Paweł Mazanka

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of accidental events. Harmony within the environment is a sign of extraordinary logic and consequence. The violation of it entails defined effects. However, it seems that accidental events, mentioned above, invoked by human interference are of relative character. This means that their causes, being out of biological system, not always can be scientifically explained or even understandable for a human being.

The above examples show us that nature not always takes up a dialogue with a human being and reveals all its secrets. Thus, nature teaches man humility.

PAWEŁ MAZANKA Instytut Filozofii UKSW

NATURAL THEOLOGY OF DESCARTES AND MODERN SECULARISM

It is noticeable that in the realm of faith and of religious practice an important change is under way at the present time. Within the Western culture religion is more and more only one of many walks of social life and not, as it was in the past, a widespread and influential factor determining the social order. Many people, especially within the science circles, seem to be impenetrable against religious problems. Until not so far ago a challenge against faith and religion took often the shape of open atheism. Nowadays, this shape is also under change. It seems as though atheism was converting itself into secularism which emerged, quite clearly, already in the XVIth century.

At present secularism is taken to mean a philosophy of life manifesting itself both in natural sciences and in politics, philosophy, morality and arts by accepting man, his mind, his liberty, his earthly plans as the only term of reference with there excluded every religious prospect. Under secularism, man is totally concerned with himself; he not only places himself at the center of every interest but also claims to be a principle and reason for the whole reality. Secularism is a form of naturalism excluding every reference to

God and to transcendent realities. As a consequence, secularism aims at identifying itself with agnosticism or with a lenient form of atheism¹.

Secularism is a form of culture and so, also its sources, independently of epochs, are rooted in culture. The sources of secularism are quite multiple; the most important of them are of philosophical, social and political, economic, religious nature to be finally linked with the realm of arts and the "mass culture". A closer analysis of secularism makes it clear that, at its bottom, there always could be perceived definite assumptions of philosophical character. The very fact that it occurs in strict connection with deism as a certain outlook on man and the world as well as their relationships to God, are a natural consequence of a philosophical concept of God and brings an evidence that secularism presupposes a philosophy that dictates a particular concept of God.

Understandably, modern philosophy includes many, more or less close with each other philosophical systems but the central place there comes to the philosophical system of Descartes. He belongs, undoubtedly, to the circle of those who laid philosophical grounds for the modern scientific era. He was the main author of intellectual revolution of the XVIIth century to open new times while departing, previously, from traditional medieval doctrines and Scholasticism renewed in the XVth and XVIth century. So it is no doubt that a philosophy of such wage could not go indifferent towards religious phenomena including that of secularism developing within its range of influence.

The present paper is an attempt to reveal some aspects of Descartes' natural philosophy which made a significant impact on the modern secularism. There is at issue his arguments for the existence of God and his concept of divine nature resulting from this argumentation.

¹ Cf. R. H. Potvin, Secularism, in: E. Craig (ed.), Routledge Encyclopedia Of Philosophy, New York 1998, vol. 9, 36; R. Bush, What is secularism, Southwestern Journal of Theology XXVI(1984) 2, 6; E. S. Waterhouse, Secularism, in: J. Hastings (ed.), Encyclopédia of Religion and Ethics, New York 1955, vol. 11, 347; F. Rodé, Sécularisation et sécularisme, in: P. Poupard (ed.), Dictionnaire des religions, Paris 1984, 1563; P. Deletter, Secularism, in: P. Meagher, T. O'Brien, C. Aherme (ed.), Encyclopedic dictionary of religion, Washington 1979, 3241.

1. THE ROLE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF DESCARTES

Noticeably, Descartes wanted to overcome, by way of his philosophy, there prevailing skepticism. This trend was quite at rise in France of XVIth and XVIIth centuries. It is enough to mention some facts: in 1569 translated into French was the entire Sextus Empiricus; also inspired by Greek skeptics Michel Montaigne published *Essais*, in 1580, that is his observations over life and people, as indifferent towards the most important philosophical issues, and his contemporary Spanish Francois Sanchez issued, in 1581, *Quod nil scitur* (On the science getting no knowledge). At the end of XVIth century there was felt a certain fatigue with the Scholastic philosophy, or even a deeper going epistemological crisis to affect the then educated minds of Europe and led the philosophy towards scepticism².

