

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITERIA OF “EXISTENCE” IN THEOLOGY EXAMPLES FROM THE SCRIPTURES

–AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
IN THE CONTEXT OF ANALYTICAL THEOLOGY–

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ABSTRACT: This article is primarily an approach to the theological argument from a philosophical and analytical perspective of language. Traditionally and historically, the ontological argument is a logical argument in demonstrating the existence of God. This article emphasizes, on the level of language, a version of theological argument based on mathematical rationality. The nucleus of this paper is given by the relationship between the ontological argument, mathematics and the problem of existence, with new discussions in analytical philosophy and analytical theology. Beyond strictly the “existence” of God, the paper also takes into account the existence of certain theological contents, certain theological attributes, starting not so much from logic, but mathematics. Also, a specific objective of this paper is a comparative presentation of two epistemological problems from the points of view of science and theology: “the epistemological criteria of existence”.

Keywords: analytical theology; ontological argument; attribute of existence; criteria of existence; empirical evidence; reason; faith; truth; scientific meaning; theological meaning

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REZUMAT: Criteriile epistemologice ale „existenței” în teologie. Exemple din Scriptură. Acest articol este în primul rând o analiză a argumentului teologic din perspectiva filosofică și analitică a limbajului. În mod tradițional și istoric argumentul ontologic este un argument logic în demonstrația existenței lui Dumnezeu. Acest articol subliniază, la nivelul limbajului, o versiune a argumentației teologice, bazată pe raționamentul matematic. Nucleul articolului este dat de relația dintre argumentația ontologică, matematică și problema existenței, cu noi discuții în filosofia analitică și în teologia analitică. Dincolo de „existența” strictă a lui Dumnezeu, articolul ia în considerare și existența anumitor conținuturi teologice, a anumitor atribute teologice, începând nu atât de la logică, cât de la matematică. De asemenea, un obiectiv specific al acestui articol este prezentarea comparativă a două probleme epistemologice din punctul de vedere al științei și teologiei: „criteriile epistemologice ale existenței”.

Cuvinte cheie: teologie analitică; argument ontologic; existența ca atribut; criterii de existență; evidență empirică; rațiune; credință; adevăr; sens științific; sens teologic

Analytical philosophy and analytical theology

This article is primarily an approach to the theological argument from a philosophical and analytical perspective of language. The epistemology of theology as theological epistemology means a critical analysis of appropriate epistemic objectives, as applied to theology, and can be interpreted as the theory of theological knowledge. It explores problems like: “the knowledge of God”, “faith”, “the epistemological criteria of existence”, “the epistemological criteria of truth”, “the possibility of certain attributes of God”, “the possibility of certain ‘theological existences’”, etc.

From the perspective of faith, the Church accepts the possibility of knowing God, or knowledge about God, and *speaks* about this kind of knowledge. This knowledge must not be understood as scientific knowledge, but one that is closer to an immediate experience, in the meaning of a revelation or immediate intuition. The language of theology tries to grasp all these aspects. Moreover, there is a rational component of religious knowledge, but this rationality is philosophical in nature, closer to how metaphysics is rational. The scientific rationality has its own rigours and requirements imposed by the “logic of facts”.

On the level of language, the meanings of sentences (and of texts in general) in science must not, as much as possible, leave space for interpretations, but they should tend towards a univocal interpretation. The theological language is, within certain limits, much wider and open to interpretation. A scientific discourse in an institute differs from a sermon in a church. It is an accepted fact, at least in analytic philosophy, that the forms of expression that primarily rely on the suggestiveness of language, the capacity of expressions to produce experiences, subjective and existential states, such as theological language, especially the one used in churches, is situated in-between the univocal scientific language and the intentional and emphatic ambiguity of artistic language. As a language open to interpretation, but one that addresses reason, theological language is closer to philosophical language.

“With its specific character as a discipline charged with giving an account of faith, the concern of *fundamental theology* will be to justify and expound the relationship between faith and philosophical thought.”²

However, not all of these criteria have equal weight in the argumentation. Some of them are necessary conditions, while others are sufficient conditions of truth or existence.³ Theology generally means the discourse of God. Theology is talking about God. Theology is “God in Question”. It is first of all the study of scriptural texts and their message, which include “theological truths” (“the truths of faith”) and the “theological attributes of existence”, important in knowing God, and God-human, as well as human-God, relations. Generally speaking, in a Christian theological context, theological epistemology within analytical theology can be understood as the study of Christianity in the clearest and most coherent language possible. How much value is in this clear, rational and somewhat scientific, unmysterious way of speaking - in particular of speaking about the existence of God, about “forms” of existence, God’s manifestation, the mystery of God as Trinity in Christianity? The amount of this value is *only* given in theology.

