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JÓZSEF SIMON

SUMMARY

This paper presents a short outline of Christian Francken's (1552-ca.1610) critical thinking concerning religious matters. The focus of his recently published manuscripts, written in Cluj (Transylvania) around 1589-1591, is on the concept of atheism. This article investigates the motifs which may account for Francken's departure from the world of confessional debates and his philosophical critique of all kinds of theism of his time. Without denying the possible existence of unknown texts which may have influenced the radicalism of the German philosopher, the author concludes that Francken's story concerning his approach to atheism can be narrated without the assumption of a tradition of *libertinage* in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

INTRODUCTION

ACCORDING to our historical commonplace, the intellectual life peculiar to Eastern Europe in the late Renaissance unfolded as an interrelation between North and South. Regarding the roots of radical thinking on religious matters of the Enlightenment, these expressions of intellectual topography lead over fluidly to such pairs of historical concepts as radical Reformation and Libertinism, or *radikale Reformation* and *libertinage*. Our understanding of these concepts embraces cultural phenomena of very different kinds, their semantic spectrum extends from conceptually unreflective attitudes as far as conceptually highly reflected philosophical speculations.

In the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of radical critique of religion in Eastern Europe developed according to these interrelated tendencies. It was indeed Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604), a Renaissance man of letters from Italy, who initiated perhaps the most radical intellectual movement, which was able to situate itself in the confessional map of Europe at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Z. OGONOWSKI, *Der Sozinianismus und die Aufklärung*, in *Reformation und Frühaufklärung in Polen*, hrsg. von P. Wrzecionko, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977, pp. 78-156.

Despite the fact that Sozzini successfully compounded intellectual and confessional motifs in grounding a gradually institutionalising church, Antitrinitarianism itself proved to be a plural denomination involving different tendencies. There were antitrinitarian intellectuals, or at least intellectuals with antitrinitarian sympathies, who issued inner critiques against Sozzini's thought concerning theological, exegetical and philosophical matters. This contribution is not concerned with whether Sozzini's critics (such as Szymon Budny, Jacobus Palaeologus, Andreas Dudith, Christian Francken or György Enyedi) might have had a separated influence in the period of the Enlightenment. However, the problem of incorporating Socinianism or Antitrinitarianism in the early tradition of enlightened criticism – as by Campanella or Bayle – can only be regarded properly by paying attention to the most radical wing of this intellectual trend, which flourished farthest in Transylvania.<sup>1</sup>

In his savant and erudite papers, Mario Biagioni shows a strong interest towards this culture of anti-authoritative thinking in Eastern Europe of the late Renaissance.<sup>2</sup> His interest is prompted by Christian Francken<sup>3</sup> (ca. 1552-after 1610), one of the most critical minds of the period. The German philosopher wrote his most radical writings<sup>4</sup> in Cluj (Claudiopolis, Kolozsvár) while working as *lector philosophiae* in the Antitrinitarian college of the

<sup>1</sup> See Pirnát's classical monograph: A. PIRNÁT, *Die Ideologie der Siebenbürger Antitrinitarier in den 1570er Jahren*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> M. BIAGIONI, *Il problema del criterio di verità nella "Disputatio de incertitudine religionis Christianae" di Christian Francken*, «Rinascimento», xi, 2008, pp. 469-480; IDEM, *Christian Francken e le origini cinquecentesche del trattato De tribus impostoribus*, «Bruniana & Campanelliana», xvi, 2010, 1, pp. 237-246; IDEM, *L'unicità della ragione: l'evoluzione religiosa del gesuita Christian Francken*, in *La centralità del dubbio. Restauri storiografici: un progetto di Antonio Rotondò*, 2 voll., Firenze, Olschki, 2011, 1, pp. 235-260.