It is only on this background (following a. o. E. Gilson, F. Copleston and I. Dambska) that the philosophy of Descartes is possible to be well understood. His philosophy was a direct response to a challenge raised by the scepticism of Montaigne. It was a desperate effort to get rid of the Montaigne's scepticism; the very form of the Discourse on Method is suggesting it. So the major adversary of Descartes was not so much the Scholastics but rather the scepticism.

In this opposition to scepticism there could not but appear religious problems or, more precisely, the question of proving the existence of God and of human soul. In fact, scepticism added to a religious confusion due, to some extent, to ambiguities concerning precisely the problem of God's existence and of human soul. Descartes was convinced to have found a purely rational and undeniable arguments for God's existence; furthermore, he felt endowed with an extraordinary mission of revealing truth on the way of reason. This conviction was even more reinforced by his spiritual guide, cardinal de Bārulle, being then a high authority in France and he motivated the philosopher to publish, as soon as possible, "the new doctrine against sceptics and atheists, if he wished to attain ultimately the salvation from the hand of Severe Judge"³.

² Cf. E. Gilson, T. Langan, Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant, New York 1963, 5-15.

³ M. J. Buckley, At the Origins of Modern Atheism, New Haven – London 1987, 69.

There spreading scepticism and religious confusion were not the only motives for Descartes to deal with the problems about God. The arguments for the existence of God and of human soul appeared within his new philosophical system containing a new concept of philosophy. The new idea of philosophy was due to his renounciation of the existing philosophy i. e. the Scholasticism. The philosophy of Descartes was in need, as it is known, of God as guarantor of itself to provide a theory explaining the world and the man. It is said here "a new one", for, although it was a philosophy intended to search for truth when explaining things and phenomena through the light of reason, with no support of faith, nevertheless the point of departure of this philosophy was not the world of transcendent things, on the part of human subject, but the content of mind and so the inner world.

It could be maintained that Descartes was involved in arguments for the existence of God mainly in the view of there spreading scepticism and religious tensions of that time, as well as in order to complete his own philosophical system and, especially, his theory of cognition so he linked the arguments with the strict reasonable way of cognition.

2. THE CASE OF CARTESIAN ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Descartes in order to overcome the prevailing then scepticism, had conceived to search for truth only by the way of natural reason, with no recourse to faith. A certain paradox in his philosophy or, more precisely, in his metaphysics, consisted in his having to turn to the idea of God which he discovered in his mind. As indicated above, the philosopher had to rebuild his relationships to the outside world being destroyed by his doubting, he had to get out of the solitude of cogito. Therefore, it was the idea of God to provide guarantee to the objectivity of ideas present in human mind.

It is assumed that the philosopher produced three modes to prove the existence of God: from the idea of God possessed by human mind; from deficient existential autonomy of human person, and by analyzing the nature of God as the most perfect being. The first and the second argument are of aposterioric character, the third one of aprioric one. The arguments produced in the Meditations on the First Philosophy followed the line of the proofs by St. Augustine and St. Anselm⁴.

Below attention will be given to the first argument, called by some authors a psychological one, it is found in the third *Meditation* called: On God: that He exists. The philosopher discusses the fact of man having the idea of God. Descartes, in accordance with his concept of philosophy, thought that the truth that God exists could be defended against sceptics only by recourse made to the undoubtable presumption which is the existence of ego. At any rate, when undertaking the task he demonstrated that the only undoubtable point is the existence of his own conscience. The philosopher perceived that in his own mind man discovers various ideas: innated, acquired and construed ones. Their common feature is to be all caused in some way. The innated ideas e. g. colors or the sun are connected with the sense of sight, arrive from outside. The author of the construed ideas e. g. of hippogriff, is man himself, while the innated ideas like that of substance or duration could originate only from an idea that man has about himself.

When explaining the presence of ideas in the mind he invokes the principle of causality which plays a major role in the argument in question: "It is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect (...). That which is more perfect, that is to say, which has more reality within itself, cannot proceed from the less perfect". An added reality present in an effect and absent in its cause would have nihilum as its cause, what is a pure nonsense.

