

Joanna Skurzak

**ATHEIST SPIRITUALITY**  
PROPOSAL OF FRENCH PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION





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## Atheist spirituality. Proposal of french philosophy of religion

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*In memory of my mother, thanks to whom  
began my fascination with the culture of France*



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# INTRODUCTION

What is spirituality? Traditionally, this concept has been associated for centuries with various forms of religiousness. Hence, spirituality was most often specified with adjectives such as “Christian”, “Buddhist”, “Franciscan”, “Jesuit”. It was identified with idiosyncratic forms of expression of religious beliefs related to specific denominations<sup>1</sup>. At the time of secularization, this concept was increasingly becoming “independent” of religiosity and religion. Man has a spiritual life regardless of whether he believes in the existence of God and practices religion or not. In this very broad sense, spirituality means a wealth of inner experiences, where humans question their existence, suffering, death, or the meaning of life. Spirituality permeates our perception of the world and shapes our relationship with other people. By sharing our thoughts and the richness of our “I”, we discover that we are spiritual beings, we transcend the material world, which has no consciousness and is not aware that it exists.

Of course, there is still an important connection between religiosity and spirituality, because without spirituality, understood as experiencing and expressing a personal relationship with God, religion becomes either an ethical system where precepts are sanctioned by a divine Authority, or a metaphysical system, for which the Absolute is the ultimate explanation of the reality around us.

Nevertheless, religion and spirituality have become areas with fewer and fewer common elements, and even mutually exclusive. Spirituality must be stripped of its religious dimension in order to be considered a true spirituality<sup>2</sup>. It begins to be defined as a reality completely alternative to religion. Religiosity is reduced to doctrines and beliefs related directly or indirectly to institutional structures. It is reduced to the observation of ceremonies and practices held in community settings. Spirituality, on the other hand, involves a personal search for the sacred without the mediation of the

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1 Vide W. Pawluczuk: *Duchowość*. In: *Leksykon socjologii religii*, Eds. M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, J. Mariański, Warszawa 2004, p. 90–92.

2 Vide J. Mariański: *Nowa duchowość – alternatywa czy dopełnienie religijności*, *Religijność i duchowość – dawne i nowe formy*, Eds. M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, S. Grotowska, Kraków 2010, p. 24.

Church, an inner experience with an individual encounter of the world that does not need transcendent justification. Spirituality understood in this way can mean experiencing art and nature, meditation, mindfulness, reflection on life after life, responsibility for the world in the context of climate crises, activism in defense of animals, and many other phenomena. Also, an atheist thought - many times “accused” by theists of proposing nihilism as an alternative to religious spirituality - is interested in and proposes a new, non-religious or atheist, spirituality.

The aim of this monograph is to analyze the texts of French philosophers who in their work deal with the issue of atheist spirituality. They include, first of all, four contemporary authors: M. Onfray, L. Ferry, M. Gauchet, and A. Comte-Sponville. This is obviously not a complete list of thinkers who deny the existence of God or religious attitudes in the French philosophical milieu. What distinguishes them is the appearance of a constructive proposal for atheist spirituality which is to replace the traditional religious spirituality. According to this proposal, the critique of religion does not leave any emptiness, but offers a possibility of replacing the “illusory benefits” of religion with a spirituality which does not have to refer to personal transcendence.

Why French atheist spirituality? Does only this cultural area propose a separation of spirituality from religion? Certainly not, as shown by publications directly devoted to atheist spirituality, for example, A. de Botton or S. Harris<sup>3</sup>. The selection of the French language area is mainly associated with 1) a long tradition of critique of religion, from the Enlightenment to our times, 2) rational (philosophical) character of this critique. French atheist thought has always been, on the one hand, very expressive and, on the other hand, very philosophical, referring to only rational arguments<sup>4</sup>. The most famous forms of atheism, for example, in the form of publications of English-language authors such as R. Dawkins, S. Harris, D. Dennett, or Ch. Hitchens, certainly deserve close attention, but they are very much associated with the scientist and naturalistic trends and often lack factual philosophical analyses.

The monograph refers to the following research hypotheses: 1) there is a concept of spirituality that does not refer to realistic transcendence - atheist spirituality; 2) atheist spirituality appears as an alternative to traditional (religious) spirituality; 3) atheist spirituality can replace the propositions

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<sup>3</sup> Vide S. Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion* 2015, A. de Botton, *Religion for Atheists. A non-believers's guide to uses of religion*, London 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Vide S. Kruszyńska, *Zrozumieć niewiarę*, Gdańsk 2011, p. 12.

of traditional religions and thus contribute to the adoption of an atheist attitude by believers.

The monograph will analyze the proposal of atheist spirituality as an alternative to traditional Judeo-Christian spirituality which has dominated European culture over the last centuries. First, the monograph tries to provide an interpretative “key” to understanding the French atheist philosophy of the 20th and 21st centuries. Second, it appreciates French authors whose thought is the subject of widespread interest in France due to its high cognitive value. Third, it reveals the influence of individual authors on shaping various sectors of contemporary culture, not only limited to the Francophone area. Fourth, it enables a deeper understanding of the processes occurring in contemporary culture, in which, on the one hand, secularization is visible, and on the other - there is a search for the sacred and specific spiritual values based not only on traditional religions. Fifth, it indicates specific patterns, not only intellectual but also moral, of engagement in promoting specific behaviors of individuals with atheist views. Sixth, it shows a possible relationship between theoretical considerations and life practice - philosophy becomes “spiritual exercise.”

The scientific methods applied in the work are related to the arrangement of the research material in accordance with the goals. Research development will be realized using standard methods of analysis and the reconstruction of philosophical texts. Standard analytical-hermeneutics methods will be applied for the interpretation of texts. This will include determining the meaning of basic concepts and definitions, reconstructing and naming styles of argumentation, and reading hidden meanings in the context of the entire studied material.

For each of the proposed philosophers, the life history and bibliography of a given author will be examined first, followed by the sources of his thought (the influence of the school, affiliations, borrowings from other systems) along with his methodological assumptions (the preferred concept of cognition, science, methods, and argumentative strategies). The next stage of the work will be subject-related issues, concerning specifically the studied problems and their solutions, with possible polemics and discussions (immanent and transcendent criticism) conducted by a given author. An essential part of the research will be the analysis of the influence of the French philosophical tradition on formulating solutions to the issue of contemporary atheism. At a later stage the research will be centered around the very concept of “atheist spirituality”. Is it possible to propose a single definition of this

concept, and if not, how does its understanding differ between authors? The final stage of the research will compare the concept of atheist spirituality with “religious spirituality”. Are there common elements and how do they differ? Can atheist spirituality be practiced by a religious person? Is atheist spirituality an alternative to religious spirituality?

# NEW ATHEISM

Atheism means a position that denies God's existence. Theoretical and practical atheism are most often distinguished. The former means the doctrine often referring to metaphysical or epistemological assumptions and indicating the necessity to reject the existence of Transcendence (understood personally or impersonally); while practical atheism is an attitude in which one does not relate to an existing personal God. Atheism should be distinguished from agnosticism widespread today, which points to the impossibility of rationally resolving the question of the existence of or non-existence of the Absolute. There are, however, philosophers, such as the French thinker Th. Giraud, who question the sense of the division into practical and theoretical atheism. In his opinion, the concept of practical atheism is empty, since there are no atheists who by disbelief in the existence of the Absolute become, for example, immoral. Atheist beliefs do not automatically entail specific behaviors<sup>1</sup>.

Why is there a new wave of atheism today? The first wave is, of course, modern atheism which includes great masters of suspicion - L. Feuerbach, K. Marks, F. Nietzsche. We can talk about the second wave in reference to the sixties of the twentieth century, with atheist existentialism widespread at that time. The third wave, which appeared at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is related primarily to the new context in which atheists proclaimed their views. This context is determined by the tragedy of 09/11, the attacks in London and Madrid, and the growing fear of religious fundamentalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Vide T. Giraud, *Une spiritalité athée est-elle possible?* Paris 2011, e-book.

The second essential reason for the “new atheism” lies in the proposal to introduce a new morality that focuses only on the mundane, without reference to the transcendent reality that currently characterizes secularized societies. An important factor stimulating the emergence of the third wave of atheism is the postmodern culture and its non-religious approach to the domain of the sacred. This is especially evident in its critique of the institutional and doctrinal form of religion. Of course, the main motive behind this criticism is the affirmation of absolute human freedom and rejection of objective truth. And therein lies one of the many paradoxes present in postmodern thought that negates all absolute values while absolutizing the value of individual autonomy, tolerance, and pluralism. According to postmodernists, religions as institutional forms, the moral principles they proclaim, and their dogmatic vision of the world and man are the source of human enslavement. Such an attitude to religion is reflected in postmodern culture dominated by relativism and religious indifferentism.

Religion “melts” in culture. As J. Dupré rightly indicates, contemporary culture is open to religions and the spiritual realm, however this openness is only horizontal; it negates any transcendence. Culture has become religion and even offers some of the emotional and spiritual benefits of religion, but it does not include such radical requirements as are present in revealed religions<sup>2</sup>. Contemporary critiques of religion are more-or-less in line with this current of thought.

Atheism is a position that denies God’s existence, but it exists in very different forms. Atheism as a more serious intellectual trend appeared only in modern times. Even if in antiquity the term atheism was used to describe people who refused to obey a religion recognized by the state as was the case with Socrates, for example, and paradoxically also with the first Christians, an atheist attitude in the modern sense of the word was rare (Theodore of Cyrene was an exception).

According to Th. Giraud, the word “atheism” appeared in 1555 and was used to denote disbelief in a social group, not in relation to individual beliefs. What is more, in French encyclopedias of the 16th and 17th centuries, the word “atheism”, on the one hand, meant an individual attitude that denied God or immortality of the soul, but on the other hand, the concept of atheism was reduced to the definition of impiety<sup>3</sup>.

2 J. Dupré, *Życie i duchowe i przetrwanie chrześcijaństwa w świeckiej kulturze. Refleksje na koniec tysiąclecia*. In: *Człowiek wobec religii*, Ed. K. Mech, Kraków 1999, p. 66.

3 Vide T. Giraud, *Op. cit.*

The emergence of atheism in modern times was largely influenced by the developing skepticism (e.g., M.E. de Montaigne) and empiricism. Both these trends, questioning metaphysical cognition, and especially the principle of causality (D. Hume), resulted in the rejection of existing evidence for the existence of God. The thought of the Enlightenment, which was born in the eighteenth century, emphasizing the autonomy of man, the need to free man from the authorities that enslave him, shaped an extreme criticism of religion and the question of the existence of the Absolute. The groundbreaking thought of I. Kant pointed to the limits of human cognition and the impossibility of reaching God with theoretical reason - which consequently led to transferring the problem of the existence of God to the practical plane - it opened a wide space for agnosticism. The existence or non-existence of God is no longer a philosophical and theological problem, but becomes a matter of a specific human decision based on subjective practical premises.

As already mentioned, the most common distinction is between theoretical and practical atheism, but this is not the only and exhaustive division. The atheist website *www.atheism.free.fr*, is an interesting site for analyses of French unbelief. It proposes an interesting and broad classification of contemporary atheism. Firstly, it distinguishes positive atheism, also appearing in the form of agnostic atheism. Their common feature is the rejection, with varying strength, of the thesis of the existence of God - from "I know that God does not exist" to "I do not know whether God exists". Another atheism is anti-clerical, in which the rejection of the same thesis about the existence of God is combined with different types of activities aimed at religious institutions, especially at their representatives. In turn, anti-religious atheism is very similar to anti-clerical atheism; its representatives take all possible measures to undermine the sense of any manifestations of religiosity.

There is also triumphant atheism, referring to various humanistic concepts whose common foundation is the assumption that, by rejecting God, man is exalted or even "deified". In such an understanding, one takes the place reserved for a deity. For example, all thinkers alluding to the views of F. Nietzsche refer to such a replacement of deity by man. Dogmatic atheism, another kind of unbelief, firmly asserts the non-existence of God and - characteristically for this stance - rejects any possibility of debating the issue. Atheism is the only possible and rational attitude that a person can take on the question of the existence of Transcendence. Certainly, dogmatic atheism is an example of fundamentalist thinking, which is not, after all, reserved only for religion. The French website shows the existence of ideological athe-

ism, e.g., of the Marxist type, which seeks to replace religion with faith in the reconstruction of the temporal world. Transcendence does not exist, and man should concentrate on changing and improving the temporal world. Nihilist type atheism is, in turn, such an attitude towards the issue of the existence of God that not only it denies his existence but also undermines the existence of any absolute values. There is nothing universal, timeless, or fundamental in this reality, let alone in any other. Any universal or absolute value could indicate the possibility of Transcendence. The consequence of such radical atheism is that our lives are reduced to absurdity. A specific response of atheism to the nihilistic understanding of this position is faithful atheism, which - like every atheism - undermines the thesis of the existence of God, but claims that it is worth promoting fidelity to religious values, for example, of the Judeo-Christian tradition because these are the values that European culture refers to.

Humanist atheism, also referred to as atheist humanism, is often cited, also by the French website. Followers of such an understanding of humanism do not emphasise the need to reject the existence of transcendence, but the freedom and dignity of the human person. Consequently, it turns out that there is no room for the Absolute that would ultimately explain the greatness of man. Man does not need to refer to the concept of "creation in the image and likeness of God" to justify his uniqueness and dignity.

Logical atheism, another example of the negation of God, claims there is no possibility of a consistent description of God. This atheism specifically focuses on the problem of the possible existence of God and the occurrence of evil. Can God, especially in the Judeo-Christian concept, who possesses the attribute of love and omnipotence, coexist with the evil that we experience here (it concerns, first of all, experienced, undeserved evil). Either God is not love and He is not interested in our sufferings, or He is not omnipotent and can do nothing about this evil. A loving and omnipotent God in relation to evil seems unacceptable.

Further examples of modern atheism refer to experimental sciences in their claims. Metaphysical atheism holds that the question of God's existence must remain unexplored and there is no scientific evidence for the existence of God, while methodological atheism, following P. S. de Laplace in asserting that God is an unnecessary hypothesis, states that science should decide on his existence or non-existence. It also appears under the name of scientific atheism, defined as the position of accepting only those views that have some scientific credibility.

It is also proposed to distinguish innate atheism, which refers to the thesis that every religious faith is adopted only through initiation into a particular religious tradition. We are born atheists and become religious through the process of upbringing. One can also speak about negative atheism, which formulates its statements only and exclusively in opposition to existing religious beliefs. Haughty atheism, another distinguished disbelief, the so-called neophyte atheists, consists in displaying elation and pride due to liberating oneself from the limitations imposed by religion and regaining the freedom of self-determination. A certain contradiction of such atheism is passive atheism, which is identical with a kind of apatheism or total religious indifference. Philosophical atheism is nothing else than the views expressed by such philosophers as P. Bayle, L. Feuerbach, F. Nietzsche, or J.-P. Sartre.

Atheism in practice, referring to B. Welte's concept of the non-existence of religion, means accepting the concept of "I do not believe in God, but certain religious practices give me pleasure" as a life principle. Unfortunately, this is a very functional approach to the phenomenon of religion. Further examples are practical atheism, according to which one lives as if there were no God; semantic atheism, which considers the concept of God to be meaningless, and finally, peaceful or Epicurean atheism, for which the most important thing is to live in pursuit of spiritual and physical pleasure, without posing such "unpleasant" questions as the existence of God or the afterlife. The last atheism is virtual; it reduces God to nature, proclaiming that some still unknown intra-world phenomenon explains the existence of the universe and there is no need to refer to transcendent causes or reasons.

Of course, this is not the only and complete division of contemporary atheism, but to some extent it reflects the complexity of the contemporary denial of God, both on the theoretical and practical levels. What are the causes of contemporary atheism? Can we speak of new atheism? Contemporary, new atheism is connected, first of all, with the new context in which atheists came to proclaim their views. This context is determined, as it has already been mentioned, by the tragedy of September 11, the attacks in London and Madrid and, therefore, by the growing fear of religious fundamentalism.

What is, or could be, this "novelty" of contemporary atheism? Firstly, new atheism proposes morality, or more precisely, a specific spirituality (as we will see later, Ferry tries to distinguish morality from spirituality stressing that atheism does not introduce anything into morality, but proposes a spirituality). It is certainly an attitude that focuses on temporality, without recourse to a transcendent reality. There is nothing that transcends this

order of being, all our efforts must focus on the world we know and can change. We are to make sense of our temporality as there is no other way to make sense of our lives, suffering or death. Secondly, the new atheism seeks to warn against the religious “threat” of fundamentalism. In the extreme interpretations of modern atheists (e.g., Dawkins or Onfray analyzed in the monograph) every religion is fundamentalism because it negates our rationality, demanding absolute obedience. At the same time, it shapes an attitude of intolerance or aggression in its followers. Polish philosopher A. Bielik-Robson notes that “contrary to what the supporters of secularism would like to think, fundamentalism is not a casual and marginal phenomenon; it is a fundamentally modern phenomenon - it is a response to aggressive modernisation. Wherever the Enlightenment takes the form of a merciless struggle with religious superstition, where the rhetoric of struggle dominates refusing elementary recognition of beliefs, religion goes underground, lurks, and waits for a favorable moment in which it could strike back, refusing the analogous recognition of the secular form of life”<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, the rejection of the heritage of the Enlightenment, narrowing the cognition of reality to a metaphysical interpretation, favors such an attitude. J. Sochoń comments similarly on fundamentalism in his book *The Postmodern Fate of Religion*: “Such a situation causes the establishment of a specific form of religion, called fundamentalism integrist. It is a thoroughly postmodern phenomenon, which has put the inventions of modernity at its service to enjoy them. Fundamentalism wants to redeem the suffering of the individual, condemned to the hardship of responsibility. And since people are above all unfulfilled consumers, they are, therefore, susceptible to the calls of fundamentalist movements. Thus, religious fundamentalism proclaims, like other religions, the inadequacy of a person as a consumer, thrown into the abyss of intersecting temptations”<sup>5</sup>. Onfray rejects any transcendence, because for him every religion is fundamentally an attitude of hatred, towards the world, reason, and carnality. The main argument of the French thinker reduces to the thesis that oceans of blood have been shed in the name of God, that the history of religion is the history of murder, genocide, inquisition, and hyper-terrorism. Onfray is absolutely convinced that all these misfortunes are only possible in theocratic systems<sup>6</sup>. This is a very reductionist claim.

4 A. Bielik-Robson, *Pusty tron miłosierdzia. Zemsta Boga Gillesa Kepela w perspektywie postseku-larnej*. In: G. Kepel, *Zemsta Boga*, trans. A. Adamczak, Warszawa 2010, p. 291.

5 J. Sochoń, *Ponowoczesne losy religii*, Warszawa 2004, p. 128.

6 Vide M. Onfray, *Traktat teologiczny*, trans. M. Kwaterko, Warszawa 2009, p. 80–91.

Onfray goes too far in his criticism of religion, for in all the examples he cites it is not religion itself, nor certainly God, that commits these or other acts but people who misuse the gift of reason and free will. It is people, and not God or religion, who commit murder, vile deeds, and their religiosity is irrelevant here. It only serves as a cover to hide completely different motives, such as expanding the sphere of influence or territory, and in most cases, simply satisfying the need for power. People use religion as an effective manipulative tool. But in this case, are we still dealing with religion? Onfray fails to see that what he is criticizing is no longer a religion, but merely an ideology. Religion as ideology, as Welte shows, is an example of the nonentity of religion, that is, a religion which preserves only external forms of religiosity and lacks reference to real Transcendence<sup>7</sup>. Such a “religion-ideology” does not worship God but people. This is something that the modern atheist does not perceive. Unfortunately, religious fundamentalism is seen by modernity as the essence of every religion. The answer from the rational world can only be one - atheism.

Thirdly, the new atheism most frequently strives to be more in line with “scientism” in the scientistic sense. Therefore, it is very eager, especially in the case of English-speaking authors, to reach for cognitive sciences and evolutionary biology, in order to use the theories developed by these sciences to depreciate religious systems pointing to their naturalistic determinants. Religion is an evolutionary product created at a certain stage of human development, therefore, all claims about the “supernatural” origin of religion should be treated as false and redundant.

The French philosopher Ph. Nemo proposes an interesting list of the causes of contemporary atheism. He distinguishes six main contexts that determine this phenomenon<sup>8</sup>. First of all, it is scientism, widespread in today’s world. Scientistic views gained popularity especially in the nineteenth century. A. Comte, followed by E. Renan, attributed an almost religious mission to them. Science, as they understand it, almost becomes religion, and scientists become priests. Confidence in science is usually accompanied by a critical attitude towards all metaphysical systems. Empirical sciences become not only autonomous but also self-sufficient, therefore, they do not need philosophy to function.

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7 Vide B. Welte, *Filozofia religii*, trans. G. Sowiński, Kraków 1996, p. 246–248.

8 P. Nemo, *La belle mort de l’athéisme moderne*, Paris 2012, p. 12–25.

An example of a scientistic attitude is the myth of the creation of a scientific worldview. The notion of a worldview should be understood as a set of statements accepted by people, determining their attitude to themselves, others, the external world, and God. Even if humans are not fully aware of it, they still possess a certain worldview. It functions as answers to questions such as, “Who am I?”, “What principles do I follow in life?”, “Do I believe in eternal life?” etc. These are questions to which science is unable to give definitive answers and, therefore, it is impossible to build one’s worldview solely on the results of the exact sciences. A scientific worldview is, therefore, a contradictory concept<sup>9</sup>. Humans should strive to make their worldview as rational as possible, namely, be able to justify the accepted theses, but this justification may refer to other forms of cognition than scientific. The error of scientism, among other things, is the fact that all such questions connected with the sense of life have been relegated to the irrational sphere or to the domain of human imagination and thus impoverishes human reflection of a very important dimension. The danger of scientism is particularly pernicious on an ethical level. The scientistic mentality, which trusts science unconditionally, can distort the process of ethical evaluation, leading to the conclusion that if something is technically feasible, then it is morally acceptable. Arguments based on the scientistic approach appeal to simple reasoning: since science has developed certain techniques, they can be applied. The technical possibility is equated with a moral norm.

What is completely ignored, is the question of referring to the personal norm in the moral evaluation of an action which demands respect for the dignity of the person for himself. Scientism thus ignores profound philosophical reflection on man.

The second reason is found in the historical-critical approach to the Judeo-Christian revelation. The historical-critical method tries to show the historical processes of the formation of biblical texts, which were sometimes very complex and lengthy. Depending on the individual stages of their creation the biblical texts were addressed to different categories of listeners or readers in completely different spatial and temporal situations. The “criticality” of the method consists in referring to objective criteria, as far as possible, in the various stages of its application (from text criticism to editorial criticism). This, however, has the effect of reducing religious texts

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<sup>9</sup> Vide S. Kiczuk, *Czy światopogląd naukowy jest możliwy?* In: *Nauka – Światopogląd – Religia*, Ed. Z. Zdybicka, Warszawa 1989, p. 35–42.

to purely human works, losing their sacred dimension. Jesus, for example, is reduced to the role of a reformer of the religious life of his time. Christianity, as well as other religions that refer to holy books, lose their specificity.

The distancing from God and religious reality, as Nemo notes, also takes place on a philosophical level through the criticism of metaphysics (Kant) or ontotheology (M. Heidegger)<sup>10</sup>. M. Szulakiewicz rightly observes that if today “someone tries to speak about God to contemporary man as it was done in the past (about God as a Supernatural beyond the world who requires proof of existence), to people who have become so engrained in the above-mentioned processes of contemporary culture, he will soon feel that he dares to speak about something that is mostly alien to them and may at best surprise them. There is an alarmingly growing dissonance between the language of worship, of religious doctrines, and the fact that the consciousness of modern man cannot cope with such a Supernatural”<sup>11</sup>. Modern philosophy, of course with numerous exceptions, is an agnostic philosophy about the absolute. From the 19th century onwards, atheist philosophy began to build an anthropological project on the only foundation, which was to be autonomous sapience.

This meant negating any reference to a transcendent *logos*, because if God is considered as the source of reason, a human cannot be considered as the principle of reason. The affirmation of an autonomous, responsible human being requires the negation of God who could only be an inverted image of man. This does not mean that the entire 20th- and 21st-century philosophy is atheist. One can find in this philosophy ample search for the sacred or pursuit of religiosity, but the metaphysical argumentation leading to the acceptance of a necessary being as a being that would not contradict reality has been rejected. The contemporary philosophy of religion is more a description of the desires of man longing for the reality of the sacred than a description of a real, dynamic, and necessary relationship of man with a personal God. This usually leads to the absolutization of art and aesthetic experience. Mystical or religious experience finds its substitute in “depth experiences” in relation to artistic space.

