

# Theonomy and Autonomy:

*The change in the understanding of reason and order  
in western philosophy as metaphysical background of the rise  
and decline of natural law-thinking*

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## 0. Introduction

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In modern times the natural law thinking has become increasingly in crisis. The orientation onto the order of natural law is replaced by an orientation to the autonomy of human being. Anyone who knows the history of philosophy, this change needs not to be surprised. You know, the idea of natural law presupposes a very specific type of metaphysics, which allows to construct a more or less strong relationship of divine order of God, the order of the world and the order of the human being as subject of reason. The connection between these three orders can be seen as the relationship between three types of reasons or rationalities which are more or less closely connected with each other and must be understood in relation to each other: I mean the connection between the absolute reason or rationality of God, the objective reason or rationality of the world which we call "nature" in a metaphysical sense, and the finite reason or rationality of the man. If we assume that the human being is free, then a certain tension between the divine order and human autonomy is virtually inevitable. During the history of ideas, the tension between theonomy and autonomy was resolved in different ways depending on the understanding of reason, which influences the understanding of absolute, objective and subjective reason and the connection between them, too. But, as we shall see, with the changing of the relation between and the modern understanding of the three rationalities of God, world and man, the natural law thinking loses its metaphysical fundamentals.

In the following I try to explain in form of a short history of ideas which philosophical developments in the background of the problem, the replacement of theonomy by autonomy in modern times, lead to the rise

and decline of the natural law thinking in the western world. Before I follow this story of reason, I must explain the correlation of reason and order.

## **1. The relation of „order“ and „reason“**

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### 1.1 The reference to a rational order as a basic orientation for human beings

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The ideas of „reason“ or „rationality“ and the idea of order are strictly correlated. When we look into the history of thoughts we can conclude: we speak of the presence of reason whenever if we assume an order or a rational structure with well-formed relations: we speak of a rational order of thought, a reasonable order of nature, a reasonable order of society, of cultures and cultural communities, an order of language, of institutions, an order of state, of moral systems, we speak of a legal order, an order of economy, of science or an order of religions etc. An order is a real order, works like an order and can be called an order only if it is reasonable and coherent, that means: it consists of comprehensible internal relations, which form a completely connected system of reasons and consequences, causes and effects, principles and derivations. Every order must be dominated by an internal coherent structure, which can be explained rationally. In addition, it seems that on a long run the stability and solidity of socie-

ties, nations, and cultures, which follow certain existing orders of co-existence depend on their reasonable coherence or rational justification, which helps the people to follow the given orders.

The real and concrete orders of societies, of states and constitutions, of economic and scientific systems etc. in one culture or civilisation are not monolithic orders, which stand for themselves or are justified only by themselves. It is a claim of our understanding that they must be connected one to another to work together harmonically and without problems in a long run. The claim of rational coherence forced us to look for a higher order from which the real orders get their ultimate justification. Only the relation of all real orders to a higher order guarantees the rational coherence of our orientations. This higher order must be an order in a deeper sense. Such an order must work like an ultimate justification or normative orientation for all our trials to establish concrete or real orders. This metaphysical order must be able to explain the correctness and the legitimacy of existing human orders which must be in rational coherence with it.

## 1.2 Three founding orders

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The Western philosophy is since its origins “logo-centric” by nature. In this history, we can find three big ideas of such founding orders which are concerted like three rational systems. They justify and orientate the concrete human orders. These three orders which we can identify as a natural, a divine, and a human order have their own rationality and coherence which works in an objective given way like the natural order, or works in an absolute way like the divine order, or in

a subjective finite way like the human order. Therefore, we can speak about three kinds of reasons, which dominate these three orders: the absolute reason, the objective reason, and the subjective reason. I will shortly explain those three orders of reason:

