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PERSON, NATURE AND COMMUNITY

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Without being able to develop the question of the relation between the person and the political community in any depth here, we would simply like to evoke a most important point and attempt to consider it anew in the light of the philosophical distinction between nature and person.

PLATO AND ARISTOTLE: TWO DIFFERING APPROACHES

When considered from the viewpoint of their respective understandings of the relation between the person and the political community, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle have remarkably different approaches!

It is principally in the *Republic* where we see how Plato considers the community as an assembly of individuals united out of necessity according to the degree to which they are in need of one another[1]. In his view, the good of the community is univocally similar to that of individuals. It consists in justice whereby each individual is in the place and has the function that nature assigns him in the community and where, within the individual, each power is ordered in the way that is due it. It thus follows that we should not search for the happiness of each individual, but rather for the good of the city as a whole[2].

Aristotle, on the other hand, considers that the human community consists primarily in a "placing-in-common", in a *koïnônia* constituted "with a view to a certain good[3]". If human communities are distinct from one another, therefore, it is primarily by reason of the human good with a view to which the members of this "placing-in-common" cooperate. As this good, with a view to which the cooperation takes place, is a human good, it is *with a view to* this good that authority will exist and be exercised over persons. Thus, if the *foundation* of the human community is indeed the community of nature existing amongst men, the finality of the cooperation between persons is the acquisition by each of a personal good which is capable of finalizing him. This is what gives to the political community its very particular quality of being a *milieu* of life ordered towards a *bene vivere*, or well-being, which has meaning only according to the end of persons. This milieu disposes persons to their happiness, which they conquer by ordering themselves towards that personal human good

[1] *Op. cit.*, II, 369b.
[2] Cf. *ibid.*, IV, 420 b sq.
[3] See Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1, 1252a 1-5.

which is capable of finalizing them: the human person of the friend, loved and chosen for himself; and the First Person, who is loved and contemplated and who is the source of all being and of all good.

Thus, the problem of the community situates in eminent fashion the complexity proper to the relation between nature and person. So as to better understand this complex problem, we would like to shed upon it a light coming from first philosophy and the relations between the *ousia*-substance and the *figura*.

THE METAPHYSICAL RESEARCH INTO OUSIA-SUBSTANCE

In the search for truth, the philosopher of first philosophy seeks the principles and causes of that-which-is as being; he seeks to grasp that-which-is, as it is, from the viewpoint of being. It is not a question of looking at being as God does, for God knows being in creating it. God knows himself and, in the contemplation in which he knows himself, he knows all that is from him as the one who creates it. For our part, we try to understand what is proper to the reality we experience, as it exists. Now, in its existence, it escapes our artistic activity, our efficient productivity. We cannot *make* being. We seek rather to know it as it is.

This metaphysical knowledge, this development of first philosophy, goes beyond our habitual manner of knowing which, quite often, remains very dependent upon the imagination. In first philosophy, however, the imagination remains silent for it does not allow us to know that-which-is as being; it permits knowledge of things in their divisibility, in their potentiality. Only the intelligence as such attains to that-which-is as being; indeed, it is in this knowledge that the intelligence awakens to the life that is proper to it, beyond its human mode, either rational or practical.

In "touching[1]" that-which-is, as soon as the intelligence asks "what is being as being?" it is awakened for itself. What is that-which-is from the viewpoint of the formal cause? Indeed, this is the first causality towards which metaphysical research is oriented, for to search for what being is from the material viewpoint does not attain being *as* being. Being as being is not matter, which is discovered as a proper cause of the becoming of the realities of the physical world. Thus, the first thing set aside in metaphysical research is the material cause. Of course, the material cause remains first in the order of origin[2], for all the observable realities that we touch and see are in becoming, and it is their becoming that we grasp in the first place.

