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## FRITZ MAUTHNER'S CRITIQUE OF LOCKE'S IDEA OF GOD

Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923), the author of such works as *Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (I–II, 1910/11), *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande* (I–IV, 1920–1923) focused his own philosophical interests on critique of the language (Kritik der Sprache), considering it the most important task, compared with Kant's critique of the reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft), Ernst Mach's critique of pure experience (Kritik der reinen Erfahrung), and with Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of European culture (Kritik der europäischen Kultur).<sup>1</sup> The attitude of nominalism was especially close to him; the attitude that recurred in the British thought several times (W. Ockham, J. Locke, G. Berkeley, D. Hume, J. S. Mill). Mauthner stated that "Ockham overcame scholastics, but his only weapon was the language of scholastics".<sup>2</sup> Ockham fought against the assumption made by conceptual realism, paving the way forward for the thesis that science only deals with mental contents, and not directly with things.

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<sup>1</sup> See: F. Mauthner, *Selbstdarstellung*, in: *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Hrsg. R. Schmidt, Leipzig 1922, Bd. III, p. 121–143, especially p. 126–128. On the underestimated philosophy of the language and Mauthner's critique of the language see O. Gramzow, *Geschichte der Philosophie seit Kant*, Charlottenburg 1928, Bd. II, p. 438–445. In the latest literature, however, works devoted to Mauthner appear, e.g. J. Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik. F. Mauthners Leben und Werk*, Berlin 1975; M. Kurzreiter, *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik bei F. Mauthner*, Frankfurt/Main 1993; E. Leinfellner, H. Schleichert (Hrsg.), *F. Mauthner. Das Werk eines kritischen Denkers*, Wien 1995; H. Henne, Ch. Kaiser (Hrsg.), *F. Mauthner – Sprache, Literatur, Kritik*, Tübingen 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Id., *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, Stuttgart 1920, Bd. I, p. 347. „Ockham hat die Scholastik totgeschlagen, aber seine einzige Waffe war die Sprache der Scholastik”. (I give all the quotations in German in the text in my own translation – H. J.). It is worth mentioning here that one of Mauthner's teachers was Alfred Kühnmann, the author of the monograph *Geschichte des Terminismus*, Leipzig 1911.

According to Mauthner, John Locke was a representative of a similar attitude in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; and his most important achievement is initiating psychology of cognition that is closely connected with philosophical critique of the language developed in the third part of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.<sup>3</sup> Mauthner emphasized that Locke tried to avoid scholastics' jargon, he accepted everyday vocabulary, according to the thesis that words first of all represent ideas, and indirectly – things. As the reasons for abusing words he indicated, among others, learning words before learning the ideas that were connected with them; changing the meanings of the same word; giving unusual meanings to colloquial terms; introducing new terms without explaining them; taking words for things (as in the case of Aristotle's ten categories), getting used to the connection between certain ideas and words because of the long tradition of doing so.<sup>4</sup> Locke justly postulated that no word should be used without connecting an idea (sense) to it.

In Mauthner's opinion, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* had an immense impact on the sources of the European Enlightenment, paving both the way leading from Locke to the French Encyclopedists' dogmatism, and the other one, to Hume's and Kant's critical skepticism.<sup>5</sup> Mauthner gave a much higher appraisal to this latter trend in thinking, since it is in this trend that all the consequences were discovered that Locke did not yet see in his own epoch.

As Mauthner stated, "...since – practicing critique of the language – Locke as a psychologist was not on firm ground, over the course of the years he ever more decidedly applied psychological-empirical analysis to the origin of religion; however, he constantly returned to the metaphysics of childish faith".<sup>6</sup> Locke's writings show his hesitation over the attitude of a sensualist philosopher and one of a "theologian" who, as a participant in religious debates, saved many of his convictions from traditional childish faith, which,

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Stuttgart 1921, Bd. II, p. 529–553. The thesis that Locke's critique of the reason leads to the critique of the language was also propagated by F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, Leipzig 1926, Bd. I, p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> For Locke's most important theses on this issue see: J. Locke, *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego* (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*); translated into Polish by B. J. Gawęcki, Warszawa 1955, vol. II, Book 3, p. 9–193, especially the chapter O nadużycaniu słów (*Of the Abuse of Words*), p. 142–171.

