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DOI: 10.56898/ST.14034

CONYERS PLACE AND THE PROBLEM OF THE RELIABILITY OF REASON

Abstract

Conyers Place was an eighteenth-century Anglican author who adamantly defended the priority of revelation in theological matters. To that end, he argued at length how unreliable human reason is and thus how inadmissible is natural theology; however, through his work he indicated that reason can be used quite effectively in the service of theology when its arguments are based on revelation, which he showed in his sometimes sophisticated, imaginative, if not infrequently controversial discussion of the problem of space, light, and panpsychism.

Keywords: *Conyers Place, revelation, space, light, panpsychism*

There is an ages long struggle between reason and faith to establish the relation between the two which ranges from a complete submission of reason to faith to the subordination of faith to reason with the many shades of intermediary positions. What should the position of reason be in the face of religious mysteries? Many times, but particularly in the budding Enlightenment age, reason was given an upper hand over claims that surpassed its ability to comprehend leading to questioning or to an outright rejection of religious statements concerning the Trinity, the Incarnation, etc. Faith, on the other hand, made claims that reason was not powerful enough to grasp many religious statements and, thus, it should restrain its opposition. It is interesting to see that when the voice of the Enlightenment was becoming stronger and stronger, the case of the priority of

faith was not abandoned as quite forcefully exemplified by statements made by Conyers Place (1665-1738).¹

Human rationality

Place was strongly opposed to the unitarian voices of his times and he combated the Arian rejection of the Trinity since, his opponents claimed, it did not agree with reason (R 13).² However, as Place indicated, reason fails even on a more fundamental level. If reason, the light of nature, should be able to show that God exists (RIG 15), then there should not be “such unnatural Monsters as Atheists” (16). In fact, it is by reason that people become atheists (41). Reason should lead people to one God (21), but the world is filled with polytheism (22). Deists believe that there is a religion of nature that can be discovered by every person by reason, the natural light, and try to reduce Christianity to this religion (79). According to Place, it is a mistake to treat Christianity as a way of fixing natural religion to restore it to its original purity. Christ referred only to the law of Moses, and revelation never refers to reason to learn human duties in regard to religion (81).

Concerning epistemology, Place stated that since the soul has only two faculties, will and understanding, then understanding is this light of nature (RIG 88). Also, “the Difference between rational and sensible Perception or Knowledge, lies, chiefly and only, in the Mode and State of the Propo-

¹ In 1683, Place was awarded his MA at Trinity College in Cambridge. In 1689, he was ordained as deacon; in 1689-1711 and 1722-1736, he was the Master of Dorchester Grammar School (The Free School); in 1736, he was appointed as Rector of Poxwell; John Venn, J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Cambridge: At the University Press 1924, part 1, vol. 3, p. 369; for an informative inscription on his tombstone, see Mervyn Medlycott, *Monumental inscriptions of Marnhull (parish church, churchyard and civil cemetery)*, Dochester: Dorset History Centre 2008, p. 2.

² References are made to the following publication of Place:
 Ad – *Adversaria: or, Truths opposed to some of the falshoods contain'd in a book, call'd, The rights of the Christian Church asserted*, London: W. Taylor 1709.
 Ar – *Arianisme confuted without dispute, by an historical scheme of the material object of salvific faith*, London: W. Taylor 1720.
 DL – *The doctrine of light, sight and colours, and our notions of the nature of them reform'd, or, an essay to solve and explain the phenomenon of vision*, London: self-published 1738.
 E – *An essay towards the vindication of the visible creation*, London: J. Roberts 1729.
 R – *The reasonableness of orthodox and Arian believing consider'd and compar'd*, London: W. Taylor 1721.
 RIG – *Reason an insufficient guide to conduct mankind in religion*, London: J. Roberts 1735.
 S – *That space is necessary being: with the history of nothing*, London: J. Roberts 1728.

