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On the Role of Philosophy in the Dialogue between Religion and Science

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We attempted to outline some facets of a feasible dialogue between religion and science considerably facilitated by philosophy. It is all about rapprochement, integration, congruence, unity, complementation, agreement, kinship, reconciliation, solidarity... Certitude and relativity, unavoidable particularism of religions and sciences is transcended by philosophy, as a universal religion inherent to creative, intelligent humanity, and the queen of all sciences. It is precisely in philosophical anthropology where all the nodes and knots of theology, science and philosophy viewed as human pursuits are tangled together.

Keywords: philosophical anthropology, religion, science, facets of the dialogue.

Why “dialogue”?

We seem to become increasingly aware of the fact that our human world is now more physically intertwined than ever before and major issues confronting mankind can be resolved only by joint efforts. **Convergence** of diverse “spheres” of man’s activity and his various current images appear to be both requisite and unavoidable. Today, as never before, it is imperative to recognize that contradictions between religion and science are important, but not overriding. **Rapprochement**, multi-faceted **integration** of religion, philosophy and science, as an embodiment of faith, thought and cognition, are quite possible.

Sometimes it is erroneously assumed that some chosen One, or all of us may be sitting on the throne in complete possession of the whole.

The contemporary Russian (with all connotations implied in the word) philosopher F. Girenok insists on the premise that stemming from the spirit of Sobornost (Russian Orthodox collective consciousness), a “dialogue” between science and religion is both impossible and irrelevant. “A dialogue can be initiated on the assumption that some truth is partially recognized by the other side (Girenok, 1998, p. 247). Science possesses a part or share. And so does religion. “In a dialogue the parts are dovetailed... Their joint meaning excludes dialogues. Russian Orthodox collective consciousness is not disposed towards a dialogue. It belongs to the community. It is the same for everyone. A dialogue suppresses some wholeness of truth. A dialogue is not juxtaposed with a monologue, but the collective Orthodox

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consciousness. In a dialogue one passes through oneself the voice of the other... and starts speaking in a strange voice. Dialogue is a way of attaining what is accomplished under the sign of the Absolute". (Ibid. pp. 247-248).

From this perspective, thinking (philosophy) may be assigned to the sphere of altheia (non-concealment), the domain of beliefs imparted by the Logos (discourse) inapplicable to the Absolute, such notions are only inherent to human language, whereas religion is the sphere of mysteries, the domain of faiths introduced by the cult or, rather, ritual that brings together the relative and Absolute. "Mysteries create the profound. Aletheia is content with the superficial. (Ibid. p. 409). Here religion and philosophy are set at different levels, with philosophy merely being the expression of *Homo rationalis*. However, such rationalization of love for wisdom can hardly be justified. Stances taken by a philosopher, a researcher and a believer do not altogether presume antipodal modalities of human experience. Wisdom does not fully amount to the knowledge of some verbal secrets, but it is, primarily, the experience of the preverbal, the possession of the cult's mysteries, observance of the ritual (e.g. Confucius). A dialogue is pursued not only on an intellectual level, it is also an existential matter. It should be borne in mind that philosophy is man's creation of his own self, and understanding is basically a state of the soul (consciousness), wherein the world of my life is brought closer to that of another.

Both science and religion reflect certain positions and, given their definite character, no view can be regarded as universal. Philosophy and philosophizing are alien to definiteness. In the realm of tradition science and religion stand for determination in matters concerning what is true. In its own manner science upholds its tradition by paradigms, religion does the same by dogmas. But from the point of view of ordinary

mortals – science and religion are assigned to the competence of a god-man – religion and science are tokens of man's imperfection. In the extremely arcane polysemy of these notions there is an infinite variety of science, religion, philosophy and a multitude of types and forms thereof.

Any authentic communication is a path leading to the Absolute, that is to say, such communication that has taken place in its afterglow, but mankind is not destined to grasp its full completeness to a degree that would render dialogue supererogatory. It is philosophy that emerges within such communication, the "topos of a dialogue" (A. Akhutin). "Each and every participant will inevitably expose himself in an unavoidably human one-sided bias, and, consequently, will come to realize in real terms, that his limitations are caused by the other side: then both of them will become aware of our predestination and meet each other then and there". (Buber, 1995, p. 98). Let us recall a well-known maxim saying that it is better, it is equally true with reference to science, to turn to God Himself, rather than to His saints or interpreters.