- First, there is the idea of a cosmic order of the world. Its manifestation is the reasonable and coherent order of nature. We can speak of the objective given rational order of nature. If the life of man should succeed, it must be orientated on this natural order. The objective order is the internal order, which is always already in the world. We can understand it because the structure of this objective given rational order of the world coincides with the intelligible and comprehensible forms of our mind or intellect. The task of the human intellect is only to read intuitively in this objective given intelligible word-structures.
- Secondly, there is the idea of a divine, absolute coherent order, which dominates the being: it springs from the absolute reason of God. Only the coherence with the divine rational order legitimizes every human order because order is only possible and legitimated when it is founded in God. According to the Judeo-Christian idea of creation out of nothing the divine reason and its order is the origin of the natural order of the world, too: the objective given reasonable structure of the world is thought not to be eternal, therefore it must have a rational origin. The world was created from a divine reason and every order which works can be seen as originated and in accordance with by God's divine reason. That means: Only the absolute coherent divine reason-structure is responsible for the stability and fitness of the

natural order. In consequence, the divine mind must be seen at least as the normative source of all human orders, too.

- There is – thirdly - the idea of an order made by man in accordance to the finite abilities of his subjective reason: every order can be accepted only if it arises from and is justified by the finite subjective reason of man or is compatible with the rational insights of human beings. Orders are justifiable only by human insight. That presupposes the confidence that the reason of finite human beings is really competent to create justifiable and working orders for all human beings. These orders made by subjective reason will be neither absolutely right and definitely true nor simply arbitrary or incoherent. They will be fallible and in their historical development needy of a constant renewal or reformation to reflect the respective historical requirements.

In short: Throughout the history of philosophy there are three last orders, which give orientation for man:

- an order given by an absolute reason, which is traditionally called “God”,
- an order, which is objectively given in the reasonable coherent structure of the cosmos, which is traditionally called “nature” and which we can consider as a kind of “objective reason”, and
- the order, which arises from the finite human rationality, which we can call “subjective reason”.

In the various epochs of the history of philosophy in ancient, medieval and modern times one of these three rational orders or reasons takes the guidance and is seen as normative orientation with respect to the other: in antiquity, this is the objective reason of the cosmos, in the

Middle Ages, this is the absolute reason of God, and in modern times this is the subjective reason of man. For the history of the self-constitution of subjective reason in the thinking of the West, the disempowerment of both, the objective and the absolute reason, in modern times is crucial. However, the fact is that the human reason is de-potentiated at the end of the modern era, too, as we see in the post-modern idea of "anything goes" which is guided by the idea of the destruction of all great narrations and traditional orders in favour of freedom. This is the actual problem the western societies have to deal with.

### 1.3 The tension between the idea of rational order and human freedom

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Indeed, a look at the history of philosophy shows that there was always a kind of natural tension between the idea of rational order and human freedom. It is easy to explain this tension:

- Every system of thought that sets an order as absolutely given must necessarily negate any real human freedom; the man is degraded to a kind of marionette of the existing absolute order, which works like a kind of metaphysical dictatorship. Human freedom in a substantial understanding would be senseless. Freedom can only be understood as a kind of disturbance or disorder which is significant for the finiteness of human beings, a kind of metaphysical accident in an at all intelligent designed

world. In relation to the dignity of given metaphysical, natural or divine order the human individual seems to be worthless.

- And otherwise every system of thought that misunderstands human freedom as an absolute freedom which is not connected to reason and therefore disordered in the sense that its choices are totally unbounded, arbitrary and lack of any rational orientation, must negate necessarily and apriorily any order which must lead to a permanent chaotic situation. Under this disordered conditions human cooperation and coexistence are impossible. But in relation to the absolute willing of the individual not only any metaphysical, natural or divine order but also any human given order is seen as worthless, as superstitious and in consequence as dangerous for the real basic needs of the individual.

Neither an order without real freedom nor freedom without any order is helpful and useful for the life and the self-understanding of man. Instead, the relation between order and freedom must be constructed and can be understood as a dialectical one.

Während das Mittelalter diese Spannung zugunsten eines Primats der Ordnung aufzulösen versucht hat, geht – übrigens ausgerechnet verursacht durch die theologische Debatte um die Allmacht Gottes – im Verlaufe der Neuzeit dieser Primat an die Freiheit über. In der Moderne erzeugt die Verabsolutierung der Freiheit gegenüber der Ordnung Probleme ganz eigener Art.

