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CHRISTIAN WOLFF'S INFLUENCE ON ROSMINI'S ONTOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL ACCOUNTS OF PERFECTION

In this paper, I consider Rosmini's reception of Wolff's ontological and practical notions of perfection, in order to show that Rosmini was inspired to some degree by Wolff. Firstly, I examine Wolff's and Rosmini's ontological notions of perfection. Secondly, I analyse Wolff's practical notion of perfection and his influence on Rosmini's practical philosophy. The focus will be on the notion of perfection as concordance with one's essence and nature.

Introduction

Nowadays, perfection is not a particularly discussed topic in contemporary practical philosophy. Indeed, the commandment of moral perfection seems somewhat closer to Ancient and Medieval thought – and, in many ways, related mostly to natural theology. The last great moral perfectionist before Kant was Christian Wolff (1679-1754) – indeed the *last*, particularly because of Kant's crucial role in debunking perfection as the foundation of practical philosophy. His critiques against Wolff are well-known in secondary literature: Wolff's principle of morality departs from an ontological notion of perfection that, especially because of its traditional ontological character, is a dogmatic one; therefore, in the context of criticism, it would not be a viable candidate to ground morality.

Nevertheless, there are relevant figures, contemporary and posterior to Kant, that still hold to a more substantial account of practical perfection. One of these is certainly Antonio Rosmini – who knew Kant's philosophy well, as secondary literature is aware, but also knew Wolff's philosophy. In this paper, I shall focus on Rosmini's reception of Wolff. Such point is not unknown to secondary literature,[1] but is certainly far from exhausted as a research topic. Here, I will

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[1] Cfr. F.L. MARCOLUNGO, *L'eredità wolff-leibniziana nella cultura veneta fra '700 e '800*, in A. VALLE (ed.), *La formazione di Antonio Rosmini nella cultura del suo tempo*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1988, pp. 79-130; F.L. MARCOLUNGO, *Christian Wolff in Italien. Zwischen Mathematik und Metaphysik*, in J. STOLZENBERG

analyse the concept of perfection in Wolff and Rosmini in a twofold perspective. *Firstly*, by considering the *ontological* concept of perfection, which is extremely relevant to Wolff's account, and directly received by Rosmini, who even quotes Wolff in his *Teosofia*. We will examine similarities and differences between both accounts. *Secondly*, we will regard the concept of *practical* perfection, cornerstone of Wolff's universal practical philosophy, harbouring an element precious to Rosmini's own account: perfection as the *concordance* with one's *essence*. I aim to show that Rosmini was directly and indirectly influenced by Wolff in his ontological and practical accounts of perfection: directly, because he even quotes Wolff concerning perfection; and indirectly, because the main point of contact (perfection as concordance with essence and nature) reflects indirect similarities between both philosophers.

1. *Ontological Perfection*

(a) Wolff[2]

The ontological concept of perfection [*Vollkommenheit*; *perfectio*] is central to Wolff's metaphysics.[3] Although concepts of *possibilitas* [*Möglichkeit*], *actualitas* [*Würcklichkeit*], and *ratio* [*Grund*] play an even more prominent role, it cannot go without noticing that it is the last great concept

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– P.O. RUDOLPH (eds.), *Christian Wolff und die europäische Aufklärung*, vol. 1, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2007, pp. 133-152; P.P. OTTONELLO, *Wolff in Rosmini*, in R. THEIS – C. WEBER (eds.), *De Christian Wolff à Louis Lavelle. Métaphysique et Histoire de la Philosophie/Von Christian Wolff bis Louis Lavelle. Geschichte der Philosophie und Metaphysik*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1995, pp. 172-181.

[2] For the reconstruction of Wolff's arguments, I depart from: E. LANZINI STOBBE, *Reason, Perfection, Obligation: Christian Wolff and the Kantian Counterpoint*, Philosophische Fakultät Sozialwissenschaften und historische Kulturwissenschaften, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg/Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Universidade Estadual de Campinas (*cotutelle de these*), Halle an der Saale/Campinas 2023. To such intent, I also depart from the bibliography presented there.