Another reason for the “new atheism” is the very popular idea of religious pluralism, which ultimately leads to questioning the veracity of every religion. Since there is no way to decide which religion is true, because they

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10 P. Nemo, *La belle mort de l'athéisme moderne*, Op. cit., p. 14–15.

11 M. Szulakiewicz, *Poszukiwania metafizyczne*, Toruń 2014, p. 161.

all seem to be equally distant from the truth about reality, the best solution is religious indifference or atheism. Religious pluralism is the position that the great religions embrace different conceptions of what is Real or Ultimate. Consequently, people adopt different attitudes in their lives, conditioned by the distinctiveness of cultures. "Within the individual cultural ways of a person there is an evident transformation of human existence from ego-centrism to focusing on the Real or the Ultimate"<sup>12</sup>. This vision of religion is so broad that even the "new atheism" with its proposition of spirituality also fits into such an understanding of religiosity. Unfortunately, religion without truth ceases to be a value on which one can build one's worldview, because for us only the reality that we consider true is a value. If religion is to maintain an authentic value, it cannot abandon the concept of truth understood in the classical sense, namely, as reference to reality. On the other hand, the argumentation in favor of religious pluralism is very rational. Sensory experience - J. Hick claims - is universal because its object is the physical world experienced by man equipped with the same apparatus of sensory cognition. We should look at religious experiences analogically noting, however, the fundamental difference. Invoking the principle of critical trust, we have no reason to doubt the truthfulness of this experience, but it is and must be pluralistic. Religious experience, unlike sensory experience, is neither necessary nor globally uniform. It is always permeated by a distinct culture, language, or tradition. Religion is pluralistic by nature because the response to the transcendent Reality is always mediated through a particular culture. Religious pluralism is not merely a state of affairs, but it expresses the very nature of religion. For atheists, however, the multiplicity of religions is an argument that undermines the veracity, and thus, meaningfulness of any religious system.

To sum up, the essence and at the same time the strength of the "new atheism" lies primarily in the proposal of a new spirituality, alternative to religious spirituality. In contrast to modern atheism of Feuerbach or Nietzsche, today's atheists do not limit themselves to the negation of the existence of the Absolute, moreover, in this matter they often emphasize an agnostic position, but in place of the traditional religion referring to the revelation, they propose a "new spirituality", based solely on the idea of man and his salvation in temporal rather than eternal life.

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12 K. Kondrat, *Idea dialogu między religiami świata*, "Collectanea Theologica", 71(2001)2, p. 79.

# SPIRITUALITY VERSUS RELIGIOUSNESS

The term ‘spirituality’ itself, and not just ‘atheist spirituality’, has raised many controversies. J. Mariański, for example, states that spirituality is undoubtedly a very problematic notion, because “this word is encountered in so many different contexts that finding a common denominator seems impossible, and undefined concepts invite abuse”<sup>1</sup>. Most often the term spirituality refers to forms of expression of religious feelings and beliefs, which are differentiated by belonging to a particular religion. Hence, we can speak of Buddhist or Catholic spirituality<sup>2</sup>. In the case of the Catholic Church, the concept of spirituality has a specifically ecclesiastical dimension and means a certain “way of understanding and living the Gospel truth as it has been received, lived, and continues to be authoritatively handed down in the community of the Church. In other words, it is historically one spirituality of the Church, which translates into the innumerable spiritualities of its individual members.”<sup>3</sup>

The following four main groups can be distinguished in the current literature on the relationship between religiousness and spirituality: spirituality as a component of religiousness; religiousness as a component of spirituality; religiousness and spirituality as separate or even contradictory phenomena

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1 J. Mariański, *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym*, Warszawa 2010, p. 200.

2 Vide W. Pawluczuk, *Duchowość*. In: *Leksykon socjologii religii*, Ed. M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, J. Mariański, Warszawa 2004, p. 90.

3 M. Chmielewski, *Duchowość*. In: *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej*, Ed. M. Chmielewski, Lublin–Kraków 2002, p. 226–232.

in some respects; religiousness and spirituality as overlapping phenomena<sup>4</sup>. The third type of relationship between spirituality and religiousness, where spirituality completely breaks with religious tradition is becoming more common. Of course, religious systems still maintain that the two realities are connected, because religion for spirituality is the element that provides a secure and open structure, however spirituality is increasingly practiced beyond an explicitly religious context<sup>5</sup>. Spirituality is no longer associated with any “religious or ecclesiastical institutions and is even defined as an alternative to religion. In any case, quite often it is not considered as an integral part of religion. Religiosity is associated with attachment to doctrines and beliefs enforced by the structures of church authorities. It is expressed in the observance of rituals and practices carried out in community contexts. Spirituality relates to one’s “self”, to a personal search for the sacred, without the mediation of the Church, to an inner experience.”<sup>6</sup> Presently, spirituality thus understood is referred to as “new spirituality”. In publications in the fields of sociology, psychology, theology, but also philosophy, the term “new spirituality” appears very often. It refers to various phenomena, most often associated with the New Age movement. Therefore, in order not to delve into the validity of this terminological discussion which would distract from the most important issues in this book, I assume that, unless stated otherwise, we are speaking about the form of spirituality that has taken shape in the modern world as a result of the changes introduced to European culture by modernity. Its most characteristic feature seems to be individualism. Thus, its origins on a wider scale can be traced back to the Reformation.

H. de Lubac in his *Drama of Atheist Humanism* writes that “it is not true that man, as some seem to say, cannot arrange the earth without God. The truth is that without God he can only, in the end, arrange it against man. Exclusive humanism is inhuman humanism”<sup>7</sup>. Similar formulations can be found in papal encyclicals: Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio* or Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in veritate*. Paul VI writes, “man can set about organizing terrestrial realities without God. But closed off from God, they will end up being directed against man. A humanism closed off from other realities be-

4 Vide J. Piotrowski, *Transcendencja duchowa. Perspektywa psychologiczna*, Warszawa 2018, p. 19.

5 Vide J. Mariański, *Nowa duchowość – alternatywa czy dopełnienie religijności*. In: *Religijność i duchowość – dawne i nowe formy*, Ed. M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, S. Grotowska, Kraków 2010, p. 24.

6 Vide J. Mariański, *Nowa duchowość – alternatywa czy dopełnienie religijności*. In: *Religijność i duchowość – dawne i nowe formy*, Ed. M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, S. Grotowska, Kraków 2010, p. 24.

7 J. Mariański, *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym*, Op. cit., p. 207–208.

comes inhuman”<sup>8</sup>. “In the same tone, Benedict XVI states that “A humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism. Only a humanism open to the Absolute can guide us in the promotion and building of forms of social and civic life [...]”<sup>9</sup>.

However, even mere observation of society contradicts these claims. A significant part of humanity, not believing in God, does not become inhuman. The provisions of the Second Vatican Council on religious freedom also undermine the above thesis: if an attitude “without God” leads to inhumanism, the Church should never accept the possibility of unbelief in God. To speak of religious freedom would become a useless formality.

It is true that atheism is an increasingly common attitude of modern man in Western culture, resulting, among other things, from the fact that the question of God himself, his existence, is rarely asked these days. The question itself has been relegated to the private sphere and is no longer a social issue. On the other hand, the fundamental gap between religion and contemporary culture does not result from the triumph and power of atheism in the 19th and 20th centuries but from the changes that have taken place in culture and understanding of people, since what is religious is no longer the foundation of the subject.

However, the separation of the orders of theology and philosophy is not a manifestation of some atheism but on the contrary, an expression of the very transcendence, namely, of respect for human freedom, so that all humans can independently find their own way. For some it is an attitude towards transcendence; for others - its conscious rejection. Transcendence in contemporary thought is perceived more in terms of the otherness of the unknown, of what one desires rather than the once and for all revealed fullness that can be described in metaphysical terms. Today contemporary philosophy of God should, as K. Mech stresses, pursue the search for transcendence, following several indications. First is the requirement of subjectivity, which means the world ceases to be that the place of question about the sacred. Instead, a human and what “happens between humans” has become such a place. The second requirement is epistemological and can be characterized as thinking about Transcendence beyond the subject-object category. God is not part of the world and object categories should not apply to him, as classical metaphysics has done so far. Another postulate is ethical, namely,

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<sup>8</sup> Paweł VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n° 42.

<sup>9</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n° 78.

making possible for Transcendence to reveal itself through one's way of being a person. For example, in the philosophy of M. Buber, this is accomplished by the mutual opening of two persons to each other, when the I-you relationship occurs. The fourth requirement of contemporary philosophy of God is the necessity of breaking with the idea of wholeness, because God is not the culmination of any system of thought. The last postulate is the requirement of depth, because, as Mech argues, the necessary condition for the recognition of Transcendence is some self-insight. Transcendence happens and is expressed in immanence<sup>10</sup>.

Even though atheism is a phenomenon statistically in minority in relation to the attitude of faith, it deserves special attention not only as criticism of a distorted image of God. This position is represented today by J.-L. Marion, for whom atheism is always based on concrete philosophical presuppositions, and thus the negation of God comes from replacing the living and true God with some finite image of God who identifies himself with reality. The real (true) God is replaced by human concepts, in which case one can even speak of conceptual idolatry rather than a rejection of the Absolute as such<sup>11</sup>. For T. Halik, an extremely important element of both faith and atheism, is doubt. As he writes, "the doubt, I think of as a sister of faith is not doubt about God, about his existence, his goodness, his readiness for communicating and self-giving. It is rather an awareness of the problematic, inadequate, conditioned, and limited nature of all human perception and concerning a Reality that radically transcends us. And the caution lest we overlook the gulf that separates us from the hidden God, lest - captivated by our own limited religious vision - we make an idol, a caricature of God, out of our own religion, on the one hand, and on the other, presumptuously condemn the paths of religious exploration followed by others."<sup>12</sup> Doubt, understood as the ability to ask questions about the very validity of the views one has adopted, is inherent both in the attitude of belief in God and in his denial. Believers should sometimes put themselves in the place of atheists and vice versa. This attitude described by Halik as "vacillation" is not a sign of uncertainty or fear, but "the pulse of life itself, a movement coming from the depths of all reality".<sup>13</sup>

10 Vide K. Mech, *Filozofia w poszukiwaniu Absolutu*, "Studia Religiológica. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego", (2000)33, p. 9–15.

11 Vide J.-L. Marion, *De la «mort de Dieu» aux noms divins: l'itinéraire théologique de la métaphysique*. In: *L'être et Dieu*, Ed. D. Bourg, Paris 1986, p. 110.

12 T. Halik, *Hurra, nie jestem Bogiem*, trans. A. Klich, Warszawa 2013, p. 43.

13 Ibid., p. 44.

According to Halik, the boundary does not run between those who consider themselves believers and those who do not. The division is between those who leave alone questions of faith, both atheists and theists, and those for whom questions about God are relevant. Whether they are believers, for whom faith never ceases to be a seeking adventure of exploration or atheists, who in one way or another struggle with the question of God, even denying his existence, it is doubt that is important, independent of the adopted worldview<sup>14</sup>.

According to Halik, contemporary Europe needs both secularism and religiousness. If the secular character of Europe is to fulfill its meaning, which, according to Halik, is to guarantee a spiritual space of freedom, then Europe needs religious faith as its complementary component; otherwise, it is in danger of turning into an intolerant substitute religion. Secularism will idolize itself. It is similar with religiosity - Christianity can best develop its identity only in freedom and pluralism, that is, when it resists any temptation to fundamentalism. Christianity today must move from narrow confessionalism to openness which includes both a kind attitude towards the "other" and the ability to subtly "recontextualise" its own tradition. Also, the author considers criticism of religion and a certain type of "atheism" as "a sort of religious experience" beneficial for Christianity<sup>15</sup>.

Halik puts forward the thesis that "today's Europe is neither non-Christian nor irreligious. It is in a sense Christian and religious. At present, the religion of Europe is not Christianity, and our European Christianity is no longer a religion."<sup>16</sup> It requires several clarifications to see that one cannot disagree with this argument. Firstly, European culture has been fundamentally influenced by Christianity and therefore, it cannot be described as non-Christian. Besides, many Europeans admit to professing Christianity. Secondly, Halik explains: "I do not consider Europe irreligious; I am convinced that 'religion' is a cultural and anthropological constant in the dimension of individual and social life - its content changes, its form radically changes too, the way people interpret the concept of 'religion' changes, but nevertheless mankind is constantly accompanied by something which prevents us from removing this ambiguous word from our vocabulary or using it to describe those phenomena that belong to the past. If we speak about Christianity and religion, we cannot use these concepts ahistorically,

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14 Vide Ibid., p. 114.

15 Ibid. *Wzywany czy niewzywany Bóg się tutaj zjawia*, trans. A. Babuchowski, Kraków 2006, p. 11-12.

16 Ibid., p. 21.

but we have to look at the changes they undergo in connection with the transformation of cultural and social paradigms”<sup>17</sup>.

According to Halik, religion in some form must find its place in contemporary culture. However, an attempt to continue its old form without reference to the changes that have taken place in modernity will lead nowhere.

To briefly explain the second part of the thesis concerning Europe and Christianity posed by Halik, it is necessary to quote the meaning of the word *religion* which he uses. He defines it as a force integrating society. He adds immediately that it is not “religion that integrates society”, but “that what integrates society constitutes its religion. For religion in this sense (as a force integrating society) I shall use the word *religio*, a word of Latin origin, from which the term for religion developed in most European languages. This understanding of religion is not the product of some functionalist trend in contemporary sociology, but remains close to the original meaning the word *religio* had at the time of its origins in ancient Rome. If I say that the religion of today’s Europe is no longer the Christian faith and that currently the Christian faith is not a ‘religion’, I use the term ‘religion’ in this very sense, as *religio*”<sup>18</sup>. Christianity, a force integrating the whole society has not been functioning since the beginning of the modern era – presently such a force is the media and the Internet. “Religion as *confessio* - a doctrinal and institutional ‘system’ integrating a particular group of believers - this is what Christianity was throughout the modern era and this form will probably continue. However, it is precisely this form that, since the ‘crisis of institutions’ and ‘crisis of ideology’ (which can be linked to the symbolic date of 1968), has been experiencing such a significant decrease in its influence due to the ‘loss of the biosphere’ that many have regarded the crisis of this rather vague type of Christianity as the collapse of Christianity and religion in general”<sup>19</sup>. Even the language of the Christian religion has lost its ability to describe the state of current knowledge and human consciousness. According to Halik, there are many reasons for this state of affairs: the Western schism, discrediting of the Church due to religious wars, the inability of theology to assimilate impulses coming from the development of natural sciences, humanist criticism of texts, Renaissance experience of carnality, individuality, lack of openness to pluralism, fear of freedom. For the Czech philosopher, the culmination of “secularization” was the fact that the

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17 Ibid., p. 22.

18 Ibid., p. 27

19 Ibid., p. 49.

Christian religion, from a “living language” becomes a “dead language” just as Latin ceases to be a medium of cultural communication (it was certainly already limited to certain social spheres) and begins to be only an object of academic studies. This does not mean that Christian faith or religion are disappearing, but their paths with the modern world are completely diverging. The most important thing is that secularization does not involve the collapse of Christianity or loss of faith”, but the collapse of the “Christian religion”, and more precisely, “the disappearance of Christianity as a religion in the sense of *religio*. It is obvious that the loss of its previous form has triggered shock, confusion, and a sense of weakness in various structures of Christianity (including the most internal one, namely, individual experience of faith by many Christians). Nevertheless, during the modern era, Christianity has found new forms of social, cultural, and political existence. From now on, however, we must track the fate of ‘Christianity’ and ‘religion’ (*religio*) separately, although from time to time they will still cross”<sup>20</sup>. Secular society is not the enemy of Christianity but - paradoxically - a form of Christianity: secular, anonymous. Unfortunately, the peaceful coexistence of both pillars of the modern West - Christianity and its secular partner - is sometimes violated not only by the return of triumphalism, intolerance, and “fundamentalism” of Christian communities but also by the secular community’s rejection of the principle of freedom of conscience, turning secularism into an intolerant religion, fighting, and pushing religious traditions out of the public space. Thus, Halik argues that “secularism, left to itself, succumbs to constant temptation of the sins of ruthlessness and arrogance, which in the distant past weakened the moral authority of the Church. Therefore, secularism also has its ‘fundamentalist’, fanatical, and totalitarian form. Also, the secular tradition, like the Churches, must get used to the fact that in the public space of a free pluralistic society - to which it has largely contributed - it is only one of the voices, only one of the parties, and not the decisive party. Perspectivism, the great gift of postmodern wisdom, that Nietzsche taught us, exposes anyone’s *a priori* claims to neutrality and objectivity as an illusion: we are condemned to one another”<sup>21</sup>.

The development of Western societies after the Enlightenment does not necessarily imply de-Christianisation. It merely indicates a slow or rapid

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 28–29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

process of divergence of ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical Christianity, at least in the form of spirituality, even atheist spirituality<sup>22</sup>.

One interesting solution, gaining in popularity and practice, is the replacement of (institutional) religion with its rituals, moral principles - with a spirituality completely detached from the religious dimension, e.g., atheist spirituality. A new approach to religious faith appears in modernism; spirituality is detached from religiosity. Religion is increasingly understood and analyzed from the point of view of institutions, rules of conduct resulting from belonging to a particular social group. Faith becomes an existential possibility, intra-human, and does not require an appeal to Transcendence. This thesis is well illustrated by the texts of the French thinker Ferry, since he speaks of the Christian incarnation only as humanisation of divinity that does not refer to transcendence. Increasingly frequent use of the Far East spirituality also reinforces the process of moving away from religiosity towards spirituality in the broadest sense.

The phrase “atheist spirituality” may seem quite paradoxical at first. In practice, it raises objections of both atheists and theists. Atheists, who would prefer to be called naturalists<sup>23</sup> - to emphasize their attachment to the exact sciences and their interpretation of the world and not be identified only with the negation of theism - will be inclined to deny the existence of a spiritual element and, consequently, the sense of speaking about spiritual phenomena. It is worth emphasizing that this does not apply to all atheists<sup>41</sup>. Bielik-Robson in her essay entitled *Is postmodern spirituality possible?* describes the problem with spirituality in an interesting way, juxtaposing it with postmodernity (this description perfectly explains why some people have a problem with the syntagma “atheist spirituality”, so it is worth quoting). “One of the characteristic tendencies of the so-called postmodern ethics is to avoid confrontation with spiritual problems; its strategy usually consists in waiting until the unsaid problems, condemned to conceptual non-existence, cease to exist on their own. For many, the term - postmodern spirituality - sounds like “wooden iron”. What is postmodernism if not precisely a radical departure from what the spiritual traditions of all previous cultures fed on; a rupture with a certain form in which ‘the spirit’ expressed its need for existential depth and meaning? (...) The postmodern world, despite all its internal diversity, has one common characteristic: it is a world of con-

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> T. Sieczkowski, *Nowy ateizm. Rekonstrukcja światopoglądu*, Łódź 2018, e-book.

scious and accepted contingency (or this diversity results from this very consciousness and acceptance). Meanwhile, the world of the spirit, to put it quite simply, is the world of what is necessary”<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, theists will often oppose the juxtaposition of spirituality with postmodernity and atheism. They will tend to refuse atheists the right to experience higher, spiritual feelings, and they will want to attribute “cryptotheism” to those who give importance to non-religious spirituality.

This reluctance will be justified on the grounds of incompatibility between religion and modernity - since there has been a permanent break with metaphysics, it has found itself on the margins of contemporary culture. There is no place for it in the postmodern debate and, consequently, there can be no place for any form of spirituality either, because it is impossible to break the bond between metaphysics and spiritual issues. Postmodernity cuts itself off completely from metaphysics, on which theists still rely to a large extent, wanting to return to the old, metaphysical order of the world. Consequently, they do not give atheists or postmodernity the right to any spirituality. Perhaps it would be appropriate to ask first what spirituality is generally and whether it contradicts atheism and postmodernity. It turns out that the answer is not simple, and it is not possible to reach a consensus on the definition of the term. Following D. Motak, it can be stated that “attempts to define spirituality are constantly undertaken, and probably without much exaggeration one can say there are almost as many definitions of spirituality as there are authors of works on the subject. To present an arbitrary choice of a few of them would not contribute to anything significant”<sup>25</sup>.

Due to the fact that the very concept of spirituality causes great problems when trying to define it and because of extensive literature on the subject in the field of philosophy, theology, psychology, sociology, and many popular scientific works, the problem will be reduced to an attempt to answer the question whether – as a result of changes in Western civilization, which took place under the influence of modernity (broadly understood) – we can observe the emergence of a completely new type of spirituality, which no longer creates oxymorons in combination with words such as atheism, modernity or postmodernity. Is the atheist spirituality, and more specifically its version found in France, as represented by the philosophers discussed in this book, an example of this?

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24 A. Bielik-Robson, *Inna nowoczesność. Pytania o współczesną formułę duchowości*, Kraków 2000, p. 265–266.

25 D. Motak, *Religia–duchowość–religijność. Przemiany zjawiska i ewolucja pojęcia*, “Studia Religiosa. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego”, (2010)43, p. 212.



# NEW SPIRITUALITY

Although the most popular current in today's philosophy seems to be the so-called new atheism, represented by the "four horsemen of new atheism": D. Dennett, S. Harris, R. Dawkins, and Ch. Hitchens, French atheism is by no less interesting, though completely different. That is why French philosophers have become the main protagonists of this book to counter-balance the great popularity enjoyed by the four just mentioned. It must be admitted that French contemporary atheism is also much more diverse. All the authors discussed here are philosophers, but each of them represents a different philosophical tradition and refers to different philosophical masters as well as to different religious connotations, which will be, however, visible, because the tradition in which one has been formed influences one's choices later on, at least through a reading list in one's youth or through a different point of reference. And so, Luc Ferry, coming from the Republican right and Gaullism, now calls himself a Kantian. André Comte-Sponville, on the other hand, Ferry's peer, represents a completely different tradition. Though politically he comes from the communist left wing, in his views one can see his fascination with Eastern philosophy and Spinoza. Michel Onfray considers the ancient Cynics and F. Nietzsche as his philosophical masters. In turn, Marcel Gauchet refers to twentieth century sociologists, such as M. Weber or E. Durkheim.

This diversity also results in the fact that the philosophers chosen as the "characters" of the book have different (sometimes even diametrically) perceptions of the question of spirituality. The problem is to provide one consistent definition. However, it seems that Ferry has the most complete

and accurate picture of what spirituality is and how it has influenced the history of the Western world, in what forms it has been present in Europe since antiquity. That is why I have chosen him as a kind of guide. To describe these four selected French philosophers and their concepts of atheist spirituality, I will use the description of Western thought proposed by Ferry. The argument for such an arrangement of material is that his analyses, reaching back to Greek mythology, refer to Greek philosophy, Christianity, and its influence on philosophy, and then describe the upheaval of the Enlightenment, *modernitas* with Nietzsche as the main figure, and the influence of materialism.

The whole story ends with humanism, which Ferry represents. Therefore, in order not to suspend the consideration of other creators of atheist spirituality in a vacuum, I set out where they were assigned by Ferry. The argument for such an arrangement of the book is also based on Ferry's conversations with Comte-Sponville and Gauchet, which appeared on the French publishing market. Another advantage of such an arrangement is the comprehensive discussion of the question of spirituality, so not only will it be possible to analyze the concept of these four selected French philosophers but also show exactly how their proposal relates to the proposals of ancient Greek philosophers and Christianity. In this way we shall achieve a comprehensive landscape of spirituality over the centuries in European thought. Ferry defines spirituality as a question of salvation: what can save a person in the face of death. The question of spirituality is inseparable from the question of the meaning of suffering and death. In confrontation with these two elements of our lives emerges what is most spiritual in a person. However, he is not only concerned with physical death, which is biologically inevitable. Much worse in his descriptions is the death we encounter in the form of the death of loved ones, but also all the irreversible losses we often experience throughout our lives: "*death (...) has very different faces, whose presence is paradoxically fully palpable in the very the midst of real life*"<sup>1</sup>. These losses, sometimes very painful, make us aware of mortality, of the fact that many things in this world fall under the phrase "never again", says Ferry<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, people are the only ones who are aware of mortality, and this causes the need to liberate themselves from this pain. "Man (...) is mortal or, to use the language of philosophers, is a 'finite being', limited in

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1 L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* trans. E. Aduszkiewicz, Warszawa 2011, p. 17.

