

陶飞亚 主 编

肖清和 执行主编

# 宗教与历史

Religion

and

History

Vol. 10



(第十辑)



社会科学文献出版社  
SOCIAL SCIENCES ACADEMIC PRESS(CHINA)



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## 托马斯·阿奎那研究

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# Analogical Mentality and Aquinas’ Way of Thinking

Antonio Olmi\*

**Abstract:** Is there such a thing as “natural reason?” From a realistic point of view, it seems hardly disputable to admit the existence of a common human nature: otherwise, how could we speak about mankind as a whole? How could we identify a human being, when we meet one? The most relevant and distinctive quality of human nature is reason: “natural” reason, because it belongs to everyone, whatever their place of birth, their culture, and the historical period of their life. The universal validity of natural reason is founded on an intuitive grasp of the so-called “first principles of knowledge”; and, in order to draw from them logically and ethically coherent conclusions, it is necessary to adopt an appropriate mode of thought—an appropriate “mentality”. In the development of the Western culture it is possible to identify four “mentalities”: the “analytical” mentality, the “synthetic” mentality, the “dialectic” mentality, the “analogical” mentality. Univocal mentalities (especially analytical and dialectical) have not led the West to the attainment of wisdom, but rather have distorted and diverted the Western quest for truth; the real greatness of the Western culture can only be appreciated through a deep understanding and an intense practice of the analogical mentality, the best example of which is to be found in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas.

**Keywords:** Human Nature; Natural Reason; First Principles of Knowledge

## What is “Natural Reason”?

Quite a few contemporary Western philosophers and opinion-makers believe

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that, although the existence of “nature” in the physical sense cannot be put into discussion, there is no such thing as “nature” in the anthropological sense: man is the ever-changing product of himself, of his history, of his own creative capacity of self-transcending. According to this view, there is nothing “essential” in common among all human beings: “mankind” is only a generic expression, and its members are “human” because of certain behavioural features, which could also be exhibited by animals or machines.<sup>①</sup>

On the contrary, another certitude is deeply rooted in the Western tradition: namely, that human beings necessarily possess a set of qualities belonging to everyone, whatever their place of birth, their culture, and the historical period of their life. Such qualities characterize “mankind” as such, and may be referred to as “human nature”: which is the fundamental “anthropological constant” whereby we can communicate, know each other, and develop the universal virtue of benevolence.<sup>②</sup>

From this point of view, “human nature” has been defined in multifarious ways. The most profound and relevant of them indicates reason as the essential constituent of human beings: man is a “rational animal”, an “animal endowed with reason”.<sup>③</sup> Unlike other animals, which are driven by instinct and strictly bound by their immediate needs, man can elevate himself to a universal knowledge of things; he can “know the truth” -that is to say, he can “adapt his intellect to reality”.<sup>④</sup>

Aristotle was the first, in the history of Western philosophy, to grasp clearly that the essence of man consists in the faculty of reason. He stated that, atop of the vegetative element shared with plants, and the sensitive element shared with animals, human life is guided by a superior principle: to which the irrational part of

① An extreme outcome of this perspective is to be found in the so called “posthumanism”. See Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998; Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010; Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Malden: Polity Press, 2013.

② This perspective can be referred to as the “classical” Western philosophy.

③ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 13; *Politics*, I, 2; V II, 13.

④ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 16, 2; *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 59; *De Veritate*, 1, 1.

the human soul has the tendency “to obey as one does one’s father.”<sup>①</sup>

The Stoics accepted such doctrine, and established a neat distinction between animals and man:

nature’s rule for animals is to follow the direction of impulse, but “when reason by way of a more perfect leadership has been bestowed on the beings we call rational, for them life according to reason rightly becomes the natural life.”<sup>②</sup>

This conception of man featuring “natural reason” became one of the cornerstones of Western classical culture and anthropology. As Cicero said, “of course reason, by which alone we excel the beasts, through which we are effective in [drawing] inferences, through which we prove, disprove, discuss, demonstrate something, make conclusions-it certainly is in common, differing in education, while decidedly equal in the capacity to learn.”<sup>③</sup>

St. Augustine of Hippo, while discerning two levels of rationality-the “upper ratio”, which relates to what is eternal and immutable, and the “lower ratio”, which relates to what is subject to time and becoming-perfectly agreed with the Aristotelian and Stoic conception of natural reason: that is, “a mental operation with the power to distinguish between, and to connect, things to learn.”<sup>④</sup>

Human beings are mortal, and subjected to change within a very short time; but reason is eternal. “One to two equals two to four is the truest ratio (another name for reason). It was not truer yesterday than it is today, nor will it be truer tomorrow, or in a year’s time. It would not cease to be true even if the world came to an end.”<sup>⑤</sup>

The classical Western idea of reason-which, in a philosophical-realistic

① Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by D. Ross, I, 13; <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/nicomachean/book1.html> (access: 2015/08/24).

② Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. by R. Drew Hicks, V II, 1, 86; [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives\\_of\\_the\\_Eminent\\_Philosophers/Book\\_V\\_II](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives_of_the_Eminent_Philosophers/Book_V_II) (access: 2015/08/24).

③ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Laws*, trans. by D. Fott, I, 30; <http://www.nlnrac.org/classical/cicero/documents/de-legibus> (access: 2015/08/25).