The main question in the third *Meditation* is concerned with the idea of God: where does this idea come from? Could it be produced by human mind? Descartes investigates first its content: "By

⁴ In *Meditations* the author gets rid of every kind of spontaneous attitude of conscience, separates himself from objective truths and the conscience on the existence of other people, while going deeper to experience his own relation to Being. It reminds rather a step of religious nature where man knowing that the daily conduct, technical and practical one does not equal his own being, confronts the World of things to another World that he penetrates and which somewhat defines him. The range of metaphysical issues in the *Discourse of Method*, the *Meditations of First Philosophy*, and the *Principles of Philosophy* is more o less the same: doubting, *cogito*, God. Cf. F. Alquié, *Kartezjusz*, thum. z franc. S. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1989, 66; 68.

⁵ Meditations III, in: Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, (ed.), Works of Descartes, Paris 1897-1913, vol. VII, 32.

the name of God I understand a substance which is infinite, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful and by which I myself and everything else, if anything else exists, have been created". Descartes wanting to defend his metaphysics against even the smallest addition of faith has simply admitted that the idea of Christian God is given to every man. Here he was explicitly mistaken, according to Gilson. For although all people have an idea of deity, they not all have the idea of Christian God. "What a stupid question, you know it though".

Descartes wrote: "All these attributes are so supreme that the more attentively I consider them, the more impossible it seems that they could originate from myself. So imperative (...) is the conclusion that God necessarily exists"8. Such analyses led Descartes to the conclusion that human mind could not acquire an imagination of God from itself. In other words: the man as a finite substance could not have an idea of an infinite substance, if it were not coming from an existing and infinite substance. In the human nature there is no contained a predesign of such an idea. So the idea of God is innated to us, acquired from Him. But here a question could arise, whether or not the idea of infinity could not be conceived by man, simply by way of negating the idea of finitude? The philosopher thinks it is impossible since the idea of infinity has to precede in some way the idea of finitude. The point is that man could not become aware of his finitude and limitation, if he did not relate it to the idea of infinite and perfect being. Moreover, although man does not comprehend the nature of infinity, nevertheless the idea of it is so clear and distinct for him that, so he gets convinced, it contains more reality than any other idea and could not be his own mental construction. Ultimately then the Being, "touched upon by the mind", as Descartes says about God, "comprehended and incomprehensible", is revealed through an unavoidable experience to everyone who wants to think comprehensively his own ideas up to their grounds and conditionalities9.

The major weakness of this argumentation is pointed out by J. Maritain. His criticism refers to the subjective point of departure

⁶ Ibidem, 35-36.

⁷ E. Gilson, *Bóg i filozofia*, tłum z franc. M. Kochanowska, Warszawa 1961, 76.

⁸ Meditations III, 32.

⁹ Cf. F. Alquié, Kartezjusz, 99.

for the argument. The argumentation begins here (like it is in the third argument), with the idea of God, and so with the content of human conscience. Descartes is looking for the cause to the idea of God in the human mind. He is not seeking to justify the existence of the Absolute on the ground of investigating the objective order in the world but in individual feelings and intimate reasons¹⁰. Therefore, some authors point out that the most dangerous consequence of the Cartesian argumentation may be a suspicion to render the existence of God dependent on human consciousness¹¹.

In fact, Descartes faced a problem to guarantee the reality to what is contained in affirmations concerning the idea of God. Many commentators think that within his philosophy he was not able to solve this problem adequately. It entailed significant effects that manifested especially in the later period of modern philosophy. So a suspicion was alive that even the most pure idea of God is no more than an artifact of human conscience and thus a show of anthropomorphism, as Blondel puts it, to elapse easily into idololatry, what is equivalent to atheism. The notorious modern critics of the Christianity like Feuerbach, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche made their attacks on theism precisely at this point: the idea of God is no more than an invention of human mind, since God does not exist really¹².

Another drawback of the above argumentation is its inseparable link with a mind narrow procedure far from the Revelation. It would be quite futile to seek in the *Meditations* or in the *Principles* such questions as the divinity of Jesus, resurrection, reward for deeds, divine grace or God's Kingdom on earth. Instead, discussed there are: laws on the collision of bodies, star vorteces, comet movements, blood circulation, heart anatomy etc. The Cartesianism had as its main appeal one offer: method and rules for the direction of the mind. It advertised with one word: "the mind"¹³. Such approach to the problem could lead to narrowing the concept of

¹⁰ Cf. J. Maritain, Le songe de Descartes, Paris 1932, 176.