2 Vide L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 17–18.

space and time. However, unlike animals, for example, he is the only being aware of his own limitations. He knows that he will die and that his loved ones will also die. He cannot, therefore, refrain from asking himself questions about this situation, which at first sight is disturbing, even absurd, and unbearable. For this reason, of course, he first turns to religions that promise him salvation<sup>3</sup>. This is where spirituality is born. “To live well, be free, capable of joy, generosity, and love, we must first and foremost overcome fear or – even better – all fears, because the Irreversible manifests itself in many different ways.”<sup>4</sup> This is why the syntagma “atheist spirituality”, as defined by Ferry, will not be unusual because, as we shall see, salvation does not come from religion alone. In Ferry’s understanding, this is precisely the task of philosophy<sup>5</sup>. It is not about critical thinking or other skills that are very often attributed to philosophy today (Ferry points out that philosophy does not, after all, have a monopoly on the correct way of reasoning and asking questions about the world), but precisely about enabling people to get rid of fear of the end. If religions define themselves as “the teaching of salvation by the Other”, by God, then the great philosophies can be defined as the “teaching of salvation by oneself”, without the help of God<sup>6</sup>. To confirm this thesis Ferry cites many examples: Epicurus, Lucretius, Epictetus, and from more contemporary, M. Montaigne who says that “to philosophize is to learn to die”<sup>7</sup>, or B. Spinoza, I. Kant, or F. Nietzsche, “who, reflecting on the ‘innocence of becoming’, discovers the deepest elements of the doctrine of salvation forged in antiquity”<sup>8</sup>. Since various philosophical concepts deal differently with the question of salvation from life in fear of death, each of these concepts will underpin the origin of different types of atheist spirituality. Interestingly, Ferry concludes that the great philosophies are secularized forms of the religions that preceded them. Thus, Greek philosophy will be the result of the secularization of Greek mythology, and *modernitas* will be the result of Christianity. This conception is obviously not novel; a similar thought was presented by C. Schmitt. There is ample literature and discussion around these concepts, with H. Blumenberg’s *The Legitimacy of the Modern* at the top. However, for the topic of spirituality itself, it is so interesting and orderly that it will be shown later in the book it as

3 Ibid., p. 15.

4 Ibid., p. 18.

5 Vide Ibid., *La révolution de l’amour. Pour une spiritualité laïque*, Paris 2010, p. 344.

6 Ibid., *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 19.

7 M. de Montaigne, *Próby*, vol. I, trans. T. Boy-Żeleński, Warszawa 1985, p. 104.

8 L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 21.

does juxtaposes and describes various types of spirituality in the history of European culture. Atheist spirituality, as observed at present in the French milieu, has its strong foundation in the whole Western thought. Therefore, it is impossible to describe it without reference to proposals that originated in ancient Greece. Following Ferry, we should first reflect on the concept of salvation in Greek mythology, select the elements used by the philosophers of the time, then analyze the revolution proposed by Christianity in this context, and what remained of it in philosophy after the Enlightenment. This part of discussion is only an introduction to show the broader context of French contemporary, atheist spirituality, therefore, it will be very brief and there may appear an accusation of being too general and simplistic, but it is Ferry's conception, so it shows how this spirituality proposal originated. Since all the authors mentioned are contemporaries, one may conclude that Ferry (especially since he had the opportunity to write books together with Gauchet and Comte-Sponville) sufficiently understands the philosophical views of his compatriots, and in this context well describes and interprets the history which led them all to the creation of their conception of atheist spirituality, even though each of them advocates a different version of the spirituality.

## ANTIQUITY AS A SOURCE OF ATHEIST SPIRITUALITY

“The first task of philosophy is to see the essence of the world, of what is most real, most important, and most significant. In the tradition culminating in Stoicism, the deepest essence of the world is harmony, order, everything that is right and beautiful at the same time, and what the Greeks called *ta cosmos*.<sup>9</sup> The first element Ferry indicates in his search for the origins of atheist spirituality is the harmony of the universe, which, as we shall see, led Comte-Sponville to propose secular mystical experiences of oneness with the reality around us. “So the Stoics encourage us to contemplate *the divinity thus conceived, (theorein)*, which has nothing to do with a personal God, but is linked to the order of the world, by all appropriate means, for

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9 Ibid., p. 36.

example, by studying the exact sciences, physics, astronomy and biology, but also through the multiplication of observations that show how much the universe as a whole (and not just as part of it) is ‘well done’: the regular movement of the planets to the same degree as the structure of the smallest living organism, the smallest insect, for an attentive observer who intelligently cultivates the theory, prove to what extent the idea of the cosmos, that is, fair and beautiful order, properly describes the reality that surrounds us, so that we can contemplate it adequately<sup>10</sup>. According to Ferry, for the ancients the universe had in some sense a ‘divine character’. It was related to a perfect other world but was primarily rational, that is, in accordance with what the Greeks called *lógos* and which means the admirable ordering of things. Therefore, the point of every system of the perception of reality is a theory, i.e., the result of exercises thanks to which one can understand and decipher this order “just like a biologist understands the meaning and function of the organs of the living organism he is dissecting”, concludes Ferry<sup>11</sup>.

The consequence of this Greek interpretation of the world as ordered and perfectly harmonious will be the understanding of human life as a search to find its rightful place within the cosmic order. “For most Greek thinkers (...) only in this search, by fulfilling this task, can one attain happiness and a good life”<sup>12</sup>. One will find happiness only by becoming part of a greater harmony. This feature of spirituality developed in antiquity will also be present in contemporary secular spirituality.

Since in the context of spirituality the most interesting question is how the ancients dealt with the fear of death, it is worth quoting after Ferry the book by H. Arendt *Between Past and Future*. Traditionally, there were two ways of dealing with the inevitability of death. On the one hand, through offspring thanks to which one could enter the eternal cycle of nature, the cosmos which does not die. On the other hand, there was the possibility of ensuring one’s immortality, or at least the immortal memory of oneself, through heroic deeds that became the subject of stories about heroes passed down from generation to generation. “But if mortals succeed in giving their works, deeds and words a certain permanence and stopping their destruction, they would enter, at least to a certain extent, into the world of eternal

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Vide Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 41–42.

duration, and establish themselves in it; mortals themselves would find their place in the cosmos where everything except human beings is immortal”<sup>13</sup>.

This was the case before the advent of Greek philosophy, which became the source of the third way of overcoming death. Ferry refers to Stoic thinking. “Indeed, according to the Stoics, the sage, through appropriate exercises of the way of thinking and acting, will be able to achieve the form of immortality or at least eternity proper to man. He will, of course, die. Death, however, will not be for him the absolute end of everything, but rather a transformation or, if one prefers, a transition from one state to another in the bosom of the universe, whose perfection as a whole gives it an absolute and, therefore, divine immutability. It is a fact, we will die, like ears of grain that will one day be threshed. However, Epictetus asks, are we now to cover our eyes so as not to see, and because of superstition avoid expressing such thoughts because they could become ‘bad omens’? No, because ‘ears disappear but the world does not’. The comment on this sentence deserves a moment’s attention. ‘It is also ominous to speak of the fact that leaves fall from a tree, that the succulent figs turn into dried figs, and grapes into raisins. For all this is the passing of things from their original state into different forms of existence. No destruction takes place here, but it is a symptom of certain laws and rules established in the world. Such a transition is a journey, it is the transition of little importance. A transition of this kind, only of greater importance, is death. It is not a transition a present being into a non-being, but into a being that does not exist now. – So, I will be gone? – You will not be there, but there will be something else that the world needs now. For you were also called into being not when you wanted it, but when the world needed your existence”<sup>14</sup>.

Only theoretical wisdom can thus save one from the fear of finitude. Death in this sense is a transition from one state into another. Participation in the eternal cosmos entails the fact that as part of this universe one will never cease to be its element. Philosophy’s task is to understand that such a transition takes place after death, and on the other hand, propose a reflection on the meaning of life.

In order to achieve these objectives, it was necessary to introduce practical exercises proposed by Stoic philosophy. The climax of philosophy

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13 H. Arendt, *Koncepcja historii: starożytna i nowożytna*. In: *Między czasem minionym a przyszłym*, trans. M. Godyń, W. Madej, Warszawa 1994, p. 58.

14 Epiktet, *Diatryby*. In: *Diatryby; Encheiridion*, trans. L. Joachimowicz, Warszawa 1961, p. 317–318, Vide L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 56–57.

is not only the cognition and contemplation of truth but also, or perhaps primarily, the teaching of salvation. Why do we need salvation? We are permeated with fear caused by the awareness of our finitude. The aim of philosophy is to remove this fear. Contemporary spirituality, developed by philosophical systems, can still offer salvation, even for those who do not share Stoic views<sup>15</sup>.

These proposals are linked to a specific current of spirituality that is still present. Similar themes can be found both in Spinoza and Nietzsche as well as in Tibetan Buddhism. This is particularly interesting in the context of French atheist spirituality, since Comte-Sponville, one of its main representatives, refers strongly to this tradition. A significant section of this book will be devoted to him, because in his thought Ferry finds a correction of the weakness of Nietzsche's ideas and presents him as an example of materialism. Therefore, it is worth highlighting this topic now, but elaborating on the details in accordance with the chronology of European history and Ferry's interpretation.

## THE NOVELTY OF SALVATION IN CHRISTIANITY

The question of understanding salvation in Christianity should actually be omitted because after all, the topic is atheist, not religious. However, Ferry gives four reasons for not doing so. First, in his opinion, Christianity is anti-philosophical and competes with Greek philosophy; a surprising view because Christianity used, for example, philosophical concepts to express their dogmas and constantly emphasizes their relationship with rationality. But Ferry asserts that the new religiosity that emerged two thousand years ago, "will, so to speak, benefit from shortcomings which weaken the Stoic answer to the question of salvation so much that they are capable of overthrowing it from within"<sup>16</sup>. Second, within Christianity there is space for philosophy. Of course, Ferry complains that there is not enough space there, that it is limited to serving theology only, but nevertheless puts this cause in the second place. The third reason is that Ferry wants to compare

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<sup>15</sup> Vide L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

philosophy with religion as its closest phenomenon. “Closest, because both ultimately strive for salvation, wisdom, understood as victory over anxieties about human finitude. Opposite, because the paths of philosophy and religion are not only different but also in fact, opposite and incompatible”<sup>17</sup>. The fourth reason is that in an ethical dimension Christianity contains ideas that are also valued by nonbelievers. This is where Ferry speaks of philosophy as the secularization of religious concepts because some Christian ideas, after their separation from the religious source, have become the subject of contemporary philosophy undertaken even by atheists. “For example, the idea that the moral value of a person does not depend on what gifts or natural talents one has received but on the use one makes of them, on his freedom and not on his nature, is Christianity’s gift to humanity, and many modern ethics, non-Christian and even anti-Christian, will nevertheless, take it up on their own account”<sup>18</sup>.

Christianity was the first idea to propose the equality of people. “However, there is something more. Based on the definition of the human person and a completely new idea of love, Christianity will leave incomparable traces in the history of thought. Not to understand them means to renounce all intellectual and ethical understanding of the world in which we still live today. To give you just one example, it is perfectly clear that without the typical of Christianity value given for the human person, the individual, the philosophy of human rights to which we are so strongly attached would never arise”<sup>19</sup>.

The fundamental difference in the understanding of salvation in the case of Christianity was the identification of the Greek *logos* with the person of Christ: “the *logos* which, as we have seen in the Stoics, is related to the impersonal, harmonious, and divine structure of the whole cosmos, is identified by Christians with a special person - Christ. To the great scandal of the Greeks, the followers of the new faith will claim that the *logos*, that is, the divine, is not at all, as the Stoics claim, identical with the harmonious order of the world as such, but that it was incarnated into a unique being - in Christ!”<sup>20</sup> Incarnation was an idea completely alien to Greek philosophy, and with it also comes a different conception of human salvation. “In the seemingly abstract, if not to say, sterile discussion investigating where and in what the divine - *logos* - is incarnated, whether it is a structure of the world

17 Ibid., p. 79–80. Vide Ibid., *Qu’est-ce qu’une vie réussie?* Paris 2002, p. 68–72.

18 Ibid., p. 80.

19 Ibid., p. 83.

20 Ibid., p. 81–82.

or, on the contrary, a unique person, what matters is simply *the transition from the teaching of anonymous and blind salvation to a promise that we will be saved not only by a person, by Christ, but also as persons*<sup>21</sup>.

In a very interesting way, Ferry discusses the relation which at the very beginning of Christianity occurred between religion and Greek philosophy. Worthy of attention is his analysis of the opening passage of the Gospel according to St John. He draws attention to the word *logos* whose meaning as “Word Incarnate” is completely incomprehensible. Ferry even says that it is pure nonsense<sup>22</sup>; it “attributes the qualities of divinity to an ordinary human being, while what is divine (...) can only be something great, because it is connected with the universal cosmic order, in no way with a particular person, irrespective of his great merits<sup>23</sup>”. In this way Christianity completely overturned the understanding of the meaning of salvation. “In the few lines with which he begins his Gospel, John invites us to believe that the Word incarnate, the divine, no longer means the rational, harmonious structure of the cosmos, the universal order as such, but a mere human being. How could a Stoic, with any sense of mind, assume that someone might ridicule him to the point of mocking everything he believed in? For it is obvious that the reversal of meaning is not innocent. Inevitably it will have great consequences for the doctrine of salvation when it comes to our relation to eternity and even to immortality<sup>24</sup>”. Ferry claims that St. Justin is a practical dimension of the subversion described here. He is a convert to Christianity, a former Stoic who was condemned to death by Marcus Aurelius after a trial concerning salvation and Justin’s defense of a Christian vision of providence based on God’s benevolent love instead of Stoic blind and heartless destiny<sup>25</sup>. Ferry lists other features that distinguish Christianity. One may agree or disagree with his description. At times he seems too simplistic, for example, when he states that the characteristic feature of Christianity is that faith replaces reason or even contradicts it. However, the matter seems to be more complicated because Christian thinkers have from the beginning represented various attitudes towards reason, ranging from extremely fideistic to extremely rational. But regardless of this, it is necessary to adopt this one-sided viewpoint for the purpose of examining atheist spirituality,

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21 Ibid., p. 82.

22 Vide Ibid., p. 83–85.

23 Ibid., p. 83.

24 Ibid., p. 85.

25 Vide Ibid., *Qu'est-ce qu'une vie réussie?* Op. cit., p. 345–363.

for at least in the case of the four thinkers discussed in this book, they all represent such a view.

Ferry believes that because of the displacement of philosophy understood in the Greek way, that is, as love of wisdom and a signpost for man to salvation, because it has only become a servant of theology, in Europe to this day philosophy has lost its original function. “Even though many people think that they have finally exited from the Christian era, most philosophers still reject the idea that philosophy can be a teaching of salvation or even wisdom. In both high school and university, philosophy has essentially become a history of thought reinforced by reflective, critical, or argumentative discourse. In this way it has become a purely “discursive” science (that is: exclusively a kind of discourse) and in this sense, scholastic, contrary to what it was for the ancient Greeks(...) With literally a few exceptions, contemporary philosophy, although no longer Christian, assumes, without even suspecting it, the servile and secondary status to which the victory of Christianity over Greek thought has condemned it”<sup>26</sup>.

There are three main changes that Christianity has made regarding salvation, and they have proved so attractive that they have easily displaced the Greek concept of an ordered cosmos. Firstly, “if *logos*, that is, the divine, incarnates in a specific person, in Christ, providence takes on a new meaning. It ceases to be, as among the Stoics, an anonymous and blind destiny, and becomes a personal, benevolent attention, comparable to the attention a father pays to his children. Thanks to this, the salvation that we can strive for by adjusting not to the cosmic order but to the indicated divine person, will become something personal. Christianity promises us an immortality of a special kind. It will not be an anonymous and cosmic eternity, in which we are but an unconscious speck of the whole, but an eternity that embraces and transcends us in every dimension<sup>27</sup>”. Secondly, the originality of the Christian message can be reduced to the “good news”, to the promise of real immortality, understood as resurrection. Immortality does not mean some indefinite existence, but comes down to the idea of resurrection i.e., not only the human soul will be saved but also our bodies. “If we claim that people are immortal as long as they follow the commandments of God, if they live and love ‘in God,’ if one assumes that this immortality can be reconciled with love, and even that it is one of its possible effects, why deprive

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 95–96.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 105–106.

oneself of it? Why not become attached to our loved ones if Christ promises us that we will be able to find them after biological death and be reunited with them in eternal life, providing we bind all our actions with God? So, between love, attachment, and simple universal compassion, which could never attach itself to a single being, there is room for a third form of love: love for eternal creatures ‘in’ God”<sup>28</sup>.

The third element distinguishing the Christian understanding of salvation will not only be personal immortality linked to the resurrection of bodies but also the way it is accomplished - through the experience of love. “The peculiarity of the Christian resurrection consists in the fact that in its doctrine of the happy life it combines three basic themes: the personal immortality of the soul, resurrection of bodies - with their uniqueness of beloved faces - and salvation through love, even the most unusual possible, so long as it is love ‘in’ God. Resurrection thus understood is the focal point of the entire Christian doctrine of salvation.”<sup>29</sup> The new spirituality accomplishes secularization here as well; it is not God who will be the object of love, but only man. As a summary of this part of the history of spirituality in the Western world it is again worth quoting Ferry who captures the process of the transformation of religious spirituality into secular spirituality: “Among the Greeks, and especially the Stoics, the fear of death finally disappeared as soon as the sage realized himself to be a part - no doubt a tiny part, nevertheless a real part - of the eternal cosmic order. As this particle, by virtue of belonging to the universal *lógos*, he began to think of death as a mere transition from one state to another - instead of a radical and final disappearance. Nevertheless, both eternal salvation and, for the same reasons, providence remained impersonal. Only as unconscious fragments of perfection devoid of consciousness could we think of ourselves in terms of eternity rather than individuality. The personalization of *logos* changes all the assumptions of the problem. If the promises made to me by Christ, the Word incarnate, which trustworthy witnesses have seen with their own eyes are true, if divine providence takes me under its protection as a person, however humble, my immortality also becomes something personal. Finally, death itself has been removed and not only the fears it evokes. It is no longer anonymous and cosmic Stoic immortality, but an individual and conscious resurrection of souls together with their “saved” body. In this way, ‘love in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 115–116.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

God' appears as a special dimension which gives ultimate meaning to the revolution which Christianity carries out in the world of concepts used by Greek thought. This very love, which is at the heart of the new doctrine of salvation, proves in the end to be 'stronger than death'.<sup>30</sup>

So, what happened in the sixteenth century that there was a change in the perception of how to liberate oneself from the fears associated with death? Why did Christian doctrine cease to be a sufficient answer for the people of the time and why, using Ferry's concept, did modern philosophy secularize the Christian vision of salvation?

Ferry sees the sources of this change primarily in four publications, which appeared between the middle of the 16th and the end of the 17th century: Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems, Ptolemaic & Copernican*, and Newton's *Principia mathematica*. The French philosopher justifies this choice as follows: "These four authors will have as much influence on the history of thought as no one before. Thanks to their work, a new era was born in which, in many respects, we still live. So not only man, as is sometimes said, has lost his place in the world, but also the world itself, at least the cosmos that formed the closed and harmonious framework of human existence since antiquity, has simply disappeared, leaving the mindset of those times in a state of confusion, which we can hardly grasp today. At the same time modern physics annihilated the principles of the ancient cosmologies - claiming, for example, that the world is not round, closed, hierarchical, and ordered, but is an infinite chaos devoid of meaning, a field of forces and objects which collide with each other regardless of any harmony - thus seriously undermining the foundations of the Christian religion"<sup>31</sup>.

It is impossible not to agree with the French author, since we know from the perspective of five centuries how much the development of natural sciences divided Christians. And it deals not only with the disputes that took place at the beginning, which resulted, for example, in burning Giordano Bruno at the stake or ordering Galileo to withdraw from his teaching. Even the 20th century witnessed papal encyclicals rejecting the theory of evolution, apologies and rehabilitation on the part of John Paul II.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 122–123.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 126–127.

And more broadly, from not only a Catholic perspective to this day we are witnessing further attempts to read the Bible literally and more and new incarnations of creationism that arise on Protestant grounds.

“In fact, science not only criticizes the views carelessly formulated by the Church on matters it would better left unaddressed, such as the age of the earth, its relation to the sun, the time of the origin of human beings, animal species, etc., but also in principle it encourages people to adopt an attitude of permanent doubt and criticism, which is hardly compatible, especially in those days, with respect for religious authorities. Thus faith, hitherto locked in a rigid corset imposed by the Church, will begin to waver to such an extent that the most enlightened minds will find themselves in an utterly dramatic situation as regards their attitude to the - increasingly unbelievable - old teaching on salvation.”<sup>32</sup>

Ferry points out that the situation of people at that time was extremely difficult, that the whole hitherto existing world had collapsed, and it was not clear where to look for new foundations, both in the intellectual, moral, and spiritual spheres. In this way, the building of human life on the foundation of atheist spirituality began. On the following pages, based on Ferry’s analyses, I will briefly outline the milestones of the creation of spirituality without God. The French philosopher believes that modern philosophy has risen to the challenge. We will see what proposals on this topic were adopted by the other French philosophers discussed in this book, but before I turn to them, I will briefly discuss the main idea of the Enlightenment so that it will be a good introduction to the criticism and subversion that Nietzsche made. His thought became the starting point of Onfray’s reflections, so I will present his proposal immediately after the analyses concerning the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. According to the way the history of Western philosophical thought is presented by Ferry, another French author, Comte-Sponville, is also an heir of this trend, but attention should be paid to certain “corrections” that he makes in the thought of the German philosopher. That is why the next chapter is devoted to his proposal. Gauchet, in turn, reinterprets modern secularization processes, suggesting the concept of the “exit from religion” as the necessary climax of the departure of modern societies from religious systems.

Concluding, the buckle holding together the whole analysis of the formation and change of atheist spirituality is Ferry’s proposal, which negates the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

materialism of the previous ones and introduces a very interesting proposal of “transcendence in immanence”. However, before I present the proposal of the French philosophers, for the sake of order it is worth analyzing what their roots are.

## THE MODERN ROOTS OF THE NEW SPIRITUALITY

In his publications, Ferry repeatedly indicates that the Enlightenment underlies the radical changes leading to new spirituality. Secularization, presently described in sociological language, is one of the visible consequences of this rupture, but it is necessary to go back to the cause. Christianity, like most traditional religions, is struggling because coexistence with the modern world causes problems. An essential element of change is the birth of a free human and autonomous subject who wants to be responsible for his destiny. This understanding of the subject has automatically weakened the position of religion, which has always linked man with God understood as the beginning and goal of life. The advent of the man of the Enlightenment shattered the foundations upon which religious beliefs were based, for their basis has always been dependence on the Creator. According to D. Diderot’s expression, a human becomes “the center” and paradigm of all interpretations. The person, shaped by the Enlightenment and having the same features as a modern human, has become incomparable to ancient man. The latter is unchangeable, dependent, compared by Aristotle to the supreme being, and described by the Bible as created in the image and likeness of God. The man of the Enlightenment, on the contrary, is no longer an abstract, universal being, but a historical individual who defines and determines himself in relation to his own destiny. What defines humans is not “externality”, but themselves and their individuality. Such an understanding of oneself obviously has consequences, also theological. The starting point is no longer static metaphysics where the purpose of life is predetermined. Thanks to the new anthropology of the Enlightenment, the subject finally has the feeling that he can decide about his destiny.

The fundamental change in the perception of reality by the modern world will be that after removing the cosmos from the mentality of people, that is, anything coherent in the world, “a human - in this case, a scientist,

on his own, so to speak, from the outside - will be forced to establish order in a universe that, at first glance, does not offer it.

Hence, the new task for modern science: from now on, it will no longer be based on passive contemplation of the beauty inscribed in the world, but on work, active development and even creation of laws which will make sense of the disillusioned, deprived of any *a priori* universe. Science is no longer a passive spectacle: it becomes an activity of the mind”<sup>33</sup>.

Consequently, a crucial change will take place: a human will be put in place of the cosmos and the divine and will have to become a point of reference when it comes to ethics as well. “Precisely by appealing to the idea of humanity, all philosophers will try to rebuild a theory, morality and even the doctrine of salvation. (...) From now on, it will be a human, through intellectual work, who will give meaning and coherence to the world that seems to no longer have them *a priori*, unlike the ancient cosmos”<sup>34</sup>.

Here is the crucial point for Ferry’s analysis: for the modern subject - who sees himself as the most unique of all that we know, so much so that he could replace the Greek ordering of the world or the Christian notion of divinity - these former concepts of salvation are no longer convincing in any way. As will be shown in a moment, the proposal of a new spirituality may then be based on materialism, on what remains after the great deconstruction made at the beginning by Nietzsche, or precisely on a new notion of transcendence. However, in the latter case, it seems that Ferry is right. Most proposals degenerated into some form of religiosity and then collapsed, and due to these spectacular failures, it is not expected that similar ideas could yet return. These are, of course, communism, scientism, and patriotism. “From scientism in the style of Julius Verne, through 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriotism to the communism of Marx, these great human - too human - utopias had at least this - somewhat tragic, admittedly - merit of having undertaken the pursuit of the impossible, that is, the reworking of higher ideals. Yet, unlike the Greeks with their cosmos and the Christians with God, they did not go beyond humanity itself. To put it more clearly, they discovered three ways of saving life - or - which is one and the same - justifying death by sacrificing one’s life for a higher cause: revolution, homeland, or science. Thanks to these three ‘idols’ as Nietzsche would say, it was possible to save what is most important in faith: by conforming one’s life to an ideal, sacrificing it

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

in certain cases, it was possible to preserve the conviction that one is 'saved' and that on the last path will get access to eternity"<sup>35</sup>.

