Annuario di storia della metafisica
Annuaire d'histoire de la métaphysique
Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Metaphysik
Yearbook of the History of Metaphysics

Quaestio

The Ontology of Relation
L'ontologia della relazione
L'ontologie de la relation

a cura di
Vincent Carraud e Pasquale Porro

2013
13
BREPOLS
pagina

Quaestio 13/2013

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Questo numero di *Quaestio* è stato realizzato anche grazie a un contributo del Consiglio di Amministrazione dell'Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro.

ISBN 978-2-503-54671-1
ISSN 1379-2547
D/2015/0095/33

Quaestio 13/2013

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BREPOLS

edizioni di pagina

Quaestio is a peer-reviewed journal, open to unsolicited contributions.
The articles sent to the Editors are normally assessed by a member of the Advisory Board and another specialist chosen by the Board, or by two external specialists. The Editors will maintain records of the reviewers, though their identity will not be made public.

Contributi e volumi per recensione vanno inviati alla Direzione di «Quaestio» (Please send contributions and review-copies to):

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Abbonamenti / Abonnements / Subscriptions
Brepols Publishers, Begijnhof 67 - B-2300 Turnhout (Belgium),
tel. +32 14 44 80 20 - fax +32 14 42 89 19
e-mail: info.publishers@brepols.com

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significa affatto predicare una negazione di un soggetto (cioè dell'individuo in questione), ma negare che la proposizione esistenziale affermativa che coinvolge quello stesso soggetto o individuo sia vera. La negazione è dunque esterna, cioè proposizionale, non interna e predicativa: la proposizione 'Pegaso non esiste' sarebbe allora da riformulare più correttamente come 'non (Pegaso esiste)'.

Dagli argomenti di Ventimiglia riemerge così, per l'esistenza, tutto il valore del *present actuality sense* di Geach, assieme all'*actus essendi* di Tommaso, mentre la filosofia scolastica mostra non solo la grande attualità delle sue soluzioni e di alcuni suoi dibattiti, ma anche tutta la verità delle sue domande. Una verità capace di resistere, carsicamente o meno, al tempo.

Frederic Tremblay

The Metaphysics of the Early Vladimir Solov'ëv

📖 Thomas Nemeth, *The Early Solov'ëv and His Quest for Metaphysics*, Springer, Heidelberg-New York-Dordrecht-London 2014, xxiii-261 pp. (Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Idées / International Archives of the History of Ideas, 212).

This book, written by a seasoned specialist of Russian philosophy, is a presentation and discussion of the metaphysical views that Vladimir Solov'ëv (1853-1900) held in his early years. Solov'ëv is said to be the first systematic Russian philosopher. According to the author, before him there were virtually no genuine Russian philosophers, but only theologians, political pamphleteers, and philosophical dilettantes. Drawing in part from texts yet untranslated into English, this book offers the English-speaking reader the opportunity to glance into aspects of Solov'ëv's work otherwise unavailable to the non-Russophone reader. The presentation is more or less chronologically ordered and abundantly interspersed with biographical information, such as the amusing story of Solov'ëv's voyage to Egypt, where, seeking a tribe that he believed was the carrier of ancient Kabbalistic and Masonic knowledge descending in a straight line from King Solomon, he journeyed from Cairo into the Suez desert where he approached a band of Bedouins who, instead of imparting him the lost wisdom that he sought, stole his watch and spoiled his top hat. Although Solov'ëv was partly a religious thinker, the author puts aside as much as possible theological and mystical issues to focus on his strictly philosophical positions.

In the first chapter, we read that the young Solov'ëv had a romantic reaction against the rationalism and abstractionism of Western philosophy, which, he thought, contained a kind of negativism in the sense of what Nietzsche diagnosed as nihilism. In *The Crisis of Western Philosophy* (*Кризис западной философии*) (1874), Solov'ëv says that Western philosophy, characterized by rational analysis, abstracts predicates, separates them, and hypostatizes them, which leads to false conceptual constructions. Solov'ëv's anti-rationalism and anti-abstractionism goes hand in hand with his sympathies toward Slavophilism; the Slavophiles, who idealized the Russian folk way of life, saw in these features a distinctive peculiarity of Slavic thought. Luckily, thinks Solov'ëv, Western philosophy, conceived as an "abstract, theoretical cognition, has, as a matter of fact, now come to an end" (p. 11). Much like Nietzsche, Solov'ëv thinks that Western philosophy as a rational theoretical analysis has reached its peak and is doomed to be overcome by a new philosophical phase, one that gives more importance to intuition. Although seemingly ungrounded, Solov'ëv's assessment of the history of Western philosophy does convey the impression of accurately predicting the wave of intuitivist and anti-intellectualist philosophers such as James, Bergson, and Whitehead.