[&]quot; So thinks e. g. L. J. Elders in: Filozofia Boga. Filozoficzna teologia św. Tomasza z Akwinu, thum z ang M Kiliszek T Kuczyński Warszawa 1992 19

z Akwinu, tłum. z ang. M. Kiliszek, T. Kuczyński, Warszawa 1992, 19.

12 See more in: M. Westphal, Suspicion and faith. The religious uses of modern atheism, Michigan 1993.

¹³ Cf. L. Kołakowski, Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna. Studia nad chrześcijaństwem bezwyznaniowym XVII wieku, Warszawa 1997, 172.

Christian God to mean merely Creator of the world. That is the point where "God of philosophers" is isolated from "God of religion", the idea of the Absolut is set apart from the idea of God of religion. This kind of exclusion, although artificial, was eagerly advocated by some modern critics of religion like L. Feuerbach.

3. THE CARTESIAN CONCEPT OF GOD AND ITS SECULARIST EFFECTS

Descartes, despite his being more a mathematician, a physicist, a physician and a philosopher than a theologian and though he let aside theological questions, nevertheless he produced, *ipso facto*, through his arguments for the existence of God, a certain concept of God's nature. So it is justified to ask whether the nature of Cartesian God is the same as that of Christian God and what influence, if any, it had on the shape of modern secularism?

An answer to this question is far from easy, be it only for the evident fact that the philosophy of Descartes has so many aspects. But to shed some light on the above problem it is worthwhile to quote one comment made by B. Pascal who died only 12 years after Descartes: "I cannot forgive Descartes. He would have liked, in the whole of his philosophy, to be able to by-pass God. But he could not help making Him give a shove to set the world in motion; after that, he has nothing further to do with God"¹⁴. The above comment, one out of many similar in content, is quoted here to point out that thinkers of that time realized how risky was his meaning of God's nature.

The heart of the problem seems to stem from a narrow place left for God within the whole system of Descartes, namely that of the highest cause of the world. In other words: God appearing in this philosophy could have only one name: "Creator of the world", while the Christian God is far more than a Creator. This devise of Cartesianism was raised a. o. by E. Gilson. He pointed out that God of Descartes is only seemingly the same as Christian God, God of St. Thomas. In fact, when St. Thomas converted the First Unmoved Mover from the *Physics* of Aristotle into the Christian notion of "The One, Who is", he raised the first Aristotelian philosophical principle to the level of the Christian concept of God. But Descar-

¹⁴ B. Pascal, *Pensèes et opuscules*, with an introduction and notes by L. Brunschvicg, Paris 1934, 77.

tes made it quite adverse: starting with the same Christian concept of God, he reduced Him to the first philosophical principle i. e. the cause of the world, the source of its existence. Therefore, he considered only those divine attributes which brought to existence the world but the world had to correspond to his metaphysics i. e. to be a mechanical design where everything is possible to be explained by geometrical properties of space and physical laws of nature.

Naturally, the essence of the infinite Being as understood in such a way, will be no more *Ipsum Esse*, as it was explained e. g. by St. Thomas but the very essence of Cartesian God is to be source of world's existence. Therefore, the ultimate act of God is to be the cause for the nature of the world. This transposition, as underlined by Gilson, has entailed serious consequences. "It is true that the Creator is, first of all, Christian God but it is also true that God the very essence of whom is to be the Creator, is not at all Christian God. The essence of true God of the Christians is not to "create" but "to be" ("exist"). "The one, Who exists" may also create, if he chooses to do so but he does not exist because of creating things or even by creating himself; He may create because He exists at the utmost. Ostensibly then, the Cartesian God, even as the highest philosophical cause was a failed God (...): Christian God reduced to the level of phisophical principle; in one word, it was a miserable hybrid of religious faith and of rational thought. The most striking character of such God was that his creating function did absorb totally His essence. Since then His name was to sound not .. The One. Who is" but "Causer of Nature". Obviously, Christian God was always "Creator of Nature" but He has been always infinitely more than that, while, following Descartes, He was doomed to degrade to that and only to that"15. So with Descartes there went astray and got lost the essence of God which is the pure existence 16. Descartes not only changed the concept of God's nature from "I am who I am" (Ex 3,13) into the "Causer of Nature" but also removed God from the world in the sense that though God maintains the world

¹⁵ E. Gilson, Jedność doświadczenia filozoficznego, tłum. z franc. Z. Wrzeszcz, Warszawa 1968, 80-81.

