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Human Nature, Desire for Recognition, Freedom

The author clarifies some problems connected with the classical concept of human nature, particularly in Aristotle and Aquinas. It is very difficult to compare between different cultures or to speak of human rights and education without having a normative concept of human nature in the classical or philosophical sense and not only in the biological sense. In particular: we cannot speak of desire for recognition and of freedom without presupposing a concept of human nature. It is still possible to speak of human nature and of its specificity if nature is conceived in a finalistic and dynamic sense consistent with evolution. Actually form (*forma*) is also the goal (*finis*) of the human being. We have to stress that this goal means openness to being as such, freedom and desire for recognition that requires freedom.

Foreword

In this paper I wish to clarify some problems connected with the classical concept of *human nature*, particularly in Aristotle and Aquinas. It is very difficult to compare between different cultures or to speak of human rights and education without having a normative concept of human nature in the classical or philosophical sense and not only in the biological sense, more often used in contemporary speech¹. In particular: we cannot speak of desire for recognition and of freedom without presupposing a concept of human nature.

1 Speaking very generally, without descending into the details of tough or perplexing cases, everyone knows that human contracts and statutes cannot create truly binding obligations just by the fact of a contractual agreement, or by the mere fact of a command having been issued by a government official. We may always criticize obligations and found human rights on the basis of natural law. We might speak today in particular of the topic of human rights that seems to require a strong anthropology. But as Russell Hittinger holds «never was a culture more dependent upon arguments about natural law and natural rights while having such meagre epistemological, moral, and political resources sufficient for reaching a consensus about these things» (F.R. Hittinger, *Natural Law Still Relevant Today?*, lecture held in 2007 at the University of Genoa, in press). Cf. also F.R. Hittinger, *Fallimento del diritto naturale? Stato moderno, antropologia negativa e dignità umana in Riscoprire le radici e i valori comuni della civiltà occidentale: il concetto di legge in Tommaso d'Aquino*, a cura di F. Di Blasi, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007, pp. 123-136. On the connection between the idea of human nature and education see «Intervista a

I start quoting Peter Van Inwagen on the role of scientific information in our knowledge of man:

It is my position that our deepest beliefs about ourselves - both the traditional beliefs and their starker up - to - date rivals - are like the belief in the alternation of day and night in at least this respect: they are not the sort of belief that be confirmed or refuted by new information (of course some of them are rather more controversial than the belief in the alternation of day and night) [...]. I once saw a cartoon that makes this point nicely. A hostess is introducing a man and a chimp at a cocktail party: «You two will have a lot to talk about», she says, «you share 99 percent of your DNA». Perhaps we should regard it as puzzling that there should be a vast phenotypic difference between two species whose genomes are so similar, but the world is full of puzzles.²

We might object to Van Inwagen: such ideas on man are the outcome of a typical humanistic culture and religious faith (the culture and the religion of the West). I think that these ideas on man, despite their historical genesis, have a rational ground. We may understand the indignation against the mere materialistic idea of man (man as a mere animal). To explicit this rational ground is the task of philosophy and particularly of Philosophical Anthropology³.

In fact some of our culture's ideas on man cannot be undermined by empirical sciences, as they do not share a holistic approach with philosophy and common sense. The holistic approach of philosophy cannot be attained by the sum of the approaches of the various sciences. As Evandro Agazzi affirms:

[...] from an ontological point of view we can say [...] that every science does not investigate any reality as a whole but only a delimited number of attributes (properties and relations) of reality. These different ways of describing the situation amount to a unique fact. It is totally illusory to speak of the *scientific image* of reality globally understood no less than of any particular reality. This is not so much owing to the fact that science is continuous process of evolution and modification (such that it would be impossible to say *what is* this alleged scientific image), but specially because *there is not* a single scientific

Robert Spaemann», a c. di V. Possenti, *Seconda navigazione. Annuario di filosofia* 2007. *Natura umana, evoluzione ed etica* a c. di V. Possenti, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2007, p. 39.

² P. Van Inwagen, *Our Deepest Beliefs about Ourselves* in *What is Our Real Knowledge about the Human Being*, Pontificia Academia Scientiarum, edited by M. Sanchez Sorondo, Vatican City 2007, pp. 111-114 *passim*.

