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10-2014

## Review: Filosofie și Religie: O Abordare Multidisciplinară (Philosophy of Religion: An Interdisciplinary Approach) (by Sandu Frunza)

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### Recommended Citation

Jones, Michael S. Book Review of Sandu Frunză's *Filosofie și Religie: O Abordare Multidisciplinară* (Philosophy and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Approach). *Religion in Eastern Europe* 24:5, October 2004, 47-49.

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**Sandu Frunză, editor, *Filosofie și Religie: O Abordare Multidisciplinară (Philosophy and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Approach)*. (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Editura Limes, 2001. 244 pages, paper.)** Reviewed by Michael S. Jones.

It seems that in Western Europe and America the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge has of late been gaining in popularity. This is particularly true in two domains of knowledge that are of interest to the readers of *REE*, religion and philosophy. Philosophy has virtually ceased to have an independent identity, and has largely become the discipline of analyzing other disciplines. This is seen in the very names of many of the philosophy courses taught at most universities: philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, medical ethics, philosophy of law, etc. The interdisciplinary study of religion has likewise become commonplace. Religious thought has been stimulated by interdisciplinary interaction with philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, historiography, the natural sciences, aesthetics, text-critical studies, and other intellectual disciplines. This growth in interdisciplinary thought may reflect a growing liberalization of the Western mind (the term "liberal" is used here in its classical sense, without reference to political or theological positions). When a mind is given increased freedom, and when it becomes more used to this freedom, it becomes more open to hearing what other disciplines have to say about its own area of interest and specialization. When it discovers that other disciplines can make valuable contributions to its own projects, it embraces interdisciplinary study.

An interesting question is whether or not the growth of interdisciplinary study seen in Western Europe and America has any counterpart in Eastern Europe and the republics formed from the Soviet Union. Several factors might incline one to expect a lack of interdisciplinary thought in this region, including the lack of intellectual freedom under the former socialist governments of the region, the present political uncertainties and economic hardships, and the more conservative nature of the popular culture and religious institutions. However, there are also factors that contribute to a positive climate for interdisciplinary thought. These include the intellectual freedom now enjoyed in many of the countries of this region, the increased ability to travel outside of the region, and perhaps most of all, the ability to communicate quickly and affordably with people from around the world via email and the World Wide Web.

My own impression, formed while living in Eastern Europe for 21 months, is that interdisciplinary study of philosophy and of religion does exist, and that it is growing. One piece of evidence for this is the book under review. It is an orchestrated collection of articles united by two main elements: the shared topic of religion, and the relationship of all of the contributors to the city Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Each of the contributors to the volume has some close connection to Cluj-Napoca, a principle Romanian educational center, most of them living in Cluj at the time of publication. Each contributor also has a unique area of academic specialization, thus making the book a pluriperspectival examination of religion by authors within the same geographical and cultural region.

The articles reflect the specializations of the various contributors. Each author has contributed an article that in some way brings his or her own specialization to bear on the study of religion. Many of the contributors are from the philosophy department of Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, while others are from other departments of the same university or other schools within the city. The contributors from the philosophy department of BBU are, first, Marcel Bodea, who is a doctoral candidate at the University of Bucharest and instructor of epistemology in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy of Babeș-Bolyai University. Bodea writes about the differences and similarities between scientific knowledge and religious knowledge. Second, Aurel Codoban, who is a professor of philosophy of religion in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy at BBU, writes about the Gnostic elements in popular Romanian Christianity. Third, Vasile Frățeanu, who is a professor of philosophy of culture and chairs the Systematic Philosophy section of the philosophy department of BBU, contributes an article arguing that philosophy is in a unique position to make possible a

knowledge of God. Fourth, Mihaela Frunzã, who is a professor of feminist thought in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy, contributes an article on the integration of religion and philosophy in the thought of Maimonides. Fifth, Sandu Frunzã, who is a professor of philosophy of religion in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy and is the editor of this volume, discusses the relationship of philosophy and Jewish tradition in the thought of two leading 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish thinkers, Buber and Levinas. Finally, the author of this review, Michael S. Jones, who at the time the book was published was a doctoral candidate at Temple University and an adjunct professor of philosophy in the Chair of History, Philosophy, and Logic in the Department of Philosophy at BBU, contributes an article explaining William James' proposal for a pragmatic justification of religious belief.

