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نقد مفهوم "طبیعت محض"

فرانکو مانی*

چکیده

چنانکه از افلاطون و ارسطو آموخته‌ایم، "طبیعی" به معنای "مادی" نیست. برای افلاطون و ارسطو بسیاری هیوات طبیعی روحانی (یعنی غیرمادی) بودند. بنابراین، 'طبیعی‌گرایی' مترادف 'ماده‌انگاری' نیست و، برخلاف ماده‌انگاری، متضاد 'روح‌باوری' نیست. در حقیقت، تنها تضاد منطقی‌ای که در سنت هزاران‌ساله سه دین ابراهیمی یافت می‌شود، تضاد میان 'طبیعی‌گرایی' و 'فراطبیعی‌گرایی' است. طبیعت مختص مخلوقات است و فراطبیعت مختص خداوند خالق. فلسفه طبیعی‌گرایانه تصور می‌کند این عالم خودبنیان است و فارغ از علل طبیعی هیچ چیز دیگری وجود ندارد. از سوی دیگر، فلسفه‌هایی همچون فلسفه آکویناس، ابن‌سینا یا ابن‌میمون بر آنند که عالم وضع هستی‌شناختی عالم همچون مخلوقی است که نیازمند وجود یک خالق است، یعنی چیزی 'برتر از امر طبیعی'. هنری د لویاک، الاهیدان قرن بیستم، استدلال می‌کند در نظر متفکران قرون میانه فقط و فقط یک ترتیب انضمامی برای تاریخ وجود داشت، ترتیبی که در آن خداوند انسان را برای خویش آفرید و طبیعت انسان به این ترتیب فقط برای سرنوشتی یگانه، که فراطبیعی است، خلق شد. اما در رنسانس، برخی الاهیدانان این ایده را پیش کشیدند که طبیعت انسان "یک کل بسته و بسنده" است و این نظام 'طبیعت محض' گرایش عمده در قرن بیستم شده است. اما - برخلاف این عقیده - هنری د لویاک به این ایده بنیادین معتقد است که چنین نیست که دو واقعیت در توازی هم، یعنی امر 'طبیعی' و امر 'فراطبیعی' وجود داشته باشد. یک مسیحی یا یهودی یا مسلمان ممکن است بگوید هر چیزی طبیعی است (رحمت الهی به کلی عبارت است از رویدادهای بیرونی و درونی جهان تاریخی)، و همینطور می‌تواند بگوید هر چیزی فراطبیعی است (هر عنصر فضازمانی جهان مخلوق است، یعنی از حیث وجود بواسطه خداوند دوام دارد).

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The Critique of the Concept of “Pure Nature”

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Abstract

“Natural” does not mean “material”, as we were taught by Plato and Aristotle, for whom many natural entities are spiritual (i.e. immaterial). Thus ‘naturalism’ is not synonymous with ‘materialism’ and, unlike materialism, is not opposed to ‘spiritualism’. In fact, the only logical opposition, founded in the millennial tradition of the three Abrahamic religions, is between ‘naturalism’ and ‘supernaturalism’. Nature is that of creatures, supernature is that of the creator God. A Naturalist philosophy thinks that this universe is self-founded and apart from natural causes nothing else exists. A philosophy such as that of Aquinas, Ibn-Sina, or Maimonides, on the other hand, holds that the universe has an ontological status as a creature which requires the existence of a creator, i.e. something ‘supra-natural’. The 20th century theologian Henri De Lubac’s argues that for medieval thinkers there was one and only one concrete order of history, the one in which God had made humanity for himself, and in which human nature had thus been created only for a single destiny, which was supernatural. But in the Renaissance some theologians introduced the idea of human nature as “a closed and sufficient whole” and this system of ‘pure

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nature’ became mainstream in the 20th century. But – against this – Henri De Lubac maintains the fundamental idea that there are no two parallel realities, namely the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’. A Christian or a Jew or a Muslim can say that everything is natural (grace consists entirely in the external and internal events of the historical world), and he can also say that everything is supernatural (every spatiotemporal element of the world is created, i.e. sustained in existence by God).