[3] For a thorough conceptual reconstruction of Wolff's concept of perfection and its development, see: J. ÉCOLE, *La métaphysique de Christian Wolff*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1990, pp. 185-188; F.L. MARCOLUNGO, *"Perfectio" e "prudentia"*, in ID., *Esperienza e ragione in Christian Wolff*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2021, pp. 135-157; C. SCHWAIGER, *Das Problem des Glücks im Denken Christian Wolffs. Eine quellen-, begriffs- und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Studie zu Schlüsselbegriffen seiner Ethik*, Friedrich Frommann Verlag, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1995, pp. 93-120; and: C. SCHRÖER, *Naturbegriff und Moralbegründung. Die Grundlegung der Ethik bei Christian Wolff und deren Kritik durch Immanuel Kant*, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1988, pp. 80-99.

presented by Wolff in the second chapter of his *Deutsche Metaphysik*[4] – which can be understood as a sign of its strategic role within the Wolffian system of metaphysics.

Wolff defines *perfection* as: (1) «Die Zusammenstimmung des mannigfaltigen machet die Vollkommenheit der Dinge aus»;[5] (2) «Perfectio est consensus in varietate, seu plurium a se invicem differentium in uno. Consensum vero appello tendentiam ad idem aliquod obtinendum».[6] Perfection is *consensus* – which may also be translated as *concordance*, convenience, agreement. Wolffian scholarship tends to emphasise that Wolff receives the specific formulation as «consensus in varietate» from Leibniz in the correspondence started after Wolff's defence of his *Habilitationsschrift* (1703) – *Philosophia Practica Universalis, Mathematica methodo conscripta* – since Leibniz saw the need for further refinement of Wolff's concept. However, the notion that perfection concerns the *concordance with one's essence* is itself present in Wolff's account even before his contact with Leibniz[7] – even if, to be sure, the contact with Leibniz helped to develop it further. It is the relation between this notion and Rosmini's account that I shall focus on this paper.

In the *Deutsche Metaphysik* (1719), Wolff analyses the concept of perfection after the concepts of order[8] and truth.[9] He famously starts by considering two examples: the perfection of a clock, and that of the course of human life.[10] A clock is perfect, if all its parts concur – *agree* – with one another in showing correctly the time. Similarly, the course of human life is perfect if one's actions agree with one another to the promotion of a general purpose. The notion of *purpose* gains relevance, particularly when Wolff adds that every perfection has its reason, by which we may judge whether a thing is perfect or not[11] – in the case of the clock, the reason of its

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[4] I quote from: [DM] C. WOLFF, *Metafisica tedesca con le Annotazioni alla Metafisica tedesca*, Bompiani, Milano 2003; [PPU] C. WOLFF, *Philosophia Practica Universalis methodo scientifica pertractata. Pars Prior. Theoriam complectens, qua omnis actionum humanarum differentia, omnisque juris ac obligationum omnium principia a priori demosntrantur*, Dionysii Ramanzini Bibliopolae apud S. Thomam, Verona 1739; [Ontol.] C. WOLFF, *Philosophia Prima sive Ontologia. Methodo Scientifica Pertractata, qua omnis cognitionis humanae principia continentur*, Dionysii Ramanzini Bibliopolae apud S. Thomam, Verona 1736; [DE] C. WOLFF, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen, zu Beförderung ihrer Glückseligkeit, den Liebhabern der Wahrheit mitgetheilet*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2016.

[5] DM, § 152.

[6] Ontol., § 503.

[7] Cfr. LANZINI STOBBE, *Reason, Perfection, Obligation: Christian Wolff and the Kantian Counterpoint*, cit., pp. 108-122.

[8] DM, § 132.

[9] DM, § 142.

[10] DM, § 152; also: Ontol., § 503.

[11] DM, § 153; Ontol., § 506.

perfection is the correct displaying of time; in the case of the course of human life, it is the final end of human life, which is perfection itself.