<sup>3</sup> The most important studies about Francken are L. SZCZUCKI, *W kręgu myślicieli heretyckich*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk, 1972 (= *Philosophie und Autorität. Der Fall Christian Francken*, in *Reformation and Frühaufklärung in Polen. Studien über den Sozinianismus und seinen Einfluß auf das westeuropäische Denken im 17. Jahrhundert*, cit., pp. 157-243.); B. KESERŰ, *Christian Franckens Tätigkeit im ungarischen Sprachgebiet und sein unbekanntes Werk „Disputatio de incertitudine religionis Christianae“*, in *Antitrinitarianism in the Second Half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. by R. Dán and A. Pirnát, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó 1982, pp. 73-84; A. PIRNÁT, *Arisztotelianusok és antitrinitáriusok*, «Helikon», xvii, 1971, pp. 363-392; J. WIJACZKA, *Christian Francken*, «Bibliotheca dissidentium», xiii, Baden-Baden, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> I refer to Francken's two manuscripts written in Cluj in Transylvania: *Disputatio inter Theologum et Philosophum de incertitudine Religionis Christianae*, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Sign.: Mss. Akc. 1955/220 (henceforth FRANCKEN, *Disputatio*) and *Spectrum diurnum Genii Christiani Francken, apparens malo Simonis Simonii Genio*, MS Székesfehérvár Városi Levéltár, Ferenc Vathay's bequest 1, ff. 15-49 (henceforth FRANCKEN, *Spectrum*). My references on both manuscripts follow the modern edition in József SIMON, *Die Religionsphilosophie Christian Franckens (1552-1610?). Atheismus und radikale Reformation im frühneuzeitlichen Ostmitteleuropa*, Wiesbaden, 2008 («Wolfenbütteler Forschungen», 117), pp. 151-203 (henceforth SIMON, *Die Religionsphilosophie*).

city. He was not a native Saxon in Transylvania, he was born in Gardeleben by Magdeburg in Germany. After having gone through his adventurous way among the Christian denomination of his time he was invited to teach philosophy in Cluj. As he himself states, he found the cultural liberty he had always been seeking for in Transylvania in the circle of Hungarian and Saxon intellectuals.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I would like to draw attention to some problematic points in Biagioni's article *Christian Francken e le origini cinquecentesche del trattato "De tribus impostoribus"*.<sup>2</sup> My aim is to provide constructive criticism, the difference of my interpretation<sup>3</sup> originates partly in the different perspective I follow.

I would like to argue for two points. First, I claim that Biagioni's explanation of the thematic relationship between Francken's *Disputatio* (Cluj, ca. 1589-1591) and the *De tribus impostoribus* as edited in 1753 by Straube in Vienna cannot be justified. Secondly, I wish to show that Biagioni's supposition of a tradition of free thought in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century is superfluous in this context: Francken's composing of the *Disputatio* can be explained within the framework of some confessional and intellectual debates in Middle-East Europe, namely in Transylvania, Poland and Moravia. I do not want to deny the very existence of a radical cultural *attitude* in the late Renaissance history of ideas at all, but I would like to show that there is a much more economical way to account for the concept of atheism in Francken's thought. Libertinism in the late *Cinquecento* is somehow the effect of, and not the cause for, Francken's radicalism.

I will not discuss the treatise about the three impostors at length; there are some well-known problems concerning the dating and the authorship of the *De tribus impostoribus*, regarding which I accept results of studies other than Biagioni's. Winfried Schröder's arguments for the late composition of the Latin treatise in 1688 – published in a somewhat corrupted form in 1753 – convince me, as well as the identification of the author in the person of Johann Joachim Müller (1661-1733).<sup>4</sup> Obviously, Biagioni does not accept Schröder's results, even though he does not refer to them. It is not our concern to pass a judgment on this matter. Therefore, I suspend my own con-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. FRANCKEN, *Spectrum*, p. 203: «His, inquam, et multis aliis vitae commoditatibus reiectis, in Transylvaniam rediit, non aliam certe ob causam, quam quod experientia didicerat, citius hic, quam alibi inveniri homines, quales Diogenes clarissimo die quaerere lucernacula sua solitus fuit».

<sup>2</sup> M. Biagioni, *Christian Francken e le origini*, cit.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SIMON, *Die Religionsphilosophie*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. SCHRÖDER, *Einleitung*, in ANONYMUS [Johann Joachim Müller], *De imposturis religionum (De tribus impostoribus)*, kritisch hg. und kommentiert von W. Schröder, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1999, pp. 7-91; references on the *De tribus impostoribus* follow Schröder's edition (henceforth *DTI*, ed. Schröder).

viction that the dating of the treatise as the year 1598 is absolutely untenable and instead I will concentrate on Biagioni's claim about the affinity of their contents respectively – as if the imposture-treatise could have existed contemporaneously with the composition of Francken's *Disputatio*.

