

Eschatology in Philosophical Discourse: Methodology, Typology and Modern Interpretations

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the problem of eschatology in philosophical discourse as different to religious teachings. Though it was a rare topic in widespread philosophy, eschatology now becomes under close attention from the side of contemporary thinkers. For further installing eschatology in common philosophical discourse, we at first raise methodological questions and then offer typology of eschatological teachings. Here the main line divides cyclical eschatology in polytheistic religions from absolute eschatology in monotheism and Christianity. "Cyclical" means absence of "absolute end" but repeating process of death and proceeding of the universe. Otherwise, absolute eschatology relates to the unique development and final events of the world. Finely some contemporary eschatological observations are considered.

Keywords: eschatology, cyclical eschatology, absolute eschatology, polytheistic paradigm, monotheistic paradigm, personal and universal eschatology

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion "eschatology" (from Greek "eschaton" — "the last thing" or, the last event, finish (of history and cosmos)) meaning "reasoning about the end" either personal or universal, is a variety of religious and philosophical teachings concerning the final destiny of individual or cosmic living periods may be cyclic or unique. Religious outlook deals with eschatology more intensively than philosophy. Meanwhile now a number of outstanding thinkers paid close attention to eschatological problems that lifts eschatological discourse on a higher level of research. In this context we should mention Nikolay Berdyaev, M. Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and other contemporary thinkers. For actualizing eschatological problems in philosophical field, we want in this paper at first undertake the questions of methodology, at second, classify religious eschatological types and at third, consider some contemporary observations showing how eschatological problematic gradually occupies the interests of larger number of philosophers.

II. METHODOLOGY IN ESCHATOLOGICAL THINKING AND CLASSIFICATION OF ESCHATOLOGICAL TEACHINGS

The methodology starts from the point what is the essence of eschatological thinking that marks and distinguishes it from non-eschatological one. We are sure to admit that materialism has no elaborated eschatological doctrine and can only turn eschatological questions. Further, the concept of eternal progress, social, technological, scientific or any else stands in opposition to eschatology because progress is viewed as non-stop process whereas eschatological teachings are reasoning on "the end", "the borders" of some being. We propose classification of eschatological doctrines by sorting them in profiling, kinds and types.

In profiling aspect, eschatology may be religious or philosophical. Traditional religious teachings about "the borders" of creatures' stress finite character of the world and man in their earth being. Pronounced eschatological element contains in all more or less developed religions: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, as well as the religious and mythological traditions of the Scandinavians and Indians of America. The first variations appear already in ancient mythological systems. If we take as an example the confessional point of view of Christianity, eschatology is "the

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doctrine of the final or last day of the present existence of the world and humanity. About the second coming of Jesus Christ and world events that will immediately follow this. About the resurrection of the dead, the hour of the Last Judgment and the coming of the kingdom of God" [1].

Philosophical eschatology as distinct to religious one has its peculiarity and tells in non-confessional language about metaphysical, transcendent eternal reality, which is primordial and about secondary reality of nature being fatally finite. From philosophical point of view, eschatological questions connect to such important problems as temporal and spatial borders of nature, the purpose of being, the essence of human life, and others. Eschatological thinking concerns also the end and purpose of human history. The great contribution to the development of philosophical eschatology was made by representatives of Western existentialism, as well as by Russian religious philosophers – V. S. Soloviev, N. A. Berdyaev, S. N. Bulgakov, and Prince E. N. Trubetskoy.

Philosophers as well as religious thinkers answer questions about the relationship between sacred and secular, divine and human, express attempts to solve the problem of the dynamic relationship between the individual and the universal. The latter aspect correlates with individual eschatology (private), which reflects the historical plan of the individual's existence, with universal eschatology (general), which tells about the purpose of the history of humankind and the world itself. So far, there are at least three kinds of eschatology: we may highlight personal eschatology concerning after-death destiny of individual; historic eschatology — about the final of history; and cosmological eschatology that shows how the whole world transcends.

Apart of it, we find sharp distinction (even contradistinction), between two opposite types of eschatology — of cycling, or repeating ending of cosmos and of its absolute end. The main features of these two types we consider further.