Key words: creatures, creator, super-natural, pure nature, Thomas Aquinas, Henri De Lubac, Herbert McCabe.

1. Definitions

Plato and Aristotle taught us that "Natural" does not mean "material": for them many natural entities are spiritual (i.e. immaterial). Since all substances are individual compounds of form and matter, therefore all the forms are, by definition, non-matter: for example, according to Aristotle, the soul is *not* the body. Aristotle was definitely a non-materialist naturalist philosopher; whereas, Epicurus was a materialist naturalist philosopher. Thus 'naturalism' is not synonymous with 'materialism' and, unlike materialism, is not opposed to 'spiritualism'.

In fact, the only logical opposition, founded in the millennial tradition of the three Abrahamic religions, is between 'naturalism' and 'supernaturalism'. Nature is that of creatures, super-nature is that of the creator God. A Naturalist philosophy thinks that this universe is self-founded and, apart from natural causes (material or spiritual it does not matter, see Aristotle), nothing else exists. A non-naturalist philosophy such as that of Thomas Aquinas, Ibn-Sina, Averrois or Maimonides, on the other hand, holds that the universe has an ontological status as a creature which imposes the existence of a creator, i.e. something 'super-natural' ('supra-natural').

These considerations lead us to a second distinction: 'supernatural' does not mean 'magical' or 'anti-natural' or **'something that breaks the laws of nature'**. Even if the meaning of 'supernatural' as synonym of 'magical' is the most widespread meaning today, it is certainly not the case in the millennial tradition of philosophy and theology.

2. An Overview of the History of Philosophy

We know that in his *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas, after treating God as creator, follows the biblical scheme of the seven days of creation and analyses creatures, both spiritual ones - i.e. angels - and the physical world, focusing mainly and at length on human beings. A part of this treatise is mainly based on Aristotle's *De anima* and can be called 'philosophical anthropology', a branch of philosophy, the domain of reason; a branch that in philosophical treatises is put before the exposition of ethics, of which it is a kind of preamble. This - *philosophical* anthropology - is the part that inspired the English philosopher Herbert McCabe and the Scottish philosopher Alasdair McIntyre and was so ably improved by them; but it was philosophical and *not* the *theological* anthropology.

Theological anthropology in those decades was improved - however - by some Jesuit theologians: first of all Henri De Lubac in his *Surnaturel* (1946) and his *Le Mystere du surnaturel* (1965), then Juan Alvaro Jimenez in his *Cristología y antropología* (1973), and then Luis Ladaria in his *Antropología teológica* (1983): the main point of these reflections is to trace the supernatural action of grace from the actual beginning of the natural action of creation, and thus to conceive of human nature as always called to divinization from its very beginning.

De Lubac's basic question in *Surnaturel* is how human persons in the natural order can be inwardly directed to the order of Grace that realises

them, without possessing by themselves this Grace in advance, and without being able to claim it for themselves at all. In his book, De Lubac tries to show when, why and how, what he calls "the system of pure nature" has come to prevail in Christian theology, in an attempt to answer this basic question.

He argues that for medieval thinkers there was one and only one concrete order of history, one in which God had made humanity for himself, and in which human nature was thus created only for a single destiny, which was supernatural. They, therefore, never imagined the possibility of a purely natural end for human beings, attainable by their own intrinsic powers of cognition and volition.

De Lubac argues that this view began to unravel in the 16th century in the thought of the theologian Thomas da Vio, also called Cajetan, who, claiming to carry over the thought of Thomas, instead betrayed it and introduced the idea of human nature as "a closed and auto-sufficient whole".

The idea of a 'pure nature', de Lubac argues, while allowing Catholic theologians to defend the essential integrity of fallen human nature against Protestantism which denied it, made – however - a separation between nature and the supernatural which would prove pernicious - making the latter (apparently) optional, not to say superfluous.

