

Bogumił Chmiel  
Uniwersytet Marii-Curie Skłodowskiej  
Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii

### ***Philosophia perennis* as an ideal of knowledge – historical study**

The main objective of the dissertation is to analyze the idea of perennial philosophy –its understanding of the XVI century (when the term was used for the first time) and consecutive interpretation until XX century. The following text consists of 290 pages divided into five chapters, introduction and conclusion.

In order to provide clear understanding of the idea, the first chapter of this work concerns methodological issues, especially the concept of 'ideal of knowledge' developed by polish philosopher Stefan Amsterdamski. The 'ideal of knowledge' is the most general category that allows us to describe historical changes in understanding of such basic terms as ' knowledge' , ' science', ' rationality'. According to Amsterdamski these terms and the ideas behind them are subject to historical evolution and their form depends on assumptions about the ultimate goal of cognitive activity. Referring this point of view to the history of philosophy, we can follow the changes in the understanding of *philosophia perennis* depending on transition in the meaning of the ultimate goals of philosophy.

The second part can be considered a historical foundation for further methodological investigation. In this section the Renaissance view on the perennial philosophy and the factors leading to its creation, have been analyzed. The contemporary understanding of eternal wisdom has been served from works of Agostino Steuco (who was the first one to use the term *philosophia perennis*), Marcelo Ficino, Mikołaj Kuzancyk and Pico della Mirandola. According to these authors, a true philosophy (i.e. *philosophia perennis*) was passed on since the first revelation in the Garden of Eden, mingling through centuries with many errors, and can be found in different traditions. The work of these thinkers was focused on the discovery of the fundamental claims ( ideas?) making up the core of eternal truth (nature of God,soul, salvation) through proper interpretation of particular doctrines and thus proving their fundamental unity. Obviously, for all of them the pure sources of true wisdom was Christianity and Platonism, other philosophical and religious traditions were considered more or less erroneous.

In third chapter formal and transcendental conditions of pursuing such kind of philosophy have been characterized. If one wants to develop philosophy in a manner proposed by renaissance

authors, i. e. to extract eternal truth of ancient texts, it has to be assumed that fundamental questions, leading to philosophical reflection, always remain the same. Moreover, the structure of world (in its major metaphysical and axiological aspect ) must also remain unchanged. Otherwise, the explanations of the V century BC Greece would be inappropriate for the contemporary cultural conditions. Furthermore we have to assume that different languages in which truth was transmitted can be mutually translatable in a way that ensures proper understanding of their hidden messages. Thirdly, philosophy can be regarded as a guide of life only if we presume that a human being is capable of self-determination according to the philosophical instructions. If we are determined by biological and/or social conditions such guidance is merely an illusion.

Referring to the historical foundation ,brought forward in second chapter and transcendental conditions described above, the last paragraph of third chapter contains the characteristics of the ideal of knowledge proper for the Renaissance thought. Firstly, the perennial philosophy objectively explains the ultimate conditions of existence(metaphysics) and actions (ethic). Thus, it provides a theoretical explanation of world's existence and shows the ultimate goal of human life. Secondly, such knowledge is not only attainable but had already been obtained. At present, after centuries of degradation and dispersal, perpetual truth can only be explained and passed on.

In fourth and fifth chapter the scheme of interpretation formulated in previous sections has been applied to the thought of modern and contemporary philosophers who identify themselves with idea of perennial philosophy (G.W. Leibniz, neo-scholastics, K. Jaspers, N. Hartmann, integral traditionalists) or whose thought express the views characteristic for this trend of philosophy (G.W.F. Hegel). The analysis of particular attitudes with reference to previously given transcendental conditions, has shown how the changes in one aspect of thought affect the realization of the *philosophia perennis* idea. The considerations carried out in last part of this work lead to the conclusion that even if we take into account the changes in the meaning of philosophy, there is a continuity in philosophical thought which is based on the ideal of philosophical knowledge, understood as an ultimate and holistic explanation of reality.