Indeed, it took a considerable amount of time for philosophy to distinguish being and becoming. As our first knowledge is that of the physical, material reality, if we are to make this distinction we must first of all be able to distinguish being from movement. Movement exists as the movement of a *reality* about which we can affirm: "This is". The movement of the material world, unlike that of our imagination and dreams, is not intentional. It exists.

[1] "The true is to *touch* and assert" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Θ, 10, 1051 b 24).
[2] *Translator's note:* 'order of origin' or 'order of generation' is used to translate the French '*ordre génétique*'.

What is more, beyond the becoming of this reality, beyond matter, our intelligence awakens to attain that-which-is. Now the first research is the search for the first determination of that-which-is as being, the substance, the *ousia*. We ask: "What is being?" which in fact amounts to asking what is the cause according to the form of that-which-is as being, beyond its becoming? To search for the *ousia* is to search for the first determination, the cause according to the form of that-which-is as being. In so doing we go beyond all secondary determinations and reach this cause, this source of all other determinations. We can do so because in all the realities we experience, in all the men we experience, we grasp a duality: that of the *quiddity* which is primary from the viewpoint of the reality's intelligibility, and that of the *subject* which is primary from the existential viewpoint. This duality is clearly expressed when we enunciate the judgment: "Peter is a man". In a certain way we find ourselves before two firsts: the substance-quiddity and the substance-subject. Our intelligence, however, remaining in contact with that-which-is, cannot remain before this duality. The first determination of that-which-is cannot be double. The duality demands to be surpassed by the principle which is one. Human intelligence seeks the principle, that is to say, the first. We observe duality, but we seek to grasp what is first, what is most radical. From the quiddity and the subject we are able to attain to the substance in itself which is what is first in the order of being.

Having attained the substance as principle, we then consider all that depends upon it, all of its effects. Qualities are the manifestation of being. The substance does not manifest itself. It is the principle. Being, in what is most itself, is hidden. We discover it in discovering the substance, but we can neither see it nor touch it. Our intelligence goes beyond all that is manifest when making this discovery, beyond all of the qualities of that-which-is. It is very important to distinguish qualitative being and being "in the primary sense", the substance. Qualitative being is being that manifests itself. Being as being, however, does not manifest itself: it is substance, more radical than all subjects; it is intelligible, more radical than all quiddities; it is.

FIGURA AND SUBSTANCE

If the substance is unique, the qualities as such are multiple: there are spiritual qualities and sensible qualities. Now amongst the qualities, the *figura* is the sign of the substance. The *figura* is not merely the geometrical shape, the quantitative limits, but the physiognomy. Now the physiognomy could be that of a countryside, a site, or, for man, the particular physiognomy of his interior landscape, of that little kingdom which depends upon his substance, upon his soul.

There is indeed a clear relation between the *figura* of a child and his soul, substance-think of the *figura* of a child and that of a monkey… The *figura* of a monkey does not express its substance, even were we to look at it over a long period of time, for in a monkey there is no substance. Yes, the monkey may indeed be a superior animal, but its *figura* expresses only its nature. The *figura* of a little child, however, expresses his substance, his soul, and all the more so given that he has not yet been spoiled by his surroundings. When he

grows, however, he may be very marked by his milieu. A ten year old child will have a sad and ravaged look should he live in a quarrelsome environment where anarchy and hostility predominate in the relations between father and mother and in their relations with others. But should the child have all things necessary for his life and blossoming, his face will be joyful. Joy predominates for he is living life to the full, the "sap is rising", the soul is blooming.

The physiognomy (and most notably the gaze) of a man or woman of thirty or thirty-five years deeply expresses what they are living. Plato affirmed that fire flows through the eyes[1], that the eyes were the windows of the soul! By their gazes it is easy to determine those persons within a group who are particularly united to each other. In a certain way the gaze enables us to understand immediately what a person is thinking and what is reflected of this in another: this inter-subjectivity, this encounter between two persons in mutual relation. Indeed, the gaze is the light of the physiognomy, of the face. A blank or sad gaze, a lost gaze is dead. It is without life. The gaze of someone living in a climate of joy and in a milieu in which his being can bloom has, on the other hand, something very comforting about it.