Every perfection has its size,[12] concerning the quantity of degrees it has. A thing is more perfect than another, if the former contains more features that can agree among themselves than the latter:[13] a clock that correctly displays hours and minutes is more perfect than another clock that only displays hours. So, for Wolff, perfection is not at all a merely static notion, whereby we may simply say that a thing is either perfect or imperfect – it *entails* degrees of perfection, which are always connected to a respective *reason* for such perfection.[14]

Such reasons are not random: they are to be found in the respective essence of each thing. Wolff defines essence[15] [*Wesen*] as: «Dasjenige, darinnen der Grund von dem übrigen zu finden, was einem Dinge zukommet».[16] Reason [*Grund*], on its turn, is defined thus: «Wenn ein Ding A etwas in sich enthält, daraus man verstehen kann, warum B ist, B mag entweder in A, oder ausser A seyn; so nennet man dasjenige, was in A anzutreffen ist, den Grund von B».[17] And thing [*Ding*] is: «Alles was seyn kan, es mag würcklich sein oder nicht».[18] So, the perfection of a thing is directly related to its reason, and specifically to the reason of every feature contained by its essence. It follows that every perfection has also a specific *rule* by which to judge whether a thing contains such perfection or not.[19]

An interesting feature concerning Wolff's concept of perfection is its relation to the concept of order – defined as «die Aehnlichkeit des mannigfaltigen in dessen Folge auf und nach einander»;[20] also: «Ordo est similitudo obvia in modo, quo res juxta se invicem collocantur, vel se invicem consequuntur».[21] If order is similitude,[22] and perfection is concordance, we have that where there is perfection, there is also order. Indeed, Wolff states: «In der Vollkommenheit ist lauter Ordnung».[23] Where things are arranged so that their sequence corresponds to a similitude,

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[12] DM, § 154; Ontol., § 519.

[13] DM, § 155; Ontol., §§ 520-521.

[14] Cfr. DM, § 160; and Ontol., §§ 505-508.

[15] Cfr. LANZINI STOBBE, *Reason, Perfection, Obligation: Christian Wolff and the Kantian Counterpoint*, cit., p. 28.

[16] DM, § 33.

[17] DM, § 29.

[18] DM, § 16.

[19] DM, §§ 164; 168; Ontol., § 509.

[20] DM, § 132.

[21] Ontol., § 472.

[22] DM, §§ 18-19.

[23] DM, § 156.

we say that there is order; but when things are arranged so that they are in a state of affairs whereby they agree with one another, we say that there is perfection. We will see that Rosmini considers order and perfection to be even connected closer.

We could summarise that, for Wolff, perfection is a concordance with the respective essence of each thing. Imperfection, on its turn, is the disagreement with such respective essence[24]. A clock that does not display the hours properly, or a human being whose actions do not agree to the promotion of the final end are, ultimately, *imperfect* – they lack the perfection that, following from their very essence, they should possess. The tension between perfection and imperfection is indeed a tension between the agreement and disagreement with the essence at hand.

(b) Rosmini

Wolff considers the concept of perfection in his *ontology*; Rosmini discusses perfection in his unfinished *Teosofia*.[25] In its eight chapter – «*Dell'ordine e della perfezione in universale*» – he starts his argument for the interconnection between the concepts of order and perfection. He defines order as «la cospirazione di più entità nell'uno».[26] Such definition may already seem at odds with the Wolffian definition, where order, as we saw, was defined as *similitude.* For Rosmini, order arises from a relationship between two different things.[27] Every order entails three elements:[28] (a) «l'uno risultante»; (b) «i termini delle relazioni»; (c) «le relazioni che, legando insieme i termini, fan che cospirino nell'uno». Similarly to Wolff – but concerning more perfection than order – Rosmini states that: «l'ordine si ha "quando piú entità cospirano in uno". All'ordine dunque è essenziale la moltiplicità».[29] That is, the manifold is required for an order, as perfection was defined as the *consensus in varietate* for Wolff.

Rosmini distinguishes between reasons[30] of order: (a) reasons of subjective order (which concern subsistence); (b) of objective order (regarding similitude); and, most interestingly, (c) of

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[24] Ontol., § 504.

[25] I quote from: A. ROSMINI, *Principi della Scienza Morale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1990; ID., *Storia comparativa e critica de' sistemi intorno al principio della morale*, in ID., *Principi della Scienza Morale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1990, pp. 161-459; ID., *Storia dell'Etica*, in ID., *Compendio di Etica e Breve Storia di essa*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1998, pp. 209-222; ID., *Teosofia*, eds. M.A. RASCHINI – P.P. OTTONELLO, vol. 13, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1998.

[26] ROSMINI, *Teosofia*, cit., p. 281.

[27] Cfr. *ibidem.*

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 284.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 289.

