

Truth, Justice, Being: Mutual Implications

Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo*

«Si autem modus entis accipiatur... secundum convenientiam unius entis ad aliud, hoc quidem non potest esse nisi accipiatur aliquid quod natum sit convenire cum omni ente: hoc autem est anima, quae 'quodammodo est omnia' (De An. 431 b 31). In anima autem est vis cognitiva et appetitiva. Convenientiam ergo entis ad appetitum exprimit bonum;... ad intellectum exprimit verum» (San Tommaso, De Ver. I, 1). «Ipsum bonum, in quantum est quaedam forma apprehensibilis, continetur sub vero quasi quoddam verum; et ipsum verum, in quantum est finis intellectualis operationis, continetur sub bono ut quoddam particulare bonum» (De Malo, q. 6, co.). «Sunt qui scire volunt ut aedificent, et caritas est» (St Bernard, Sermon Thirty-six on the Canticle of Canticles).

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Being, Truth and Justice in Scientific Activity

The problem I would like to deal with is twofold. On the one hand, I ask whether it is possible to provide a contemporary version of the “philosophy of the ancients” on the mutual conversion of the transcendentals: *quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum* (Kant, *Critique of*

* H.E. Most Rev. Msgr. Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo is the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in Vatican City.

Pure Reason, § 12). On the other, I ask how we can recognise in their movement from one to the other a way of indicating the human being.

I will not spend much time to show that even justice is a development of the notion of good, in the measure in which good postulates, besides the personal estimate of what is a good in itself and is worth something to me, the reference to the other as a person, and in the sense of those who are close to me and whom I call neighbours, both with reference to the other in his furthest face, but which has in any case the capability of acting as my vis-à-vis in society (even as a neighbour), especially through just institutions.

In the light of the above, what will be my thesis? My thesis is that the mutual convertibility of the transcendentals, good and truth, presupposes first of all their distinction, that is to say the possibility of thinking of one without the other. Only later, upon a deeper analysis, the movement from one to the other can be established, or the implication of the one through the other.

The Truth of Philosophy and of the Sciences

“The truth will set you free”: these words from the Gospel enjoy perennial validity and illuminate with divine light the endeavours of the scientist who refuses to subordinate his commitment and his research to anything but the truth. Truth is the goal of the whole universe: *finis totius Universi est veritas*, as one of the greatest thinkers of all time, Thomas Aquinas, wrote. The truth of all beings, their forms and their laws is hidden in the bosom of the Universe, which yearns for its truth to be discovered by the human intellect.¹

In my opinion, theoretical truth – in its historic journey towards the recognition of its autonomy – can be encountered not only in theoretical philosophy or in theology, but also and increasingly in the sciences of nature, considered in their full range of topics. It is what the Pontifical Academy of Sciences has pointed out in an excellent book in which she draws the balance of the discoveries of this century starting with the computer, and going on to biology (DNA’s double helix), information technology, quantum mechanics, the chemical explosion, astrophysics, the order of chaos and, last but not least, the neurosciences. The common denominator is the idea of *discovery* and discovery is an organised form of the *observation of nature*.²

¹ *Contra Gentiles*, Bk. I, Ch. I.

² Cf. AA.VV., *Paths of Discovery*, The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Acta 18, Vatican City, 2006.

The Difference between Science and Metaphysics

For precision's sake let us say, first of all, that science differs from Metaphysics since the latter has as its object, as indicated by Aristotle, "being as being", which transcends the physical and biological being and all of nature. Therefore Metaphysics "is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others treats universally of being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attribute of this part" (1003 a 21-25). Philosophy has the task of opening and consolidating the horizon of transcendence, starting from the two preambles of faith: the immortality of the soul and the existence of God.

On the contrary, sciences move *per se* in the horizon of the phenomena of the natural realities, and today, in particular, analyse the constitution of matter and of life, the human body and the brain, which is its masterpiece. The sciences, however, *per accidens*, in a way also touch upon the horizon of transcendence. Firstly, because scientific activity is inspired by the scientist's motivations, which are spiritual goals. Secondly, because, from the objective point of view, the experience of which the scientist as a human being becomes the protagonist is the perception of a constant, of a law, of a logos, which he has not created, but which he only discovers. Therefore, in a broad sense, if we admit this experience, it is not possible not to admit almost concomitantly the existence of a higher Reason, different from the human one, which has set those laws that support the natural world: this is the meeting point between the sciences of nature and Metaphysics.