Let us reconstruct Biagioni's argumentation. After admitting that we are not able to establish the relationship between the *Disputatio de incertitudine religionis Christianae* and the *De tribus impostoribus*,<sup>1</sup> Biagioni goes on to emphasize the «*assoluta evidenza*» concerning the affinity of some themes common to both texts and adds the conclusion that it is plausible to suppose that a printed text might have existed already in the preceding centuries which served as the original text for the book about the three impostors.<sup>2</sup> This may have some obscure connection to Francken's *Disputatio*: either as a source of this or as using this latter one as its source. However, several materials, handed down by a complicated history of lost manuscripts and printed texts, must have been synthesized in the publication of the *De tribus impostoribus* in 1753, dated back to or even probably published in the year 1598. Biagioni supports his thesis with biographical details. Tommaso Campanella reported in one of his letters – known only from later sources<sup>3</sup> – that he had seen the famous treatise about the three impostors in Francesco Pucci's hands in the prison of the Holy Office in 1597.<sup>4</sup> We know that Pucci and Francken had been in contact in Poland during the years 1583-1585<sup>5</sup> and some sources relate both of them to the same group of intellectuals in Bohemia at the end of the same decade. If Francken's *Disputatio* was written in the period 1589-1591 – as Biagioni correctly assumes –, then the work testified by Campanella might have been identical with Francken's work.

#### LITERARY FORM: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

The first similarity between the two texts concerns their structure and literary form. While Francken's *Disputatio* is obviously a dialogue between a theologian and a philosopher, the first five chapters of the *De tribus impostoribus* of the Vienna edition (1753) unfold as an indirect dialogue recounted by a narrator.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the difficulties of supposing a kind of dialogical discourse in the latter,<sup>7</sup> there are some good reasons for seeing a strong di-

<sup>1</sup> BIAGIONI, *Christian Francken e le origini*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. B. G. STRUVE, *Dissertatio historico litteraria de doctis impostoribus*, Ienae, 1703, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> G. ERNST, *Campanella e il De tribus impostoribus*, «Nouvelles de la République des lettres», 1986, 2, pp. 143-170.

<sup>5</sup> BIAGIONI, *Christian Francken e le origini*, pp. 238-239.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 242.

<sup>7</sup> The short dialogue beginning with «Ergo ne...» is an exception, cf. *DTI*, ed. Schröder, p. 113.

vergence between the two dialogical forms. The literary origin of enacting a scene with a theologian and a philosopher in the way proper to the *Disputatio* is Duns Scotus' *Prologue* to his Oxford lectures (*Ordinatio*) on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.<sup>1</sup> Strange as it may seem at a first glance, the traditional arguments for the eminency of Christian religion stemming from the period of Patristics are presented by the theologian in the first part of the *Disputatio* within the textual and intellectual framework of this epochal text of Scotus.<sup>2</sup> The *Prologue* shapes the changes which occurred in the counterposition of theology and philosophy (*controversia inter theologos et philosophos*)<sup>3</sup> at the very end of high scholasticism and marks the reference points for their conflict during the next two centuries – we may say up to the time of the Pomponazzi affaire and of the fifth Lateran Council in 1513.

However, Francken introduces serious alterations: the respective positions of the theologian and the philosopher in Scotus' *Prologue* are not the same as their positions in Francken's *Disputatio*. Scotus would have never accepted that the *motiva credibilitatis* stressed by his theologian could be regarded as proofs for God's existence – whereas his later followers in the Scotistic school misinterpreted his original intention and viewed the theological motifs for the credibility of Christian faith at the same time as such proofs for the field of rational theology.<sup>4</sup>

This varying historical context of scotism is responsible for the distinction characterising the differences between the methods of theology and of philosophy in Francken's *Disputatio*:

The theologians themselves confess as well that they do not demonstrate from the better known to the lesser known, but *from the previously believed to the afterwards believed*.<sup>5</sup>

This is, of course, a resonance on the much debated methodological formula of inferring from familiar premises into less familiar conclusions<sup>6</sup> in Aristotelian science. Scotus describes the parallel structure of theological inference as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SIMON, *Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 68-74.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. my critical notes to the edition, SIMON, *Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 151-182.

<sup>3</sup> DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio*, Prologus, p. 1, q. 1, n. 5, in IDEM, *Opera omnia*. Studio et cura Commissionis Scotisticae ad fidem codicum ed. praes. Carolo Balić, Rome since 1950, (further ed. Vat.), I, 4: «In ista quaestione videtur controversia inter philosophos et theologos. Et tenent philosophi perfectionem naturae, et negant perfectionem supenaturalem; theologo vero cognoscunt defectum naturae et necessitatem gratiae et perfectionem supenaturalem».