Facets of the dialogue

Man is a spiritual creature, i.e. the one endowed with faith and reason. Faith is the revelation of man's spirit per se, reason is the same spirit in action or creativity. Thereby, holistic man develops a harmonious **congruence** or agreement between religion and science as an embodiment of faith and reason. And this role has been delegated to philosophy.

Faith manifests itself in religion which is the making of the humane in man, faith is truly regarded as the principal acquisition of the spirit, outside religion man is nothing, but a rapacious ape. Reason is embodied in science and philosophy. Reason acts as the key organon or implement of philosophy and science. Cognition is a spiritual activity, and any cognition is based

on faith. Contrary to the well-entrenched views, religion and science are not aliens inhabiting “different planets”; as manifestations of the spirit, they are essentially the same.

But this unity or oneness is acceptable to neither historic (mainstream) religions based on dogmata, nor science which is invariably striving to transform its potential (concepts, reference points...), nor philosophy with its openness and infinite freedom drive it to seek wisdom outside Divinity...

As is well known, notorious independence is seldom pure, upon closer examination it turns out to be thinly veiled dependence in disguise, not yet recognized. It is noteworthy that previous epochs tried to sever all ties between science and religion with a view of attaining some quasi-independence of science, attempts eventually leading science to an impasse. Science does not furnish a worldview needed by everyone (including scholars and researchers). “Science has gone out of its way to undermine the bulwarks of religion, but it is unable to create a system of values to replace the one postulated by religion (Pomerants 995, p. 72). A borderline, a subtle difference between absolute differentiation (i.e. between dissimilitude and separation) is being erased. Juxtaposition between the meaning sought along the lines of cognition and that one which is imparted by the experience of faith is brought about by secularized consciousness, it implies the debunking of myths that constitutive thinking on the one hand, and the derationalization of faith, on the other. Only in a later epoch – the age of Enlightenment, a period of predominant secularism emerge separation and a contrast between faith and reason. It should also be remembered that juxtaposition between religion and reason leads to the demonization of the former.

Discords between religion and science are, in fact, conflicts between man’s powers of cognition, intellect, reason and faith in its

numerous hypostases. Acute as they are, conflicts between religion and science are not tragic; the confrontation between theology and philosophy is more straightforward and deep-seated. Both philosophy and religion bestow a fundamental dimension to human life with reference to the reality of the One. The initial mode of being, both in theology and philosophy, comes “sub specia aeternitatis”. Their common goal is to make the One an object of their scrutiny and become its mouthpieces. Philosophy and theology are concerned with Meaning. Therefore, the role of theology lies in its ability to maintain the consciousness of the One, whereas philosophy has the capacity for motion, susceptibility and universal openness.

Science strives for precision, religion – for faithfulness. In his endeavor toward clear meaning, the researcher builds up logical models; that is why science is loath to operate in symbols or, even, notions, preference is given to terms.

An explicit term tends to generate a logical idea. Religion is an unraveling of faith, a believer makes the universe “faithful” so that it may fit the images projected by his hopes and expectations. It should not be assumed that religion is “subjective” or that science is “objective”. From a human perspective, both religion and science are subjective, but in terms of eternity and life itself, they are objective. The attainments of religion and the findings of science remain objective as long as they can stand the test of life, or as long as they are capable of positive impact on man. “Testing” is anything but passive, it is an active process wherein man molds an object, i.e. man makes his contribution so that the world should fit his own concept of what it ought to be like. Philosophy is a test of both faithfulness and precision done by man’s thinking. And science, indeed, knows many enigmas and mysteries! As A. Einstein put it, the most beautiful and profound emotional experience ever granted to man is his awareness

of the mysterious ... the ability to perceive what our mind finds inconceivable, what is obscured by our direct experience (Einstein, 1967, p. 176).

The One (Absolute) is not an object that can be objectively cognized. But coming to know God cannot be regarded as anything subjective. A subjective view is bound to be arbitrary, Subjects galore. The Unconditional, as it unfolds itself to man, is a passage leading inwards and upwards, common to the entire multitude. The Unconditional is the Whole. If the universe is the basis of reality, God is the quintessence of everything that is ideal. Thereby, man, his holistic self, is empowered (as a holistic creature) to possess that **unity** between religion and science as representatives of reality and ideality.