The Difference between Science and Mathematics

I would like to insist on the term nature. Indeed, it has enabled us to put mathematics back in its slot as a discipline of forms, numbers and relations as rational constructs pursued for themselves and not as constituting the science of reference. As Claude Allègre writes, "contrary to the sciences of nature, mathematics does not develop by virtue of an oscillation between observation and theoretical model". This is probably the reason for the perhaps excessive and certainly controversial title – *La défaite de Platon* – he has given to this extraordinary overview of science in the 20th century.³ With the sciences of nature what is at stake is the knowledge of what is real and it is truth that qualifies the relation of theory to what is real in the sciences of nature.

³ Claude Allègre, *La Défaite de Platon ou la science du XXe siècle*, Fayard, Paris 1995, p. 429.

The Difference between Science and the Human Sciences

The second reason for concentrating on the sciences of nature to make the demand for truth in its theoretical purity is provided by Jean Ladrière throughout all of his epistemological works and, more in particular, in an essay entitled *Herméneutique et épistémologie* published by Paul Ricoeur in the book *Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*.⁴ He does not try to distinguish the project of the sciences of nature from that of the mathematical subjects, but from that of the human sciences that can rightly demand to derive an explanation from comprehension. These human sciences – he says – do not have as their theme the idea of nature as a system of phenomena regulated by laws, but the idea of action as a transforming initiative. Regarding action, “the recommended strategy consists in going from the objectivated forms towards their production, in short in redoing in the opposite direction the process of objectivation (...). Therefore, rebuilding such a project means recalling the meaning of what initially was only an enigmatic object, interpreted as a trace and constituting a problem starting from such an interpretation” (Ricoeur, 109). Thus it would be a serious mistake – and this mistake might be the temptation of a sketchy and nebulous hermeneutical thought – to believe that the whole problem of the status of science can be rebuilt on the model of the de-subjectivation of the products of action. The need for such a result is extremely rigorous: it is believed that we can plausibly reconstruct the “very trajectory that leads from certain initiatives to certain situations. Now, what makes the reconstitution plausible is the fact that we can recognise ourselves in it, that is to say that when it is presented to us it appears to us as a course of events that we could have experienced, like a process in which we might have acted or, in any case, co-acted” (Ricoeur, 110).

Now, the fact that the initiative that produces the observed processes is entirely unknown to us, because it is extraneous, makes it possible for nature to be nature and not action. This is why we only have observation and explanation through laws. To quote Ladrière: “the source, here, is no longer action, it is law, that is to say nature itself whose law is considered capable of expressing an internal constitution and, if we can say so, an immanent intention. Now, the only way to effectively prove that an observed process can be subsumed under a law is to reconstitute it effectively starting from this very law. Such reconstitution – the famous *sôdzein ta phainomena* – is nothing else but a doubling of what nature has already produced on its own, the generation of a second process that should be a

⁴ Jean Ladrière, *Herméneutique et épistémologie*, in P. Ricoeur, *Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, éd. du Cerf, Paris 1991.

faithful image of the former; it is a simulation, unreal in itself, of what effectively took place” (Ladriere, 111). Therefore it is a copy of nature. In other words, the scientist, unlike the philosopher and mathematician, imitates nature, and the proof is that when imitation does not follow nature’s profound laws, nature itself rejects it. Precisely because of the fact that we cannot understand the production of nature as an action similar to those that initiate from us – something that could be believed until Galilei and Newton – we must observe, experiment, explain and copy nature itself.

Unable to understand nature as an objectivation of an initiative similar to our own – of ourselves as agent beings – it is necessary for us to *explain* it “by appealing to the general notion of law, inasmuch as this notion provides a content to the idea of nature” (Ladriere, 113). Law, therefore, is present in the phenomenon that we would not be capable of producing with action or understanding through narration; it is present in it “as its own internal reason. And the explanation consists in exhibiting this reason, following the sense of implication, from the phenomenon towards its own condition” (Ladriere, *ibidem*).

