

## Angelo Campodonico – University of Genoa - How to speak today of Human Nature?

### Foreword

In this paper I would like to clarify some problems connected in the contemporary milieu with the classic concept of human nature, that we find particularly in Aristotle and Aquinas. Let's start with a quote from the philosopher of Notre Dame Peter Van Inwagen: "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]...[he means scientific information]. I once saw a cartoon that makes this point nicely. A hostess is introducing a man and a chimp at a cocktail party: 'You too 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"<sup>1</sup>.

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 can have a rational ground. Hence we may understand the indignation against the mere materialistic idea of man. To explicit this rational ground is the task of philosophy and particularly of Philosophical Anthropology<sup>2</sup>.

In fact some ideas of our cultures 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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, p. 111-114 *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Although the term "philosophical anthropology" is not used very much in the contemporary philosophical milieu and there are no chairs of this discipline in most philosophical faculties, except for the catholic ones, I believe that contemporary philosophers deal very often with topics 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. Furthermore the classical concept of human nature, which is deeply connected with the topic of Philosophical anthropology, cannot be deleted. In fact it seems very difficult to compare different cultures or to speak of human rights and duties without having, at least implicitly, a normative concept of human nature (in the classical or philosophical sense) and not only in the mere biological sense (the used more often in contemporary speech).

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 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...In short, 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, because they become part of the Unity of experience that we cannot ignore, 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”<sup>3</sup>.

In fact the main problem of Philosophical anthropology in the last decades and the root of this old and new 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

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<sup>3</sup> E. Agazzi, *The Scientific Image and the Global Knowledge of the Human Being*, in *Our Real Knowledge of the Human Being*, p. 75-78 *passim*.

like philosophy of nature is in a way quite static, but in others in continuous development. Also scientific discoveries become 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 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 actions<sup>4</sup>. 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 the human being and his actions in a materialistic way as a casual sum of particles and events. This happens in contemporary thought as well as in prearistotelian philosophy<sup>5</sup>.

### 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, but also a desire for compassion towards and from other human beings<sup>6</sup>. 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.

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<sup>4</sup> See H. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology*, Harper & Row, New York 1966.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. Runggaldier, *Was sind Handlungen? Eine philosophische Auseinandersetzung mit der Naturalismus*, Kohlhammer GmbH, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln 1996.

<sup>6</sup> *We can find the topic of the other in Aristotle, particularly in the books on friendship of the Nicomachean Ethics and in Aquinas*. Very often in Aquinas' works it is apparent that the topic of the “other” is implicit. For instance: when Thomas holds that an act is moral only when both the *interior* act and the *exterior* act are right, according to the phrase “*bonum ex integra causa*” (in contemporary terms we may speak of a mix of *internalism* and *externalism* in his ethics), we might ask: how we can know that an exterior act is a good one? I believe that Thomas implicitly thinks that the others can know the morality of our exterior acts as well as those virtues that are the sources of those acts, better than we do. This is why they can advise us. We might say that the others are somehow “in ourselves”. To sum up: I think that very often in Thomas' works the topic of intersubjectivity, that is very important nowadays, it is only implicit, and that is not strange. Nowadays we talk very much about the “community”, because we are not very often communitarians. On the contrary community was very important in everyday life during the Middle ages. Still the relationship with other people is *natural* and we always need that.

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”<sup>7</sup>. 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 fulfilment 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 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”<sup>8</sup>. 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. As Max Scheler holds, we cannot think of (and therefore desire) anything higher than person (being with reason and free will), although not only

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<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan, London 1960, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> J. Haldane, *Human Beings: Rational, Reflexive and Restless*, in *Proceedings of the VI European Symposium of University Professors*, Rome 2008, *Broadening the Horizons of Rationality. Perspectives for Philosophy: Philosophy and Anthropology*, (in press).

conceived in merely anthropomorphic terms. Therefore 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 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, “somehow all beings” (“quodammodo omnia” according to Aquinas) and in the case of God also ontologically and actually infinite.

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 her 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”<sup>9</sup>.

Going on from phenomena of recognition towards their grounds, we see in man a restless desire open to the infinite (*voluntas ut natura* according to Aquinas) 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), which is *appetitus rationalis* or *voluntas* (will). 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 taking 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”<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> L. Dewan, *Wisdom as Foundational Ethical Theory in Thomas Aquinas*, in W. Sweet (ed.), *The Bases of Ethical Theory*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 2001, p. 35. The numbers in the quotation of Thomas are mine.

Therefore we can call *natural* in general also what concerns human fulfilment, what is moral (in accordance 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 apprehension 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.) *ratio ut natura*, while the developments, which are grounded on those principles, are called *ratio ut ratio*<sup>11</sup>. More frequently he speaks of “*voluntas ut natura*” (will as nature - the necessary openness of our will to the infinity of being and of goodness, which is the ground of every choice), while “*voluntas ut ratio*” (will as reason) means those choices (*electio*)<sup>12</sup>. Also on the will (*voluntas*), connected with the knowledge of the infinity of being, is grounded the human desire of infinity, of God (the “*desiderium naturale videndi Dei*”).