After Cajetan, the 17th century theologians Baius and Jansenius developed their hypothesis of a 'purely natural purpose' attributed to a 'spiritual nature' (human or angelic) in order to ensure the **gratuitousness** of divine Grace, that is to say, that Grace must be "*added*" as a undeserved gift by God onto the human nature, which, by itself, has got only 'natural' features ruled by 'natural' laws which include contingency and death.

The system of 'pure nature', perceived as a novelty in the 17th century, became mainstream in the 20th century, so much so that rejecting it became synonymous with denying the gratuitousness of the supernatural.

Whereas, De Lubac considers the Christian tradition from the 2nd to the 17th century, and provides evidence to show Aquinas (who was the first to use the word 'supra-natural' systematically) never imagined any purpose for the created spirit other than a supernatural one. In addition, De Lubac examines the origins of the word 'supernatural', including the problematic epithet 'super-additum' ('something super-added'), and the widespread confusion of 'supernatural' with 'miraculous' (in the - warped, misleading - sense of a completely arbitrary addition, as a synonym of 'magic', that is, something that breaks the laws of nature). Finally, De Lubac indicates why it is not necessary to resort to the hypothetical system of pure nature to protect the gratuitousness of the beatific vision.

Thus Henri De Lubac maintained the fundamental idea that there are *not* two parallel realities, namely the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'. For the great medieval thinkers there were not two orders of history – the sacred one of Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and Jesus, and the secular one of Cesar, Napoleon, Churchill and Stalin – but there is only one concrete order of history, the one in which God had made humanity for himself, and in which human nature was thus created only for a single destiny, which was supernatural.

3. What is Creation in Philosophical Theism ?

To be created identifies with to exist from nothing, and an existing thing does not have different qualities in comparison with a non-existing thing. Creation would be impossible if it made a difference to something, for instance: if creation made any difference, it would be impossible for God to create – in the words of Herbert McCabe – a Nicaraguan Okapi because he should create a 'created Nicaraguan Okapi' which would be different from the mere Nicaraguan Okapi, and, if he wanted to create a created Nicaraguan Okapi he could just create a 'created created Nicaraguan Okapi'. Whereas, apart from creation, all the other causes make differences in the world (for example, a hurricane leaves detectable traces of its action), but God does not: he makes things precisely as they are, the world as it is.

You can say that a hurricane has been there but you cannot say God has been there, since there are no traces of God; therefore, the 'Argument for Design' by William Paley is wrong because no traces of creation (order, ingenuity, etc) can be detected; you can no more say that the world that exists has to be made by God than you can say this sort of world must exist. Like existence itself, 'being created' does not add anything to a thing, it cannot enter into the description of anything, we could never say, 'if this is created then it must be like this and not like that'.

We should understand the relationship between these two aspects – **dependence** and **autonomy** – while avoiding any contrast.

Rowan Williams reflected in depth on dependence: we have both a good reason (our experience of unhealthy past dependences) and a bad reason (our illusion of being self-sufficient) to be suspicious of it. In order to get a role and therefore to be independent, we risk depending in a problematic way on particular persons and institutions; whereas, a healthy dependence is one that makes us love our individual Self because we acknowledge it exists 'for another', even though we are aware that every particular 'other' cannot fulfil our expectations. The classical doctrine of creation says that before being engaged with other people, we exist because God knows us and relates to us. This idea of God here, I think, points to the unforeseeable multiplicity of particular dependences towards other equally dependent creatures. 'Unforeseeable' because we do not know God's plans, as McCabe says: by creation we mean the dependence of all that is, even though we do not know what it depends on.

While other creatures limit, or, at least, influence us, God does not do this. Even though he is united to us as other creatures cannot be, nonetheless this intimacy does not influence us, on the contrary it makes us be ourselves. That God continuously operates within creatures does not mean they have not their own actions, but that every creature is what it is – in its very autonomy - because of God.