“[...] Christian Revelation becomes the true point of encounter and engagement between philosophical and theological thinking in their reciprocal relationship.”⁴

² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998), 67 (p. 58 - <http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/>).

³ For the sake of clarity, I present a suggestive illustration of the logic used for a necessary condition: “If a number can be divided by four, then it can be divided by two.” This way the divisibility by two appears as a necessary condition for the divisibility by four.

⁴ *Fides et Ratio* 79 (p. 68).

In this context of theology and analytical epistemology the general subject of the paper is the theological analysis - from the perspective of analytical theology and analytical philosophy - of two issues of theological epistemology. In this sense the specific objective of this paper is a comparative presentation of two epistemological problems from the points of view of science and theology: the epistemological criteria of existence. For the theological part, direct reference is made to the Scripture, by examples from the Old and New Testament whose theological and epistemological interpretation is plausible and relevant for the discussion.

“Theology is the science of faith which means theology is also understood in scientific discipline. It is the conscious and methodological explanation and explication of the divine revelation received in faith.”⁵

The ontological argument

It can be said that three of the most important moments in the history of the ontological argument are Anselm’s ontological arguments, Kant’s critique and the recent contributions of analytical philosophy (Charles Hartshorne, Norman Malcom, Alvin Plantinga etc.) based on modal logic. The main problem appears with the argument’s premises, which are considered at least controversial. The most difficult point to be justified in the whole argument is the premise about the logical possibility. This point can be strengthened through other theistic proofs. What the other arguments need, is the exclusion of contingency from perfection. Important aspect: In Hartshorne’s considerations, *to exist* means to be somehow actualized, but that somehow cannot be extracted from reason: we need other arguments in favor of God’s existence to show that God’s existence is logically possible. We need a global or cumulative argument! Nowadays it is a common point among philosophers, that the ontological argument reformulated is a valid argument. In general, what can be criticized are the premises that can be founded upon this argument; namely the truth of these premises. The ontological argument is not sufficient enough to demonstrate God’s existence but is one of the most important steps for accomplishing this task.

A classical point of view: Kant’s critique of the ontological argument comes exactly from this direction. In his opinion, existence is not a real property.

⁵ K. Rahner, Theology. I. Nature, in K. Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise “Sacramentum Mundi”*, New York 1975, 1687.

Kant’s objection is addressed to the premise that a being which exists as an idea in the mind and also in reality is greater than a being which exists only in the mind. It results that existence is a property which makes the things that possess it greater than those which do not. But, as Kant argues, existence cannot function as a predicate, it cannot belong to another concept, not even to the concept of a perfect being. Therefore, if existence could not function as a predicate, it cannot belong to the concept of God. In this case we have to compare something which exists in reality and in the mind with something that exists only in the mind.

A modern (analytical) point of view: Norman Malcolm returns in his paper “Anselm’s ontological argument” to the discussions about the ontological argument. The comparison between “that which his nonexistence could not be conceived” and “that which his nonexistence could be conceived” (the first manner of existing being the *necessary existence*) has become an actual problem in modal logic and analytical philosophy of the 20th century. Anselm manages to show that nonexistence must be excluded from a divine perfect being. Anselm has demonstrated (in a modern way) that the notions “contingent existence” and “contingent nonexistence” cannot be applied to God. His existence has to be either logically necessary or logically impossible. The critique of Kant does not affect Anselm’s argument; this argument had not fallen after Kant’s critique because the predicate required here is the modality of existence.

The problem of God’s existence is treated in modal logic and analytical philosophy in terms of possibility and necessity. The concept of “existence” (e.g. Kant) is replaced by the concept of “necessary existence” (e.g. Anselm). Possibility and necessity are discussed from the perspective of the possible worlds. In this way, something is possibly true if it is true in at least one possible world and is necessarily true if it is true in all possible worlds. The central idea about God’s existence is that, if God is a necessary being, He exists in any possible worlds.