④ Augustine of Hippo, *On Order*, trans. by S. Borruso, II, 11, 30; <https://www.scribd.com/doc/137067640/Book-Augustine-de-Ordine> (access: 2015/08/25).

⑤ *Ibid.*, II, 19, 50; <https://www.scribd.com/doc/137067640/Book-Augustine-de-Ordine> (access: 2015/08/25).

perspective, seems to be rather self-evident and hardly disputable—found its clearest and widest explanation in St. Thomas Aquinas’ thought. He distinguished between “reason” and “intellect”: they refer to the same cognitive faculty, but “intellect takes its name from being an intimate penetration of the truth, while reason is so called from being inquisitive and discursive.”<sup>①</sup> “To understand” is simply to apprehend intelligible truth, while “to reason” is to advance from one thing understood to another; “reasoning, therefore, is compared to understanding, as movement is to rest, or acquisition to possession; of which one belongs to the perfect, the other to the imperfect. And since movement always proceeds from something immovable, and ends in something at rest; hence it is that human reasoning, by way of inquiry and discovery, advances from certain things simply understood—namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment returns by analysis to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found.”<sup>②</sup>

Therefore, according to this conception, the universal validity of “natural” reason is founded on an intuitive grasp of the so-called “first principles”: which are the original and fundamental certainties of human knowledge. Every chain of reasoning starts from them, every argumentation assumes them; even those who deny these certainties make reference, albeit implicitly, to them, because it is impossible to orient oneself in reality without their help.

Of course, since the first principles of natural reason are the ultimate criteria of all demonstrations, they cannot be demonstrated. As Aristotle says about the most evident of them, the principle of non-contradiction: “Some indeed demand that even this shall be demonstrated, but this they do through want of education, for not to know of what things one should demand demonstration, and of what one should not, argues want of education. For it is impossible that there should be demonstration of absolutely everything (there would be an infinite regress, so that there would still be no demonstration); but if there are things of which one should not demand

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① Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, II-II, 49, 5 ad 3; [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS\\_Q49\\_A5.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS_Q49_A5.html) (access: 2015/08/25).

② Ibid., I, 79, 8; [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FP\\_Q79\\_A8.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FP_Q79_A8.html) (access: 2015/08/25).

demonstration, these persons could not say what principle they maintain to be more self-evident than the present one.”<sup>①</sup>

Because of the intuitive nature of their knowledge, the first principles cannot be completely systematized; that is, definitively arranged in a set of formally expressed propositions. Indeed, in the history of Western philosophy there have been more attempts to deny them, futilely trying to build new starting points for human thought, than to explore them thoroughly in all the vastness of their implications.<sup>②</sup>

During the past century, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange summarized the first principles of human reason in the following list. First, the *principle of identity*: “what is is, what is not is not”; otherwise, “each thing is the same with itself and different from another.” Second, the *principle of non-contradiction*: “it is impossible for something to belong and not to belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect”; or else “contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time.” Third, the *principle of substance*: “what exists remains the same, under multifarious and transient ways of being”; which means that “a substance is distinct from its properties”, and that “a thing-in-itself is a property-bearer, to be distinguished from the properties it bears”. Fourth, the *principle of the reason of being*: “every being has a reason of its existence either in itself or in something else.” Fifth, the *principle of causality*: “every effect has a cause.” Sixth, the *principle of finality*: “every agent acts for an end.” Seventh, the *principle of induction*: “the same cause, in the same conditions, always produces the same effect.” Eighth, the *principle of synderesis* (or the first principle of practical reason): “good is to be done and pursued, evil is to be avoided.”<sup>③</sup>

The list may slightly vary, because the same principles can be highlighted and mutually ordered in different ways. Antonio Livi, for example, speaking of “common

① Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 4; <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.4.iv.html> (access: 2015/08/26).

② Some prominent deniers of common sense were: R. Descartes, D. Hume, I. Kant, G. W. F. Hegel. See Antonio Livi, *Filosofia del senso comune. Logica della scienza e della fede*, Milano: Edizioni Ares, 1990.

③ See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le sens commun, la philosophie de l' être et les formules dogmatiques, suivi d' une étude sur la valeur de la critique moderniste des preuves thomistes de l' existence de Dieu*, Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1909, pp. 105–117.

sense” preferred to put four “existential realities” (the world, the self, freedom, God) before the classically renowned “cognitive principles” (non-contradiction, causality, finality).<sup>①</sup> However, at the height of the Western reflection on the foundations of natural reason we could place these words of St John Paul II: “Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an *implicit philosophy*, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference-point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, *orthós logos*, *recta ratio*.”<sup>②</sup>

## Four Uses of Reason in The Western Culture

In order to think “rightly”, that is, to draw “logically and ethically coherent conclusions” from the first universal principles of reason, it is necessary to adopt an appropriate mode of thought: which, in lack of a better word, we could name “mindset”, or “mentality”. In this context, we intend “mentality” as a way of thinking, based on a specific “cognitive attitude”: that is to say, on a peculiar “disposition to know” that involves not only the human mind but the person as a

① See Antonio Livi, *Filosofia del senso comune*.

② John Paul II, encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998/09/14), 4; [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html) (access: 2015/08/27).