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Political Imagination – Contributions to a Christian Vision of Politics

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: On the one hand, contemporary politics is so overwhelmed by imagination that there is a risk for politics to be dissolved into mere creative communication. On the other hand, in an age when politics is reduced to simple administration, there is little room for imagination and the new possibilities it brings. By illuminating the ambiguous nature of the imaginative act I would like to show how a Christian vision of politics may help to understand both sides of this paradox.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: There are two radically distinct ways to carry out imagination depending on the subject's fundamental attitude. Thus I will elaborate through a phenomenological analysis how this difference is present in all dimension of political imagination concerning the following essential criteria: a) the focus on the intentional object, b) methodology, c) temporal structure.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: If the act of fantasy is really that negative in all these aspects why do philosophers prefer it to the act of *imagination*? I argue that historically speaking the pivotal point is the Kantian

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philosophy and it is the Kantian heritage that influenced Feuerbach to lay the new fundaments of *political fantasy*.

RESEARCH RESULTS: Through interpreting a crucial passage of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* I show that the way Kant and Feuerbach transformed the concept of a receptive and obedient imagination focused on the Christian mystery are fatal for political philosophy.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: I insist that contemporary Christian politics is once again on a cross-road, either it remains captivated by fantasy or it gets liberated by becoming true imagination. Imagination is centered on the mystery that illuminates the whole sphere of politics in all of its horizontal and vertical dimensions and thus allows for a radically new beginning of political reflection.

KEYWORDS:

imagination, fantasy, politics, phenomenology, eschatology

POLITYCZNA WYOBRAŹNIA – PRZYCZYNEK DO CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIEJ WIZJI POLITYKI

Streszczenie

CEL NAUKOWY: Z jednej strony, współczesna polityka jest tak pełna wyobraźni, że istnieje ryzyko, iż przerodzi się w komunikację czysto kreatywną. Z drugiej zaś strony, w epoce, gdy polityka sprowadza się do zwykłego zarządzania, mało jest miejsca dla wyobraźni i nowych możliwości, jakie ona stwarza. Wyjaśniając dwuznaczną naturę aktu wyobraźni, chciałbym pokazać, w jaki sposób chrześcijańska wizja polityki może pomóc w zrozumieniu obydwu stron tego paradoksu.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Istnieją dwa diametralnie różne sposoby zastosowania wyobraźni w zależności od postawy podmiotu. Dlatego, stosując analizę fenomenologiczną, zbadam, w jaki sposób owa różnica uobecnia się we wszystkich wymiarach wyobraźni politycznej, spełniając następujące istotne kryteria: a) koncentracji na przedmiocie intencjonalnym, b) metodologii c) struktury czasowej.

PROCES WYWODU: Jeśli w istocie akt fantazji nie spełnia tych wszystkich kryteriów, to dlaczego filozofowie wolą go od aktu wyobraźni? Argumentuję, że historycznie rzecz biorąc, kluczowym momentem jest filozofia kantowska i że to właśnie kantowskie dziedzictwo wpłynęło na Feuerbacha, który stworzył nowe podstawy dla filozofii fantazji.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: W wyniku interpretacji zasadniczego ustępu *Istoty chrześcijaństwa* pióra Feuerbacha pokazuję, że sposób, w jaki Kant i Feuerbach przekształcili pojęcie receptywnej i uległej wyobraźni skoncentrowanej na chrześcijańskiej tajemnicy, okazuje się zabójczy dla filozofii politycznej.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: Podkreślam, że współczesna polityka chrześcijańska znów znajduje się na rozdrożu: albo pozostaje pod urokiem fantazji, albo wyzwala się, stając się prawdziwą wyobraźnią. Wyobraźnia skupia się na tajemnicy, która oświeca całą sferę polityki we wszystkich jej horyzontalnych i wertykalnych wymiarach, uwzględniając tym samym radykalnie nowy początek refleksji politycznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

wyobraźnia, fantazja, polityka, fenomenologia, eschatologia

1. IMAGINATION AND POLITICS

The imaginative capacity is one of the most decisive elements responsible for a political vision and thus political praxis.¹ At the same time, it is arguable that the imaginative faculty underwent the most radical change in what has been established as the ‘postmodern area’. Therefore when one would like to clarify what Christian politics might look like today, or to be more precise what Christian politics is called to be, there is a need to deepen our understanding of the ambiguous term imagination.²

1 “On the one hand, contemporary politics is overwhelmed by imagination. Politics depends on our capacity to create images, not least because images mediate our being in the world and are therefore crucial for any sort of communication—political communication being no exception. (...) On the other hand, politics seems to lack imagination in the sense of the capacity to question what is given. In an age when politics is reduced to governance, to simple administration, there is little room for the imagination and the new possibilities it brings” (Bottici, 2014). Even if I disagree with Bottici’s analysis and her conclusions I think she has a good point in observing the lack of imagination in contemporary Western politics because of our absolute saturation with images. She is also right that the actual context of the political discourse is highly spectacularized and virtualized.

