



Philosophical sciences

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RATIONALISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE METHOD

Europe has been fundamentally Christian at the heart of its culture since ancient Rome. Certainly, as Severino points out in his texts, European countries, in addition to their differences, do not unite into a common picture. Thus, for example, within politics there is one Europe, but within philosophy a very different one¹. The European part of the world owes its lack of semantic integrity to its unprecedented development in such directions as: natural science, philosophical, political and many others. For the same reason, in a global sense, Europe lacks a purpose². Nominally it can be indicated in normative legal acts, agreements, resolutions and so on, but in fact such a goal will have only a function of decoration and rhetorical reception. It is important to consider this, because from a retrospective point of view, the purpose has always been significant and has always connected people with God. By and large, the same is true for each of the European states. Perhaps this is the reason for the upheaval of consciousness that took place and gradually radicalised from the 17th century onwards, starting with the works of the pioneers of the path of scientific criticism of Scripture. Today the image of the teleological path of the state, the individual or society is found by many to be more than questionable. As a consequence, the percentage of atheists is growing, people give up a life of faith in the plan for a life full of ambitions and personal aspirations under the Nietzschean banner of the death of God. This is probably one of the reasons why religions and Christianity in particular are losing their power and are increasingly being questioned and explored in new ways. One of the most current ways

1 Severino, E. (2016). The essence of nihilism. Verso Books. URL: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=cm7nDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=The+essence+of+nihilism&ots=E3tTY0WjG7&sig=y6FiHh1_6cI-GYxMUgoA03FzzPAE&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=The %20essence %20of %20nihilism&f=false (22/08/2023).

2 Ibid.

of exploring Scripture is by rationalising it. This essay will focus on two main areas of rationalisation, namely the rationalisation of the concept of God through the works of Spinoza and Hobbes, and the rationalisation of the stories of Scripture themselves for the sake of gaining reliable historical knowledge through comparative analysis of the literature. The object of this essay is to examine the problematics of rationalisation of Christian doctrine.

Perhaps the first philosophers who dared to analyse Christian Scripture were Spinoza and Hobbes. Studies also note the heredity of their doctrines. Hobbes wrote that religiosity as a phenomenon is most likely inherent only in humans³. Nevertheless, he does not deny God. Although his position based on what he wrote above can be interpreted in such a way that it was humans who invented God, Hobbes had a different position. Repeatedly in his book «Leviathan» he makes it clear that he is a supporter of the fact that God was directly involved in the creation of Scripture through the prophets. Developing this thought, he concluded that it is worth distinguishing between the Supernatural (opus supra Naturam) and the Unnatural (opus contra Naturam)⁴. According to Hobbes God addressed humans using human language.

«From the very moment of creation, god not only reigned over all men through nature by virtue of his power, but had also special subjects to whom he proclaimed his commandments by voice, as man speaks to man. It was in this way that he reigned over Adam, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil»⁵.

Speech is the norm for humankind as a corporeal and spatially finite being, but not for God whose description is directly opposite to human beings. Of course, as in matters natural and in matters supernatural man requires proofs and in accordance with supernatural revelations need supernatural proofs than Hobbes called miracles. For Hobbes, nature is the instrument of God and changing its course or suspending it is a miracle⁶. In addition, Hobbes nevertheless supports the Christian tradition recognising its truthfulness and correctness.

The man, who later acquired the name «Prince of Atheists», although he was to some extent a follower of Hobbes, was to a greater extent his opponent in the field of philosophising about religion. Spinoza devoted a whole «Theologico-

3 Горан, В. П. (2018). Т. ГОББС И Б. СПИНОЗА О «БОГОДАННОСТИ» БИБЛИИ. *Сибирский философский журнал*, 16(4), 299–310. URL: <https://sibphil.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/173/137> (10/08/2023).

4 Ibid.

5 Hobbes, T. (1991). *Leviathan, or Matter, form and power of the state of the church and civil. Works: in*, 2, 3–590.

6 Горан, В. П. (2018). Т. ГОББС И Б. СПИНОЗА О «БОГОДАННОСТИ» БИБЛИИ. *Сибирский философский журнал*, 16(4), 299–310. URL: <https://sibphil.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/173/137> (10/08/2023).

