



DI BLASI, FULVIO. FROM ARISTOTLE TO THOMAS AQUINAS: NATURAL LAW, PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE, AND THE PERSON

Indiana: St. Augustines Press, 1ª ed., 15 octubre 2021. 264 pags. ISBN: 9781587312731

Once again, the attempt to contribute to the discussion on the triple relationship between Natural Law, practical knowledge, and the dignity of the Human Person. Wasn't realistic metaphysics or Aristotelian-Thomistic superseded? Whether in the sense of Heidegger or Carnap¹, the supposed overcoming of Thomistic, Aristotelian or realistic metaphysics seems to be postponed once again when a book like this appears published. Written by Professor Fulvio Di Blasi, Director of the Thomas International Center, expert in the relationship between law, morality and metaphysical foundations of morality and law.

The book begins its reflection based on the relationship between knowledge and love, from a non-rationalistic understanding of knowledge, but rather from the doctrine of analogy, within which knowledge of the Good is a participation in the Love of God, due to the fact that our knowledge of the Good is a shared knowledge.

In the same way that God and Good are united, as transcendental notions, the knowledge of *Bonum Universale* is knowledge of God himself, and since God is Love, if we increase our knowledge of the Good, we love that good more, and basically, we participate in the love of God: "Knowledge of the Good -whether sentient or intellectual- must mean intentional posesión of the form of something as object of an appetite.(...) In the knowledge of Good, the possessed form and the inclination of the appetite coincide"², making the distinction, supported

1. Barrio Maestre; José María, Sobre la superación del orden categorial en la metafísica tomista. *Pensamiento: Revista de investigación e Información filosófica*, Vol. 51, N° 201, 1995, págs. 441-454.
2. p.24.

by analogy, with rational beings: "In the case of rational beings (...) our intellectual knowledge of the Good -that is, as a (rational) appetite for the ens known as an end- in God's knowledge as the cause of every Good"³ Now, it is evident that for the "reception" of this knowledge, an "active intellect" actualizing is required, an intellect that is also a participation of the Divine Active Intellect. The faculty of the knowing subject is participated, as well as the known object, and the very action of knowing.

Having said this, the author begins his second chapter on virtue and the syllogism. The classic question about whether we act well following a syllogism of how we should act, or what other factors intervene in a virtuous action -so that it is virtuous- apart from knowing what the virtuous action is. In this way, Di Blasi relates what was said in the first, introductory chapter, about knowing and loving what is known, with what he presents and develops in the second: if we love what we have known, then we act according to what we love. The trap, and the objections to this logic, is to think that in this process we pass from a theoretical syllogism to a practical syllogism, or from the theoretical to the practical as "automata". But the author, by introducing the Aristotelian notions of *proairesis* (p. 33), *physis*, *nous*, *orexis* and taking from Aristotelian physics the notions of "act", "ends" and "sense" (appetite), manages to explain the interpretation Thomist about the problem of "moral intellectualism" or also called "Socratic rationalism"⁴. Di Blasi also deals with the theories of Finnis, Grisez and Anscombe, he even quotes MacIntyre to deal with the issue of "natural law versus prudence" (p. 36): "The practical syllogism, in other words, either does not really conclude in the action but in a statement/proposition *per se praxeis*- which regards or relates to an action" (p. 36). In this chapter, Di Blasi delves into this controversy, whose origin dates back to the end of the medieval university, but which remains as current as ever, about the connection between the universal (knowledge) and the particular (action). The grace that the author has is that he treats the subject very seriously, exposing each position without caricatures, developing his idea, so that the reader can fully understand the controversy. That makes this book a tremendous contribution. And that is why this new attempt to contribute to the discussion on Natural Law, Knowledge and Dignity of the Human Person is very relevant.

The third chapter, dedicated to the Law, places the author and this book within the most conspicuous Thomist tradition. We have to declare here that the author is Italian, but he demonstrates an excellent level of English, which is not his mother language, especially relevant when he deals with predicaments in this section and explains with a very useful scheme (p. 59) the univocity, equivocity and analogy. The analogical treatment of the concept of "Law" places the reader in a Thomistic hermeneutic key. That is why not every law is imperative, but it can also be a projection of nature or even a realization -metaphysical or moral- at least in the case of the rational subject (p. 63 "Law as an Act of Reason"). This chapter also shows with mastery the work of Thomas Aquinas, especially the *Summa of Theology*. There are several key citations, in my opinion, to go directly to the source, in those passages or definitions that help to understand the problem of the Law, such as *dilectio naturalis* or *dilectio electiva*, among others (p. 67). Finally, in this chapter 3, the author exposes the Thomist doctrine of *the voluntary act* with sufficient clarity and development.

