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Traditions which Converge in Aquinas' Stand on Sins of Lust *Contra Naturam**

Tradycje łączące się w stanowisku Akwinaty odnośnie do grzechów pożądania *contra naturam*

Abstract. The paper holds that in Aquinas' study of sins against nature not only the biblical and the patristic traditions converge ostensibly, but also the Greek philosophical and Romanist heritage come together. The text deals with the question of what belonging to a moral tradition means and refutes the Gadamerian relativistic answer to this problem. The paper ends by showing with John Paul II that only a metaphysical, not merely hermeneutical understanding of the tradition is compatible with the Catholic faith.

Streszczenie. Artykuł dowodzi, że w studium grzechów przeciwko naturze Tomasz z Akwinu na pozór łączy biblijne i patrystyczne tradycje, ale także wplata greckie i romanistyczne tradycje filozoficzne. Tekst próbuje odpowiedzieć na pytanie, co oznacza przynależność do tradycji moralnej i obala relatywistyczną odpowiedź Gadamera na ten problem. W konkluzji autor, za Janem Pawłem II, ukazuje, że tylko metafizyczne, a nie jedynie hermeneutyczne rozumienie tradycji jest zgodne z wiarą katolicką.

Keywords: Sins *contra naturam*; moral tradition; first practical principles; relativism.

Słowa kluczowe: grzechy *contra naturam*; tradycja moralna; pierwsze zasady praktyczne; relatywizm.

Saint Thomas Aquinas' thinking represents a convergence of traditions of which he made a great synthesis. This observation appears almost common place; however, we intend to demonstrate today that such an achievement

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was possible only because all these traditions, in the measure in which they were used by Aquinas, serve a common reality by trying to signify it or to enact it. This point has been contested today and for this reason we will need to investigate how it is that these traditions express reality.

Such a task is particularly difficult when we are considering a moral tradition, in which participants try to enact the good first by recognizing it. The questions arise how one can recognize the good without accepting the standards of a particular tradition. How can we get to know the reality served by a moral tradition without getting trapped within the particular standards of that particular tradition?

In order to answer these questions, we will have to attempt an explanation of what belonging to a moral tradition means. In the light of this, we will offer a critique of Hans Georg Gadamer's conception of tradition. We will establish, I hope, that also in morality there is a truth served or obscured by traditions which enables us to measure the different traditions.

We will get our insight and test it by applying our meditation to the subject of the sins against nature. This is perhaps the most interesting subject matter since there is clear historical evidence which shows that honest thinkers were able to find the truth about it amidst an extremely corrupted society.

1. The Fact of Aquinas' Insertion in Several Moral Traditions Regarding the Sins Against Nature

In q. 154, a. 1, c., of the II-II of his *Summa Theologiae*, Saint Thomas Aquinas holds that there are six kinds of sins against chastity, one of them being the sins against nature. He also states immediately that the sins against nature are those in which sex is used in such a way that by human choice or by the very structure of the sexual act itself the end of procreation is precluded.¹ But at other times during the exposition of the vices against chastity, Aquinas takes *contra naturam* in a wider sense. For example, in a. 2, c., of the same question, he states that fornication is a sin because it is *contra naturam hominis*. Every sin is a disorder and therefore deals with things in a way which is not appropriate to their nature, *id est*, in an irrational way. But among sins some receive a surname, we could say: they are not only sins but in a very special way they go against nature.

In the identification of these sins, it seems to me, we can observe four traditions which play an important role. Those whose influence is most explicit are the Biblical and the Patristic traditions. This becomes obvious by just analyz-

¹ See *Contra Gentiles* III 122, 5.

ing the citations Aquinas makes in his treatment of this matter: in the *Summa Theologiae*² the citations are taken almost exclusively from: (a) the Bible (Old and New Testaments), (b) the Fathers (and some other theologians) and (c) the Magisterium. Among the Fathers, Augustine takes pride of place, but he is not alone.