sition of the same Objects to the Soul, and the Quality of that real Presence that produces the Notice and Perception of them: If the immediate real Presence of Objects to the Soul is natural and proper, so that they and their attendant Differences are simply and directly perceived, we call the Perception sensible.” If it is not immediate, then the knowledge is of more excellent kind when reason is used (101); this is a rational perception obtained by reasoning which is worked out through the “four established Sets and Sorts of Counterfeits: ... 1. Lines or Points. 2. Cyphers or numeral Figures. 3. Ideas. And 4. Words or Names,” all of them but “Shadows of Realities” (102). Ideas are provided by nature; “invisibly lodged in us,” they are objects of sense, natural representations of things (115). Seeing objects is perception, seeing their ideas is thinking (116). Animals also have ideas. Words are “sham Originals artificially instituted” (118). They are not really signs of things; they relate to or stand for ideas of things, so, they are counterfeits of counterfeits; words raise the ideas of objects, they allow to manage ideas already impressed (120). All knowledge derived from books and conversations is the knowledge of absent originals and is based upon trust (124). Philosophers elevate this type of knowledge and use some reasoning known to them only (125). However, syllogisms bring no new knowledge (127), so reason is worse than senses since it perceives the same object “in a more degenerate State of Proposition,” it sees indirectly what senses see directly (128). Where senses end and fail, there reason begins (129); since reason is limited to its narrow human scale, the more opportunities it has to act, the more imperfect is a person who uses reason. God and angels do not use it and yet people elevate themselves to their level because of the alleged high status of human reason (130). Our ideas, like nature’s originals that impressed them, must be in the concrete form of objects, so, by their constant use, abstract ideas are assumed to be real (135), whereby people fool themselves; they assume these ideas are innate and all intellectual knowledge is based on “these No-Ideas of No-Originals ... these Nullities” (136).

This is sensualism carried to the extreme. Only images of concrete objects provide reliable knowledge (never mind the problem of the unreliability of the senses), since they correspond directly to the outside objects. Abstract ideas are stripped from a specific content and, thus, for instance, no object corresponds to the concept of human being, plant, animal, etc., and so, these concepts are nullities that cannot and should not be treated seriously. With such a contention it appears that the rationality as an en-

dowment of the human soul is a redundant embellishment at best, a mistake at worst, which does not cast positive light on the divine creation.

In any event, it appears that later Place somewhat softened his sensualism by stating that in the human and animal souls there are two forms of knowledge: organic or systematic that is founded on the senses and consists of ideas; on the other hand, there is substantial knowledge invoked “by the Substance from the Compresency of the Objects to it [the soul], antecedent to all Notices [perceptions] from without” (E 82); it includes the knowledge of the necessary being, of its own being and its faculties, and the knowledge of the soul’s union with the body (83). As to self-knowledge, the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum* is frivolous; the right order is: I am, therefore I think (87). The soul as the blank slate refers to the sensory knowledge of outside things, not to absolute knowledge referring to objects wrought by the substance. The soul must be conscious of the necessary or divine Being without the help of the senses; its omnipresence and infinity enforces the knowledge of itself on all vital substance (86). Taken at its face value, these portentous statements indicate that all the argumentation about reason’s inability to prove the existence of God is completely unnecessary. Why try to rationally argue that God exists if this existence is already implanted in the human soul as part of substantial knowledge?

Be it as it may, maybe there is some role of reason in religious matters, after all. As Paul described it, Romans did not know God adequately nor did they worship Him properly; professing to be philosophers, they were fools (RIG 159). As Place saw it, Paul did not try to reform them in a philosophical way speaking about the sufficiency of reason, but he preached Jesus giving new rules and new authority (162). However, reason does exist and there should be some role for it to play in the human life, even in religious matters. Yes: reason with the help of revelation can “by Reflection on the Creatures” confirm that there is a God (18). Reason can make people more comfortable by strengthening the message of revelation. By reflection on creatures? It is possible that, in the spirit of physico-theology. Physico-theology was very popular in the second half of the 17th and in the 18th century in Europe. It relied on the proof from design as a proof of the existence of God: according to this approach, the orderliness detected in nature on the cosmic scale and on the micro level clearly indicated that that everything was created by and intelligent and powerful Supreme Being. Place apparently also meant the investigation of the world, its complexity and orderliness, as pointing to the divine agency. This may be implicit in

