

Preface

The majority of articles published in the present volume of *Humaniora: An Online Journal* revolve around the issues of philosophy and the study of religion. However, the disciplinary and theoretical perspectives adopted by the authors differ significantly. One can find here both studies in the history of philosophy and the history of religion, the analysis of contemporary religious change, as well as the explanation of such religious phenomena as spiritual awakenings.

The volume begins with an article on the ways in which Puritanism and Puritans have been represented and assessed throughout the centuries. As a religious movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Puritanism has been represented in many different ways both by its opponents and its supporters. It is no wonder that even today the meaning of the term ‘Puritanism’ is far from unambiguous. The author of the article is especially interested in the image of Puritans and Puritanism presented by two writers: Voltaire and Max Weber. At the beginning of his *Letters on England*, Voltaire focuses on the religious practices of the Quakers and assesses them using the standards of enlightened reason. Max Weber, on the other hand, portrays Puritanism in a positive light. He emphasizes the role Puritanism played in the emergence of modern secularities, including the so-called spirit of capitalism.

The second article focuses upon the relationship between a well-known philosopher John Locke and the religious community of Polish Arians known as Polish Brothers. Although the relationship was noticed many years ago, only recently the knowledge of this unexpected intellectual affinity was accepted by most Western scholars. The author of this article argues that the influence of the thought of Polish Brothers on Locke’s philosophy can be reduced to two issues, namely, toleration and rationality of religious beliefs. Therefore, he looks for these influences in two Locke’s works: *A Letter Concerning Toleration* and *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Among the Polish Socinians (Polish Brothers) two writers influenced Locke’s thought on toleration and the rationality of Christian faith, namely, Jonasz Schlichting and Jan Crell. However, the works of these two Socinians are only selected examples which do not constitute the complete picture of relations between the English philosopher and Polish Brothers.

The article *Ukraine as a center of contemporary global religious confrontation: Constantinople – Rome – Moscow* is dedicated to the status of Ukrainian churches of the Eastern Christian tradition. The author of the article argues that today the churches are place of confrontation between three centers of Christianity: Constantinople, Rome and Moscow. In the past, Ukraine as a border area between the East and the West had to choose between these three different developmental tracks losing the possibility of establishing an independent Kyiv Church. The situation has changed in recent years. As the Patriarch of Constantinople granted autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian churches have a chance to regain independence from the three aforementioned historical centers. The author argues that the official recognition of the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine may have geopolitical consequences.

Religious issues are also discussed in the article on neural determinants of spiritual awakening. Awakening can be understood in many different ways because many religious and spiritual traditions refer to this phenomenon. Here it is defined as intense experience involving the sense of unity with the sacred and resulting in permanent or temporary change of behavior. In order to explain this phenomenon in a scientific way, we have to ask at least two fundamental questions: Are there any types of external stimuli that can trigger these experiences? What kind of underlying neural processes can be associated with the spiritual awakening? The author attempts to answer both questions but she gives priority to the functioning of the limbic system whose activity might be responsible for the emergence of altered states of consciousness similar to spiritual awakenings.

The article entitled *Enlightenment philosophy and skepticism* focuses on the role of ancient and modern skepticism in the development of Enlightenment thought. This problem has been discussed by historians of philosophy for last several decades but there seems to be no unanimous conclusion accepted by scholars. Some historians, as Richard Popkin, claimed that there were very few skeptical motives in Enlightenment philosophy and skepticism existed on the fringe of this intellectual movement. Such an opinion may rise doubts since one of the greatest thinkers of Enlightenment, David Hume, advocated a version of skepticism. Modern skepticism, including Enlightenment skepticism, almost never appears in a pure form but is usually connected to various elements of cultural background.

The last article discusses the problem of objectivity in contemporary science, especially the problem of probability theory and its philosophical interpretations. Since modern scientific theories use the concept of probability, the way we understand probability influences our understanding of the status of scientific theory. Scientists usually choose the objective interpretation of probability theory according to which the assertion of probability does not depend on the beliefs of the individual. But what do scientific assertions based on the objective interpretation of probability theory refer to? In trying to answer this question, the author refers to philosophical debates on determinism.

Apart from journal articles, we publish a university lecture given by David Engels and entitled *On the way to empire?* The topic is a crisis of civilization. The lecture points out to startling similarities between the declining years of the Roman Empire and contemporary Western Europe. Since the prerequisites for European civilization crisis resemble those for the Roman Empire, we can expect that the subsequent consequences will be similar. The author attempts to forecast events that will happen in the close future.

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