<sup>5</sup> F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, op. cit., Bd. II, p. 539.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543. „[...] der sprachkritische Psychologe Locke da selbst auf keinem festen Boden stand, daß er mit dem Jahren immer entschiedener die psychologische Analyse und den Empirismus auf die Entstehung der Religion anwandte, aber immer wieder in die Metaphysik des Kinderglaubens zurückfiel”.

in Mauthner's opinion, testifies to the bondage of verbal formulas kept in the collective memory of the participants in the culture of the West. Mauthner praised Locke for rejecting many theological sophistries that were accumulated in the history of positive Christianity, but he did not understand why Locke – contrary to the title of the work *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) did not support the rational religion, but he accepted the belief in Jesus-the Messiah as indispensable for the salvation of the soul as the essence of Christianity. It was also incomprehensible for Mauthner that Locke was not satisfied with natural (rational) revelation as deists did, but he also recognized supernatural (extra-rational) revelation as a possible and useful source of cognition, speaking against the lack of faith presented by deists who interpreted Christianity in the wrong way.<sup>7</sup> Mauthner remarked that if supernatural revelation, resulting from God's inspiration, existed, it would have to be communicated to man in a natural way, e.g. via the sense of hearing, and then filtered by the traditional means of the human language, since we do not know the language of God.<sup>8</sup>

According to Mauthner, considering this question undermines the faith in the possibility of supernatural revelation. This is followed by another difficulty connected with the assessment of credibility of the witnesses of revelation. Locke considered the primary revelation as more credible, the one experienced by Jesus' apostles and supported by the testimony of miracles, than the revelation mediated by the Christian tradition; hence he trusted the Bible more than Christian theologians who put forward speculative dogmas that have no connection with the practice of Christian life.<sup>9</sup> He was skeptical about the phenomenon called religious enthusiasm or exaltation, which he understood as an inner experience of God, independent of the Bible, because in such cases it would be difficult to differentiate the illusions of one's own imagination from the real voice of God. In Locke's opinion reason should perform the function of the judge of the revelation, despite the fact that this revelation is concerned with super-rational faith. Although Mauthner saw a contradiction in this thesis,<sup>10</sup> Locke's intention could be defended

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 539–540.

<sup>8</sup> Locke himself was aware of this difficulty, but he did not draw the conclusion that supernatural revelation is not possible, as Mauthner later did. See: J. Locke, *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego* (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*), *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 445–446.

<sup>9</sup> See: J. Locke, *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego* (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*), *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 447.

<sup>10</sup> F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, *op. cit.*, Bd. II, p. 539.

by pointing to the difference in the area of revelation between the truths contrary to reason and hence deserving to be eliminated, and the super-rational truths.

Let us first reconstruct Locke's basic theses about God, and then take into consideration Mauthner's commentaries and assessments.

1. According to Locke the idea of God (as well as the name "God") is not innate, since it does not occur commonly in all the cultural circles.<sup>11</sup> There are differences in comprehending deity not only between representatives of polytheism and monotheism, but also within monotheistic religions, in Christianity itself; and what is more, followers of the same confession (e.g. Anglicans, Puritans) understand God's attributes and acts in the world in different ways, albeit they use the same name, that is "God".

2. According to Locke the idea of God may be considered as a natural discovery made by the human reason, which, at a certain stage of exercising its own cognitive powers and of looking for causes, reached the ultimate reason and called it "God".<sup>12</sup> This discovery was propagated and transmitted (albeit not without mistakes) by way of tradition to subsequent human generations.