Place's statement that order is more valuable than matter. Order not matter is a superior part of creation. Incidentally, political order much more so than natural and that is why the God of order could not leave the foundation of social life undetermined.³ Therefore, God instituted monarchy, but not tyranny, nor oppressive or unjust administration. The government was instituted as a blessing for people and tyranny is a degeneracy of it and contrary to its end. Parliament is a necessary conduit of the monarch's will, not participating in the legislative office or sharing the authority of the crown, but being a way of promulgation this will.⁴

According to Place, the natural light completely fails in the matter of "the Mode of the Divine Being" with other matters in the Scriptures the mind can refer to evidence (R 30); that is, the triune nature of God can in no wise be confirmed by rational arguments, but what about other things related to God? It appears that this is possible, at least to some extent. Self-consciousness indicates that we cannot think outside the bounds of the material system; we cannot reach the notion of infinity (31). Confined to the material system, we have no other concept of spiritual substance than that it has nothing to do with matter (32), whereby we use evidence related to matter. Considering God as immaterial being, the notion that implies negation of and contradiction to all material properties, is making God somehow corresponding to matter (33). Does this mean that apophatic theology is unacceptable? Does saying that God is not material make Him less spiritual? Maybe in human understanding, but it seems that imperfect as it may be, a concept of the divine Being who is above matter and is not finite can be formed in the human mind by self-reflection and by reflection of the material world. And thus, in the religious matters, reason is at best on a shaky guide. As mentioned, atheists use reasoning to prop their irreligion, but it is conceivable that reason can just as well be used to speak about God's existence.

The Trinity

In one of his books, Place showed how a case of trinitarianism can be made relying only on the Bible since the proper evidence of the Christian

³ Conyers Place, *The true English revolutionist, or; The happy turn, rightly taken*, London: W. Taylor 1710, pp. 43-45.

⁴ Conyers Place, *The arbitration: or, The Tory and Whig reconcil'd*, London: J. Baker [1711], pp. 41, 43-44.

faith is the revelation in the Scripture (Ar xiii). On over 100 pages, the discussion is almost solely limited to the discussion of divine names, Elohim and Jehovah.

According to Place, about divine names can be said with certainty that Jehovah, the singular, is one, and Elohim, the plural, is more (Ar xvi); Place considered it to be unfortunate that the translations of these names are God for Elohim, and Lord for Jehovah (xviii); in his view, Elohim should be translated as the divine Persons or Powers (47) or Gods rather than God, or Deities (49), or the Persons of the Gods (50), Jehovah Elohim as One-and-More (xix), or One and yet More (xx). For apostle John, the Word or Son of God is included in Elohim: Elohim was in the beginning and so was the Word, the Word was with God (the Father) and was God. All things were made by the Word (10-11), and so they were by Elohim when He spoke (12). The Word must be included in the Elohim who created the world and man (13). Moreover, many times words accompanying Elohim are also in the plural (16). If the plurality of Elohim is admitted, it follows, they are persons, three in number (22), individual subsistents, agents, intelligents, each by himself (23). References are also made to Jehovah (24), so, the first parents believed in Jehovah Elohim, three Persons one God, the Trinity in Unity. The Gospel is a restoration of the divine nature to what was lost by the fall and God is worshiped now as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (25-26).

In Place's view, the time from the creation to Moses was the trinitarian period when the plurality of the divine Persons was known and professed, the divine Unity was recognized more obscurely. And so, Adam and Eve knew God as Elohim (Ar 3); Elohim created the world and man in *their* image (4). The second period, from Moses to Christ, was the unitarian period when the knowledge of the unity of the Godhead was clear to the Jews (53). The third period, the period of the Gospel, was when the unity and the plurality of the Godhead were made explicit (54).

Moses announced the Jews the name of Jehovah (Ar 55); actually, Jehovah, "I am who I am" or rather "I will be what I will be," *ejuh asher ejuh* (Ex. 3:14), is not a proper name (60). Elohim is a predicate by which Jehovah is explained; Jehovah was something in the idea of God, more superior to Elohim (61), one infinite essence of the Elohim (99). God says, Jehovah Elohim is my name (3:15) (66).