2 There is certainly an important difference between a descriptive and a prescriptive philosophical discourse. Since any valid prescription is based on

I would like to offer here what could be called a 'phenomenological observation' concerning the nature of imagination. The phenomenological analysis of imagination shall be thus limited to the elucidation of the two basic kinds of imagination – a distinction highly relevant for politics.

By way of a historical example – recalling a crucial passage from Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* – I shall not only show how these two kinds of imagination work in political praxis but I also would like to highlight the implication of this difference in the domain of theo-politics.

My thesis could be summarized like this: Christian politics requires certain imaginative praxis, i.e. not just certain kind of imagination but also an *imaginative attitude* when dealing with political issues.

2. DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL IMAGINATION

In order to capture the precise meaning of the affirmation that imagination is indispensable for political praxis it is important to distinguish the different dimensions of political imagination. Each and every imaginative act that is described here certainly presupposes some understanding of imagination's *intentional object*. Politics is often referred to as the art of the possible; understanding of politically relevant phenomena implies in this sense an act that goes beyond the mere awareness of the factual; it requires penetrating into reality in order to evolve its hidden potentials. Let me recall here the difference between what is perhaps best captured in the German terms 'Realität' and 'Wirklichkeit'.³ What I mean by political 'Wirklichkeit' is in this

the true knowledge of the state of affairs, I try first to illuminate how the contemporary paradigm looks like in order than to suggest how it could be radically renewed. One can only expect a radical improvement when going back to the absolute origin of the phenomenon. This origin is obfuscated by the contemporary interpretation that should be put under trial. This is what a phenomenological analysis of imagination supposed to facilitate.

3 This concept stems from Meister Eckhart's translation of the Aristotelian 'ergon' y 'energeia'. As these terms suggest, part of reality is continuously

sense the actual state of affairs, or simply factuality. What fits into this category is the contingent part of political reality that is continuously in change. In order that something can be altered there should be a solid fundament that is not subjected to any modification. Thus, I would like to contrast this rather reduced understanding of reality with what is truly real: the founding principles of being, i.e. reality in a supernatural sense. These fundamental principles of being are at the same time the foundations of any political factuality as well.

It is important to bear in mind this difference between the two ways of understanding reality with regard to *political imagination* for it may be understood merely as referring to the sphere of political factuality instead of including here the reality in a deeper sense as well designed to with the term 'Realität'. *Political imagination* might not only concern contingent issues of political factuality in a given situation but shall also and even primordially be preoccupied with metaphysics with regard to their political implications.

In order that there be praxis of Christian politics it is crucial to insist on this broader concept of political imagination versus to a mere pragmatic elaboration of how a given political situation might be improved. The pertinent question here is not only, whether there should be an imaginative inquiry into supernatural matters relevant for politics, but also: how exactly are these two spheres related to each other.⁴ Putting forward an analogical understanding versus a total

changing. These historical changes however should be interpreted as manifestations of a fundamental and eternal principle of reality. It is the task of political philosophy to understand and to interpret this analogical relationship between these two spheres, the eternal and the temporal (historical). For Aristotle what constitutes an event is precisely the manifestation of this relationship.

4 Hard as it is to capture this sphere of reality, both Greek and Christian classical tradition sustains that it is radically insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of politics. The factual political vision, its analysis and its interpretation remains ideological if not based on reality beyond these internal political relations towards what might be called the ultimate principle of being. Strangely enough ideology means not the *logos* derived from the idea but rather the contrary: reasoning not based on the right knowledge and acknowledgment of true 'principles', ultimate realities but deduced and based on some self-invented idea. What is testified by the Classic tradition in its encounter with sophistic ideology could be formulated in many ways and has its political implications: the visible is only explicable from the

separation of these realms or claiming that they mutually excludes one another, Christian reflection defines the basic task of imagination as one and yet twofold: it is one in the sense of deepening the dialogue between God and man, and it is twofold for it includes the movement from the supernatural to the natural (*katabasis*) and from the natural to the supernatural (*anabasis*).⁵

Political imagination that entails both of these movements of the soul faces the questions raised above (what is the extension of political reality? and how is the supernatural related to the natural realm?) and is challenged to offer and answer in all dimensions of reflective political life. Let us limit here to simply enumerating the relevant intentional objects of political contemplation!