With due respect for the conventionality of such discourse, it is appropriate to talk about the existence of two ontoses, the ontosis of the spirit and of the universe; religion represents the Spirit in the “universe”, science also treats of the universe, but this concern is perceived as a spiritual activity. (However, it would be erroneous to assume that science confines itself exclusively to the cognition of the material, or perceptible, universe...) Science is action in the realm of reality, religion – in actuality; philosophy is that passage which permits back and forth movement. That is why the content of philosophic ideas does not directly correlate with the extra linguistic experience (reality). “As soon as the Eleatics (and later Socrates and Plato in their polemic with the Sophists) elevated objective “knowledge” about the relative universe and delegated it to the rank of “opinions”, the genetic link between philosophy and science was finally severed. Henceforth, philosophers began to refer to relative knowledge as an “opinion”, whereas a subjective opinion was deemed to be knowledge. Distinctive features of philosophy are said to be subjectivism and a plurality of opinions, conditioned by its refusal to cognize the world from common and

acceptably meaningful gnoseological positions” (Ju. A. Rotenfeld). Another contemporary Russian thinker holds that “scientific and philosophical discourses have different areas of study: the first treats of being with all its objective “givenness”, the second is concerned with thinking, cognition of being in its virtual diversity of forms, structures and levels”. (Krotkov). Je. A. Thereby, given a great variety of transitions from reality into actuality and vice versa, philosophy is capable of mutually **complementing** religion and science.

Philosophy represents an endless search that is not destined to arrive at ultimate solutions, this unprecedented quest is fraught with the peril of the Spirit’s self-destruction. Theology faces a somewhat different hazard, i.e. an ossification of the Spirit, in that case we are confronted by the phenomenon of the so-called “orthodoxy” and fanaticism. They invariably occur when there is a yearning to see wholeness complete, when wholeness is not even allowed to stir, when a part is assumed to be the Whole.

Science only accepts curtailed reality, any fantastic actuality is deleted to give way to what catches the eye, whether it is equipped with a microscope or a telescope, for all its rationality the logos of science is restricted by the limits of what can be checked in principle. But more importantly, life is rendered meaningless when science (in its pure form) has the final Say. By applying certain positive criteria, theology also tends to take a blinkered view of the actuality. Only philosophy is universal and all-embracing... That is why it is not confined to any scientifically defined object.

The Russian philosopher I. Ilyin shrewdly remarked that objective experience forms basis of any knowledge. “Outside objective experience knowledge is out of the question... scientific knowledge is a systematic practice of being obsessed with objects. Outside mobilized objective experience there has never been, nor

will ever be any knowledge”. (Religious..., 1998. p.35). Contrary to the above assertion, neither religion nor philosophy shall ever show any interest in concrete objects. Among other things, philosophy is about the self-edification of man. Philosophy cannot remain blank: Turning round and round in the same vacuous space.

A relative, object-oriented character of the positions taken by scientific and theological systems allows them a certain autonomy or independence, also other from “metaphysical principles”. Sciences, in particular, distance themselves from primordial principles so that they could investigate an object from their own, distinctive points of view. By bringing their subject matter in conformity with universal principles, sciences would have to go beyond their specific areas wherein the knowledge painstakingly obtained can find a successful application.

Of course, every thinker (researcher, philosopher, theologian) finds himself amidst his people, his epoch and his culture. In that respect, philosophy is also very particular. But, at the same time, philosophy is tantamount to a limitless expanse without any boundary or constraint, it is open to any exploration of reality since by his very nature the Eros of philosophy is devoid of passion. The Philosopher attempts to assume such a position that would be above anything particular or specific, i.e. a position rooted in pure reality.

According to Karl Jaspers, “philosophy is nothing, but a continuous journey”. “Something that has been only partially cogitated is not philosophy yet; by contrast, what has been thought out exhaustively – is not philosophy any longer: it may be a sermon, an ethical injunction or pathetic hype”. (Kharitonov). An idea recedes into the unthinkable, into the definite, rather than the indefinite. By its very nature, philosophy is tolerant, it is riddled with doubts because it is championing the cause of freedom.