Art, and especially the art of painting, demonstrates in its own way what the *figura* is. Through his self-portraits Rembrandt was able to give us an expression of himself. He did not see himself only from the exterior, but from the "interior" as well. It was this that he sought to express in his work, thereby marking it with a great interiority. We see this in sculpture also when, for example, it expresses the smile of a child: the Greeks were able to capture this, whereas the Egyptians did not. In order to help us understand what exactly we grasp in the gaze and physiognomy that is distinct, these examples are significant because the *figura* depends directly upon the substance. It is a quality that manifests itself as such through quantity, by bringing about a unity in diversity. In a certain way, the unity of the soul, of the substance, manifests and expresses itself in the unity of the *figura*.

FIGURA AND THE ATAVISM OF NATURE

Nevertheless, the *figura* does not only, nor does it always express what is deepest in the soul, for it is also very dependant upon one's atavism: we resemble our parents, grandparents and ancestors…And there are times when the atavism skips one or more generations! The atavism is at the level of nature and does not express what the soul is. Whereas the soul is unique for each one- it is substance, principle of being and life- the atavism, which is linked to the body, is source of similarities amongst the individuals of a family. At times these similarities can even lead to confusion. Twins can bear such a strong resemblance to one another that they may even be obliged to give their names even when presenting themselves to acquaintances. Early on, the mother might be the only one capable of distinguishing them. As they grow, however, they often become more distinct: their personal soul leaves its mark, giving to each his special character. Thus, becoming also plays a part in the *figura*. Indeed, our face differs from one period of our life to another: there is

[1] Cf. *Timaeus*, 45 b.

something that remains unaltered; while at the same time there is something which changes and deepens. Struggles and old age alter one's gaze, bringing to it something different.

On the one hand, the individual and his atavism are reflected in the face, while on the other, the subsistence of the personal soul is manifested there as well. The *figura* brings about the union of the individual and the personal, spiritual soul, since the soul is united to the body. This is what is important to grasp concerning physiognomy. The artist quickly grasps this combat (for there is indeed a combat) between the atavism and the soul, between the individual and the person. This combat manifests itself in the physiognomy. With age the *figura* becomes unified even though, during the ascent of growth, the combat may be quite violent because of the fact that the atavism bears something unknown within itself. The knowledge we have of our atavism is quite poor not only because the atavism partially depends upon the indetermination of matter, but also because we are immersed in it. In a certain way we form but "one body" with our family. This explains why strangers can immediately grasp the family type whereas the children who possess it cannot.

By the *figura*, therefore, we are able to see clearly the manner in which the family type, the atavism of nature and the spiritual soul, the person are distinguished as well as the manner in which they come together. Children of the same family have the same atavism, but each child has his own soul, and so his own person. The *figura* manifests at one and the same time individual dependence, the atavism, and the finality of the person. With age, the expression of the person prevails over the atavism: in a mature man the atavism has usually been assumed by the personality. It was this that made Leonardo da Vinci say that at forty-five years a man has the face of his soul.

COMMUNAL LIFE, CONTEMPLATION AND FRIENDSHIP

The human *figura* thus manifests what is peculiar to man: the soul in the body; a spiritual soul assuming an atavism. Moreover, the atavism is not solely that of a family, but also that of a race, a country, a culture. It obviously varies from one race and country to another. The spiritual, contemplative finality of the person, on the other hand, is beyond the atavism, and whether one is European, American, African or Chinese the contemplative type of the person is analogically the same. In as much as the personal finality surpasses the atavism of nature, personal friendships can arise between persons of extremely different cultures. Indeed, even though the atavism always predominates to some extent in communal life, for individuals add up, they nevertheless meet up with one another from the perspective of their person. If we speak of "communal life", it is based on the fact that all have a common human nature with differing atavisms. But insofar as each is tending towards a contemplative life, the atavism can be overcome from the personal viewpoint for contemplation is personal; and this we discover primarily in friendship.