1. Imaging the consequences of a political act
2. Imagining the addressee of a political act
3. Imagining the political community
4. Imagining the problem at stake
5. Imagining the 'space' of political actions
6. Imagining politics within the context of personal relationships

3. IMAGINATIVE FACULTY – IMAGINATION AND FANTASY

The imaginative faculty has a very complex function. Whereas a great part of imagination consists in involuntary acts thanks to which the perceptual data are transmitted to consciousness, the usage of political imagination in the afore mentioned six dimensions certainly goes beyond the realm of perception and is up to our liberty. For it is the

perspective of the invisible, the natural from and through the supernatural. Consequently human nature is only illuminated in its relation to divinity. And therefore the factual reality, the political 'Wirklichkeit' can only be truly illuminated by understanding of these realities (Realität).

5 Both movements have their origin and their culmination in Christ, thus any serious philosophical inquiry of imagination is necessarily Christ-centered. This double aspect of *anabasis* and *katabasis* of imagination is clearly visible in the great 'phenomenological' analyses of contemplation by Ricardo de Sancto Victore, *De gratia contemplationis seu Benjamin major*, Migne, Patrologia Latina tom. 196, col. 70-72, I. Book, ch. VI.

will that decides how exactly the imaginative act should be carried out. However manifold these acts might be depending 1) on their intentional object, 2) on their intensity, 3) their focus, 4) on the implication of the subject and 5) on the type of relation between subject and object⁶ (to call just the most important factors), there are only two basic alternatives. These two options for any imaginative acts are not only structurally but also morally distinct. This should not surprise us for any faculty of the soul could be applied in a morally positive and negative way; just as there is a good and a bad will and there is a morally positive and negative usage of the memory, or there are morally positive and negative emotions, some imaginative activities can be called as well morally good while others are bad.

Capturing the difference requires a phenomenological analysis concerning how exactly is the act exercised and how does the inner structure of the act look like. Now, I would like to focus only on the first issue, i.e. on the attitude which gives rise to the imaginative act. The decisive point concerning the attitude is whether imagination is based on perceiving the given phenomenon *as* something with an overwhelming and inexhaustible surplus of meaning or *as* something imperfect that has to be amended through some act of imagination. How we perceive reality depends on our fundamental disposition towards Being. The imaginative act based on a 'positive fundamental attitude' towards reality is faced with the task to extract some concrete meaning that is already there; therefore this imagination is characterized with an intrinsic and constitutive *receptivity*. On the contrary, the type of imaginative act derived from a 'negative fundamental attitude'⁷ is not so much receiving reality as it pretends to create it.⁸

6 I follow here the phenomenological distinctions elaborated by Alexander Pfänder (1933).

7 It is certainly questionable whether there is such thing as a negative fundamental attitude in a strong ontological sense. Given the fact that the positive fundamental attitude corresponds more to the fundamental gift-nature of reality it is undoubtedly more rooted in reality. The possibility of a 'fundamental attitude' that is negative is derived from the possibility of a positive fundamental attitude of which it is a mere negation.

8 Human imagination has an inalienable responsive character. It can pretend to create reality, yet this creation is only possible because the created being exposed to our free will.

The *fundamental attitude*, i.e. the inner disposition of the subject towards the meaning-unit of the given phenomenon determines the basic character of the act as positive or negative. The difference between *fundamental*, *habitual* and *momentary* attitudes is noteworthy in this context.⁹ What is important here is that the *fundamental attitude* influences both, our habitual dispositions as well as our actual and spontaneous ways to encounter reality but is very distinct from them. For a *fundamental attitude* always involves the whole person (versus concerning only some capacities) in regard to her overarching and most profound relationship with life and being. A *fundamental attitude* in contrast to the spontaneous *momentary attitudes* is super-actual for it is funded on an evaluative judgment on the nature of reality as such.

Although imagination is always a *response* to reality, it might completely acknowledge or partially or even absolutely deny this fact. The basic form of the imaginative act is derived from the subject's openness towards reality that reveals itself for and through him. The main criterion for the moral value of the imaginative act lies in its faithfulness to the absolute positive openness towards reality: to the fact that being is good.¹⁰

Given the highly dramatic nature of one's relationship to reality is a great merit if the imaginative act remains faithful to the absolute goodness of reality in each and every step of the descending as well as the ascension. The drama stems from the fact that 'being' does not always appear to human consciousness as obviously good without restrictions; the immense suffering, death and the incomprehensible amount of sin and ugliness that calls our attention and triggers our imagination certainly cannot and should not be blended out. Moreover, imagination in general, and especially Christian imagination trained by the contemplation of the Cross, is called to penetrate in these shadow fields of being in order to discover the absolute positive origin of all apparently negative data. The dramatic challenge all imaginative acts have to face consists in discovering the indications

9 I follow here the thorough phenomenological analysis of Alexander Pfänder (1933).

10 This affirmation is an answer to the original divine affirmation of being: "God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good!" (Gen 1.31)

of the original gift of being and life within the data that might not always please our subjective taste and sensibilities.