3. According to Locke the idea of God (like any idea) signifies a direct object that is present in the mind.<sup>13</sup> It belongs to the class of complex ideas of substances constituting composition of a definite number of simple ideas originating from inner experience, that is from reflection. In Locke's opinion, "having, from what we experiment in ourselves, got the ideas of existence and duration; of knowledge and power; of pleasure and happiness; and of several other qualities and powers, which it is better to have than to be without; when we would frame an idea the most suitable we can to the Supreme Being, we enlarge every one of these with our idea of infinity; and so putting them together, make our complex idea of God".<sup>14</sup> Locke complemented this argument by referring to the indefinite and obscure idea of a substratum supporting the properties.<sup>15</sup>

4. According to Locke, the idea of God is a real idea as far as it contains simple ideas that have their correlates in reality, and it is a fantastical idea (fiction) when it does not satisfy this condition. The idea of God cannot

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<sup>11</sup> J. Locke, *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego* (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*), *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97–98, 114.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 439. Cf. also vol. II, p. 74–75.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 424.

be fully an adequate idea, since it only partially, or not entirely represents the originals (God's properties) to which it refers. The human mind cannot cognize God's real essence, so it has to be satisfied with the knowledge of the nominal essence. As Locke wrote, "for, though in his own essence (which certainly we do not know, know, not knowing the real essence of a pebble, or a fly, or of our own selves) God be simple and uncompounded; yet I think I may say we have no other idea of him, but a complex one of existence, knowledge, power, happiness, &c., infinite and eternal".<sup>16</sup>

5. According to Locke, ignorance of God's real essence is not an obstacle that would make man unable to cognize his Creator and his own duties set by God the Lawgiver.<sup>17</sup> Locke emphasized the needs of the acting man, and not speculations that exceed the limits of our cognition. He stated that God equipped man with moderate cognitive abilities and harmonized the influence of things outside the mind with them, guaranteeing maintaining the life and a definite level of happiness in this and in the future life, however, on condition that divine law is observed.

6. According to Locke there are two sources for cognizing God: natural revelation (reason appealing to the help of outer and inner experience), and supernatural (super-rational revelation: primary and traditional). God's existence does not have to be accepted on the basis of the authority of Christian tradition or through blind (devoid of consideration) faith, but it can be rationally proved; however, not in an a priori (as in an ontological argument) but an a posteriori way, which is connected with the choice of a certain variety of a cosmological argument.<sup>18</sup> As Mauthner remarked, Locke wanted to prove the existence of God "like geometricians do",<sup>19</sup> placing the truth about God's existence in demonstrative knowledge that is characterized by certainty, which cannot be said about the probabilistic knowledge of the existence of sensual objects.

The structure of the cosmological argument is the following: Locke starts from an obvious fact (one that does not require a proof) of his own existence (I exist as a thinking subject) and hence he draws the conclusion

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 440.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26, 418.

<sup>18</sup> For a cosmological argument for God's existence, see: J. Locke, *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego* (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*), *op. cit.*, vol. II, Chapter X, p. 336–353.

<sup>19</sup> F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, *op. cit.*, Bd. II, p. 543. Mauthner undoubtedly refers here to Locke's statement: „It is as certain that there is a God, as that the opposite angles made by the intersection of two straight lines are equal” (J. Locke, *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego* (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*), *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 105.

that since something cannot originate from nothing, there has to exist an eternal, omnipotent and omniscient cause of my existence, and so there exists God.<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that in his argument Locke not only stated the existence of God but also indicated God's properties, assuming that the cause of the intelligent being has to be the supreme intelligence, as a being devoid of thinking would not be able to cause a thinking being. Moreover, the cause has to have the supreme power at its disposal, for otherwise it would be impossible to create something that did not exist before. And finally, it has to be a cause that is free, which does not exclude determination of the will by imagining something that is the best. Stressing God's incomprehensible infinity Locke included among his properties first of all duration and omnipresence; and only secondarily and figuratively – power, wisdom and kindness.<sup>21</sup> He characterized God (not without Descartes' influence) as an infinite and incomprehensible substance that has created both a finite spirit and a finite flesh. As Mauthner justly remarked, Locke used two languages;<sup>22</sup> he drew on the Christian tradition calling God the Creator, the Administrator of the World, the Moral Lawgiver, the Just Judge, the Kind-hearted Father; he also used the language formulas of natural religion that were referred to "the colorless God of deists", such as the Supreme Being or Deity.