³ Although nowadays the term «philosophical anthropology» is not very much used in the contemporary English speaking philosophical milieu and there are no chairs of this discipline in most philosophical faculties, I do believe that contemporary philosophers deal very often with topics which are deeply related to what we call «philosophical anthropology». See, for instance, the mind-body problem, the philosophy of intentionality and of human action, which is the necessary ground of ethical reflection, bioethics, problems concerning the different approaches to cultural anthropology, philosophy of politics and of multiculturalism, searching for values shared by different cultures, and so on. See A. Campodonico, *L'uomo come microcosmo. Il significato e il metodo dell'Antropologia filosofica* in *La persona e i nomi dell'essere. Scritti di filosofia in onore di Virgilio Melchiorre*, a c. di F. Botturi, F. Totaro, C. Vigna, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2002, vol. I, p. 275-289; *Chi è l'uomo? Un approccio integrale all'antropologia filosofica*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007.

image, even taken at a single historical moment: there are the physical image, the chemical image, the biological image, the psychological image, the sociological image, and so on, and it is obvious that, given a certain «thing», only a limited number of these different images can be applied to it [...] it is an untenable claim to maintain (as W. Sellars once affirmed) that the progress of our knowledge consists in continuously replacing the *manifest image* of the world by its scientific image, because the former is intrinsically wrong and only the latter is true. Actually there is a sense according in which the manifest image and the different scientific images of the same reality may be «true», but this sense must be carefully indicated [...]. What has been said does not intend to underestimate the cognitive value of the scientific images. Quite the contrary, every scientific image is *partial* not only because it does not capture «the whole of reality», but also «the whole of any single reality», but this partiality is the price paid for a great advantage: *objectivity* [...]. Now, since every science speaks only about its domain of reference, and since we can be confident that (despite never attaining an «absolute certainty») it is able to produce a reliable *image* of its domain, we must conclude that this image is *true relatively to its domain of reference*. Precisely because truth is always relative in this referential sense, it would be absurd to pretend that any partial image is true also in other domains of reference and even less in the whole of the thing from which the partial set of attributes has been selected [...]. In order to capture the global truth we have to rescue the cognitive relevance of many aspects of our *experience* in its full richness [...]. In particular those aspects that are not strictly bound to sensory evidence alone and that we, nevertheless, commonly qualify as «experience» (such as moral, aesthetic, religious, sentimental, affective experience), or are present to us in fundamental aspects of our cognitive activity, such as introspection or reflection [...]. The global unity of life, once it becomes the object of reflection, inevitably generates the problem of its sense and value [...] the scientific truths must be included in this effort [...], but at the same time we are brought to consider what problems regarding the sense and value of Life overstep the possibility of treatment of these different scientific frameworks, and we easily find a great deal of them.⁴

The main problem of Philosophical anthropology in the last decades and the root of this new and old discipline, has been considering at the same time the *basic reflection approach* of philosophers and common man and the *scientific approach*. That is why Philosophical anthropology like philosophy of nature is in a way quite static, but in others in continuous development. Scientific discoveries are also part of everyday experience in man. I think that the reflection approach comes first from a methodological point of view: we understand scientific concepts, thanks to pre-scientific concepts, but we may even accept truths on human nature that science cannot confirm. In particular: the Aristotelian and Thomistic concept of *form* as the principle of order is still very important when we have to deal with macroscopic entities such as human being and his actions⁵. This concept connects the reflection approach to the scientific approach. If we do not make use of the concept of *form* in Philosophical anthropology, the alternative is to conceive human being

4 E. Agazzi, *The Scientific Image and the Global Knowledge of the Human Being*, in Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo (ed.), *What Is Our Real Knowledge of the Human Being?*, Vatican City 2007, pp. 75-78 *passim*.

5 See H. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology*, Harper & Row, New York 1966.

and his actions in a materialistic way as a casual sum of particles and events. This happens in contemporary thought as well as in pre-Aristotelian philosophy⁶.

1) The human desire for recognition

Now in order to know how to speak today of human nature, let us look at some main anthropological contents, starting from a phenomenological approach to human experience and then looking at the conditions of possibility of those phenomena. What is specifically *human* in our world if we try to look at it from a «point of view of nowhere»? I would answer: first of all a restless desire for recognition by other human beings or other persons, i.e. beings with reason, freedom, and love. This means a restless desire for originality and authenticity in front of others, a quest that might have good or bad ethical consequences; a desire for interpersonal communication in the silence of the universe, communication by media with other human beings, but also with God (in religion), a quest for honour and glory, but also a desire for compassion towards and from other human beings. This restless quest happens either pushing up the infrahuman level (animals etc.) towards the human level, or thinking the divine from the point of view of man.

Dealing with the religious sense, C.S. Lewis observed that «if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world»⁷. His suggestion is that what people aspire to most acutely is something that the world does not provide. Lewis does not refer immediately to God as the goal of transcendent desire, but he describes the religious believer who argues that natural desires are not in vain, and hence that the longing for deeper satisfaction than this existence can offer, points to another world within which fulfillment may be found.

Arguably nothing compares with religion as a domain of commitment. What then explains the origins of religion and its power to draw and to hold the longing and allegiance of so many? We have an inbuilt desire for transcendence, a notion of a supreme other, and an attitude of awe or piety towards the world as the work of that «Other». A desire for transcendence and an inclination to religion are exactly what one would expect if we were creatures of a God who created us for completion in union with him; confirming Augustine's observation in the *Confessions* when he wrote that «you made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you».