It is in this drama of being completely exposed to the human free will, when imagination shall follow its vocation to penetrate into the most mysterious ontological foundation of being. Yet by rejecting this vocation it might remain on the surface. Opting for this negative way the imaginative act refrains itself to a reduced sphere of reality for it only considers the negativity and imperfection of the given data and not as a however poor manifestation of the original richness of being that it reveals.

It is this ‘reversed imaginative act’ – renouncing to what is the real task of imagination– that I would like to call ‘fantasy’.¹¹ It is essential to *fantasy* that it starts out with a negative account of the given and constantly tries to overcome what has been perceived as limitations of the intentional object in question. The full fledged imaginative act that only deserves the name ‘imagination’, watches out – within the given data – for the original ‘image’ reflecting the *logos* that is at the source of all. In contrast to this ‘genealogical endeavor’ fantasy, instead of contemplatively reaching out for the hidden origin of its intentional object, hastily moves towards new future horizons which promise a more perfect appearance of reality by precisely elaborating techniques and processes of improvements.

Even though there is a certain inventive spirit here at work the term ‘creative imagination’ is still misleading for human creativity is radically receptive and responsive and thus is better called with the expression of J.R.R. Tolkien “sub-creation”.¹² This concept refers

11 St. Agustin is the first Latin author who used the term imagination in a consistent manner combining the biblical distrust of images with the negative account of Greek and Neo-Platonic philosophy (see especially Plotinus, *Enneads* 5,5), on “*phantasia*” as a hindrance of spiritual contemplation (noesis). In *De Genesi* (Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram Imperfectus Liber*, in *Patrol. Lat.* 34, 458.) he argues that intellect is alone capable of intuiting the world in its essence rather than merely in its corporal image. See further: Kearney, 2002.

12 I use here the key term of Tolkien’s aesthetics. See. J.R.R Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, Harper Collins, 2006, especially ‘On Fairy Stories’, pp. 142-145: “Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the likeness of a Maker.” (145.o.); see also: Tolkien’s

to the collaborative aspect of any creative activity that responds to a gift from the very origin through the absolute affirmation of being. This is what imagination is really called for. Now, after having seen in what kinds of a *fundamental attitude* imagination is rooted in and what are the dramatic sources of the deteriorated usage of imagination called fantasy, let us take a brief look at the mode the these two acts are constituted.

poem 'Mythopoeia' in which he refutes C.S. Lewis' opinion according to which myths in general are false for they are nothing but "lies breathed through silver." Tolkien restores the dignity of art that collaborates with the Logos of the Creator through understanding artistic activity as its extension and expression: <http://mercury.ccil.org/~cowan/mythopoeia.html>, (access: 01.10.2013)

The heart of Man is not compound of lies,
 but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,
 and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,
 Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
 Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,
 And keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
 Man Sub-creator, the refracted Light
 Through whom is splattered from single White
 To many hues, and endlessly combined
 In living shapes that move from mind to mind.
 Though all the crannies of the world filled
 With Elves and Goblins, though we dared build
 Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
 And sowed and the seed of dragons – 'twas our right
 (used or misused). The right has not decayed:
 We make still by the law in which we're made.

See in more details: Wayne G. Hammond-Christina Scull, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*, Houghton Mifflin, 2006, pp. 620-622.

The expression 'sub-creation' has nevertheless a long history. Let me just recall two key ideas of Hugo de Sancto Victore that sustain a similar idea of mimesis. He distinguishes the work of God (*opus Dei*) from the work of nature (*opus artificis*) and argues that the labor of the craftsman and artist imitates nature (*opus artificis imitator naturam*) and lends the forms from the nature (*a natura formam mutuatur*). See. *Euriditio didascalica* (Didascalicon), I. book, ch. X and XII, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, tom. 176, col. pp. 747-748 and 760).

3.1. The Focus on the Intentional Object: Reduced Versus Directed Towards Fullness

The first difference that stands out, concerns the way how the imaginative act focuses on the *intentional object*. We stated above that *fantasy* is unable to do justice to the inherent gift-character of the given, i.e. it is exclusively preoccupied with the given data, without taking into consideration the act-of-giving-oneself of the phenomena.¹³ This distinction might sound rather technically until we apply it to human person, for it is obviously very different to look at somebody on the account of what this person *has* in the sense of good and bad characteristics and personal features, as compared to what this person *is* (*by becoming oneself*).