Solov'ëv, who translated Kant's *Prole-*

gomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik into Russian, was well acquainted with Kant's philosophy. But, he was also, in a major respect, anti-Kantian. According to him, we can know the things in themselves. In having knowledge of the phenomenon, we have knowledge of an aspect of the thing in itself. In Chapter 2, we learn that, in the unfinished manuscript *Sophia* (*София*), Solov'ëv proposes the following argument by analogy: when we look at an object through its reflection in a mirror, we see only the reflection, but the reflection is of something that the mirror allows us to know by way of reflection. Similarly, phenomena may not be the things in themselves, but they are like mirror reflections through which we can know the things in themselves. It is the rationalistic tendency to abstract and disjoin that, according to Solov'ëv, has led to the Kantian philosophy and to its eventual collapse into the Fichtean system. Solov'ëv feels much closer to Schopenhauer, who, according to the author, had a key influence on Solov'ëv. For Solov'ëv thinks that there is matter, but that this matter is, at bottom, force. This view, he thinks, is akin to, if not identical with, Schopenhauer's identification of the noumenon with the Will. Solov'ëv admits the existence of the Will, but, unlike Schopenhauer, he calls it 'spirit'. By doing so, the author remarks, Solov'ëv links his position to the older and more widespread religious tradition. Like Schopenhauer's Will, the spirit is absolute, eternal, outside of space and time, everything spatiotemporal is a manifestation of it, and metaphysics is the quest to know it.

The early Solov'ëv was anti-rationalist, but he was also anti-empiricist and anti-positivist. The empiricist and positivist trends, too, were, he thought, the results of a negativism. Against the Humean empiricists, the early Solov'ëv admitted of universal and necessary features of the world such as laws of nature and the Pythagorean theorem. What is universal, necessary, and atemporal has the ideal mode of being as opposed to the real mode of being of temporal, individual, and contingent entities. By dividing the world into these two modes of being (*способы бытия*), Solov'ëv proves to be – in spite of his anti-rationalism – a neo-Platonist of some sort. We learn in Chapter 3 that Solov'ëv thought that ideal beings are known by way of intellectual intuition (*интеллектуальная интуиция*), a notion he develops in *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (*Философские начала цельного знания*) (1877). For Solov'ëv, not only is the intellectual intuition a means to know objective features of reality, but it is also itself an objective feature of reality. The author recognizes that Solov'ëv's notion of intellectual intuition bears similarities with that of Fichte's *intellektuelle Anschauung*, but that, unlike Fichte, Solov'ëv used the notion of intellectual intuition as a stepping-stone to infer the objective existence of the transcendent realm of ideal beings (p. 85).

Evil – a topic discussed in Chapter 4 – plays an important role in Solov'ëv's philosophy. For him, an "inherent evil lies in each living entity from the start of its existence" (p. 114). According to Solov'ëv, evil, or *what should not be*, could only have been the result of a severance from the original "all-unity" (*Всеединство*) – an expression that the author is almost sure is a translation of Schelling's *Alleinheit*. Since then, history has been an Hegelian-like teleological process, the end of which is the world's re-unification into the original unity. This historical development back to unity, from evil to the good, will pass, at the human level, through the merging of philosophy, science, and theology. The historical development pervades not only the human level, but the entire universe. The Solov'ëv of *Lectures on Divine Humanity* (*Чтения о Богочеловечестве*) (1877-1878) identifies a number of gradual, yet discrete stages of the perfective development of the universe, from the formation of the celestial bodies up to that of living beings and, eventually, human beings. This doctrine seems

to anticipate the theory of levels of reality that he later presents in his mature work, *The Justification of the Good* (*Оправдание добра*) (1897), and which bears resemblances with the theories of levels of the likes of Lloyd Morgan, Samuel Alexander, and Nicolai Hartmann.