The problem of God’s existence is treated in the cognitive linguistics and in the cognitive science of the religion.⁶

In what follows, I will use a simple example to sketch the critique of “existence” as an attribute from the analytical perspective of transgressing the limits of language, especially the way in which the language is legitimately used. If in the sentence: “The whale is a mammal” we give up the attribute “mammal” connected to the whale, we get the sentence: “The whale is.”, where the copula “is” is transformed into an attribute of the whale, an attribute of existence. The

⁶ R. Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God - Theology After Cognitive Linguistic*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole, MA 2014, 217-249.

linguistic error suggested by the example is better emphasized by the following example: “In the marine park of the town there are whales and cachalots”. We give up the word “cachalots” and keep the conjunction “and”. We then get the sentence: “In the marine park of the town there are whales and”. This way the “and” should get an adjectival function such as in “white whales”, while it is easily seen here that something is wrong with the language, that something of the way we normally use language has been violated. On a linguistic level there should be “something” following the copula “is” or the conjunction “and”. This “absence” may induce that “is”, as well as “and” are seen as apparent predicate or attribute. They receive thus a syntactic function which is grammatically strange to them. This is how linguistic or, going beyond the limits of language, ampler, ontological, etc. confusions can be generated.

The ontological argument is in a close relationship with the philosophical problem of *existence*. The nucleus of this paper is given by the relationship between the ontological argument, mathematics and the problem of existence, with the new disputes in the analytical philosophy and analytical theology. In the center of the philosophical attacks against the ontological argument is the concept of *existence*. Is *existence* or not a *property* or a *predicate*?

I AM HE WHO IS⁷

In general, when someone, perhaps an atheist, is interested in someone’s faith, the first question he addresses to that person is: “Do you believe in the existence of God?”. “Existence” as an attribute (“existence” is a property that things can either possess or lack) of an object/subject: “something exists”, “someone exists” is, philosophically speaking, a problematic question, starting, as it has been shown, with Kantian critique. (“God exists” appears to be of the form “S is P”; it appears to attribute a property -the property of existence- to a subject, God. In this logical form the existence is a predicate.) It continues to be a question just as controversial in current analytical philosophy (ontology) as well.

However, the theologically most important and at the same time most challenging thing in this context is the way in which God presents his nature on Moses’s request, the way how he, we should say, defines himself: the only attribute which God, in the beginning, attributes to himself, and which he reveals to man by Moses is the attribute of existence, an attribute which is so problematic and controversial for human understanding from several points of view.

⁷ Exodus 3:14.

¹³ Moses then said to God, “Look, if I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM HE WHO IS.” And he said, “This is what you are to say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” - Exodus 3:13-14⁸

¹² [...] I am God,

¹³ yes, from eternity I AM. [...] - Isaiah 43:12-13

⁵⁸ Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, before Abraham ever was, I AM. - John 8:58

¹⁷ HE EXISTS before all things and in him all things hold together. - Colossians 1:17

⁴ John, to the seven churches of Asia: grace and peace to you from HIM WHO IS, WHO WAS, and who is to come, [...] - Revelation 1:4

From a logical point of view, in the proposition “I AM HE WHO IS” the presence only of the existential predicate leaves open all possibilities except that which denies existence. (Otherwise it would have violated the logical principle of non-contradiction⁹).

In a possible theological interpretation this may mean that God does not define himself in any determined way, he leaves open all his options of manifestation, the absolute autonomy of being (existing) when he wants, as he wants, and what he wants. God manifests himself freely, apparently arbitrarily in relation to man, in the ways of his choice. In this sense of the absolute, the attribute of existence is connected to transcendence, it is a “transcendent attribute”.

In a possible philosophical interpretation this may mean something similar: that God does not define himself through any of the immanent determinations of man’s world, the only ones that he might have access to in understanding, representation and expression (empirical, factual, phenomenal determinations). In this sense of the absolute too, the attribute of existence is connected to transcendence, it is a transcendent attribute.

The transcendence of the attribute “existence” in relation to God guides by its metaphysical nature not towards the “objectivity” of the world, but rather towards the mystical.

⁸ <http://www.catholic.org/bible/> (4.06. 2016).

