



Universalitas & Pervasivitas

il costituirsi e diffondersi della S.J. e suoi echi (1540 - 1773)
di A. Pisani

Schede autori Sotto attacco

Pierre Charron

(Parigi, 1541 – Parigi, 16 novembre 1603) è stato un filosofo e teologo francese, il cui pensiero si ricollega a quello di Montaigne, di cui fu amico.

Cenni biografici

Figlio di un libraio, seguì i corsi di diritto a La Sorbona e successivamente esercitò per breve tempo l'avvocatura, che abbandonò per essere ordinato sacerdote. Intraprese in quel periodo lo studio della teologia, facendosi conoscere ed apprezzare per la profondità del pensiero e la solida preparazione dottrina. Nella prima metà degli anni settanta del Cinquecento insegnò teologia prima a ad Agen e poi a Condom, dove acquistò una casa. Trasferitosi a Bordeaux, città nella quale visse per quasi vent'anni, conobbe Montaigne, legandosi a lui da profonda amicizia. Dopo un breve soggiorno a Cahors, chiamato dal vescovo per riorganizzare l'insegnamento della teologia nella propria diocesi, tornò a Parigi nel 1595, in qualità di rappresentante, presso il Parlamento, del clero d'Aquitania. Otto anni più tardi si spense nella capitale francese lasciando ogni suo avere in eredità al cognato del defunto Montaigne.



Pensiero ed opera

Scrisse due testi di un certo rilievo e alcune opere minori. Il primo ha toni marcatamente apologetici, *Tre verità* contro tutti gli atei, idolatri, giudei, maomettani, (nel francese del tempo, *Trois veritez*, e, in quello contemporaneo, *Trois vérités*), che vide la luce nel 1593 mentre il secondo, *Della saggezza* (in francese, *De la sagesse*) del 1601 ha un carattere quasi profano. Quest'ultimo, particolarmente influenzato dalle dottrine di Montaigne è un'esaltazione del cattolicesimo illuminato e della tolleranza religiosa, con un chiaro invito, rivolto soprattutto ai propri compagni di fede, ad abbandonare credenze e atteggiamenti dogmatici. Solo così infatti ci si può aprire agli altri uomini, che seppur non cristiani obbediscono anch'essi alle leggi di natura, le quali hanno un respiro universale e affratellano tutti gli esseri umani fra di loro. Chi, indipendentemente dalla propria confessione religiosa, agisce secondo le leggi naturali e secondo i principi razionali ed universali che da esse scaturiscono, agisce infatti in accordo con Dio e con la propria chiesa. Questa e non altra è la vera saggezza.

In Charron la saggezza, che trova le proprie basi nelle leggi della natura e in una ragione universale, non è vincolata ad alcun tipo di religione ma preesiste ad essa. Le credenze religiose, in particolare quelle cattoliche, si limiterebbero pertanto a confermare la validità delle fonti naturali suindicate, non a originarle. Tali postulati furono apertamente combattuti dai gesuiti, che accusarono il filosofo di eresia e sollecitarono ripetutamente, contro di lui, l'intervento delle autorità ecclesiastiche del tempo. La protezione di cui godette Charron da parte di alcuni alti prelati, fra cui il vescovo di Cahors gli permise tuttavia di passare indenne attraverso tali critiche e di morire serenamente a due anni di distanza dalla pubblicazione delle sue *Trois vérités*.



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French philosopher, born in Paris, was one of the twenty-five children of a bookseller. After studying law he practiced at Paris as an advocate, but, having met with no great success, entered the church, and soon gained the highest popularity as a preacher, rising to the dignity of canon, and being appointed preacher in ordinary to Marguerite, wife of Henry IV of Navarre. About 1588, he determined to fulfil a vow which he had once made to enter a cloister; but being rejected by the Carthusians and the Celestines, he held himself absolved, and continued to follow his old profession. He delivered a course of sermons at Angers, and in the next year passed to Bordeaux, where he formed a famous friendship with Michel de Montaigne. At the death of Montaigne in 1592, Charron was requested in his will to bear the Montaigne arms.