<sup>4</sup> For the medieval and modern (E. Gilson) misinterpretations cf. A. WOLTER OFM, *The 'Theologism' of Duns Scotus*, in IDEM, *The Philosophical Theology of Duns Scotus*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 209-253.

<sup>5</sup> FRANCKEN, *Disputatio*, p. 154: «Nam ipsimet Theologi fatentur se non ostendere ex notiori minus notum, sed ex prius credito posterius creditum».

<sup>6</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Analytica Posteriora*, I, 2, 71b 9-12.

Therefore, it is impossible to use the natural reason against Aristotle: if it is argued from what is believed, that is no argument against the philosopher, because he does not concede believed premise. Therefore, these arguments that were made against him have other premise which is either believed or proved from what is believed; correspondingly these are only theological persuasions from *what were previously believed into what is believed*.<sup>1</sup>

Francken's philosopher attributes explicitly *this* methodology of inferring «ex creditis ad creditum» to his partner in the *Disputatio*. Although Renaissance philosophers of method discussed the preliminary step of 'regress method' – as they called it – in large extent,<sup>2</sup> the constitution of 'theological' procedure in the same way seems to have Scotistic origin. May Francken's theologian depart very far from the theologian's position described by Scotus in the *Prologue* – especially in the case of the last seventeen rational arguments for God's existence in Francken's *Disputatio* –, the interpretation of his methodological approach requires the context of the historical re-interpretations of Duns Scotus' philosophy.

There are no signs of this kind of separation of theology and philosophy in the alleged indirect dialogue in *De tribus impostoribus*. Here we see an overall reduction of theology on psychological (fear),<sup>3</sup> social (social exchanges)<sup>4</sup> and political factors (fraud).<sup>5</sup> We are faced with a juristic explanation of theological evaluations of testimonies<sup>6</sup> and comparative treatments of different supranatural revelations.<sup>7</sup> Faith appears as *credulitas* subjected to delusions of humans: there is not the least demand to go deeper into the problems of theological epistemology. Opposite to this, Francken draws attention to a further consequence of the inversion of Aristotelian method «ex prius credito posterius creditum»: «these kinds of arguments effect belief only for those, who will to believe in them».<sup>8</sup> The claim is peculiar to late scholasticism again: theological arguments presuppose the act of

<sup>1</sup> DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio*, Prologus, p. 1, q. 1, n. 12 (ed. Vat., I, 9): «Igitur impossibile est hic contra Aristotelem uti ratione naturali: si arguatur ex creditis, non est ratio contra philosophum, quia praemissam creditam non concedet. Unde istae rationes hic factae contra ipsum alteram praemissam habent creditam vel probatam ex credito; ideo non sunt nisi persuasiones theologicae, ex creditis ad creditum».

<sup>2</sup> Cf. N. JARDINE, *Epistemology of sciences*, in *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by James Hankins, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 685-712.

<sup>3</sup> *DTI*, ed. Schröder, p. 103 (Hobbes).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 107.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 114-117.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 127-140.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, passim, above all pp. 114-117, 121-122.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. FRANCKEN, *Disputatio* 154: «1. PHILOS. [...] Huiusmodi autem argumenta non faciunt fidem nisi volenti credere, quod vobis prius est creditum»; *ibidem*, 156: «2. PHILOS. Ergo istae rationes non nisi volenti credere persuadent»; *ibidem*, 157: «3. PHILOS. Vitiosa est ratio falso antecedente, nisi enim quis velit credere»; *ibidem*: «4. PHILOS. Vitiosa est ratio falso antecedente, quia nemo vobis credit, nisi qui voluerit vobis credere».



will independent from any intellectual operation of mind. Francken's philosopher denies the possibility of reconciling the intellect and the will in any kind of 'persuasiveness' provided by a scotistic perspective. Francken's reception of the scotistic conflict between theology and philosophy turns out to be more than following merely the literary form of the dialogue between a theologian and a philosopher. It expresses the moderate rationality of proofs for the eminency of Christian religion; this is the 'reasonableness' of controversial theology the arguments of which could be and were treated as proofs for God's existence as well. The philosopher's critique in the first part of Francken's *Disputatio* aims at the destruction of this moderate rationality of theological arguments for the eminency of Christian (or any) religion. These problems of theological epistemology are not at all in focus in the *De tribus impostoribus* – at least not in its presently familiar form. Our 'Hyde park atheist' lacks this level of philosophical reflection on the relationship between theology and philosophy. He contends to state the experimental fact that dissensions may originate from the lack of will to concede the truth.<sup>1</sup> According to these results, we have no reason to assert the similarity of the two texts regarding their dialogical structure.