John Haldane maintains:

Another answer might conjecture that religious longing is simply the result of an ancient mutation which has survived because it confers certain advantages – a product of blind evolution. The problem with this, however, is that it fails to address the nature of religious aspirations and beliefs as *aspirations* and *beliefs*. What needs to be understood

6 Cf. E. Runggaldier, *Was sind Handlungen? Eine philosophische Auseinandersetzung mit der Naturalismus*, Kohlhammer GmbH, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln 1996.

7 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, The MacMillan Company, Oxford 1960, p. 79.

is why people hold to certain longings and ideas and engage in particular practices, and part of that explanation will involve their *beliefs* about the point and value of those religious notions and practices. The fact that ancestors behaving in related ways enjoyed certain reproductive benefits in consequence, hardly touches the issue. So I return to the fact of billions of believers and to the suggestion that religion is a natural response to the universal sense of being in a world created and governed, by what and to what end one does not quite know.⁸

Furthermore from this point of view we might conclude that when transcendence (God) is not admitted for metaphysics, human desire becomes not fulfilled.

2) The role of desire in human being

Let us go back to the desire for recognition. In fact, as Max Scheler holds, we cannot think of (and therefore desire) anything higher than *person* (a being with reason and free will), although not only conceived in merely anthropomorphic terms⁹. In our experience person is the only being who may really nourish and satisfy human desire. The more we stress the material and animal nature of man, the more he wants to be original and to be recognized as such by other persons. But I wish to stress that in all these cases the reason is first of all ontological and not merely psychological. In fact only persons are – as we are – intentionally and potentially infinite and in the case of God also ontologically and actually infinite¹⁰.

Men always affirm implicitly in their life an ontological hierarchy of values and of beings, in which persons (intelligent and free beings) play a main role. More particularly, the term “I” can only be applied by a being that has the idea of others and the capacity to view him or herself as an object of attention for others. Given these dependencies the geneticist idea that persons and their psychologies might be reduced to genes is incoherent. As John Haldane maintains: «Geneticisation is an error that can and should be resisted»¹¹.

Going on from phenomena of recognition towards their grounds, we see in man a restless desire open to the infinite thanks to reason, which is capable of universal meanings (particularly being and good as such). Although nowadays we often look at man merely as the sum of many needs, still such needs are comprehended and unified by desire (particularly desire for recognition). According to Aquinas

all things that do not of themselves belong to the thing in which they are, are reduced to something which belongs of itself to that thing, as to their principle. Wherefore tak-

8 J. Haldane, *Human Beings: Rational, Reflexive and Restless*, VI European Symposium of University Professors, Rome 2008 (in press).

9 Cf. M. Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, Transactions Publishers, Brunswick (New Jersey) 2009, in particular p. 25.

10 According to Aristotle and Aquinas the soul is «in some way all things». Cf. Aristotle, *De anima* III, 431b; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, 4, 1; 16, 3.

11 J. Haldane, *Human Beings: Rational, Reflexive and Restless*.

ing *nature* in this sense, it is necessary that the principle of whatever belongs to a thing, be a natural principle. 1) This is evident in regard to the intellect: for the principles of intellectual knowledge are naturally known. In like manner the principle of voluntary movements must be something naturally willed. Now this is good in general, to which the will tends naturally, as does each power to its object; and again it is the last end, which stands in the same relation to things appetible, as the first principles of demonstration to things intelligible; 2) and speaking generally, it is all those things *which belong to the willer according to his nature*. For it is not only things pertaining to the will that the will desires, but also other things that are appropriate to the other powers; such as the knowledge of truth, which befits the intellect; and to be and to live and other like things which regard the natural well-being; all of which are included in the object of the will, as so many particular goods.¹²

Therefore we can call *natural* in general also what concerns human fulfilment, what is *moral* (according with reason and with *moral* or *natural* law). Both first principles of theoretical and practical reason are *natural*. Sometimes Thomas calls the first principles of reason which are grounded on the knowledge (*apprehensio*) of being and of good (i.e. the principle of contradiction, the principle according to which the whole is larger than its parts, the first ethical principle etc.) *reason as nature* (*ratio ut natura*), while the developments, grounded on those principles, are called *reason as reason* (*ratio ut ratio*)¹³. More frequently he speaks of *will as nature* (*voluntas ut natura*), the openness of our will to something or someone, which is the ground of every choice, while will as reason (*voluntas ut ratio*) means those choices (*electio*)¹⁴. Also on the will (*voluntas*), connected with the knowledge of the infinity of being, is grounded the human desire for infinity and for God.