⁹ “It used to be said that God could create everything, except what was contrary to the laws of logic. The truth is, we could not *say* of an “unlogical” world how it would look.” – L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, P 3.031. - Project Gutenberg’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, by Ludwig Wittgenstein, October 22, 2010 [EBook #5740] <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5740/5740-pdf.pdf> (14.12.2015).

“*How* the world is, is completely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world.”¹⁰

“Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is.”¹¹

On the level of language, the language which expresses the world of man, propositions such as: “I AM HE WHO IS.”, “from eternity I AM”, “HE EXISTS before all things and in him all things hold together”, surpass the limits of language, and are situated in the field of the “inexpressible”.

“There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical.”¹²

From a theological point of view, the existence of God “as existence” remains in the field of faith, of the divine mystery that faith accepts.

”[...] the presence of two other complementary forms of wisdom - *philosophical* wisdom, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect, for all its natural limitations, [...], and *theological* wisdom, which is based upon Revelation and which explores the contents of faith, entering the very mystery of God.”¹³

From a philosophical point of view the problem is open for reason, for the senses, for any kind of experience, whether empirical, that is, pertaining to facts, or mystical. These considerations bring forth a very important aspect of theology: the forms of manifestation of God’s existence that God reveals to man, the possibilities of his understanding and representation, so that he, the man, would recognize God’s existence in his limited way. On the level of language, this means also the surpassing of the limits of natural language used especially for the world of man. These questions will be discussed once the main criteria for existence in mathematics and empirical sciences (physics) are briefly presented.

Attribute of “existence” in science

The shortest and most definite characterization of ontology as a discipline of philosophy describes it as: “philosophical theories on existence”. (A more detailed description: Ontology is the philosophical study of existence, of reality and of the nature of being as well as the basic categories of beings and their relations.) The *ontological argument* has a theological-ontological purpose, but, more importantly, it is a logical approach - therefore exclusively rational - to theology and philosophy in demonstrating the existence of God.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* P 6.432.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* P 6.44.

¹² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* P 6.522.

¹³ *Fides et Ratio* 44 (p. 39).

Let’s take *science* as a reference. What are the criteria of existence that formal sciences, like mathematics, and empirical sciences like physics, biology, etc. use in their fields to state that something *exists*? For instance, in mathematics there are explicitly “existence theorems”. In physics there are elementary particles which are said to exist or particles whose existence is explored, and physical media which are said not to exist (classical ethereal medium – Michelson-Morely experiment, etc.)

Attribute of “existence” in mathematics. An example

In mathematics, the criteria of existence of “something” are exclusively connected to the theoretical coherence, specific to mathematics in stating a *mathematical existence*. This theoretical coherence is a necessary and sufficient condition. A single and suggestive example in this respect is the existence of “mathematical entities (objects)”: transfinite numbers, whose existence was promoted and mathematically supported by Georg Cantor. An epistemological benchmark to be referred to in this sense, significant for some possible *epistemological criteria of “existence” in theology*, is the correspondence of mathematician Georg Cantor with Catholic theologians, including Pope Leo XIII.¹⁴

There is the possibility to find some suggestive analogies between *the existence* (criteria of existence) of some mathematical objects (entities): transfinite numbers, and theological thinking, which, on the one hand, do not break the laws of mathematical coherence, and on the other hand, exploit purely mathematical results by theological interpretation. In other words, mathematics (and logic) can be a point of reference, but, very important, only a source of analogy in theological expression.

This short example refers to the case of exchange of letters between German mathematician Georg Cantor and the top community of Catholic theologians, in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁵ As a mathematician, in his dialogue with the community of mathematicians on the subject of infinity,

¹⁴ J. W. Dauben, Georg Cantor and Pope Leo XIII: Mathematics, Theology and the Infinite, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38.1, 1977, 85-108.

¹⁵ Dauben, Georg Cantor 85.: “He was also keenly aware of the ways in which his work might in turn aid and improve both philosophy and theology. Prompted by a strong belief in the role set theory could play in helping the Roman Catholic Church to avoid misinterpreting the nature of infinity, he undertook an extensive correspondence with Catholic theologians, and even addressed one letter and a number of his pamphlets directly to Pope Leo XIII.”.