No person is completely given to us based solely on the data of him we might have access to. Not only because there are always some missing data given our limited intellectual capacity but because the very way how she *exists*, i.e. she ‘arrives’ from a hidden origin mysteriously into being. There is an obvious difference between the itinerary of those imaginative acts (*fantasy*) that go from focusing on a particular feature to be improved and proceed towards a consideration of the whole person, and those acts going the other way around (*true imagination*): starting with the consideration of particular features already in the context of the whole person and approaching the recognition that the whole meaning of the phenomenon is not yet fully given for it is in process of coming to full its existence.

One might object that while *fantasy* is certainly a critical approach towards reality, *imagination* remains naïve for it blends out any imperfection. The critique that *fantasy* can offer to reality, however, is based on a hasty and subjective judgment the criteria of which are subjective expectations. By exercising the act of *fantasy* one approaches reality already with the implicit question what this or that reality supposed to be.

This is incomparable with the profound critique *true imagination* may provide, for reality is considered here as a manifestation of

¹³ See to this complex topic: Marion, 1999; Milbank, 1995; see further the overview offered by Robyn Horner (2001).

what is “beyond being” (epekeina tés ousias).¹⁴ A real critique is only possible within the analogy that allows us to see the insurmountable difference between the primary and the secondary analogue.

What permits the necessary critical distance here is the perspective of hope. *Imagination* takes the attitude of hope concerning those truths about the phenomenon in question that are not yet seen but are already announced. While the critique of *fantasy* is always based on a certain disappointment because reality is never exactly the same we expect it to be, *imagination* encounters reality with the openness of hope beyond hope, i.e. not with an expectation that can be disappointed but with the poverty of the mind for which the very existence of things is an inexplicable and yet wonderful mystery.

While *fantasy* reduces its intentional object to a mere phenomenological data to be reshaped, the meaning-horizon of imagination is this hope for ‘the unforgettable and un hoped for’.¹⁵ In another words, while the act of *fantasy* focuses on some data of the phenomena in question that supposed to be modified, a full fletched *imagination* remains contemplatively open to the whole phenomenon – even to those meaning-unites that are not yet fully given, but merely announced.

3.2. Methodology: Analytical Versus Synthetical Procedure

The different focus of the act leads to another essential discrepancy between the two modes how the imaginative faculty can be exercised. The intentional objects of *fantasy* are elements of the given phenomena

14 Plato, Republic, 509b (Hamilton & Cairns, 1961).

15 This expression that stems from the title of the book *L’inoubliable et l’inespéré* by Jean-Louis Chrétien, seems to me a very precise definition of the subject matter of imagination. There has to be a previous experience of fullness and perfection that triggers the desire and sets in motion the imaginative faculty. Even if this experience is not yet articulated and concrete (for the intangible nature of divine love and being) it is unforgettable: form a residuum of memory that cannot be erased. We always already know love and being in some way and that is why our most profound desire is always already directed to these realities. While imagination is certainly exercised through and with hope for the community with being as love, it is also true that its intentional object is beyond all human hope (l’inespéré). See: Chrétien, 1991.

that are dealt with in an analytical way. *Fantasy* seeks to re-combine those elements that are judged to be imperfect with elements that are inherent to the phenomena or that supposed to be newly introduced into it in order to obtain better results. *Fantasy* comes short to give a real account of what is present to consciousness; in order to be able to ‘creatively’ reorganize the elements of the phenomenon, it has to renounce precisely to grasp the inherent image, or the imprint of the logos that the phenomena come from and alludes to. In contrast to this *imagination* seeks precisely this image *within and beyond* the individual data by *synthesizing* them.

The synthesis *imagination* is eager to come up with, certainly exists previously to any imaginative act, thus the question is not inventing or constructing it, but rather to discover it by obediently following the “instructions of the given”. Quite to the contrary the typical procedure of *fantasy* that is analytical in the sense of constructing the image through a new combination of the elements previously abstracted from the given meaning unit.

3.3. Temporal Structure: ‘Past Future’ Versus ‘Eschatological Future’

The third essential difference concerns the time structure of these two acts and is due to the way they are related to the tempi (past, presence future). *Imagination* is characterized by its openness to future in a very specific sense: *eschatological future*, i.e. future that we hope for as perfect loving communion with the origin of all. Imagination somehow looks always at phenomena from the perspective of the future and eschatological sense of whatever is its intentional object and observes everything simultaneously as ‘approaching’ this future horizon and ‘coming from’ there, i.e. as having a pretest of the ‘eschatological future’. The presence and the presence that became past makes only sense for imagination from that eschatological outlook for it has already, *hic et nunc* began and yet approaches us from the future.