Indeed, the kinds of sins against chastity are settled through a citation of the Decretals (q. 154, a. 1, sc). That fornication is a mortal sin is established with citations from the book of Tobias and Galatians, and from the Decretals (a. 2, sc). That fornication is not the gravest sin is demonstrated with a text by Pope Gregory (a. 3). The gravity of touches and kisses is settled with a passage from Matthew (a. 4). That nightly pollutions are not sins is settled with Augustine (a. 5). In order to decide whether seduction or violation of a virgin belongs to a special kind of sin, Aquinas cites Sirach (a. 6, c.). In order to demonstrate that rape (*raptus*) might be a different kind of sin than seduction (*stuprum*, which can use violence against the virgin), Aquinas cites Pope Symmachus as supporting his arguments (a. 7, c.). To show that adultery is a special kind of sin, he cites Pope Leo and Sirach (a. 8, sc and c.). That incest is another special kind of sin against chastity, he proves with Leviticus, Augustine and Aristotle (a. 9, c.). That lust can be sacrilegious, he demonstrates with citations from Augustine (a. 10, sc and c.). That the sins against nature are a special kind of sin, Aquinas settles by citing II Corinthians and its Gloss, and citing Romans (a. 11, sc and c.). Finally, Aquinas proves that sins against nature are the gravest of the sins against chastity by citing Augustine, Genesis and its Gloss (a. 12, sc and ad 4m).

But it appears to me that it is easy to see under the surface of Aquinas' exposition, the influence of the Roman Law tradition. When Aquinas comments on Chapter 7, book 5, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he shows the correspondence between the Roman Law conception of natural right and the Aristotelian one. The Philosopher calls "natural right" anything that is just independently of human institution. The Roman Jurists, in turn, include in such category (right independent of human institution) two branches: natural right strictly speaking and the right of nations, *ius naturale* and *ius gentium*. The first one is what nature teaches to all animals, while the second category is peculiar to human beings and is naturally found by reason.³

In the light of this, one can easily acknowledge that Aquinas would name a "sin" as a "sin against nature" if it goes against that which nature teaches all animals, that is to say, if it consists in performing venereal actions in a way

² In the *Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas uses arguments occasionally grounded on Aristotle's insights. And then he shows that reason's conclusions are the teachings of Scripture.

³ See *Commentary in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, lib. 5 l. 12, 1019.

in which procreation is purposely or intrinsically precluded. Specifically, sins against nature would be intercourse with animals, homosexual intercourse, masturbation, anal or not vaginal intercourse with women and contraception (we could add abortion and infanticide as long as they are means to avoid the responsibility involved in sexual intercourse, although they add the malice of homicide).

Aquinas does not limit himself to simply acquiring this tradition. He goes further and penetrates the reason by which the two kinds of contrariness to nature are differentiated. One of them goes against the most basic and evident principles of morality in the area of chastity, while the other is against moral truths which must be found by reason:

In every genus, worst of all is the corruption of the principle on which the rest depend. Now the principles of reason are those things that are according to nature, because reason presupposes things as determined by nature, before disposing of other things according as it is fitting. This may be observed both in speculative and in practical matters. Wherefore just as in speculative matters the most grievous and shameful error is that which is about things the knowledge of which is naturally bestowed on man, so in matters of action it is most grave and shameful to act against things as determined by nature. Therefore, since by the unnatural vices man transgresses that which has been determined by nature with regard to the use of venereal actions, it follows that in this matter this sin is gravest of all.⁴

A second tradition almost not mentioned explicitly but also active is that of classical philosophy. It was probably in Plato where this insight was established precisely against the sophistic way of understanding *nature* and *natural*.⁵ In *Laws* 8, 838–841, he states that nature has given a law according to which the use of sex must be directed to procreation and, therefore, any use of sex against procreation would be against nature: homosexuality, abortion and infanticide, contraception and masturbation. Perhaps the first origin of this way of philosophical approach to this problem, besides the life and teachings of Socrates himself,⁶ is precisely this text by the old Plato. In it he even distinguishes be-

⁴ II–II, q. 154, a. 12, c.

⁵ The sophists took *natural* to mean the physical dimension of things (which they took as the only real one) or what happens generally among animals such as to live dominating the others. See *Laws* X, 889a–890a. Instead, Plato takes *natural* to mean according to the good of one's particular nature and to the good of the whole. This is suggested by *Phaedo* 97c–98b. In *Laws* 10, Plato just says that the law commands to serve others and that the Law is not conventional, but natural, real, even more real than physical reality (890a–899d).