3) Nature as Reason. The Role of Reason in Desire

Desire for recognition requires, in man, both an animal dimension (a need, a quest) and a specifically human one (reason as openness towards the infinity of being and freedom), body and soul. There is no true recognition without freedom. We want to be recognized only by someone who is free and to freely recognize

12 L. Dewan, *Wisdom as Foundational Ethical Theory in Thomas Aquinas*, in William Sweet (ed.), *The Bases of Ethics*, Marquette U.P., Milwaukee 2001: p. 35. The numbers in the quotation of Thomas are mine.

13 Among these first principles of reason there is a hierarchical order. The principle of contradiction is the ground of the other principles (i.e. the principle according to which the whole is larger than its parts), the first principle of practical reason is the ground of the other practical principles.

14 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* 22, 5: «Now nature and the will stand in such an order that the will itself is a nature, because whatever is found in reality is called a nature. There must accordingly be found in the will not only what is proper to the will but also what is proper to nature. It belongs to any created nature, however, to be ordained by God for good, naturally tending to it. Hence even in the will there is a certain natural appetite for the good corresponding to it. And it has, moreover, the tendency to something according to its own determination and not from necessity. This belongs to it inasmuch as it is the will».

someone. The recognition of the other man requires the body, but what is peculiar in man as such it is not mental, which is common also to the superior animals, but knowledge of universals. As Anthony Kenny holds:

What is peculiar to our species is the capacity for thought and behaviour of the complicated and symbolic kinds that constitute the linguistic, social, moral, economic, scientific, cultural and other characteristic activities of human beings in society. The mind is a capacity, not an activity: it is the capacity to acquire intellectual abilities of which the most important is the mastery of language. The will, in contrast with animal desire, is the capacity to pursue goals that only language-users can formulate. The study of the acquisition and exercise of language is the way *par excellence* to study the nature of the human mind. It was by careful analysis of the nature of language that Wittgenstein was able to make a definitive contribution to philosophical psychology.¹⁵

We need, however, to be attentive to how the line is drawn between the domains of mind and of matter if we are to capture what is truly distinctive of human beings. John Haldane maintains:

Suppose we ask what can an animal such as a cat do? We should have no difficulty with the idea that one cat may see another i.e., be aware of it visually. But if we are to say that an animal can think of the quiddity or nature of cats as such, or can think of itself as itself, or as an individual cat distinct from another that it sees, then we must be willing to attribute intellectual and reflexive abilities to it. For Aquinas, following Aristotle, the immateriality of intellectual thought is implied by the fact that it is abstract. In aural perception I feel vibrations in my ears deriving from the beating of a distant drum. By contrast, when I think about the ideas of vibration, or of distance, or of matter, these various features are entertained as purely abstract. In Aristotle's *De Anima* and in Aquinas's commentary upon it the ultimate gap is between intellection and every other activity of animals – human and otherwise. In terms of that tradition, to comprehend the nature and activity of any living system calls for a form of *understanding* that is not reducible to scientific explanation by reference to causal laws. Though the latter may well be apt for describing the behaviour of the matter of which living things are made. The distinctive point about abstract thought is that it calls for a unique form of understanding, the contemplation of natures, which is the preserve of *mind*. One implication of these reflections is that we should not be content to locate the non-reducibility of human personhood in the area of sensory experience [...] there is a significant strand of anti-reductionism in contemporary English-language philosophy but the focus of this is almost exclusively on sentient consciousness.¹⁶

This makes explicit the common view that activities such as believing and thinking can be adequately accounted for materialistically; but that phenomenal consciousness is materialistically inexplicable.

In response to this new Cartesianism Haldane offers two observations:

15 A. Kenny, *Human Beings, Proceedings of the Conference Human Beings. Philosophical, Theological and Scientific Perspectives*, Gorizia 3-5 october 2008 (in press).

16 See G. Strawson, *Mental Reality*, MIT Press, Cambridge MS 1994.

First, by making this the defining feature of the difference between mind and matter has the effect of including all sentient beings on the side of the mental, while failing to provide a criterion of human personhood as such. Far from providing a basis for humanism this approach tends to undermine the idea of the special nature and dignity of the human being. Secondly and against the prevailing orthodoxy, I think that the part of human psychology that is least amenable to materialist analysis or reduction is that to which belong «higher intellectual achievements», and in particular intellection. In this I am siding with the ancients and medievals for whom mind properly concerned abstract general judgement rather than embedded, particular sensory activity, which was deemed to be exercised through the body.¹⁷

In fact, according to Aquinas, the specific role of man in the cosmos is grounded on his intellect, which is by nature open towards the whole of being thanks to the first principles of theoretical reason:

