
Di Ceglie, Roberto. *God, the Good, and the Spiritual Turn in Epistemology*. Cambridge University Press, 2023, pp. 235.

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The historiography of analytic philosophy is highly sensitive to the term “turn”, which, in the phrase “linguistic turn”, indicates the shift from a predominant focus on the logical analysis of language to a greater sensitivity to ordinary language. Subsequently, the term “religious turn” was used to emphasize the epistemological shift that allowed religious beliefs to be considered legitimate even in the absence of justification, understood in the foundationalist and internalist sense. The title of Di Ceglie’s book is therefore quite ambitious in suggesting a “spiritual turn”. With this expression, the author aims to propose a “turn” from a merely epistemological or intellectualistic interpretation of knowledge, including the religious one. In other words, he proposes a “turn” from a view that takes into account only the intellectual dimension, to a position that also takes other dimensions into consideration, as proposed by a theological approach. This concerns, in particular, the moral and religious dimensions, which, especially in the case of knowledge related to religion, can be decisive. For this reason, the “turn” is specified as “spiritual”, because it takes into account the person as a whole, and not just the intellectual dimension. Historically, predominantly intellectualistic interpretations have also been offered for religious knowledge; for example, whenever the relationship between faith and reason has been understood by considering only what is common to the two (the intellectual dimension), and not what is specific to faith (the moral aspect: wanting to believe; the religious aspect: wanting to believe because of the relationship with God, who gives love for Him, and therefore the will to believe in Him). It should be noted that Di Ceglie does not intend to argue that we should put this turn into practice. It has already been adopted by many believers. His aim is to make explicit what has been done, and is done implicitly. His thesis is original on a theoretical level, not a practical one: “I speak of a ‘turn’ only because the protagonists of philosophical and theological debates on the truth and credibility of the Christian faith are often *unaware* of the crucial role that a spiritual approach to those debates may play. A turn *from their explicit views* seems, therefore, necessary” (p. 132). The ambition I have mentioned above never degenerates into a provocation, because it is reflected in the text, where the tight arguments live up to expectations and converge in supporting the general thesis of the book according to which “the spiritual turn is based on the conviction that epistemological matters can

fruitfully be treated by recourse to factors that are not strictly epistemic" (p. 7), with the logical consequence that "a spiritual turn in epistemology is required, which implies a theological approach to faith and religion like the one I will argue can be found in Aquinas's thought" (p. 9). The reference to Aquinas, while appropriate since this medieval thinker is, in effect, Di Ceglie's main source of inspiration, should not mislead: the book is not a mere revival of Aquinas, but an original interpretation of his thought, consistently brought into dialogue with the typical demands of the analytical epistemology of religion, suggesting new avenues for reflection, and leading to conclusions that go beyond Thomistic thought. The comparison with Eleonore Stump's interpretative methodology supports this approach.

The book is sequential, unified, and has a performative value (it requires the reader to be persuaded and change their intellectual posture). Therefore, it is advisable to follow the chapters in order, avoiding a focus on specific sections, which would result in a loss of understanding. A second recommendation concerns a careful reading of the *Introduction*, both to familiarize yourself with the book's structure, and to appreciate its significance, which consists in departing from *mere epistemology*, indicated by ME, and offering it an alternative, a spiritual turn, indicated by ST. In an appropriate *explicatio terminorum*, the ME is defined as that position according to which "One should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence" (p. 2), while the ST "is based on the conviction that epistemological matters can fruitfully be treated by recourse to factors that are not strictly epistemic. The spiritual turn emphasizes the primary importance of human flourishing, taken as a commitment to God and the good" (p. 7) with the clarification that the term spiritual "designates the overall perfection of humanity" (p. 7) and the specification that the God referred to is, in the first instance, that of the Christian tradition, due to the role that this religion has had in Western culture, and due to the confessional affiliation of most of the authors considered. What is suggested is a first approximation to the notion of ST which will then be specified throughout the book, thanks to a tripartite path through which the reader is accompanied step by step, and helped by short summaries placed at the beginning and end of each chapter, and by signposts such as "my thesis is [...]", "I will argue that [...]", "my argument is [...]", "my approach consists [...]", "my purpose is [...]", and so on.

In the first part, entitled *Toward the overcoming of the Lockean view of faith and reason*, some criticisms of Locke's approach are considered with regard to the connection between his epistemology and the relationship he establishes between faith and reason. In this section, the authors called upon by Di Ceglie are (1) the reformed epistemologists – with particular attention to Plantinga – who allow the author to grasp some instances already proposed by Calvin; (2) John Henry Newman, whose notions of "assent", "illative sense", and "conscience" are emphasized, and (3) Thomas Reid, a promoter of the notion of "common sense", according to which the relationship between reason and the contents of revelation should not be conceived as unidirectional, but as dynamic. Although with different emphases, these authors

contribute to highlighting the flaws of evidentialism, and to supporting the autonomy and epistemic legitimacy of religious beliefs. The attentive reader will find in some footnotes an invitation to delve deeper into Wittgenstein's "hinge epistemology", starting with the text *On Certainty*, where the Austrian philosopher quotes Newman himself. Di Ceglie considers all of this necessary, but not sufficient: "my purpose is to argue that the specificity in question [the will to believe due to the love for God that God himself grants by grace] allows faith to put reason in the best possible condition to function" (p. 27).

