

Doctor Virtualis 14

Call for paper

Filosofie francescane – Franciscan philosophies

1.

In the western cultural tradition the reference to Francis of Assisi is frequent when the goal is to recall a vision of the Christianity as something close to the Evangelic tradition, to political choices devote to the needs of the poor people, or, even, to the importance of the ecology, as it is clear in the recent Papal encyclical *Laudato si'*.

The symbolic function of Francis is an open question also for the Medieval though scholars because on one side it seems to deal with an explicit Franciscan philosophy, since the scholastic period in the XIII and XIV centuries, but, at the same time, it seems unclear what is specifically due to Francis in this kind of philosophical tradition. The tradition seems to be defined especially by its Augustinian components, but it is not so evident why the Franciscan inspiration should flow into the tradition recalling to Augustine.

Sometimes – such as in Alessio – it has been underlined the difference between a line derived from Bonaventure and his work in translating the Franciscan thought into a conscious theory that can be taught in the University and another line, referable to Roger Bacon, that interprets the Franciscan inspiration mainly as a methodology, as a recall to the necessary confrontation with the popular origins, which results in an experimental approach to the knowledge process and in the aim of building a unitary vision of the sciences. This is definitively a suggestive interpretation, more relevant from the historical point of view than, for example, of the one from Gilson, who sees the two Franciscan philosophers mainly oriented towards the mystical tension to God, in case of Bonaventure, and the apostolic mission, in case of Bacon. However, both are useful, even if from different point of views, mainly for distinguishing the internal articulation of the Franciscan thought and for clarifying what finally makes it *Franciscan*.

From a different point of view, this theme can be considered also as a point of confrontation, and sometimes of collision, among the masters of the XIII and XIV centuries about some fundamental philosophical themes; in this perspective, the question is whether it is a matter of balancing the hegemonic role of the Aristotelian tradition in the philosophical thought of that years and the opposite line, which is ideologically linked to Francis and theoretically related to Augustine.

2.

Why the Franciscan philosophy joins almost naturally the Augustinian tradition? Also by the great researchers of the Medieval thought of the last century the strong relation between Augustine and Francis is taken as a matter of fact and it is not investigated in terms of a doctrinal or theoretical relation. According to Vignaux, a crucial role in the relation between Francis and Augustine is the theme of the conversion. In fact, in Augustine it is not only a religious or existential moment, but also a continuous approach to the philosophical thought; similarly, in Francis the conversion is both the practical-existential moment in which he leaves the wealth and the world, and the existential transition of his religious path.

In the context of the discussion about the knowledge problem it is frequent the reference to the Augustinian theory of illumination in opposition to the Aristotelian theory of abstraction. From this discussion arises the question; is it a moment of the opposition, typical of the western philosophy, between realism and positions that, because of the understanding of the weakness of the human reason with respect to the supernatural, are characterized by strong subjectivist components, sometimes dangerously near to the skepticism and even idealistic?

Also from this point of view, it is clear the debt towards the Augustinian tradition, but it is very less clear the debt towards the Franciscan inspiration, if not in the attempt of combine enlightenment and experience, at least in the will of seeing the wisdom as an end point for the human understanding and, at the same time, as the highest moment of the imitation of Christ.

3.

The fact that the reference to the Franciscan tradition can be interpreted as an ideological choice capable of keep the distance from the too much intrusive Aristotelianism makes interesting to study the dialectic between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism which is present in some Franciscan authors. The goal is to clarify in which terms this dialectic produces positions sometimes clearly conflicting also from the political point of view.

It is remarkable that, from this point of view, there are positions in the scholastic historiography of the last century (e.g., Boehner) that claim as inappropriate to focus on a Augustinian

and that instead highlight as the Franciscan masters used to refer to the Aristotelian method as the scientific and rigorous method for the philosophical research distinct from the theological discourse, such that it seems to emerge a valid proposal even for the neo-scholastic tradition of the XX century, which, based on the example of the Franciscan philosophers, should be capable of renew itself and open to the results of the new scientific culture.

4.

It is interesting as well, in order to describe the complexity of the problem, to take into account the historiographic contributions that come from the Franciscan tradition. Just to mention two among the most scholars, we can observe that Merino, in his *Storia della filosofia francescana* (1993), and Todisco – *Lo stupore della ragione* (2003) – introduce the Franciscan thought in the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, by highlighting the centrality of the relational understanding of the relation among humans, creation, and God and the priority of the will-love and of the good on the understanding and the truth.

In particular, Todisco aims at finding the possible final outcomes of the Franciscan thought in the modern and contemporary thought by trying to start an ideal dialogue between some Medieval thinkers (Bonaventure, Scotus, Ockham) and some contemporary philosophers (Girard, Lévinas, Wittgenstein), in order to give back to the Franciscan inspiration that role which in the history of the modern philosophy has been obscured by the victory of the Aristotelic-Thomistic thought. In front of the autonomy of the rationality, which can finally makes God superfluous, it appears again a kind of rationality that in the direct relation with God searches the origin of the relation with the other; to the hegemony of the deductive thought the opposition comes from a narrative thought open to catch the mystery of the free intervention of God in the history; to the main role of the understanding and, consequently of the truth, it is highlighted the essential role of the will and, consequently, of the good.

From this point of view, it should appear more evident also a direct relation with the experience of Francis, which re-defines the essence of the real and the soul of the history in terms of a logic of the good, instead of a logic of the truth and the rationality, and that by means of thinkers like Bonaventure, Bacon, Scotus and Ockham it gains a philosophical and theological dignity, by proposing itself as a fundamental mediation in front of the infinite dimension of the truth and of a world which derives from God for an act of totally free love.