The key question then arises: how to speak nowadays about salvation without referring to the cosmos which modern people no longer recognize as their destiny, nor without reference to God or to other attempts of creating religiosity on a secular foundation (such as communism or other totalitarianisms just described, which must undoubtedly be rejected)? Is the idea of salvation conceivable on the basis of pure humanism? Or maybe the consequences of Descartes' or Kant's modern upheavals - the revolutionary nature of their thought - force us to adopt a different vision of philosophy than the one proposed by the ancients (and adopted among others, by Ferry) as love of wisdom and, consequently, to seek salvation, i.e., breaking out of the fear of mortality and finitude, in other words, to find the meaning of life?

It may be suggested that morality should fill this need for spirituality. After all, moral principles are essential to the peaceful functioning of societies; they are based on mutual respect, and, therefore, on the value inherent in each person. The proposal that it is this moral action that lies at the heart of the new spirituality, that treating others as equal and endowed with the same dignity, seems to be a good solution, and we find such propositions in the history of philosophy. Ferry, however, objects such a proposal. He states that in this way we cannot solve any of the human existential problems. If suddenly all the people in the world started to respect one hundred percent of human rights (which, according to Ferry, are the unquestionable basis of contemporary morality) and consequently, there would be no more wars, no more theft or other transgressions, the problem with the meaning of life would persist<sup>36</sup>. "While the observance of human rights allows us for living together in peace, by themselves they do not give any meaning or even any purpose or direction, to human existence"<sup>37</sup>.

Morality will never replace spirituality; its purpose is to regulate individual and social relationships through a guaranteed respect for the other person, while spirituality is always an order of "salvation", a search for the meaning of life in confrontation with suffering and death. "This is why in the modern world, as in ancient times, it was necessary to invent something beyond morality to replace the teaching of salvation. The problem is that without the cosmos and God this seems particularly difficult to conceive.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 184–185.

<sup>36</sup> Vide Ibid., p. 181–183.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

How to face the fragility and finitude of human existence, mortality of all things on earth, lack of any external principle exceeding humanity? This is the equation with which (...) modern teaching of salvation has had to face<sup>38</sup>. Contemporary morality is still permeated by the Christian spirit; the alternative is a new science of salvation, completely irreligious<sup>39</sup>.

How then “to think of salvation if the world is not a harmonious order and God is dead?”<sup>40</sup> Exactly such a question is the title of one subsection of Ferry’s book. One possible answer is communism, although it also includes scientism or patriotism. Generally speaking: some form of religion of earthly salvation. Ferry explains what this means in a following way: “faced with the impossibility of getting hooked up in the cosmic order, and in the absence of faith in God, modernists invented substitute religions, forms of spirituality without God (...), ideologies which – despite usually practicing radical atheism – subscribed to ideals that gave meaning to human life and even justified the sacrifice of life for them”<sup>41</sup>.

Here one must undoubtedly agree with Nietzsche’s criticism accusing these great systems that they are the result of the cunning of religion which they tried to overcome. It is difficult to question the observation of the German philosopher that the great objectives of these ideologies, meant to surpass a person, are in fact “idols” that have taken the place formerly occupied by the cosmos or God.

The second possibility of an answer to this question relates to the thought of Nietzsche<sup>42</sup>. He is the key thinker for the whole postmodern critique of humanism and the Enlightenment rationalism. If after him it is no longer possible to maintain the old beliefs that a human is the center of the world, that he is the principle of all moral and political values, and that reason is not such a wonderful and liberating power as the thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries believed, then what can now underlie the meaning of human life? It is worth considering why Nietzsche carried out such a violent deconstruction of the Enlightenment. He believes that people of the Enlightenment admittedly call themselves atheists, they no longer wish to profess any religion, but in fact they still remain believers, “because they still believed that certain values are higher than life, that reality must be

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38 Ibid., p. 183.

39 Vide A. Comte-Sponville, L. Ferry, *La sagesse des modernes. Dix questions pour notre temps*, Paris 1998, p. 525.

40 L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 184.

41 Ibid.

42 Vide Ibid, *Qu'est-ce qu'une vie réussie?* Op. cit., p. 111.

judged in the name of an ideal, that it must be transformed to conform to higher ideals such as human rights, science, reason, democracy, socialism, equal opportunities, etc.”<sup>43</sup> The Enlightenment also believed in progress, a new reality, transformation of humanity along the lines of the Christian promises of a paradise in the afterlife<sup>44</sup>. The new kingdom was transferred from the hereafter to the temporal order.

“In short, in the eyes of postmodernists, especially Nietzsche, the humanism of the Enlightenment remained a prisoner of religious structures and unconsciously maintained them, even when it thought it had transcended them. Therefore, the criticism that this humanism unleashed against others, i.e., against the supporters of ancient cosmologies and religious ideas, will also have to be applied to it.”<sup>45</sup> No longer reason, but instincts and drives create a person. In this way Nietzsche rejected the culture of the past, but failed to define the future. The time of uncertainty has arrived, when one no longer identifies oneself with the culture or ethical imperatives received from history. Y. Ledure calls the time in which we live a time without identity, comparing this situation to a fallow field waiting for new sowing<sup>46</sup>. Nietzsche sees the cause of this crisis in Christianity and Platonism. He compares his philosophy to dynamite and believes that it accelerated the extraction of a new anthropological space. Nietzsche’s philosophy not so much caused as revealed the crisis. In *Ecce homo* Nietzsche wrote: “I know my fate. One day my name will be linked with the memory of something monstrous - a crisis that has never happened on earth before, the deepest conflict of consciences, a settlement against everything that has been believed in, supported, and celebrated. I am not a man, but dynamite. In all of this, there is no founder of religion in me - religions are for a mob, after contact with religious people I have to wash my hands”<sup>47</sup>. If Nietzsche symbolizes modernity, it is because his reflection reveals its problems and defines challenges. Analyzing Nietzsche’s works, one can see the enormity of the “rupture” in the field of culture and ethics. An important part of his output attacks Christianity, however nowadays it is no longer possible to reflect on the phenomenon of religion in contemporary culture without reference to his works.

Referring to Nietzsche, Ferry argues that “if there is no longer transcendence, nor ideals, nor a possible escape into the hereafter, even after God’s

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43 Ibid., *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 193.

44 Vide Ibid., *Qu'est-ce qu'une vie réussie?* Op. cit., p. 225.

45 Ibid., *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 193–194.

46 Vide Y. Ledure, *Transcendances - Essai sur Dieu et le corps*, Paris 1989.

47 F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo. Jak się staje, czym się jest*, trans. B. Baran, Kraków 1996, p. 125.

death ‘humanized’ as a moral or political utopia (“humanity”, “homeland”, “revolution”, “socialism”, etc.), *then within ‘this world’, while remaining on this earth and in this life, one must learn to distinguish what is worth living and what deserves to die. Right here and now, one must be able to separate the unsuccessful, mediocre, reactive, and weakened forms of life from the forms of life that are intense, impressive, courageous, and rich in diversity. (...) Salvation according to Nietzsche can only be earthly, rooted in the intertwined forces that form the warp of life. It cannot consist once again in inventing a new ideal, one more idol, which, for the umpteenth time in a row, will serve to judge and judge anew and condemn existence in the name of a supposedly higher principle, external to it*<sup>48</sup>. With Nietzsche the era of a new secular spirituality begins. Onfray refers directly to him.

## NIETZSCHEAN SPIRITUALITY

Onfray’s critique of religion is undoubtedly very radical, particularly in the *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*<sup>49</sup>. In contrast to Ferry or Comte-Sponville, his interpretation makes use of many very familiar stereotypes about religion, such as intolerance of religion, religious background of the whole evil, hatred of life and corporeality, contempt for the earthly life. However, the two greatest errors that Onfray makes are related to the negation of the rational dimension of religion as well as a completely wrong understanding of what religion is, of its essence. These, among others, make his criticism extremely radical.

According to Onfray, one must reject all manifestations of transcendence, even its traces in contemporary society, e.g., the appeal to universal human rights. The invocation of what is universal, fundamental, is a continuous maintenance of the religious dimension, even if the Absolute has been rejected. “To maintain a theocracy without God, to maintain millenarianism without a Messiah, to maintain parousia without a Prophet, to keep paradise and hell without the hereafter (...) is undeniably a run towards the abyss”<sup>50</sup> - concludes Onfray.

48 L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 243.

49 M. Onfray, *Traktat ateologiczny. Fizyka metafizyki*, trans. M. Kwaterko, Warszawa 2008.

50 Vide, *Dekadencja. Życie i śmierć judeochrześcijaństwa*, trans. E. Aduszkiewicz, A. Aduszkiewicz, Warszawa 2019, p. 38.

In Onfray's view, the hatred of intelligence and knowledge inherent in the essence of monotheistic religions (the criticism of *Atheist Manifesto* is, by the way, limited to them) is a sufficient reason why the abandonment of a religious attitude is necessary and natural. What arguments, if any in this case, try to justify the proposed thesis? Unfortunately, we will not find many in Onfray's book. First of all, he points to the conflict of the sacred books: Quran, Torah, and the Bible. Each of them proposes different solutions, refers to different Revelations, which, of course, cannot be verified in any way, and thus are mutually exclusive.

Moreover, none of them can pretend to convey the truth, because we find there many contradictions such as the fact that the Torah was written at a different time than the Judaic tradition maintains, the Evangelists certainly did not know Jesus, the Muslims wrongly uphold that Mohammed is the author of the Quran<sup>51</sup>. Unfortunately, the author uncritically accepts ideas that are nowadays rarely upheld by followers of the demythologization of biblical texts. The author ignores any hermeneutical or historical-critical research related to the religious books. Can it be upheld today that the Christian religion claims the world was created in six days because the Bible says so?<sup>52</sup> The theory of creationism, which Onfray fails to see, is not identified with a literal interpretation of the creation story. Many such examples can be found in the work of the French atheist, but they are all based on one erroneous assumption in his *Atheist Manifesto*: there is only one type of rationality, the one represented by the natural sciences. This is the error made by many contemporary atheists. To give a single definition of rationality is not an easy task as emphasized by, e.g., K. Ajdukiewicz: "The slogan of rationalism has probably never been explicitly formulated (i.e., in the only manner rationalism considers proper)"<sup>53</sup>. W. Stróżewski proposes that the notion of *rationalism* should be treated as a set of specific philosophical trends, in which the fundamental role is played, for example, by proof in general or by proof of a mathematical nature. However, the common element is the thesis that "the most valuable cognitive ability of man is reason"<sup>54</sup>. E. Wolicka suggests distinguishing three concepts of *ratio* in the history of philosophy: firstly, *ratio* as an intellectual intuition capable of grasping what is essential, which allows us to reach what is supra-empirical (St. Thomas

51 Ibid., *Traktat ateologiczny*, Op. cit., p. 92–93.

52 Ibid., p. 103.

53 K. Ajdukiewicz, *Zagadnienia i kierunki filozofii. Teoria poznania. Metafizyka*, Kęty-Warszawa 2004, p. 49.

54 Vide W. Stróżewski, *Istnienie i sens*, Kraków 2005 p. 437–439.

Aquinas); secondly, *ratio* as the power to create general notions (Descartes, I. Kant). Finally, the third concept treats *ratio* as an analytical-critical ability; its role is reduced to ordering data obtained from observation (D. Hume, A. Comte, J.S. Mill).<sup>55</sup> Of course, the only concept of *ratio* accepted by the supporters of new atheism is the *ratio* identified with cognition characteristic for the exact sciences. Paradoxically, as M. Gogacz remarks, characterizing the stance of extreme rationalism, the identification of *ratio* with one type of cognition is “a radical version of rationality, but by the same token, it deprives itself of calm consideration of the matter and rightness. One might add that in this approach rationalism is not always rational.”<sup>56</sup> It is correct to distance oneself from various forms of subjectivism and irrationalism, but one should not exclude such sources of cognition as inner or external experiences. Extreme rationalism, while emphasizing rational cognition, rejects e.g., a link between intellectual reflection and the senses as a cognitive power. For Gogacz, we deal with crypto-irrationalism here, because the thesis of the uniqueness of reason as the source of cognition does not come from the intellect, but is derived from the irrational order<sup>57</sup>.

Onfray, with his flagship thesis of the religion's hatred for reason, is in fact an adherent of scientism and his views are, after Marxism, an attempt to create a scientific worldview. The term “worldview” should be understood as a set of statements accepted by human beings, which determine their attitude towards themselves, other people, the external world, and God. The basic element of every worldview is an attempt to answer questions such as: Who am I? What principles do I follow in life? Do I believe in eternal life? What is my relationship to other people? What gives meaning to my life? However, these are the questions to which exact sciences cannot give us ultimate answers and, therefore, it is impossible to build one's worldview solely on the results of such sciences. Thus, a scientific worldview is a contradictory concept<sup>58</sup>. A human should strive to make his worldview as rational as possible, that is, to be able to justify the accepted theses. But his justification may refer to other forms of cognition than scientific. One of the errors of scientism is that it transfers all such questions related to the meaning of life into the irrational sphere or the domain of human imagination, and thus impoverishes human reflection of a very important

55 Vide E. Wolicka, *Odzyskać wymiar mądrościowy*, “Znak”, 527(1999)4, p. 90.

56 M. Gogacz, *Obrona intelektu*, Warszawa 1969, p. 28.

57 Ibid., p. 31.

58 Vide S. Kiczuk, *Czy światopogląd naukowy jest możliwy?* Op. cit., p. 35–42.

dimension<sup>59</sup>. Another consequence of scientism appears on the ethical plane. A scientific mentality of absolute trust in science can distort the process of ethical evaluation, leading to the conclusion that what is technically feasible is thereby morally permissible<sup>60</sup>. Arguments based on the scientific mentality invoke simple reasoning: science has mastered these techniques, so they can be applied. Technical possibility becomes the moral norm. The question of addressing the personalistic norm in the moral evaluation of action, which demands respect for the dignity of the person, is completely ignored. Scientism rejects deep philosophical reflection on man and those aspects of reality, such as ethics, which cannot be completely subordinated to the model of natural sciences. Rationality cannot become, as Onfray proposes, synonymous with atheism. Christianity is rational and has played a fundamental role in shaping European rationality. Even atheists recognise this, for example Ferry, according to whom it is the Christian religion that has introduced a significant change in the understanding of philosophy: under the influence of theological disputes, philosophy ceased to be the art of living and became an analysis of concepts and mental constructs<sup>61</sup>. However, for Onfray the richness of theological struggle, both ancient and modern, simply does not exist.

Another fundamental question about the work of the French atheist concerns Onfray's understanding, or perhaps, experience of religion. What is religion? What are the constitutive elements of this phenomenon? What distinguishes a religious phenomenon from other phenomena? These are the questions every researcher of religion should answer when reflecting on human religiosity. However, it is difficult to find answers to these questions in Onfray's output. Intellectual and reliable reflection has been replaced by a description of a negative (personal?) experience that the author of the *Atheist Manifesto* might have had. Religion is described as a "death cult", "hatred for carnality and women", "contempt for temporal life", "insult to reason", "hatred for science". The essence of religions, especially monotheistic, is identified with hatred. Nowhere, however, does a philosophical analysis of the essence of religion appear. Onfray remains either on the level of slogans and invectives or cites the old scheme of the origin of religion as a projection of a human facing the struggle with the mystery of death. Of course, there are as many definitions of religion as there are branches of philosophy of

59 Jan Paweł II, *Fides et ratio*, n° 88.

60 Ibid.

61 L. Ferry, L. Jerphagnon, *La Tentation du christianisme*, Paris 2009, p. 83.

religion, religious studies or theories explaining religion, and it is increasingly recognised that none of them is general enough to encompass all phenomena considered as religious<sup>62</sup>. Difficulties arise from the multitude of historically and contemporarily existing religions, the nature of religious experiences, the cognitive inaccessibility of the religious object which is never given directly, or from the connection between religion and other areas of human life. It is certainly not possible to analyze this phenomenon without referring to specific religions. Religion “in itself”, absent in historical trends, simply does not exist, although there have been attempts in history to create a natural or philosophical religion. Onfray too easily identifies the essence of religion with all possible hatred, without a thorough analysis of historical religions. But as observed by I. Fernandez, one of the critics of Onfray’s concept, his fundamental error lies in something else: he forgets that people do not believe in religion, but above all they believe in the existence of the Transcendent<sup>63</sup>. One cannot ignore the fundamental reference of this phenomenon to the transcendent reality in the reflection on religion.

The religious relationship is constituted by human actions, which are manifestations of existing relationships between humans and the Transcendent. Primarily, these actions take the form of acts of faith, hope and love. St. Thomas Aquinas regards these acts as the fundamental realization of the human quest for God. The relationship to religion is also created by the acts proper to the moral virtues. However, there is one condition: they must be guided by love towards God. A special group among those acts are the acts of religious virtue. Thanks to them, one can directly give due honor to God. These acts can emerge through acts of other moral virtues or they can be one’s own acts of the religious virtue. Man builds social relations through his religious activity, which means that religion has a social-organizational-legal dimension. However, this dimension of religion is entirely dependent on the relationship of concrete people with a personal God. Each of them, to manifest an attitude to God, uses a sign reality, such as art, religious language, and all kinds of symbols.

Looking at the history of religion, we can see that people have always searched in various ways for a relationship with another person to accompany them during their lives, help them overcome the hardships and toil of everyday life, and give meaning to it. From the beginning, people instinctively

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62 Vide A. Bronk, *Podstawy nauk o religii*, Lublin 2003, p. 103–124.

63 Vide I. Fernandez, *Dieu avec esprit. Réponse à Michel Onfray*, Paris 2005, p. 111.

sensed that the only justification for their personal existence can be found in a relationship with a powerful “You”, in a relationship with a loving person. People’s attempts to imagine a religious object of reference have sometimes been very naive and limited<sup>64</sup>.

The personal nature of the object of a religious relationship is found in almost all historical religions. In religions which deified cosmic objects, a given object of worship was generally regarded as a revelation of a personal deity. For example, people worshiping the Sun, treated it as a personal god by making offerings to it, speaking to it, and establishing personal contact with it. In many religions of China, India or Greece, a manifestation of a person striving for the relation with the sacred in a personal sense is the personification of natural phenomena and material things (in Greece: Zeus, nymphs, household deities; in Persia: Mitra, Indra, Prthiwi, Varuna; in Egypt: Re-Harakhte; in India: Rta)<sup>65</sup>.

Religion is only explained in a non-contradictory way when it is possible to point to the extra-subjective existence of the subject of the relationship, i.e., a personal god present in the world as the efficient, exemplar, and final cause. Rational indications for the necessity of existence of such an entity are possible only thanks to the metaphysical cognition which strives to make the existence of the entire reality non-contradictory.

Metaphysical thinking or even questions of this nature do not appear on the pages of *Atheist Manifesto*. At present, there are concepts such as D. Cupitt’s proposal which try to propose religion without any reference to transcendence. But in this case, it is more appropriate to speak of atheist spirituality (as it is done, for example, by another atheist - Comte-Sponville) than a religion<sup>66</sup>. Religion implies a reference to a reality transcending the present order, even if it is as impersonal as, for example, Buddhism.

Another simplification of Onfray’s understanding of the essence of religion is the assumption that every religious system distorts people, reducing them to fanatical followers who hate everything that is earthly, beautiful, and good. One cannot deny the occurrence of fundamentalist attitudes, but to identify any devotion with fundamentalism is a far-reaching simplification. Fundamentalist behavior can appear in every religion, especially in those that use the concept of revelation, however, it is a distortion of the essence of religion and not its most appropriate form. Fundamentalists are convinced

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64 Vide M. A. Krąpiec, *Religia i nauka*, “Znak”, 19(1967)7–8, p. 861–887.

65 Vide Z. Zdybicka, *Człowiek i religia. Zarys filozofii religii*, Lublin 1993, p. 266–268.

66 Vide D. Cupitt, *Po Bogu. O przyszłości religii*, trans. P. Sitarski, Warszawa 1998.

that the world, other cultures, and religions are a threat to their own faith, so either they will destroy this threatening world or the world will destroy their faith and religion. There is no faith that religion, existing in the world, can spread peacefully only by the force of its inner truth. Fundamentalism is a pathological defensive reaction caused by a sense of a threat to one's own religious identity. Religious fanatics do not distinguish the essential from irrelevant elements in religion or essential truths from historically conditioned forms of communication. For them, religion does not undergo any changes. There is a danger that by defending faith with all their heart, they often do not defend the actual main principles of a given religion but its secondary elements and do not refer to the rationality of faith, but to the literal wording of the religious tradition. Fundamentalism, paradoxically, is a manifestation not of a strong but weak faith, afraid of reason and the outside world. Onfray's proposition of atheological experience differs little - obviously, in principle, not in content - from the fundamentalist position. His proposal is such a commitment to a certain truth, in this case that religion is identified with hatred, that it becomes superfluous to ask about any other truth. He himself becomes a follower of hatred whose object is the alleged hatred of religion.

For the author of the *Atheist Manifesto*, religion cannot contain any elements perfecting man. Even if the supernatural source of religion is rejected, religious experiences transform and allow man to cope in a positive way with difficult moments of life such as death or suffering. This is, of course, a functional approach to religion, but it nevertheless recognizes the positive value of religion. A religious relationship often leads to the perfection of the human subject. A person develops by undertaking various cognitive, moral, and aesthetic activities. But it is also possible to realize the potentialized nature of man in the pursuit of union with the transcendent "you". The climax of the religious act is union with the Absolute and, consequently, one of the most complete actualizations of a human<sup>67</sup>. Religious experience is the act that most involves and integrates a person (it unites the cognitive, volitional, and emotional elements of human nature). The human subject, by interacting with the divine subject, does not lose his individuality, but strengthens and consolidates himself, and strives for perfection. All religious acts shape the human person to the highest degree. Through them one fully

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<sup>67</sup> Vide Z. Zdybicka, *Czym jest i dlaczego istnieje religia?* In: *Religia w świecie współczesnym*, Ed. H. Zimoń, Lublin 2000, p. 67–68.

becomes a person, finally actualizes his potential, and achieves happiness. Such thinking, however, is completely contrary to atheological experience.

Nevertheless, Onfray's atheological proposal is not limited to mere criticism; there is also an attempt to formulate postulates aimed at replacing a religious approach to reality. The hitherto secular morality is still permeated by the spirit of Christianity and very often in place of the old rites it introduces new ones, as the author of the *Atheist Manifesto* describes, "no less stupid than the ecclesiastical ones"<sup>68</sup>. Therefore, fully atheist atheism is needed, which will not be a strange version of Christian atheism or faithful atheism (Comte-Sponville). But what would it consist in? What are the features of such atheism? Feuerbach sees the need to distinguish two variations of atheism: one that rejects the existence of a personal, transcendent God or any other absolute principles, and the other that merely rejects the transcendent being but accepts the existence of something absolute, though reduced to a purely human dimension. Onfray consistently rejects both these dimensions. For him, even bioethical laws existing in many secular European countries are dictated by a thoroughly Christian inspiration, because they introduce norms that refer not to the social contract, but to the universal truth about the uniqueness and exceptionality of human dignity. This conviction finds its source and ultimate justification in religious reflection. The existence of God is negated, but Christian values remain. The French atheist, despite the extraordinary aggression directed against Christian values, indicates the danger of identifying the religious message with morality. Every religion proposes an ethical code, but the essence of religion comes down to the response to the call addressed to a person by the Absolute, and only from this experience specific human behavior results. As F. Schleiermacher rightly points out, religious experience cannot be reduced to either metaphysics or morality<sup>69</sup>. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, representatives of analytical philosophy, trying to justify the meaningfulness of religious language, proposed exactly such a solution. According to R. Braithwaite, the meaning of expressions is determined not so much by the method of verification, but by its use in a language. However, he interprets the principle of use in the spirit of empiricism, that is, expressions must be used in empirically, namely, in a way that can be established by empirical research. Thus, Braithwaite sought the empirical use of religious statements, which he ultimately identified with

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68 M. Onfray, *Traktat ateologiczny*, Op. cit., p. 215.

69 Vide F. Schleiermacher, *Mowy o religii do wykształconych spośród tych, którzy nią gardzą*, trans. J. Prokopiuk, Kraków 1995.

the use of expressions of the language of religion as moral expressions. For him, all Christian doctrine is reduced to the declaration of a certain style of behavior. For example, the sentence “God is love” means nothing more than an encouragement to adopt an “agape” lifestyle<sup>70</sup>. With this approach, the demand for language to be used in an empirical way is fulfilled, and so the language of religion has meaning despite its subjective nature, but its meaning is identified with moral precepts.