In 1594 Charron published (at first anonymously, afterwards under the name of "Benoit Vaillant, Advocate of the Holy Faith", and also, in 1594, in his own name) *Les Trois Vérités*, in which by methodical and orthodox arguments, he seeks to prove that there is a God and a true religion, that the true religion is the Christian, and that the true church is the Roman Catholic. The last book (which is three-fourths of the whole work) is chiefly an answer to the famous Protestant work entitled *Le Traité de l'Église* by Du Plessis Mornay; and in the second edition (1595) there is an elaborate reply to an attack made on the third Vérité by a Protestant writer. *Les Trois Vérités* ran through several editions, and obtained for its author the favor of the bishop of Cahors, who appointed him grand vicar and theological canon. It also led to his being chosen deputy to the general assembly of the clergy, of which body he became chief secretary. It was followed in 1600 by *Discours chrestiens*, a book of sermons similar in tone, half of which treat of the Eucharist. In 1601 Charron published at Bordeaux his third and most remarkable work -- the famous *De la sagesse*, a complete popular system of moral philosophy. Usually, and so far correctly, it is coupled with the Essays of Montaigne, to which the author is under very extensive obligations. There is, however, distinct individuality in the book. It is specially interesting from the time when it appeared, and the man by whom it was written. Conspicuous as a champion of orthodoxy against atheists, Jews and Protestants -- without resigning this position, and still upholding practical orthodoxy -- Charron suddenly stood forth as the representative of the most complete intellectual skepticism. The *De la sagesse*, which represented a considerable advance on the standpoint of the *Trois Vérités*, brought upon its author the most violent attacks, the chief being by the Jesuit François Garasse (1585-1631), who described him as a "brutal atheist." It received, however, the warm support of Henry IV and of the president Pierre Jeannin (1540-1622). A second edition was soon called for. In 1603, notwithstanding much opposition, it began to appear; but only a few pages had been printed when Charron died suddenly in the street of apoplexy. His death was regarded as a judgment for his impiety.



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Charron's psychology is sensationalist. With sense all our knowledge commences, and into sense all may be resolved. The soul, located in the ventricles of the brain, is affected by the temperament of the individual; the dry temperament produces acute intelligence; the moist, memory; the hot, imagination. Dividing the intelligent soul into these three faculties, he shows -- after the manner which Francis Bacon subsequently adopted -- what branches of science correspond with each. With regard to the nature of the soul he merely quotes opinions. The belief in its immortality, he says, is the most universal of beliefs, but the most feebly supported by reason. As to man's power of attaining truth his skepticism is decided; and he plainly declares that none of our faculties enable us to distinguish truth from error. In comparing man with the lower animals, Charron insists that there are no breaks in nature. The latter have reason; nay, they have virtue; and, though inferior in some respects, in others they are superior. The estimate formed of man is not, indeed, flattering. His most essential qualities are vanity, weakness, inconstancy, presumption. Upon this view of human nature and the human lot Charron founds his moral system. Equally skeptical with Montaigne, and decidedly more cynical, he is distinguished by a deeper and sterner tone. Man comes into the world to endure; let him endure then, and that in silence. Our compassion should be like that of God, who succours the suffering without sharing in their pain. Avoid vulgar errors; cherish universal sympathy. Let no passion or attachment become too powerful for restraint. Follow the customs and laws which surround you. Morality has no connection with religion. Reason is the ultimate criterion.

Special interest attaches to Charron's treatment of religion. He insists on the diversities in religions; he dwells also on what would indicate a common origin. All grow from small beginnings and increase by a sort of popular contagion; all teach that God is to be appeased by prayers, presents, vows, but especially, and most irrationally, by human suffering. Each is said by its devotees to have been given by inspiration. In fact, however, a man is a Christian, Jew, or Muslim, before he knows he is a man. One religion is built upon another. But while he openly declares religion to be "strange to common sense", the practical result at which Charron arrives is that one is not to sit in judgment on his faith, but to be "simple and obedient", and to allow himself to be led by public authority. This is one rule of wisdom with regard to religion; and another equally important is to avoid superstition, which he boldly defines as the belief that God is like a hard judge who, eager to find fault, narrowly examines our slightest act, that He is revengeful and hard to appease, and that therefore He must be flattered and importuned, and won over by pain and sacrifice. True piety, which is the first of duties, is, on the other hand, the knowledge of God and of one's self, the latter knowledge being necessary to the former. It is the abasing of man, the exalting of God, the belief that what He sends is all good, and that all the bad is from ourselves. It leads to spiritual worship; for external ceremony is merely for our advantage, not for His glory. Charron is thus the founder of modern secularism. His political views are neither original nor independent. He pours much hackneyed scorn on the common herd, declares the sovereign to be the source of law, and asserts that popular freedom is dangerous.

A summary and defense of the *Sagesse*, written shortly before his death, appeared in 1606. In 1604 his friend Michel de la Rochemaillet prefixed to an edition of the *Sagesse a Life*, which depicts Charron as a most amiable man of purest character. His complete works, with this *Life*, were published in 1635.

Cfr.: NNDB <http://www.nndb.com/people/843/000104531/>