ARTYKUŁY

PERSPECTIVA
Legnickie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne
Rok XXIII 2024 nr 2 (45) s. 5-16

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JOHN ABERNETHY'S THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES

Abstract: John Abernathy was an eighteenth-century Irish pastor in the age of the popularity of physico-theology wanted to provide arguments for the existence of God from the structure and orderliness of the universe. He also argued, that the harmony found in nature can be used as an argument for God's power, wisdom, and goodness. He also discusses the problem of the existence of evil arguing that God eventually is the cause of all natural phenomena, including natural disasters and rational beings are the cause of moral evil.

Keywords: John Abernathy, physico-theology, theodicy.

John Abernethy (1680-1740) was an Irish Presbyterian minister. In 1693, he entered the University of Glasgow; having received the MA degree, he studied theology in Edinburgh. In 1703, he was ordained as a minister in Antrim, where he served for nearly three decades. In 1730, he accepted the ministry of a church in Dublin. He was a member of the Belfast Society called also Nonsubscribers, which, among others, did not require subscribing to the Westminster Confession, which was required by the Synod of the church of Dissenters[1].

Today, he is primarily remembered as a major figure in the Nonsubscriber movement. However, widely read and fairly well-educated, he also made some contributions to the broader theological issues laid out primarily in his discourses on the existence and attributes of God. His two-volume work was fairly popular; it had several editions and was also translated into German. In this work, as the subtitle indicates, he wanted to approach the problem of God's existence and His

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[1] [J. Duchal]. *Preface* (D 1.i-xcii); A.G. Brown. *John Abernethy, 1680-1740, scholar and ecclesiast*. In: *Nine Ulster lives*. Eds. G. O'Brien, P. Roebuck. Belfast 1992, p. 125-147.

attributes "from the frame of the material world"; that is, he wanted to use the physico-theological approach in which the investigation of the makeup of the world and its elements should lead to theological conclusions.

1. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The existence of oneself and the existence of the world point to the Creator. There is no other point of more agreement among people than the existence of God (D 1.7)[2]. This is a conclusion based on "the most obvious reflections" and the universal agreement seems to come from "the voice of nature, or God himself speaking intelligibly to every nation by his works". And yet, there is a small number of people who deny that (8). They, of course, have to address the problem of the existence of the world, and they resorted in their explanations to necessity, un- or non-designing necessity, that is, and to chance (accident, randomness). That much was observed by other theologians of the age who argued against atheists, or, as they were frequently called, Epicureans, but Abernethy was quite original by addressing necessity and chance separately using the argument of uniformity and variation. Nature is at the same time various and uniform; the former is an argument against necessity, the latter against chance (21).

Consider the variety of landscapes, of the makeup of creatures (D 1.23), the variety of materials, plants, animals and their shapes and colors (24). The atheist may try to explain this variety using chance. However, the uniformity of nature cannot be explained by chance (25): the same courses of celestial bodies, the fact that plants and animals grow and die the same way perpetuating the same species (26). The more complicated a system (27, 361), the more obvious is the presence of design; contrast a heap of sand with a building, a pile of scrap metal with a clock (27). In the world, there is a correspondence between its parts and the unity in the design as a whole (28). The change of seasons assures that there is no excess of heat or cold (31). All parts fit together for the "several tribes of animals" and for people in particular. The solid ground supports human bodies, this air allows living beings to breath, and water supports the life of plants and animals. Every environment has animals and plants suited for it (32). It would be much less absurd to claim that an intricate mechanism and an elaborate art piece or building were made by a random mixture of their elements than to say that the entire world is the result

[2] References are made to the following works of Abernethy: D – *Discourses concerning the being and natural perfections of God, in which that first principle of religion, the existence of the Deity, is prov'd, from the frame of the material world, from the animal and rational life, and from human intelligence and morality; and the divine attributes of spirituality, unity, eternity, immensity, omnipotence, omniscience, and infinite wisdom, are explain'd*. Dublin: 1740 vol. 1, 1742 vol. 2; S – *Sermons on various subjects, with a large preface, containing the life of the author*. London 1748 vols. 1-2, 1751 vols. 3-4; T – *Scarce and valuable tracts and sermons*. London 1751.

of chance (33). Consider the human face or a landscape with all its details that can only imperfectly be represented by art; consider the makeup of animal bodies perfectly proportioned and fitted together to work in unison, all of it being the work of "All-ruling wisdom […] the fountain of all excellence and perfection" (35-36). The structure of animal bodies and their parts are "exquisitely fine" and their sensory faculties and their self-motion cannot be explained without an intelligent cause. Those who try to do otherwise are but "very bungling world-makers" (40).