In his lengthy philological analyses, Place was not helped, nor encumbered, by the future often controversial higher criticism, in his treatment

of all Scriptures as a uniform record ultimately inspired by God. However, it required considerable reasoning efforts to prove his trinitarian point. Apparently, when the Scriptures are recognized as an authority, reason can use it as the starting point. The danger is that it may, and it often did, lead to interpretations and conclusions which are not universally admissible. And yet, the problem remains, why should the Scripture be recognized as an authoritative source, to begin with?

The church

The ultimate authority is the will of God. For a Christian, God's will is the supreme law and the basis of his choices; his faith is an act of submission to the will of God; his will seconds the divine will. God's will, not ours, is the principle of determination, our choices are based on His authority. On the other hand, for a heretic, religion is a purely arbitrary act of his own will.⁵

To find the will of God, the Scriptures should be consulted. However, they were written in Hebrew and Greek (R 53), so, their translations are made in human terms (54). Thus, the reliance on the Scripture most often amounts to the reliance on their particular translation in a particular language, and, as Place plentifully illustrated with his discussion of divine names, that is not quite enough. Since the original terms of divine revelation were delivered in languages no one quite understands, then the divine Revealer intended them to be offered in some secondary state of reposition (preaching or promulgation (42)) that included equivalents having the force of the original terms (39). The reposition of the original terms of testimony requires a divine mission or commission. The doctrine of the Trinity should be conveyed in an understandable fashion by repositors to "the simpler and ideotick part of Mankind," that is, by the church (42), the body of Christ, the spouse of Christ, Christ Himself (1 Cor. 12:12), the ground and the pillar of truth (1 Tim. 3:15), "a witness and keeper of Holy Writ" that has authority in controversies of faith (in which Place quotes art. 20 of the articles of the church of England), the trumpet of God, indefectible and infallible in its assent to the mode of the divine Being, the

⁵ Conyers Place, *Heretical characters illustrated and confirmed. With some applications of them to Mr. Whiston, from passages in his Primitive Christianity, &c.*, London: Edward Place 1713, pp. 27-28.

essence of its constitution. No reason or understanding can balance the authority of the body which speaks about the essence of its own being (43). The orthodox believers perceive that all faith rests on the authority of the tradition as the only foundation of knowing that the Scripture is the word of God; they insist on “the necessary Doctrine of the Catholick Churches Infallibility and the Authority of that Tradition” of the belief of the Scripture being God’s word (51-52). It is very important that Place accentuated that it is the church which delivers the message. If the original testimony of such proposed things of which the mind knows nothing, be divine, and it be repropounded to the mind in human terms, the appearance of truth in these terms has no weight, but the authority of repropounders is all for the mind to rely upon (28). Apparently, for this reason Place could not agree with the opinion that the church of England was established by the act of the parliament since, for him, it meant that the church was created by the state, not by God or Christ and, thus, this was a scandalous position (Ad 3-4). Establishing may at best approve, confirm something already made (6). “Religion had much better stand alone upon its own Legs, without the support of secular Assistances” (7).

Interestingly, there is a divinely permitted element of flexibility in the church. The church of England allows for the institution of rites and ceremonies, most of them of “Venerable Antiquity” (Ad 18); that is, some rites and ceremonies are devised by people (38). Christ gives His laws, empowers people “to transact the Affairs of Religion according to those Laws,” made them officers to interpret these laws. These officers and ministers are independent on the earthly powers. However, flexibility allowed within the church must not violate the laws given by Christ, which is providentially enforced since Christ perpetually acts in His kingdom.⁶

Space

In spite of a low status that Place gave to reason, he did not limit himself to quoting Scriptures to make his arguments, but ventured into arguments which required a great deal of reasoning even if he was not always convincing.

In a separate pamphlet, Place argued that space was a necessary being

⁶ Conyers Place, *The thoughts of an honest Whig: or, The scheme of the Bishop of Bangor’s Sermon before the King*, London: E. Curll 1717, pp. 33, 34, 37.

(S 38), a real existent (44). Experience shows that space is “an Ingredient essential to every effectual Thought” (46). Space is infinite and our concept of infinity is derived from space (48, 49). Infinity is linear and superficial, that is, one- and two-dimensional, immensity is infinity in all dimensions, that is, it is three-dimensional (49).