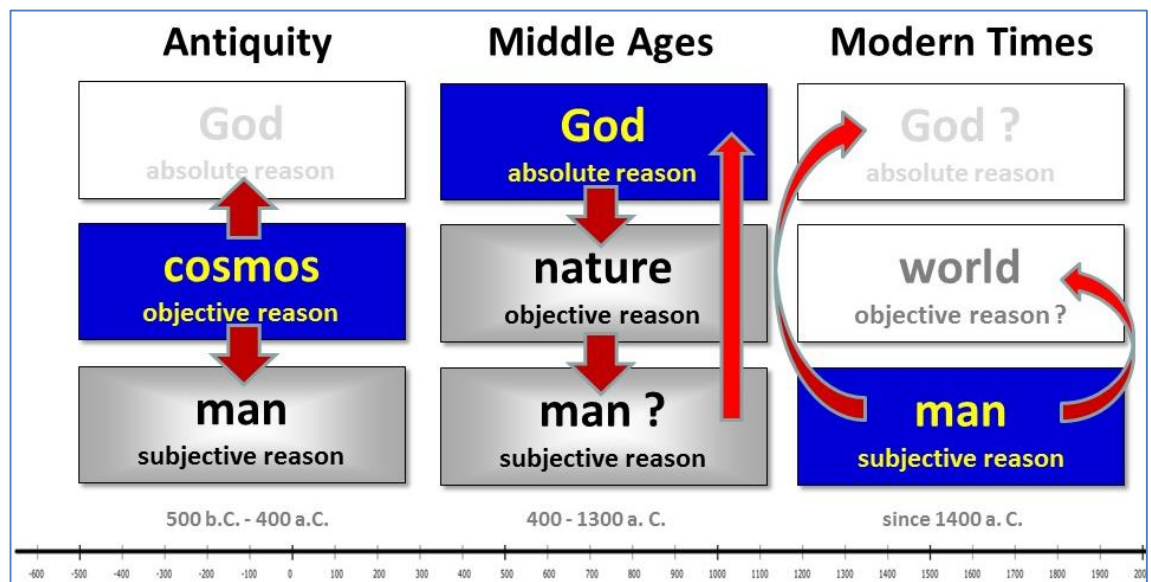
During the middle ages this tension between order and freedom was dissolved in favour of a primacy of the order. In modern times the



tension was dissolved in favour of a primacy of freedom. Its interesting to see that the chance was essentially initiated by an theological debate in the late Middle Ages, the question of the omnipotence and freedom of God himself. This debate was the beginning of the decline of natural-law-thinking and the starting point of the primacy of human autonomy compared to the primacy of a divine or natural order.

To understand how the modern problem of this tension between order and freedom was generated we have to look into the history of Western Thinking to reconstruct the genealogy of the problem.

## 2. A short history of the problem: The struggle for primacy of freedom or order



## 2.1 The objective reason of the cosmos and the primacy of the cosmic order

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The pre-Christian antiquity saw the world dominated by an eternal order which has no beginning and no end. As this order was ever since like the cosmos itself, it needed no origin for its explanation, because the world had no beginning and no end. Its rationality is manifested in the harmony and regularity of natural processes and in the well orderliness of the state. While the specific individual things are transient, their rise and fall is regulated and guided by eternal ideas, by the eternal “logos” of the world which works like an internal law of the cosmos. These laws are static and not dynamic. These forms remain stable in all superficial change. The subjective-human reason, which participates at the logos of the world, can – however - recognize this order, which is reflected in the individual things as their universal or essence and therefore. Epistemology and metaphysics, knowledge and ontology fall together because both take measure at the nature of things. The appropriate reference to this metaphysical order guarantees truth and certainty of knowledge as well as the success of life.

In short: The eternal order, which manifests itself in the structures of the world and in the nature of the state can be described as objective reason. It enables orientation and knowledge of the world for subjective human reasons. The order of the world did not need a divine reason as a creator of its order because it was eternal and the law, the well-formed structure, the nature of the world has always been in the world. That the world has a beginning and an end, was as unimaginable as that there may be something historically new. Only in this

context, it can be understood that history in ancient times is imagined as the steady recurrence of the same.