In this radical initial situation epistemology finds a justification of its own autonomy; it happens to diversify the forms of explanation following the nature of the invoked principle of legality; it will thus speak of explanation by subsumption, by reduction, by genesis, by finalities. Thus we situate ourselves along the journey of the notion of truth appropriate to the sciences of nature, if we extrapolate the element common to these different forms of explanation, that element that constitutes precisely the clarifying moment of an explanation: “We ask for an explanation to dissolve the opacity of the fact that, in its singularity, it is only a pure apparition in the general field of experience” (Ladriere, 116).

At this stage of the reflection we find the role of models and the general process of modellisation. It occupies the place left empty by the comprehension of the action for which we take the initiative. Moreover, it bears the weight of the pretension of truth in the scientific sense of the term. The empty place is occupied by imagination that produces models: “It is precisely necessary to operate on another support compared to the one of the real bodies, on a support capable of sustaining the work of the imagination. It is the model, the abstract object, built according to perfectly well-known procedures, that is considered capable of constituting a sufficiently faithful representation, albeit a simplified one, of reality” (Ladriere, *ibidem*). Once again we find mathematics, discarded as a paradigm of truth, as a means to build *models*, that are not mathematical objects but figurative

representations of the legality of what is real and which require testing or copying or reproducing the processes of nature in a laboratory.⁵

From Truth to Justice

I think we have said enough to draw at least a general outline of scientific truth; its fate is essentially linked to the representation of the model, an issue that has become central in epistemology. To this end, during the course of the development of sciences in the prodigious 20th century, nothing will come to deny the formal definition of the truth of science as the adaptation of the mind to the reality of the phenomenon of nature. Truth as *sôdzein ta phainomena*. And no idea of justice (or good) is necessarily implied by this idea of adaptation in oscillation, which Claude Allègre mentioned above, between theory and observation. There is no idea of justice inasmuch as we consider exclusively the propositional form of the observation protocols, of the construction of the model, of the verification and denial procedures applied to the alleged theoretical enunciations. Anyway, when we speak about the truth of the sciences, we can affirm some good, because we can say for sciences what is valid for all truth, i.e. that the truth itself, because it is the object and the end of the intellectual operation, is contained under good, like a particular good. “*Ipsum verum, – Thomas says – in quantum est finis intellectualis operationis, continetur sub bono ut quoddam particulare bonum*”.⁶ Nevertheless, here we speak of this particular good that arrives at intelligence when knowing the truth, but not about the common or universal good in relation to the people, one another, and all goods, i.e. justice.

Things change – and the idea of justice stands out at the end of the journey we are about to undertake – if we consider episteme no longer just a network of

⁵ With the application of the mathematical models to the scientific method, modern physics has perfected the conditions of images in which the phenomena of nature are intentionally reflected and, more in general, the contingency of matter. The application of mathematics to the physical method had perhaps been envisaged by St Thomas himself: “The principles of mathematics are applicable to natural things, but not vice versa, because physics presupposes mathematics; but the converse is not true, as is clear in the third book of *De Caelo et Mundo*. So there are three levels of sciences concerning natural and mathematical entities. Some are purely natural and treat of the properties of natural things as such, like physics, agriculture, and the like. Others are purely mathematical and treat of quantities absolutely, as geometry considers magnitude and arithmetic numbers. Still others are intermediate, and these apply mathematical principles to natural things; for instance, music, astronomy, and the like. These sciences, however, have a closer affinity to mathematics, because in their thinking that which is physical is, as it were, material, whereas that which is mathematical is, as it were, formal. For example, music considers sounds, not inasmuch as they are sounds, but inasmuch as they are proportionable according to numbers; and the same holds in other sciences. Thus they demonstrate their conclusions concerning natural things, but by means of mathematics” (*In Boeth. De Trinitate*, q. 5, 3 ad 6).

⁶ St Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, 6, co.

propositions, which Frege said we should be able to write on a wall, but as a project. A hermeneutics of reason becomes possible, charged with the very project of episteme: “properly speaking, this is where – says Jean Ladrière – the task of a reflection begins that will be afraid of reading, in those same works in which the mathematical project is inscribed, what this very project really is, what carries it, what inspires it, what calls it. Here the properly hermeneutical task separates from the methodology of the explanation, modellisation makes room for reflection, the articulated clarity of the operation makes room for the uncertain decoding of a step that traces its path as it moves forward along it” (Ladriere, 123). The idea of project is already situated at the border between the theoretical and the practical. The threshold is crossed if this idea of epistemic project is connected to that of the founding moment, in which “a willingness starting from which something new begins” is underlined (Ladriere, p. 124).