From infinity and immensity comes the idea of omnipresence (S 50). The latter idea opens the way to the concept of omniscience, which leads to a rather curious statement that space as pervading through all things knows and perceives all things, which is only understandable if we accept his no less peculiar definition of knowledge as “the substantial Presence or Penetration of one Thing by another” (52). Space also evokes the idea of eternity (54). There is no succession in eternity (65). Eternity is one present. We are moving and pass, not eternity (62). All duration is present only; it is a continuation of what is present, present being continued on the same; if the duration is past, the thing whose duration it was, is no more (64). To say that God was from eternity should not be allowed. God is “I am” (67). Another attribute of space is unity (70); it is also absolutely uniform, essentially indivisible (72).

Space is an uncreated entity and creation is “stocking one corner of its boundless Continent with a new started up Sort of Secondary Beings” (S 54). Uncreated, space is also indestructible since apparently space will be unaffected by the conflagration in the days of last judgment (55).

In his idea of space, Place seems to have been influenced by Newton. In his *Principia*, Newton stated that “absolute space in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable” (scholium ii to definition viii) and that the order of parts of space is immutable (scholium iv), the scholium that Place quoted (S 48). In the general scholium to book 3, Newton also said that every particle of space is always, that is, space is eternal. More forceful statements about space can be found in his *De gravitatione et aequipotidie fluidorum*, where he said that God created bodies in the empty space, although, space is not empty; it is filled with itself; it is infinite, eternal and immutable, and, in summary, space is eternal, infinite, uncreated, uniform, immobile, causing no motion or change.⁷ Particularly in the General scholium, Newton focused on God, His nature and attributes and space was brought up to show God’s great-

⁷ Isaac Newton, *Unpublished scientific papers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978 [1962], pp. 109, 104, 101, 104, 111.

ness versus anything else even if the entity was infinite and eternal. For Place, sheer reflection on the concept of space leads him to the detection of divine attributes to the point that space is almost identified with God, at least, he blurred the line between space and God by ascribing omnipresence to space, which led him to space's omniscience, which "clears the way to" omnipotence (52), which supposedly makes easy for people to grasp the idea of God's providence and more easily comprehend the divine omnipotence, or "how God can at once conduct all things," and God's omnipresence (53). And he could prop it up scripturally, since the Scripture presents God, the infinite Being "by Characters that throw us on Space" (1 Kings 8:27, Job 11:8, etc.) (83).

Place attempted here to say something about God beginning with something hardly accessible to senses: can we see space, or do we derive its existence by observing bodies and assuming that they have to be somewhere, in space? Also, senses are unable to see space in its entirety, thus, its properties are derived from reason, unreliable as it may be, and yet, by Place's reasoning, it is leading this very reason to God. However, what exactly is the relation between space and God? Place did not make it clear, although he had a tendency to blend space with God. In that respect, Newton was more clear. He explicitly stated in the General scholium that God is not space and that He constitutes space. The last point is rather murky: space is uncreated and yet constituted by God. In *De gravitatione*, he said that although uncreated, space is an *effectus emanativus* of God, somehow emanated from God and, thus, dependent on Him and, as such, space was not a substance and again, space is eternal and immutable as an *effectus emanativus* of an eternal and immutable Being.⁸ Although the nature of constituting space or its emanating from God is uncertain, Newton clearly wanted to stress the priority of God in all respects, even when he allowed the existence of uncreated entities, such as space.⁹ In this he may have alluded to the status of the Son of God who was uncreated and yet He was born of God, "begotten not made" in the words of the Nicene creed, although, considering his unitarian beliefs, his understanding of "begotten not made" would depart from an orthodox understanding.

⁸ Newton, *op. cit.*, pp. 99, 104; cf. Alejandro Cassini, Newton and Leibniz on non-substantial space, *Theoria* 20 (2005), pp. 25-31.

⁹ For an attempt to show that God's existence is dependent on space, see Patrick J. Connolly, Space before God? A problem in Newton's metaphysics, *Philosophy* 90 (2015), pp. 83-106.

Panpsychism

Place's treatise on space could be considered a vindication of space by elevating it to the divine level, but he did not stop there; one year after this treatise, he published his vindication of the entire creation.