#### CERTITUDE

Biagioni refers to the parallel between the criteria of religious certitude in Francken's *Disputatio* and the *De tribus impostoribus*. He reconstructs correctly Francken's diagnosis: the cause of the divergence of religion(s) is the lack of certitude to ascertain which religion is the true religion among the others. The kind of certitude required here is the same as the certitude concerning the axioms of Euclidean geometry. The lack of geometrical certitude in the case of any religion and the probable proofs for their truth results in the insight that none of the religions can claim its truth and eminency in respect of the others. Biagioni draws the reader's attention to the Anonymus' claim in the *De tribus impostoribus*:<sup>2</sup> «who would doubt that 2x2 is 4, but on the opposite, the religions agree concerning neither the aim, neither principals nor the middles».<sup>3</sup> After stating the defects of each religion regarding *a priori* certitude of their notions, Biagioni attributes a common thesis to the compared texts: they both share a materialistic epistemology as responsible for the multiplicity of religions.<sup>4</sup> It is verified by the old Aristotelian claim which Francken adds to his evaluation of the epistemological status of current theological arguments: «that is more familiar for us, which

<sup>1</sup> DTI, ed. Schröder, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> BIAGIONI, *Christian Francken e le origini*, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> DTI, ed. Schröder, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> BIAGIONI, *Christian Francken e le origini*, pp. 244-245.



is nearer to the senses». <sup>1</sup> Therefore, there is a double tendency in the texts: the problem of *a priori* and *a posteriori* evidence in religious matters. The relationship between these two types of criteria for certitude requires some further investigations concerning the rational ideal of geometrical cognition and the sense-cognition of experience.

Biagioni elected important extracts from Francken's late *Anaylsis*<sup>2</sup> (Prague 1595) and showed very convincingly the presence of the idea that the conception of God is the result of an imaginary process in mankind, the description of which belongs into the competency of natural psychology. We can find arguments for the political instrumentalisation of God's conception as interpreted in this way in the German philosopher's works. Although these phenomena can be explored in Francken's writings, Biagioni fails to recognise that a materialistic epistemology of *various* opinions about God does not exclude a unique metaphysical concept of God as presented by Francken's different works. Biagioni tends to treat Francken's intellectual position through a 'Campanellian glass'. This line of interpretation must inevitably conclude that Francken was a Machiavellian or a Politician in the sense as Campanella's categories of infidelity, introduced in the first two chapters of his famous *Atheismus triumphatus*.<sup>3</sup>

Keeping in mind Biagioni's intention to see Francken's radicalism in the strong psychological reduction of the concept of God, it may appear strikingly surprising that in the *Spectrum*<sup>4</sup> it is explicitly the discipline of metaphysics that is made to be the counterpart of theology instead of a theory working with a materialistic epistemology or with any kind of psychological account of sensual certitude. Regarding the context of Francken's debate with his former Italian friend Simone Simoni<sup>5</sup> (1532-1602), his statement becomes clearer in outlines.<sup>6</sup> In this text Francken aims at a refutation of Simoni's position, which presented medicine, i.e. natural philosophy in a broader sense, as the counterpart of theology: faith finds itself in opposition with empirical science. Francken rejects Simoni's conception and main-

<sup>1</sup> FRANCKEN, *Disputatio*, p. 156: «Nam notius nobis est, quod sensui vicinius». Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Analytica posteriora* 1, 2 (72a 2)

<sup>2</sup> FRANCKEN, *Analysis rixae christianae, quae imperium turbat, et diminuit Romanum*, Prague 1595.

<sup>3</sup> T. CAMPANELLA, *Ath. triumph.*, pp. 1-23.