Well, this is precisely where truth and justice intersect and convert into one another. And truth is intended in a broader sense with respect to the propositional truth deriving from verification operations or to the representative models by which theories become accessible to the human being. This is truth as the common horizon to the comprehension of the operations that lead to the action and to the explanation of natural facts and, moreover, to the comprehension of the fact of being in the world, against the backdrop of which the comprehension of action and nature is outlined. Why justice? Because along all of this scale that goes from the project to the task, passing through the unpredictable, a community of research is implied.

This level is exactly where good and human justice are involved in the activity of scientific reason recognised as the vocation, task and mission of the scientist.

This is well known at the level of the science of nature, in which the scientific community is the collective subject of research, with its teams, its rivalry, its power struggles, but also its vocational unity before the other powers, its exercise of professional responsibility before technical applications, in short the search for its place in the totality of *episteme*, among theology, philosophy, ethics and politics.

This is precisely the level in which justice is involved in this enterprise of reason recognised as a task. And it is implied at the same time as the intersubjective structure of practical reason is implied, which is common to the scientific community, to technology and to politics. Justice, in all of these cases, consists essentially in the equal access to speech, in the duty of sharing the best arguments,

in the obligation of listening to the other side in all conflictual situations and in the recognition of the human rights of the person and the consequent *ius gentium*. In short, the conflictual-consensual statute of *research* – at all levels – indicates the space of justice.

St Bernard: Knowledge for Edification

Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the strongest personalities in history, who came down from the loftiest peaks of mysticism to share divine and human truth with the ecclesial and civil society of his time, as a true master of love and knowledge, described the different types of men and women of culture always found in history. According to St Bernard there are five motives that lead human beings to study: “There are people who only wish to know for the sake of knowing: this is base curiosity. Others wish to know in order that they themselves may be known: this is shameful vanity, and such people cannot escape the mockery of the satirical poet who said about their likes: ‘For you, knowing is nothing unless someone else knows that you know’. Then there are those who acquire knowledge in order to re-sell it, and for example to make money or gain honours from it: their motive is distasteful. But some wish to know in order to edify: this is charity. Others in order to be edified: this is wisdom. Only those who belong to these last two categories do not misuse knowledge, since they only seek to understand in order to do good”.⁷

The words of St Bernard the Mystic indicate a profound grasp of what motivates those who engage in culture, and they are more than ever relevant in order to remind both the teachers of thought as well as their disciples of the true purpose of knowledge. St Bernard explained that the motor of practical reason is justice and good. St Bernard of Clairvaux raised knowledge to the level of love, to the level of charity and understanding: *Sunt qui scire volunt ut aedificent et charitas est.*

Justice as a Transcendental

The thematisation of justice in the field of the search for the truth has been brought to a level of radicality that makes the idea of justice worthy of being elevated, in many ways, from the condition of simple virtue among other virtues to that of a transcendental, equal to the truth. In a nutshell, in my opinion there

⁷ St. Bernardus, *Sermo XXXVI in Cantica*, PL, CLXXXIII, 968.

are five directions along which justice has been considered a sign of theoretical practice of sciences belonging to the field of practical reason.

First of all, there are Husserl's pressing invitations, in the last part of his life, to responsibility, which he believes belongs to the final level of transcendental phenomenology. Of course this endeavour is supportive of a claim defined as "final foundation". However, it is worthy of note that this very demand involves what Husserl calls the responsibility of oneself for the self-founding action. Now, Husserl did not ignore the intersubjective dimension of this theoretical-practical action of self-responsible foundation. All the work connected with *The Crisis of European Sciences* tends towards a raising of the awareness of the temporal and historical dimensions, that ends up assigning this responsibility to a culture, the European one, and to a community, that he calls "arcontic" of the thinkers that bear the weight of the transcendental task. The fact that justice is the virtue implicitly designed as the final ethical mark of this responsibility shared by a historically-situated community is not far fetched.