### 3) The Role of Reason in Desire

The desire for recognition in man requires both an animal dimension (a need, a quest) and a specifically human one (reason as openness towards the infinity of being), body and soul. The recognition of the other man requires the body [*materia signata quantitate*], 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”<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *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”.

<sup>13</sup> See A. Kenny, *Human Beings* in these *Proceedings*.

We need, however, to be attentive to how to draw the line 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. I mentioned earlier that there is a significant strand of anti-reductionism in contemporary English-language philosophy but the focus of this is almost exclusively on sentient consciousness”<sup>14</sup>.

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

In response to this new Cartesianism Haldane offers two observations partly implicit in what I have already held. 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 least amenable to materialist analysis or reduction is that to which belong “higher intellectual

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<sup>14</sup> Let me illustrate this quoting briefly from one prominent author: “The existence of experience is the only hard part of the mind-body problem for materialists ... The things we think of as higher intellectual achievements are just not a philosophical problem, except in so far as they involve a capacity for experience” (Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality* (MIT Press, Cambridge MS 1994)).

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, deemed to be exercised through the body”<sup>15</sup>.

In fact, according to Thomas, the peculiar 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”<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore Thomas holds that the closest resemblance to God in creatures comes through intellectuality: “... 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”<sup>17</sup>.

#### 4) 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 (the *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 (the *kinesis* or *actio transitiva*). This is the case of *art* (technology in contemporary terms). Thomas holds: “...when nothing else is produced in addition to the activity of the potency, the actuality then

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<sup>15</sup> J. Haldane, *Human Beings: Rational, Reflexive and Restless*.

<sup>16</sup> *Summa contra Gentiles*. 3.112. This reminds us of the point made in *ST*. 1-2, 2, 6, that the intellectual part of the soul *infinitely* surpasses the corporeal good.

<sup>17</sup> *Summa theologiae* I, 93, 2.

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”<sup>18</sup>.

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 themselves<sup>19</sup>. 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*. This is the Aristotelian difference between *zen* and *bionai*. 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. “...we note that we do not speak merely of "intellect" when the time comes to make the comparison, 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*”<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> *In XII libros Metaphysicorum* VIII 1865. Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* IX, VIII, 790.

<sup>19</sup> 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...”.

<sup>20</sup> L. Dewan, *Wisdom as Foundational Ethical Theory in Thomas Aquinas*, 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 *intellectus principiorum*, the apprehension of the first principles of theoretical reason, 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 ourselves<sup>21</sup>. Particularly in our relationships with other people, in friendship (*amor amicitiae*) and in love (particularly according to Aquinas in 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 it up: recovering human nature means a fresh start in our lives which is always possible thanks to the *natural* first principles and to some *natural* acts. Aquinas makes an interesting comparison between the “fresh start” of the first principles and the newness (*novitas essendi*) of God’s creation, and between creation and the gift of Grace <sup>22</sup>. From this point of view, we can also make an analogous comparison between the “fresh start” of natural first principles and the “fresh start” produced in man by God’s forgiveness.

##### 5) Newness of being and Chance

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

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. L. Tuninetti, “*Per se notum*”. *Die logische Beschaffenheit des Selbstverständlichen im Denken des Thomas von Aquin*, Brill, Leiden 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *De potentia* III, 1 ad 6: “And as the understanding of first principles, which is the starting-point whence the conclusion is derived, does not proceed as a conclusion from something else, even so creation which is the principle of all movement, is not from something else”; *De pot.* III, 8 ad 3: “Since grace is not a subsistent form it cannot properly be said to be or to be made, and consequently properly speaking it is not created in the same way as self-subsistent substances are. Nevertheless the infusion of grace approaches somewhat to the nature of creation in so far as grace has not a cause in its subject—neither an efficient cause nor a material cause wherein it pre-exists potentially in such a way that it can like other natural forms be educed into act by a natural agent”.

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 Thomistic 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 lives<sup>23</sup>. But this kind of newness always requires nature and necessity as its ground. 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 general<sup>24</sup>. 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 all<sup>25</sup>.

In fact it is absurd to oppose to each other, nature and chance and nature and history. This happens - maybe - because we often have too static and essentialist a concept of nature and of God. But, as noticed before, in Thomas there is a *dispositional* or *dynamic* concept of nature. It is noteworthy 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<sup>26</sup>. But the internal logic of his metaphysics of creation is deeply

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<sup>23</sup> 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 necessary 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 things...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".

<sup>24</sup> 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".