According to Mauthner, the very name, "cosmological argument", is misleading. It is rather a logical or sophistic argument characteristic of philosophers who remain at the stage of childishness of the reason. Every event presumes a cause, and every cause a further cause – and so on, as far as the ultimate cause that is called God. Mauthner intends to show that even Kant missed the significant weakness of the argument, which leads to a simple tautology. Similar to the ontological argument that says that an existing being exists, a cosmological argument states that the ultimate cause is the

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<sup>20</sup> F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, op. cit., Bd. II, p. 543.

<sup>21</sup> J. Locke, *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego (An Essay concerning Human Understanding)*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 280.

<sup>22</sup> F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, op. cit., Bd. II, p. 544. This thesis put forward by Mauthner is confirmed by relevant fragments of Locke's work. For instance, for the terms describing God according to the Christian tradition see *Rozważania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego (An Essay concerning Human Understanding)*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 375, vol. II, p. 77 and others; whereas for deistic ones see e.g. vol. II, p. 76, 230 and others. The term "the colorless God of deists" (*der farblose Gott der Deisten*), "God-shadow" (*Schattengott*) appears in Mauthner when he analyzes the significance of Hume's work; Hume was a consistent and courageous continuator of Locke's inspirations. See: F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, op. cit., Bd. II, p. 590–591.

ultimate cause. What we have here is not any broadening of our knowledge. As Mauthner stated, both the assumption of the world's eternity, that is of an indefinite regression of causes in time, and the assumption that there is the ultimate or the first cause, which gives the mind satisfaction freeing it from the anxiety of searching for subsequent causes, may be defended with the help of equally worthless verbal combination-play.<sup>23</sup>

Mentioning Hume's contribution to awakening Kant from his dogmatic slumber Mauthner remarked that Hume was a more courageous and consistent thinker than Locke and Kant since he discovered that the concept of cause (*Ursache*) is an unreal one, that it is a fiction, which the human mind brings into the outer reality. Kant accepted causality as the adequate way by which the human subject orders the data from the sensual experience, that is he considered it an a priori category of the intellect; however, he did not venture to interpret it as the result of a mental habit, or as a common pretence, and this is why he did not apply Hume's discovery to analyzing the concept of cause in the cosmological argument.<sup>24</sup> According to Mauthner the weakness of the argument may be shown by interpreting a causal sequence only as a sequence of temporal events, that is indefinitely small changes in indefinitely small time segments. The concept of cause in contemporary physics has lost all its meaning, and this is why physics gives up the function of explaining the nature and is satisfied with a description of phenomena. Resignation from explaining is tantamount to accepting the concept of cause as an exclusively regulative principle of thinking. The opposite attitude may be called dogmatism, which may assume two forms. Dogmatic materialistic monism, which explains light, heat, electricity, magnetism as different consequences of the same unknown energy, that is of an unknown deity, makes a similar mistake that dogmatic scholastic philosophy makes, which refers everything to the ultimate cause called God.<sup>25</sup> From the point of view of critique of the language practiced by Mauthner, differences of attitudes result from an argument over words.