The atomists say that first randomly generated animals were imperfect and short-lived, but with time, they became more perfect, although this process of perfecting remains mysterious (D 1.42). Also, strangely, none of such an initial process can be observed today (44), and why did not chance lead to the generation of sirens and centaurs? Moreover, an attempt to mix species ends reproduction process after the first production (45). The generation of an organism by chance, to utilize a comparison used by the ancients, is as likely as composing a poem (49) by a "fortuitous jumble of letters" (50). Also, the random motion of atoms cannot explain the sensory perception allowing to distinguish so many colors, sounds, shapes, pains, and pleasures (53). In fact, in their explanations, atheists must eventually explain by random motion of atoms all mental phenomena. People can move their limbs just by willing it, although the exact mechanism of how will causes muscles to move remains unknown (55, 247), but it is certain that such a motion comes from a self-determining power, not from chance (56). Human thinking may be occasioned by sensory perception, but can go far beyond it. The consciousness of our own being and powers is not derived from the senses at all (59). Some thoughts have nothing to do with external objects, such as the ideas of virtue, justice, benevolence, etc. (60). Thus, intellectual powers of the human soul are superior to sensitive powers and these powers give people ideas about the "self-original intelligence in the universe, […] an intelligent Author" (61).

The world is, at the same time, filled with immense variety of beings and is organized by uniformity. Blind necessity can only account for the latter, blind chance only for the former. This is an important point quite originally brought up by Abernethy, which leads to the teleological admission of the existence of ubiquitous purpose in the universe, in the large and in the small, and thus the existence of a Designer who infuses purposiveness into the universe.

2. MATTER AND SPIRIT

The investigation of oneself and of the world also points to the existence of two realms, corporeal and incorporeal.

Perception and reasoning are of different nature than visible phenomena. In which respect consciousness is similar to motion and form, in what respect are

reasoning and will similar to magnitude and divisibility? (D 1.65). These mental powers must be generated by a power of a noncorporeal nature (68). Even atheists must agree that something must have existed from eternity, a self-existent and independent entity. For them, it is matter; however, the "designing active mind has of all things the best pretentions" in respect to this eternal existence (72). The atheists make the lowest level of reality, senseless passive matter, the principle of reality, whereas theists choose for such a principle the highest possible level of reality (73), "an eternal self-existent mind, immutably possess'd of all absolute perfections" (75).

The existence of motion in nature cannot be accounted for without the admission of the existence of the spiritual realm. Bodies continue to stay in the state they are (D 1.115) and changes are affected by force. The force of attraction and gravity is used with great success in the explanation of motion, but this leaves the existence of attraction and gravitation unexplained (116); although this force pervades bodies (117), it is not of corporeal nature since it can act at the distance when bodies do not touch one another (116). Matter is passive, it can be aggregated or divided, but it does not aggregate or divide itself. It is spirit that is an efficient cause constantly operating, present in all bodies (118). Also animating principles in animals and humans are spirits; thus, God must be a spirit (124).

3. GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

Using the makeup of nature as an argument for the existence of God is a clear indication of Abernethy's physico-theological approach. People best understand the perfections of God "which are most clearly manifested, and immediately exercis'd in his works"; they are power, wisdom, and goodness, but not God's self-existence and infinity (D 1.235). From God's manifestations in nature people can know about Him, but not His essence, not His eternity nor the infinity of His power (2.240). Abernethy agreed with other physico-theologians that some knowledge of the divine powers, wisdom, and goodness can be gleaned from the investigation of nature, but he did not go further than many of them did by directly seeing in nature other attributes, in particular, God's infinity.