Political Treatise» to the analysis of Christian doctrine, while Hobbes devoted a large part of his central work «Leviathan» to it. In many respects, one can also trace Spinoza's criticism of much of Hobbes' thought. First of all, Spinoza did not recognise the divinity of scripture pointing out that religion has always served only the state⁷. Several times in the treatise itself he pointed out that Scripture teaches nothing but obedience⁸. For Spinoza, religion has no theoretical value at all and exists only for the sake of its practical application, namely the subjugation of people.

«If the supreme secret of monarchical, rule,» he wrote, «and of extreme importance to it, is to keep men deceived, and to cover the fear by which they must be restrained with the loud name of religion, so that men fight for their enslavement as for their well-being, and consider it not shameful, If, on the contrary, in a free state nothing that brings misfortune can be conceived or undertaken, because to oppress by prejudice or otherwise curb the free judgement of any man is absolutely contrary to general freedom»⁹.

Spinoza also opposed the separation of the Supernatural and the Unnatural¹⁰. According to Hobbes, the Supernatural is defined as something that surpasses natural reason, and the Unnatural as something that contradicts it¹¹. In essence, however, it is quite vague. Spinoza himself expressed himself sarcastically with regard to one such supernatural incident:

«But I do not understand: how could people who previously knew nothing but the name of god, and who wished to hear him speak for the purpose of ascertaining his existence, how could they be satisfied with a creature who, say, said, «I am god» (a creature belonging to god no more than the other creatures, and not belonging to the nature of god)?» What, I ask, if god had made the mouth of Moses – but why Moses? – just even some animal – to utter and say the same thing: «I am god», would they have realised from this that god exists?»¹².

Essentially, for Spinoza, the Supernatural and the Unnatural are synonyms. This can be illustrated with an example as follows. If a flying camel starts singing children's songs, it will be Unnatural for both Hobbes and Spinoza, but

7 Горан, В. П. (2018). Т. ГОББС И Б. СПИНОЗА О «БОГОДАННОСТИ» БИБЛИИ. Сибирский философский журнал, 16(4), 299–310. URL: <https://sibphil.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/173/137> (10/08/2023).

8 De Spinoza, B. (2001). *Theological-political treatise*. Hackett Publishing.

9 Горан, В. П. (2018). Т. ГОББС И Б. СПИНОЗА О «БОГОДАННОСТИ» БИБЛИИ. Сибирский философский журнал, 16(4), 299–310. URL: <https://sibphil.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/173/137> (10/08/2023); De Spinoza, B. (2001). *Theological-political treatise*. Hackett Publishing.

10 Деборин, А. М. (1927). Мировоззрение Спинозы. Вестник Коммунистической академии, (20). URL: <http://russianway.rhga.ru/upload/main/035.pdf> (01/09/2023)

11 Горан, В. П. (2018). Т. ГОББС И Б. СПИНОЗА О «БОГОДАННОСТИ» БИБЛИИ. Сибирский философский журнал, 16(4), 299–310. URL: <https://sibphil.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/173/137> (10/08/2023).

12 De Spinoza, B. (2001). *Theological-political treatise*. Hackett Publishing.

if it turns out that the same camel was tapping lines from the Holy Scriptures with its hooves in Morse code and during this the Red Sea parted, it will be Supernatural for Hobbes, but for Spinoza the essence of this phenomenon will not change, it will remain as impossible. Moreover, Spinoza denies the prophets pointing out that if someone claims to possess something that is above the intellect then it is below the intellect and the prophets themselves personally could not overcome their limitations despite the fact that God was associated with them¹³. For Spinoza, God represents the nature of all things «Substance». Though Hobbes observed that whoever claims that God is the world denies his existence. Nevertheless Spinoza, considering this fact, wrote that everything exists either because of an external cause or because of a cause that contains its own nature. Since God is absolute, his nature cannot but contain a compulsory existence¹⁴. Hobbes also writes about the extended God and Spinoza's God also has the attribute of extension. There is also an opinion that Spinoza was influenced by extremely materialistic ideas, because of which Spinoza endowed Substance with thinking later¹⁵.