Place was appalled by Descartes' reduction of animals to the level of machines (E 8). If any equalization should be made, it should be not by reducing living beings to the level of machines, but rather by elevating what is considered inanimate to the level of living beings (14). In his view, life and consciousness are the two main attributes of being and the first and main emanations of substance (3); they are the main perfections of being and a glory to the Creator (5-6). How can a claim be made that consciousness is "the farthest distant" from the properties of matter while, at the same time, not knowing what consciousness and matter are (11)? It is close to blasphemy to say that God could not endow matter with consciousness (12). All created substance has a degree of life and perception, directly or indirectly (14). When Genesis speaks of waters or earth bringing life, the elements must be "endued with the Principles and Powers of Life" released by God to generate animals. Psalm 148 speaks about the entire world praising God, the sun and the moon, waters, mountains, etc. (15). Celestial bodies can be seen as "acquainted with the Creator's Will and Works" by which God conducts the natural motion of the elementary world; in particular, the sun is "the common Parent of Life upon our Ball," producing and preserving life (21-22). Stars are intelligent substances (23), and so, the Egyptians and Persians who worshiped the sun "founded their Idolatry on better Philosophy than ours" (24). Nature is "a vital and directive Principle latent in every thing," distinct from matter which it informs (26) and each body is "its own Principle of Life and Consciousness" (28). In this, Place followed Campanella's principle that what is in the effect, must be in the cause, life, in particular (30). The fact that we see no signs of cognition or sense in chairs and tables does not mean that they are not there (39). Denying consciousness to matter is caused by human pride, vanity, lusts, and passions (41). People love to say that they are at the top of the creation, which is reinforced by the prejudices of education and tradition (42) and by the conviction that the world has made for the benefit of humans (44), which is as good as saying that the lice should imagine that human heads were created for their benefit (45). It is an "implicit Blasphemy" to claim that all this vastness of space and matter exists only for the human benefit (46).

The soul, the vital and conscious power and principle, works by its plastic virtue on matter turning it into instruments of sense and action (E 51) since generation is not a production of a new life, but only of new organs (49). “All Things are full of Life and Souls every where latent” and souls organize matters into their organs when an opportunity arises (53): carcasses turn into insects, souls become souls in new bodies. Generation does not produce a new life but prepares matter for the service of vital powers wherever they are latent to unite themselves into organs to maintain their union (55). Depending on the part in a system of organs in which a soul resides, other souls in the same organism are dependent on it, which makes it a *hegemonikon* (54). For the Stoics, *hegemonikon* was the highest and noblest part of the soul; Place turned it into a separate soul that presides over innumerable souls that constitute a particular material entity.

How far does the ensoulment of matter go? On the one hand, we read that whatever can be said about atoms’ ability to form bodies, can even more so be said about conscious atoms (E 35). This idea seems to be consistent with the panpsychist approach: “We have as much Reason to believe that any common Bit of Dirt, Sand, or Pebble, has Life in it, as that Seeds, Spawn, Eggs, have so, only as we are pre-acquainted with the Event” (66). On the other hand, Place said that one simple vital principle becomes a soul, when innumerable atoms make an organ (57). Is just one soul associated with this organ? Or would it be some lower level *hegemonikon* that dominates over the organ and the souls of each suborgan down to the level of atoms? Also, do souls come into being only when there is a material entity for them to preside over? Can the soul exist by itself? Place remains silent on these issues.

Each particle in the body has been used in a hundred animal bodies of different species and served under different souls, but it seems that each soul was used only once (E 57-58). What happens to these souls? Place did fleetingly mention afterlife designated for human souls living with angels in the state of perennial present (110), but it is unclear what happens to nonhuman souls.

Moreover, Place spoke about the preexistence of souls as vital principles of all substances considered inanimate (E 69), which is clearly required by the panpsychist approach. How did human souls preexist? If souls are used only once, with what substances were they associated, presumably in some dormant state? It would appear that Place would implicitly side with the idea that all souls of all living beings had been created at the beginning

and because of rather limited material resources on earth, they were waiting one after another for their turn to organize some chunks of matter into an organism using recycled atoms from organisms that had died and dissipated.