The author does not strictly limit the book's scope to metaphysics, but also spills over into Solov'ëv's ethics and political philosophy in Chapter 5. To be fair, however, Solov'ëv's ethics is intermingled with the issue of freewill, which is to some extent a metaphysical issue, and his political philosophy is intermingled with his views on the end of history, which also fall within the scope of metaphysical speculation. As Nikolai Lossky says, for Solov'ëv "[e]thics are also inevitably linked with metaphysics."[1] According to Solov'ëv, philosophy, theology, and politics ought to eventually merge into a *theosophy*. And, as we may infer from the latter view, the ideal political state, which is also the future political state, is a *theocracy*. Solov'ëv's political vision is that of a "free theocracy" in which all individuals would freely perform vital functions in the all-unity. Even if this chapter has metaphysical underpinnings, the reader expecting discussions of core metaphysical issues may find Chapter 5 to be somewhat out of focus. However, it is the organic aspect of Solov'ëv's system that is to blame here and not the author, who, it should be added, had to accomplish the nearly impossible feat of extracting the metaphysical elements from the Solov'ëvian organic corpus.

In Chapter 6 – the final chapter –, the author comes back in force to central metaphysical issues. Here, he discusses Solov'ëv's conception that metaphysics is logically prior to epistemology and ethics. Knowledge is dependent on minds, and minds on human beings, and, since human beings are part of what exists, knowledge is likewise just a part of what exists. According to the author, Solov'ëv espouses a correspondence theory of truth; true knowledge is knowledge about what *is*. On this account, for Solov'ëv, "the *reference* of a true proposition *exists*, whereas that of a falsehood, a lie, does not" (p. 160). But, whereas the reference of true propositions containing singular terms can be objects of sense perception, the reference of true propositions containing general terms must be objects that have a general nature, i.e., universals, that the cognizing "I" knows *via* intellectual intuition, the notion of which Solov'ëv developed in *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877), and which is further developed in the *Critique of Abstract Principles* (*Критика отвлеченных начал*) (1877-1880). This non-sensory mode of intuition is much like the neo-Platonic mode of knowledge of the intelligible forms – a notion that was quite in tune with the then nascent Russian neo-Platonic tradition, which, in turn, was coherent with the Russian Orthodox faith.

Solov'ëv also admits of the existence of substances. Properties such as colors could very well be, Solov'ëv thinks, as Berkeley conceived of them, i.e., as beings the *esse* of which resides in their being *percipi*. But this cannot be the case with substances, which are known through the phenomenon of resistance; their impenetrability testifies to their objective existence. There is a multiplicity of mutually impenetrable substances, some of which are composed of others. But the concatenating sequence cannot go on forever, so there must be atomic substances. Solov'ëv thus admits, at least in *Critique of Abstract Principles*, an "atomic naturalism" according to which everything is, at bottom, composed of atoms. Since impenetrability and extension are the products of a dynamic interplay between reciprocal forces, the fundamental atoms cannot themselves be impenetrable and extended. They must rather themselves be simple *forces*. These forces are not the properties of substances, but compose substances – go-

[1] N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, International Universities Press, New York 1951, p. 108.

ing back full circle to Solov'ëv's view in *Sophia* that matter is ultimately spiritual. The spiritual side of being, or what Schopenhauer calls 'Will' and what Solov'ëv also calls 'the unconditional' or 'God', is what most genuinely exists. Everything else is conditioned by it and is a manifestation of it. The influence of Spinoza, who was Solov'ëv's "first love," and who conceived nature or God as at once *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, is here palpable.

Solov'ëv's syncretic speculative metaphysics is often vague, inconsistent, fanciful, and the argumentation often unsatisfactory or even downright lacking, as the author himself remarks repeatedly. Nevertheless, Solov'ëv's metaphysics is extremely rich in ideas, and, perhaps most importantly, inescapable to anyone seeking to understand the history of Russian metaphysics. For, as the first systematic Russian philosopher, Solov'ëv had a great influence on the posterity of Russian philosophy and, to some extent, framed the way philosophy would be exercised by his successors. This was especially the case with the ideal-realists Nikolai Lossky and Simon Frank. The distinction between real and ideal modes of being, the idea that universal and necessary features of reality are known by way of intellectual intuition, the idea that intellectual intuition is itself an objective feature of reality as a unity of the subject and the object, and the idea that "all is one," will later take centre stage in Lossky's philosophy. Frank, who edited an anthology of Solov'ëv's works, adopted Solov'ëv's notion of "all-unity," even though he also modified it. This book is thus a must-read to anyone interested in the history of Russian metaphysics. It is noteworthy, however, that Solov'ëv's intuitive organic philosophy may have also inspired some Western philosophers. It is known, for instance, that Whitehead, who was a colleague of Natalie Duddington (a translator of Solov'ëv, Lossky, and many other Russian authors) in London, had read Duddington's translation of Lossky's *The Intuitive Basis of Knowledge*. He may also have read other of Duddington's translations. So, it is quite possible that he was directly or indirectly inspired by Solov'ëv's intuitive organic philosophy.