Nevertheless, since it is a question of rationalising the idea of God in this case, it is also necessary to remember how Spinoza imagines the mind and will of God. The point is that in his most important work he points out that God cannot have the same mind and will as human beings, since God would then have an understanding either complete (in the case of the original argument) or partial only of those things that already exist, which is impossible¹⁶. Thus Spinoza denies any teleologicality leaving everything to causality only:

«If, for example, from some roof a stone fell on someone's head and killed him, they will prove by this method that the stone fell precisely in order to kill the person, since if it had not fallen for this purpose by the will of a god, how could so many circumstances have come together by chance, since they are often combined in so many ways? You will answer, perhaps, that it happened because the wind blew, and the man was walking along this road? But they, however, will stand on their own: why did the wind blow at that time? Why was the man walking on that road at that exact same time? If you again answer that the wind rose at that time because the sea had begun to stir the day before in calm weather, and the

13 Горан, В. П. (2018). Т. ГОББС И Б. СПИНОЗА О «БОГОДАННОСТИ» БИБЛИИ. *Сибирский философский журнал*, 16(4), 299–310. URL: <https://sibphil.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/173/137> (10/08/2023).

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 De Spinoza, B. (1949). *Ethics* (No. 11). Simon and Schuster. URL: [https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ngRBDcXDGqAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Spinoza,+B.+\(1949\).+Ethics+&ots=3odqjEgtPt&sig=tHPv13CW8KLajDEjN43FEHxFF8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Spinoza+%2C+%20B.+\(1949\).+%20Ethics&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ngRBDcXDGqAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Spinoza,+B.+(1949).+Ethics+&ots=3odqjEgtPt&sig=tHPv13CW8KLajDEjN43FEHxFF8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Spinoza+%2C+%20B.+(1949).+%20Ethics&f=false) (20/08/2023)

man had been invited by a friend, they will again insist, for there is no end to the questions: why did the sea stir? Why was the man invited at that time? And thus they will not stop asking about the reasons until you resort to the will of God, i.e. to asylum ignorantiae»¹⁷.

For Spinoza, this form of God's «desires» is absurd. For if God desires something, he does not have it, which is ontologically wrong. It is also important to note that Spinoza's ideas echo not only the ideas of Hobbes (in more cases in the form of criticism), but also the ideas of Aristotle about the divine, and it is also important that according to the statements of the philosopher himself, he was not an atheist, but fought only with religious prejudices.

Certainly such understanding of the concept of God, which was initially proposed by the above presented researchers, does not fit into the format of the Christian faith at all. Also it is possible to note with certainty that everything described above cannot be compared with Christian doctrine precisely because of the rational approach. God as Spinoza's nature cannot be combined with the triple nature of the Christian God moreover the philosopher openly wrote that those who consider God as some mythical creator clearly do not know what they are talking about because it is not understandable from what kind of potency it is possible¹⁸. In relation to Hobbes, things are a little more complicated, but nevertheless it can be assumed that to a large extent the philosopher's ideas were not apologetics of established Christian doctrine at least as evidenced by the fact that Hobbes endows God with extension¹⁹. More generally, this indicates that the more radical the rationalism about God (from Hobbes to Spinoza), the more it departs from classical Christian theism.

The second type of rationalisation of Christian texts is historical. It seeks to eliminate all elements of fantasy from the texts in order to deal ultimately only with real historical events (Whipper, 2013). This method has been repeatedly criticised, largely due to the following reasons. First of all, proponents of this approach propose to identify the following events as absolutely taking place in the 30s and 60s of the 1st century AD. At the beginning of 30 years under the procurator of Palestine Pontius Pilate in Galilee performed a wanderer Jesus, who later moved to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem Jesus declares himself a prophet

17 De Spinoza, B. (1949). *Ethics* (No. 11). Simon and Schuster. URL: [https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ngRBDcxDGqAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Spinoza,+B.+\(1949\).+Ethics+&ots=3odqjEgtPt&sig=tHPv13CW8KLajDEjqN43FEHxFF8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Spinoza+%2C+%20B.+\(1949\).+%20Ethics&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ngRBDcxDGqAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Spinoza,+B.+(1949).+Ethics+&ots=3odqjEgtPt&sig=tHPv13CW8KLajDEjqN43FEHxFF8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Spinoza+%2C+%20B.+(1949).+%20Ethics&f=false) (20/08/2023)

18 Ibid.

19 Горан, В. П. (2018). Т. ГОБЕС И Б. СПИНОЗА О «БОГОДАННОСТИ» БИБЛИИ. *Сибирский философский журнал*, 16(4), 299–310. URL: <https://sibphil.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/173/137> (10/08/2023).

after which he was seized as a false prophet and killed. Then Jesus' disciples, who believed that he was a prophet and son of God, accept the idea that he had risen and would come again. The apostles John and Peter found the first community of the new faith in Jerusalem. Soon the new faith reaches the Greco-Catholic milieu and suddenly Saul, a native of Cilician Tarsus who had opposed the followers of Jesus calls him the Christ, the son of God, takes the name Paul and starts several religious communities in Rome, Ephesus, Galatia and other cities²⁰.