McCabe thinks that it is easier to appreciate this in human beings and their actions than in other creatures. The more our actions are free, that is not conditioned by other creatures, the more a 'window' on the creator God opens; in fact, then, we are acting exactly because we are ourselves. My action is free when it stems from my motives and reasons and is not caused by anything else; however, it is caused by God because God is not 'anything else', is not a rival agent in the universe; the creative causal power of God does not operate on me from outside, it is what makes me me, *in the autonomy of my nature*. The idea that God could interfere with my freedom springs from a idolatrous concept of God: in a hierarchy of less and more powerful causes God should be at the top; however, the more a cause is powerful the more it interferes with the other causes, in this case my freedom. However, God does not make the greatest difference, greater than say an earthquake or the explosion of a star, because he makes all the differences – creation, that is the existence of the universe – which means that he does not make any differences at all. As McCabe says: “as man becomes more and more self-creative, God does not fade out of the picture, he fades in. The pictures of God, however, fade out. The God who makes us instead of us making ourselves is replaced by the God who makes us make ourselves /.../The creative power is just the power that, because it results in things being what they are, cannot interfere with creatures /.../ Creation is simply and solely letting the things be, and our love is just a faint image of that”. I comment on these passage saying that we achieve this freedom from other creatures' pressure as far as we have True ideas aimed at reaching real Goodness; freedom is a sort of **auto-nomy**, i. e. **self-regulation** which reveals ('a window opens') our dependence on a God who is Truth and Goodness. So, God 'fades in' not ontologically but 'in' our understanding: if we think that God is Truth and Goodness, the *true ideas* we conceive that move our will towards real goodness make us free, that is 'ourselves' (not forced by other creatures), and this fact 'opens a window' onto the creative action of God, who makes us be ourselves. As Joseph Ratzinger suggests, the doctrine of creation means a true humility which is grateful for life and the other goods, of being dependent in love, as opposed to another kind of humility – a toxic one – which despises existence, human beings and the world (the Dualism of the Gnostics).

God – McCabe says – is the power upon which the other powers depend for their efficacy; if such a power does exist, then the world that we take for granted must be given in a much richer and more mysterious way; in fact, **if the world were simply granted, to exist for me would mean just to be A and not B, i.e. a particular kind of thing. Whereas, if the world is created and not granted, to exist means that the entire system of being-a-particular-kind-of-things exists, of which I am a part.**

Therefore, to be **dependent** does not exclude at all to be **autonomous**. This is the '**supernatural**' essence of every '**natural**' item. We at some time have a very strong feeling of the gratuitousness of things, a sense of gratitude for there being a world. The true believers think that even if a person was not loved by other persons, he is nonetheless loved by God because God 'is the unconditional everlasting love which sustains us in being' and, therefore, God is but a 'label' for whatever makes sense of our gratitude for existing, to which we say 'thank you'. Thus, as far as a creature is good, it is not hindered or diminished by other creatures, as we can see more clearly in free human actions. **This is its autonomy**. However, as far as a creature exists and is good, it depends on God, or – better said – it is **made of** God, who is Being and Goodness; and **this is its dependence**. Human beings, when they acknowledge this dependence by their conscious gratitude, show more clearly this union of autonomy and dependence, that is, of '**natural**' and '**supernatural**', than other creatures do. A Christian or a Jew or a Muslim can say that everything is natural (i. e. Grace consists entirely in the external and internal events of the historical world), and he can also say that everything is supernatural (i. e. every spatiotemporal element of the world is created, i.e. sustained in existence by God).

Who is Jesus Christ in Christianity?

The recently deceased theologian Nicholas Lash argued that in God we can only see (and understand) Jesus Christ: if not, what other 'aspects' of God could we see and understand in God? In Jesus there is nothing missing; there is nothing else to see. Indeed, even Herbert McCabe argues that a human person is simply a person with a human nature, and it makes absolutely no difference to the logic of this whether this same person exists (as in Jesus) or not (as in us) from eternity as divine.