Already in the fourth chapter the author gets in into the subject of the Human Person and his dignity. But it doesn't it chronologically. It does not start with Boethius's and his classic definition, which is what one would expect in a Handbook, but rather begins with the most troubling contemporary problem: the limits of modern science, artificial intelligence, and the digital age. It presents in a very accurate way the problem of human dignity disguised as "scientific progress." The tone of the book changes. He leaves aside the strictly scholastic, technical language, to take a tone closer to the philosophical "essay", but with a deep use of Aristotelian-Thomist concepts. The title of this chapter "Spirit or Digital Self" is witty and insightful. We have lost the "spirit", says the author, and we have put in its place an image of the "self", but it is not real. The dilemma posed by the film "Matrix" -the one he cites as an example- appears to delve into the classic problem "determinism, choice and Freedom"

3. p.25.

4. Santa-María, Andrés; El intelectualismo socrático y su recepción en Aristóteles. *Nova tellus* vol.26 no.1 Ciudad de México ene. 2008.

(p. 77). As a good Thomist, he begins by distinguishing the terms to then enter an original problem or dilemma between "algorithm and truth" (p. 79). Throughout this chapter, which in my opinion is the easiest to understand for a reader not versed in metaphysics or moral philosophy, Di Blasi makes the concept and notion of "person" appear as a participation of Being: "Thomas Aquinas vigorously states that creation is not a movement" (p. 86) Di Blasi sentence. The appearance of the idea of "person" appears together with the understanding of freedom, to end the chapter with the classic definition of Boethius.

In the chapter V, Di Blasi carries out a critique of the notion of Ultimate End as beatitude. He refers to the article "Natural Law, God, Religion and Human Fulfillment". We will not enter this controversy because it is beyond the nature of this review. The controversy requires entering metaphysical depths that contrast with the previous chapter, on the consideration of the role of grace in the achievement of natural moral virtue.

Chapter VI deals with contemporary discussions about Natural Law and the notion of nature. Rhonheimer's idea of *autonomy* appears, but also -again- Finnis and Grisez. This chapter should appear spontaneously after expressing his distance with the naturalist doctrines of morality. For this reason, in this chapter, when he explains what "Thomistic realism" means (p. 120), he enters the philosophy of knowledge, its intentionality, and the objections of modern phenomenology based on the ideas of classical idealism. In the following pages -124 to 150- he deals with moral issues applied to sexuality, the family, issues called "prolife", all, for the author, problems that emanate from the defective understanding of human nature, as the basis of the morality. In our opinion, the author devotes very little space to the subject or accusation of the so-called naturalistic fallacy (p. 141), which is precisely what could be attributed to him. Perhaps it would have been more effective to stop at exposing, as he has done in previous chapters on other issues of equal depth, to develop the issue of said fallacy, and thus avoid taking charge of each "pro-life" issue, such as marriage, procreation, abstinence. sex, among others.

The following chapter, VII, is dedicated to deepening the idea of Natural Law as an inclination to Good, an issue that was already alluded to in chapters III and V. This chapter is very systematic, which helps to better understand the content of the Law. Sentence "natural law as inclination to God". The order of the index is not -in our opinion- accurate at this point. This chapter must have preceded many others. Not only because of the systematization of the subject, but also because of the originality that he poses when explaining towards the end of it that the question of morality and natural law is different from the "religious" subject, because this question is highly criticized, especially in the so-called "pro-life issues" in current political discussions. Although we must make it known that this book compiles articles, congresses, and disparate presentations by the author. However, I would have preferred another order. It is not relevant to the importance and quality of the book. It's just a suggestion.

Precisely the eighth chapter deals with the political aspect of morality and law. But he approaches it in a rather original way. He approaches the subject of social morality from the ideas of "equality" and "friendship", which denotes his Aristotelian approach to the subject of society. The final chapter, chapter IX, is an application, much like a conclusion, of what has been discussed throughout the book, to current politics. The priority of the "correct" over "the good" defines the axis of his chapter (p. 220). He exposes his idea about the Modern State and the current crisis of authority that, for the author, are linked. The liberal notion of democracy, he maintains, would imply distinguishing what is right from what is good, which leads to the idea of the underhanded tyranny of the majority. This idea had already been observed in another Italian, in Cornelliio Fabro, who also held a similar idea. The problem with all this, for the author, is that the dignity of the human person is violated, summarized in the "exaltation of freedom as autonomy" (p. 229).

In short, it is a book that leaves the structure of a manual, and at times it is too technical -metaphysical- to be a book on morality, which is not a criticism for those who seek the metaphysical foundation of the moral order. For the rest, and as can be seen from reading this book, it is impossible to escape from that. If we want to found morality or explain Natural Law in a satisfactory way, we will have to return, again and again, to the metaphysical foundations.



Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas seem to still have tremendous validity in contemporary ethical and political discussion. In the end, it is very clear that this book seeks to highlight the value of the human person, and precisely because of its value it cannot be treated in a less profound and technical way than what Fulvio Di Blasi treats it.

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