<sup>4</sup> The following thoughts are based on FRANCKEN, *Spectrum*, pp. 193-196; cf. SIMON, *Die Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 61-68.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. FRANK, 'Averroistischer Aristotelismus' und die Dissoziierung von Philosophie und Theologie in der frühen Neuzeit – der Fall 'Simon Simonius', in *Konversionen im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, hrsg. v. F. Niewöhner und F. Rädle. Hildesheim-New York, Olms, 1999, pp. 133-152.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of their debate see SIMON, *Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 53-61. Cf. L. SZCZUCKI, *Una polemica sconosciuta tra Christian Francken e Simone Simoni*. In *Humanistica. Per Cesare Vasoli*, a cura di F. Meroi, E. Scapparone, Firenze, Olschki, 2004, pp. 159-170.

tains that the primary science in opposition to the faith of theology is metaphysics. The certitude concerning geometrical and logical axioms belongs to the competency of metaphysics. In the *Spectrum* Francken does not deny that men have a metaphysical concept about God; they have indeed, but this concept – identified with the notion of God in St. Anselm's famous *a priori* argument – does not belong to the competency of theology, but to that of metaphysics. The metaphysical concept of God is an anthropological standard, it has metaphysical certainty and is independent from the variety of religious beliefs. Francken has a project of emancipation in his mind: not even the ancient figures had been atheists who had been supposed not to have any concept of God. Although Francken draws a line between the notion and the existence of God – anticipating his laconic treatment of Anselm's proof in the *Disputatio* –, it is however not a materialistic psychology that concerns the notion of God in question. Further, the metaphysical notion of God is compatible with the various 'applications' of it according to the extant variability of religious experiences. These latter 'applications' or 'accommodations' – according to Francken's own terminology – of the metaphysical concept of God on beings existing physically apart from the mind can be the subjects of the psychology of religion. The 'applications' of God's concept – and not the metaphysical concept of God itself known with geometrical-*a priori* certainty – are the subject matters of a psychology of religion which describes the various rites and ceremonies and which applies experience data explained eventually through a materialistic epistemology. The «concezione assolutamente materialistica della conoscenza»<sup>1</sup> is only a partly materialistic epistemology – also in the late *Analysis*: the notion of God is present in the minds of human beings. The explanatory function of experience-based psychology is limited only by accounting for the plurality of religious notions.

Francken gives us no direct answer to the question whether the metaphysical concept of God could eventually be applied on a metaphysical entity as well. But stating the corresponding entity in a materialistic fashion – Francken refers here to the identification of nature and God by the Stoics – fails to be a metaphysical application. The ancient and the contemporary representatives of different denominations are 'religious', none of them were and are 'atheists' because all of them conceive the metaphysical concept of God (which means that they all were and are members of mankind). On the other hand, the theory of application of the metaphysical concept of God is able to explain the psychological phenomena accompanying religious notions. In somewhat Kantian terminology: the metaphysical concept of God proves to be the very condition for the manifold possible

<sup>1</sup> BIAGIONI, *Christian Francken e le origini*, p. 244.

religious experiences, even though these later can be described through a materialistic psychology *a posteriori*.

So much is clear in Francken's *Spectrum*. But one may object that Biagioni is right in attributing a materialistic epistemology to Francken in his *Disputatio*, where it is given both the criterion of geometrical certitude and the refutation of the anselmian notion of God.<sup>1</sup> Facing this problem we should divide the arguments of the *Disputatio* into two parts. The argumentative goal of the first 20 arguments consists in the refutation of the eminency of the Christian religion as opposed to other religions, i. e. the God of the Christians is only one of the forms in which the unique-metaphysical concept of God appears in sensual experiences of different religions. Concerning the arguments 21-37 I have to address some considerations.

The last seventeen arguments and their refutations are usually out of the focus of scholars' reflections, though one may regard these as ones of the most important intellectual experiments in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century or even of late Renaissance philosophy. Compared with other documents of radical thinking about religion in the same period, Francken's preference for a metaphysical treatment of subjects is obtrusive. Francken's commitment to refuting the proofs for God's existence on a philosophical level is perhaps even more striking than his radical-atheistic attitude in religious matters. In the second part of the *Disputatio* there is no reference to experience as standing in opposition with the theoretical demonstrations of God's existence or of the rational concept of God. His diagnosis remains within the borders of rational theology and of metaphysics. Without going into details we can set out that the metaphysical conflict of rational theology occurs between the God of an ontology of *analogy* and the God of an ontology of *univocity*. This is expressed in a most spectacular way in the counterposition of «*primum movens immobile*» and «*summa perfectio sine aliqua imperfectione*».<sup>2</sup> In my book I tried to give ramifications for further interpretations emphasizing that it may be indeed *the* problem of rational theology that Francken was unable to resolve, but which Descartes solved in his *Third Meditation*.<sup>3</sup>