¹⁶ That is pointed out also by John Paul II: "Descartes removed us from the philosophy of existence and also from the traditional ways of St. Thomas. These ways lead us to God who is «the self-existence» – *Ipsum esse subsistens*". Jan Paweł II, *Przekroczyć próg nadziei*, Lublin 1994, 47.

in existence but does not intervene in it. The world put into motion follows its own rules i. e. the principles of mechanics. God having designed the world, manifestly abandoned it. The Absolut which filled its role could go away being of no further use.

This concept of God was influencing more and more the experience of God in the religion of that time. So the religious rites became increasingly concentrated on God whose essence was to create, to be the first cause of the world. It is no hazard that in the middle of XVII century deism emerged in Western Europe to be called a natural religion with no place left in it for the Revelation, the divinity of Christ, and miracles. It was a purely reasonable religion, based precisely on the concept of God Creator of the world and it was to replace religion grounded on Revelation¹⁷. A forerunner of deism is held to be Herbert of Cherbury (+ 1648, philosopher and embassador of England to Paris) who stayed under strong influence of Descartes' rationalism¹⁸.

It is worthwhile to look more closely into the ties of Cartesian philosophy with there emerging natural religion. What did Descartes understand by philosophy? Philosophy means the study of wisdom, and by wisdom we understand not only "prudence in affairs but also a perfect knowledge of all things which man can know both for the conduct of his life and for the conservation of his health and the invention of all arts"19. Emphasized by the author is the fundamental role of natural capabilities of the mind and their usefulness in practical life. This resolved approach of Descartes to matters of this world without dwelling in the contents of the Revelation is pointedly illustrated by an event in the life of the philosopher. Well, Descartes came to meet, once, Ann Marie Schuurman (+1678) who was one of the most learned women of her times and stayed primarily in friendly relationships with him. The philosopher found her studying the Book of Genesis in Hebrew and expressed his surprise that a person so high capable wasted her time for so futile and useless things. Descartes added that he himself

¹⁷ Cf. J. H. Hick, *Philosophy of religion*, New Jersey 1990, 5.

¹⁸ Deism became widespread in the XVIIth century in England and France and from there went over to Germany, North America and Poland. In Poland deists were a. o. Stanisław Staszic (+1826) and Jędrzej Śniadecki (+1838).

¹⁹ Descartes, Rules for the Direction of the Mind, in: Ch. Adam, P. Tannery (ed.), Works of Descartes, vol. X, 360.

once attempted to read the first chapter of Genesis but could not get anything clear and distinct from the text and, instead, even greater confusion occurred in his mind. So he never returned to the reading and was rather concerned to forget it. Miss Schuurman got so indignated by this comment that the meeting ended with disruption of friendly ties²⁰.

The philosophy of Descartes, apart from intentions of its author. worked to weaken the role of the Revelation in religion; the Revelation ceased to be a focal point of religion. Religion came to be more connected with the reason than with the Revelation. In the XVIIth century the Western Christianity stood "in the face of a volcanic like eruption of Cartesianism" which with astonishing speed, during a couple of years, altered the intellectual life of many circles. The rapid extension of Cartesianism was advanced a. o. due to a dynamic growth of natural sciences which, in turn, worked that among those learned of that time, more and more explicit was distrust concerning the Scholastic conceptual tools. There followed a gradual lack of interest in strictly theological problems. Many admirers of Descartes' teaching like John of Bredenburg the Lutheran from Rotterdam or Herburt of Cherbury wanted to create a rational deistic religion. They maintained that the Revelation brings nothing new or important to religion. In their view Descartes provided sufficient arguments for the existence of God following the principle of causality. The Revelation could only confirm or explain that, for what the reason produces indisputable proofs. On the concrete case of John of Bredenburgs one could notice not always easy to grasp connection between the Cartesian method and the natural religion of deists and also with a theology of anthropocentric bias as suggested by that method.