[30] Rosmini's account of *reason* (of perfection) also resembles Wolff's definition: «*il perché piú entità costituiscano l'uno*» (*ibidem*, p. 294). For Wolff, reason [*Grund*] is precisely *why* something is (DM, § 29; Ontol., § 56).

moral order (of *perfection*).[31] Here, Rosmini's argument is already unfolding toward the concept of perfection. He crucially states that: «La *cospirazione* dunque, che si chiama anche *convenienza* di piú entità nell'uno, ecco la ragione dell'ordine»;[32] and: «la convenienza per la quale le parti dell'ordine producono l'uno».[33] At first, Rosmini presented the definition of order as '*cospirazione*'; now he fully uses the term '*convenienza*', directly present in Wolff. So, the question we must ask is: *why does Rosmini consider order almost as Wolff considered perfection?*

Rosmini starts his section «*Dei concetti di perfezione e di perfetto*» thus:

L'uno, rimossa ogni molteplicità, non dà alcun concetto né di perfetto, né di perfezione. I concetti di perfetto e di perfezione compariscono alla mente, tosto che ella pensa quell'uno che risulta da' più, il quale si ravvisa in un dato ordine. Perfetto dunque è una qualità, che si predica dell'uno in quanto risulta dai piú.[34]

Perfect is a *quality* – predicated upon the unity formed by a relationship between entities. Rosmini also formulates it as: « [...] perfetto è un predicato che si dà all'uno in quanto risulta da più»;[35] and: «Perfetto [...] si dice "l'uno formato nel modo piú compiuto dalle entità che sono atte a formarlo"».[36] If *perfect* is a quality predicated upon the unity formed, *perfection* is defined thus:

Ma se si considera l'uno in relazione di ciascuna entità che lo costituisce, e si considera che da quella entità riceva qualche parte dell'essere suo come uno, questa relazione si suol dire una perfezione. Altro dunque è una perfezione, altro è la perfezione. La perfezione è l'astratto di perfetto: ma una perfezione non è l'astratto di perfetto semplicemente preso, ma di perfetto parzialmente preso.[37]

Perfection is the *abstraction* of the perfect, the relation between the entities forming the corresponding unity. *A* perfection, however, is not the abstraction *as such*, but only an instance of it. Rosmini, then, addresses our question about the relation between order and perfection. He says that the universal subject of perfection is «l'uno che risulta dai più».[38] There are different kinds of perfect, since there are different kinds of resulting unities – corresponding to the three supreme categories of order (subjective, objective, and moral). He states that everything that was said about the reason of order also refers to the reason of perfect unity: «[...] l'ordine e il perfetto sono due concetti che si riferiscono alla stessa cosa, ma considerata da un lato

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[31] ROSMINI, *Teosofia*, cit., p. 293.

[32] *Ibidem*, p. 291.

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 296.

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 306.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 307.

[36] *Ibidem*.

[37] *Ibidem*.

[38] *Ibidem*, p. 308.

opposto».[39] The difference between both concepts is a matter of *perspective*: if regarded from the point of view of the relation – the *cospirazione* (convenience, or concordance) – we have *order*; if considered from the standpoint of the result – the *unity* – we have *perfection.*

Rosmini seems to *rethink* the Wolffian thematic of order-perfection in that he understands order *closer* to perfection. His very definition of order resembles Wolff's definition of perfection – even more than his own definition of perfection does. If Wolff does not seem to distinguish between both perspectives of the relationship that results in perfection, Rosmini's account is intriguing exactly because of that.

Furthermore, Rosmini establishes[40] that the determining reasons of order correspond to the reasons of the perfect – and that the rules of order and the perfect relate to one another. We must highlight Rosmini's supreme rule to judge order: «la convenienza risultante da tutte le convenienze delle singole entità o, come abbiamo detto piú sopra, la relazione di tutte le loro relazioni».[41] This point is crucial, because it stresses the importance of concordance in the interconnection between order and perfection – a pivotal point of contact between Wolff and Rosmini.