#### METHOD: 'LIBERTINAGE' OR 'RADIKALE REFORMATION'

Last but not least, let me focus on the supposition of a hidden tradition of free thought. The problematic point of this supposition originates not in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Philosopher's objection against the Theologian's, argument 22, in FRANCKEN, *Disputatio*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the Philosopher's objections against the Theologian's, arguments 28-31, in FRANCKEN, *Disputatio*, pp. 174-177; as well as SIMON, *Die Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 117-119; 142-143.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. DESCARTES, *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, in IDEM, *Oeuvres*, éd. par Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, Paris, 1964, vol. VI, pp. 34-52.

the hypothesis of radicalism, as if there were no trends in early modern Eastern Europe which might have been even more radical than the religious thinking of the Sozzini brothers with their humanistic background. The problem lies in the fact that Francken's story concerning his approach to atheism can be narrated without the assumption of a tradition of *libertinage* in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As I have already emphasised, I do not want to deny the very existence of such a tradition, I just tend to think that it is superfluous while telling the narrative of Francken gradually getting nearer to the idea of atheism.

Our story begins around 1582-1583. Francken as an intellectual with unidentifiable confessional background<sup>1</sup> showed strong sympathies towards antitrinitarian thinking. As a philosopher he chose the radical wing of antitrinitarism as compatible with his own philosophically motivated critique of religions. Lech Szczucki showed very clearly that his philosophical attack was not acceptable even for the mainstream of Unitarian thinking represented by the thought of Fausto Sozzini.<sup>2</sup> This conflict culminated in a public debate between Francken and Sozzini in 1583 – the text of their dispute in Pawlikowice in Poland was published afterwards<sup>3</sup> and became one of the main sources for Sozzini's distanced attitude against the so-called non-adorantist version of antitrinitarism which flourished in Transylvania and Lithuania. Sozzini accused Francken of atheism in the dispute – it was the very first time<sup>4</sup> that Francken had to face an accusation of atheism and the political use of this strange Latin form of that Greek term. Let us quote Sozzini's words:

So far as I can see, all those who deny Christ's adoration, decreased into atheism at the end; this concerns you as well, unless you change your teaching.<sup>5</sup>

Sozzini identifies the adherents of nonadorantism as atheists. Francken rejects this identification and points out its absurdity. According to the German philosopher, if one accepts this description of nonadorantism as athe-

<sup>1</sup> I follow Szczucki's description in SZCZUCKI, *Philosophie und Autorität*, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SZCZUCKI, *Philosophie und Autorität*, pp. 197-212.

<sup>3</sup> F. SOZZINI, CH. FRANCKEN, F. DÁVID, *Disputatio de adoratione Christi, habita inter Faustum Soccinum et Christianum Francken, necnon Fragmenta responsionis fusioris, quam F. Soccini parabat, ad Francisci Davidis de Christo non invocando scriptum: aliaeque nonnulla ad hoc argumentum pertinentia*, Racoviae, 1618.

<sup>4</sup> Except for Christoph Herdesheim's personal letter to Francken (20 November 1581). Herdesheim warned Francken of converting back to Catholicism with a reference to Simone Simoni, whose conversion presents «manifestum [...] Atheismum». Cf. Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, ms. 1488, f. 294v; as well as SZCZUCKI, *Philosophie und Autorität*, p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> «Quotquot ego vidi adorationis Christi oppugnatores, omnes tandem in atheismum sunt prolapsi: quod & tibi accidit, nisi sententiam mutaveris», in F. SOZZINI, CH. FRANCKEN, F. DÁVID, *Disputatio de adoratione Christi*, 33.

ism, the only possible way to avoid atheism would be to adopt Trinitarian theology – and Francken was aware of the fact that Sozzini would never adopt it. However, this dispute shows us how deep the possible uses of the term ‘atheism’ were engaged in the context of confessional culture.<sup>1</sup> The debate between the Italian and the German intellectual testifies a conflict which is entirely of a confessional character. There may be some secondary attitudes with secular tendencies towards a line of early *libertinage*, but the first context is that of the inner debates of antitrinitarianism.