The most obvious manifestation of the power of God is not as much creation out of nothing, but "styled creation, […] the disposing all things in the world into regular forms which we see, and framing them into vast and beautiful systems […] to make one harmonious whole" (D 1.276). However, just as He created the universe, He can just as easily "unhinge the whole frame of nature," and that by itself gives people "a very awful idea of his Omnipotence" (280). Apparently, Abernethy agreed with it, since he viewed God only not as powerful beyond human imagination, but also as omnipotent, which can hardly mean anything else

than being infinitely powerful. In fact, omnipotence is God's "infinitely active Nature" and it is too high for humans to understand (268). Strictly speaking, this view of God's power is not directly derived from, as it were, reading nature, but is a theological extension of this reading. And hence, the idea of God's omnipresence is also intelligible as the God who without any mediation preserves and governs all things (1.239). God uses the laws of nature, but sometimes acts against them to call the attention of people (283). However omnipotence has its limits: God does not do what implies a contradiction (287): He cannot do so that a thing may be and not be at the same time, that the whole may not be greater than its part, that a magnitude of an object can be of different size at the same time, that bodies may not be solid, that they can be in different places at the same time, and the like (288). More importantly, God cannot do what contradicts with His perfections, particularly, His wisdom and goodness (289). In the next century, Cantor showed that a whole can be equal, cardinality-wise, to its parts, and some authors would reject the entire premise that there are any limits to God's omnipotence (cf. Shestov). In any event, to such authors, as to Abernethy, the manner of God's omnipresence is incomprehensible (251).

As to the issue of understanding or knowledge vs. wisdom, one is a faculty, another is its proper exercise (D 1.351). The most obvious proof of God's wisdom is the works of creation, their orderliness, the care for them and the government of them in the way most suitable for each individual creature (360). There is an interconnection of elements of nature; for instance, "animals are under an apparent oeconomy, whereby they are rendered useful to one another, and all of them subordinated to man". The harmonious complexity points to God's wisdom (361) and so does the variety of kinds, the gradation of beings (363), "so there is a subordination of use, the lower still serving the higher, till we ascend to man, the chief of the works of God in our world" (364). And thus, it appears clear to Abernethy that intelligence was at the origin of the world (198) and thus before the world existed, thereby wisdom is the first principle of things (199).

Having derived God's wisdom from the organization of nature, Abernethy rather surreptitiously extended it to omniscience, basically, infinite wisdom, even though no finite mind can form an idea of God's infinite knowledge (D 2.256). Only this allowed him to state that no event can surprise God and that God knows the future of all things (1.347-336). This leads to the problem of predestination: how can one square divine prescience with the human freedom? The problem is quickly resolved by indicating that foreknowledge does not influence the nature of things nor does it impair human freedom (341-342). In this, God knows the future since it will pass; it does not pass because God knows it (2.134). In the end, the divine prescience is inexplicable to humans (1.344). In this context, prayer is not telling God something He does not know, but it is an acknowledgement of His perfections (2.437), and an expression of human confidence in Him (438).

As to the divine goodness, it is manifested by "the bounty of God to all sensitive, and especially rational creatures, his opening his hand liberally, and giving them that which is convenient for them, suitable to their several natures" (D 1.51). The argument becomes very similar to the argument in favor of God's wisdom: the elements of the world are harmoniously interconnected, forming one orderly whole: but this orderliness also means that parts of the world serve each other's needs, the interconnection indicates that one part could not exist, at least not comfortably enough, without another, and this speaks to God's goodness. Animals live in environments which can provide them food and shelter, the environments can maintain by their wholesome state by, for instance, the actions of these animals and recycling their byproducts. The world, when considered as a well-oiled machine, shows God's wisdom in its intricate design. The world considered as being filled with life, rational and irrational, shows God's goodness in which its parts contribute to well-being and, thus, to the happiness of one another. Inanimate nature is "the means of happiness to sensitive or intelligent beings" (57), which points to God's bounty and that the world is not only designed, but also well designed (59), thereby showing God's goodness, which is "an affectionate disposition to make others happy" (2.259). This goodness can be concluded from the observation of the world and the way inanimate nature serves the purposes of the animate nature and how rational creatures, humans, are endowed with faculties "fitting them for proper ends and uses" (275). Beings on each level of creation are able to be happy by the endowments given them by God, but they are also instrumental for the happiness of beings on a higher level of creation.

Notwithstanding Abernathy's claim, it appears that rather than being a conclusion of his reasoning, God's goodness is its theological prerequisite. Why did God create the world? To proclaim His glory to rational beings? This does not necessarily lead to His goodness. The world may have been created for purely aesthetic reasons, as a piece of art whose beauty is to be enjoyed by the Creator Himself. After all, the beauty of the world is one argument for the existence of God (2.312).

However, God created the world out of benevolence to spread happiness in the way which also manifests His power and wisdom (D 2.176); the world was "ordered according to the highest reason and the most perfect equity, for the greatest absolute good, or the greatest happiness of the whole intellectual system" (1.177, 276, 2.345).