What is the proposal for a new, anti-Christian ethic and how will it differ from the morality functioning in secular societies of the Western societies? As Onfray argues, it is necessary to “overcome a secularism permeated by what it opposes”<sup>71</sup>. Moreover, he believes that the principle of tolerance inscribed in Western civilisation means that religion, magic, and rationalism are treated in the same way. It is necessary to reject the present relativism that equates magic (i.e., religion) with science and restore all scoffers, materialists, hedonists, radicals, cynics, atheists, sensualists, and eulogists of pleasure in public discourse<sup>72</sup>. But are the latter surely the only guarantors of rationality and scientificity? Is the rejection, as a rule, of one of the possible attitudes towards the existence of God and the lifestyle resulting from this an expression of “better” spirituality? Or, perhaps, is it a gateway to intolerance and intellectual “totalitarianism” in the atheist version? The extreme materialism suggested in the *Atheist Manifesto*, which at the same time explains the origin of the world and the purpose of human existence by referring only to matter, leads to attributing the features proper to the absolute to matter. And this is certainly not acceptable to the French atheist. Comte-Sponville, the already mentioned atheist, believes that a more rational solution to this question is not to identify the absolute with the empirical world, but to adopt an agnostic position, defining the beginning of the world with the enigmatic phrase “mystery of being”, which does not necessarily have to be a personal God. However, the problem of the ultimate explanation of the contingent world remains without a satisfactory solution.

It is also unfortunate that in Onfray’s proposal there are no significant suggestions as to how, thanks to “post-Christian secularism”, one could struggle with the problem of death, meaning of life, and suffering. Reducing an entire lifestyle to hedonism is a very simple answer, but it should be

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70 Vide R. Braithwaite, *An Empiricists View of the Nature of Religious Belief*. In: *The Existence of God*, Ed. J. Hick, London 1963, p. 228–252.

71 M. Onfray, *Traktat ateologiczny*, p. 217.

72 Ibid., p. 218.

doubted whether all the age-old “metaphysical questions” will disappear thanks to such an attitude.

Is his radicality alone capable of eliminating existing religious traditions and “Christian atheism”? First, Onfray’s proposal is an expression of the enormous distance of part of contemporary culture to the classical tradition, both metaphysical and religious. Transformations that have affected European culture such as wars, migrations, consumerism, and processes of secularization, have led to a significant indifference, and in the case of the French philosopher, even to hostility towards the Judeo-Christian tradition. Unfortunately, Onfray transforms his own hostility towards religion into an argument, hardly invoking rational arguments. Moreover, he unilaterally presents only one point of view and disregards any other possible interpretation.

The fundamental error of the *Atheist Manifesto* consists in the radical opposition between religion and rationality. It ignores the increasingly emphasized fact that the relationship between faith and reason does not have to be conflictual. Faith does not exclude rationality and rationality does not exclude faith. Moreover, one can see the opposite process: by limiting or even excluding any space for faith, one leaves room for ideology, which in turn leads to the subordination of reason no longer to faith, which Onfray considers the greatest possible evil, but to ideologies and utilitarianism. And such a situation may have as dangerous consequences as the threats from religiously motivated terrorism. Ideological fundamentalism is no less dangerous than religious fundamentalism. Marion perceives the exclusion of openness to faith as a threat to rationality, which at this point imposes only one paradigm approach to reality<sup>73</sup>. The element of faith is part of rationality, at least by the very fact that faith in reason is necessary, in its cognitive capacities, and its ability to attain truth. Unfortunately, the rationality proposed by Onfray is a fundamentalist faith in one paradigm of rationality - his own.

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73 J. L. Marion, *Le croire pour le voir*, Paris 2010, p. 10.

## MATERIALISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Modernity can be perceived like a religion, or more precisely, as a belief in something supernatural. J. Dobrowolski understands it in this sense, claiming that “a modern human strongly believes in several metaphysical objects, such as ‘I’, ‘free will’, ‘natural law’, ‘inherent dignity of humanity’, ‘human rights’. These are all the things whose existence, in a strictly natural sense, cannot be proven (like the existence of God). Also, one simply cannot do without assuming them in modern life. While it is, of course, possible to know that these objects are necessary fictions, one cannot live, at least in a modern, civilized way, as if they did not exist.”<sup>74</sup> But can only the extreme radical approach to all transcendence, as represented by Nietzsche, prevent falling into some religiosity? Does an atheist have to be an immoralist by definition? A negative answer to this question is given to us by Comte-Sponville and it perfectly shows that the thesis put forward by Dobrowolski is not always true. A similar accusation against Comte-Sponville is addressed by Ferry. In his view, one cannot be completely materialistic. “Why strive to put an end to ‘idealism’, to all ideals and all ‘idols’ if this great philosophical programme becomes...an ideal? Why mock transcendence in all its forms and appeal to wisdom which loves reality as it is, if this love turns out to be perfectly transcendent if, as a goal, it is completely unattainable whenever circumstances become a little more difficult to bear?”<sup>75</sup>

These problems were overcome by Heidegger. “His thought, however, is not materialism - that is, a philosophy hostile to the very idea of transcendence.”<sup>76</sup> Comte-Sponville’s thought is not merely a continuation of Nietzscheanism but its fulfillment, bringing to completion what Nietzsche himself did not have the courage to do, namely, to reject all manifestations of transcendence. There is no place for any trace of the divine and sacred. Ferry states, “In the landscape of contemporary philosophy, Comte-Sponville appears to be the one who has undoubtedly carried the attempt to establish a new ethics and new science of salvation furthest, and with the greatest intellectual talent and precision, by radically deconstructing humanism’s pretensions to transcendent ideals. This means that even if Comte-Sponville is not

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<sup>74</sup> J. Dobrowolski, *Nowoczesność i sekularyzacja*. In: Eds. S. Wróbel, K. Skonieczny, *Ateizm. Próba dokończenia projektu*, Warszawa 2018, p. 165.

<sup>75</sup> L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

a Nietzschean - he rejects sternly the fascist tones that Nietzsche does not always succeed in avoiding - he still shares the Nietzschean conviction that 'idols' are illusory, must be deconstructed and genealogically reconstructed, and only the wisdom of radical immanence is possible. His thought, too, will eventually reach its peak, in one of the many forms of *amor fati*, in an appeal to come to terms with the world as it is, or if you prefer - which amounts to the same thing - a radical critique of hope. "To hope a little less, to love a little more" in his eyes, is essentially the key to salvation. For hope, contrary to what all mortals think, is far from helping us to live better. It rather strips our life of what is essential and what is given here and now"<sup>77</sup>.

In his research related to the problem of God and religion, Comte-Sponville presents arguments for adopting an atheist position. Regarding the existence of the Absolute, he proposes not atheism claiming that God does not exist, but a specific form of agnosticism-atheism arguing that only "belief in the non-existence of God" is possible. It is impossible to formulate any knowledge about the existence of God. Some believe in his existence, while others do not.

Atheism is a form of faith, and certainly this approach distinguishes Comte-Sponville from the proponents of extreme scientism, such as Dawkins. The French philosopher strongly criticizes scientism, referring to it as a metaphysical system because it demands, on a scientific level, answers to questions that are outside the scope of scientific inquiry. No empirical science - for that is the type of science at issue here - can answer moral, metaphysical, and even political questions<sup>78</sup>. The scientist creates metaphysics from the system of empirical sciences.

In colloquial terms, it is very common to contrast the (religious) attitude of faith with the atheist position. A religious person "believes there is a God" and an atheist "knows there is no God". However, such an opposition is erroneous because in all beliefs about God we always deal with a belief, and it is a belief either in his existence or non-existence. God is not an object of direct cognition, so any theses about him (regarding his existence or non-existence) belong to the order of faith. Comte-Sponville rightly claims that his negation of God is precisely a belief in his non-existence. For it is not possible to formulate any knowledge about God's existence, but it is important to trace the rationale that leads to the formulation of one's faith (atheist

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>78</sup> A. Comte-Sponville, F. Euvé, G. Lecointre, *Dieu et la science*, Paris, 2010, p. 17.

or religious). Comte-Sponville presents his arguments for “atheist faith.”<sup>79</sup> They are as follows: the weakness of evidence for the existence of God, the Absolute as too simple an answer to the question about the beginning of the world, the existence of evil.

All historical arguments for the existence of God are inconclusive. Moreover, why should God “hide” from man? Is respect for our freedom, as theism argues, a sufficient argument for this? The first proof discussed by Comte-Sponville and, he adds, also the most deceptive, is ontological<sup>80</sup>. It is astonishing in its simplicity (God must exist, otherwise the definition of God would be wrong), fascinating, as evidenced by centuries of interpretations of St. Anselm’s reasoning, but because of this it is also very dangerous. Of course, in his rejection of this type of reasoning the French philosopher refers to other critiques, for example, of St. Thomas: there is no transition from the logical order to the order of existence. A definition of a being, even of one than which nothing greater can be conceived, does not ensure its existence. A concept will remain a concept, regardless of whether its designator exists or not. The criticism is most legitimate, but Comte-Sponville sees no other way to evaluate this reasoning, for example as an attempt to rationalize theistic beliefs by analyzing the consistency of the concept of God. He admits that it is a dazzling monument of the human mind but has nothing to do with a rational approach to faith. The existence of God, he notes, is merely an object of faith on the part of a human, but he seems to deny this faith any rational basis.

He interprets the classical cosmological proof in a similar way. He summarizes it, referring to the Leibnizian version<sup>81</sup>. How does the French philosopher argue with this type of argumentation? In his opinion, the use of the principle of sufficient reason does not lead to a conclusion about the existence of God, but only to some necessary being, an absolute principle, but whether it is a personal God with whom we can interact, Comte-Sponville doubts. Another argument against the cosmological proofs derives from the rejection of the conclusion that one must assume a necessary being, for is it impossible to propose another solution, e.g., contingency or the very mystery of being?

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<sup>79</sup> Vide A. Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna. Wprowadzenie do duchowości bez Boga*, trans. E. Aduszkiewicz, p. 139–141.

<sup>80</sup> Vide Ibid., p. 89–92.

<sup>81</sup> Vide Ibid., p. 92.

It is, but the French philosopher does not explain how, in such a case, to propose an alternative other than sufficient reason. It is, like most metaphysical principles, accepted by way of intuition, but an intuition that does not contradict the existing reality. In this context, rational theism, through the hypothesis of God, wants to give an overly simple answer to the question of the beginning of the world. Why is there something rather than nothing? The answer from classical metaphysics leads to God, but why not suggest another answer, asks Comte-Sponville. He suggests recognising that there is some “mystery of being”, a mystery that we cannot yet fathom. However, the mystery of being as an explanation of reality is not an explanation at all, but a suspension or even a limitation of human cognitive activity.

Another type of argumentation that requires polemics is the physical-theological argument based on the idea of order and intentionality<sup>82</sup>. However, Comte-Sponville’s reasoning merely amounts to an appeal to the authority of science - since science can explain most of the phenomena available in nature, it is unjustifiable to look for supernatural reasons for the existing harmony - although, as mentioned above, he is not an advocate of extreme scientism. Science should not give, let alone seek, answers to metaphysical questions.

The conclusion of the arguments cited by the French philosopher for the existence of God is very simple: the lack of conclusive evidence is an argument for the non-existence of the absolute. But is it a completely justified conclusion? Arguments for the existence of God are not proof in the mathematical sense, though they cannot be denied coherence in the process of their formulation and may become the basis for justifying theistic beliefs. To claim that a better explanation for the existence of reality is some unspecified mystery of being or even a chance-event is less rational than the appeal to the principle of sufficient reason and the contingency of being.

The French thinker devotes ample space to the polemic against the theistic belief that the weakness of evidence is even necessary because it results from God’s respect for our freedom. God should be chosen by man freely, consciously, and not as a result of rational calculation or proof. Comte-Sponville believes that he has three reasons to challenge this argument. In his view, to assume that God respects our freedom regarding his existence would lead to the conclusion that man is more free than God who does not have this possibility. However, this is a misunderstanding of the very concept of freedom: is it solely the ability to choose or is it the becoming of

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82 Vide Ibid., p. 97–98.

the subject through truth and goodness? God is free and his freedom is the very source and reference of human freedom. The second reason for rejecting this theistic proposal of respect for freedom is Comte-Sponville's conviction that knowledge gives more freedom than ignorance. The claim that God hides to respect freedom implies that ignorance is an element of freedom, which, however, is not a true statement. Truth is the essential constitutive factor of freedom; without truth freedom becomes licentiousness. Without truth, freedom becomes romp. Yet God does not leave one in ignorance but reveals himself through revelation; that is the expression of divine truth. However, the relation between truth and revelation in Comte-Sponville's work does not appear.

Another criticism concerns the inconsistency of the concept of respect for freedom with the idea of God as personal and loving. What can one think of God the Father who - the French philosopher asks ironically - hides from his children? Is he loving? Is he caring? Humanity is so flawed that God's presence is even necessary. As in his previous reasoning, Comte-Sponville overlooks the historical dimension of a religion such as Christianity. For a Christian, is God absent or hiding from people? Again, the answer is radically different from that proposed in his *Book of Atheist Spirituality: An Elegant Argument for Spirituality Without God*. The history of virtually every religion is a constant presence and God's concern for those to whom he revealed himself or whom he chose. Even if it is possible in individual or social life to speak of moments of "absence of God", as is in the case, for example, of some Judaic interpretations of the Holocaust, the basic idea of every religion is the conviction that God is alive, present, and acting. And this is fully consistent with his Transcendence and transcending our order of cognition and existence.

Another, most classic argument against the view God exists concerns the existence of evil<sup>83</sup>. Not, of course, evil as a necessary side of human freedom or of the nature of creatures, but radical evil, the evil that causes the greatest harm and is, in a sense, unjustifiable. There is too much of it and too little of the good to assume that there is an Intrinsic Good. The smallness of a human is too big to maintain that God is at the origin of people. Comte-Sponville devotes most space to this argument, considering it crucial in the polemics with theistic views. He calls this type of argumentation "positive arguments".

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83 Vide Ibid., p. 119-121.

He begins his analysis with a classic charge of the excesses of evil. It is not its existence, but its magnitude, monstrosity, or disproportionality in relation to good that becomes the objection to theism. Such reasoning is not intended to show only the weakness of religion, but also to be a strong argument for adopting an atheist position. Evil is not a challenge for an atheist, but only for a believer, because for the former, evil is accepted as something simply existing in the world, whereas for a religious person it becomes a challenge to his rationality. How to reconcile it with the existence of a good and omnipotent God? The French philosopher claims that there is no symmetry in the relation evil - good. There is too much evil to claim that Absolute Good must be found at the origin of the world and of man. The world cannot be God and imperfection must be present in it - an explanation Comte-Sponville would agree with, but why is there so much evil? There is no answer to this question and certainly the hypothesis of a Good God cannot be taken into consideration. As he concludes, "There is too much monstrosity in the world, too much suffering, too much injustice - and too little happiness - for me to accept the idea that they were created by an all-powerful and infinitely good God."<sup>84</sup>

Of course, one can take up the line of argumentation proposed by such thinkers as H. Jonas or S. Weil, but the explanation of the disproportion of evil through the idea of a weak God leads to the negation and rejection of the concept of God. A "weak God" who withdrew power from creation so that it could fully and freely carry out its mission, has little in common with the God of religion and is more a testimony to the presence of a spirit in people than a manifestation of the existence of a real, loving, and acting Absolute. Comte-Sponville does not discuss possible proposals for the solution of the theodicy problem (for example, P. Ricoeur's proposal); he arbitrarily advocates the rejection of theism on the grounds of the existence of radical evil. For example, in his view, the existence of evil as a divine mystery does not explain anything; it is merely an example of dismissing the radicalism of the question. In the French thinker's argumentation, there is a disproportion between the strong thesis of the non-existence of God resulting from the existence of radical evil and the possible interpretations that undermine such criticism. Why does he not analyze the solutions of analytic philosophy and the whole theory of the defense of free will?<sup>85</sup> This

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>85</sup> Vide A. Plantinga, *God and Other Minds. A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief of God*, Ithaca 1994.

disproportion between the proposed solution and other possibilities is as great as between the radicality of evil and other possible solutions to this issue. Unfortunately, in his analyses he omits contemporary thinkers (e.g., P. Ricoeur or E. Lévinas), for whom the religious answer explaining the scandal of evil is not as obvious as Comte-Sponville suggests.

One of the last arguments is related to the previous one but focuses on the evil in people. The ease of doing evil, smallness of people, and their weak will are sufficient arguments for Comte-Sponville to doubt whether a perfect God is the author of such a “mediocre” work. Faith in God in this case is nothing but hubris, a manifestation of one’s megalomania, while atheism would be a sign of the greatest humility and recognition of the whole truth about a human. Of course, no one denies, to use Ricoeur’s term, “man’s imperfection”, but does its very existence contradict the possibility of being created by Good God? This contradiction is not shown by the French philosopher. He only refers to psychological reasons rather than philosophical reasoning. Unfortunately, he does not consider, for example, the hypothetical model of God’s creation of humans, who, on the one hand, would be capable of making choices and have free will, but on the other hand, would not be able to choose evil.

The final rationale in favor of an atheist stance, conclusive in his own journey, is the power of the desire for God, which testifies to the illusory nature of religion. In this case, however, Comte-Sponville is aware of the subjective nature of such reasoning: why is there such a desire in us? It responds to the innermost needs of a human: complete security, the attainment of perfect happiness, justice, and eternal life. The idea of God is a perfect way to realise them, but too perfect to be true, argues the French philosopher. Here, he refers to the arguments of Freud, Nietzsche, or Feuerbach. God is only a projection of our humanity. Religions are too optimistic to be true. As Comte-Sponville notes, this is a very subjective approach; it may convince some, but not others, and on a purely intellectual level there is no conclusive argument. All that remains is faith.

Does denying the existence of a personal, good God inevitably lead towards nihilism? Certainly not. The French philosopher suggests adopting and shaping a specific spiritual attitude which he calls atheist spirituality. What is spirituality itself? It is only the life of the spirit which enables to treat the concept of spirituality very broadly. A human is a finite being, but open to the life of the spirit, to the infinite, and as philosophy consists in thinking so spirituality consists in experiencing and living. Atheism

does not deny this way of life, moreover, it does not deny that there can be something absolute. Such a distinction was also made by Feuerbach, who distinguishes between two kinds of negation of God: one which rejects the existence of a personal, transcendent God and any other absolute principles, and the other, which merely rejects a transcendent being while accepting the existence of something absolute. Both Comte-Sponville and Feuerbach advocate the former current. However, what is meant by the word “absolute” or rather “what is absolute”? “What is absolute” exists independent of any conditions, relations, or points of view<sup>86</sup>. But it is not a personal, transcendent being, existing independently of man and this world, for the absolute is not God. This position is called materialism, naturalism or immanentism. Certainly, from the philosophical point of view, these positions are not identical, but they have one thing in common: the rejection of all personal supernaturalism, and this, in turn, is the basis of the new spirituality. Materialism here means primarily ontological dependence of spirit on matter, but as Comte-Sponville argues, the existence of a spiritual dimension must still be assumed. Moreover, it is necessary to indicate the relation between matter and spirit but exactly the opposite of the one assumed by theism. It is not matter that has been brought into existence by the Spirit, but spirit is the result of the transformation and evolution of matter. But how was it accomplished? Can matter be both material and immaterial? Metaphysical questions remain unanswered here.

A new spirituality grows out of this materialism. To characterize it, Comte-Sponville refers, paradoxically, to the traditional Christian virtues or more precisely, theological, though replacing them with his own proposals. Thus, instead of spirituality of faith he proposes spirituality of faithfulness; spirituality of hope is replaced by action; and spirituality of love becomes an alternative to spirituality of fear and subordination. In his opinion, these experiences lead to mysticism, naturally, of a non-religious nature.

It is difficult to give a single, comprehensive definition of mysticism. It seems that it is more appropriate to indicate some essential features of the specific relation of the subject to the transcendent reality, which will enable to distinguish the phenomenon of mysticism from other spiritual-religious experiences. A. Kłoczowski lists several such features<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Vide A. Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna*, Op. cit., p. 144–145.

<sup>87</sup> Vide A. Kłoczowski, *Drogi człowieka mistycznego*, Warszawa. p. 22–26.

The first of these is the experience of radical passivity. The mystic feels overwhelmed and penetrated by a higher reality which completely transcends him. He feels “surprised” by this reality. He does not choose it, on the contrary; he feels chosen by it. The mystic’s passivity emphasizes that what is most important takes place outside of him, in a different religious reality. Passivity does not mean the mystic’s complete inertia. Thanks to his spiritual experience, the mystic reaches the deepest layers of his soul which, filled with light, becomes the source of his new activity.

The second “diagnostic” feature of mysticism is the so-called idea of wholeness. The mystic experiences that his being is part of something greater. Only in this wholeness (e.g., in God or Cosmos) will he find his fullness. In Eastern religions, for example, people are part of the cosmic order and only in the unification with it do they find their place. In the case of theistic religions, one cannot speak of merging with God. Christian mysticism, for example, does not lead to the loss of individuality of a being, but only to human fulfillment through a supernatural relationship with God. Only God can satisfy all human desires and needs.

According to Kłoczowski, cognition of an entirely different nature from everyday scientific or philosophical cognition is the third characteristic of mystical experiences. Because the object of a mystic’s cognition is a reality different from the whole reality known to him so far, the very method of cognition must have a different nature. Most frequently, we speak here of intuitive or affective cognition. It is both very intimate and internal and can be accompanied by some external manifestations of the supernatural, such as stigmata.

The last characteristic of mystical experiences is the complete transformation of being. According to Kłoczowski, “the mystic becomes a ‘new human’, he is born to a “new life”; not only experiences a transformation of consciousness but also his behavior radically changes. Under the influence of this experience, the mystic is guided by a different, more demanding scale of values”<sup>88</sup>. A person who has such experiences undergoes a transformation in both dynamic (will) and cognitive (intellect) aspects. One of the most frequent effects of the mystic’s ontic transformation is the ordering and transformation of his sensory sphere, which begins to harmoniously cooperate with the desires of the soul<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>89</sup> Vide C. A. Bernard, *Le Dieu des mystiques*, vol. 1: *Les voies de l’interiorite*, Paris 1994, p. 132–133; 525–558.

Thus, some common features of mystical experiences can be given, but in most cases they refer to a transcendent reality, even if the idea of wholeness, passivity or the transformation of being can be interpreted in a purely natural way. This is what the new spirituality does. The French philosopher cites B. Spinoza or L. Wittgenstein; in Poland H. Elzenberg could be mentioned. During the contemplation of the vastness of the world, when one experiences complete peace, his egocentrism becomes less noticeable, as he is permeated by the conviction of unity with the immensity that surrounds him. It becomes a sign of this new, mystical spirituality. However, it is an emotional-aesthetic experience rather than religious or spiritual. We simply deal with an “oceanic feeling”, that is, experience ourselves in unity with everything. It is a type of instatic mysticism (from Gr. *in-stasis* - “be in oneself”). The way to true reality does not run through the external world; it is found in people themselves; it is our “I” or “self”. This “I” is not identified with the self on a psychological level. The way to union with something absolute passes through the inner man. One must learn to detach oneself from externality which is only an illusion, and know the deepest spiritual truth about one’s identity with the divine. According to R. Otto, mysticism appears, among others, in yoga<sup>90</sup>. It is the “pure” mysticism of the soul. The soul is not a place of encounter with a God separate from it, but an end in itself. The human soul is no longer permeated by God, but becomes God itself. It is not so much ecstasy as - using the terminology of M. Eliade - enstasy, i.e., an experience of interiority and immanence, and a purely natural experience.

According to Comte-Sponville, in this experience we find such elements as silence, mystery and transparency, fullness, simplicity, unity, acceptance, along with death, and eternity.

The first element is silence, which does not consist in the absence of conversation, but in the suspension of the work of reason, in which, as the French thinker immediately adds, there is nothing irrational. It is the contemplation of reality, which does not have to be transformed into any rational discourse. It is the contemplation of truth-reality itself. Silence thus understood is the human’s primary contact with the surrounding world. Comte-Sponville fails to see, however, that one aspect of intuitive cognition or pre-rational cognition of reality is the ability to create concepts. As

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<sup>90</sup> Vide R. Otto, *Mistyka Wschodu i Zachodu. Analogie i różnice wyjaśniające jej istotę*, trans. T. Duliński, Warszawa 2000, p. 165–166.

rational, contemplation is a manifestation of human cognitive power. In this case, atheist spirituality is identified with the functioning of human cognitive abilities.