These events are proposed by rationalists as necessarily reliable even though some studies show that there are no other historical sources for the 1st century AD that mention Jesus Christ²¹. In essence, the figure of Christ is very problematic from this perspective. Firstly, it is extremely difficult to understand the worldview and character of this man his personality changes from text to text. There is an opinion that Christ was either fully or partially constructed as an image by theosophists to best meet the demands of the time and socio-cultural context. Thus, for example, in the Apocalypse Christ is a militant anointed one in the style of the Old Testament, and already in the «Epistles of the Apostle Paul» Christ is a product of Platonic philosophy²². When all the miraculous things are extracted from Christian texts, Jesus loses the ideological power of the founder of Christianity and appears as nothing more than a mad ascetic.

Moreover, in the case of the complete exclusion of all supernatural things from the Holy Scriptures, it turns out that Jesus could not have risen from the dead, if He ever existed at all, because the incarnation of God is also a miracle. Thus it turns out that the supporters of rationalisation of the sacred Scripture in an impulse of desire to get rid of the fiction, pushed it out of the door and locked themselves in and then let it in through the window. It is also likely that this theory faces criticism for attempting to view Christianity as a phenomenon that was born suddenly by two men, namely the Apostle Paul and Jesus Christ, while completely ignoring the historical context and the sects and beliefs that preceded it²³. Also, early Christianity was no stranger to the ideas of ancient philosophers, and Paul found in the heathen his main audience in the later and used Platonic terminology²⁴.

20 Виппер, Р. Ю. (2013). *Рим и раннее христианство*. Рипол Классик.

21 Ibid.

22 Виппер, Р. Ю. (2013). *Рим и раннее христианство*. Рипол Классик.

23 Ibid.

24 Виппер, Р. Ю. (1954). *Культура античности и христианство*.

Within the study of Christian texts as historical texts is also mentioned the work of a contemporary of that era, namely the historian Josephus Flavius. He documented the existence of religious groups such as the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essai. He also writes about a fourth sect, but does not name it. Between the Essenes and the early Christians, researchers find signs of heredity between them calling them «grandfathers» and «grandsons» of each other respectively²⁵. Likewise, the ideas of the early Christians resemble Seneca's ideas in many ways. For example, Seneca's beliefs in monotheism, Seneca's ideas («The Great State» and «our society») are a premonition of the universal church, the separation between body and spirit is present in both Seneca and early Christians and the ideas of the sanctity of the spirit of the righteous, the escape from society, politics, the path to self-improvement and the concept of equality of people from birth is also present in both early Christian authors and Seneca²⁶. Researchers who have studied the writings of Josephus Flavius have also noted that his writings were probably significantly altered by church officials, making references to Jesus Christ in his writings seem to be questionable evidence in favour of Christian theism²⁷.

Based on all of the above, it can be assumed that the rational approach to considering Christian doctrine for its historical content has a number of significant omissions. It is also worth noting that, on the whole, the rational consideration of Christian texts as historical sources is to the detriment of Christian theism. Attempting to extract all elements of the miraculous from Scripture leads to internal contradictions, and further consideration in the context of historical sources and other texts of the same time can also be either contradictory or have a negative impact. Also at the beginning of this essay attempts to rationalise the idea of God on the part of European philosophers, who also come to conclusions that contradict the Christian doctrine and principles of Christianity, were discussed. Summarising the above, it can be concluded that a rational approach to such abstractions as the Christian God or faith in general is most likely inappropriate within the classical Christian tradition.

DOI: 10.51587/9798-9866-95976-2023-014-263-269

25 Виппер, Р. Ю. (2013). *Рим и раннее христианство*. Рипол Классик.

26 Виппер, Р. Ю. (1954). *Культура античности и христианство*.

27 Виппер, Р. Ю. (2013). *Рим и раннее христианство*. Рипол Классик.