Despite of its apparent future-orientation *fantasy* remains enclosed in the past; its initial data with which starts to operate is always what has been given; *fantasy* tires to modify it towards a horizon of a better future – again compared and measured with the past. There

is no adequate recognition of the meaning-fullness of presence as something that is not yet a full-existence, and yet it already an image of the fullness of times – as it is the case with *imagination*. The lacking appreciation of reality by the act of *fantasy* results in avoiding presence and rushing towards a supposedly brighter future. What is missing here is the retained moment of sudden contemplation that penetrates into the depth of times where the origin and the future are mysteriously co-given in the presence. It is contemplation where imagination has its heart; it is precisely this dwelling at the essence of things that is rejected when opting for *fantasy*.

4. A PARADIGMATIC CHANGE IN THE HISTORY IMAGINATION

Philosophers as well as theologians of the classical tradition both, in the ancient world and in the Christian area were quite aware of the dramatic and ambiguous nature of imagination.¹⁶ Besides the clear recognition of the two radically different usages of the imaginative act they also had an obvious preference for ‘imagination’ over ‘fantasy’ – to apply here the terms we defined above. Despite the differences in their views the other truth they did not question concerned the fundamental relationship between imagination and

16 On the Hebraic distinction between good and evil “yetser” see the Adamic myth and especially Gen 3,5 versus the good or integrated use of imagination in Deut. 31.21 and the particular passage of Deuteronomy 65 where man is urged to worship Yahwe with his whole soul. See further 1 Chr. 28.9; 29.18.

It was first Plato who offered a “comprehensive view of the outer and inner, necessary for an adequate concept of the nature and function of «phantasy» (in: Bundy, M.W. (1927). *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought*, p. 18.) We cannot offer here an exhaustive summary. It is enough to point out the paradox he was confronted with. In the VI. Book of the Republic (Analogy of the Divided Line) he developed an epistemic account arguing that *eikasia* is the lowest form of knowledge. In the X. Book of the Republic he develops his critique further against a certain kind of artistic imagination. Yet he also acknowledges a legitimate function of images and art and even argues that there are some images engendered by God. See especially the dialogues Phaedrus and Timaeus. (Phaedrus 250 a-d; Tmaeus 7-72 and Timaeus 71 a).

the intellect.¹⁷ In this paradigm imagination was in general not so much considered as autonomous; it was rather subordinated to the intellectual faculty and to memory. The reasons to conceive the relationship in these terms was elaborated in all fields of philosophy starting out with metaphysics through epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, political philosophy and even logic. A good example for this approach to imagination is the insight often stressed upon according to which any possibility is deducible from reality, but not the other way around. Imagination certainly assists to the intellect to grasp things by forming the intellectual images of the perceived data, but its role supposed to be obediently assisting the intellect and never prescribing it what to do.

The epistemological skepticism of Kant concerning the possibility of knowing the ‘noumenal’ reality and his Copernican revolution introduces a radical change concerning the following unquestioned basic claims on imagination and its relationship to other faculties. Before the Kantian reinterpretation of imagination it was generally accepted that however important the aid of imagination might be for the intellectual comprehension of the whole sphere of reality

17 Thomas Aquinas attributes to the imaginative faculty two capacities; one he regards less than the intellect for imagination apprehends only the images of the bodies while the intellect alone apprehends the essences of the things. It follows that God cannot be seen by the imagination for God is incorporeal but can be seen – even if not comprehended – by the intellect. Therefore imagination should be subordinated to the intellect; otherwise it damages both faith and reason. On the other hand, Aquinas describes a certain passive usage of imagination that receives the divine infusion of images. Curiously enough, the certainty and clearness of this type of imagination is beyond any intellectual grasp. Without faith however, imagination would not be able to exercise this highest function. Thomas insists that this is only possible when imagination is not based on the sense-perception but on the vision of Him who is believed. This vision, i.e. participation in the divine glory, is foundational for understanding the first principles (St, I/1. q. 12. ar. 13). Faith as a kind of knowledge is determined therefore by the image of Christ. It is in this sense that Thomas allows for the possibility of a radical amendment of the intellect by the certain type of imagination: “For the intellect’s natural light is strengthened by the infusion of gratuitous light; and sometimes also the images in the human imagination are divinely formed, so as to express divine things better than those do which we receive from sensible objects, as appears in prophetic visions; while sometimes sensible things, or even voices, are divinely formed to express some divine meaning.” (St, I/1. q. 12. ar. 13.)

(the supernatural sphere included) by deciphering the analogy between God and Creation, between Being (Sein) and being (Seiende), imagination is not supposed to dictate reason and therefore the natural sphere could not possibly prescribe what the supernatural should look like.

