

BÖHME, Jakob (Boehme)—Protestant theosopher and mystic, precursor of German idealism, b. in 1575 in Stry Zawidów near Zgorzelec, d. in 1624 in Zgorzelec.

Böhme came from a powerful farming family, had no financial problems, and devoted his adult life to writing, although for three centuries a carefully nurtured legend had contributed to the picture of Böhme as simple tailor. He did not have a formal philosophical education, but he knew the current literature in alchemy, the Cabbalah, mysticism, and religion. He traveled much, had a circle of educated friends, and was a devout Lutheran.

The system Böhme created was not a philosophy in the strict sense, but a Gnostic vision formulated in Hermetic language and deeply rooted in trends of the time such as late medieval and Renaissance mysticism, Lutheranism, and the views of representatives of the Reformation (S. Franck, C. Schenkfeld, V. Weigel).

Böhme wrote all his works, except for one, during a six-year period. Although his views went through changes, traces of Gnosticism are present throughout. Böhme presented himself as someone who had access to God's essence and through God saw all creation. The content of this vision was written down and passed on to adepts for belief. The vision includes views on God, the world, man, and evil. It is also a feature of Gnosticism to expound upon evil as the major problem.

Böhme's basic works include the following: *Morgenröte im Aufgang*, called *Aurora* (1612); *Die Drei Prinzipien göttlichen Wesens* (1619); *Vom dreifachen Leben des Menschen* (1619–1620); *Vierzig Fragen von den Seelen* (1620); *Von der Menschwerdung Jesu Christi* (1620); *Sechs theosophische Punkte* (1620); *De signatura rerum* (1622); *Von der Gnadenwahl* (1623); *Mysterium magnum* (1623).

Editions of his collected works include the following: A. Faust, W. E. Peuckert, *Sämtliche Schriften* (I–IX, 1941–1942, 1955–1961); W. Buddecke, *Die Urschriften* (I–II, 1963–1966).

UNDERSTANDING OF BEING AND THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD. Things are composed of six opposing qualities: hot—cold, sour—sweet, bitter—salty. These qualities are not static but dynamic. Each quality possesses a modality of good and of evil. In this way the structure of reality is based on three parallel oppositions and on one opposition that cuts reality in half, as it were (the dualism of good and evil).

Böhme introduced the dogma of the Holy Trinity into his ontological speculations. The Holy Spirit permeates nature, which is God's body, but it directs the modality of the good in things. God the Father is the source of all qualities (heaven). God the Son is the source of eternal joy (the sun). The Holy Spirit is the principle of motion and life (fire, air, and water). The relation of God to the world is similar to the relation of the human soul to the body. In God are found the fundamental qualities of nature, the number of which was increased to seven in harmony with the number of astral bodies and basic metals in alchemy. The seventh quality is the result of the other six working together. These qualities acquire the status of different spirits (Quell-Geister). The world arises from God, who is corporeal, and who filled the world before creation with his corporeality.

Böhme's system oscillated between pantheism and panentheism; creation "*ex nihilo*" and God's transcendence to the world are also denied.

The visible world is God's second creation, created in an attempt to correct evil, which had affected the angelic world. Before the fall of Adam there was a fall in the world of angels, i.e., the fall of Lucifer, who had turned his imagination toward the center of darkness and desired that the center of darkness would dominate the center of light. Lucifer, one of the three archangels (besides Michael and Uriel) wanted to rival God and fell, pulling with him angels from his sphere. His fall is the cause of evil in the world, and God is not responsible for that evil since Lucifer is free. In God there is no evil, but in creatures that reflect God evil can be actualized in view of Lucifer's free action.

Every being, however, is independent of the Creator, for each has within itself its own center of being that it has received from God. Men possess freedom, which is the condition for moral responsibility. Böhme thought that a world that contains evil is better than no world at all. God reveals his love and grace through the work of correcting the world.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD. God is the undifferentiated source whose chief power is the will. Since He has no other object of his will except himself, He wants to be divided from himself. As a result two centers come into being: light and darkness. The light penetrates the darkness and seven rays come into being. This schema has several characteristic elements: God is will; He needs auto-manifestation, which leads to differentiations; evil is an ontological principle.

Böhme treats God as an absolute person and recognizes self-revelation as His essence. One effect of this self-revelation is the emergence of opposites. God, as pure will, acquires self-awareness by a process of self-revelation. The tendency in the will takes the form of opposing desires, of which one is the center of darkness, and the other is the center of light. The world is not contingent, but is necessary to the self-revelation in time of divine eternity. Evil is the reversal of order. Humanity is the link between the world and angels, while divine revelation happens in the world through human consciousness.