Rosmini's direct mention to – and critique of – Wolff appears immediately in the sequence:

Se dunque all'ordine Eterno e necessario, e agli ordini eternamente determinati, si dà il nome di ente, allora è vero quanto asseriscono i filosofi, che l'*ordine*, o il *perfetto* nulla aggiunge al concetto di ente, eccetto la considerazione della mente che distingue in tali enti le diverse entità onde risultano, le loro convenienze coll'ente risultante, e la loro armonia o cospirazione nell'uno.[42]

Rosmini adds a footnote with the closing passage of the section about perfection in Wolff's *Ontologia*:

Perfectio rebus tribuitur, quatenus determinationes intrinsicae per rationem quandam [Rosmini's quote: quamdam] generalem, seu certas regulas [absent in Rosmini's quote: vel rationem generalem] explicari possunt. [...] Quoniam determinationes istae ens quoddam constituunt, quatenus sibi mutuo non repugnant [absent in Rosmini's quote: (§. 142.)]; perfectio rei nullam ei tribuit determinationem, quam non habet. Ipsa igitur non alio respectu rei tribuitur, nisi quatenus per notionem quandam [Rosmini: quamdam] generalem seu certas regulas explicari potest, cur determinationes intrinsecae tales potius esse debeant, quam aliae.[43]

For our purposes, such quote serves more as clear evidence of Rosmini's reading of Wolff's

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[39] *Ibidem.*

[40] *Ibidem*, pp. 308-309.

[41] *Ibidem*, p. 309.

[42] *Ibidem.*

[43] Ontol., § 530; also: ROSMINI, *Teosofia*, cit., p. 309. About this reference from Rosmini to Wolff, see: OTTONELLO, *Wolff in Rosmini*, cit., p. 179.

works on metaphysics first-hand[44] than as a topic to be addressed systematically – which I intent to do in future research. For Wolff, according to Rosmini, perfection does not add anything to the concept of being – it merely points out the state of affairs of the relationship between entities at hand. If a manyfold of entities agree with one another, we say that there is perfection, but such statement does not add anything to their beings that was not contained in their respective essences. Rosmini, on his turn, considers that perfection may indeed add something to the being of a thing – but here we will merely mention such point.[45]

We must keep in mind that Rosmini seems to highlight the notion of *convenience* in matters of order and perfection, and that such notion concerns the entities in a relation that implies the notions of order (if considered the relation itself) and of the perfect (if regarded the resulting unity). Now, we will unfold the notion of convenience in practical philosophy.

2. *Moral Perfection*

(a) Wolff

Once analysed Wolff's and Rosmini's *ontological* notions of perfection, we will address the respective *practical* notions. Firstly, we must stress that Wolff's practical philosophy is well known to be perfection-based.[46] In his *Deutsche Ethik* (1720), he formulates the general rule for human actions as: «Thue, was dich und deinen oder anderer Zustand vollkommener machet: unterlaß, was ihn unvollkommener machet»[47]. Such rule is also the very law of nature[48]: the

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[44] For an overview of Rosmini's bibliographical reception of Wolff, see: OTTONELLO, *Wolff in Rosmini*, cit., pp. 172-174.

[45] Cfr. ROSMINI, *Teosofia*, cit., pp. 309-315.

[46] See, among others: U. GOLDENBAUM, *Wolff's Powerful Concept of Perfection and Its Roots*, in S. SCHIERBAUM – M. WALSCHOTS – J. WALSH (eds.), *Christian Wolff's German Ethics. New Essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2024, pp. 67-86; P. GUYER, *Perfection, Autonomy, and Heautonomy. The path of Reason from Wolff to Kant*, in J. STOLZENBERG – P.O. RUDOLPH (eds.), *Christian Wolff und die europäische Aufklärung*, vol. 1, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2007, pp. 299-322; H. KLEMME, *Werde vollkommen! Christian Wolffs Vollkommenheitsethik in systematischer Perspektive*, in J. STOLZENBERG – P.O. RUDOLPH (eds.), *Christian Wolff und die europäische Aufklärung*, vol. 3, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2007, pp. 163-180; E. LANZINI STOBBE, *Is Christian Wolff's Practical Philosophy Eudaimonistic?*, in SCHIERBAUM – WALSCHOTS – WALSH (eds.), *Christian Wolff's German Ethics. New Essays*, cit., pp. 153-173; T. ROSENKOETTER, *Perfection and the Foundations of Wolff's German Ethics*, in SCHIERBAUM – WALSCHOTS – WALSH (eds.), *Christian Wolff's German Ethics. New Essays*, cit., pp. 174-195.