Cantor never made reference to God. However, in his private correspondence Cantor made explicit references to God.¹⁶

The first observation is that the existence of some mathematical objects can be correlated with our world (of facts), for instance by finite sets. The second observation is that the existence (Cantor's contribution) of some new mathematical objects can be correlated with a transcendent world, by infinite sets. By analogy, mathematics is correlated with theological content and relations: God and his attributes, God and our finite world, etc. In other words, the propositions about God are mathematical-rational propositions of theology because they show something about God on the basis of mathematical formulations with theological significance. The language of mathematical signs understood as *symbols with theological significance* may imply theological content and representations, that these symbols make possible without infringing internal religious requirements. If we speak *this way* about God - there may be reasons for us to speak like this but they are not mathematical - then we project mathematical objects and forms in theological language. The resulting propositions are interpretations / images of theology. Let us mention, however, that both religious and mathematical language is autonomous on their content level - that is, beyond their linguistic form - and neuter in their mutual relationship. On the one hand, mathematical expression can be projected into the natural language of our finite world; on the other hand it can be projected into the theological language of God's infinity. In strict connection with these issues, it must be emphasized all over again, that mathematics in general (or logic) brings no arguments either for the existence of God, or for the faith in God, or for the theological images or attributes of God. Mathematics (or logic) does not prove anything from a theological point of view. It is just a way of thinking which allows for a rational discourse about God. A rational theological proposition about God can have a *theological meaning* or even a *theological sense*, may *show* something theological, even if it does not share a mathematical form with the God that it speaks about, but only projects a mathematical (or logical) form over Him in its discourse. This way, religious propositions show a certain kind of *theological image* of a *fact* / object which is not from this *world*.

¹⁶ Dauben, Georg Cantor 105-106: "By the early part of 1884, he could write to Mittag-Leffler that he was not the creator of his new work, but merely a reporter. *God* had provided the inspiration, leaving Cantor responsible only for the way in which his articles were written, for their style and organization, but not for their content." (Cantor to Mittag-Leffler, Jan. 31, 1884, in A. Schoenflies, Die Krisis in Cantor's mathematischem Schaffen, *Acta Mathematica* 5, 1927, 15-16.)

Attribute of “existence” in physics

For physics, the theoretical coherence of physical theories, by which the existence of physical entities (objects) is theoretically anticipated, is only a necessary, but not sufficient condition. There is also a need for the correspondence with the world of physical facts according to some “empirical protocols” recognized by the community of scientists (physicists). Similar is the case for biology or history, for instance for the “historical fact” in a strictly scientific sense. In this context, let me mention an extremely important aspect about the “criteria of existence” in sciences: these criteria of existence are established, for each of the sciences, by the scholarly community!¹⁷ From this point of view, there are no significant differences in principle between the theological community spirit and a certain kind of authority of the community of theologians, and the scientific community spirit and a certain kind of authority of the community of scientists. In what regards the theological community’s spirit and consensus, there may be greater differences in certain theological aspects between various communities of theologians. I mean, in particular, the community of Catholic theologians from the point of view of theology, and the Christian community from the point of view of the faith. However, the essential fact is that in both cases, the scientific and theological communities and authorities are those which establish or determine which are the criteria of existence and the criteria of truth for their respective fields of expertise. The way in which nature presents itself to scientists and is recognized as such by them is specific to each science. Let us mention though, that the criteria of existence and truth in the case of empirical sciences, like physics, and social sciences, like history, may differ significantly. For instance, due to their specificities, the “physical fact” and the “historical fact” do not have identical criteria of existence.

Just as much, or just as little, theological criteria of existence correspond to mathematical criteria of existence or the criteria of existence of various empirical sciences. A mathematical theory does not a priori anticipate the “existence” of scientific facts; a mathematical theory does not a priori anticipate theological “existences”.

Scientific meaning. Theological meaning

Moving from the ontological register to the gnoseologic one, as regards the *theological truth*, one may say that the logical / mathematical truth, as well as the “truth-correspondence” do not represent necessary requirements. However, this is

¹⁷ Th. Kuhn, *Structura revoluțiilor științifice (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions)*, București 2008.

not a logical arbitrariness, nor indifference to facts, but the fact that the value of a message prevails in certain situations, beyond its logical correctness or correspondence with facts. The scientific meaning of facts is in fact no more than the meaning of facts within a scientific theory. The theological meaning of facts is external to this scientific meaning and is situated, so to say, in an existential theological horizon; it is the meaning of facts in this horizon. The attribute “existence” is no exception to the specificity of these meanings / senses.