Then, in the section entitled *The Christian faith as part of both the problem of inconclusiveness and its solution*, Di Ceglie advances his own proposal in two parts. In the first, he directly engages with Thomas. After what seems to be a digression on the notion of "Christian philosophy" and on those pages in the history of Thomism in the twentieth century that have ended up interpreting Thomas as a proto-Lockean, Di Ceglie focuses on the definition of "faith". These are the pages in which the author displays all his philological skills and his meticulousness in grasping the specifics of terms such as *evidentia*, *praeambula fidei*, and *believe [in]* in their original theological context, regardless of the analytical revisions of Richard Swinburne or John Hick, sometimes deemed incomplete, if not downright misleading. Aquinas would have the merit of demonstrating the compatibility between the primacy of faith and the autonomy of reason. More than that "for Thomas, the readiness to believe, which is due to charity, enables the faithful to use reason to the best of their abilities" (pp. 78-79). The key point of this section is the invitation not to neglect the notion of charity in order to fully understand the relationship between faith and reason. In the second part of this second section, a series of authors (Basil Mitchell, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Lara Buchak, Evan Fles, Richard Feldman, and Linda Zagzebski), and positions (fideism, quasi-fideism, practical rationality, religious disagreement, non-rational commitment) are considered because they tend to minimize the incompatibility between Aquinas's proposal, considered the most representative of Christian thought, and the presuppositions of the ME. Di Ceglie thinks that it is necessary to distinguish between these two perspectives, which he considers ultimately incompatible although he considers the one he prefers more comprehensive than the other. Saying that 'one should always prefer more evidence to less evidence' is incompatible with saying that 'one should *not* always prefer more evidence to less evidence', although the latter is more comprehensive than the former. Once this distinction has been made clear, it is possible to grasp the novelty of the ST, that is, one can understand how "the Christian faith offers an opportunity to rethink the nature and purpose of debates, a rethinking that allows for a wider epistemological view than ME" (p. 88).

Finally, the third part (*The spiritual turn: why and how to take it*), clarifies several aspects of ST, consolidates its general framework, and highlights some of its possible applications. The most relevant clarifications concern the connection between the search for truth and the commitment to the good ("the act of doing good is the ultimate end of the search for truth, which means that the former *shapes and includes* the latter"

(p. 121)) and the – at times paradoxical – role played by the ultimate end (“taking the ST, therefore, means that *the ultimate end must somewhat be attained before starting any possible action, the intellectual one included*” (p. 124)). These clarifications allow one, on the one hand, to distinguish ST from “virtue epistemology” and reduce it to a “social turn” or a “moral turn”, and, on the other, to evaluate the problem of “inconclusiveness” differently. Only after admitting that “only [believer’s] firm adherence to their fundamental beliefs, including the conviction that such beliefs are due to their love for God and their neighbor, allows them to wonder whether or not their intellectual research is shaped by a love for God and their neighbor and to reject the outcomes of the research, which may be shaped by self-love and self-interest” (pp. 130-131) it is possible to give a different assessment of the lack of conclusions to which the debate between believers and non-believers often leads. From the ME perspective, the lack of a shared conclusion leads to an intellectual failure, and a lack of commitment to action, while from the ST perspective, “the problem of inconclusiveness is for believers first and foremost *an opportunity* to reflect on their own spiritual progress, which they are expected to value incomparably more than conclusiveness” (p. 131). This allows Di Ceglie to discuss the *divine hiddenness argument* proposed by John Schellenberg, demonstrating its irrelevance. In light of the conclusions reached, interreligious dialogue should also be re-established, abandoning the naturalistic assumptions on which, for example, the one suggested by John Hick depends. Thanks to the ST, in fact, it becomes possible to “promote respect and peace among religions and, at the same time, a firm belief that only one of them is true” (p. 153).

For the sake of argument, Di Ceglie considers it appropriate to add a further chapter in which he responds to potential objections that might be raised against ST. His hope is that ST can be adopted by both believers and non-believers, albeit for different reasons and with different outcomes, but with mutual benefit. This benefit consists, first and foremost, in the renunciation of “ideological positions”, in the Marxist sense of the term. The author concludes with a dozen final considerations “to promote the assumption of good habits and consequently perfect any human enterprise, the intellectual activity included” (p. 212).

As the author himself states in the *Acknowledgements*, several chapters of the book are adaptations of articles previously published in miscellanies or journals. Their placement within the broader context of *God, the Good, and the Spiritual Turn in Epistemology* is not only coherent, but also sheds new light on the republished texts, and enables them to be understood as part of a broader project. The book thus becomes the culmination of its author’s intellectual journey, a sort of provisional intellectual testament or, if you prefer, a pause to take stock of the research undertaken thus far. Like all worthy journeys, this one too is to be hoped for. The author has engaged closely with past authors, demonstrating not only great historical sensitivity but also suggesting previously unexplored historiographical paths. Furthermore, in the field of philosophy of religion, he has raised decisive criticisms of the argumentative cogency

of “divine hiddenness” in defence of agnosticism, and has contributed to the development of a philosophy of interreligious dialogue alternative to the canonical one. But, above all, open lines of inquiry abound in the field of epistemology, where religious beliefs can be compared with epistemic virtues and the epistemology of disagreement, two of the most debated current areas. Two questions, however, arise: what are the consequences of Di Ceglie’s proposed religious epistemology for epistemology *tout court*? Moreover, on a further level, what are the presuppositions of philosophical anthropology capable of supporting such a ST? In short, Di Ceglie’s book exhibits that delicate balance between achieved results and open perspectives characteristic of texts truly worthy study, exploration, and careful reading.

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