⁶ See *Symposium*, 199c–212c and 214e–222b.

tween the demands of the law of nature (not to separate sex from procreation) and the further demand that reason addresses to the citizens' virtue, to remain true in perfect monogamy to the spouse of youth. Aren't these the seeds of the distinction between the natural law common to all animals and the special requirements of human reason?

In Aristotle's works, homosexuality is also called a vice against nature and on this at least he follows the teachings of his mentor.⁷ –Not so in the matter of abortion or infanticide, which Aristotle holds as legitimate if used with eugenic purposes.

Doubtless, in the New Testament, Paul has in mind the stern condemnation of homosexuality by God's Law in the Old Testament, a law which, in its moral dimensions (neither ceremonial nor judicial) has not been abolished by Christ but brought to its fulfillment.⁸ In the Book of Leviticus (18:22–30) one finds a clear precept regarding homosexuality. And, before such an explicit precept, already in the Book of Genesis homosexuality is regarded as a nefarious sin which provokes God's wrath. The fate of Sodom is to become the paradigm of God's judgment on this type of crime. (Genesis 18:20–21; 19:4–7.12–13.) But, behind the language which Paul uses in his epistle to the Romans one finds philosophical insights similar to those of Plato. So it is when he states that, among those who having known God did not worship Him, women *change the natural use* [of sex] *with that which is against nature*, and men also *abandoning the natural use of female burn in desires of one for the other* (1:26–27).⁹ Thus, already in the New Testament, one can find a fusion of the biblical tradition and the classical, philosophical one. This explains why the philosophical tradition does not need to appear directly in Aquinas' typology of sins against nature.

The Fathers progressed on the path marked by the New Testament itself, that is to say, on the path of making a convergence between the Biblical and the classical traditions, both philosophical and juridical. This fact also contributes

⁷ See *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 5, 1148b24–30. Already Aristotle observes that the unnatural inclination of males to be joined to males comes either from a distortion of nature or from habit, “when, for example, somebody has been sexually abused from childhood.”

⁸ C.T. Baglow has referred to the fact that the moral Law of the Old Testament is in force in the New Testament, although now it commands not through fear but through love. See *The Principles of Ecclesial Nature*, p. 542.

⁹ Romans 2:14 states that the gentiles, who have no law, do what belongs to the law by nature and for this reason they are law to themselves. In this text “nature” is wider than in Romans 1:26–27. Thus, in Paul we already find a distinction concerning *natural* similar to that of Aquinas.

to the latent character of the classical and Roman influences on Aquinas' text in the *Summa Theologiae*.¹⁰

There is no doubt, therefore that Aquinas is grafted into these four traditions, the Biblical, the Patristic, the Romanist and the philosophical. On the point under examination today, due to the scarcity of direct citations from the Roman jurists and philosophers one could conceive a doubt. But when one sees (1) the citations from the Canon Law sources (plus the dependence of Canon Law sources on Roman Law) and one considers (2) that the very denomination of "against nature" of certain sins is connected to the Greek philosophers and to the Roman jurists, the doubts are dispelled.¹¹

This means that now we have in front of us a more difficult and more theoretical task. What does it mean, to be grafted into a tradition? To be more precise, what does it mean, to be grafted into a moral tradition?

2. The Meaning of Aquinas' Insertion in Moral Traditions

Alasdair MacIntyre in his *Three Rival Versions of the Moral Enquiry*¹² and in his *Dependent Rational Animals*,¹³ following mostly Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, has clarified what it means to cultivate morality within a tradition. First of all, in the same way as the craftsmanship of shoemaking cannot be acquired without the guidance of a master in the craft, the competence in ethical reasoning cannot be acquired without the guidance of a mentor. We have available experience about this kind of relationship in the formation of good judges, for example. The criterium, the sharpness of the eye¹⁴ is slowly formed by a combination of the study of the principles and the organization of the discipline plus a training in the ability to identify the right solution for a case.

But this is not all. There is an extremely difficult epistemological problem underlying the acquisition of ethical proficiency. According to Aristotle, in or-

¹⁰ This Patristic synthesis prepares the new one which will be performed by Aquinas, who incorporates the full reception of Aristotle, the reception of the Arabs and of Roman Law.