In his times, Place was quite original with his idea of panpsychism, although Spinoza's pantheism could be considered as a form of panpsychism¹⁰ and possibly Leibniz' ontology with his idea of monads. Moreover, the issue was theologically perilous. Place mentioned Origen who saw the stars and heaven as alive, however, he was condemned for these views (E 19). The problem is philosophically serious and was rightfully raised by Place: how can life originate from inanimate matter? More problematically, how can consciousness arise from matter devoid of consciousness? The problem was raised frequently after Place even in modern times, to mention only Whitehead's take on it. Although panpsychism is not very popular in modern times, it is being considered "a proper response" to the dualist attempts to solve the mind-body problem.¹¹

Light

Place combatted the idea that light was derived from the sun by rays coming from it considering this to be a "vulgar Error and groundless Imagination." The agency of the sun is only added because of the imperfection of human vision and the impurity of atmosphere (DL 11-12). In the beginning, God created light. What He created was a visive system, an immense frame of subtle matter stretched across the entire cosmic space reaching ethereal and probably also celestial regions; this system is "Light subjective, Light material and substantial," the first creation of God, separated from formless matter and perfected as the foundation of natural order, the first that was approved by God as good (4). God gave the name of day to the same light as its proper product (8). The sun created on the fourth day of creation is only an instrumental cause of light and day for us, for the earth used to heighten the visive/luminous system (10). The dissipation of rays

¹⁰ Spinoza did say that one substance cannot generate another substance, *Ethics*, part 1, proposition 6.

¹¹ Galen Strawson, *Mental reality*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, pp. 75, 108. Incidentally, it is also being proposed that "panexperientialism" is a better term than "panpsychism," David Ray Griffin, *Unsnarling the world-knot: consciousness, freedom, and the mind-body problem*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1998, p. 78.

from the sun in all directions for 6000 years could considerably diminish the size of the sun (44). If the sun emitted rays that provide light, the sun would be a mutable body, which is “an incredible Story in itself” (46). Not only does the orbit of the sun not change, but also the form of the sun and the position of its parts is “immutably fixed” (53). In fact, the sun owes its brightness to the visive system, otherwise, it would be invisible (65).

Place also provided a rather tortuous mechanism of vision, which, in his mind, was being erroneously explained by the reflection of sunbeams from objects. The eyes are living spectacles and are to the soul what spectacles are to them; they filtrate the threads of the visive fluid (DL 65). Light is not an object of perception, but its subject; it is not what we see, but what sees, with what we see things since light is an organic part of us (66-67). The soul sees and hears things by “lengthening out itself beyond the Bounds of its personal Circumscription home to the Objects perceived” to some substance by which objects can be seen and “by a substantial Union made into a *Continuum* from the Organ to the Object”, the visive fluid (19). The fluid from the outside arrives to the eye to be united with the fluid inside (20). In this way, the soul sees directly the originals (26). Because the continuity of the visive fluid in the eye and in the outside, apparently, nothing passes to the eye as through a window, only what is already in the eye (32). Apparently, the contact of the visive fluid in the eye with the visive fluid touching (and permeating) an object is sufficient to see the object, visive fluid enabling an indirect contact of the object with the eye. It also enables the contact between the contact and the object, in particular, a mirror, whereby an image of myself is impressed on the mirror; the mirror cannot see, but an image of myself is in it and this image is reflected by the very same visive fluid to my eye (87-88).

Place was consistent in proposing his theory of light by considering the phenomenon of vision as well, strange as it may be, but, surely, it required a great deal of reasoning to arrive at it.