Mystery and obviousness are further elements of this spirituality; it is the admiration for the mystery of existence. There is only being, and why something rather than nothing? There is no point in looking for an answer to this question since existence is obvious. The mystery of being is reduced to the obviousness of being. However, this is an attitude that abandons an important cognitive question. Why not confront the question of existence, the origin of existence, the cause or reason for existence? Atheist spirituality arises in a way from neglecting the most important question: why is there something rather than nothing? It turns out that the new spirituality has nothing to offer in this matter apart from the statement that there is no mystery of being; there is only being. The mystery and the world become one. And this experience of the obviousness of being or existence is to be the source of the deepest joy pointing to wholeness. There is existence and only existence, and can one desire anything else? This is certainly a very optimistic assumption of Comte-Sponville because such experiences of complete contingency, absence of concerns, or suffering are not common. Since they are rare events, it is probably difficult to build a person's spiritual development on them.

What are the consequences of this experience of mystical existence? It leads to simplicity and unity. Simplicity consists in concentrating on what is essential and important. It is, as the French thinker writes, "to be with oneself to the extent that there is no more self, because there is only one thing left, only the act, only consciousness"<sup>91</sup>. The consequence is unity, which is experienced on two fundamental levels: the unity of the world and the unity of man.

The unity referring to the world has been strongly present in the whole philosophical reflection. Searching for it has often been the fundamental aim of cognition. In antiquity, in the quest for the so-called principle of the world, people wondered whether there was something that "united" the whole universe, something that lay at its foundation. Various answers were given, at first very naïve. For example, Thales of Miletus claimed that the basis of everything was water. Since there is no life without water and water is part of ourselves, it must be the most important principle - the substance of the

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91 Vide A. Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna*, Op. cit., p. 175.

world. Anaximenes suggests that air is what links all reality. Next comes the question if there anything that unites people, animals, plants, machines as well as our thoughts and dreams. The answer is: yes, being, existence is the most fundamental unity.

The second unity, which has also fascinated philosophers for centuries, is the unity of man and in man. Our life is fleeting and changeable. Many different events make up the history of our lives and among them are those that completely transformative, e.g., love, work, children, or participation in important historical events. Even the way of looking at the world and interpreting events changes, and the person is constantly aware of the aging process. However, despite these constant changes (external and internal), there is unity in human consciousness, there is something permanent, something that does not change - despite so many transformations. There is a certain principle, which allows us to say that what a subject has done, these have been his deeds. This principle of oneness of ourselves is simply our "I" - the center that binds all experiences. And this unity includes us in the mysteries of the unity of existence.

The next stage in this spirituality is the experience of eternity, but of course it is not eternity in the theistic sense. It is an experience of the present, because in fact neither the future nor the past exists. There is only duration; even past events are present in man only as present memories, and the future - as present expectations or hopes. Everything that exists both within and outside us is present, so the present is everything, it is even eternity, but eternity here and now. Even the idea of death ceases to arouse fear because the present exists and there is no sense in waiting for any other eternity. Comte-Sponville's proposal to identify the present and eternity is not original, because this idea was already present among the Stoics and in Eastern traditions. Another proposal of spirituality without God can be mentioned, namely the one presented by Harris. He puts forward the same idea of eternity identified with the present. Referring to the reasoning of the French philosopher himself, one can say that this theory is too optimistic to be true or fully attainable in everyday life.

The concept of unconditional acceptance is a climax of atheist spirituality. It is primarily about saying "yes" to everything that happens. It is not an approval of everything, but the adoption of an attitude of non-religious faith that everything that is, is true. Such a concept of faith as basic trust and acceptance of the world appeared in the works of such philosophers as G. Marcel, K. Jaspers, P. Tillich. They indicate an important aspect of faith:

it always accompanies us in everyday life, in its most basic manifestations<sup>92</sup>. Faith is the foundation of our life, not its additional (unnecessary) aspect. All humans base their lives on many elements of faith - trust, not relating this faith directly to religion; often as an act of trust in another person. It is an even more fundamental attitude which permeates literally everything: it anticipates my every action, my every decision, my every thought, and above all, it determines my first, most basic contact with the world around me.

In Tillich's interpretation, faith is "a state of supreme preoccupation"<sup>93</sup>. Every human being is concerned about something, preoccupation is our basic state of life. We have many material concerns - to keep or get a job, ensure a peaceful life for ourselves and our children, etc. - and just as many spiritual concerns: concern for the good upbringing of our children, for our own and others' happiness, our health and that of our loved ones. Of course, Tillich does not mean a preoccupation that would manifest itself in depression, sadness, or constant complaining.

The fact that I care about something so much that it becomes the object of such a penetrating concern indicates that we are dealing with something extremely valuable. I am concerned because I consider the person or thing extraordinary, unique, the only one. Tillich believes that we feel something that can be called an ultimate concern. There is a certain "care" that begins to be of utmost importance, for which one would be ready to sacrifice everything else. At this point, man opens himself up to what Tillich describes as infinity and unconditionality. In this ultimate concern, for example, for the well-being of a loved one who at that moment is the highest good for me, I begin to experience that there is something that infinitely surpasses me, something I begin to serve, to which I yield, and have no possibility of withdrawing. There is more to the "ultimate concern of love" than just the good of the other person. I serve something more than this one person, unique in my eyes. According to Tillich, I am unable to say and define exactly what that is.

Expanding on Tillich's thoughts, one could say that fundamental faith is like a "background" or "horizon" for our whole lives, for all our actions.<sup>94</sup> Fundamental faith is the most basic acceptance of reality. It is expressed in the belief that despite everything it is worth living, being good, trusting,

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92 Vide K. Tarnowski, *Usłyszeć Niewidzialne. Zarys filozofii wiary*, Kraków 2005, p. 403–448.

93 P. Tillich, *Dynamika wiary*, trans. A. Szostkiewicz, Poznań 1987, p. 31.

94 Vide K. Tarnowski, *Usłyszeć niewidzialne*, Op. cit., p. 421.

making demands, getting up from your falls, making the most ordinary effort of existence.

We must live like this because there is something which prevents us from losing faith that we cannot do otherwise. Fundamental faith is the primordial trust in the presence of “something more” in this life. Our aims, efforts, concerns have a certain horizon, always present, though unattainable, towards which they constantly lead. As I walk towards the horizon, I do not get closer to it, but it is always present, always in front of me. Far away and yet in sight. Thanks to it I can see everything else, I refer everything to it, it is the background for my every glance, it enables me to experience perspective. The same happens with fundamental faith. Its expression is, for example, a strong conviction that despite the presence of evil, or even its omnipresence in this world, it is good that is more fundamental, more essential, stronger, and more beneficial for people, more natural. It is impossible to dispose of this conviction because it is omnipresent, even at times when we think we are completely depressed by evil, in despair. Yet this feeling of pain is so strong because we are aware of the existence of good. Our dejection because of evil is a longing for good. Perhaps it seems that this moment is unattainable, distant and, in sharp contrast to our present state of mind. Fundamental faith is sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker, but we cannot lose it completely<sup>95</sup>.

Fundamental faith “completes” itself in religious faith, but this aspect is absent in “new spirituality”. In contrast, B. Welte, one of the philosophers analyzing fundamental faith, sees no point in speaking about it if we do not ultimately refer it to Transcendence of a personal nature. In his opinion, faith understood as the foundation of reality is possible because of God and through him. Such faith becomes a “big yes” to everyone and everything - an acceptance of the totality of existence. This, however, is achieved thanks to the awareness of the existence of God as the ultimate source and completion of all good. However, it is necessary to remember that saying “yes” to everything is not consent to evil in which one is often immersed. This “no” to evil, which must be overcome with all the consequences that evil entails, is part of the “yes” as the expression of faith. Ultimately, evil cannot be overcome without the existence of Absolute Good. According to Welte, man desires to reach the good which is no longer threatened, and this aspect belongs intrinsically to fundamental faith. Fundamental faith involves stepping out

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<sup>95</sup> Vide P. Fontaine, *La croyance*, Paris 2003, p. 144.

of a world permeated with evil and entering a completely different world, which will be “oxygenated” by the power of the Absolute identified with Personal Good. Genuine faith does not stop at itself, but leads the subject towards the infinite You, which it ultimately calls God<sup>96</sup>.

But can the new spirituality face the most important “challenge” for any spirituality, which is the mystery of death? As already mentioned, immersion in the present is supposed to postpone the inevitability of death, but is it possible? Death, as Comte-Sponville states, will only take away the future and the past, but not the present. It does not take away the whole person, only a part. In this respect, Ricoeur’s concept of horizontal and vertical resurrection is much more interesting<sup>97</sup>. Not only will our goodness remain permanently in other people after death, but also it will demand resurrection in another order of being. Only God, as Absolute Good, can collect every piece of goodness of people which was theirs. Even the smallest good cannot be lost. This is not a purely philosophical argumentation, but certainly an interesting postulate to complement natural spirituality with supernatural spirituality.

The outlined atheist spirituality, based mainly on the experience of unity with the existing world, acceptance of its existence and diversity is, as Comte-Sponville states, something unique. It is not a type of everyday experience, hence the reference to mysticism, which also in theism belongs to experiences of an exceptional nature. The “new mysticism” leaves no room for an appeal to a personal God. He becomes superfluous because the experience of unity of existence, peace, and acceptance fill a person completely and leave no room for anything else. God, who is no longer missing, ceases to be God, concludes the French philosopher<sup>98</sup>. However, to what extent Comte-Sponville’s proposal is unique? Later, we will see how it compares to contemporary thinkers, but at this point it is not difficult to relate his proposal to traditional Eastern spirituality. The reference to the concept of *mindfulness*, created by J. Kabat-Zinn, is primarily puzzling<sup>99</sup>. He suggests adopting a system of spiritual training inspired by Buddhism and removing a religious element from it. As a person associated with medicine (currently Professor Emeritus of the Massachusetts Medical School) he wanted to com-

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96 Vide B. Welte, *Tajemnica i czas*, trans., K. Święcicka, 2000, p. 165.

97 Vide P. Ricoeur, *Życie aż do śmierci oraz fragmenty*, trans. A. Turczyn, Kraków 2008.

98 Vide A. Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna*, Op. cit., p. 198.

99 Vide J. Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*, 1991.

bine the benefits of Buddhist practice with the achievements of medicine and, judging by the popularity of his system, he largely succeeded.

Harris, one of the so-called four horsemen of atheism, also relies on Eastern spirituality. He published a book referencing to atheist spirituality in the title<sup>100</sup>, in which he describes his own path to a spirituality without God and presents the value of the teachings of Eastern masters. There he writes that “the human mind is the most complex and subtle expression of reality that we have encountered. This adds depth to the humble search for ‘something like being’ oneself in the present”<sup>101</sup>. It is difficult to resist the impression that spirituality proposed by Comte-Sponville, Harris, and Kabat-Zinn has a common source, so one can question the originality of the French philosopher’s proposal. The question arises, however, whether the French seem to duplicate old models or whether they have something new to offer and, consequently, whether atheist spirituality in general can have something hitherto unknown to offer or it is just another version of approaches already proposed by various religions.

## PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

Ferry does not hide the fact that in his understanding philosophy is completely opposed to religion, as if the two were incompatible. He even compares philosophy to the serpent in the Book of Genesis. Because philosophy wants people to save themselves, it is diabolical and requires a lack of humility, faith, and hope - which after all - are essential in the case of religion<sup>102</sup>. “If religion appeases fear by turning death into an illusion, it risks doing so at the cost of freedom of thought. This is because in exchange for peace of mind, which – to a greater or lesser degree – requires the abandonment of reason and acceptance of faith to make room for faith, it demands from people to stop critical thought and accept faith. (...) To philosophize rather than to believe is in essence, at least from the point of view of philosophers, to prefer clarity of mind over comfort, freedom over trust.”<sup>103</sup> Philosophy

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100 S. Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*, Op. cit.

101 Ibid., p. 222.

102 Vide L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 24–25.

103 Ibid., p. 26–27.

cannot overcome death, these attempts - if at all possible - belong to the biological sciences and medicine. However, “philosophy also promises to save us, if not from death itself, then at least from the fear of death, yet by our own efforts and by the power of reason alone.”<sup>104</sup>

It is the fear of death that becomes an obstacle for a person to live a good life. It concerns not only biological death but also “the irreversibility of the course of things which is a form of death at the very heart of life.”<sup>105</sup> It turns out that, according to Ferry, there are only two alternative ways to deal with this problem: philosophy or religion. Both seek the answer of “salvation”, however in religion we are saved by a transcendent Being while philosophy “wants us to save ourselves, on our own, by means of ordinary reason if we manage to use it properly, that is, courageously and resolutely.”<sup>106</sup> The argument Ferry gives against the adoption of a religious solution coincides with Comte-Sponville’s argument. “First of all, (...) the promise that religions make to us to soothe our fear of death (...) is (...) too beautiful to be true. Too beautiful and at the same time too implausible is the image of a God who would be what a father is to his children. How to reconcile this image with the unbearable repetition of massacres and misfortunes tormenting humanity: what father would leave his children in the hell of Auschwitz, Rwanda, Cambodia?”<sup>107</sup> The second reason given by Ferry is best illustrated by the following passage from his book, “Well-being is not the only ideal on earth. Freedom is also an ideal. If religion assuages fear by turning death into an illusion, it risks doing so at the cost of freedom of thought. This is because, in exchange for the peace of mind which it claims to bring, at some point it always demands that we abandon reason to make room for faith, that we stop critical thought and accept faith. It wants us to be as little children before God, not as adults in whom it only sees arrogant logic-choppers”<sup>108</sup>.

It is difficult not to protest against such a vision of the relationship between religion and philosophy. Firstly, one cannot agree with the French philosopher when he says that religion makes death an illusion. The best proof of the falseness of this statement is the reference to Christianity for which the motif of death and its overcoming by Christ is crucial. If death were merely an illusion for this religion, then Christianity would lose its meaning. Secondly, there is no need for the alternative that Ferry puts for-

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104 Ibid., p. 19.

105 Ibid., p. 21.

106 Ibid., p. 25.

107 Ibid., p. 25–26.

108 Ibid., p. 26–27.

ward saying that it must be either religion or philosophy. In his opinion he goes so far as to state that philosophy could be like the apple chosen by our first parents as a result of the serpent's temptation. In this sense, Ferry says that philosophy is "devilish" because unlike religion, which is solely based on faith, it is supposed to teach not humility but pride, and consequently, to separate people from God. Such a vision of both religion and philosophy is strongly one-sided, even far-fetched, and though it can be observed in some situations, it is only the result of a cognitive bias.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is difficult to agree with the proposition put forward by Ferry here, it must nevertheless be admitted that spirituality without God which he constructs further, is worth analyzing. In his view on the history of Western culture, it can be divided into three parts. At the beginning was the time of Greek philosophy when the meaning of life and possibility of salvation after death were decided by people themselves. Philosophers reflected on the preparation for death, and this was an important part of their reflection. The ideal pursued was order - the cosmos. Ferry presents Odysseus as an example of such an understanding of the world. Odysseus rejects immortality and eternal youth to maintain the eternal order (of mortal man) as well as the proposal of the goddess Calypso, because his place is in Ithaca, with his wife and son. Therefore, he cannot violate the place which has been assigned to him in the world order, and which he lost through war.

With the advent of Christianity, the perspective changes completely. Salvation is no longer in the hands of people, but in the hands of God. In addition, God incarnated in a human, which completely contradicts the Greek vision.

On a theoretical level, the work of the new religion consists in the personalization of the cosmos. It is no longer governed by impersonal principles, but becomes permeated by love expressed, for example, in the idea of Incarnation. Moreover, such a world cannot be known by reason, it requires not only theoretical knowledge but also faith, that is, an act of trust in the Creator. Also, philosophy is deprived of some role - it ceases to be a certain "way of life" and "spiritual exercises", because this role is taken over by Christianity. Philosophy is reduced to the analysis of concepts by Christianity and ceases to be a search for wisdom. On the ethical level, the Christian revolution is associated with the transformation of the highly hierarchical Greek society by the introduction of the idea of equality of all humans before God. All people are created in the image and likeness of

God, and it does not matter from which social class they come from. It was the greatest revolution proposed by the Christian doctrine. The last change concerns the soteriological plane. Thanks to Christianity, salvation as the goal of human life becomes individual and conscious, both in its cause and destiny - for it is Christ, a divine person, who saves, and every human being is the addressee of the proposal.

Another radical novelty of Christianity is the idea of the resurrection of the body, which is based on selfless love practiced in this life<sup>109</sup>. Unfortunately, the French thinker does not see that presently an important element of the Christian religion is the proposal of personal salvation whose source is God himself. No “new spirituality”, even though it is capable of self-sacrifice, offers life after death. The hope of personal - individual salvation, understood as continued existence in a new reality after death, is a specifically religious proposal<sup>110</sup>. A non-religious spirituality cannot solve the essential challenge for every spirituality, religious or atheist, namely the question of human death.

Ferry recognises the philosophy of Kant as a breakthrough in the understanding of philosophical salvation. It resulted in a transition from aristocratic to meritocratic morality. It was Kant who proposed the transition from top-down commands what we should obey to the following questions: “In what reality should we root the new order; how to recreate a coherent interpersonal reality without appealing to nature that is no longer the cosmos and without appealing to nature that has value only for believers?”<sup>111</sup> The changes brought about by posing these questions have transformed moral, political, and legal reality, becoming the basis of *modernitas*. “We can only rely on the human will as long as people accept the fact that they must restrain and limit themselves, as long as they understand that their freedom must sometimes stop where the other person’s freedom begins. Only such voluntary limitation of our desire for infinite expansion and conquest can give rise to peaceful and respectful relations between people. One might say, the “new cosmos” is an ideal that we must build ourselves, and not something natural that has been given to us”<sup>112</sup>.

Ferry makes an interesting thesis that the great philosophies are secularized religions which previously prevailed. “Our nature (...) of itself inclines to selfishness, so if I want to make room for someone else, if I want to limit

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109 Vide Ibid., p. 94.

110 Vide I. Ziemiński, *Życie wieczne. Przyczynek do eschatologii filozoficznej*, Poznań 2013.

111 L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 165.

112 Ibid., p. 165–166.

my freedom to the conditions in which it is compatible with someone else's, I must make a certain effort, even force myself. Only on this condition is it possible to establish a new peaceful order of coexistence of human beings. This is what virtue consists in; in no condition (...) in the actualization of the most gifted nature. It is virtue, and only virtue, that enables the origin of a new cosmos, new world order, based on man and not on the cosmos or God"<sup>113</sup>. Work on oneself, reserved exclusively for religious systems, becomes the domain of philosophy, not religion.

"If virtue is equated with natural talents, then indeed no beings will be equal. In this perspective, it is normal to build an aristocratic world, that is, essentially a non-egalitarian world which not only postulates a natural hierarchy of beings but is also connected with an organization in which the best 'will be at the top' and the worse 'at the bottom'. On the contrary, if we recognise that virtue is not located in nature but in freedom, then all beings will be equal, and democracy will impose itself"<sup>114</sup>. Consequently, the emphasis is shifted from the whole, the cosmos, which was most important to the ancients, to the individual. "Only the individual counts to the extent that ultimately disorder is worth more than injustice: we have no right to sacrifice individuals in order to protect the Whole, because the Whole is nothing but the sum of individuals, an ideal construct, in which every human being is an 'end in oneself' and it is forbidden from now on to treat a human simply as a means to an end."<sup>115</sup> In consequence, a moral world was born, "in which the value of individuals, of persons, is measured by their ability to break out of the logic of natural egoism in order to build an ethical world which is a human product."<sup>116</sup> Ethics replaces religions; it is responsible for building a new order, not in the afterlife but here and now. This element of spirituality - the transformation of temporality - will appear in Gauchet's philosophy.

Ferry highlights the element of Descartes' philosophy which results in the emphasis placed on the subject and, consequently, a new concept of nature based on individual consciousness, not on tradition as before. This will change the understanding of truth, which is no longer the agreement of the intellect with a thing, but the certainty of the object in relation to itself. "So, it is not trust or faith, as in Christianity, but self-awareness that leads

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 171–172.

to ultimate truth.”<sup>117</sup> The consequence will be the rejection of all arguments from authority, that is, all beliefs imposed by someone or, as in the case of religion, by religious institutions. All this will cause far-reaching changes in the context of the spirituality of modern people shaped by these ideas, revolutionary at the time. The problem arises because, once the cosmological order of the ancients and the God-given order of the world are rejected as happened in the Middle Ages, the concept of salvation loses its main points of reference, “so that on the ground of pure humanism the idea of salvation is virtually unthinkable”<sup>118</sup>.

## TRANSCENDENCE IN IMMANENCE

In the introduction to *Man Made God: The Meaning of Life*, Ferry raises the question of mourning. Could only religions offer consolation on this subject, and *modernitas* condemns us only to psychotherapists and their pills? Can a modern human still ask questions about the meaning of life? “In the world where the influence of religion has diminished and all utopias that set our actions within the framework of a widely outlined project have collapsed, there is no longer a place where the question of the ultimate meaning of our efforts is considered. Once dealt with by religion, today this problem seems outdated, not to say ridiculous. We sense it before we even grasp it rationally: the old question of the “meaning of existence” smells of metaphysics. It seems to appear in a very specific period of life, namely in adolescence with its first anxieties, while for most adults it remains confined within a strictly defined sphere of privacy. It appears only in exceptional circumstances, during bereavement or serious illness. And even then, it is squeezed into the tight form of banalities and formulas, rightly referred to as occasional...”<sup>119</sup>.

Ferry states that the most distinctive feature of the secularized world is the fact that people have ceased to look at their lives in eschatological terms, in relation to the ultimate goal. Our world is dominated by constant plan-

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117 Ibid., p. 179.

118 Ibid., p. 180.

119 Ibid., *Człowiek-Bóg czyli o sensie życia*, Op. cit., p. 15.

ning and setting goals, but there is no “sense of meaning” in this behavior.<sup>120</sup> Ferry believes this sense of meaninglessness is one of the most significant problems of the secular world. It is obvious that not everyone asks such questions about meaning. Modern psychology also has many methods that allow us not to disturb our well-being on a daily basis. Ferry draws attention to the “great projects” that have emerged to replace religion and give life a new meaning. Communism, for example, was such a project.

What about trends, nowadays very popular, which make us look for meaning in Buddhism and other Eastern traditions? Ferry points out that this is not a satisfactory solution for modern man, for a humanist. At this point he disagrees with Comte-Sponville’s ideas on this subject, presented in the previous chapter. The sense of Buddhism is the negation of the self; the individual is no longer of any importance and becomes even an obstacle, and Ferry rejects such an approach. He writes, “As followers of humanism we can never completely abandon the question of meaning, even though the world of work and consumption in which we live constantly urges us to do so. We will not give up the desire to decipher the meaning of what happens to us - and when evil strikes us, when death arrives with all its absurdity, we cannot help but ask, ‘Why?’ However, as secular humanists, disillusioned, we cannot answer it, because we can no longer refer to that absolute subject, the divine subject, which used to appear to finally dispel all our doubts.

This is the contradiction that most profoundly defines our consideration of the question of meaning in democratic societies. It is precisely this antinomy the creators of new forms of spirituality would like to eliminate, convincing us that we must love fate even though it brings so much evil. As if after the “death of God” even the memory of any transcendence must perish! But perhaps, instead of running away from this contradiction it should be thoroughly examined and carefully considered. Perhaps transcendence has not disappeared completely, replaced by a “cosmic order” or a self-powerful individual, but is only transformed to conform to the requirements of modern humanism”<sup>121</sup>.

This is where the concept of transcendence in immanence steps in, central to Ferry’s thought. To present it, it is necessary to start from the question of replacing the theological-ethical order of humanism with a humanism starting from the subject. “In the traditional world, the so-called

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<sup>120</sup> Vide *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

existential problems were settled in advance, whereas in our democratic societies where the principle of individual autonomy applies, they appear with unprecedented sharpness. Marriage, raising children, fidelity, attitude to money, the body, matters related to the progress of science and technology - our attitude to these issues is no longer governed by clearly defined and recognised principles”<sup>122</sup>.

Therefore, it seems that the effect of modern humanism’s introduction of a human-centered ethic will be the rejection of all transcendence. For greater part of society, which in Europe at present is predominantly atheist or agnostic, this is obvious. Ferry, however, takes a very different approach. He believes that the evidence for a trace of “religiosity” in contemporary atheist thought is constant thinking in terms of “this world” and “the other world” that comes to the fore when something turns out more important than the life of an individual. And yet even atheists can often indicate values that are more vital to them than their lives, for which they would be willing to risk it. “Here is the transcendence again we are looking for. It is no longer the transcendence of a God who rules over us from the outside, nor even the transcendence of formal values which seemed to mysteriously transcend the egoistic immanence of the Self. It is a transcendence that is located beyond good and evil, because it belongs to the order of meaning and not to rigid moral principles.”<sup>123</sup> Consequently, Ferry suggests that, contrary to popular opinion, a person of *modernitas* does not abandon the deeper foundations of his life, his morality. By placing the emphasis on the subject, he opens access to authentic spirituality, finally freed from theology, because it makes a human its starting point rather than a dogmatic image of divinity. (...) The core values of modern ethics, whatever is said here and there, are not original... or very modern. What is new, however, is that these values are understood starting from man and not deducing them from a revelation that precedes and embraces him. In other words: the indefinable transcendence to which these values bear witness is revealed in people themselves, and at the same time its existence is reconcilable with the guiding principle of humanism, which demands the rejection of arguments referring to some authority”<sup>124</sup>.