III. CYCLIC ESCHATOLOGY IN POLYTHEISM VS ABSOLUTE ESCHATOLOGY IN MONOTHEISM

Many researchers have noted fundamental differences contrasting the eschatological concepts of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) with the eschatology of the eastern religions — Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and others. These differences lie in the models of perception of history and time in general. Based on this contrast, we distinguish two types of eschatological views: historical ("western" religions) and cosmological ("eastern" religions). Likewise, M. Eliade believed that there are certain differences between Biblical (Old Testament

and New Testament) eschatology and the forms of expression of eschatological ideas and views in other religious cultures [2]. The conditionality of such differences between monotheistic Bible eschatology and eschatological plots of polytheistic religions necessitated the introduction of two names to reflect specific forms of eschatological moods and ideas: historical type of eschatology and the cosmological/mythological one. Religions of primitive and eastern peoples, as polytheistic, are characterized by Theo-genesis and Cosmo-genesis ideas related to the archetype of the eternal struggle of two aspirations in the life of the cosmos — its fading and its becoming. The cosmological type of eschatology is based on an understanding of the cyclical nature of cosmic and historical development, that most of the ancient religions, for example, Ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Ancient Greek, Roman, and Indian support.

In the same type, the general principle underlying the concepts of the world history in Indian religions is the repeating series of giant cycles, which include a combination of shorter cycles. Within the small cycle, periods alternate according to the principle of the Golden, Silver, Copper and Iron epochs known in ancient Greek myths, which were stated by Hesiod. Similarly, in Hinduism, according to the Puranas, the first, perfect south (cf. the "Golden Age") is characterized by a long life expectancy of people (4 thousand years), the absence of cataclysms, suffering, vices, and the rule of divine law (dharma). $\frac{1}{4}$ shortens each subsequent south, and accordingly the state of space is degraded, living conditions are multiplied, evil is multiplied, dharma is violated, that lead to terrible disasters and are signs of the end of the world in Kali Yuga. Ultimate degradation should be replaced by the forthcoming golden age — as the beginning of a new small cyclic movement. In contrast to shorter cycles in West European mythology, the maha-yuga is equal to 4,32 milliard Earth years, and 1 thousand maha-yugas is one cosmic "Brahma day"/12 hours (1 Brahma day + 1 Brahma night of the same duration = 1 kalpa). By the second part of the kalpa, there comes the "night of Brahma," or the coagulation, destruction of the world to a state of chaos (pralaya), alternating with the creation (srishti) of the world, thus forming the "24 hours of Brahma" [3].

In the Mahabharata, the eschatological functions of Brahma are expressed in the "devouring" of everything.

"Creatures begets and devours ...

It produces beings, and there is a place for their convergence ..." [4]

In the primordial Vedanta text "Vedanta-sutra" we also meet with this metaphor:

“Eater [Brahman], because both mobile and motionless [i.e. the whole world] is consumed [by him as food]” [5].

The Vedanta-sutra says, “the creative activity of Brahman is just a game, as happens in the world.” The meaning of this game can be comprehended by referring to the concept of “yuga”, which in Sanskrit literally means yoke, a team for cattle. The four yugas (krita, treta, dvapara, and kali) are designated by the terms for playing dice, which corresponds to the dice in 4, 3, 2, and 1 point. Thus, Brahma’s game (lila) with the world is essentially a dice game.

Thus, having examined the Indian and similar religious eschatological doctrines, we concluded that they belong to the cyclical type, where the reversibility/repeatability of the cosmic being gives out pantheistic unity of the Divine and time, of supernatural and natural. There is no creationist idea in this eschatology, and it belongs to polytheistic paradigm.

On the contrary, Judaism and Christianity are characterized by historical type of eschatology, i.e. based on an understanding of the uniqueness and linearity of cosmic and historical development. History, within the framework of the general eschatological concept of Abrahamic religions, is associated with the history of the fall, where everything ends with the restoration of the harmony of the lost paradise, and the future Kingdom of Heaven acts as a kind of alter ego — the “golden age”. In other words, the model of the ideal past is superimposed on the model of the ideal future (Ede and Heavenly Jerusalem), where they become a generalized concept of paradise. Both of these projections — paradise in the past and the future — according to the eschatological view, are united by the timeless nature of being. The origins in the framework of eschatology do not come from the creation of the world, and not from the appearance of ancestors in Eden, but from their fall. The point here lies not in the fact that the paradise period of our ancestors' life was “beginningless”, but in its potential infinity to sin and the occurrence of death resulting from the sin. That is, the transition from mythological to historical time is associated with the emergence of ideas about the end of time, the necessity and inevitability of its coming and the allotted segment for the human race. In Christian understanding history is a single line that has its beginning and end, and has its meaningful conclusion.