This truth does not interest only logicians and metaphysicians but also theologians, because if the person of Jesus is uncreated this fact does not make any difference either: being uncreated does not add any feature to the person of Jesus.

Just as we cannot infer anything about Fred from Fred being created, so we cannot infer anything about Jesus from Jesus being uncreated; to be divine is not to be a kind of being, just as to be a creature is not to be a kind of being (the word 'nature' is used only analogically in the phrase 'divine nature'), whereas, to be a man is to be a kind of being and this is the kind of being that Jesus was and is. McCabe maintains that the only knowledge we can have of Christ is of his human nature. When we think to know what God is in himself because we know what (the fundamental qualities of) Jesus Christ is, we are wrong, since what we know and understand is just his human nature and not his divine one, as we will see below.

The revelation of God in Jesus in no way, for Aquinas, changes the situation. By the revelation of grace, he says, we are joined to God as an unknown, *ei quasi ignoto coniugamur*.

For example, we do not know what the intra-Trinitarian relationship is between the Father and the Son, however, both by faith and reason we know Jesus’ attitude of obedience to the will of God, and by faith we hold that this ‘is just what the eternal procession of the Son from the father appears as in history.’ McCabe thinks that a better understanding of the humanity of Jesus will help us to go towards the mystery of God: that is, we can improve our ‘understanding of’ Jesus’ humanity, but his divinity is a ‘mystery’.

A contemporary theologian, Ian McFarland, resumes this observation of McCabe and provides it with historical examples of alleged ‘divine’ qualities of Jesus: perfect God consciousness (Schleiermacher), Jesus’ intention to found the kingdom of God (Ritschl), refusal to claim any goodness for himself (Baillie), absolute subordination to the will of the Father (Pannenberg); all these Christologies share the same basic claim: Jesus’ humanity is seen in what is average and everyday, while the divinity abides in such extraordinary qualities. But this temptation has to be resisted because we can only point to what is created, and those ‘extraordinary’ or ‘heroic’ aspects are just human, not divine. If we take the humanity of Jesus seriously, then ‘no aspects of it can be treated as a proof or manifestation of his divinity’. ‘None of them, taken singly or in combination, establishes that this person is the second Person of the Trinity’, and whatever miracle Jesus performs, they can be performed by other humans also.

And what does the Incarnation tell us, on the other hand, about the divine nature?

It is most important to observe that to be divine is not to be ‘a kind of thing’ (just as to be a creature is not to be a kind of thing), whereas to be a man means to be a kind of thing, actually that one Jesus was. God is *not* part of the universe so he is not something to disregard if you want to know what a man is.

Thus, the two natures are not like an engine and a sail to provide movement to a boat but are two levels of speaking of Jesus. They are also a way to say that Jesus exists on two levels. And McFarland follows McCabe on this point as well: Chalcedon says that Jesus is fully divine but, since the divine nature is invisible and ineffable, it cannot be shown and so treated as an observable property of Jesus; in fact, any observable property of Jesus can be exhibited also by other human beings. The divine nature in the mind of the Fathers of Chalcedon has qualities such as omnipotence, eternity and the like, but, for the very reason that they are super-human, Jesus cannot exhibit any of them in his human life. An impressive example is divine impassibility and how Jesus ‘exhibited’ it on the cross.

The divine nature is not something which can be known by us, neither by reason, nor by faith. The divine nature of Jesus for us is not a series of qualities or ideas, but is a relationship with us. So, the hypostatic union appears *only* in the transformative relationship with the believer.

Consequence of this Doctrine for our Lives

This intellectual movement through the history of thought brings us to a current consideration. The study of past history must help us to understand the present. As for what regards our topic, we should focus on three present attitudes towards Nature.