[...] it is evident that all the parts are ordered to the perfection of the whole: for the whole is not because (*propter*) of the parts, but the parts are because of the whole. But intellectual natures have a greater affinity with the whole than do the other natures: for each intellectual substance is somehow all [beings] (*unaquaeque intellectualis substantia est quodammodo omnia*), inasmuch as it is inclusive (*comprehensiva*) of the whole of being (*totius entis*) by its intellect: whereas any other substance has only a particular participation in being (*entis*). Suitably, then, the others are provided for by God because of [or for the sake of] the intellectual substances.¹⁸

4) First Principles. The *Natural* Sources of Reason and Desire

According to Platonic thought, the source of the acts of reason and will is the contemplation of the eternal truths. Aristotle does not agree with Plato's concept of eternal truths. As in Aristotle, also in Thomas only some natural acts, deeply connected with the first principles, which have in themselves their own end (*praxis teleia* or *actio immanens*) such as living, being happy, contemplating the truth, living friendship and love, although some of them seldom occur in our lives, are paradigmatic for every other kind of acts which have their ends outside themselves (*kinesis* or *actio transitiva*). This is the case of *art* (technology in contemporary terms). In his *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* Thomas holds:

17 J. Haldane, *Human Beings: Rational, Reflexive and Restless*.

18 *Summa contra gentiles* III,112. This reminds us of the point made in *Summa theologiae* I-II, 2, 6, that the intellectual part of the soul *infinitely* surpasses the corporeal good. Furthermore Thomas holds that the closest resemblance to God in creatures comes through intellectuality. Cf. *Summa theologiae* I, 93, 2: «[...] it is evident that the likeness of the species is approached in function of the ultimate difference. Now, some things are assimilated to God, firstly and most commonly, inasmuch as they are; but secondly, inasmuch as they live; but thirdly, inasmuch as they wisely consider or understand (*sapiunt vel intelligunt*) [...]. Thus, therefore, it is evident that only intellectual creatures, properly speaking, are in the image of God».

[...] when nothing else is produced in addition to the activity of the potency, the actuality then exists in the agent as its perfection and does not pass over into something external in order to perfect it; for example, the act of seeing is in the one seeing as his perfection, and the act of speculating is in the one speculating, and life is in the soul (if we understand by life vital activity). Hence it has been shown that happiness also consists in an activity of the kind which exists in the one acting, and not of the kind which passes over into something external; for happiness is a good of the one who is happy, namely his perfect life. Hence, just as life is in one who lives, in a similar fashion, happiness is in one who is happy. Thus it is evident that happiness does not consist either in building or in any activity of the kind which passes over into something external, but it consists in understanding and willing.¹⁹

Those natural acts, having their end in themselves, are somehow circular. Only those perfect and fulfilled kind of acts are at the very root of our natural desire for happiness and of hope. We can speak in contemporary terms of *basic human experiences*. Prominent among those acts is the act of living, because we are always living, also when we are angry or when we commit sin and make mistakes. From the biological point of view we do not live *more or less*, but we *live* (as long as we live). And when we live there is always, within ourselves, an order, an *actio immanens*, a goodness (in an ontological sense, because there is an inclination of our body towards preservation and fulfilment) and an integrity (*integritas*), which means unity of the parts of a whole among themselves²⁰. It maybe that we do not pay explicit attention to them, but still those *natural* acts are implicitly the very source of our desire for happiness. Of course we have to note that, in us, life is not only biological life, but is also intellectual and moral life in an analogous way: *intelligere est vivere*²¹. These kinds of life always presuppose biological life. The intentional and transcendental character of our knowledge both preserves and deeply changes from within our biological life and our inclinations:

[...] we note that we do not speak merely of «intellect», [...] but of «intellectual nature». It is as if we are to view the intellect as a new dimension of natural being, expanding the meaning of «tendency», «inclination», «order towards the good». Thus, we see reality as shot through with tendency towards the good, but those beings which have intellect or mind have *inclination* in its most perfect realization, as *beings which experience the appeal of goodness as such*.²²

19 In IX Met. VIII 1865. Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* IX, VIII, 790.

20 Cf. *Summa theologiae* I, 18, 2: «The same must be said of life. The name is given from a certain external appearance, namely, self-movement, yet not precisely to signify this, but rather a substance to which self-movement and the application of itself to any kind of operation, belong naturally. To live, accordingly, is nothing else than to exist in this or that nature; and life signifies this, though in the abstract [...]».

21 This is the Aristotelian difference between *zen* and *bionai*.

22 L. Dewan, *Wisdom as Foundational Ethical Theory in Thomas Aquinas*, William Sweet (ed.), *The Bases of Ethical Theory*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 2001, p. 54.