Ferry’s fundamental thesis boils down to describing two processes, which, according to the French philosopher, take place in the religious and secular space. On the one hand, we deal with the humanisation of the divine,

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122 Ibid., p. 28.

123 Ibid., p. 32.

124 Ibid.

and on the other hand, with the process of “divinisation” of a human. The humanisation of divinity is nothing else but the negation of the existence of the Transcendent, which fits in the contemporary critique of all kinds of metaphysics and reduces the understanding of religion to a purely human aspect. Religion is not a relationship to a personal God but only a possible space for personal development. There are still people who accept the existence of a reality beyond this order, but increasingly they are “abandoning traditional dogmas and turning to the ideology of human rights.”<sup>125</sup> This is evident, for example, when we look at how selectively even believers treat the prohibitions and commands of the Church in moral matters. Ferry argues that the proposal of the primacy of truth in the sense of moral truths over freedom contained, for example, in John Paul II’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, is unacceptable to the modern person. Moral problems are no longer considered from a theological perspective, but only from human. The humanisation of the divine, namely the reduction of the religious dimension solely to a horizontal perspective is, however, a complete negation of the essence of religion. Ferry suggests replacing religious spirituality, which, in his opinion, no longer refers to a personal God with a “new spirituality”, identical with sanctification and a human. We do not deal with the rise of nihilism - as sometimes claimed by representatives of traditional religions, especially Christianity - or godlessness, but with a genuine return to ethics and traditional values<sup>126</sup>. According to Ferry, an essential feature of the “new spirituality” is also the concept of holiness, but specifically defined, in a completely different way than in religious narratives. Holiness is ultimately reduced to an emphasis on the almost sacred character of human dignity. It is in fact the only value for which people might give their lives. Presently, they are not willing to sacrifice their lives for the state, God, or an ideology. Only those who we love can trigger an attitude of sacrifice in us including giving our lives for them. It is “sacralization (divinization) of humanity”, which implies a transition from what might be called a ‘vertical transcendence’ (these are entities external and more important than the individual, situated, so to speak, above the individual), to “horizontal transcendence” (the transcendence of other people in relation to myself<sup>127</sup>. The ‘Other’, though it is most often our ‘Close one’, becomes the fundamental determinant of ethical relations. Modern thought, according to Ferry, rejects in principle

125 Ibid., p. 46.

126 Vide Ibid., p. 78.

127 Vide Ibid., p. 89.

any attempt at “sacral” justification of the nature of human dignity. What does it derive its ultimate justification from? Does human dignity have no ontic - transcendent justification? Ferry does not ask these are questions.

Ferry, however, does not completely cut himself off from religious systems. His spirituality also draws on Christianity. In his publication *La Tentation du Christianisme*<sup>128</sup> he tries to describe the processes occurring between Christianity and Western civilization. On the one hand, Christian faith ceased to function in the public space and is increasingly reduced to a private sphere, but on the other hand, it is still a strong tradition, at the root of our culture. Christianity cannot, therefore, be ignored or omitted in contemporary discourse, since the elimination of references to Christianity will sooner or later lead to the “deculturalization” of Europe. Ferry, like historian J. Jerphagnon, tries to trace the influence of Christianity on the Greek tradition to find from this perspective a possibility of a new mode of Christian presence in modern society. According to Jerphagnon, with whom Ferry disputes, the “success” of Christianity in ancient times was determined by Roman pragmatism (a new religion capable of uniting the empire), but also a completely different from the conception of religiosity which referred to individual testimony, even to the point of martyrdom. On the other hand, according to Ferry, the confrontation between Greek philosophy and Christianity concerned primarily the intellectual plane. The “Christian revolution” stood in opposition to two currents present in Greek philosophy. First, the world, even if it contains harmony, is impersonal, and second, the purpose of life is in temporality, in a good life, not in the search for eternal life. Living in harmony with the cosmos allows one to overcome the fear of death. Christianity breaks with this tradition in three fundamental fields: theory, morality, and salvation.

In his concept of spirituality, Ferry nevertheless refers to a specifically understood transcendence; it is “transcendence in immanence”. Transcendence thus understood by Ferry was strongly criticized by Gauchet. Their joint book *Le Religieux après la religion*<sup>129</sup> reflects their debate, in which they try to clarify their positions on the new dimension of religiosity. Ferry reiterates his thesis that traditional religion, which refers to a personal God and on this basis, wants to create a moral law and build society, is in decline. The criticism of personal Transcendence does not yet mean that there are

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128 L. Ferry, J. Jerphagnon, *La Tentation du christianisme*, Op. cit.

129 L. Ferry, M. Gauchet, *Le Religieux après la religion*, Paris 2003.

no longer believers or practitioners of traditional religions, but in Ferry's view, it ultimately comes down to the individualized views of certain people. Gauchet agrees with this diagnosis, but the differences between them appear in the conclusions they draw from their description of present-day religiosity. Ferry tries to justify the thesis that the 'humanisation of the divine' and 'sanctification of people', the processes described above, lead to a slow discovery of transcendence in immanence. How does he understand it? He reduces it to the necessity of transcending secular ethics which in certain situations becomes helpless, i.e., when it comes to issues such as death, suffering, and the meaning of life. It is not a question of referring to a specific religion, but to something that transcends the purely temporal dimension. Transcendence becomes an ethical horizon, but of a very unspecified nature. Unfortunately, the concept is so vague that it is not clear what it ultimately means. Instead, Gauchet rejects every manifestation of transcendence, since Ferry claims that "the transcendence of freedom, so to speak, not only exists within but also outside us: we do not invent the values that guide and move us. We do not, for example, invent the beauty of nature or the power of love."<sup>130</sup> This already suggests that there are values independent of us, and this is completely rejected by M. Gauchet.

## THE DISPUTE OVER SPIRITUALITY L. FERRY - A. COMTE-SPONVILLE

In Ferry's view, Comte-Sponville appears as the one who, undoubtedly, the farthest and with the greatest intellectual talent and precision, has led the attempt to establish new ethics and teaching of salvation by radical deconstruction of humanism's claims to transcendent ideals. He perceives Comte-Sponville as a Nietzschean because he shares his Nietzschean conviction that 'idols' are merely illusions, that they must be deconstructed and genealogically reconstructed, and that only the wisdom of radical immanence is possible. The summary of atheist spirituality proposed by Comte-Sponville is one of the many forms of *amor fati*, that is, an appeal to come to terms with the world as it is, while radically criticizing hope. To

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<sup>130</sup> L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 293.

hope less and love more, as Ferry summarizes Comte-Sponville's thinking, is a proposal for a new understanding of salvation. Contrary to what many thinkers claim, hope is far from helping us to live better; rather it strips our lives of what is essential and what is given here and now.

As among the Stoics and Nietzsche, from the point of view of renewed materialism, hope is much more of a misfortune than benevolent virtue. Comte-Sponville believes that to hope is to desire without joy, knowledge, or power. Hope is a great misfortune, and not, as it is often said, an attitude that could give flavor to life<sup>131</sup>. Ferry believes that Comte-Sponville's proposal reduces hope to three desires. First, it is a desire without joy, because hope implies that we simply do not have what we want. If I expect, hope for a better life, for health, this means that I do not possess these things. Hope always presupposes lack. It is also a desire without knowledge because we do not have the knowledge that would allow us to convert hope into simple expectation. If I know when the things which I do not possess will come to me, I no longer hope for them, but simply wait for them. Hope is also a desire without power, a kind of passivity, because if we had the power to fulfill our desires, we would be able to achieve them quickly. The right action would suffice. On the one hand Ferry admits that Comte-Sponville's proposal is consistent and that the reasoning is correct. The materialistic point of view rightly rejects hope as it is too idealistic thinking. Instead, both the materialist philosophy of salvation and Comte-Sponville propose the idea of the famous *carpe diem* – seize the day. If any effort is worth making, it is only living the life which unfolds here and now. There is only the present, and not a future filled with vague hope.

In Comte-Sponville's view, Ferry continues, the evil that affects us has a twofold form; it consists in looking longingly back to the past which has already gone, and looking forward to the future which has yet to come. We forget about life as it is, in the only reality which has value, because it is the only reality that is truly real: the reality of the moment, which we must learn to love. The spirituality proposed by Comte-Sponville is nothing more than loving the world as it is. It consists in accepting what the present brings. This is the essence of materialist spirituality<sup>132</sup>.

Ferry, however, does not share this approach of Comte-Sponville. He thinks that Comte-Sponville stops at the materialist position, rejecting

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131 Vide A. Comte-Sponville, L. Ferry, *La sagesse des modernes. Dix questions pour notre temps*, Op. cit., p. 315–320.

132 Vide L. Ferry, *Jak żyć?* Op. cit., p. 287–289.

everything that could be transcendent. Ferry has many objections to such thinking, and he describes the most important as follows: “Materialism does not convince me not because I find it inconvenient [due to its lack of transcendence of freedom or transcendence of value - note J.S.]. On the contrary, as Nietzsche says, the science of *amor fati* is an unparalleled source of consolation, a cause of infinite serenity. If I feel obliged to transcend materialism and try to go further, it is because I consider it, in a literal sense, as ‘unthinkable’, too full of logical difficulties for me to be intellectually satisfying. To name the principle of these contradictions again, I shall only say that the cross of materialism is that it never succeeds in rethinking its own thought (...). A materialist says, for example, that we are not free, *but of course he is convinced that he makes this statement freely, that in fact no one forces him to do so - neither his parents, his social environment nor his biological nature*. He claims that we are thoroughly determined by our history, but he continues to encourage us to *free ourselves from it, change it and if possible, make a revolution!* He says that one must love the world as it is, come to terms with it, escape from the past and the future, live in the present, *but he does not stop, as you and I do, when the present begins to weigh him down, but tries to change it in the hope of a better world*. In short, a materialist makes profound philosophical statements, *but always for others, never for himself*. Each time he reintroduces transcendence, freedom, a plan, an ideal, because he really cannot but regard himself free and driven by values higher than nature and history. Hence, the fundamental question of contemporary humanism is how to think of transcendence in two forms in us (transcendence of freedom), and beyond us (transcendence of values), without immediately giving way under the blows of materialist genealogy and deconstruction? (...) How to think of humanism finally free from metaphysical illusions, which at the very beginning, at the birth of modern philosophy, it was still dragging behind?”<sup>133</sup>.

Ferry sides with post-Nietzschean humanism saying that he is an heir of Kant and then of E. Husserl and of his proposal to rehabilitate the concept of transcendence which Husserl called transcendence in immanence. It is about the classical example that Husserl gives, when we look at a box of matches seeing only three of its sides, even though there are six of them. This is an example of the fact that man never has absolute knowledge, that everything appears against an invisible background. Our consciousness is

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 294–295.

always a “consciousness of something”, it is always limited by some element of the external world, so we will never attain omniscience. “In other words, all presence presupposes absence, all immanence - hidden transcendence, all representations of an object - something that remains withdrawn”.<sup>134</sup> Ferry underlines the importance of this discovery. “Transcendence is not a new ‘idol’, an invention of a metaphysician or believer, or another fiction of some hereafter which would serve to depreciate reality in the name of an ideal, but it is a fact, a statement, an undeniable dimension of human existence inscribed in the very core of reality. Transcendence thus conceived or, to put it better, this very transcendence will not yield under the whip of classic criticism of idols, which is done by materialists or various defenders of deconstruction. It is precisely in this sense that it is metaphysical and post-Nietzschean”<sup>135</sup>. Transcendence in immanence should give meaning to human experience. This is best visible in the case of sensitivity to the world of values. As he notes, it is “precisely ‘in me’, in my thinking or in my sensitivity that the transcendence of values appears. Although these values are in me (immanence), they nevertheless act as if (transcendence) they were imposed on my subjectivity, as if they came from elsewhere. (...) I do not invent mathematical truths, nor the beauty of a work of art, or ethical imperatives. (...) The transcendence of values in this sense is most real. However, this time it is in the most concrete experience, not in metaphysical fiction, not in the form of an idol, such as ‘God’, ‘paradise’, ‘republic’, ‘socialism’, etc.”<sup>136</sup>. Values are genuinely transcendent, therefore, unlike extreme materialism, his proposal appeals to “non-metaphysical humanism” which wants to accept the transcendence of values openly and consciously. “Not because of helplessness, but because of clarity of vision, because this experience is unquestionable, and no materialism is fully aware of it”<sup>137</sup>.

There appears horizontal transcendence, which unlike vertical transcendence, is rooted in human beings and the surrounding reality, not in something above our heads. This brings us to the most important processes taking place in the modern world. First, it is the humanisation of the divine. For example, human dignity no longer needs reference and justification in God and the world does not have to be created by a divine being to impress with its beauty. The second process is exactly opposite, namely, the diviniza-

134 Ibid., p. 298.

135 Ibid., p. 298–299.

136 Ibid., p. 300–301.

137 Ibid., p. 301.

tion or sanctification of people in the sense of sacrificing ourselves out of love for the person dear to us. Today, it is only for the sake of our beloved that we agree to take risks, even risking our own lives; we certainly will not do so to defend “great concepts” such as the homeland or revolution<sup>138</sup>.

There is some doubt about Ferry’s interpretation. Is it possible to simplify the history of Western thought as he proposes? Can we say that there was antiquity with its ordering of the world, people as its element, seeking salvation in this cosmos? Can we accept that then this vision was superseded by Christianity proposing salvation by God and life in the other world, and the response to this was the Enlightenment, which is secularized Christianity and extreme materialism? Can we say that its revised version is humanism which saw the weakness of materialism and proposed transcendence in immanence? The problem is in the place of Christianity in this puzzle. Should it not be somewhere aside? Why can humanism not be Christian? Are *modernitas* and Christianity in contradiction? Ferry seems not to have even asked this question, nevertheless, even he, at the end of his book “*Learning to Live: A User’s Manual*” shows that there is room for Transcendence in itself, and not only that in immanence. We have access to transcendence in immanence through our own reason. But we cannot find this passage to the other Transcendence on a philosophical level. Then why reject it in advance? Is it not better to leave a question mark here and allow each person to decide whether he would find this transcendence in himself or give it a capital “T” at the beginning? Ferry seems to be inconsistent here, because on the one hand, he wants to be as open as possible to all thoughts, referring to the Kantian understanding of extended reason, and on the other, he refuses to take this possibility into account.

## EXIT FROM RELIGION

Marcel Gauchet in his monumental work *Le désenchemement du monde*<sup>139</sup> proposes a general theory of religion which he calls “exit from religion”. Here we deal with a theory that refers to the great philosophical interpretations

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<sup>138</sup> Vide Ibid., p. 309–310.

<sup>139</sup> M. Gauchet, *Le désenchemement du monde*, Paris 1985.

of religion of modern time (I. Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, L. Feuerbach, K. Marx, F. Schleiermacher, F. Nietzsche, E. Troeltsch, and others) and the one that brings up the ideas proposed by the social sciences (E. Durkheim, M. Weber). The first difficulty that appears while reading *Le désenchemement du monde* is the very definition of religion. According to the French thinker, the answer to the question what true religion is cannot to be found in classical texts describing the present state of historical religions (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.), but we must refer to the beginnings, to archaic times or primitive societies, which - according to Gauchet - were marked by the rejection of two orders: historical and state. Religions had no history yet and were not linked to a system of power.

Consequently, only those societies which treated religion as systems of neutralizing conflict, namely, preventing social division, were truly religious<sup>140</sup>. Gauchet consciously refers to Weber's notion of the "disenchantment of the world" but gives it a different meaning. For Weber, disenchantment is the end of magic as a means of human salvation. It is not necessary to invoke God for the world to be rational and comprehensible and for people to realize their development on an individual and social level. According to the French thinker, "disenchantment" has a much broader meaning: it is, primarily, the disintegration of the understanding of religion as a way of organising human life and the whole society. Gauchet asserts that a contemporary human interprets religion differently than a few centuries ago. Presently, religious relation is commonly regarded as an individual, metaphysical belief connected with the feeling of Transcendence and related to an individual human destiny. It is a belief, not a social organization. Religion carries us - but individually - to the recognition of the hereafter, the invisible realm. In the past, for centuries, religion was something else: a way of being and structuring society. The individual's religious beliefs were of little importance. Before religion was reduced to personal beliefs and a relationship with the Transcendent, it had the function of informing and overseeing social life. Through religious systems, humanity was subordinated to the rule of gods. This is the initial and most enduring significance of religion as such, argues Gauchet.

Religion also meant referring to heteronomous law. The religious system sanctioned and obliged the observance of the law coming from the Absolute. This legal organizational principle is divided into four areas. The

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140 Vide Ibid., p. 61.

first is tradition or the organization of society on the principle of obedience to the founding past. Every society is “indebted” to the patterns left by its ancestors, and through them it becomes dependent on God. The second area is related to domination. In religion there is a kind of authority that commands the absolute submission of the whole society to the holiness of the other world. The third area of religious laws consists in the establishment of a hierarchical system, strongly present in every religious system. Religion tries to order all entities by pointing out their inequality and imposing the attachment of a lower being to higher: the created world is subordinated to people, and the people are obliged to submit to the gods. Finally, the last area is incorporation, that is, the establishment of a specific relationship between the individual and the religious group, consisting in the submission of the individual to the collective whole. These four dispositions are found in all known religious systems from their emergence until modern times<sup>141</sup>.

What does the process of the “exit from religion” – a key concept of Gauchet’s entire philosophy – consist in? The French thinker contrasts heteronomy, a characteristic feature of religious systems, with the autonomy that has taken place in Western societies since modern times<sup>142</sup>. Autonomy, or autonomous organization, is precisely the opposite of heteronomy. Obedience to the past tradition led to the imposition of one vision of development on the whole society. Moreover, this development was subordinated to another goal, namely salvation, that is a passage of people from this world to the transcendent reality. Thanks to secularization processes, the domination of transcendence as a force organizing social life gives way to the authority emerging as a representation of individuals, and thus not imposed from above. Hierarchy inherent in social life begins to yield to the principle of equality between individuals. People treated as part of a larger organization and subordinated to “eternal order” discover their independence and individuality. Finally, the maintenance of order by reference to the religious principle as a “glue” of society gives way to the agreement between individuals, according to the model of “social contract”. Exit from religion, as Gauchet asserts, consists in this transition from the world of heteronomy to the world of autonomy. As he indicates, this process did not occur overnight, but was slow and sometimes even confrontational. Moreover, the process of autonomisation has been subject to repeated attempts to return to disinte-

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141 Vide Ibid., p. 73–75.

142 Vide M. Gauchet, *La religion dans la démocratie*, Paris 1998, p. 18.

grating forms of religious life, both in the past and presently. For example, the Reformation, perceived presently as one of many processes conducive to the secularization of Western societies, was originally conceived as an attempt to restore Christianity to its original purity and a return to the early Christian system. A contemporary attempt to return to religious heteronomy is, for example, the New Orthodoxy movement. A return to thinking from the depths of tradition and traditional Christian notions is common to the entire movement. After all, this is how the representatives of this movement understand the Latin word *radix*: as referring to the source.

These notions become tools for a creative and inapparent dialogue with modern times. J. Milbank, G. Ward and C. Pickstock argue that the dialogue with contemporaneity should not only maintain the old Christian concepts but also refer to them. Representatives of radical orthodoxy argue that only Christian theology is capable of a correct interpretation of the world, only it realizes the whole reality because it does not neglect the transcendent dimension.

Representatives of this current claim that it is necessary to defend theology from the dangers of modernity. The latter has led to its total marginalization. Theology has lost its competence to create a comprehensive vision of the world, be a general theory, describe experiences of all kinds. The exact sciences have led to a situation in which theology has become a description of either a vague Christian experience or a speculation on transcendentalities, also rather vague, or at best, historical-philological research. Theology ceased to describe reality.

In his works, Milbank proposes a different interpretation of reality, indicating an important place for theological thinking. The basic assumption of radical orthodoxy is that neutral and impartial secular rationality of modernity has a hidden theological core anyway. As Milbank shows in his work, modernity can essentially be interpreted as a development in theology. Drawing on a genealogical description of modern secular sociology and philosophy, Milbank attempts to show how the modern exclusion of theology presupposes a theological perspective.

From an orthodox Christian point of view, this 'hidden' theological development within modernity can be understood as both pagan and heretical. If Christianity seeks to find its place in modernity, it only compromises itself<sup>143</sup>. Of course, Gauchet thinks that such attempts are completely

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143 J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reasoning*, Oxford 1990, p. 23.

misguided and there is no return from the exit from religion. On the other hand, the example of Judaism is interesting because it is the only religion, according to the French thinker, which has preserved its autonomy from political systems. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Judaism had to redefine itself as a diasporic religion. The lack of its own territory forced Judaism to radically dissociate itself from politics, so it had no influence on the legal systems in the countries where Jews lived. This apolitical nature of Judaism is a unique case in the history of religion<sup>144</sup>.

It is also interesting to note that not only the great religious narratives attempt to return to a heteronomous order. Ideologies, especially those leading to totalitarian societies, are nothing more than variations of “secular religions”, fortunately, increasingly rare<sup>145</sup>.

Gauchet juxtaposes totalitarian systems with religious fundamentalism, especially in the context of contemporary Islam. One of the fundamental elements of totalitarianism is positioning itself in contemporary history and presenting itself as the only way to transform the future. Totalitarianisms, like communism referring to dialectical materialism or Nazism appealing to the doctrine of racial struggle, offered a simple, effective way to a different, better future. The proposal of a new society here on earth, not long ago has been the seductive power of totalitarian systems. In contrast, the religious authoritarianism of e.g., state Islamic regimes or Islamist radicals is essentially positioned to regain the past, not the future. It is about the restoration of the external rules of Islamic observance revealed in the past. Only absolute fidelity to what used to be, will allow us to survive in this world which often tries to destroy what is religious and sacred<sup>146</sup>. Beyond that what belongs to the past, Islam has little to offer. Sharia law acts in principle as a general law for the internal community of believers, but it has nothing to offer to those who are outside,” Gauchet argues.

Despite religious authoritarianism, fundamentalism still leaves much more room for the conscience than totalitarian oppression. Here, Gauchet appreciates the repeated resistance of religious systems to totalitarianisms, since internal laws of religion constituted the only barrier to the claims of authorities, which asserted they had the right to completely subordinate a human and society to the ideology they proclaimed.

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144 Vide M. Gauchet, *Retour ou sortie du religieux?* “Philosophie Magazine”, (2015)25, <http://www.marcelgauchet.fr/blog/?p=2996>, access 15.11.2020.

145 Vide M. Gauchet, *La condition historique*, Paris 2003, p. 367–413.

146 Vide Ibid., p. 161–162.

But how does the process of the exit from religion described by Gauchet differ from the secularization processes that have been dynamically taking place in Western civilization since modern times? What distinguishes “the exit from religion” from “secularization”?

According to Gauchet, the concept of secularization is ambiguous; it means two different and even contradictory phenomena<sup>147</sup>. The first meaning, most original, refers to a new organization of the public sphere in which religion ceases to play the role of a reference matrix, as in the Christian era, although, at the same time, this does not mean that religion must be completely “erased” from the public sphere and transferred to the private one, which is a frequent demand of many contemporary atheists. Thus understood, the process of secularization began with the Renaissance, when the Reformation broke the unity of Latin Christianity and deprived the papacy of its power over united Christian Europe. The medieval unity of Europe is broken, even if it is done with a different understanding of Christian heritage, but in this way the first “liberation” from papal authority takes place. After Luther’s public appearance, rulers and princes could free themselves from loyalty to the pope and the political sphere established its autonomy. In 1648, the term “secularization” appeared in the documents of the “Peace of Westphalia” defined as the removal of some property, territory or institution from ecclesiastical jurisdiction or the confiscation of goods belonging to the Church and transferring them to secular purposes. Since then, the word began to appear in public discourse across Europe. The culmination of these processes happened during the French Revolution, when not only was the Church openly persecuted but also statehood was established, cutting itself off from the religious dimension. At the same time secularization of the Christian heritage also took place, which ceased to play the role of a reference point for the development of science, art, culture, and many other areas of social life.