- 1) In the present, at least in the Western world (but also in the former communist world of Russia and the communist world of China), explicit religious faith has greatly diminished and is tending to disappear. Strong majorities of those people living today think that reality is Monist and this Monism is Naturalist, i. e. governed by internal laws that are predictable and controllable, and devoid of any purpose or sense that is not internal to itself.
- 2) Of the remaining minority (say, 30% to 10%) many think that reality is Dualist, that there are two parallel orders of reality: the natural and the supernatural. This thought concerns – perhaps ! – the majority of those who remain believers today, who say to themselves: *“There is my secular life which concerns the body, health, sex, family, work, money, entertainment and politics. And there is another line of reality, the religious one, which must protect me from the evils of poverty, ageing, disease, persecution and other violent interpersonal conflicts, and death. And this second order of reality is 'supra-natural' because it is made and willed and 'managed' by a being of a nature other than and superior to human one, called God. And the two orders can exist separately from each other”*.
- 3) Here, however, there is a third thought, that of the tradition from Thomas Aquinas, to De Lubac, to Ladaria to McCabe that I have presented here, a thought that should enlighten at least some and convince them that reality is Monist, that is, there is one and only one order of reality, but this one order is supernatural, not ‘natural’.

What practical consequences can we draw from the third attitude, the one that denies both Monistic Naturalism (the atheistic immanentism) and Dualistic Naturalism (the "pure nature" system)?

We human beings live a life that is neither due to us nor planned by us, that is unpredictable and full of pain, sin and tragedy (as well of adventure, knowledge, love and joy). This life is like a 'preparation' for an hoped new life, in which we could detach ourselves from our past personality, in which we could become fully ready and fully open to the unpredictable. This life can really be a *transformation* of our natural potentials, personal desires and habits, which we have acquired from parents and society. However, Herbert McCabe emphasises that the author of this *transformation* is not me: there are ways to become more human (commandments, virtues), but no means to become divine: this in fact is God's business.

McCabe thinks that modern atheism of Nietzsche and Marx is right in saying that God cannot love creatures because of the inequality between them; for Nietzsche and Marx God the creator of the world is just a vast omnipotent baby unable to grow up and to abandon himself in that true love that requires equality; they say that to accept this God is to accept a sort of slavery. But McCabe observes that these atheists omitted to notice that we are no longer just creatures, because, by being taken up into God, by the gracious force of the transformation (always unpredictable, sometimes painful) he accomplishes in us and through us, we are raised into share in divinity. The fact that God cannot love us is not because we are sinners, but because we are creatures; 'sin is nothing but our deliberate settling for simple creature-hood', closing ourselves off and rejecting the gift of God's love, the risk of divinity. However, divine love and power perform in us the ultimate liberation of people, the liberation from mere creature-hood.

Therefore, it seems that the difference between creation and redeemed new life, between nature and super-nature, is that the former lacks equality (the relationship between creator God and creatures is real only in the creatures, as Aquinas says), whereas the latter does have this equality, which is the necessary premise for reciprocity.

Indeed, Grace (the 'super-natural') is not an improvement of creatures, as would happen to a man, for example, who became more handsome, intelligent, generous, courageous or long-lived. As McCabe says: "A creature with grace is not just a superior kind of creature. Grace does not make man a better creature, it raises him beyond the creature, it makes him a partaker of divinity." What does this sentence mean?

It means two things, which are then two practical consequences of these philosophical considerations on Naturalism.

1) being transformed by God's grace does not mean being stronger, more beautiful, more wise, or more virtuous than other human beings, and therefore, in practice, we should never live and act without this awareness.

2) No one, theist or not, is able to know the nature of God, to see his face, that is, to understand what the first and last Cause of the Universe is. However, the theist may be endowed with a stronger awareness of the Mystery of God than the atheist, and it is therefore easier for the theist who avoids the trap of Naturalism to refute the Myths that cultural fashions gradually present to us. This kind of theist will never place the First Cause and Ultimate End of our life - i.e. God - in some phenomenon of the universe, be it the Human Spirit (Hegel), the will of the world (Schopenhauer), social and economic equality (Marx), the will to power (Nietzsche), or the Big Bang.

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