As happens in our biological life, also in our intellectual life and in our conduct or ethical life, in facing reality, we always have to come back to our first principles, theoretical and practical, as if in a circular movement. We cannot abandon those first principles and go on without them. The ground of *ratio* as *discursus* (from *currere* – to run) is the apprehension of the first principles of theoretical reason (*intellectus principiorum*), as well as the ground of our own ethical choices is the apprehension of the first principles of natural law. The insight of the first principles of knowledge (*prima principia indemonstrabilia per se nota*) is paradigmatic, because even when we make mistakes in our reasoning and in our conduct, our first principles can grasp always and immediately the truth and the good. Therefore, although we may not understand the truth and make mistakes, we can always have a new start in our search for truth and moral good. It is noteworthy that Thomas calls the first natural principles (theoretical and practical) also *habitus* (*prima principia quorum est habitus, habitus principiorum*), because we always can use them, since they are in potency in ourselves²³. Particularly in our relationships with other people, in friendship (*amor amicitiae*) and in love (in particular according to Aquinas in the contemplation – love of God) we can experience happiness, the top level of life. That is why we always remember some happy periods of our life. To sum up: recovering human nature means a fresh start in our lives and that is always possible thanks to the *natural* first principles and to some *natural* acts²⁴.

5) Nature as Freedom

Which is in this context the place and role of human freedom? First of all – in our experience – freedom is always presupposed. Speaking of freedom, we always presuppose it²⁵. As we have seen, the appeal of good as such is the very ground of freedom.

We have to stress that freedom is not only and first of all *freedom to act otherwise* (the first meaning of freedom from the phenomenological point of view), but *self-determination*²⁶. Also when we do not have to deliberate between two (or more) alternatives we are free²⁷. This is the case, for instance, of a mother who *naturally*

23 Cf. L. Tuninetti, “*Per se notum*”. *Die logische Beschaffenheit des Selbstverständlichen im Denken des Thomas von Aquin*, Brill, Leiden 1996.

24 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei* III, 1 ad 6; *Ibid.* III, 8 ad 3.

25 Cf. J.L. Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, Galilée, Paris 1988, p. 34.

26 On the first meaning of freedom (freedom to act otherwise) cf. T. Pink, *Free Will. A Very Short Introduction*, OUP, Oxford 2004, in particular, p. 78, on the second meaning (freedom as self determination) cf. F. Botturi, *La generazione del bene. Gratuità ed esperienza morale*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2009, pp. 138-147. On the topic of freedom very important is all chapter V, *L'organismo dialettico della libertà*.

27 Cf. D. Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action and Prudence in Aquinas*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994, p. 165: «[...] deliberation, as a stage in practical reason, is not even a necessary part of human action. It is choice or decision that provides the essential link between intention and action. The rational structure of action (a means related to an end) is

and *freely* loves her children. Let us consider the different meanings of freedom and their grounds that connect them:

a) Freedom as *self determination* and *free will* (*libertas minor*). It requires reason as implicit openness to the infinity of being, desire for good in general and self-knowledge²⁸:

We have a willing for the good in general; but we do not choose the good in general, but only in particularized form, and it is the reason that performs the function of specification. *Liberum arbitrium* does not occur without the particularization, and because of the nature of being and mind there is an indeterminacy about every particular good specified by reasoning, which is the source of possible error, of evil, and also of freedom.²⁹

Freedom is grounded on necessity. We necessarily love the fullness of good. That's why we are often bored, when dealing with finite beings and we can choose among them.

b) Freedom as *fulfilment* (*libertas maior*) requires natural goods and natural inclinations towards those goods³⁰. Inclinations are the ground of the precepts of natural law³¹. Without inclinations we may have justification, but no motivation for acting.

seen and desired in intention, and approved and chosen in decision. A great many ordinary actions are intended, chosen and executed (and are fully voluntary) without deliberation»; H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of what we care about. Philosophical Essays*, CUP, Cambridge 1988, pp. 1-10; E. Stump, *Aquinas Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will*, «The Monist», 80 (1997), 4, pp. 576-597.

28 Cf. F. Botturi, *La generazione del bene. L'organismo dialettico della libertà*, p. 137: «L'apertura interale dell'appetizione umana, in quanto spiritualmente riflessiva, la rende capace di *autopossesso*, cioè priva di una motivazione "esteriore" che la pre-determini come movente autonomo. La trascendentalità interale e riflessiva dello "spirito" è dunque il *costitutivo formale della libertà*, quale principio di iniziativa assoluta». Against determinism Botturi stresses that freedom is possible, because there are different faculties in the human soul. Cf. also C. Vigna, *Libertà e responsabilità della verità. 12 tesi brevemente delucidate* in AA.VV., *Bene, male, libertà*, «Annuario di filosofia 1999», Mondadori, Milano 1999, p. 188-89.