The Kantian epistemology and metaphysics introduced also a paradigmatically new understanding of imagination because by reducing the sphere of reason, everything that went beyond that limit settled by Kant's interpretation of rationality was labeled as danger of irrational 'phantasm'¹⁸. The Kantian restrictions of rationality lead to an artificial opposition between reason and imagination helping to discover metaphysical realities. Kant thereby rephrased essentially the ambiguity between positive and negative usage of imagination described above. On the one hand, he approaches imagination with the suspicion that it might mislead reason outside of its own limits to the sphere of irrational dreams of metaphysics and thereby of faith. On the other hand, he seems to give more credit to a new kind of productive imagination by stating that since we cannot know the *noumenon*,¹⁹ in a way all knowledge is due to imaginative construct of reality.²⁰

In contrast to this Plato, Aristotle and the following tradition including the Church fathers, St. Agustin, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas clearly recognized that suggesting such autonomy for imagination, let alone its supremacy over intellect would not be just morally wrong but, it would also lead to blasphemy by claiming that

18 It is well-known that the main target of Kant' critique is Emanuel Swedenborg. See especially Kant, 1880.

19 See especially Kant & Guyer, 1998, B 288 ff., B 295 ff. and B 697 ff.

20 Richard Kearney summarized the Kantian contribution – which he evaluates positively – in the following points: „... first by demonstrating that imagining was not merely 'reproduction' of some given reality (the fallacy of imitation) but an original 'production' of human consciousness; second, by showing that the image was not a static 'thing' (res) deposited in memory (the fallacy of reification) but a dynamic creative act; and third by establishing that the image was not just a mediated carrier between the derived spheres of the lower 'body' and the higher 'soul' (the fallacy of dualism), but an inner transcendental unity which resists this very duality" (Kearney, 2002, p. 156).

the supernatural reality (reality in the strong sense) is a construct of human creativity (Kant & Guyer, 1998).

Blasphemies are obviously not just some erroneous statements; they are also morally wrong utterances that lead to vicious acts which again have devastating effects on political communities. We find a great caution both in Plato's and in St. Thomas' political philosophy concerning some type of art precisely because of the supernatural foundation of political communities. They fear that this foundation might be misrepresented and thus destroyed by certain imaginative activity.

Proclaiming the autonomy of imagination does not do justice to its inherent and original ambiguity; neither does the subjugation of imagination to rationality in terms of empirical experiences that are verifiable and measurable. What justifies the caution concerning imagination is the very recognition that it truly deals with higher mysteries; „the imagination is man's faculty for perceiving divinity“ (von Schlegel, 1971, p. 242) – as Schlegel affirmed it. Any artificial opposition between the intellect and the imaginative faculty is inappropriate for it runs the risk to reduce reason to mere technical usage denying any possibility of contemplation and – at the same time – reduces imagination to a 'crazy servant' of the intellect that left alone would deviate into the irrational sphere.

The obedient imagination that played an important role in understanding the mysteries in an *analogical* way, when reduced to the sphere of mere natural knowledge (by Kant and his followers, Fichte and Schelling) was set free of all restriction: now it can freely construct the whole conceptual sphere. Imagination became the source of the new morality and new politics (established by the autonomous human mind) because it was the unique way to approach reality that was not attainable any more for the intellect.

And if in the fields of morality, politics and arts, Kant was rather conservative and cautious, the following generations draw all the bold consequences of his metaphysics: imagination and art was called to give lessons not just to politics and morality but to faith as well. The first lesson was precisely revealing politics and especially theo-politics as a theater set up by imagination.

5. POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF 'TRANSCENDENTAL AND CREATIVE IMAGINATION'

The paradigmatic shift from *mimetic* to a *productive* imagination and therefore from *imagination* to *fantasy* promoted by the Kantian philosophy has been fulfilled among others by Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach understood that the imaginative act cannot be restricted to the sphere of aesthetics, but rather it pervades all spheres of reality starting with religion. The novelty of the Christian event – incarnation, life and death of Jesus Christ – causes in an incomparable change in the self-understanding of the human person. The very notion of personhood is radically transformed through Fichte and it certainly affects imagination as well. For it leads to a reversal of the orders and to insisting “on the primacy of the anthropological over the onto-theological truth” (Kearney, 2002, p. 154).

Before considering Feuerbach’s contribution it is important to bear in mind that in general terms the Christian event implies a substantial change in conceiving the imaginative faculty at least for two reasons: the Christian event is beyond anything humanity could have imagined in terms of Divine-human relationship. In the light of the Christian Revelation paradoxically God seems to be both closer to us in love and further in dignity than pre-Christian imagination stipulated. Moreover, the closer we get to Christ’s humanity through the collaboration of intellect and the imagination focused on the incarnated events, the more we discover his divine nature.

Secondly, imagination that was left alone after the fall with the deepest desire of human heart to assist reason in finding the way back to Divinity, after the Christian event faces a new challenge: discovering the unimaginable within the real. But if the majestic God is so infinitely close and exposed to human free will and if, at the same time, imagination is so powerful, isn’t God just the creation and a best invention of human mind? – Feuerbach’s thesis is even more complex than this: in Christianity the creative human *fantasy* coincides with the ultimate desire of the human heart.