[47] DE, § 12.

[48] DE, § 19.

commandment by which nature – and here we must understand *reason* – obligates human beings, i.e., gives them the motive [*Bewegungs-Grund*] to act. Wolff defines motive precisely as «Gründe [...] des Wollens und nicht Wollens»[49] – so that our faculty of reason [*Vernunft*] gives us the reason [*Grund*] to act. Such reason to act is the reason to act for the promotion of the good and avoidance of evil. Good is defined as: «Was uns und unsern Zustand vollkommener machet»[50] – that which perfects our and other's (internal and external) states – defined as the «Art der Einschränckung» (DM, § 121) of a thing. Our actions are good if they promote perfection, and evil if they promote imperfection.[51]

If it is nature – "*die bewegende Kraft der Welt*"[52] – that gives human beings a motive to act, the promotion of perfection is an obligation that ultimately rests upon the notion of concordance with such nature (grounded on reason). In the *Ethik*, Wolff states that: « [...] das Gesetz der Natur beruhe auf der Übereinstimmung unserer Handlungen mit unserer Natur».[53] And in the *Philosophia Practica Universalis*, he talks about the concordance with nature and essence: «Lex naturae nos obligat ad commitendas actiones essentiae ac naturae nostrae convenientes, & omittendas actiones eidem disconvenientes».[54] Such formulations are not at all surprising if considered within Wolff's metaphysics. Ontological perfection was defined as concordance – but now we must add that he considers both notions of *essence* and *nature* in a larger framework that comprises also his cosmology and natural theology.

According to Wolff, the main purpose of the world is the «Offenbahrung der Herrlichkeit GOttes».[55] Such glorification of God is indeed the reflection of God's perfections – the realisation of greater perfections in the world, thus promoting a more perfect reflection of God's perfections.[56] As parts of the world, human beings have also a role to play in such promotion of the greater perfection of the world – which is why the final purpose of all human actions is said to be «die Vollkommenheit unser und unseres Zustandes, ingleichen die Vermeidung der

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[49] DM, § 496.

[50] DM, § 422.

[51] DE, §§ 2-3; see also: E. LANZINI STOBBE – L. SIMCHEN TREVISAN, *Obrigação, lei e direito natural em Wolff e a dicotomia entre ações boas e más*, in D.S. CASTRO – M.O. MOURA – S.R.A. SOUZA – U.V. CORSI (eds.), *XXIV Semana Acadêmica do PPG em Filosofia da PUCRS: Cinquentenário Filosófico. Filosofia antiga, medieval e moderna*, vol. 1, Editora Fundação Fênix, Porto Alegre 2024, pp. 137-150.

[52] DM, § 629.

[53] DE, § 28.

[54] PPU, I, § 188; see also: PPU, I, §§ 122-128.

[55] DM, § 1045.

[56] See also: E. LANZINI STOBBE, *A Teodiceia de Christian Wolff*, in «Kant e-prints», XIX, 2024, pp. e024005.

Unvollkommenheit»;[57] and the highest good for human beings is correspondingly defined as «einen ungehinderten Fortgang zu grösseren Vollkommenheiten».[58] And it is so, because «Wesen und Natur der Dinge sind GOttes Mittel»[59] for the main purpose of the world. When we say that human beings are *obligated* by our own *essence* and *nature* to *perfection*, we say that we are obligated to *be in concordance* with our own essence and nature – meaning the promotion of perfection (concordance) in general in the world. Such concordance with essence and nature is indeed the feature of Wolff's practical notion of perfection that seems present in Rosmini's own account.