“The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does. *In* it there is no value - and if there were, it would be of no value.

If there is a value which is of value, it must lie outside all happening and being-so. For all happening and being-so is accidental.

What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *in* the world, for otherwise this would again be accidental.

It must lie outside the world.”¹⁸

Facts are neutral in value for science. A scientific fact as such is neither ugly nor beautiful, neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral, and as to its metaphysical value, it is neither absolute. Also, a scientific fact as *scientific fact* has no connection with God. People with different religious, ethical or political conceptions must relate to facts in the same way, beyond their personal convictions. As physicists, for instance, they can be atheists, Christians, Jews, Muslims; republicans or royalists; moral or immoral, etc. For instance, gravitational attraction or energy conservation, phenomena in general and the laws of physics, must not have anything to do with the existence of God. Consequently, the knowledge of facts and linguistic expression of these facts must remain, as much as possible, neutral for science both as to their value or subjective experiences. For science as such, there is no experience of facts, no experience of science,¹⁹ and no existential dimension. The Church, however, appreciates the religious experience, the experience of faith, the experience of facts such as, for instance, forms of man’s relation to God, something that is completely devoid of meaning and relevance for science. A scientific experience is intersubjectively repeatable. The scientific community only recognizes such kinds of experiences. In contrast, the Church recognizes the possibility of individual mystical experiences, unrepeatable on the level of both the subject and the community. The selective intervention of the Holy Spirit for only some people is accepted by the Church, and is a specific

¹⁸ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* P 6..41.

¹⁹ As long as such subjective experiences are treated as facts, these are objects of sciences like psychology or neuro-cognitive sciences.

feature of Christian faith. The mystical experience and faith is often expressed in a specific language. Man as a social and cultural being, faithful or unfaithful, lives and communicates in a world full of meaning and values, so that the boundary between various forms of languages – scientific, theological, artistic, philosophical – cannot be, and indeed is not an impassable abyss or an “interdiction” of interdisciplinary communication.

Empirical evidence of God’s existence in relation to faith

The way in which God reveals himself to man, the way in which his existence is recognized as such by man has its own particularities, its own specificity, completely different from science (one or another). Faith is different from reason, it is different from empirical intuition perceived by the senses.

²⁴ Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵ So the other disciples said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord,’ but he answered, ‘Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.’

²⁶ Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you,’ he said.

²⁷ Then he spoke to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more but believe.’

²⁸ Thomas replied, ‘My Lord and my God!’

²⁹ Jesus said to him: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” - John 20:24-29

This is not to say, however, that one cannot speak about at least partly factual evidence or rational arguments in favour of the existence of God. But it does say something very important: that God’s existence cannot be tested just by a number of scientific experiences and their theories; or it cannot be tested only at the end of a mathematical demonstration; or it cannot be tested only at the end of a logical-philosophical argumentation completed with ontological presuppositions, like ultimately every ontological argument.

God and the reason of man. God and the world of facts

There is, nevertheless, a complementary relation as well between theology and science. I will formulate two theological presuppositions (which, in a different context, pertains to the truths of faith): the mind of man, the reason of man is from God, and the world (of facts) in which man lives is also created by God.

¹ 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' - Gen 1:1

Through the act of divine creation, the "World of man – Nature" receives the same attribute of "existence" that God attributes to himself. In this sense the mystical means that this World exists.

"Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is."²⁰

As long as the world "exists" for some theologians - Augustine - the *miracles* of this World are no longer in an ontological, but a gnoseological order.

"A portent, therefore, happens not contrary to nature, but contrary to what we know as nature."²¹

²⁶ "God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, [...]'. -

²⁷ God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, [...]" - Gen 1, 26-27

This entitles those who believe in God, whether "simple" believers like Cantor or theologians, to look for possible sources of closeness in the representation and understanding of God and His World.

³⁶ "Jesus replied, 'Mine is not a kingdom of this world; [...] As it is, my kingdom does not belong here.'" - John 18:36

Man's ability to comprehend, "name" in his own way, or rationally (or scientifically speaking, rationally-mathematically) understand infinity has suggested possible theologically relevant interpretations. The case is by no means the blending of mathematics and theology, but the fact that human reason has come to speak about something that does not come from our finite world, and speak about it in a way that has never been done before. To try to take one step closer to the mystery of "the God Being" starting from these new results of science seems to be a legitimate approach, a natural step in the horizon of theological presuppositions (truths of faith) formulated above. The situation is similar also for certain modern results of empirical sciences, for example physics. Let us only

²⁰ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* P 6.44.