Univocity and analogy

This distinction between natural atavism and personal finality also enables us to understand the importance of distinguishing knowledge according to genus and specific difference from properly analogical knowledge. Univocal knowledge according to genus and specific difference attains the nature, that which is common: Peter, James and John are men. "Man" is attributed in univocal fashion to each. By analogical knowledge, however, which attains being and the transcendentals (*res, unum, aliquid, bonum, verum*[1]), we are able to grasp that which is unique to each person. Indeed, the person is characterized by his soul which is substance, and by his link to his end. One who is finalized has his "own character". Should he not be very finalized, however, the individual will prevail, he will be bored when alone, and he will end by falling back to that common level where he is one amongst others, or perhaps even to the generic, animal level. A *person* is never bored when alone because he is linked to his end: God or the friend.

Thus we understand that should our human knowledge not attain to the level of the good and of being, the analogical level, but remain merely at the level of genus and specific difference, we always finish by reducing the person to the nature and by affirming that people must always live the communal life. We are comfortable in community for there we can encounter our likeness! The atavism, the genus prevails. The man who has not discovered his end is bored when alone and is always in need of company: *asinus asinum fricat* as the old saying goes, "donkey rubs up against donkey"! The man who remains at the natural, generic level needs to warm himself alongside another. The person of one who has truly attained his end, his finality of loving and contemplating, however, is revealed beyond the nature and community, though these are not rejected. A cat is not made to love, but rather to produce other cats. The human person, however, surpasses the generic aspect, the atavism, and touches his first personal finality in attaining to the other in friendship. It is here where the person reveals himself. Furthermore, should he attain to God in contemplation, he then fully attains his end and so understands that his spiritual soul is made for God. Our soul can rest and come to a halt only in God[2].

The *figura* manifests to us in tangible and visible fashion this complexity of the human person in whom the spiritual soul informs a body. The spiritual soul has its finality. In as much as it informs the body, however, it is bound to the nature and the genus. Hence we cannot codify analogical knowledge, in which the person surpasses nature. The *figura*, however, helps us to grasp this distinction in sensible fashion. The experience of the human community is marvelous in this regard. The family is the first human community, but the family does not sufficiently develop the person such that this distinction be grasped fully. Today, many wish to leave their families quite early, at only fifteen or sixteen years of age. In a certain way this is "natural"[3] for their person is developing and cannot remain solely within the family: they necessarily need to discover friendship. When a young person truly

[1] Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1.
[2] See Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, I, 1: "You arouse him to take joy in praising you, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."
[3] *Translator's note:* "natural" is not used here in a strictly philosophical connotation, but according to more common usage.

makes this discovery, however, he is able to remain within the family in a healthy manner where tensions are overcome in an intelligent fashion for a door has been opened. Furthermore, should this friendship be a good one, it might permit him to discover contemplation. The same can be said for the monastic life which is itself a family life: should a member of the monastic community discover contemplation and personal friendship, he is able to accept communal life and live it in a truly human and Christian fashion. If, however, he has not made this discovery, the communal life threatens to smother him. Indeed, the human person cannot be relative to the common good.

These brief remarks allow us to understand one aspect of the complexity of human life. With the discovery of the *ousia*-substance, metaphysical knowledge enables us to know the person in depth. But as we are a soul "in" a body, we grasp the "echo" of the substance through the body: in the realm of our sensitivity, the gaze enables us to understand the interiority of our soul and best expresses the alliance of soul and body. Our soul informs our body, but surpasses it by the intelligence and spiritual love. Friendship, which arises within a community but which goes beyond it, is the first moment where the person surpasses the generic dimension of the atavism. Friendship is personal, there is no communal friendship. It is personal, and it is what permits that ultimate surpassing whereby the person opens out towards contemplation.