attempts formulated to deny the reality of evil and its ontological consistency, to prove that evil is relative and always depends on a good having thus a final effect in making this good. It has been tried to support the idea “of the best world among the possible worlds” expressed as answer to the absence of a perfect world in the sense of the elimination of evil, because otherwise together with this it would eliminate also certain necessary forms of good that appear after the presence of evil.

It has been defined the approach of evil in an anthropological manner, finding again its origin in the human nature responsible through the actions of the moral agent for the manifestation of a radical evil that reaches the level of principle in understanding the human behavior. The arguments against the idea that the present world is the best among the possible worlds are formulated to show that an evil that is radicalized no longer represents only an original aspect isolated in temporality, but a supreme saying as a fundament of all bad sayings of free will. In this respect, there is no reason enough for the manifestation of evil in the world.

The understanding of evil as something irreducible to human nature, that cannot be transgressed in the attempt to be attributed a clear responsibility only to a human instance, man not being unique and completely responsible for the presence and manifestation of evil in the

world, comes back to searching the cause of evil at the level of an entity created good, but which reaches to be bad after making a capital mistake of pride by means of which it tries to be substitute to God. The consequence of the attempt to substitute the devil ends in marking a constant opposition declared to God by means of the instigation of man to bad deeds and to disobedience to Him.

The anthropomorphization of God through His definition as pitiful, full of compassion to the sufferance of man, sharing his pain, but not being able to eliminate evil and sufferance determined by it, the evil that man himself causes by means of practicing the freedom given by God himself is defined after the theorization of Christ's sacrifice. From the chose of Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection, God suffers to the same extent for the affectation of his creation and permanently tries to help it to reach perfection, even if this means that it punishes it when it makes less mistakes that it really deserves, more according to pity and love than according to order and justice.

The bad act expresses each time a disorder of the will by means of the fact that it tends to chose changing good to the detriment of the one that does not change, and this fact happens because man is attached to what offers an immediate answer to his affective stimulus that he issues. He notices, first of all, that his need of affection is fulfilled in an immediate manner by created entities and similar to him, without having the capacity to understand that he must search the love that does not change, all of God and then the one of the created beings, because it was offered to him at first, although he did not manage to recognize it and to appreciate it.

Bad deeds or sins are of various types and can be considered capital, penal and final. The capital ones shape the desire to love and to have certain things or fear and desire to step away from certain aspects, sins can represent also the punishments suffered after some mistakes made previously and have the role of man's awareness for the committed mistakes, reestablishing the order and the universal justice. The final sins have an irremediable character and mark the human stubbornness to persist in evil and to step away from God, they can be forgiven only through the action of grace that is so strong it can pass through will and human freedom in order to do good.

After the compared analysis done on the theory of the issue of evil following the lines of arguments presented by Bonaventure and Thomas d'Aquino, it was noticed the fact that the premises from which the two medieval authors start are similar, both of them consider that will is the cause of evil, that this is understood as active and passive moral evil, but the difference occurs in establishing the manner by means of which the manifestation of evil can be stopped: Bonaventure favors the education of will, and Thomas the education of intellect.

It becomes obvious the fact the hypothesis according to which it was considered that the two authors find different origins to the issue of evil is not confirmed, the difference being in establishing the effects of evil and in the way in which it can be removed and not in the definition of the cause of evil. Both Thomas, as well as Bonaventure, use as source of substantiation of the arguments regarding the personal interpretation and description of the issue of evil on Aristotle and Augustine, in a particular way taking ideas from the works *Nicomachean ethics* and *De libero arbitrio*.

In the Bonaventure's philosophy one can identify the influence of Augustine by means of taking his fundamental idea on the cause of moral evil instantiated in human will and on the fact that the only real evil is the moral one or sin. At the same time, Bonaventure seems to anticipate Kant's idea that the formation of a moral character with the help of reason or of practical intellect through the education of deficient will can form a solution to the issue of active moral evil that manifests into the world.

The original sin does not represent the cause of all previous sins and neither the cause of the evil suffered by humanity after the fall, but it is only an effect of the deficient will has by the first persons in the state of innocence. The fall into sin and losing Eden describe a human drama reiterated by every individual that existed after the first persons, reaching till present days and passing through this: a state of happiness and superior fulfillment felt for a certain period of time changes through a wrong act in a condition of guilt, fall, sadness and unfulfillment. Because the act of disobedience of the first people reflect an ulterior condition of all other humans, the knowledge and understanding of the event, of the causes, of the effects and of its consequences can reach towards a knowledge and self understanding proper and authentic.

Bonaventure explains the way in which punishment was made and the divine decision to punish the first persons by means of the fact that God manages in a very careful manner and right the world that he created, thus he does not allow the existence of something without order in the universe. The mistake has order with punishment, for this reason, for the first persons, to the disgrace of sin follows the glory of justice. What lacked order through the fall from the order of nature, reaches to be reestablished by the order of justice and this order includes all the creation, therefore what removes itself from an order, reaches to be subject to the other form of order.

Anyone that has a good will must take care of it in the highest level, to educate it in order to maintain it good, to use it and to enjoy it completely, always carefully reflecting how important it is and how hard it can be annulled if the one that has it does not want this. Taking an idea from Augustine, Bonaventure defines a capital aspect for the theory of human will: it persists in good

for as long as man has the intention to keep it thus or to educate it to remain good or to make it better. The intention is the starting point in establishing the further character of will, it remains good or it becomes bad as long as man is determined and wants to keep it thus.

Will represents the movement of the soul and its orientation towards something, will is always “will for something” or “will for something well determined”, it cannot be simple will without an object towards which to reach; by means of the desire of a specific thing, will tends to something that was first judged by the practical intellect or by conscience and is considered valuable in order to be then chosen. The fact that will has the tendency to act according to a judgment of intellect that considers the desired object as valuable for the moral agent, redefines the dignity of will as being equal to the one of the intellect in the system of the faculties of knowledge.

In these conditions, Bonaventure supports the idea of a primacy of will, because the volitional faculty is above the intellectual one in the moment when someone acts: a person wants something and only after this first act of desire, the intellect can judge if that thing is good or bad, and after this judgment, the will tends to something that has been evaluated as good or bad. To be free means in fact that the moral agent has the power and capacity to desire and to choose in an equal manner both what is good, as well as what is bad.

The freedom to choose of will must be oriented towards what is correct from a moral point of view, and Bonaventure shows that this is possible to the extent in which man can find himself and can define himself as image and resemblance of God by means of his directed activity towards the imitation of the divine work in the personal works taking into consideration the fact that arts, crafts reflect a manner to touch perfection. In this respect, philosophy represents the first step for understanding the theological knowledge and to access the authentic wisdom necessary to the education and formation of a good character from a moral point of view that not only tends towards doing good deeds, but it also fulfills them following and recognizing the principles of good in all its activities.

As a consequence, the only solution to the problem of the manifestation of evil in the world is the education of will at the same time with the one of the intellect, so that the situations in which man makes mistakes from error of reason and from bad will to be diminished. The education of will can be made through the assumption of a spiritual itinerary where man, having a limited, imperfect nature and a will weakened by the original sin, lets himself be guided by God as unique model of reason and will to act correctly and to perform in an immutable way the good.