The second element that accounts for Francken’s focus on the question of atheism seems to be somewhat banal. István Báthory, the king of Poland – of Hungarian origin – died in his hunting castle in Grodno on 13 December 1586. His physicians disputed about the medical causes, the possible mistreatment and even perhaps about his intended poisoning of the dead over years.<sup>2</sup> The debate was politically and confessionally motivated – at the end Simone Simoni, the Italian physician of the deceased king, accused other participants of being atheists. Francken was involved in this polemic in the late months of 1589 in Transylvania as a contributor to a published apology for the accused Giovanni Muralto.<sup>3</sup> Regarding Francken’s whole *oeuvre*, this is the very moment in which the theme of atheism became central for the German philosopher. The *Spectrum* and the *Disputatio*, both written between 1589 and 1591 in Cluj in Transylvania, arose as reflections on this political use of atheism. According to Francken’s diagnosis, none of the political uses of the term ‘atheism’ held sufficient philosophical ground. The ancient accusations<sup>4</sup> as well as the modern charges against intellectuals of being atheists can be viewed either as pure politically motivated speech acts or as false interpretations of philosophical thoughts which are theistic in their very nature. It is Francken’s genial discovery that a philosophical refutation of rational arguments for the existence of God had yet never been undertaken in the history of European philosophy. The task was given and the German philosopher readily fulfilled this purpose in his *Disputatio*. Francken’s program is very clear: he had to invalidate the political uses of atheism and to substitute it by a philosophical critique of philosophical theism.

<sup>1</sup> The polemic between Sozzini and Andreas Dudith reveals the same phenomena, especially concerning the uses of atheism. Cf. SIMON, *Die Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 47–49.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the list of the debate’s documents with some bibliographical details in SIMON, *Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 40–42.

<sup>3</sup> MURALTUS[–FRANCKEN], *Apologia Iohannis Muralti Medici, contra Simonem Simonium Lucensem*, Claudiopoli, 1589.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the ancient genre of ‘catalogue of atheists’ handed down through Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos*, IX. 51–56, and Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I 42, 117–119. Cf. M. WINIARCZYK, *Der erste Atheistenkatalog bei Kleitomachos*, «Philologus», 120, 1976, pp. 32–46. Francken used Sextus Empiricus’ work (as edited in Paris 1569, pp. 258–265) without adopting the sceptical perspective.

To conclude: the theme of atheism appears only very rarely in Francken's works before 1589. In 1583 it occurred as an external position which did not concern his debate with Sozzini at all. It was indeed the brutal fact of the denunciative use of the term in the framework of *political* speech which awakened Francken and drew his attention to the question of denial of God's existence. The first reaction on the topic in the *Spectrum* is thoroughly emancipative: none of the accused was and is atheist; the second reaction is a presentation of a holistic philosophical critique of theism. My possible reconstruction does not presuppose any corpus of libertine texts having been existed previously. Biagioni rightly emphasizes that many ideas of the first five chapters of the *De tribus impostoribus* had been circulating in Eastern European radical thinking in the last decades of the *Cinquecento*.<sup>1</sup> But this claim is not enough to establish the view about the early origin of the tractate. Francken's case shows us two points very clearly: 1) his early works had been enfolded within the framework of *radikale Reformation*, and we do not need to refer to any allegedly existing tradition of free thought or libertine atheism; 2) the topic of atheism appears relatively suddenly in his *oeuvre* following his encounter with the political usage of the term. Regarding the second point: here too, we do not need any presupposition for an interpretation other than Francken's philosophical erudition concerning Ancient, Hellenistic, Arabic, Scholastic and Renaissance thought. We may be easily misguided in studying the intellectual richness of Early Modernity, if we tend to establish an all too near connection between intellectual trends, such as Averroism, Machiavellism, Scepticism, Renaissance philosophy of nature (including natural psychology) and radical Protestantism. Such a strategy of unifying radical movements might have fascinated Campanella's own procedure of constructing his complex cultural identity in his time. However, our method of textual criticism ascertains our historical concepts in a more modest way. The concept of atheism presented in Francken's *Disputatio* can be treated as a result of his philosophical erudition described by textual criticism and a close reading of the texts. Since Francken's atheism presupposes no other motifs than his engagement in the debates of Protestantism, his philosophical erudition and his accidental encounter with the political use of the term, Biagioni's hypothesis of a tradition of free thought is superfluous here. I do not deny the existence of a 'new philosophy' or a tradition of 'libertine thinking' in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, of course, but some elements peculiar to radical reformation and to the Aristotelian tradition of philosophy are able to give us a more economic way to situate Francken's radicalism in the spectrum of Early Modern thought.

<sup>1</sup> BIAGIONI, *Christian Francken e le origini*, p. 245.