²¹ Augustin, *The City of God*, 21.8: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120121.htm> (28.01.2016).

mention the current scientific cosmological models, the apparently contradictory duality of the *manifestation* of certain physical realities (e.g., wave-corpuscul duality), etc. One may also add that, in what regards the criteria of existence of science, applicable on a “laboratory scale” (somewhat like the scale of our world in which we actually live), they are often no longer applicable at the scale of the scientific image offered through cosmological models.

Let me emphasize again that this is not a blending of sciences and theology but that the human reason that God gave to man and the way in which the world created by God appears to man by science may lead, through some scientific results, to man’s getting close to the mystery of God. By the critical and constructive spirit they promote, analytical philosophy and theology contribute to the current dialogue between theology, science and philosophy.

“[...] we must [...] explore more directly the relationship between revealed truth and philosophy. This relationship imposes a twofold consideration, since the truth conferred by Revelation is a truth to be understood in the light of reason.”²²

Still, the Scriptures continue to be the fundamental instance that ultimately validates or not the legitimacy of the relations between theology and science, and theology and philosophy.

Many of the theological interrogations formulated in time continue to be just as timely at present. My intention in this presentation is to very briefly describe the interdisciplinary dialogue of our time between theology (analytical theology), philosophy (analytical philosophy) and science (mathematics; physics) on a new, modern question regarding the problem of human spirituality: existence as attribute, which appears, paradoxically, in the Scriptures from the beginning of God’s Revelation to man as *Name*: “I AM HE WHO IS.” The modern understanding of the existence of such a problem and the search for certain analytical solutions for attempts of conceptual clarifications means nothing else than an attempt to take a step closer to understanding the mystery that surrounds God.

Can mathematics be a form of ontological argument?

What can we say if we still choose to speak logically, mathematically or scientifically about the “existence” of God? Then we must accept that we have transgressed the limits of our language, meant one way or another for the “attributes” of man’s World, and we step into the field of the inexpressible. Philosophically speaking, it is a false impression that there are ontological arguments

²² *Fides et Ratio* 35 (p. 30).

(meaning logical evidence) of the existence of God, or that through “scientific creationism” science supports anything of the World of God. The value of a mathematical-theological language does not increase with the rationality of mathematics or the value of mathematics for science. Also, the value of logical-theological language does not increase with the rationality of logic due to the value of logic in our everyday life. Silence is preferable to such pretensions. Only if it is considered, for instance, that mathematical and artistic language are on the same level in theological expression, the “silence” of mathematics in theology can be broken. Mathematical language is just as little “relevant” (or just as relevant) for theology as, for instance, artistic language is for science. (As a game, one can of course transfer the law of energy conservation to musical notes, but it is only for physics to establish/assess whether this enterprise has any value for physics.) Relating to the existence of God any form of language, other than theological language, is obviously in this same position.

The theological proposition presented in a mathematical form, which is therefore a mathematical image, does not communicate, does not *say* anything about a “content that *exists*” in the World of God, it is in no way connected with such “content”, such “existence”. Another suggestion: a mathematical theological image is on the same level with an artistic theological image (melody, painting, poetry, etc.), but while the artistic image speaks (*shows*) to our sensitivity, the mathematical theological image speaks (*shows*) to our reason.

A suggestive illustration: it is accepted that photography as an image reflects an existent reality whose “projection” it is. Let us take for example a documentary photo. It is an image, a “proposition” about a fact. (Completion: If we go beyond it by giving personal value to it, we may say that it reflects something nice (aesthetic), or (im)moral, or existential for us, then it is a nice (aesthetic) or (im)moral or existential image, it is the aesthetic, or moral, or existential projection of a “fact” and it is no longer the mere “fact as such”.)

For instance, using the “mathematical infinity” in the construction of the theological image of God’s infinity, it is not necessary that something of God’s infinity be found *through* the mathematical infinity. Even in the case of a painting “presenting” God, it does not mean that God is “like this”. The painting about God is addressed to our sensitivity, while the “mathematical-theological painting” to our reason. Of course, in both cases – perhaps even more in the mathematical case – we might say that “understanding” is produced. Perhaps. The common denominator is different however: both images produce “experience”.

