

## **Spaemann, Robert: Der letzte Gottesbeweis**

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If the papal advisor on philosophical questions promises to give the last proof of the existence of God, then this is something which well merits our attention.

It is exactly this that has occurred with the publication of this little book by the German philosopher Robert Spaemann, primarily known for his contributions to bioethical discussions. His "Last proof of the existence of God", a short essay of little more than 20 pages, is accompanied by a more extensive study by Rolf Schönberger, the historian of philosophy, whose aim is to situate Spaemann's argument in the history of philosophical discourse about God. As usual, Spaemann's essay is written in accessible language and with great clarity of argument. The argument proceeds in four steps, which may briefly be described as follows: In the first place Spaemann shows how, even in a highly technological and scientific world like ours, the idea of God is inescapable, because, when all is said and done, scientific explanations fail to yield an answer to metaphysical questions. Next, Spaemann asks what exactly is meant by the idea of God; his reply is as follows: God is the union of the adjectives "powerful" and "good", or of "being" and "sense", that is to say, God is the idea which allows to reconcile the fact of our existence with our desire of sense.

Yet—says Spaemann in a third step—why must we believe that to this idea there corresponds an extramental reality? Confronted with this, he discusses two traditional proofs of the existence of God: the ontological proof and the teleological one, contrasting each of these with the critiques that they provoked (those of Thomas Aquinas and of Kant in the first case, and that of the theory of evolution in the second). Still, the most important criticism for Spaemann in all attempts to prove the existence of God is that of Nietzsche insofar as he denies the very idea of truth and does so in a way so radical that not even the negation of this idea constitutes a truth.

With this background, in his fourth chapter, Spaemann presents his argument, which is, as he himself says, a grammatical argument: to say of something that it is so and so at this moment, is equivalent to saying that in the future it will have been so and so; for example, if today you read these words, tomorrow or in the remote future you will still have been reading them. To say: "In the remote future it will not be true that I will have been reading these words", goes against all our intuitions and seems to be impossible.

Now, if this is so, and if truth always depends on a consciousness that can think it, then we have to presuppose a consciousness that guarantees the truth for the future perfect in aeternis, that is to say, the truth of everything that will have been the case. Because even at the moment when the human race dies out, that our galaxy collapses, etc., we still want that what is the case today continues having been the case, and therefore we have to suppose that a consciousness will continue to exist that "verifies", in that future present, the truth of the past.

This is Spaemann's argument. What has to be said? Is it really the ultimate argument or only the last one at this time? It seems that Spaemann has not learned the Nietzschean lesson of suspending the idea of truth and of falsity: it is clear that it is difficult if not impossible to

think that in the remote future what is now the case will not have been the case. But this is not what we have to accept if we do not believe in the existence of God; rather if we deny the existence of God what results is that in the remote future what is the case now will neither have been the case nor will have not have been the case. That is to say, that that which has evidently been the case will not simply not be true, and therefore false, but that the very idea of truth and falsity will disappear: that which has been the case will be neither true nor false!

I do not know whether it is desirable to think in that way, nevertheless it is not impossible.

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