Arguably, the main reason why Place proposed his theory of light was the Genesis account about light being created before the sun was brought into being. Many explanations of this account have been tried over the ages, but a somewhat similar approach as Place’s was used by other authors at about the same time Place did it. His theory was published in 1738. In 1741, Thomas Morgan in his *Physico-theology* spoke, mainly in ch. 2, about the medium of vision that was universal in all nature, consisting of probably the smallest particles. It was an elementary light which was an element

sui generis, the medium of vision, a material fluid, the visive medium, visive fluid, nonmechanical medium different from the earthly fire of sunbeams, and thus, even terminology was strangely similar. In his massive *Spectacle de la nature*, particularly in vols. 3 (1735) and 4 (1739), Noël-Antoine Pluche repeatedly spoke about *le corps de la lumière* created before the sun, a fluid filling the entire universe, the real source of light.¹²

Conclusions

Place's future son-in-law, Conyers Middleton, described Place's philosophy by saying that Place had "a great zeal for the honour of Revelation and as great a contempt for Reason" and was busy "writing down Natural Religion by denying its very existence."¹³ However, the statement is somewhat overwrought since in spite of his very strong stance against reason, his "contempt for Reason" was far from absolute since Place used it quite extensively in his own investigations, very imaginatively, often very impressively, even though some of his conclusions may be impossible to accept. An apparent contradiction between his hostility to reason and the reliance on it stems from the fact that reason does not have a free reign in all areas; it is excluded from its rational claims in religious matters. This is particularly clear from the focus of Place's *Reason an insufficient guide to conduct mankind in religion*. Place was visibly alarmed by deistic and atheistic trends in England and set himself to counter them. He referred to and quoted some of the works of his opponents, including Thomas Chubb, *A collection of tracts on various subjects* (1730), John Jackson, *Plea for humane reason* (1730), William Wollaston, *The Religion of nature delineated* (1722), Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as old as the creation* (1730). Place was particularly appalled by claims that reason was able by its own strength to arrive at the concept of God and that the Scripture was not really necessary to that end or, at best, it could have only a supporting role by confirming the claims of reason in religious matters.¹⁴ For Place, such an attitude in-

¹² For some other fluid theories of light, see Geoffrey N. Cantor, *Optics after Newton: theories of light in Britain and Ireland, 1704-1840*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1983, 91-113; various authors were largely motivated by the biblical creation account according to which vegetation was created on the third day before the sun was created on the fourth day.

¹³ Quoted in Hugh Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2010, p. 88.

¹⁴ For an often harsh criticism of the Scriptures by English deists, see Henning Graf Reventlow,

licated the denigration of revelation and, thereby, of Christianity and, indirectly, of the position of the church. To counter their claims, Place did not just try to argue against particular deistic claims, but he argued against their purely rationalistic approach, their reliance on human reason that had proved so many times to be of limited ability and in the matter of the Being that surpassed any limits of power, wisdom, and finitude reason was a sorry instrument unable to deal with the theological problems at hand. That is why, Place argued, God helped humans by providing revelation before Christ, and, most importantly, through the person of Christ Himself. What reason can do is to accept that fact and act according to the rules this revelation provides. Reason cannot arrive at inviolable theological truths by investigating nature, but reason has a perfectly good place when investigation of nature is motivated by the Scripture and strengthens its claims. And hence, his arguments about the nature of light, clearly inspired by the Genesis account, were made to support this account. His panpsychism had clear scriptural backing and only enhanced the glory of God by showing how more glorious His creation was, not just dead matter, but the reality teeming with life and consciousness on each level. Even his curious investigations concerning space had scriptural support and point to the attributes of space that in the full glory can be found in God, the attributes that are most clearly stated only in revelation. Thus, the reach of reason is limited, but appreciably strong to be used in philosophical matters to make theological truths clearer, the truths important to every person because of their eschatological consequences.

Conyers Place i problem wiarygodności rozumu

Streszczenie

Conyers Place był osiemnastowiecznym autorem anglikańskim, który gorąco bronił pierwszeństwa objawienia w kwestiach teologicznych. W tym celu obszernie argumentował, jak zawodny jest ludzki rozum, a tym samym jak niedopuszczalna jest teologia naturalna; jednakże poprzez swoje prace wskazał, że rozum może być dość skutecznie wykorzystany w służbie

The authority of the Bible and the rise of the modern world, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985, part 3.

teologii, gdy jej argumentacja opiera się na objawieniu, co pokazał w swojej niekiedy wyrafinowanej, twórczej, choć nierzadko kontrowersyjnej dyskusji problemu przestrzeni, światła i panpsychizmu.

Słowa-klucze: *Conyers Place, objawienie, przestrzeń, panpsychizm*

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