The subjective reason of man was called the “nous” or intellect. His task was to recognize this given order of the world by a kind of intuition, called “theoria” of the ultimate principles of this order. The “dianoia” had only the task to deal with this connecting them to the experience. Whereas the will had only the task to follow the insights of the human mind under the guidance of the intellect whose primacy was grounded in the connection with the eternal order. Everyone who could not follow the insights of the intellect in his acting was either stupid, weak-willed, or simply evil. The freedom of the will was not even a question. Freedom only was discussed primarily as liberty in a political sense. Therefore, the question of the primacy of order or freedom could not arise. The parallelism of objective and subjective reason was simply accepted as a normative standard in antiquity. The rationality of the world and the human being needed no relation to a third party from which they received their rational standards.

This situation changes with the Stoic philosophy and finally the philosophy of Neo-Platonism, especially the philosophy of Plotinus, whose interpretation of the logos as an transcendent principle of all forms of rationality and the later identification of this idea with the Christian God allows to speak now of God as an "absolute reason" which is seen as the origin of all reasonable orders.

## 2.2 The medieval “ordo”-thinking: human freedom under the primacy of an absolute order

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### 2.2.1 From immanent to transcendent principle of order: God as an absolute reason

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The Stoic philosophy thought it to be possible to call the “logos” as God and to identify both. In accordance to the Hellenistic philosophy, it was not forgotten that Plato had called the “nous” as God and that for Aristotle the first unmoved mover is seen as “noesis noeseos”. The first unmoved mover as eternal “nous” is imagined like a permanent self-thinking and eternal self-recognizing thinking, therefore, determined as an absolute rational, absolute coherent intellectual activity without any mistake or failure. On this background, the “logos”-idea is also gaining entrance into the philosophy and theology of medieval Christianity – and later in the philosophy of the Islamic world. On this way the “logos” changes from an immanent principle of world-events (as yet in the Stoa), to a transcendent, absolute principle especially in the Neoplatonism. This happened more powerful already in the Prologue of John's Gospel, where God is introduced as pre-existent Christ who is determined as the incarnate “logos”, as *logos creator* of the world: "In the beginning was the logos, and the logos was with God and the Word was God. In the beginning it was with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing happened." All what exists therefore must be seen as grounded in God's reason, as mentioned by the Christian early theologian Tertullian.

With the emergence of the idea of an "absolute reason" which was reinforced by the neo-platonic philosophy of Plotinus the "logos" changed from a static to a genetic-dynamic principle. God's original acting which was determined as a "creation out of nothing" was now interpreted as a process guided by his absolute reason. The world was seen as the product of the absolute reason. And as creation of an absolute reason it had to be rational, harmonious and coherent, too - despite its phenomenal multiplicity and diversity and despite its oppositions in the visible foreground. In the background of the visible individual things there is an order which is visible only for the human intellect. Only the intellect can see in a special kind of intuition or contemplation that behind the visible world there is an order, which guides all single things and guarantees the harmony of the world, an "objective order" given by the absolute reason of God and therefore participating at the absolute order of him. Plotinus explained this by the fact that the cosmos must be understood as an emanation of the supreme principle. As the "objective reason" of the world is grounded in the "absolute reason" the human mind as a created "subjective reason" can find orientation by following the "objective reason". He can find the "absolute reason" indirectly by recognizing the "objective reason". That is possible because "logos" is also the essence of the human soul and coincides with the ego. However, as a "subjective reason" it is a discursive faculty, which mediates between the pure knowledge of the intellect and of sense experience.