Let us remind that the cosmological argument is supposed to lead to a poor tautology: the ultimate cause is the ultimate cause. All the same it is considered permissible to substitute the second part of the statement with an apparently identical, as far as the meaning is concerned, word: the ultimate cause is God. This would be permissible only if the word "God"

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<sup>23</sup> F. Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, *op. cit.*, Bd. IV, p. 431.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431–432.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 433.

was understood as nothing but the unknown ultimate cause, without giving it the properties of a personal being. Mauthner quoted the example of mystics who only in the state of ecstasy feel the essential unification with God, eliminating all the notions about God's superhuman and supernatural personality. When they wake from this state they start thinking about God like average Christians do, supplying God with all the properties that are mentioned in the Christian catechism.<sup>26</sup> However, Mauthner remarks that "it is ridiculous in the language of ideas to ask about a deity [going beyond – H. J.] ideas".<sup>27</sup>

The cosmological argument, in Mauthner's opinion, is a childish play on words also because the mentioned properties of God-the ultimate cause are mutually based on each other; this also concerns the connection between such concepts as God, soul and will. Liberation from the apparent concepts of soul and freedom of the will effected by the psychology of Mauthner's times questioned human immortality and responsibility, as well as God's properties: spirituality and justice. From the point of view of critique of the language the words "God", "soul" and "will" do not have their counterparts in reality; however, theologians conditioned something very important, namely man's eternal happiness, on faith in the existence of God, soul and will.<sup>28</sup> Illusion (superstition of the language) consists in the fact that the existence of the soul and will (that is, of a certain substrate) has already been assumed, and hence only faith in the properties (immortality, freedom) was required. It is the same with the basic problem of any religion, because faith in God-abstraction would remain empty and ineffective if it was not supplemented with faith in certain properties of God. Hence orthodox followers of various religions that were considered as the only true ones were right giving the name of atheists to those who doubted the existence of God's such or other properties, even though they did not deny the existence of God.

Mauthner stated that three ideas: God, immortality and freedom are inseparably connected with each other. Indeed, it is possible to conceive the possibility of faith in God without faith in immortality and freedom of the will, but it is a fact that theology of Christian denominations that are common in the West based the three dogmas on each other. The property of God called justice had man's freedom of the will and responsibility as its

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443. "Es ist töricht, in der Sprache der Vorstellungen nach der Gottheit hinter der Vorstellung zu fragen".

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 445.

premise; the conclusion drawn from the premise were rewards and punishments to the immortal soul in the next world.<sup>29</sup> Incorporeity of God – so similar to man – was to result from spirituality of the human soul, and then the existence of spirits (including the soul) – from God's incorporeity. The so-called omnipotence of God's will, that may be understood as the highest level of human will seemingly found in our self-awareness, completely cancels the freedom of human will, but again postulates man's responsibility. These statements only concern the God of the Western theologians, and they do not refer to the God of the Old Testament, in which there is no thesis concerning the immortal human soul, or the concept of man's free will.<sup>30</sup>

As Mauthner remarked, medieval scholastic philosophy, on which all theology has been based until today, worked out these questions extremely penetratingly, assuming the attitude of conceptual realism, which means ascribing metaphysical reality to the words: "God", "soul", "will", without taking into consideration any possible experience. In Mauthner's interpretation, behind the theoretical decisions made by the Western theologians there were assumptions of practical metaphysics, e.g. existence of rewards and punishments after death, that were treated as more important than joys and sufferings of the earthly life.<sup>31</sup> The words: God, soul, will even today belong to the colloquial language; even today – like in the medieval realism – they are understood as names referring to reality; and only some people treat them as empty ideas of practical metaphysics, using the Kantian formula: as if there were God, soul and will.

The result of Mauthner's critique of the language is the thesis about three lingual images of the world illustrated by the example of the concept of God. It is possible to describe God as a thing (in the language of nouns), as a property (in the language of adjectives), and as an activity (in the language of verbs). This is similar to Aristotle's attempt of deriving adequate categories from an analysis of a simple Greek sentence, which was brought by A. Trendelenburg to his contemporaries' attention. Mauthner reduced the list of ten categories to three, referring to L. Valla's thesis that the most important categories are: substantia, qualitas and actio.<sup>32</sup>

The God of the noun world (the God of the traditional metaphysics) is not a thing like other things, but a living thing, a being similar to man,

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438–442. For three images of the world see also: Id., *Selbstdarstellung*, in: *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, *op. cit.*, especially p. 138–143.