Christianity is distinguished from other religions by this, that in other religions the heart and fantasy are divided, in Christianity they

coincide. Here the fantasy does not wander, left for itself; it follows the leadings of the heart; it describes a circle, whose centre is feeling. Fantasy is here limited by the wants of the heart, it only realizes the wishes of feeling, it has reference only to the one thing needful; in brief, it has, at least generally, a practical, concentric tendency, not a vagrant, merely poetic one. The Miracles of Christianity – no product of free, spontaneous activity, but conceived in the bosom of yearning, necessitous feeling-place us immediately on the ground of common, real life; they act on the emotional man with irresistible force, because they have the necessity of feeling on their side. The power of fantasy is here at the same time the power of the heart, – fantasy is only the victorious, triumphant heart. With the Orientals, with the Greeks, fantasy, untroubled by the wants of the heart, reveled in the enjoyment of earthly splendor and glory; in Christianity, it descended from the palace of the gods into the abode of poverty, where only want rules, – it humbled itself under the sway of the heart. But the more it limited itself in extent, the more intense became its strength. The wantonness of the Olympian gods could not maintain itself before the rigorous necessity of the heart; but fantasy is omnipotent when it has a bond of union with the heart. And this bond between the freedom of the fantasy and the necessity of the heart is Christ. All things are subject to Christ; he is the Lord of the world, who does with it what he will; but this unlimited power over Nature is itself again subject to the power of the heart; – Christ commands raging Nature to be still, but only that he may hear the sighs of the needy (Feuerbach, 1881, ch. XV. the end²¹).

With the idea that God is an invention of the human imagination Feuerbach goes infinitely further than Hugo Grotius with his hypothetical foundation of natural law and political life: *etsi Deus non daretur*.²² The new politics that Feuerbach envisions is based on the

21 In the following translation I replaced the word 'imagination' by 'fantasy' because in the German original Feuerbach does not once mention 'Einbildungskraft' or 'Vorstellungskraft'; he uses consequently the term 'Phantasie'. See: Feuerbach, 1881.

22 We find the original formula of Grotius in his work *De Jure belli ac pacis* of 1625. (in: *De Iure praedae y De Iure belli ac pacis*, Edición bilingüe, traducción y notas de Primitivo Mariño Gómez (Madrid, Centro de Estudios Constitucionales 1987).

Recently this sentence has been mentioned by Pope Benedict XVI in his Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical of Culture (08.03.2008) (https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080308_pc-cultura.html) „The formula «*Etsi Deus non*

freedom of fantasy and the necessity of the heart that perfectly coincide in the invented figure of God who rules over nature. The project of discrediting religion by revealing its anthropological foundation plays a crucial role in contemporary political imagination that understands politics as the ultimate common horizon of reality and thus as the sphere of realizing the self-invented true religion of humanity without God. Moreover, the Feuerbachian fulfillment of the Kantian metaphysics entails three important aspects of post-modern politics: 1) the complete control over nature, 2) the unrestricted liberty of fantasy and 3) the ultimate legitimacy of any political decision in sentimentalism. Only the figure of the poor is completely forgotten or rather misused for some dubious political agenda – as it is the case of Marxist ideology.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary Christian theo-political reflection finds itself once again at the cross-road: it can either insist on the non-invented nature of God and thus understand politics within the context of religious reality, or follow Feuerbach and reverse the order of religion and politics by claiming that God is a product of human *fantasy* and therefore human history and politics marks the utmost transcendent sphere of reality. I tried to show above that in all six dimensions of political imagination this entails a decision between two radically opposed acts: 'imagination' and 'fantasy'. I also argued that these two manifestations of the imaginative faculty are not just structurally different; they also have a distinct moral, metaphysical and religious outset.

Thus the question arises: If politics depends to that extent on our way of understanding and exercising imagination, shouldn't Christian politics be more imaginative? And if so, how?

daretur» is increasingly becoming a way of living that originates in a sort of «arrogance» of reason – a reality nonetheless created and loved by God – that deems itself self-sufficient and closes itself to contemplation and the quest for a superior Truth. The light of reason, exalted but in fact impoverished by the Enlightenment, has radically replaced the light of faith, the light of God.”

However schematic the answer offered by above reflections might look like, it may humbly contribute to a renovation of Christian theopolitics by pointing out that Christian imagination should return to the core of the Christian mystery and sacramental reality. Only an imaginative understanding that rejects the false option of *fantasy* in all dimensions listed up in the first part of this essay can offer a political vision in the light of the Cross.

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