### 2.2.2 Christian Thinking and rational understanding: divine order and human freedom – a relation of obedience

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This Christian Platonism remained the dominant philosophy of the Middle Ages until the reception of Aristotle in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Platonic ideas are consistently understood as in the mind of God. These ideas in the intellect of God are the principles by which God firstly in the act of creation brings order, meaning and direction in the shapeless mass of matter. This divine rational order of the world is now seen as standard of knowledge and action for the finite human reason. The real point of reference of human knowledge were the overruling universals behind the particular things, the divine, first of all order-giving ideas, the divine cosmos, finally the divine intellect (*intellectus divinus*), in which human reason objectively finds orientation and guidance. However, the human possibility of this relecture of the nature with the help of the ideas in the mind of God requires a certain parallelism between divine and human reason. This certain parallelism was guaranteed by the biblical doctrine of the divine-likeness of man as “*imago Dei*”. It manifests itself - so the Greek Fathers of the Church - in the possession of reason and freedom. To be awarded both, makes the special human dignity, how in particular the Greek church father Gregory of Nyssa, highlighted forcefully. (Here I must make an important annotation which explains something very important and decisive for the difference of the Christian and the Islamic view of man: in opposite to the Christian Thinkers the Islamic-arab Thinkers like al-Kindi, ar-Razi, al-Farabi or Ibn Sina (called in Latin “Avicenna”), which all share the neoplatonic view of the relation between God, world and man, the idea of the man as “*imago dei*”

which in Christian tradition is used to explain the strong rational abilities of man despite of his freedom and which grounds the dignity of every man independent of his religion, plays a less important or even role in Islamic-Arab philosophy and theology. Sometimes it is thought as suspicious or is simply not accepted because seen as heretic. In consequence there is less confidence into the abilities of the human reason as we can see for example in the related philosophy of al-Ghazali: truth and insight is possible for man only if it is given by a divine revelation and needs authorities like prophets who receive the truth exclusively and communicate it to the people in form of a book. Therefore, it is only consequent that Muslim people must believe not only in God but in the prophet, too. There is less confidence in the power of subjective reason and the abilities of human freedom. Every finite order which is the result of a dialectic of reason and freedom therefore must be seen as suspicious).

My task now is to explain mainly the role of freedom in the mediaeval-neo-platonic view: The mutual reference of divine and human reason to the objective reason of the natural order was the grounding reason, why order and freedom were seen as compatible with each other in the Middle Ages – but with a priority for order.

At this point we have to remember that in antiquity freedom was mentioned primarily in terms of outer, political freedom. In the Christian Middle Ages, the idea of an "inner freedom" of the will or a real freedom of choice arises. In the letters of Saint Paul and in withdrawal from the Mosaic Law, the question of the inner freedom of man is a focal point of his preaching under the title "law of liberty". Saint Augustine characterizes the Christian tradition through his doctrine of

“*liberum arbitrium*”, the freedom of choice, for almost a millennium. This freedom did not seem proper destructive, and so it had to be made compatible with the medieval idea of “*ordo*”.

But under neoplatonic conditions freedom can only mean to be in accordance to the order established by God. To act in opposite to this divine order is seen as a deficit of freedom, finally because God reacts and fights back to maintain the order given by himself: the consequences are illness, suffering, and death. All disorders caused by pure instincts, inclinations, desires, etc. violate the divine order. They are rejected as sin. Finally, the medieval man could not imagine that finite man could break the order of the infinite God by his own finite power. Therefore, superhuman, quasi semi-divine forces were adopted, demons, ghosts, devils, semi-spirits etc. were adopted as the underlying cause of such non-compliance. The physical body, which was identified as the principle of disorder, was a gateway of their work.

The freedom of God was conceived according to this topos and therefore formed no particular theme. God acts always and necessarily according to its nature that means in consequence: order and freedom are always identical in God and His work like reason and will, wisdom and power. The very fact that God acts always according to his pure wisdom and goodness, constitutes the divine freedom. Freedom and omnipotence of God cannot be understood otherwise than as an *ordinate action*, which means: according to the eternal order of creation, understood. It is simply not conceivable that God acts except the eternal order. The divine and eternal order of idea, one might say, is the



higher-ranking representation of the essence of God than freedom. Based on the assumed ability to God's reason we could say: The divine mind or intellect dominates the divine will. This intellectualism is the base of the priority of reason and order in the Middle Ages. For human reason thus guarantees the order of the world because God was not a chaotic arbitrary God; he created the world not arbitrary but in accordance to the laws he have given as absolute reason. But the relation of divine order and human freedom has to be seen as a relation of obedience. Only this obedience and compliance guaranteed human reason that it gets a stable and successful orientation for its thinking and acting.