In monotheistic paradigm, Personal God has quite different essence from His creation, because He created the world from nothing, so in theistic doctrine there is no essential unity between Him and temporal being which has unique development, unique history, therefore, one beginning and one ending.

IV. MODERN THINKERS ESCHATOLOGISTS

The interpretation of eschatology from a philosophical point of view is most relevant, because allows us to consider this phenomenon as a doctrine of a global ontological disaster, and not just the end of a physical, economic or political nature in general. As a distinctive feature of modernity, one can name the ongoing surge of eschatological ideas that find expression in all spheres of human life: the media, literature, music, cinema, etc. As a result, today eschatological ideas are becoming an element of both a religious and non-religious worldview. S. S. Averintsev said in this respect: “Eschatology in the form of “meta-history”, i.e. independent transcending of a noticeably accelerating course of history”, turned into prevalent topic in 20th century [6].

In this connection, it is necessary to ascertain the heterogeneity of the eschatological state in our time, distinguished by its breadth and multi-directionality: along with the idea of the future end of the world and the death of all humanity, there is also the idea of understanding the meaning of history and humankind’s place in it. In other words, the eschatology of the universal Armageddon is complemented by the eschatology of hope. First, the eschatological view of modernity is related to various options for the end of humankind: tragic or, optimistic. In addition, the globalization processes taking place in the modern world, all the time cause aggravation of eschatological aspects, which are an integral part of the work outlook. The essential aspect of eschatology clearly comes to the fore, which can be reduced to concern about the fate of man as an individual and the world as a whole, in the light of the idea of the death of the world and the future after it, which is expressed primarily in thoughts of salvation. Therefore, the evolution of the metaphysics of eschatology provides reasons to assign a leading role not so much to the death of the world, but to the ideas of a future world and salvation, because the very existence of the human race is being questioned.

Existentialist philosophers are moving now to the primeval frontiers of eschatological thinking. Judith Wolfe’s book centers on Heidegger’s developing commitment to an eschatological vision which though derived from theological sources but reshaped mainly to philosophy, especially phenomenology [7]. Heidegger’s “being-unto-death” philosophically discovers personal eschatology. In addition, Heidegger deeply concerns social eschatology in his severe critique of scientific-technical progressivism illusions of contemporary man: “Science does not think”. K. Jaspers exhibits harmful demonism of technology, that is why Hans Schwarz in his book “Eschatology” mentions K. Jaspers as a contemporary eschatological thinker who stands in contradiction with secular humanism, which is non-eschatological [8]. Social

eschatology becomes mainstream of contemporary existential philosophers, they demonstrate threats hanging over humanity and appeal to us “to start thinking” (Heidegger), thinking with the most sober assessment concerning our future and the dismissing of all kinds of illusions like “secular religion of progress” (N. Berdyaev) [9]. According to N. Berdyaev and Jaspers [10] eschatological thinking is to indicate for contemporaries the way out and salvation, which is possible only if we realize the danger of our destiny, recognize the “eschatology of being” (Jaspers) and consequently gain hope and equip with real rather than illusory means for prevention of disastrous “abyss” (Jaspers).

V. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the ideas of eschatology and salvation had belonging to the religious part of world outlook, now they go beyond religious vision, confirming the fact that eschatology is an element of philosophy and worldview in general. Methodologically we gave classification of eschatological teachings, disserting them in religious or philosophical (profiling); personal, historic and cosmic (kinds); cyclical or absolute (types). Eschatological thinkers, especially existentialist philosophers indicate for contemporaries acknowledging the real danger of our destiny, getting out of progressism illusions and gaining hope to escape global catastrophe.

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