Mathematics alone does not produce scientific knowledge, nor theological experience. Even more, if mathematics must not conflict with its application in science, the possibility of conflict between mathematics and theology is excluded

from the start. On the one hand, if it is evident that theology and mathematics do not overlap, it should be just as evident that science and mathematics do not overlap either. On the other hand, mathematics may contain the world of facts, may get to the facts, the limits of the scientific world are also the limits of its application, but it may not contain the world of God, it cannot get to the “contents”, the “existence” of this world. Nothing can be said about the ontology of man’s World, or the ontology of the World of God from within mathematics.

The transcendental perspective means to start from mathematics towards the world of facts, to throw the “net” of mathematical language onto the world of facts, of phenomena. By the extension of language, in a theological context, the “net” of mathematical language is thrown onto the transcendental world of God. However, this does not mean that, by the criteria of existence of mathematics, any “mathematical existence” necessarily corresponds to a “theological existence”.

In case of propositions of rational theology starting from mathematics, the mathematical form is used in a relation of projection, the mathematical image is projected *onto* the theological World. Similar situations can also be found in the relation of mathematics with the World of science. In particular, the propositions about God are propositions of rational theology, for they *show* something about God on the basis of a mathematical image. Evidently, this is done without the violation of the correctness and rationality of the mathematical language, and also without the violation of religious requirements, norms, truths and values.

Mathematical existences do not mean that God exists, or that God is infinite, that there are certain attributes of God, etc. A mathematical proposition, only as a mathematical proposition, is not the image of anything theological. However, the language of mathematical signs understood as theologically meaningful symbols may refer to a *theological image* that these symbols construe or represent, with the remark that no such theological affirmation is connected to mathematics. What is connected to mathematics, or to logic in general, is only a matter of language. If we speak *like this* in theology, then we project mathematical forms onto a theological language.

One cannot deny however that, starting from such a mathematical context, beyond the mathematical (logical) form of rational theological language, there is a mystical horizon of meaning of mathematical symbols. Such a mathematical context, such *mathematical forms* are no foundations either for the existence of God, or for faith in God, or for theological images or attributes of God. They are nothing more than forms of language that enable a rational discourse about God. A rational theological proposition about God may have a *theological meaning*, may *show* something theological, even if it does not “share” a mathematical form with the God that it speaks about, but only projects onto Him, in its discourse, a

mathematical form. Only in this way can a rational theological proposition show a certain *theological image* which is the *mathematical image* of a “fact” which is not from this *world*.

Conclusion

“It is not just a question of theological discourse using this or that concept or element of a philosophical construct; what matters most is that the believer’s reason use its powers of reflection in the search for truth which moves from the word of God towards a better understanding of it.”²³

Perhaps the best answer for the question: “Do you think God exists?” is “You do not know what you are asking.” (after Matthew 20: 22 / Mark 10:38).

To a great extent, the concept of “truth”, the criteria of truth, the problem of truth finds itself in a situation similar to that of the concept of “existence”, the criteria of existence.

Nowadays the ontological argument is a modal logic argument, in an analytical perspective of language, about the existence of God. There is, on the level of language, a version of theological argument based on mathematical rationality. The theological language is open to interpretation for the scientific language and the language of mathematics. God’s existence is logical/mathematical possible. From a theological point of view the problem is open for reason, for the senses, for any kind of experience, whether empirical, that is, pertaining to facts, or mystical.

This analysis brings forth a very important aspect of theology: the forms of manifestation of God’s *existence* that God reveals to man, the possibilities of his understanding and representation, so that he, the man, would recognize God’s *existence* in his life, in his world. The way in which God reveals himself to man, the way in which his existence is recognized as such by man has its own particularities. *Faith* is different from *reason*, it is different from *empirical intuition* perceived by the senses. God’s existence cannot be tested just by a number of scientific experiences and their theories; it cannot be tested only at the end of a logical-philosophical argumentation; it cannot be tested only at the end of a mathematical proof.

Knowledge of God’s existence is genuinely human knowledge. God’s existence can be mediate in the human without being derived from humanity (resons, metaphors etc.), or confused or conflated with the human.

²³ *Fides et Ratio* 73 (p. 63-64).