29 D. Westberg, cit., p. 89: «We have a willing for the good in general; but we do not choose the good in general, but only in particularized form, and it is the reason that performs the function of specification. *Liberum arbitrium* does not occur without the particularization, and because of the nature of being and mind there is an indeterminacy about every particular good specified by reasoning, which is the source of possible error, of evil, and also of freedom».

30 See H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of what we care about. Philosophical Essays*, p. IX: «[...] necessity it is not only compatible with autonomy; it is in certain respect essential to it. There must be limits to our freedom if we are to have sufficient personal reality to exercise genuine autonomy at all. What has no boundaries has non shape. By the same token, a person can have no essential nature or identity as an agent unless he is bound with respect to that very feature of himself – namely, the will – whose shape most closely coincides with and reveals what he is».

31 According to Aquinas natural law requires harmony between practical reason and human basic inclinations (not every inclination, but inclinations towards perfect goods). Inclinations towards good are known (also implicitly), valued, interpreted by practical reason and, in

c) Freedom as fulfilment requires an aim in life (a hierarchy of goods and a *hypergood* or supreme good). Freedom grows up thanks to the hierarchization of desire. In fact, as moral beings, we cannot act without freedom or against freedom (here Kant agrees with Aquinas), nor act without freely searching for all fundamental human goods and for a supreme good. Otherwise freedom is an empty idea and nihilism is always possible³². Therefore we cannot easily give up the ideas of nature and of natural law. From this point of view the stress on freedom to act otherwise (as in libertarianism) is a kind of surrogate of infinity as the aim of desire. We cannot *only* choose, but ask *why* to choose. Therefore freedom requires moral responsibility.

d) Freedom requires recognition in order to grow up: that means another person/persons as the object of our desire as we have seen. That means physical natures with reason and free will. In fact human beings, as open to the infinity of being and free, are adequate to the infinity of our desire and to our freedom³³.

To sum up: human nature as the ground of freedom means that

- *Nature* is the *given* (being, life, reason particularly as intellect, the source of our desire for happiness). In particular: *nature* is our inclinations and, in the first place, *natural* openness towards infinity and desire for fulfilment.

- *Nature* is our need for intersubjectivity. The others have a *nature* as us. Without relationship with others and recognition freedom cannot grow.

Therefore human freedom is grounded on *human nature* conceived as unity of body and soul, desire for fulfilment and *natural* intersubjectivity.

6) Newness of being, Chance and Freedom

Contemporary Neo-Darwinian evolutionism requires chance. What is the meaning of chance in our lives? I believe that we are always by nature looking for something new. But why? Because we are naturally open to the whole of being, but we find out in our world only finite beings. Some of them (the others) are open to the whole of being, but still they too are finite and contingent beings. Only what appears *new*, really *new* (we might say in Aquinas' terms *cum novitate essendi*), as grounded in the newness of the act of being, can fulfil our natural desire for happiness and truth. Therefore also chance and luck are very important in our lives³⁴. But this kind of newness always requires nature and necessity as its ground.

particular they become moral norms (precepts) thanks to the same practical reason. See *Summa theologiae* I-II, 94, 2.

32 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of the Self*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Toronto 1991.

33 But human beings, although intentionally infinite, are ontologically finite (they suffer, die etc.). Therefore there is place for religion.

34 Cf. *Summa contra gentiles* III, 74 *passim*: «[...] divine providence does not take away fortune and chance from things. For it is in the case of things that happen rarely that fortune and chance are said to be present. Now, if some things did not occur in rare instances, all things would happen by necessity. Indeed, things that are contingent in most cases differ from neces-

Thomas holds that we can know that there is chance, because we know – at least implicitly – that there is nature, order and necessity in ourselves and in the world in general³⁵. According to Aquinas, if it is true that we must speak of chance from the point of view of the secondary causes and of man – the autonomous role of the secondary causes is very much stressed by him – from God's point of view there is no chance at all³⁶.

It is absurd to oppose to each other, nature and chance and nature and history. This happens – maybe – because we often have a too static and essentialist concept of nature and of God. But, as noticed before, in Thomas there is a *dispositional* or *dynamic* concept of nature. It is important that in Aquinas' thought we can find a deep and often implicit sense of history and of the role of secondary causality in nature and in history, although he does not discuss this topic extensively in an explicit way. But the internal logic of his metaphysics of creation is deeply open to the newness (*novitas*) of historical events and therefore to chance. This is not strange for a philosopher who is also a great Christian theologian³⁷. This means that the

sary things only in this: they can fail to happen, in a few cases. But it would be contrary to the essential character of divine providence if all things occurred by necessity [...]. Moreover, it would be against the perfection of the universe if no corruptible thing existed, and no power could fail [...]. Besides, the large number and variety of causes stem from the order of divine providence and control. But, granted this variety of causes, one of them must at times run into another cause and be impeded, or assisted, by it in the production of its effect. Now, from the concurrence of two or more causes it is possible for some chance event to occur, and thus an unintended end comes about due to this causal concurrence [...]. Therefore, it is not contrary to divine providence that there are some fortuitous and chance events among thing [...] the natural intention of a cause cannot extend beyond its power, for that would be useless. So, the particular intention of a cause cannot extend to all things that can happen. Now, it is due to the fact that some things happen apart from the intention of their agents that there is a possibility of chance or fortuitous occurrence. Therefore, the order of divine providence requires that there be chance and fortune in reality».