### 2.3 Order under the primacy of absolute freedom

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This relation of order between absolute, objective, and subjective reasons breaks down at the end of the Middle Ages. This collapse was caused by the reception of Aristotle in the 12th century, a reception which was initiated by the Spanish-Muslim thinker Ibn Rushd, in Latin called "Averroes" (By the way: the Aristotelian philosophy of Averroes had great effects in the Christian world but was more or less ignored totally in the Muslim-Arab world whose philosophical thinking remained orientated on the neo-platonic metaphysics. Indeed, the way of thinking of the oriental and the occidental world begins to divorce at this historical point). However: With the reception of the original and not neo-platonic reinterpreted Aristotle the relation of order and freedom becomes a problem in the Western Philosophy.

This development has to do with the change in the consciousness of freedom in the late Middle Ages. The reasons for this development are originally theological. The relationship between the absolute reason of God, the objective reason of the world, and the finite subjective reason of man, which guaranteed the unity of order and freedom, at the end of the 13th century was made dubious by the *concept of absolute freedom of God*. The absolute freedom of God has already been discussed since the 10th century: the question was whether a God could be called free and omnipotent, whose will was determined and forced to follow always his own intellect. Ultimately there were religious-theological reasons, which led to a resolution of the unity of order and freedom as to the end of the medieval "ordo"-thinking. A God who has delivered the people, who granted forgiveness to the sinners, and is able to do miracles, acts ultimately not according to the measure of an eternal order, but his almighty actions must be thought as coming from divine freedom at all.

It was in particular William of Ockham, who developed the concept of freedom of God in a strong consequence, by distinguishing in God two powers in his acting: there is a divine acting with absolute power (*facere de potentia absoluta*) and otherwise there is a divine acting with ordained power (*facere de potentia ordinata*). I must explain these two forms of power a little bit:

*Potentia absoluta* means that the action of God must be thought as independent of any given order. His will and action is not given an order or must follow a law, but they are "above" any order in the sense of logical priority. Any order, even an eternal order, must be thought

as intended by God's will. Any order, even the eternal, can be logically reduced to an act of will.

The will is the origin of any order. But God's absolute acting and order-setting is not "*inordinate*", that means, without order or even against the order. Rather, his will is an order-producing will. And he acts then according to his self-given order. He determines the actions corresponding to the desired order by himself. It is therefore one and the same will and one and the same action, which is free in one respect and order-related in another respect. In the perspective of God an act of absolute power (*facere de potentia absoluta*) always includes an act of order-related and order-setting power (*facere de potentia ordinate*) therefore not sufficient. And vice versa any *facere de potentia ordinata* includes a *facere de potentia absoluta*. Therefore, freedom has the priority against order. There is no "absolute" order anymore. With this construct it is the first time in the Greco-Christian tradition that a real "new" order as anything "new" at all is conceivable and legitimate.

This simultaneity of "facere absolute" and "facere ordinate" was transmitted even by the theologians of the 14th century to the doctrine of human freedom, so that the freedom of man is thinkable in analogy to the double structure of the freedom of God - a transfer which was justified with the well-known "imago dei"- doctrine. An acting according to an order - if it is to be free action - must be established in an original act of pure freedom; but this free action is realized not "absolutistic", but as the production of order. Freedom is therefore, one might say, the legitimacy of order. The sense of order is the arranging and

realizing freedom. This applies not only to the acting of God but to the acting of man, too.

## 2.4 The universalization of the primacy of freedom in modernity

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What are the consequences of this doctrine of freedom for the development and the course of Modern Times? First of all, Ockham's doctrine is nominalistic and voluntaristic, because it is now thinkable that God produces merely single things, too, when he wants it. But in the view of the man: when there is the danger that there are purely single things without connection to ontological universals then it seems possible that the divine order and in consequence the objective order of the world is lack of coherence. The subjective reason of man encouraged by the doctrine of "image dei" must for himself finally give himself an order. The function of God for science and the knowledge of man must be reinterpreted. We know the result: in modern time, we should make science "etsi deus non daretur", as if there would be no God. And we make all orders under the perspective: "etsi deus non daretur".