Of the contributors who are not from the philosophy department of BBU, four are professors of religion. Father Ioan Chirilã, professor of Old Testament in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at BBU, contributes another article attempting to reconcile philosophy and theology, this time through a discussion of the Romanian philosopher D. D. Roșca and the Romanian theologian Isidor Todoran. Father Ioan-Vasile Leb, professor of church history and chair of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at BBU, presents an essay on the early 4<sup>th</sup>-century Christian apologist Lactantius, using Lactantius' writings as the basis for a warning against pagan philosophy and an argument for a Christian approach to philosophy. Father Ștefan Iloaie, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Orthodox Theology of the University of Sibiu and lecturer on ethics in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at BBU, contributes an article that attempts to define the basic characteristics and strengths of a Christian philosophy. Cãlin Sãplãcan, doctoral candidate and instructor of ethics in the Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology at BBU, discusses the differences and similarities between religious ethics and philosophical ethics and argues for a dialogue between the two.

The remaining contributors are professors or researchers in various other domains at institutions located in Cluj-Napoca. Ștefan Anghi is a professor of aesthetics at the Gheorghe Dima Academy of Music. Anghi's article discusses the role of aesthetic contextual elements in religious (as well as non-religious) interpretation. Vasile Boari, professor of political science at Babeș-Bolyai University and chair of the Faculty of Political Science and Administration, investigates the philosophy of the author of the Biblical book *Ecclesiastes*, finding pieces of wisdom that he deems equal to the insights of the great philosophers. Camil Mureșanu, who is director of the Institute of History at the Cluj branch of the Romanian Academy (and also professor in the philosophy department of BBU), provides an analysis of the concepts of certainty and doubt that attempts to uncover a zone of reciprocity and tolerance between the two. Marius Jucan, professor of American Studies in the department of European Studies at BBU, contributes a study on the relationship between the religious and the political in literature. Lastly, Andrei Marga, the president of BBU and a former professor of philosophy, writes on the return of contemporary philosophy to the contemplation of religion, using the Jewish philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig as his example.

Many of the articles that comprise this volume are truly pluriperspectival: they involve not only the study of religion from some perspective outside of religion, but also the embracing of the insights of one religious tradition by an author from another tradition. An example of this is the contribution by Dr. Sandu Frunzã. Frunzã's article combines a historical and philosophical analysis of certain religious elements in the philosophies of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. Dr. Frunzã is well qualified to write about Jewish philosophy, having studied in Israel and having taught courses on Judaism at BBU.

Frunzã opens his article with a discussion of the essence of Jewish philosophy. He then turns to an analysis of the relation of philosophy and religion in the thought of Buber and Levinas. Then follows an exegesis of the philosophy of relationality as found in each thinker, including discussion of the similarities and differences between human-human relationships and the human-divine relationship. Along the way Frunzã points out how the Jewishness of their thought is reflected in their philosophical proposals. He reflects positively on the conceptualization of relationality found in these thinkers and suggests that in addition to illuminating the natures of the subject-subject relationship, the subject-object relationship, and the subject-God relationship, this conceptualization may also provide a clarification of the philosophy-theology relationship.

Frunzã's appropriating of elements of the philosophies of Buber and Levinas, which according to Frunzã's analysis are at least in part a product of their Jewishness, is particularly interesting because

while Frunzã views the Jewish elements in the thought of Buber and Levinas as a positive contribution, Frunzã is not himself Jewish. To the contrary, Frunzã is Romanian Orthodox, and has written extensively on the philosophical elements in the thought of that greatest of Romanian Orthodox theologians, Dumitru Staniloae. This is an outstanding example of the intellectual openness and the inter-ideological profundity that can now be found in Eastern Europe.

The articles of which this book is composed are fitted together loosely, held together by the common interest in the interdisciplinary study of religion and by common cultural elements, but distinct in their specific topics and in many cases in their methodologies. In reading them one gets an impression of unfettered intellectual freedom, each author arguing for his or her own perspective or conclusion with care for neither overt nor covert political consequences. While the articles and the subjects that they address are interesting, the intellectual freedom evidenced in these articles may be as interesting as what the articles actually say about religion. To those who have an interest in the development of Eastern Europe, this book may be one welcome sign of the progress of intellectual freedom in the region.

This broad array of experts bringing their diverse expertise to bear on topics of religion and philosophy is compelling evidence that the interdisciplinary study of philosophy and of religion exists and is thriving in at least one part of Eastern Europe. Since the political and intellectual freedoms that helped to bring about this community of liberal-minded scholars and their work are now found throughout most of Eastern Europe, it seems likely that such interdisciplinary efforts can be found in other Eastern European educational centers as well.

*Michael S. Jones, PhD, associate editor, Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*