The second meaning of this term indicates exactly the opposite process: it denotes the influence of religions on any culture. Gauchet refers directly to the concept of C. Schmitt, for whom all political concepts are secularized theological ideas. Society believes that it is secularized, but in fact religion still plays an important role, though in a camouflaged way. It is present in legal and ethical systems as well as the suggested hierarchy of values.

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147 Vide M. Gauchet, *Retour ou sortie du religieux?* “Philosophie Magazine”, (2015)25, <http://www.marcelgauchet.fr/blog/?p=2996>, access 15.11.2020.

The flaw in the first interpretation of the secularization processes consists in, according to Gauchet, the erroneous belief that it suffices to limit the role of religion and society will undergo a radical change<sup>148</sup>. The transfer of religion to the private sphere does not mean that religious systems have ceased to influence society. They still do, only in a much more discreet way and continue to lead, for example, to the radicalization of individual convictions. The second interpretation of secularization advocated by Schmitt does not explain how secularized theological concepts function in society. Do they have any meaning? What do they refer to? Are they still rooted in the reality of the “hereafter” or has there already been a rupture?

In Gauchet’s view, both descriptions of secularization fail to capture what is most essential in the exit from religion - namely, the radical transformation of society. Society does not need religion for anything and must organize itself without any reference (positive or negative) to religious systems. Secularization, as Gauchet interprets it, describing two different processes, continues to maintain this relationship.

Furthermore, the exit from religion should become a global process, which is slowly happening, supported by the development of global economy<sup>149</sup>. Gauchet emphasizes that globalization is not just an economic-financial process, but it means access for all societies to intellectual and material tools produced by the West and developed economies. The ideas and values underlying economically developed societies, such as liberalism, individualism, or hedonism, are conveyed through globalization. In contrast to the first globalization, imposed by colonial imperialism, the second globalization we are experiencing is a cultural westernization of the world and it takes place without the direct imposition of Western political or anti-religious patterns. The West does not send its representatives across the planet to proclaim to “leave religion!”. It is sufficient to distribute products intensively and fuel materialistic needs, which in themselves contain the message of exit from religion as a hidden message. There is no need to force externally the abandonment of religion by societies that have not done so from within. The process will accomplish itself, even if today it is far from completion.

According to the French thinker, one can speak not only of the abandonment of religion by societies but also religion itself can, and even should, undergo a similar process, which Gauchet calls “the exit of religion

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148 Vide Ibid.

149 Vide M. Gauchet, *La condition historique*, Op. cit., p. 415–425.

from religion<sup>150</sup>. The best example of the possibility of such a process is the emergence of Christianity with its specific idea of the Messiah. The idea of the divine incarnation is an example of the potential exit of religion from religion. Christ, according to Gauchet, is the “upside-down messiah.”<sup>151</sup> In many religious systems, the figure of the messiah has traditionally been regarded as a victorious king sent by God to unite people in his name and defeat all his enemies. Initially, Christ was thus perceived by his listeners and disciples. Ultimately, Jesus as a man-god appears as a powerless and suffering figure who testifies by his life and death to the radical separation of two worlds: visible and invisible. His message, presented through the incarnation, emphasizes the double externality: on the one hand of God in relation to the world (he is not of this world), and on the other, the superiority of people over creation (it is people who will be saved, and they are the object of God’s concern). Gauchet, referring to the example of Christianity, believes that every religion should go through the process of transition from its fossilized forms to openness to radically different interpretations. Not only societies but also religious systems face the process of exit. A manifestation of the exit of religion from religion is the individualization and privatization of religion, emphasized by many sociologists. Not only has religion ceased to play a key role in Western societies but also the reduction of religion to personal beliefs triggers “personal interpretations” of religion. Many followers of religious systems no longer accept old dogmas, and their positions are very different from the traditional message of the traditional religious system (many Catholics do not accept the Church’s position on abortion, contraception, etc.). Past, heteronomous religious norms have decisively separated themselves from religion, presently understood as personal faith.

Exit from religion is Gauchet’s key concept. It describes a process that is and should be taking place in the social space. Along with this process, should a new spirituality emerge, detached from religious spirituality, autonomous, not heteronomous, imposed externally by the hereafter? Gauchet’s answer is obviously affirmative. Exit from religion means, on the one hand, that we still know what religiosity is because humanity has been like that for millennia. We remain sensitive to the values of religiosity. Denying religious systems or ceasing to participate in rituals does not mean that when we enter a religious building or place, we do not feel the atmosphere of the

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150 Vide M. Gauchet *Le désenchemement du monde*, Op. cit., p. 197–208.

151 Ibid., p. 231.

sacred. While listening to J. S. Bach's St Matthew Passion, we can still feel the intensity of the composer's faith. We have always been religious and - in the sense of sensitivity to the sacred - we will always be. But spirituality does no longer consist in performing religious activities, but according to Gauchet, it should be broadly understood. It means the openness to all possible answers related to questions of human destiny and existential condition.

More precisely, it is opening to an inner space of relationship with oneself called interiority, which is the fundamental human experience in Western society. Moreover, spirituality understood in this way originally characterized religions (especially monotheistic), because in the individual relationship with God in history there appeared an intense experience of self-consciousness and interiority. Unfortunately, according to Gauchet, the initial spiritual experience was quickly displaced by religious legal and institutional systems and religion moved away from individual experience. But this experience of the richness of our "self" not only continuous but also deepens along the process of exiting from religion. The French thinker argues that this process is confirmed by the search for spiritual experiences elsewhere, for example, in the religions of the Far East, in particular Buddhism in which Westerners seek spiritual rebirth. On the other hand, according to Gauchet, there is an important misunderstanding in this case - people in Buddhism expect to strengthen their inner self and spiritual wealth, whereas this religious system was originally about going beyond one's own "self" and its rejection<sup>152</sup>.

Another example of the new spirituality is the whole sphere of knowledge, cognition, and science, which is nothing but one great spiritual adventure<sup>153</sup>. What drives the will to know? Contrary to the naive image, it is not only about gaining knowledge, but, as Gauchet puts it, the encounter with the unknown is important. The essential element in knowledge is the measure of what is unknowable and what we want to discover with our reason. Knowledge is in fact a real metaphysical experience because nothing is more reminiscent of a 12<sup>th</sup>-century monk praying in solitude than a scientist looking in his laboratory for answers posed by the world around him. Both are similar mystics<sup>154</sup>.

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152 Vide M. Gauchet, *Retour ou sortie du religieux?* Op. cit.

153 Vide L. Ferry, M. Gauchet, *Le Religieux après la religion*, Op. cit., p. 71.

154 Vide M. Gauchet, *Retour ou sortie du religieux?* Op. cit.

Another space for post-religious spirituality is related to art.<sup>155</sup> At present, many people have a significant relationship with music, which has absolutely nothing to do with mere listening; it is a rather spiritual experience. Music shapes our inner self and opens us to other values. To say that music is just entertainment is to completely miss the extraordinary experience of openness to spirituality, reflection, and even contemplation. Experiencing art can be part of non-religious mysticism.

Art liberates the intellectual and existential space in which the subject tries to break away from the world, gain distance, in order to find oneself again. Regardless of whether the process of the exit from religion is completed or not, we will still have to come to terms with the existence of a new spirituality, which opens us to what is beyond us, although it does not refer us to a transcendent reality.

The exit from religion also shapes a greater commitment to the earthly world and transformation of the world around us.<sup>156</sup> The old religious models, such as mysticism, contemplation, separation from the world, are now incomprehensible and even harmful. The measure of contemporary spirituality is the pursuit of the renewal of social relations, e.g., by establishing fair institutions, reversing the processes of climate degradation, and reducing the role of economic factors in access to technical, cultural, or material goods.

In the context of the new spirituality, it is interesting to note the discussion between Ferry and Gauchet recorded in the work *Le Religieux après la religion*. The fundamental question to which both thinkers seek an answer is whether the end of monotheistic religions means the end of religiosity as such or whether there is no possibility of a different dimension of transcendence than the personal God known from the Revelations. Their answers differ fundamentally. In the discussion, they both try to clarify their positions on the new dimension of religiosity. Ferry believes that traditional religion which appeals to Revelation and wants to create moral law and build society is already in decline. There is no return to religion, which of course does not mean that there are no longer individuals with religious convictions; of course, there are quite a few of them, however these are specific views of individuals and nothing more. Gauchet agrees with this diagnosis, but differences arise in their views on the consequences of this situation. Ferry

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Vide M. Gauchet, A. Houziaux, O. Roy, P. Thibaud, *La religion est-elle encore l'opium du peuple?* Paris 2008, p. 88.

tries to point out that the “humanisation of divinity” and the “divinisation of humanity” lead to a slow discovery of transcendence in immanence.

Transcendence becomes an undefined ethical horizon. Gauchet does not accept even such very indefinite transcendence, because in his opinion it still has the features of religious transcendence. He proposes to replace it by an “earthly absolute.”<sup>157</sup> How is this expression to be understood? Primarily, it negates any form of metaphysical transcendence. One can only point to the transcendence of certain categories in relation to empirics, certain norms, or values in relation to human experience, but in no way do they transcend the earthly order. It is possible to indicate an absolute dimension in a human, denoting all the aspects of one’s subjectivity which underline one’s irreducibility to purely material aspects, but this does not mean that the “absolute in a human” indicates the necessity to accept an external Absolute<sup>158</sup>. The world must remain radically immanent.

Gauchet’s concept of the abandonment of religion and his proposal of a new spirituality provoked a lively discussion in philosophical and theological circles<sup>159</sup>. The most frequent argumentation of the opponents of the exit from religion proclaimed by Gauchet is the continuing vitality of Christianity, especially in developing countries or the Far East<sup>160</sup>. In their view, Gauchet’s theories are more wishful thinking than a description of the actual state of affairs; the exit from religion in most countries of the world simply does not take place. Critics also stress that many of the descriptions proposed by the French thinker are very schematic or even reductionist, and fit in with the modern and contemporary critique of religion and religiosity.

G. Labelle believes that Gauchet’s concept is a “neo-Durkheimian” perspective which - referring to the monumental work of Ch. Taylor *A Secular Age* - must be rejected<sup>161</sup>. Gauchet’s concept of a new atheist spirituality is neither original nor innovative. The replacement of religious relations, mystical experiences, spirituality of belief or the pursuit of salvation understood religiously by activities such as commitment to humanity, science or experiencing art, does not provide the answer to the most fundamental

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157 Vide L. Ferry, M. Gauchet, *Le Religieux après la religion*, Paris, 2004, p. 44.

158 Vide Ibid., p. 73.

159 Vide *Religion, modernité et démocratie. En dialogue avec Marcel Gauchet*, Ed. F. Nault, Paris-Quebec 2008.

160 Vide J. Richard, *La fin de la religion d’après Marcel Gauchet*. In: *Le christianisme d’ici a-t-il en avenir ?* Eds. J. C. Breton, J. C. Petit, Montréal 1987, p. 239.

161 Vide G. Labelle, «Post-durkheimisme» et «sortie de la religion». *La réception des travaux de Marcel Gauchet par Charles Taylor*. In: *Religion, modernité et démocratie. En dialogue avec Marcel Gauchet*, Ed. F. Nault, Paris-Quebec 2008, p. 132.

questions such as those concerning the meaning of life, suffering or one's fate after death. Proposals of L. Ferry or A. Comte-Sponville, who do not avoid these topics, seem to be more positive, factual, or even more attractive from a non-believer's point of view.



# CONCLUSION

Although the theme is mainly developed by Gauchet and Ferry, modernity in the approach of the discussed authors appears as the end of religious heteronomy. The principle of religious domination sanctioned by divine revelation is undermined. Most of the presented atheists do not deny the symbolic character of the society which refers to values that transcend a human as an individual.

All the authors understand spirituality very horizontally, as a fulfilled life that is reduced to individual development. Ferry and Comte-Sponville, who refer to the notion of salvation or mystery, do not propose a deeper understanding of these concepts. Salvation is identified with human development and progress, while mystery implies an unconditional and indefinite reference to people or nature. As Labbé notes, all French atheists radically criticizing metaphysics still hold on to it to some extent<sup>1</sup>. The function of “meta” is still present, because the life of the mind “transcends” nature, society, and even the subject itself. The progress of an entire civilisation “transcends” the life of the individual. The metaphysics of transcendence is replaced by the metaphysics of immanence, which however, does not indicate the ultimate justification of either reality or the subject. New supra-moral or even mystical experiences - ultimately reduced either to aesthetic experiences or self-sacrifice for the other - are also to possess the “meta” nature. But can such experiences give meaning to the whole life? Can sacrifice for others make sense of every suffering and “transcend” death? The ability to behave in this way, to commit glorious, heroic deeds is not, after all, the norm and cannot be. Spirituality should not be merely punctual, limited to specific experiences of individual character. Atheist spirituality often appears as a spirituality for few. But on the other hand, paradoxically, atheist spirituality refers to the central idea of Christianity which is the new concept of love - Jesus’ proposal is to replace Aristotle’s *filia* with new universal love, *agape*, totally altruistic, capable of loving one’s enemies. The

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1 Y. Labbé, *Le ‘religieux’ après le christianisme. Perspectives philosophiques contemporaines*, “Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques”, 94(2010), p. 112.

central idea of atheist spirituality, according to which love for the other and creation is the way to earthly salvation, is still permeated by the evangelical spirit. Or would the term secular spirituality rather than atheist spirituality be more appropriate? One does not always have to justify one's actions by referring to Revelation or a particular religious system. The motivation to commit oneself for the benefit of another person or society does not have to be religiously motivated. Is it not possible to combine secular spirituality with Christian spirituality? Is this not a call for believers even at present? Perhaps the new spirituality proposed by the French philosophy of religion can become a new bridge between the increasingly "privatized" religion and the secularized world.

The characteristics of the presented representatives of contemporary criticism of religion indicate the heterogeneity of the third wave of atheism. It is necessary to distinguish three main streams: the first – radical, perceiving religion as a source of evil and many conflicts. Religion should be completely replaced by other forms of spirituality. In this current, every religion, without exception, equals fundamentalism – an argument which has no factual basis confirmed. Apart from Onfray, also Dawkins certainly belongs to this current, with his radical critique of religion in *The God Delusion*<sup>2</sup>. Publications by Dawkins, Harris, or Hitchens most often boil down to one very simple thesis: religion is the source of all evil and must, therefore, be completely rejected. The argumentation does not consist in honest or critical reasoning, but is merely a propagandist influence on the imagination: "let's try to imagine a world without suicide bombers, September 11th, July 7th, the Crusades, witch-hunt, gunpowder conspiracy, partition of India, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, without massacres and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia, the persecution of Jews as those who 'killed Our Lord', conflicts in Northern Ireland, "honor killings", and various televangelists with teased hair and shiny suits, robbing gullible people of their last pennies ('God demands it of you!'). And finally, imagine a world without the Taliban ordering the demolition of ancient statues, without public executions of "blasphemers", a world where women are not flogged for daring to expose a piece of their flesh"<sup>3</sup>. And it should be added immediately, let us imagine a world without the contribution of religion in the field of art, science, culture, charity, or the individual transformation of people. Is religion

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2 R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, London 2006.

3 Ibid., p. 10–11.

only a source of evil and misery? Are religions the only source of horrific evil? Why do the “champions” of a utopian, “religionless” world forget that ideologies, be they communist or Nazi, were the causes of the suffering of millions of people? About this the texts of Dawkins and many other atheists are discreetly silent. Similarly, in the case of the accusation of intolerance or fictitiousness of religions, that every religious system, as if by nature, is hostile to a different worldview and amounts to the “seduction of minds” and the introduction into a completely unreal world<sup>4</sup>.

The second current treats religion as a useful fiction, that is, it denies religion has any cognitive functions, it can only help people in their struggle with their own contingency. Such a “religion without God” has only a functional dimension. Religion may be treated as a positive reality, but the existence of God has no meaning. However, no representative of religion will agree with this last statement, because without the existence of God religious practices simply do not make sense.

The analysis of the third wave of atheism should be undertaken not only by representatives of the philosophy of religion, but also, or perhaps primarily, by representatives of religion. Religion should not deprive itself of the dimension of self-criticism and self-reflection. These analyses should concern not only the “dialogical” form of criticism, such as Comte-Sponville’s thought, but also its most radical forms, like Onfray’s or Dawkins’. The accusations formulated therein are not so much a negation of religion as they are a warning against the current danger, namely religious fundamentalism.

In conclusion, it should be said that contemporary critiques of religion indicate an extremely important intellectual challenge not only for the philosophy of religion itself but also for theology (the issue of religious fundamentalism). All contemporary critiques of religion warn against this fundamental threat. Fundamentalism is in fact conditioned by rigid cognitive structures. It is based on the domination of the need for security, strong fear, and a sense of threat from the external world. For fundamentalism, the basic criterion of truth is the compliance with its own system of beliefs and the opinion of authorities recognised by itself. Fundamentalism is characterized by low tolerance for cognitive dissonance, and thus is unable to engage in dialogue. A fundamentalist treats all other opinions as an attack on himself and the worldview he represents. The “third wave of atheism” is, therefore,

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<sup>4</sup> Vide M. Wörther, *Kein Gott nirgends? Neuer Atheismus und alter Glaube*, Würzburg 2008; J. Sochoń, *Religia w projekcie postmodernistycznym*, Lublin 2012; P. Nemo, *La belle mort de l'athéisme moderne*, Paris 2012.

not a “tsunami” for religion, but a wave which can raise it towards even greater religious maturity.

A. de Botton, a Swiss thinker, offers an interesting proposal in his *Religion for Atheists*<sup>5</sup>. At the very beginning he declares that he is not interested in the question of the truthfulness of religion. In his opinion, religion is not true in any sense<sup>6</sup>. This issue does not make sense and in his work he does not intend to take up matters related to the existence of the Absolute and consequently, the truth or falsity of religious statements. He leaves this problem to other atheist thinkers. His aim is to show that religion can be useful, interesting, and even can bring consolation. Moreover, an atheist can take certain ideas and practices from religion and transfer them to the secular world<sup>7</sup>. De Botton enumerates religious elements that can inspire a non-believer. These are: community, kindness, education, tenderness, pessimism, perspective, art, architecture, institutions.

The religious community can be a model for attitudes that make us see a potential friend in the other person rather than an enemy. Unfortunately, modern times offer a different perspective in which everyone is a threat to everyone. Thanks to religious affiliation, one who shares religious beliefs can expect help and understanding because he is a member of a community. This, in today's world, according to de Botton, is an increasingly rare attitude, and religion to some extent maintains it, so why should not the “new spirituality” follow suit?<sup>8</sup>

Kindness, another postulate of de Botton's atheist spirituality, is nothing else but a demand to restore life to the ethical dimension present in religious systems. He does not mean the introduction of e.g., Christian ethics as a system obligatory for everybody, but the preservation of ethical reflection which should constitute an important element of individual and community reflection<sup>9</sup>.

Religious education can also be a model for atheist society. Why? Because it recognises not only knowledge, scientifically understood, but also cares for the development of the whole human being including this element, which religion calls soul, and at present rather broadly understood as spirituality.<sup>10</sup> Tenderness, embodied, for example, in the person of Mary in

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5 A. de Botton, *Religion for Atheists. A non-believers's guide to uses of religion*, London 2012, e-book.

6 Vide Ibid., p. 10.

7 Vide Ibid., p. 11.

8 Vide Ibid., p. 11.

9 Vide Ibid., p. 94.

10 Vide Ibid., p. 161–162.

Christianity, is another element which can fascinate the atheist. It is nothing else but paying attention to the human emotional side. It is also important and cannot be neglected in modern spirituality<sup>11</sup>. Paradoxical elements to which de Botton refers are religious pessimism and perspective. These two elements teach us a healthy distance from reality<sup>12</sup>. Unfortunately, atheism is sometimes a naive position as it believes in progress that is supposed to eliminate all possible ills of this world.

Two other religious models are art and architecture. According to the Swiss thinker, contemporary art as well as architecture have ceased to delight and become incomprehensible to people who are not proficient in these matters. Art has ceased to evoke emotions that are easily shared with others<sup>13</sup>.

The last postulate of "religion" for atheists is to view religious institutions, although they are the most criticized aspect of any religion. De Botton, however, sees their positive dimension; it is the institutions that give a sense of identity and offer ceremonies through which spirituality is implemented. Perhaps it would be worth reflecting on similar institutions in secularized society, de Botton argues<sup>14</sup>.

De Botton's project of creating a religion for atheists is interesting, but as A. Draguła notes, it is essentially a sacral, though non-religious, proposal<sup>15</sup>. His interpretation is not a criticism of religion (although he is critical of the contemporary world and atheism), but he fails to perceive the value of religion as such. Religion contains positive elements, but on the condition that they are detached from any reference to Transcendence.

Summing up the considerations of the Francophone philosophers, one can say that the new spirituality they propose involves resignation from faith in a transcendent God and a search for the indefinable sacred (holy, the highest) in immanence. As A. Kubiak shows in her analyses, spirituality thus conceived manifests itself in a great wealth of possible aspects, such as the experience of art and nature, life after death, ideas of healing, or oceanic experiences of unity with the universe<sup>16</sup>. Presently, the new spirituality is becoming a popular alternative to religious spirituality. However, one should not treat both spiritualities as separate sets; they do not have to compete. Systems of spiritual development associated with specific religions

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11 Vide Ibid., p. 165.

12 Vide Ibid., p. 187.

13 Vide Ibid., p. 207.

14 Vide Ibid., p. 298.

15 Vide A. Draguła, *Ateistyczna imitacja religii?* "Więź" 2(2018), e-book.

16 Vide A. Kubiak, *Duchowość Nowej Ery*, "Studia Socjologiczne", (2002)1, p. 45.

will always provide inspiration even for atheist spiritualities. The latter, in turn, can indicate that there is a spirituality apart from religions that can develop human beings. Beside religion there is not only nihilism, as sometimes presented by the defenders of the old religious order; sometimes there are realities that are nonetheless enriching.

It is also worth noting that it is wrong to pose a simple alternative: either religious spirituality or atheist spirituality. The analysis of the concept of spirituality proposed by atheist thinkers shows that non-religious spirituality does not necessarily have to relate to the adoption of a position negating the sense of religion. A similar approach is taken by Czech thinker Halik, who claims there is a third way of spirituality, alternative to religion and atheism. It is a spirituality experiencing its “golden age”, “but since mainstream Christianity has long been reserved towards it and more attached to the ecclesiastical, doctrinal - institutional form, presently Christian syncretic and neo-Gnostic influences prevail”<sup>17</sup>.

There might be a system of spiritual development for both believers and nonbelievers. Spiritual training systems like *mindfulness* are an example of such an approach. Mindfulness exercises are ways of engaging our attention and consciousness to gain insight into ourselves for the purpose of self-knowledge and self-understanding. Even though mindfulness exercises grew out of the religious concepts of the Far East, they have become independent systems of self-healing which can become useful for both a religious person and an atheist. The development of atheist spiritualities, therefore, is a phenomenon that only illustrates another change: alongside religious spirituality there is also a postmodern spirituality, which pretends to be universal. For, as Harris rightly concludes: “the human mind is the most complex and subtlest expression of reality that we have yet encountered. It adds depth to the humble search for ‘something like being’ oneself in the present”<sup>18</sup>.

It seems that the spirituality proposed by atheists, from a purely practical point of view, does not contradict religious, for example, Christian spirituality. The advice of the Stoics, or Comte- Sponville who bases his approach on them to a large extent, may even improve the everyday functioning of every human being. Does the advice of this French philosopher to hope less and love more contradict Christianity? The Gospel also proclaims

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17 T. Halik, *Wzywany czy niewzywany*. Op cit., p. 50.

18 S. Harris, *Przebudzenie*. Op. cit., p. 222.

that “each day has enough trouble of its own”, so it seems that living in the present moment is a healthy habit for the psyche. The same applies to other elements. Similarly, Ferry’s proposal can be used by believers in the sense that immanence does indeed contain within itself a certain dimension of transcendence. Ferry stops here, and the Christian will go further, just as Husserl did, especially at the end of his life. Husserl, after all, is Ferry’s inspiration. Atheists create their visions of spirituality to bridge the gap after religion, but do their underlying claims not contain an assumption that may be considered incorrect? As we have seen in Ferry’s narrative (and in other authors, since this is a widely held view), Christianity was ousted by the Enlightenment and its mainstream has positioned itself towards the new order in a defensive or even hostile manner. Perhaps this alternative between religious spirituality and atheism is only possible if we consider ourselves heirs of the Enlightenment combated by religion and we straddle, not ready to reject one or the other. And what if the Church had not denied the progress of the Enlightenment from the very beginning but accepted the successive achievements of science as a common work of mankind, and not as a hostile element wanting to fight religion? Maybe then everything would have turned out differently and we would not have seen such severe divisions. Maybe in recent years it would not have been necessary to rediscover that spirituality can be independent from religion, because this type of spirituality would persist from the very beginning.



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