In the process of secularization of modern times, there happens a universalization of the primacy of freedom with respect to any order. In this process, human reason took the vacant place of God as the absolute reason. It sees itself as freedom and thus the secular heritage of the former theologically understood *facere de potentia absoluta*. The human reason is the new origin and the sovereign author of any order and any legitimate law. Only the human reason gives law and order.

Ockham's nominalism dominated in the 14th and 15th centuries almost all European universities and influenced all areas of life and science. It was crucial for modernity that in the process of secularization the dominance of the question of God was restricted as unimportant. The theology had to give its leading position among the *scientiae* to the philosophy and the emerging sciences. The divine reason and in consequence the natural order of the world were no longer able to offer a reliable knowledge for the orientation of man. In thus way the way was open to a universalization of the idea of freedom.

We can conclude: The man entered the former position of God and gave an order to the world. Every acceptable order must be an order of freedom. The man claims authority for any order setting in the course of modern times - regardless of divine and natural orders. The human reason is the new origin and the sovereign author of any order and legitimate law – in the field of science, education, politics, economics, art, society or in the field of morals.

In general, the human reason sees itself as the new lawgiver who has taken over the legislative competence from the old instances, namely theology and metaphysics. These releases rarely have the tendency to despotism, they are not chaotic or anarchic as we can see in several fields:

- For example, the modern understanding of market: the economic market is understood as a dynamic structure, organized by offer and ask, and regulated by freedom.
- For example, the modern state: the ruler is no longer seen as the earthly presence of God's rule, he must justify himself by contract theories. As all human beings are seen as reasonable

they have the natural right to control the ruler who is not in possession of a higher form of reason. Democracy is the logical consequence. If the problem of freedom and order is abolished unilaterally in absolutism, then freedom provokes a whole new phenomenon: the revolution.

- For example, the modern science: the science of reason is not a "divine science" but a science "etsi deus non daretur". The problem of method is decisive for it, not the problem of an ultimate truth. Its object is not the being, but are the laws. Their motive is not the knowledge of God, but the curiosity ("curiositas"). But when it is no longer certain that God has created a reasonable order of the world, then the relation of human knowledge to God is no longer necessary in order to understand the world-structures. The human reason therefore must develop methods to find the structures of reality in a self-responsible manner.
- finally our understanding of history: the history is made by man and is the place of his freedom. It can be understood neither as fate nor as Providence, but as the self-representation of rational freedom in time. The story is simply the history of freedom, and the meaning of history is freedom. Hegel says in the introduction to the "*Lectures about the Philosophy of History*": the "final end of the world" is "the reality of freedom".

## 2.5 The misunderstanding of freedom and the depotentialization of reason and order

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However, the primacy of freedom is not only a story of success. It also causes problems if freedom is set absolutely: If Freedom is not understood as transcendental as the primary condition of order but historically, it follows, that the reason must produce successively new laws, regulations, and orders to demonstrate its essence as absolute freedom. Freedom then is not understood as the unity of absolute and ordinate action, rather than making new things, as modernity of facts. "Change" becomes a value in itself, and historically valid can be only the New, again and again, how claims the postmodern philosophy. This infinite progressiveness of the New does not have a goal; it is due to a misunderstood absoluteness of freedom in the perspective of a negative freedom, which means an orderless independence of all and which forgets that freedom as autonomy is freedom, only if it produces real and concrete orders. Otherwise, freedom is a source of disorientation, as is impressively demonstrated in postmodernism. Therefore, the German philosopher Hermann Krings can speak of a "self-misunderstanding of reason as an absolute freedom".

## 3. An order of freedom: "sapientis est ordinare"

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What are the results of this historical developments?

We have seen that in modern times the model of absolute freedom, originally connected with the *potestas Dei*, is claimed by the human

reason. The finite subject of reason has become the base of legitimacy of any order. Its orientation on the own capacity of autonomy takes the place of an orientation in a divine order that is manifested in nature. In the course of this metaphysical change of Government a "metaphysics of freedom" takes over the reins of a metaphysics of divine or natural order; intellectualism is replaced by voluntarism, realism by nominalism, the natural law by the law of reason; theonomy by the autonomy of the finite subject of reason.