(b) Rosmini

Rosmini's practical conception of perfection lies in the core of his practical philosophy. We will focus on his *Principi della Scienza Morale*, although Rosmini does explicitly refer to Wolff in the *Storia Comparativa e Critica intorno il Principio della Morale* and in the essay *Storia dell'Etica*.[60] In the *Storia Comparativa*, he classifies Wolff's principle of morality as a second class of positive principles that seeks the source of moral obligation in human nature[61]. He states that:

Altri, accorti che non conveniva cercare la perfezione di tutto l'uomo nella perfezione di una sua parte, posero questa umana perfezione nella perfezione di tutte le singole parti, e nell'armonia fra di esse. Wolfio, che dà appunto per principio della morale quello di cercare la propria perfezione, comincia dal definire la perfezione in generale "certa corrispondenza fra la diversità delle parti colla unità del tutto", ed osserva sulle vestigia di Leibnizio, che "fu considerata siccome base della umana perfezione l'armonia delle varie potenze dell'uomo, e segnatamente la concordia de' suoi desiderî colla ragione".[62]

Rosmini correctly identifies that Wolff's principle of morality rests on perfection as harmony, and that it is related to Leibniz's account. However, he does not focus on the meaning of perfection as *concordance* (with one's essence and nature), which, we will see, is a major point of agreement between both philosophers.

To understand Rosmini's account of practical perfection, we must briefly address some of the main concepts of his philosophy. Famously, the cornerstone of Rosmini's philosophy is the

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[57] DE, § 40.

[58] DE, § 44.

[59] DM, § 1032.

[60] In the *Storia dell'Etica*, Rosmini merely refers to the fact that Leibniz attempted to separate Ethics from Law, and that Wolff and the Wolffian school continued such project (cfr. Rosmini, *Storia dell'Etica*, cit., p. 218).

[61] Rosmini, *Principi della Scienza Morale*, cit., pp. 358-362.

[62] *Ibidem*, pp. 361-362; cfr. Ottonello, *Wolff in Rosmini*, cit., pp. 177-178.

«idea dell'essere»[63] – being in its ideal form, innate to human beings.[64] Such idea is that by means of which all knowledge is possible, because it is the idea behind all ideas. Through the idea of being, human beings receive «lume della ragione»[65] – i.e., their reason is illuminated by being itself.

Rosmini considers «*l'essere*» in three modalities: *ideal* being (which is the opening of human beings to being as such, the possibility for everything to be given in such category); *real* being (the determination of being, by means of the presence of data from sensibility, the passage from mere possibility to actuality);[66] and *moral* being (located between ideal and real being, where morality will serve as passage from possibility to actually in concordance with the essence of everything). It is precisely within the dynamics between the three modalities of being that we will find Rosmini's account of practical perfection.

In the *Principi*, Rosmini formulates the moral law in several ways – two of which interest us more:

(1) «Segui, nel tuo operare, il lume della ragione»;[67]
(2) «Vuogli, o sia ama l'essere ovunque lo conosci, in quell'ordine ch'egli presenta alla tua intelligenza»[68].

For Rosmini, human beings are sentient-intelligent beings, possessing sensibility and intellect. Because of our intellect, we are capable of being illuminated by the light of being. We receive the moral law from such light: being illuminates human reason and, from there, we take that we must follow such light – implying an *obligation* to know being *as it is*, i.e., to recognise being in its *proper order*. Such obligation also implies to *love* being entirely (with one's will), so that we must love all being *in due order*.[69]

It is not lightly that Rosmini uses the word 'order' at this point – his approach is directly connected to his account from the *Teosofia*. Thus, we are obligated to know and love all beings in their respective order – in the context of the concordance among parts forming a unity. And such context will ultimately lead to the notion of concordance with one's essence.

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[63] For his whole argument in such regard, see: *ibidem*, pp. 51-65.

[64] Concerning the relationship between Wolff, Kant and Rosmini regarding *reason*, see: E. LANZINI STOBBE, *Reason and Light of Reason in Rosmini's Principle of Morality with Regard to Wolff and Kant*, in «Revista Instante», VI, 2024, 3, pp. 1-33.

[65] ROSMINI, *Principi della Scienza Morale*, cit., p. 56.

[66] This is also an interesting topic about Rosmini's reception of Wolff – who is well known for his metaphysical account of '*complementum possibilitatis*'. I intent to address it in another study.

[67] ROSMINI, *Principi della Scienza Morale*, cit., p. 56.

[68] *Ibidem*, p. 110.

[69] *Ibidem*, pp. 107, 110.