The creation of the world means, of course, the creation of intelligent beings, human beings, in particular. "Divine wisdom shines conspicuously" in the makeup of the human body (D 1.392), but particularly wondrous are mental faculties of humans: self-reflection, self-determination, judgment, will, affections, etc.; nothing resembling these faculties can be found in the material nature (394). Moral powers are the greatest glory of human nature and we cannot avoid attributing them also to God (11). It can be assumed that any perfection that is in humans is

also in God or an analogous superior perfection. Humans perceive through their senses, God also perceives although differently and whatever humans can discern imperfectly, God knows everything perfectly. Humans make moral judgments, God does that perfectly. Humans are swayed by passions, God is not (15). God always acts "according to the methods of moral rectitude and goodness apparent to his own most perfect understanding" (19). By implanting in humans moral agency and by giving moral laws and rewarding virtue God "promotes in the wisest and most effectual manner the greatest absolute good of the whole rational creation" (22). Benevolence is "the noblest and most excellent affection" and it certainly can be attributed to God (23).

All of it can be considered an argument for the goodness of God: divine wisdom created humans, the highest and most perfect creatures in the world known to us. Since morality is human perfection, it should also be a perfection in God, and thus, divine wisdom leads in a roundabout way to the divine goodness. and hence, this goodness should also shine, like the divine wisdom, in the whole of nature.

As a purely physico-theological argument, Abernethy's proof of the universal happiness and of God's goodness derived from observation of nature is the least convincing. But it shows best Abernethy's approach. His ultimate authority is the Scripture and the only quotations in his *Discourses* come from the Bible. Physico-theologians relied very heavily on the state-of-the-art scholarly knowledge extensively quoting – their own or other authors' – results of the observation of nature and results of the many experiments. This made physico-theological treatises to be frequently extensive lectures on science. Physico-theologians often provided very detailed descriptions of natural phenomena, anatomy and physiology of plants and animals and humans which resembled or had been taken directly from specialized scholarly treatises. Abernethy occasionally provided such descriptions, but they were always given on a rather superficial level, not infrequently relying on common, everyday observations accessible to everyone attentive enough to natural phenomena around them. For instance, we read that "from the sun there is a communication of light and heat to the earth, which is the apparent cause of the various productions upon its surface, and of so manifold use to its inhabitants that they could not subsist without it. By that genial warmth tender plants of different kinds spring up from small seeds, and are nourished, some into strong stalks, some into low shrubs, and some into stately trees, all bearing fruits which are the food of animals" (D 1.30). "There is an admirable correspondence between the parts of the terraqueous globe, whereby it is made a convenient habitation for the various tribes of animals which it sustains. The thin fluid that surrounds it is immediately necessary to the preservation of their lives, by breathing, as well as for the transmission of light, and nourishing warmth from the sun; its solid parts support heavy living bodies, and it is every where so well supplied with water in perpetual

courses, and by refreshing showers, as to answer sufficiently, every where, the purpose of producing food for them, and to furnish them with drink, besides other conveniencies of life." Etc. (D 2.61). No scholarly authorities are ever mentioned[3], no references to scholarly literature are ever made. This is in stark contrast to other physico-theological works.

In spite of the claim made in the subtitle of the *Discourses*, physico-theological divagations were at best of supportive nature used in addition to the arguments from revelation. This reliance on Scriptures was the reason why physico-theologically derived God's attributes were, without warning, extended into infinity and, thus, God's wisdom became instantaneously God's omniscience and His power became omnipotence.

4. THEODICY

The design of a machine as its true essence is known before the machine is built, similarly, the plan of the universe was in the "All-comprehending mind" before the universe was created, the design or the "archetypal ideas of the true Essences of thing were present in this Mind before the things were made" (81). Such a designing cause must be free to choose the best arrangement of parts for an intended purpose of the whole. In this, wisdom is manifested, namely in choosing the best means (82). The world could have been different than it is now, but the Creator chose "that which in the whole was the fittest and the best" (83). This statement is very close to the Leibnizian maxim that the existing world is the best of all possible world. And yet, many authors ask: is it, really?

The design of the universe was planned in eternity, nothing can surprise God, nor sudden emotion can arise (D 1.218). The assumption of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and infinite goodness, leads Abernethy to addressing the problem of the existence of evil.