35 Cf. J. Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas*, CUP, Cambridge 1999, p. 130: «Indeed, despite contemporary assertions to the contrary, contingency cannot go all the way down. It couldn't. A creature that was not directed to some ends by natural necessity would not be a particular kind of thing with a particular sort of agency. Indeed, it would not be a creature. It would be chaos».

36 Cf. *Summa theologiae* I, 22, 4: «And thus it (God) has prepared for some things necessary causes, so that they happen of necessity; for others contingent causes, that they may happen by contingency, according to the nature of their proximate causes. Ad 3: «[...] the mode both of necessity and of contingency falls under the foresight of God, who provides universally for all being; not under the foresight of causes that provide only for some particular order of things».

37 See J. Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas*, pp. 215-16: «He (Thomas) cannot revise his treatment of the virtues in the manner the Stoics suggest, effectively eliminating their exposure to luck, for this would not only ignore his confidence in unreconstructed Aristotelian virtue, it would also deny the reality and consequence of our fall from grace – that virtue and happiness are in fact exposed to misfortune in ways that can undo each. Nor can he simply rest content in his Aristotelian commitments and maintain that the virtues do well enough against fortune's challenges, for this would ignore the obvious – that virtue in Eden does far better. And of course it is this fact that give him grounds to find fault with what he has, to yearn fore something more, and to tempt Stoic revisions of his largely Aristotelian treatment of the moral virtues.

events of history, of contemporary history, help us, more and more, to discover human nature and natural law also by way of negation in a dialectical way. Nature and history, nature and time are not against each other, but they are complementary living polarities. If this is true, we ought to look with open eyes at today's events and not only at those of the past, to get a deeper knowledge of human nature and natural law. Here human freedom and ethical responsibility play the main role.

7) The Nature of Human Being

Intellectual knowledge makes our quest (desire) infinite, able to make absolute its finite objects. Although the intersubjective dimension is already present at the animal level (see «mirror neurons»), desire is *human* only thanks to man's knowledge of the universals. Human nature as strict unity of mind and body and the goal of man cannot be separated from his desire and, particularly, from his desire for recognition, therefore from freedom and responsibility.

To sum up: it is still possible to speak of human nature and of its specificity if nature is conceived in a finalistic and dynamic sense consistent with evolution. Actually according to Aristotelian and Thomistic anthropology, form (*forma*) is also the goal (*finis*) of the human being³⁸. We have to stress that this goal means openness to being as such, freedom and desire for recognition that requires freedom³⁹.

Entities emerge from evolution not identical with the elements they unite. More comes into existence through union of elements. Being is achieved and maintained union. Each element in the becoming process can be reducible to a passive principle, prime matter, and an active principle, substantial form. Human nature (as strict unity of mind and body) and the goal of man cannot be separated from his desire for recognition. Notwithstanding technological developments (in particular biotechnologies) and similarities between animals and human beings in terms of genetics and cell biology, the specificity of man is apparent in his language, his inclination to the wholeness of being, his freedom and his quest for others' recognition (other men and also a personal God).

In man, the apex of the evolution of nature (as we know it), particularly in his experience of intersubjectivity and freedom, which requires a strict unity of body

His actual response, if we can call it that, resides between these two alternatives, and since hope is the mean between confidence and despair we should not be surprised to find Aquinas's reply in his treatment of the theological virtues».

38 Cf. F. Chiereghin, *L'eco della caverna. Ricerche di filosofia della logica e della mente*, Il poligrafo, Padova 2004, in particular p. 179: «La forma come fine fa da attrattore nell'evoluzione. L'attrattore forma non determina in anticipo punto per punto il prodursi delle traiettorie, ma solo la tendenza del loro convergere verso il bacino di attrazione: il sistema evolve mantenendo i suoi gradi di libertà e tuttavia ha nell'attrattore la forma che ne regola lo sviluppo» (cf. G. Nicolis, I. Prigogine, *La complessità*). The book of Chiereghin, which concerns the topic of form in neurosciences, is very interesting.

39 On the topic of freedom as the goal of evolution see H. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology*. Northwestern University Press, Chicago 2000.

and mind (the specificity of Aristotelian and Thomistic anthropology), the main dimensions of reality are integrated at a higher level or sketched at a lower level.

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