Rosmini's account in the *Principi* recurs to the concept of the good to arrive at such conclusion.[70] Following the preceding Patristic and Scholastic traditions, he considers being and good as identical but regarded from different perspectives. Quoting Thomas Aquinas, Rosmini affirms that good is that which is wanted by everyone. A good thing is wanted because of the degree of perfection it contains, so that there is a direct relation between the perfection of a nature and the appetite as such. Furthermore, such appetite is related to the pleasure caused by that perfection: pleasure and displeasure relate to the intrinsic order of each thing, so that good is that which is in concordance with its respective nature, generating pleasure. Also this point seems close to Wolff – who defines pleasure as «Anschauen der Vollkommenheit»[71] – even if Rosmini does not explicitly refer to it.

According to Rosmini, our intelligence observes in the *essence* of every thing (its determination of being) the rule by which to judge its good or evil. Good is, therefore, «*ciò che conviene alla natura della cosa*».[72] In a formulation close to Wolff's practical account of perfection, Rosmini says that the *finality* of every thing is its perfect *state* – the *complete essence* of such *nature*.[73] Such meaning of perfect and perfection is also directly connected to the notion of unity resulting from order. Here, we grasp what it means to say that the moral being is the intermediary between ideal and real being: it concerns the *actualisation* of the possibility of ideal being in the actuality of the real being, so that morality is the tendency from one to the other. Moral good is the «*bene ordinato*»[74] – it concerns the order by which being presents itself to us, thus corresponding to *convenience* among the parts of a thing, and among things.[75] Every thing has a specific degree of perfection, in that it possesses being (or should possess, according to its essence). So, perfection – the good – of a thing is that which agrees with its essence, giving it «pienezza».[76]

It is the same with human beings. Since we are constituted by soul and body[77], our goodness must correspond to both. There is a double tendency:[78] self-conservation (goods of existence), and self-perfection (goods of perfection). The *final end of human beings* is the «perfezionamento di se' medesimo»[79] – which is a tendency of human nature itself. The justification provided for it

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[70] Rosmini considers the concept of the good in its relation to the idea of being, cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 65-85.

[71] DM, § 404.

[72] ROSMINI, *Principi della Scienza Morale*, cit., p. 80; cfr. *ibidem*, p. 109.

[73] *Ibidem*, p. 81.

[74] *Ibidem*, p. 109.

[75] *Ibidem*.

[76] *Ibidem*, p. 82.

[77] *Ibidem*, pp. 95, 97.

[78] *Ibidem*, pp. 90-91, 95.

[79] *Ibidem*, p. 91.

is that the final end of Creation is the good – perfection – of intelligent beings and their participation in the absolute Being, which is God. Also here Rosmini seems close to Wolff – who holds that the final end of the world is perfection, but in the sense that human beings can contribute to the increase of the perfection of the world.

Rosmini's perfectionism is characterised by the identification from acting morally well and acting seeking the order of being[80] – the *concordance with the essence of being.* Because humans are intelligent beings, we are illuminated by the light of reason, thus having knowledge of being; such knowledge shows us that not only we must know, but also love all being; and such knowledge and love must address being in the order by which it presents itself to us. Human beings cognise the obligation to act in accordance with the knowledge of being in its proper order and, when we recognise such obligation, we assume that we must act accordingly.[81] It is, ultimately, an *obligation* that concerns the *essence* of human beings, because it commands us to act – from the perspective of the moral being – toward the full actualisation of our essence, thus becoming what we are in essence, participating in being as such and its order. This point seems also consonant with Wolff's practical conception of perfection since, as we have seen, he constantly affirms that our essence and nature (and the essence and nature of all things) obligate us to promote perfection and avoid imperfection.

Final Remarks

Although Rosmini does not explicitly mention Wolff in his main account from the *Principi*, Wolff's influence on Rosmini's conception of perfection cannot be overlooked – particularly considering that he directly quotes Wolff in other works. To be sure, Wolff and Rosmini find themselves in a larger tradition that connects the concept of perfection to the notion of concordance with essence and nature – comprising Ancient to Modern philosophy. However, it is remarkable that Rosmini addresses *Wolff* in his context – since Wolffianism had already almost vanished from the philosophical scene due to Kant's criticism – which could show that Wolffian philosophy can still have something to add to the philosophical debate even after Kant.

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[80] *Ibidem*, p. 112.

[81] Cognition and recognition of the good, as well as the role of the will, are topics of great interest in Rosmini's practical philosophy, which I plan to address in another paper. See, for instance: *ibidem*, pp. 128, 131ss.