According to Abernethy, pain, sickness, etc. steer people away from "inferior gratifications" that undermine virtue and direct their minds to "the more noble and solid satisfaction" resulting from exercising virtue (D 2.119). Adversities indicate that sensory satisfaction is uncertain, low, and unworthy of human pursuits. When righteous people are persecuted, they treasure virtue even more. The punishment of sinners is a public warning to other people; the suffering of the righteous (121) may also be useful; consider the case of Joseph, whose suffering led eventually to "great prosperity to himself" and to "preserving his own kindred" (122). The suffering of the righteous is also an example to others: virtues never

[3] Newton is once fleetingly mentioned not as a scholar but because of his theological statement (D 1.132).

shine better than at the time of trial (123). Even the righteous themselves will be glad when their adversity brings fruit (124).

God's plan is so vast and complicated that no human mind is able to grasp it, but people can be assured that "all things, being under the direction of a wise and good Agent, are ordered for the best" in spite of appearances (D 2.127). And thus, everything that happens, the entire "series of events […] is absolutely the best" (128). Everything that may appear contrary to the human mind should be counted as appearances, which seems to include all natural disasters and all misfortunes on the individual and social level. Abernethy was consistent in pressing the presence of God's providence to the last. God extends His providential care even to "the minutest affairs of the world" (D 2.345), and so, God's providence is a cause of sickness, pain, and death (D 2.106). The Scripture speaks about the goodness of God, but it also says that "natural evil is his creature as well as good, and that the suffering of sensitive and intelligent beings (107) proceed from him as truly as their happiness" (108). What is considered evil may have salutary effects just as what seems pleasant may have destructive effects (109). When speaking about good people suffering and bad people prospering, the big picture should be kept in mind (2.209, 278-279). Some events at first shocking later turn out to be wisely done. The same should be assumed about the cases "to the end of which our knowledge does not reach" (210). Even the most grievous incidents in human life can be reconciled with God's goodness when people consider "the shortness of our views," and when they "shall cease to censure the ways of providence as unequal" (278). Whatever happens should be joyfully accepted since it happens according to the will of the perfectly wise God (D 1.399).

In the case of these rare exceptions that seem to violate the general law of sympathy, people should acknowledge human ignorance in a premature criticism of God's works. Animals considered useless or hurtful may be beneficial in the "oeconomy of nature," which people just do not see (D 2.67-68). Stratification of creatures should also be taken into account. It is possible that events in the lower world are related and useful to higher natures. Without a doubt, there are in the universe other rational creatures than humans and above them (D 2.147). In the eighteenth century, it was common to recognize the possibility of intelligent life in other planetary systems assumed to accompany the stars and so did Abernethy by saying that other planets are very likely inhabited (1.278) and also other planetary systems around fixed stars are "stock'd with proper inhabitants" (279), they are worlds with innumerable living intelligent beings (1.218-219; 2.59). However, he was original in supposing that there may be a variety of moral systems in different worlds and that these worlds may be somehow interconnected so that the events in one relate to events in another (2.149). In this, he took truly a cosmic view of God's providence and of theodicy.

5. KNOWLEDGE AND CONSCIENCE

Knowing God is and should be the most important thing for all people. And yet, the way to such a knowledge is incomplete and arduous. People do not even know the nature of human consciousness nor the nature of anything, for that matter (D 1.231, 246). They have understanding of things sufficient to direct their life, but the full comprehension of the nature of things does not seem to be necessary for the human life (231). However, there is also an intuitive knowledge which is "our knowledge of some truths is distinct and compleat, from the first moment of their being intelligibly propos'd, without any difficulty or labour in reasoning" (318); Intuitive knowledge is without any reasoning at all (308) and other truths are discovered by reasoning (1.318). People have a direct intuitive knowledge of their existence (110) and of their rational faculties (231), they have an intuitive knowledge of properties and existence of some objects without knowing their essences, and it is possible that people did have and will have a direct intuition of God's being and attributes without knowing His essence (232). As of the condition of humankind, human knowledge of God is not by intuition, but by reflection and reasoning and "the most obvious obligation […] is to improve that capacity by deliberate attention and reasoning" and to use it (2.402). Thus, since all nature has a stamp of God's wisdom, the more diligently it is investigated the more this wisdom can be appreciated (1.372). The progress of knowledge and the recent discoveries of naturalists "has most eminently tended to establish the foundations of religion" (1.366). Coincidently, human piety is proportional to the "clear and distinct perceptions of his [God's] nature and attributes, in a rational way," thus, intellectual powers should be freely exercised (403). In fact, knowledge is absolutely necessary to the practice of virtue. Virtue is exercised by rational beings, and so, it depends on reason and understanding (S 2.115). Religious practice must be founded on knowledge; if it is founded on ignorance, it leads to superstition (120). In true Christianity there is rational worship and the practice of virtue with understanding (121). A Christian grows through the study and understanding of the will of God and one's duties (122). However, human knowledge set against an immensely large cosmos with all its variations and against the infinite perfections of God is doomed to fail. Also, vicious disposition is the greatest hindrance of religious knowledge, the prevalence of evil habits and strong lusts and passions (139), and corrupt affections direct people away from the light of reason (258). Also, the impious and atheists turn away from God because their aversion to purity and justice (392). There is another avenue for people to bring themselves close to God, their conscience.