Also according to Merino, the Franciscan thought is based on a personal and communitarian experience that combines the experience of Francis and his vision of the cosmos; in the commitment of discovering and living the truth as illumination, liberation, and deliverance, the pragmatic understanding of the knowledge is crucial in the Franciscan philosophers. The main inspiration in authors as Bonaventure and Scotus – even if with remarkable differences – is the idea of relation, which is not an accidental category as in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, but it is transcendental and essential. Scotus, in particular, can be considered, from this point of view, as a precursor of the *dialogic philosophy* that is crucial now in the philosophical thought of the last century.

Finally, also in the perspective of the Franciscan historiography, it remains unanswered the question of the essence of the Franciscan philosophy; again, the discussion seems to be focused more on the premises rather than on the specific object of the Franciscan masters thought.

It still remains the question then: how to read a thought line of which nobody seems to discuss the existence, but of which the specificity is still not clear?

5.

Trying to take the point of view that understands the conflicts among Franciscan, Dominican, and Secular masters, as well as those between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism, as moments of confrontation on themes that, obviously in contexts very different and with different historical meanings, come out in the history of philosophical thought, which are the topics that are specifically highlighted in the Franciscan tradition?

In front of a view of the reality as something that is given once forever, in front of which humans have only the goal of knowledge, without the chance to intervene and change the world, the Franciscan thought proposes a view of the finite nearly in terms of incompleteness that requires the conscious intervention of the humans, both on the theoretical and on the ethical-practical level.

Also the human knowledge must refine itself, understanding the fundamental role of love and will. This refinement is possible only by means of the theology, in which there is a peculiar way of seeing the articles of faith and also an understanding of the language, which is used to describe them, with a specific attention to the poetic and rhetorical attention. If, in this way, the Augustinian tradition and what remains of the Monastic tradition, which was an essential part of that thought line until the XII century, enter in the Universities, it comes to mind the question whether it is possible to think that it is going to grow up an approach similar to those that, in subsequent times, will give a remarkable role to the historical dimension of the human elaboration of the revelation data.

The dynamicity of the created reality comes not only from the active participation of the creatures, but also from the metaphysical constitution of the world, in which the hylomorphism and the theory of the plurality of forms introduce in the world a tension towards the return to the beginning, which is parallel to the tension of the soul towards its own perfection that can bring it back to God.

The idea of incompleteness of the created world and of a path that brings back to their own perfection all the creatures seems to see the value of the world in its transcendental meaning on one side, but, on the other side, a theme typical of the Franciscan masters, especially in authors as Scotus and Ockham, is the attention and love for the contingent and material things: is it possible to say *such as in Francis*? If it is surely Franciscan and Augustinian the importance given to the intentionality of the knowledge, consistent with the

love that moves the understanding, is it possible also to say that it is typically Franciscan the love for the contingent in its beauty, simplicity, and temporality?

Approaches that appear in the development of the Franciscan thought, such as the probabilism and the nominalism, move to a further question about the way in which the so called *Christian skepticism* originates in some specificities of this tradition that maybe refer to the idea of a direct relation with God, already present in some measure in Francis.

6.

If we take into account the Christian thought in the contemporary world, it comes to mind the question whether and in which measure the Franciscan insistence on the need of transforming the world and to intervene both at the theoretical and on the ethical-practical dimension could have influenced the interpretations of the Christian culture that highlight the aspect of ethical doctrine with essential elements of Philosophy of Praxis and that are opposed to the interpretations that instead highlight the doctrinal and dogmatic contents. Just to limit to some examples in the XX century, we can recall historians of the philosophy such as Mario Dal Pra, for whom the practical, ethical, and political engagement, through the decisive process of the interiorisation, is a decisive step for the goal of coming out the dramatic crisis of the half of the XX century, or such as Vignaux who recalls the practical components of the Franciscan tradition in order to move towards a culture of work capable of opposing to the selfishness typical of both the capitalistic and the socialist society, that results in a relation of dominance between the humanity and the nature. Or again: the Second Vatican Council and the Liberation theology, in which some of the main protagonists are Franciscan.

It is particularly interesting the relationship that exists between the Franciscan tradition and the Modernist movement, to which has been close the same Paul Sabatier, from many people considered as the initiator of the modern Franciscan historiography. Insisting on the traditional parallelism between Christ and Francis, the modernist movement tends to identify itself with their history and to feel betrayed by the institutional Church as they have been betrayed respectively by the transformation of the Christian culture into a dogmatic construction and by the internal changes of the Franciscan order.

Ernesto Buonaiuti, fundamental exponent of the Italian modernism, proposes Francis as a character capable to open a debate on the Church inflexibility and, thus, as a symbol of the engagement of the modernists, some of which find in his guide positive elements of strong social and political value, such as the sacrifice of the wealth, the attention to the individual, and the sacrifice of the privileges.

7.

As a synthesis of what has been said, two questions to which we aim at finding and answer fundamentally remain: does it really exist a Franciscan philosophy? What makes of a philosophy a *Franciscan* philosophy?

We could add some further questions that we could define as complementary: could we have *Franciscan philosophers* who will not be part of the Franciscan order? In such a way, we arise again the problem of the –isms: if *Franciscanism* – we apologize for the neologism – is a thought tradition, a style of philosophical thought that comes over the institutional collocation in the Franciscan order, it is still more difficult to answer to the question: is there something of Francis or something Franciscan in a *Franciscan philosophy*?

It is quite clear that, behind these questions, we glimpse the other, huge, question, that has been so much discussed and probably never answered, about the possibility that it exists or that we could talk of a *Christian philosophy*. But to propose again such a question brings us too far away.

deadlines

November 15, 2015	title and abstract, not less than 4000 characters, to Doctor Virtualis
December 15, 2015	acceptance from DV
April 2016	final paper due to DV
July 2016	peer review from DV

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