to which properties similar to human ones and superhuman activities are ascribed; however, activities that again are similar to human ones, and hence can be compared. In the oldest Greek philosophy the name of what is divine was identified with the primitive matter, e.g. fire; in the polytheist Greek religion the name “God” was a generic one, later it became the proper name of the Christian God, and in pantheism it again became the name of the matter from which first the four elements, and then inanimate and animate bodies were formed.<sup>33</sup>

The God of the adjective world underwent a similar transformation. God’s main property is infinity; he was called the Endless if he was a person, and then, that which is endless and impersonal. A change in understanding God’s activities, described in the language of verbs, occurred in the same way. God’s main activity was creating as far as God had personality; but for God’s pantheistic activity it was difficult to find an adequate name, because such names as: transformation, movement, conservation of energy and development had lost their religious meaning. The God of the verb world as the Creator is a proper name; and as energy – the name of the matter.<sup>34</sup>

A linguistic analysis of the three images of God may be applied not only to the notions of philosophy of nature. Also the God of the church faith changes, depending on the accepted point of view and on the accompanying language. Theological theory is basically satisfied with the noun God. Although God-person’s existence is shown by alleged proofs, one believes in the existence of God-person without proofs. Traditional definitions of the concept “God” refer to an abstract, which is a paradigm for imagining all possible things; this abstract does not exist beside and apart of its properties, powers and results. Confessors of the church (childish) faith treat God’s activity called rule over the world or providence with hope and fear, assessing the activity as good or bad from the point of view of one’s own needs and emotions.<sup>35</sup>

Mauthner remarked that history of atheism in the West gradually achieves the aim, which is liberating human minds from the power of the word “God”, unknown in the tradition of the East. Every word is entangled in its own history; it is subject to various transformations of its meaning, until it discovers that behind the curtains there are no contents that can be referred to the real outer reality. Instead of rational convictions (unmasked as sophistic) we should – according to Mauthner – be satisfied with the

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<sup>33</sup> Id., *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, op. cit., Bd. IV, p. 437–440.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 441.

irrational sense of our unification with the whole of the world. Mauthner argued that his critique of the language culminates in skepticism if one looks back, and in mysticism without God if one looks forward, that is towards the future.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, it is worth making an attempt at an assessment of the significance Locke has in Mauthner's history of atheism, or history of liberating the minds of the West from the fiction of "God". Mauthner accused Locke of incompleteness, willingness to compromise, and a lack of consistence. However, as a historian of atheism he thought that "human thinking had to pass through sensualism, materialism, to the view expressed in the critique of the language, according to which thinking is nothing but language, and language cannot be a tool for understanding reality".<sup>37</sup> Referring to I. Kant, F. K. Forberg and H. Vaihinger Mauthner stated that the formulation they used, "as if God existed" signifies an empty idea of the so-called practical metaphysics. Since the world is a subjective representation, a practical interest appears that inclines one to search for what is outside the representations and to try to name this unknowable X. (God, thing in itself, will). The concept of God, cleared of all the layers piled on it by the theological tradition, should be understood, according to Mauthner, as a simple phantasm, a sound lie of the life, an illusion that is necessary for living, and not as reality.<sup>38</sup> Hence an acting man treats the concept "God" as a useful fiction (or a regulative idea), a poet – as an ideal or a living symbol.

As Mauthner suggests, Locke rightly turned the human mind off the useless metaphysical speculations and directed it towards the study of what has practical value. For this reason in his work *The Reasonableness of Christianity* Locke proclaimed himself in favor of the need to separate necessary truths (indispensable for salvation) from unnecessary ones causing unsolvable arguments over words. In this way he started the tendency to reduce the multitude of Christian truths to the indispensable minimum of truths