¹¹ This aspect of my paper is in line with J rgen Vijgen's research: *Aristotle in Aquinas' Biblical Commentaries*.

¹² See *Three Rival Versions of the Moral*, p. 61.

¹³ See *Dependent Rational Animals*, pp. 67–91. Here MacIntyre deals mostly with the ethical education given by the parents to the small child, before he or she is teachable by other people.

¹⁴ See *Nicomachean Ethics* VI 11, 1143b5–14.

der to be virtuous, one has to choose not only what the virtuous man chooses, but in the same way as he does. The problem is that one cannot even know what is good and what must be chosen (as the objection goes) if one has a bent will. How, then, can one even practice choosing as the virtuous and prudent man (the *spoudaïos*) does it, before being virtuous?

The answer to this question is crucial and is also manifold. The first part is this: one knows what to choose because one happens to have or seeks a mentor who can guide one's decisions. All beginners who have no experience of the real good and the truly pleasant must submit themselves by faith in a mentor to a hard discipline. Aristotle points this out in the second book, chapter 4, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

It is well said then that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good. But the many do not do these but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy. (1105b9–18)¹⁵

But, of course, with this the problem is not yet solved. Because the youth must choose the teacher or mentor. Why should they follow a philosopher rather than a sophist? There must be some kind of dim knowledge of the moral truth in order to be able to make the right choice. Here we have to divide our considerations into two different cases. Those beginners who have received divine faith have a gift through which they can discern. But those beginners who have not received such a gift, must use their natural reason and with natural reason we also have ways to discern between the real mentor and the fake one. How can it be achieved?

Aristotle and Aquinas offer two keys. First of all, everybody is searching for the good and such is the object of *boulesis* or *intentio*, which is the principle of deliberation. Now, everyone seeks that which *appears* good to himself, so that each takes the apparent good as his principle of practical reasoning. However, only the true good is a true principle. There is truth in this matter and it appears to the *spoudaïos*, to the diligent and prudent man, who, for this

¹⁵ I introduce slight corrections in the translation and in the light of the original Greek.

reason, is “standard and measure” [*cánon kai metríon*].¹⁶ Thus, the youth can learn from the true heroes and from saints what is truly good.

However, again, how can the youth recognize the hero or the saint with natural reason? In book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states that the *right appetite* is the principle of practical reasoning. But, what is the rule by which the appetite is said to be right? The conformity with the truth concerning the good is such rule. But, isn't this a circle? Aquinas answers that it is not:

We must say that the end and those things that aim at the end [*eorum quae sunt ad finem*] pertain to the appetitive faculty, but the end is determined for us by nature, as was shown in the third book. On the contrary, the things that aim at the end [*ea quae sunt ad finem*] are not determined for us by nature but are to be investigated by reason. So it is obvious that rectitude of the appetitive faculty in regard to the end is the measure of truth for the practical reason. According to this, the truth of the practical reason is determined by agreement with a right appetitive faculty. But the truth of the practical reason itself is the rule for the rectitude of the appetitive faculty in regard to things that aim at the end [*ea quae sunt ad finem*]. According to this, the appetitive faculty is called right inasmuch as it pursues the things that reason calls true.¹⁷

The case stands thus: one may choose a particular action, such as extracting the appendix of a patient. This is a practically true action if one intends to heal an inflammation of the appendix. Of course, one must have chosen previously to practice the medicine according to its nature, according to the Hippocratic oath, instead of choosing to practice medicine in order to kill patients (as it is practiced today). In this case, the right appetite of choosing to heal the inflammation is right because it conforms to the true nature of medicine and we can know it because we have chosen to adhere to the true nature of medicine. Now, the truth of the judgment on the nature of medicine can be found because man naturally loves the good. One could choose to reject the true nature of medicine, and in this case one would have to take that choice somehow as a service to the good in common. This is done by present-day sophistry. Doctors choose to perform abortions, for example, against the Hippocratic oath, led by a rationalization: they want to believe that they contribute in this way to liberate women. But the fact that they need a rationalization testifies to a deeper real-

¹⁶ See *Nicomachean Ethics* III 4.