Science is the man’s withdrawal from the realm of Truth (absolute if not in character, but, at least, by its intent or source) which gives way to the reality of invariably relative truths. However, it would be wrong to assume that science is just a mere extension or a feeble supplement to religion, as, for example, was postulated by R. Genon. Religion and science have grown from the same root, i.e. man’s primeval urge to fathom his own being. The separation of the surrounding world into two: the one “according to the truth” and its “general” counterpart happened to be the beginning of cognition as we know it. Dialogue between religion and science becomes possible only when they are differentiated; the so-called traditional sciences, indisputable descendants and consequences of religious truths and possessing an “absolutely reliable character” (R.Genon), are yet a far cry from genuine science. Besides, first, there are sciences which try to solve problems, second, there is “big-time” science, born of pure inquisitiveness, and again, thirdly, there are “sciences” that are specialized or “technical” oriented toward goals, and there are other specialized “sciences” that live by “proofs” rather than by truths. In short, there is “mainstream science” brought forth by man’s selfless striving toward truth, and there are “technical” aspects of science and religion. Besides, at any time in history, man has always had everyday-practical and non-scientific forms of cognition.

If science is concerned with truths, philosophy and theology deal with the Truth. Given that theology has already found, discovered and established the Truth, philosophy is “still” searching for it, creating it. To put it more cogently, philosophic truth is unlimited and prone to change. The One can reveal itself only in the capacity of the transcendental; It is, It exists only by surpassing all that exists. That is why philosophy is capable of acting as a third

party which facilitates a voluntary **agreement** between “religion” (Truth) and “science” (truths), thereby cultivating mutual understanding and strengthening trust between them.

By providing answers, religion quenches man’s metaphysical thirst, by contrast, philosophy teaches how to bring up questions, i.e. it exacerbates or kindles his metaphysical thirst. Philosophy offers an object lesson: metaphysical problems defy an ultimate solution, since man can never penetrate the substrate of objectivity, neither experience nor thought is capable of grasping their truly convoluted relationships. (See the works by N. Harman).

Genuine philosophy always remains theological without disrupting its ties with its Mother-Sophia. Bona fide theology is philosophical, it does not confine itself to the ultimate or the immutable. Nevertheless, theology invariably belongs to religious confessions, it can never go beyond its religious cult. This entails its indelible concreteness, its boundary is delineated by its concrete culture, its specific spiritual wholeness.

If truth is not mere responsiveness to the world nor it is receptiveness to the Spirit that “is God”, then it may be inferred that the goal of science is to establish what IS, rather than what is held to be true. Science is the sanctuary for knowledge, religion is the domain of wisdom. Knowledge without wisdom is destructive, wisdom deprived of knowledge is a fiction. Philosophy plays a complementary role in the relations between religion and science, philosophy is looking for a religion that would be **commensurate** with science, it is also in pursuit of a science congenial to religion... It should be noted herein that “science-friendly religion” are religions with diverse religious experience and theological doctrines in agreement with various sciences with their specific character of conceptualization and mode of research.

One of Schopenhauer’s aphorisms is. “Scientists are those who have perused many books, but thinkers, geniuses, the motive forces behind mankind’s progression are, in fact, those who have turned their attention to the book of the Universe” // Schopenhauer A. *Paralipomena*, Russian edition, St. Petersburg, 1892. There are, indeed, “scientists” who, as Schopenhauer aptly put it, “have read far too many books”, but besides, there are also “researchers” who are literally piercing the Universe, and there are doers, reformers or, to quote Schopenhauer again, “motive forces of humanity”. People of science belong to all the three categories mentioned above. Today science is primarily a means of transforming the world. The first category may be called “librarians”, that is, probably, why some persons (in Russia) holding advanced degrees of Candidate or Doctor of Sciences feel resentful when they are called “scientists” or “learned people”.

With a thinly veiled allusion to Alexander Pushkin’s poetry, i.e.:

On seashore far a green oak Towers
And to it with gold chain bound,
A learned cat whiles away the hours
By walking slowly round and round
To right he walks, and sings a ditty
To Left he walks, and tells a tale...

A. Pushkin. *Ruslan and Ludmila* (Prologue)
a professor once said to me acrimoniously:
“We are not “learned”, only cats may be “learned”, we are scientific workers”. Workers. Sure, scientists, researchers adhere to a certain worldview, but their research may be a totally different matter.