All evil is not the same. Some evil is found in nature, like natural disasters. There is also moral evil of which God is not a cause, but this evil is only permitted by God (128). Moral evil results from "the natural imperfection of finite minds" (131). Distinguishing moral evil from what can be termed natural evil was

important to assign the authorship of moral evil solely to rational beings (thus, animals are not accountable to any evil they can cause)[4] and the misuse of their free will. God knows what rational and thus moral agents will do, but He does not impinge on their freedom. Importantly, according to Abernethy, the moral sense, the sense of right and wrong is inborn. The sense of morality is imprinted on human nature (D 1.91). "A sense of good and evil in characters and actions is indelibly imprinted on every human heart" (186). In fact, "The moral capacity of mankind […] is the most important part of their constitution" (185). Such sentiments of morality lead to the condemnation by the heart in the case of crimes (92). Morality was not invented by politicians (97); there are so many different forms of government and yet, justice, mercy, gratitude, and truth are the same and accepted when they are "intelligibly propos'd". This indicated that "morality is a part of human constitution" (99). Acting immorally means making violence to oneself.

Each person has "a sense of virtue […] engraven on his heart" by God (100; S 1.257, 4.159). In all people there is "a sense of the difference between moral good and evil" (S 3.37), although people do not always act accordingly due to their "selfish inclinations, vicious customs and habits and strong prejudices" (38). Although a "profligate wickedness" can destroy the "natural sense of right and wrong" whereby all rational enjoyment is lost (D 2.207), this would be an extreme case. The engraving of the moral sense is too deep and this manifests itself in the voice of conscience. In fact, every person should follow the light of the conscience (T 223). To serve God "without the Approbation of our Understanding" is not service but affront to God. Reason was given to people to glorify God and to be happy (234). The divine authority obliges the conscience and acting against its light is to rebel against God, whether the belief is right or wrong. This is a principle of reason and natural religion presupposed by the Christian religion (235). Conscience is a monitor and a judge (238) and it is accountable only to God. Conscience is a human judgment about oneself and about one's own actions judged in the light of the law of God (241). The ecclesiastical authority has no power over conscience (249). Since conscience decides "in all Cases wherein the Reason of man and the Sincerity of Christian permit them [people] to differ" (230). This was also Abernathy's argument in respect to assenting, or not, to the Westminster Confession[5]. As a Nonsubscriber, he relied on his own conscience and, eventually, on making himself accountable directly to God. This was a bold conviction which did not endear him to many believers even among his coreligionists[6].

[4] Some animals can reason within a very narrow sphere of what they can see, but animals have no sense of religion or virtue in which lies "the preeminence of man above the beasts" (D 2.46).

[5] Abernathy expressed this sentiment early on in *A sermon recommending the study of Scripture-prophecie, as an important duty, and a great means of reviving decay'd piety and charity*. Belfast 1716, p. 17-18.

[6] J.S. Reid. *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. Vol. 3. Belfast 1867 p. 113-120, 147-148.

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DYSKURSY TEOLOGICZNE JOHNA ABERNETHY'EGO

Streszczenie: John Abernathy był irlandzkim pastorem w XVIII wieku w epoce popularności fizykoteologii, który chciał przedstawić argumenty na istnienie Boga na podstawie struktury i porządku wszechświata. Twierdził również, że harmonia występująca w naturze może być wykorzystana jako argument na rzecz mocy, mądrości i dobroci Boga. Omawiał również problem istnienia zła, argumentując, że Bóg ostatecznie jest przyczyną wszystkich zjawisk naturalnych, w tym i klęsk żywiołowych, a istoty racjonalne są przyczyną zła moralnego.

Słowa kluczowe: John Abernathy, fizykoteologia, teodycea.