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Transformations of the „German Mysticism“: Tauler – Theologia Germanica – Luther – Paracelsus – Weigel

Summary

This dissertation can be seen as an attempt to give a detailed and contextual answer to the question, which spiritual and intellectual traditions inspired the German religious thinker Jacob Böhme (+1624), whose work I had analyzed in my previous thesis (2001). The main concern was to examine the fusion of two lines of thought which determined the work of Böhme: the late medieval „German Mysticism“ and the Paracelsian natural philosophy.

The frame of the dissertation can be described as searching for the bridge of thought that spans between the Dominican preacher John Tauler (+1361), as the most influential representant of the „German Mysticism“, and the protestant pastor Valentin Weigel (1533–1588). It was in Weigel's work where the confluence of both currents came about before Böhme and in a distinct and for Böhme influential manner. The dissertation doesn't attempt to give an exhausting description of the whole tradition between Tauler and Weigela but concentrates solely on a handful of the most important thinkers, or works, that played main role in the evolution of ideas in this period. A separated chapter was dedicated to each of them. As to the general method, the retrospective analysis was used as it seemed to be most suitable for the original task, i.e. the searching for the inspirational sources of Böhme. It means, each chapter's topic was considered primarily as to it's place in the development of the thought leading finally to Weigel's, or Böhme's, system.

The starting point of the investigation is a detailed analysis of the influential work of John Tauler and its comparison with the thought of Meister Eckhart, Albertus Magnus, Berthold of Moosburg, Dietrich of Freiberg and also with the heretical conceptions of the „Free Spirits“. The essential terms *grunt* and *gemuet*, established by Eckhart, are exposed as a result of the combination of neoplatonic elements with the influence of Arabic Aristotelianism (Averroism), to which Tauler himself adds the (Franciscan) voluntarism while making a shift from the typical Dominican intellectualism.

The anonymous *Theologia Germanica*, which used be seen side by side with the works of Tauler, comes with some shifts in opinions. It results, as the chapter II also wants to prove, mainly from the author's effort at a systematical criticism of the „Free Spirits“ and their antinomianism. As in Tauler's case, even better, we can observe the clear presence of neoplatonic topics together with elements of voluntarism and nominalism, as well as the striking presence of the theme of imitatio Christi which serves as a regulative principle against the heretical conceptions of the divinization of man. The chapter also pays special attention to the peculiar conception of the relation between God and his creature, which tends to make the existence of created (human) being the condition and organ for God's self-knowledge.

The following chapter on Martin Luther (+1546) as an influential editor of *Theologia Germanica* and an important interpreter of Tauler's mysticism refers to the outcomes of the previous chapters. It disapproves the still common idea of „late“ Luther's breakup with all kinds of mysticism, and consequently also with the Tauler's, and presents a historical account of the influence of Tauler and *Theologia Germanica* in the 16th century.

The chapter IV aims to grasp Paracelsus as an inheritor of the „German Mysticism“ in its lutheran reformulation and at the same time of the neoplatonic thought of the Florentine Renaissance; not only Ficino but also Pico della Mirandola (especially his conception of man, man's radical freedom, essential „polymorphism“, as well as the notion of astral influences and their relation to man) are discussed as possible sources. Paracelsus' use of concepts of „German Mysticism“ is marked with a certain neglect of their original theological and philosophical content. Yet, this doesn't hinder him from coining his reformational ideas, the social and religious radicality of which sometimes reveals their close relation to Anabaptists. For Weigel, here, the most important concepts will be the Paracelsian neoplatonic trinitary anthropology

(body, astral spirit, immortal soul) and his conception of the „light of nature“ and „light of mercy“, which, for Paracelsus, are of the same importance.

Although (prospectively, with respect to the thought of Jacob Böhme) each of the previous chapters has its independent interpretative value, the keystone of the dissertation is the last chapter on Weigel. It explains his most important and original concepts, and shows the influence of Taulerian and Paracelsian ideas in his work, where they are for the first time consciously joined and fused, as well as to identify more precisely some other influences (Boëthius, Hugo a Sancto Victore, Cusanus, probably also Pico della Mirandola). The aim is also to determine the impact of neoplatonism, and its form adopted by Weigel, so typical for the whole tradition, as well as its relation to the lutheran voluntarism and to the principle *sola fide* which plays such an important role in Weigel's work since its very beginnings. Detailed analysis of Weigel's treatises of different periods enables to sketch an important evolution of his thought. Starting with direct orientation on Tauler and *Theologia Germanica*, yet always already in connection with some hidden Paracelsian concepts, it was followed by the works using more Paracelsian notions and giving much more space to the natural philosophical and cosmological questions, landing finally in the renewed, and reworked, plain mysticism of Weigel's late works. It is shown, nevertheless, that, in contrast to Paracelsus, Weigel's interest in nature as another source of knowledge remains always secondary: it is only means for the religious knowledge. Also, Weigel's late „mystical“ phase must be counted for more akin to the heresy of the „Free Spirit“ than to what was articulated by Tauler or *Theologia Germanica* – precisely as the criticism of „Free Spirit“.