A religion displaying **kinship** with science is not the same religion that is born in a mysterious revelation at the dawn of culture, philosophy helps faith negotiate the tortuous path leading from Tertullian’s “credo quia absurdum est” to Anselm’s “credo ut intelligum”.

Religion is the basis, the foundation; religion begets philosophy. In terms of viability, religion is much stronger than philosophy, religion possesses greater vitality. By contrast, philosophizing may be described as whittling down of spirit and life, it is brittle, mercurial and volatile... This is theurgy that has risen to the Light and has been warmed by its rays.

Limitations of science impel its progress in special fields, limitations of theology lend stability to spiritual being. By unfolding the significance of religion and endowing cognition with a purpose, philosophy «loosens the foundations», thereby rejuvenating the spirit. Theology grants continuity to the spiritual experience, whereas philosophy may be described as condensed experience of doubt – a potential for innovation in culture. As Whitehead pointed out in his *Religion and Science*, religion will be unable to restore its erstwhile power until it learns to treat change in the same spirit, as it is done in science. **Reconciliation** between religion and science is feasible only if religion opens itself to creativity and if scientists become fully aware of the fact that the very existence of science and its postulates are firmly rooted in religious tradition.

It is common knowledge that the very existence of “objective reality”, that science is purportedly concerned with, is logically unprovable and presupposes an act of faith. In the Russian language there is little distinction between religious faith and scientific belief that engendered science per se, it would be more pertinent to say, be it faith or belief, that all the fruits of our activity have been nurtured by the single faith of unsplintered, holistic man, as creator and creation of culture, as he is studied by philosophical anthropology. It is precisely philosophical anthropology is the locus where all the nodes and knots of theology, science and philosophy, viewed as human pursuits,

are tangled together, it is an area of **solidarity** between religion and science.

Faith is man’s stance in veritas. Man is a creature that is faithful and believing, man believes just because he abides by faith. Postulate, epistemological faith is born of faith-trust, faith-empathy. The emergence of science and philosophy marks a transformation of faith, however, that primeval faith-veritas, a self-identity of the human being or the abode of Truth, is always in us, for that reason, philosophy and science cannot and will not ever lose their religious nature. Philosophy is philosophizing, the smelting of consciousness, a creative process. Philosophy may also be described as a creative religion, whereas theology is a religion, affirming and consolidating. The foremost predestination of theology is to strengthen and safeguard the nucleus of culture or the cultivation of the Divine Light. Theology supports man in his tradition, yet again and again it brings us back to Deity.

By means of its integrative function, philosophy relates everything to everything else. Certitude and relativity, unavoidable particularism of religions and sciences is transcended by philosophy, as a universal religion inherent to creative, intelligent humanity, and the queen of all sciences. Therefore, the goal of philosophy is to resuscitate religion as a dominant science whereby man can acquire actual and active, genuine and real knowledge about transcendental unity of all traditions. Then abstract, rational self-thinking will be superseded by a faithful cognition that preserves feeling and meaning in their oneness.

Religion and science represent two types of mankind’s fundamental experience. Wherever there is unity between religion and science, it is more expedient to pay heed to religion, it is abundantly richer. When they are in discord, it is better to turn to science as it is more reliable.

We attempted only to outline some facets of a feasible dialogue between religion and science considerably facilitated by philosophy. It is all about rapprochement, integration, congruence, unity, complementation, agreement, kinship, reconciliation, solidarity, and also possibly unification, mutual supplementation, reduction to a common denominator, appeasement... Philosophy

is a quest pursued along diverse paths of alignment between religion and science, religions and sciences by man who is split and disunited, but, nevertheless, trying to bring himself into a whole.

I, for one, adhere to the positions of “philosophia perennis”, a universal religion or “Santana dharma” that is “perennial religion” or “religion of the Spirit”.

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О роли философии в диалоге религии и науки

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Статья – попытка очертить некоторые грани возможного диалога религии и науки при посредничестве философии. Это их сближение, интеграция, согласование, единение, взаимодополнение, приведение в соответствие, примирение, солидаризация. Определённость и относительность, неизбежный партикуляризм религий и наук трансцендируется философией как универсальной религией, религией творческого думающего человечества, и царицей наук. Именно в философской антропологии заплетаются узлы богословия, науки и философии как дел человеческих.

Ключевые слова: философская антропология, религия, наука, грани диалога.