¹⁷ Aquinas' *Commentary in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, lecture 2, n. 8. I follow the translation by C.J. Litzinger, O.P., with a correction in the light of the Latin text. Where Fr. Litzinger translates *ea quae sunt ad finem* as *means*, I strive to translate more literally.

ity: man naturally loves to be a server of what is truly good. This is why there is room for a rational discussion on whether it is good to abort or not. This is also why the sophists have a hard time to hold a rational discussion: they have misgivings about their rationalization and the just man reminds them about the good reasons to have such misgivings. But, when, instead of sophistic pseudo principles, the healing nature of medicine is established as a principle, it works as a pre-supposed reason which shows that here and now the good is not found in killing the patient but in striving to heal him.

Loving the good in common, then, is not something that we can choose. It is natural to us. Of course, the actualization of such love presupposes that reason grasps being with its nobility (in the first intellectual grasp). When this happens, the will naturally loves it and then the intellect forms the notion of the good, that is to say, "being as lovable by the will."¹⁸ The problem remains about how reason is able to recognize being not having known it previously, as Plato describes superbly in *Meno* (see 80d-e). And the answer to that question was given by Aristotle at the opening of the *Metaphysics*: *pántes ánthropoi tou̓ eîdenai orégontai phýsei*, all human beings naturally desire to know. So, it is after all our love for being, that which moves us from not knowing to knowing. A natural love. The will, therefore, moves the intellect to know, but does not give the intellect what is known. What is known is sensible being given to us in mature sense experience when we are around one and a half years old.

Such natural love for being and its nobility is one of the traces of what Aquinas calls the *semina scientiarum et virtutum* which our soul treasures by nature. But there is more than this. From this love the intellect naturally proceeds to grasp "being" and "good" and immediately to formulate the first principles both theoretical and practical.¹⁹ These early and natural realizations are the framework which allows room for conversion of even the most corrupted men. Of course, such conversion would be a miracle of grace, but a miracle, not a contradiction. It is worth noting, moreover, that the natural possession

¹⁸ See *De Veritate* I 1, c.

¹⁹ See *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 63, a. 1, c. Aristotle would be in complete agreement with Aquinas. Every choice presupposes an intention, therefore the first intention or *boulesis* cannot be chosen, it has to be natural. And such is the intention of the final end, for which reason, the wrong ends do not satisfy us. This is the reason for which he says in book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that Socrates had a point when he said that the person who does evil is ignorant, even the incontinent. Of course, Aristotle will say that such ignorance is the consequence of evil and not vice versa. But the fact remains that the evil person does not really choose in agreement with what he loves and intends. See 1147a18–22 y 1147b9–19. In the hierarchical structure of intentions and choices, the natural desire is always frustrated with ignorance although the cause of such ignorance be evil.

of these principles is identified by both Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure as the natural shining of God's countenance within the human soul to which Psalm 4, verse 7 in the Greek version refers.²⁰ And they are right: the possession of the principles is the most clear mark of God's Wisdom within the world of our experience. Such possession also is what explains human openness to the good mentors and texts (even texts which come from different traditions) and to supernatural moral elevation as well.

But notice that, despite these natural endowments, even Aristotle got lost in very important matters such as infanticide and abortion. Why? Plato has the answer: it is extremely difficult for a young person who lives in a society thoroughly corrupted to find his way towards the order of the soul and divine truth. Actually, in a corrupted society like Athens, only a man protected by God can find his way, as is stated in the *Republic*.²¹ This was the case of Socrates, of course, who was guided by God since his youth on the path of the moral good. Very particularly, it was Socrates who was able to withstand the pressure of the so called "Greek vice" which was general in his time, community and tradition. He was able to stand alone against it, deal with the youth in a way according to their dignity and acknowledge the natural order of the power of procreation. Plato informs us about all this in the *Symposium*, both through Socrates's and through Alcibiades' speech.²² The example of such mentor fructified in Plato's old age in that golden text which is really a gift from God. God wanted through his Providence to leave for us the testimony that man is not so submerged in a particular tradition that he cannot find the truth if such tradition is corrupted. Thus, He made sure that Plato left a testimony of the ability of man to reach the truth amidst a very corrupted society:

[838e] you have answered well, because this very thing was said by me, that I have the art to establish this law of using the procreative union in accordance with nature: keep away from male, do not kill intentionally what is generated from human beings, do not sow onto rocks and stones [839a] where the seed will never receive a viable generation, keep away from the field of every female in which you do not want the sown seed to reach generation.²³

²⁰ See, for example, Aquinas, *Comentario al Libro de los Salmos*, Tomo I, pp. 107.109. Bonaventure, *In Libros Sententiarum*, Liber II, Distinctio 24, Pars I, art. 2, q. 4, Conclusio. Bonaventure identifies here the habit for which spiritual substances are called "light" with the agent intellect.

²¹ See book 6, 492e–493a.

²² See 198b–212c and 215a–222b.

²³ 838e–839a. Translation mine.

Here we have a testimony that the spirit of man transcends particular cultures and traditions. Man strives to know the truth and this effort, precisely, constitutes the fountain of all high cultures and traditions. But such traditions must lead their followers to re-enact in themselves those insights which were achieved by human effort and God's gift. And this is precisely what Aquinas did, thanks to the ascetic and meditative tradition of the Latin Christendom and, in particular, of the Dominican order. One can see by reading the *Summa Contra Gentiles* III 122–126, that Aquinas, without having read Plato directly, understands in depth the insights which moved Plato to state the above cited formula. This is so because his mind was open to the truth about the good, because he received faithfully God's revelation of the commandments, and because he submitted himself to a long process of ascetic preparation filled with the love kindled in meditation.

3. A Critique of Hans Georg Gadamer's Understanding of Tradition

At this point, I want especially to critically consider Hans Georg Gadamer's understanding of "tradition" and the application of that understanding to the traditions into which Aquinas is grafted. Particularly, I want to submit his tenets about the incommunicability of the different traditions and about cultural relativism to in depth criticism.

According to Gadamer, a linguistic community is a collective subject. Any experience which individuals of such community could have would be mediated by language. For this reason, man would be unable to reach true knowledge about reality and especially, knowledge that is not bound to a particular historical and cultural horizon. Any such knowledge is just apparent knowledge, nothing else really but a way in which the community understands itself. Moreover, due to the universal mediation of language, translation is impossible and any reading of documents belonging to a different language community by a particular community's member would yield not a true understanding of the different community but a deeper understanding of one's own community. Any standard of judgment found within the tradition of a given community is essentially tied to a particular cultural horizon, there are no universal, meta-cultural standards of judgment.²⁴

²⁴ See H.G. Gadamer, *Verdad y método*, T. I, pp. 16–19; 373–414, 567–568, 583–584.

Such views as Gadamer's are, of course, contradictory. The very judgment "there are no meta-cultural standards of judgment" is applying the relativistic standard to all cultures and their standards. Gadamer was aware of this and his reply was, I would say begging your pardon, shameless. According to him, language would not be subject to the principle of non-contradiction which belongs to a logic that is applicable to the "objective" possession of facts and states of affairs and that has philosophical relevance only among the "nations of debate." (He means the nations where analytic philosophy is cultivated.) But such logic and the principle of non-contradiction, Gadamer continues, are not philosophically relevant in Germany.²⁵

The difficulties of translation must not lead one to deny the simple fact that translation is, however, possible in areas outside of poetry. The possibility of translation, in turn, is due to the fact that we actually experience reality beyond language and our concepts are natural resemblances of essences which we symbolize with words but are not bound by them. The essences of which concepts are similar lie in a sense beyond movement, as Aristotle saw well in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*: substantial forms do not change *per se* but are destroyed *per accidens*; prime matter is subject to change but lies beyond destruction; the human soul, which we experience by reflection, is a necessary being once it exists; and, finally, with the ladder of the hierarchy of being we can reach a glimpse of the eternal reality of God. We are members of a variety of communities, but such communities are not substances: each one of us can reach insights which transcend the political and linguistic communities, although we cannot transcend the supernatural community which is the Church whose Head is the *Lógos* Himself, source of all truth and insight.²⁶

These observations are applicable to our insights concerning moral reality as well. Our natural moral endowment grows through moral practice with a mentor. But such practice leads to the capacity to *see* the truth about the good, practical truth.²⁷ Also in this realm there are statements which are of univer-

²⁵ H.G. Gadamer, *La diversidad de lenguas y la comprensión del mundo*. Joaquín Silva replies to this objection in the same way in which Gadamer did (see J. Silva, *Hermenéutica y verdad teológica*, pp. 206–253). The same did Jean Grondin (see J.Gronidin, *Introducción a la hermenéutica filosófica*, p. 32).