The approach of some deists will be more and more radical. Following the rationalist concept of knowledge including the Cartesian presumption that the cognition is true only when attaining clear and distinct ideas, they will become convinced after a time, that

²⁰ F. Copleston remarks: "It is not surprising that from time to time Descartes insisted on the practical value of philosophy. The civilization of any nation, he says, is proportionate to the superiority of its philosophy, and a State can have no greater good than the possession of true philosophy". F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. IV: *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Leibntz*, New York 1963, 78.

the Revelation of God is no more than a legend, a myth. They will dismiss every concept of mystery and miracle events as well as prophetic predictions will be repudiated as a show of human ignorance and not God's intervention in the world. For deists God will be like a watchmaker or the supreme designer of the world machine, as Fontenelle, Voltaire or Rosseau put it. Deism having such appealing propagators was gaining more and more wide circles not only in France and other European countries but also in North America (It is remarkable that not only deism but also modern pantheism takes some inspiration from Cartesianism. When speaking about pantheism or identifying God with nature, it is not indispensable to recur to the philosophy of B. Spinoza with his specific understanding of God: "Deus sive natura". In fact, Descartes himself came to this conclusion when considering in the *Meditation* VI, the question of truth concerning the sensuous cognition as guaranteed ultimately by God himself who is not deceiver: "I conceive the nature, generally taken, to be, at this moment, nothing else than God himself or the order of created things as established by God"21.

To sum up the above considerations it has to be pointed out that the concept of God as found in the Cartesian philosophy, had rather little in common with God of Christian religion and that, unfortunately, contributed to the rise of deism. The Cartesian God appears to be "Creator of the world" and not "The One who is". So not surprising is a defiance by Pascal: "The God of the Christians is not a God who is simply the author of geometrical truths and of the order of the elements; this is a concept of the pagans and of the epicureans, (...) but the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob; God of Christians is God of love and consolation; it is God who fills hearts of those He ownes"22. The philosophy of Descartes gradually discouraged interests in the truths of Revelation and, as a consequence, weakened the relationship of man with the Transcendence. Unfortunately, neither Catholic nor Protestant theologians have been able to bring the Cartesian philosophy in line with theology. There was no repeat of what St. Thomas made with Aristotle. Perhaps this task would be impossible to accomplish. The very idea of Cartesian rationalism (that is the decisive role of reason and the claim to admit as true what is clear

²¹ Meditations VI, vol. VII, 79.

²² B. Pascal, *Pensèes et opuscules*, 361.

and distinct) worked through its own inertia to lead its adherents into positions difficult to reconcile with supernatural faith and especially with revealed truths and, therefore, was gradually conducing to laicization of thinking and reinforcing modern secularism²³.

TOMASZ STĘPIEŃ Wydział Teologiczny UKSW

REMARKS ON NEOPLATONISM AS A SYNTHESIS OF ANCIENT THOUGHT

PREFACE

As we know, Neoplatonism was the last philosophical system created by ancient pagan philosophers. This system was very attractive to Christian thinkers, who made it a basis for explaining Christian faith. Therefore it became a part of Christian philosophy of Middle Ages. In the same time, when in Europe falling Roman Empire left almost no culture and philosophy in the west, in the eastern lands conquered by Arabs, Greek texts were translated into Arabic, and the dawn of Arabic philosophy began. Writings of Aristotle became the most popular, however Arabic philosophers read those texts in a neoplatonic way, because neoplatonic pagan philosophers considered the thought of Aristotle as a part of their system and interpreted it in a specific way.

All this may seem obvious but at the beginning I would like to show how important Neoplatonism is to understand both Christian and Arabic philosophy. Proper understanding of Neoplatonism is not a simple thing. Last few decades brought a lot of new studies on Neoplatonism, and it becomes clear, that many things must be revised in understanding of neoplatonic thought. Those studies have shown a new vision of the last pagan system. I would like to present only some problems of this vision, which in my opinion are of great importance in studies on medieval Christian and Arabic philosophy.

²³ Cf. L. Kołakowski, Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna, 172-174; 176-182; 226.