Especially in the sphere of catholic Neo-Scholasticism this development was seen more than a loss than as a profit. The refusal of the results of this development is justified with the danger of subjectivism and the relativism. But – as a philosopher I think - there is no way back to such a metaphysic. What else: Neither Platonism nor Aristotelianism, neither Neoplatonism nor Thomism, neither modern rationalism nor modern empirism are part of revelation. Their systems must not be believed, but be justified argumentatively and philosophically. They all are historically-related attempts to make transparent the relationship between God, World and Man. They all uses historically-related concepts, metaphysical intuitions and precondition, which changes in the history of thinking with good reasons.

But indeed and without doubt, this transformation from theonomy to autonomy is ambivalent. The man is not like God. He never is absolutely free. Man is a finite being; and though he claims his freedom as essential to order, it is nevertheless finite freedom. As such, the human reason needs the insight that freedom is always related to order. The problem of an unconditional, but finite freedom is the problem of Western modernity. These problems will only be avoided if freedom



and law, freedom and order remain dialectically related to each other: For freedom without reference to a rational order is anarchy, chaos, and arbitrariness. Nevertheless, as a result of our history we cannot accept the reverse perspective any longer, an order without freedom. The claim of freedom is unconditioned. This claim would remain general, formal, and empty without the attempt to realize it in practical systems of freedom, in the real and concrete orders made by man and which guide the real life of people. Freedom can only be realized by putting systems or orders as the condition of its existence. Nevertheless, there remains a tension between freedom and order that cannot be resolved: the concept of order means in principle a "totality of necessary rational relationships". That contradicts with the concept of freedom as "an absolute beginning ability". Order and freedom remain therefore in a permanent contradiction; this means that freedom is by its nature in opposite to all its realization in form of orders: the order of work, of law, of state. Freedom must contradict them necessarily. But this aporetic structure is the presupposition of its finite realization. That means: we can reach always only finite freedom in finite orders. The orders we found therefore have to be reformed continuously. Such finite orders are suitable for the realization of freedom only, if they reflect the basic contradiction of freedom and order in itself. It follows that neither human orders are unconditional perfect orders, nor that human freedom is realized totally in any kind of order. The pitfalls of this dilemma are the absolute reduction of freedom at the cost of the order, or vice versa, the absolute reduction of the order at

the expense of freedom. To avoid these pitfalls, the relationship between order and freedom or system and freedom have to be determined dialectically.

The "deal of freedom" („*commercium libertatis*“), which is a dialectical one of finite freedom in finite orders, therefore, is always a very challenging, even exhausting business which has to deal continuously with certain dilemmas, aporias, paradoxies and problems. But sophisticated transactions require the wisdom and the wise. Thomas Aquinas mentioned the special task of the wise with the sentence: "Sapientis est ordinare": It is the task of wise man to establish or create order. When we read the sentence from the other way around then every emergence of finite order may be understood as a manifestation of wisdom. Wisdom is not an autonomous producer of order. But the wise man moderates the free forces in this game so that they can cooperate together freely and find a reasonable order of freedom which is aware of the permanent tension between order and autonomy remembering the original meaning of the word "autonomy": Human beings have to give themselves free as well as reasonable a rational und reasonable order of freedom.

And by the way: in the Christian thought the history of the autonomy not only starts with the transition from the middle ages to modern times. It was the Christian thinking which the first time discovered the idea of "inner freedom" as a freedom of will and choice. The ancient world had no idea of it. It was Paulus who treated the question of inner freedom in withdrawal of the "Mosaic Law" under the title "Law of Liberty" Paulus. I remember the teaching of St. Augustine about "*liberum arbitrium*". For the early church and the greek „fathers of church“, for

example Origenes or Gregory of Nyssa, the autonomy of man as a subject of rationality was a strong indication for the similarity of man to God and as consequence of his particular dignity.