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> On Aquinas' sense of history see his etymology of some words. Cf. *In I Sententiarum* d. 23, q. 1, a. 1: "...secundum Boetium sumptum est nomen personae a personando, eo quod in tragoediis et comoediis recitatores sibi ponebant quamdam larvam ad repraesentandum illum cuius gesta narrabant decantando. Et inde est quod tractum est in usus ut quodlibet individuum hominis de quo potest talis narratio fieri, persona dicatur: et ex hoc etiam dicitur *prosopon* in graeco a pro quod est ante, et sopus quod est facies, quia huiusmodi larvas ante facies ponebant". Cf. Max Seckler, *Das Heil in der Geschichte. Geschichtstheologisches Denken bei Thomas von Aquin*, Kosel Verlag, Munich 1964.

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 theologian<sup>27</sup>. This means that the 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). If this is true, we ought to look with open eyes at the events of the times we live in, and not only at those of past times, because in this way we can get to know in greater depth human nature and natural law. Nature and history, nature and time are not against each other, but they are complementary living polarities. I think that this is, in fact, Aquinas' concept of the relationship between nature and history.

## 6) 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 capacity of the universal. Human nature (as strict unity of mind and body) and man's goal cannot be separated from his desire and, precisely, from his desire for recognition.

To sum it 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. In fact, according to Aristotelian and Thomistic anthropology, form (*forma*) is also the goal (*finis*) of the human being<sup>28</sup>.

Entities emerging from evolution are 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 man's goal cannot be separated from his desire of recognition. Notwithstanding technological developments (in particular

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<sup>27</sup> See J. Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas*, p. 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. 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”.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. F. Chiereghin, *L'eco della caverna. Ricerche di filosofia della logica e della mente*, Il poligrafo, Padova 2004, 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” [cfr G.Nicolis, I.Prigogine, *La complessità*).

biotechnologies) and similarities between animals and human beings in terms of genetics and cell biology according to Cole -Turner's paper, the specificity of man is apparent in his language, his inclination to the wholeness *of* being and his quest for others recognition (other men and also a personal God).

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

As we have stressed before, it is noteworthy that *natural* are the biological tendencies of man (vegetative, sensitive etc), which are also common to every being and, particularly, to other animals. These inclinations can be guided by reason. But natural is also what in our world is proper only to man, since he is a "rational animal": the first principles of reason and will. Thomas holds: "...in man, nature can be taken in two ways. First inasmuch as intellect and reason is the principal part of man's nature, since in respect thereof he has his own specific nature. And in this sense, those pleasures may be called natural to man, which are derived from things pertaining to man in respect of his reason: for instance, it is natural to man to take pleasure in contemplating the truth and in doing works of virtue. Secondly, nature in man may be taken as contrasted with reason, and as denoting that which is common to man and other animals, especially the part of man which does not obey reason. And in this sense, that which pertains to the preservation of the body, either as regards the individual, as food drink, sleep and the like, or as regards the species, as sexual intercourses, are said to afford man natural pleasure. Under each kind of pleasure, we find some that "are not natural" speaking absolutely, and yet connatural in some respect. For it happens in an individual that some one of the natural principles of the species is corrupted, so that something which is contrary to the specific nature, becomes accidentally natural to this individual: thus it is natural to this hot water to give heat. Consequently it happens that something which is not natural to man, either in regard to reason, or in regard to the preservation of the body – from some ailment, thus to a man suffering from fever, sweet things seem bitter, and vice versa – or from an evil temperament; thus some take pleasure in eating earth and coals and the like; or on the part of the soul; thus from custom some take pleasure in cannibalism or in the unnatural intercourse of man and beast, or other such things, which are not in accord with human nature"<sup>29</sup>. Here Aquinas holds that there may be corruption of human nature *in the individual man*. But what seems natural according to the individual might not be according to the human species. This is very important nowadays in facing

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<sup>29</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II, 31, 7. Cf. also *Summa contra Gentiles* III, 122, particularly 5.

problems of interculturalism, sexual ethics etc. I want to stress that if the nature, value, meaning and dignity of every human being as such is not fully acknowledged, people search for a substitute of equality in dignity: everything becomes interchangeable<sup>30</sup>. Therefore it becomes very difficult, because politically incorrect, to speak of the corruption of nature in the individual man or of natural (accidental) defects in the individual man and of human nature at all.

### Conclusion

A last question concerning the nature of human being. Can all we have seen about human being be the outcome of a totally chaotic evolution (in a nihilistic sense)? In fact we must give reason of form, of formal causality at all its levels, particularly of the openness of human mind and of human desire towards the infinity of being and of the actuality of human mind. As John Searle affirms: “There is in short no way for us to picture subjectivity as a part of our worldview because, so to speak, subjectivity is in question”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Penguin Classics, tr. G. Bevan, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 2003.

<sup>31</sup> J. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, The Mit Press, Cambridge 1992, p. 98.