

Pre-conceptual understanding of God: The comparison of Karl Rahner and Mulla Sadra's views

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Abstract

In this article, the views of Karl Rahner and Mulla Sadra on the pre-conceptual understanding of God are compared. Although these two thinkers belong to different historical and intellectual traditions, there are some ways in which they can be compared. With the adaptation of the concept of Transcendental Thomism from Joseph Marshall's thought and the use of Heidegger's ontology, Rahner presents a new interpretation of onto-theology. Rahner says that Heidegger's ontology ultimately leads to nihilism, since Heidegger interprets Being in terms of nothingness. Rahner believes that ontology should determine its orientation regard God, either as atheistic or theological approach, but the Heidegger's ontology is silent about God and does not speak positively or negatively about Him. The most important feature of Dasein in Heidegger's thought is to ask of being, and this asking shows that Dasein has pre-conceptual or a-priori understanding of God. According to Rahner, Dasein's asking of Being indicates that he or she has pre-conceptual understanding of absolute Being or God. Rahner takes the idea of 'pre-conception'(Vorgriff) from Heidegger's philosophy and uses it in direction of his theological purposes. Like Marshall and some of the French spiritualists such as Maurice Blondel, Rahner emphasizes on dynamic nature of reason, and believes that Dasein's permanent quest for understanding of Being and his or her active presence in the world is impossible without a-priori understanding of reality. Although Dasein is aware of his finitude and knows that the death will end up all of his possibilities but still has an uninterrupted effort to outline new plans for future and understanding the universe. Referring to Thomas Aquinas' philosophy, Rahner poses a new interpretation of the process of mental abstraction. In his opinion, the process of abstraction can be analyzed in three moments:

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comparison, negation, and transcendence. The human mind first compares objects and looks at their differences and similarities, and then rejects the particularity of objects and extract the universal concepts that are applicable to many things. The negation of the particularity of objects and transcending them to universal concepts depends on the fact that man has pre-conceptual understanding of absolute Being (God). Therefore, any knowledge that man finds from the world cannot be realized without pre-conceptual understanding of God. In fact, the transcendental horizons of human comprehension can not filled with the finitude and and particularity of objects, and this leads to dynamics of human intellect for acquiring the science. On the other hand, endless activity of Dasein is not possible without understanding his own finitude and going beyond of present situation, and this requires a pre-conceptual understanding of Absolute Being. Of course, pre-conceptual understanding of God does not mean a-priori understanding in terms of epistemological approach, but in existential one's. On this basis, Rahner joins the existential attitude of the universe with Aquinas' doctrine of theology, thus allowing the possibility of dialogue between contemporary ontology and theology. The fruit of such combination can be seen in onto-theology or ontology that based on theology.

Also, Mulla Sadra on the basis of ontological attitude and explaining the universe as manifestation of God, speaks of the pre-conceptual encounter of human with God. This confrontation is universal and infallible. According to this confrontation, God is familiar for every ignorance man, and the people are intrinsically know Him. Also, Mulla Sadra speaks of pre-conceptual encounter of human in the realm of prenatal world according to arc of ascent and arc of descent. In Sadra's view on Abstraction, It can be outlined three epistemological moment: impossibility of acquired knowledge to God, intuitional understanding of God, demonstration for applying the concept of Being to God. Sadra maintains that God is the foundation of being and phenomenon in relation to God, are pure connection. Therefore, knowledge of everything requires knowledge of God. Analyzing of this theory is based on some views in Sadra's doctrine such as: ontological attitude (fundamentality of existence), universe as manifestation of God, arcs of ascent and descent, the being of God as beyond of infinite. Therefore it can be claimed: in terms of this fact that in Sadra's philosophy the being of God is the origin of universe, then pre-conceptual confrontation of human with God is prerequisite for every cognition. Although, Mulla Sadra discusses the pre-conceptual understanding of God in prenatal world and in this case his position is dissimilar to Rahner's one.

Keywords: Onto-theology, Mulla Sadra, Karl Rahner, Heidegger, Pre-conceptual Understanding, Transcendental Thomism

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