Böhme also characterizes God as “Urgrund”, that is, as independent of any other being and lacking any ontological determination. This is God’s most fundamental aspect. At the same time, this “Urgrund” is complete and primitive freedom. Here there is actually no plurality, self-realization, or self-revelation. There is, however, an eternal tendency for God to move in this direction.

Self-revelation is composed of three elements: the principle of freedom, the medium of self-objectification, and the link between subject and object. In trinitarian language, the indeterminate will corresponds to the Father, the will as possessing identity corresponds to the Son, and the will as self-revealing corresponds to the Holy Spirit. A fourth element appears in addition: Sophia—divine wisdom containing an infinite number of ideas that will be realized.

Böhme departed from his earlier views in which God was conceived in spatio-temporal categories. God is separated from the world. God’s nature contains three qualities: the quality of concentration, the quality of expansion, and the quality of synthesis, which holds the other two in tension. This is the dark center in God, which is the source of both life and destruction. The center of light is composed of three qualities in which the spirit becomes real. The first quality corresponds to love, the second corresponds to tone (it contributes to determination), and the third joins God with the world. The seventh quality (and fourth in sequence) joins the center of darkness with the center of light.

God, as good, eternally overcomes the potentially destructive force of non-being He contains in himself. This translates into beings that come into existence in a dialectical process. The world’s coming-into-being is necessary and flows from God’s nature. The essence of the world is defined by God’s essence. Hell and heaven are eternal, whereas the world is temporal and is subject to the predominant influence of evil.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF MAN. Man is a microcosm and a microtheos, and thereby the intermediary between God and the world. Adam’s fall was not the fundamental source of evil, because the fall of Lucifer had already taken place. Adam fell before he became a man of blood and bones, while the fall presented in Genesis was the final fall. Adam had earlier belongs to three basic principles. His role was to connect the two centers of God, but he was concentrated upon himself, which separated him from God. This led to a series of falls. The last phase concerns the events in Genesis, when Adam opposed God and wanted to acquire knowledge “of good and evil”. Adam was initially hermaphroditic. He could reproduce by magical generations. When he became corporeal he lost his intuitive and magic powers.

Because man is a μικροθεος [mikrótheos], humanity did not lose its similarity to God and is still a “microcosm”. Thereby, despite the fall, humanity can take part in correcting evil.

Because of man’s unique position in the cosmos, man in his self-awareness not only knows himself, but also God and the world. Also fulfillment of God’s self-revelation occurs in human consciousness and in human language. “Vernunft” is the reason, which abstractly knows the world of phenomena. “Verstand” is intuition reaching the essence of things, although the fullness of knowledge, because of the fall, is possible only by grace. As man truly knows things he participates in their nature, and the full expression of this nature is manifested at the moment the name of a thing is enunciated. For this reason a consanguinity appears between human speech and God’s creating word. When Adam gave names he completed the act of creation. In Adam’s speech there was perfect agreement between the name, the sound, and the essence. After the fall of the tower of Babel, humanity lost this natural speech and the different various conventional languages appeared. There are, however, exceptional people who can reach to the nature of things by their own language. Speech also plays an important cosmic role, because by speech the fallen cosmos can be joined with God. The way to salvation is to abandon one’s selfishness, that is, the concentration of the will upon oneself, which was the cause of the fall. When he concentrates on God, man becomes a μικροθεος [mikrotheós].

INFLUENCE. For a long time Böhme’s works were regarded as a product of pure inspiration without any debt to other writers. This belief helped their assimilation. Schelling wrote: “[...] Böhme is a marvel in the history of mankind, and especially in the history of German thought. If anyone could forget what a treasure of natural profundity of mind and heart is contained in the German nation, it is enough to recall Böhme. [...] Just as the mythologies and theogonies of primitive peoples anticipated science, Böhme anticipates all the scientific systems of modern philosophy in the description of God’s generations. Jacob Böhme was born in the year 1575, René Descartes in the year 1596. What was intuition and immediate nature in Böhme appears in Spinoza, who died 100 years after Böhme’s birth, as developed rationalism.”

The last formulation accurately renders the method whereby Böhme’s views were assimilated—it was a uniquely conceived rationalization. Modernity was a time in which philosophical systems were built. Rationalism did not consist in reading the rationality of being, but in constructing systems that contained proposed models of reality (ontology). They looked for their ideas for such models not in reality but in various sources on the border of occult knowledge (Hermeticism, the Cabbalah, mysticism, and theosophy). Böhme’s writings were one such unofficial source. Along with Meister Eckhart, Böhme’s doctrines had a great influence on Hegel (according to the account of F. von Baader, Hegel’s collaborator and a publisher of Böhme’s writings). Böhme may be counted among the precursors of the late nineteenth-century and twentieth century theosophical movements.

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