²⁶ I have dealt with this problem of cultural and historical relativism, as posed by Hans Georg Gadamer, in my paper *Sobre la inadecuación de la filosofía hermenéutica para explicar la revelación divina*.

²⁷ In the two works quoted above, MacIntyre strives to break with historical relativism. – And I think he succeeds, perhaps more than he realizes. See *Three Rival Version of the Moral Enquiry*, pp. 201–202; and *Dependent Rational Animals*, pp. 77–79. However, it must be pointed out that there seems to be a wrong conception of first principles presupposed

sal value, even if some human groups live in the shadows of darkness regarding them and even if an encompassing comparison of the relative moral value of two communities is a very hard task in which one can be easily deceived due to the universal character of the practical good. Despite these difficulties, who in his right senses could deny that the genocides which have been (or are being) committed by the totalitarian states are crimes from any point of view which has still some contact with reality? (Well you would not believe, but there are great masses who have lost even the dimmest contact with reality due to ideologies of evil and hatred.)

We need to free our souls from the spider webs of Hegelianism and post-Hegelianism in the measure in which they presuppose or imply cultural relativism. Our knowledge of truth transcends any human tradition. Human traditions are born in the personal experiences of truth achieved by meditation on the reality given to natural reason and on the Revelation of Jesus-Christ (also in the Old Testament) given to us through the Bible, through the unanimous testimony of the Fathers and through the guardianship of the Solemn Magisterium of the Church. This is precisely what John Paul II masterfully explained in *Fides et ratio*:

It cannot be said that the Catholic tradition erred when it took certain texts of Saint John and Saint Paul to be statements about the very being of Christ. In seeking to understand and explain these statements, theology needs therefore the contribution of a philosophy which does not disavow the possibility of a knowledge which is objectively true, even if not perfect. This applies equally to the judgements of moral conscience, which Sacred Scripture considers capable of being objectively true. (n. 82)

The importance of metaphysics becomes still more evident if we consider current developments in hermeneutics and the analysis of language. The results of such studies can be very helpful for the understanding of faith, since they bring to light the structure of our thought and speech and the meaning which language bears. However, some scholars working in these fields tend to stop short at the question of how reality is understood and expressed, without going further to see whether reason can discover its essence. How can we fail to see in such a frame of mind the confirmation of our present crisis of confidence in the powers of reason? When, on the basis of preconceived assumptions, these positions tend to obscure the contents of faith or to deny their universal validity, then not only do they abase reason but in so doing they also disqualify themselves. Faith clearly presupposes that human language is capable of expressing divine and transcendent reality in a universal way—analogically, it is true, but no less meaningfully for that. Were this not so,

in MacIntyre's endeavors. This conception is most apparent in his book *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*.

the word of God, which is always a divine word in human language, would not be capable of saying anything about God. The interpretation of this word cannot merely keep referring us to one interpretation after another, without ever leading us to a statement which is simply true; otherwise there would be no Revelation of God, but only the expression of human notions about God and about what God presumably thinks of us. (n. 84)²⁸

God's Providence is the main force behind history. Other agents are moved by Him or simply permitted to act abusing their own nature. For this reason, amidst the great confusion and darkness sown on the matter of sins against nature especially by neo-Marxism, that is to say, *gender ideology*, we can have faith that He is right now rekindling fidelity to the moral truth in many hearts through the faith in His Word, as He moved Socrates and Plato to accept the principles of chastity amidst a very corrupted society. This is so because far from being trapped in any particular cultural horizon, the spirit of man transcends history and participates in Eternity.

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²⁸ John Paul II. Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Rome 1998, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html. Retrieved on April 7th 2019.

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