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447. „Sprachkritik war mein erstes und ist mein letztes Wort. Nach rückwärts blickend ist Sprachkritik alles zermalmende Skepsis, nach vorwärts blickend, mit Illusionen spielend, ist sie eine Sehnsucht nach Einheit, ist sie Mystic“. The quoted fragment is part of Chapter 10 entitled „Der Frieden in gottloser Mystik“.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 426. „Um ganz frei zu werden, frei von den Worten des Glaubens, aber auch frei von den Worten einer überheblichen Philosophie, mußte das menschliche Denken hindurchgelangen durch den Sensualismus, Materialismus bis zu der sprachkritischen Einsicht, daß es, das Denken, nichts als Sprache sei, und daß die Sprache ein ungeeignetes Werkzeug sei, die Wirklichkeit zu begreifen oder gar die sogenannten letzten Fragen, obgleich oder weil diese nur Menschenfragen der Menschensprache sind, in befriedigender, in beruhigender Weise zu beantworten“.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

connected with the moral perfecting of man, although he was not an advocate of deism. He tried to show rationality of Christianity saying that Christian revelation cannot contain truths contrary to reason, although it contains super-rational truths. Moreover, he thought that reason should be the judge of revelation.

In Mauthner's opinion Locke yet did not know (which was later proven by Hume and Mach) that reason, referring to the data from experience, is a kind of instinct serving human activities and practical needs.<sup>39</sup> Compared to Locke who was a rationalist in matters connected with religion, Mauthner assumes irrationalistic positions, substituting rational reasons with a vague feeling. Also as a historian of atheism he cannot assume an objective attitude, which would require eliminating the emotional factor. Mauthner's work is a testimony to a crisis of the reason, or even something like a philosophical suicide, as it leads to the conclusion that the reason has to be identified with the language, which does not allow us to contact things beyond the mind, or even access our inner world. Hence, what we call cognition may be reduced to poor tautologies of play on words.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that nominalism often treated by Mauthner as a result of his own considerations, is indeed an assumption for his critique of the language, accepted at the beginning. The charge of the vicious circle made in *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande* against numerous thinkers in the history of philosophy, also refers to Mauthner himself. He was under the illusion that his last word in philosophy is not skeptical resignation, but mysticism without God. This only confirms the thesis that he did not understand the meaning of the word "philosophy", since he saw its main task not so much in the argumentative layer, but rather in formulating emotional appeals for liberating mankind from the bondage of the linguistic fiction consolidated in the tradition of the West. If Locke rightly emphasized abusing words and looked for a remedy to prevent it, Mauthner does not seem to trust any of the words, either uttered or written. If he

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>40</sup> This is confirmed by Mauthner's following statement: „Maybe what we call philosophy is merely humanity's questioning look, the question in itself, a question without contents". „Und vielleicht ist das, was wir die Philosophie nennen, eben nur der fragende Blick der Menschheit, die Frage an sich, eine Frage ohne Inhalt". (Id., *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Stuttgart 1901, Bd. I, p. 703; I quote after Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik. F. Mauthners Leben und Werk*, *op. cit.*, p. 74). It follows from this that words not only do not refer one to extra-mental things, but also they do not refer one to ideas (meanings). Accepting the assumption of nominalism Mauthner accused Aristotle (whom he completely misunderstood) of taking words for things; and here he cited Locke's *An essay concerning Human Understanding*, especially Book II. See note 4

was consistent, he would recognize silence as the only right way, instead of writing many-volume works that were a record of his recurrent mistakes, among which one sometimes finds ones that are similar to his own predilections and attitude – which does not mean that they are right.

Translated by Tadeusz Karłowicz

#### S U M M A R Y

In his book *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande* Fritz Mauthner asks what the place of Locke's idea of God is in the Western history of atheism. In the philosophy of Locke he appreciates the psychology of cognition which was related to the philosophical critique of language, developed in the third part of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. However, Locke did not have the courage to extract consequences which D. Hume and I. Kant drew in their critique of the idea of substance, including the idea of God. It indicates that Locke remained under the influence of the Western Christian tradition, although at the same time he undermined its foundations. Mauthner accepts the thesis of his contemporary H. Vaihinger that the name of 'God' means a utilitarian fiction rather than an extra-mental being.

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