With K.O. Apel and J. Habermas' discourse ethics – *Diskursethik* – this mobilisation of the virtue of justice no longer remains implicit; it is clearly required by the very practice of discourse; justice is the moral rule underlying any discourse, upheld by the idea directing the search for a consensus and moved by an exchange of arguments without limitations or constrictions. The well-known formula of the jurists – *audi alteram partem* – leaves the restricted environment of the court to cover the entire space of public discussion.

The third significant reference, i.e. the hermeneutics of reason, foreseen by Paul Ricoeur and Ladrière, who was my privileged guide in the first part of this paper, cannot fail to encounter the transcendental of justice. In his book, which I have extensively quoted, justice is expressly nominated towards the end, when the foundation of the epistemic task is compared to that of technique and to that of politics. With regard to the task of reason, he writes that "...this having to be is in itself structurally connected with an unrepresentable [contrary to the abovementioned modellisation], in which the sense of the task to carry out – which cannot be assimilated to any effective foundation of a finite nature – is dissimulated, although we tried to think of it as the horizon of truth, of justice and, at times, even of beauty" (p. 124).

Moreover, the foremost contemporary philosopher who has tried to elaborate a global ethics of technological civilisation is Hans Jonas. He is persuaded, that faced with the "Prometheus Unchained" of today's civilisation,

which is threatening the very survival of the planet, it is indispensable to develop a new ethics of responsibility that takes into account the long-term effects of our actions, that is to say the extra human world and the future generations.⁸

Last but not least, the fifth reference is of a theological nature and derives from the Magisterium of the Popes of all times, but especially in these last one hundred years of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Social Sciences: practical reason, also in its relationship with the theoretical activity of science, needs to be purified by the grace of Christ, since it is continuously inclined to egoism because of sin, both individual and social, and gives rise to hotbeds of injustice in the world.⁹

From Justice to Truth

Considering that the theoretical truth of science recalls justice, I shall continue with the dialectic current that, starting from the self-sufficiency of the idea of goodness developed in the notion of justice, this continues by a further reference to the idea of truth.

Life, if it is to be human life, is originally evaluated and the evaluations are originally qualified in terms of *good* or *evil*, just or unjust. There is no way of seeking a supplementary truth liable to legitimate the injunction of good and justice. This is where St Thomas comes to our aid, by maintaining that, since the first improvable principle of theoretical reason is that affirmation and negation are incompatible and thus that the supreme law of thought is the principle of non-contradiction, therefore the first principle of action is founded on the distinction between good and evil, and thus, on the principle of *bonum est faciendum et malum vitandum*.¹⁰

In order to find the truth in the notion of good and justice, it is necessary to look to the anthropological presuppositions or fundamental anthropology, which determines entry of the human being into ethics. These fundamental presuppositions are those by virtue of which man is considered existentially *capable* of receiving the injunction of good and justice. The originality of the existential sphere in which this capacity moves is a completely original situation that we may call the emergence of freedom, and with it, of all human rights. Christian thought – well before the moderns and with the same, or with more awareness than them,

⁸ Cf. H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984.

⁹ *Papal Addresses*, Introduction, biographies of the Popes and ed. Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Pontifical Academy of Sciences, *Scripta Varia 100*, Vatican City 2003.

¹⁰ Cf. S. *Th*, I-II, 94, 2.

regarding the independence of the human subject – had called freedom the *motor omnium* of a person’s capacities and the principle of that person’s independence (therefore *capax* as *causa sui*) both before nature and society, and before God. Speaking of capacity and freedom, assertions are made that refer to what man is in his way of being, therefore if it is true then, he is made to be accessible to a moral, legal or political problem, be it merit – or demerit – worthy, or broadly speaking, to a problem of value and rights.

This is where the true function of attestation intervenes. It operates with the first natural principles of reason but it moves them within the transcendent truth that is God the Creator and the soul as a spiritual free subject. Thus even the soul lies hidden in the bosom of each of us, but it makes its presence felt with the action of which the I *capax* or the self is the beginning and end.¹¹

I am reminded of the famous text of *Kritik d. praktischen Vernunft*: “two things fill my spirit with an ever new and increasing admiration and veneration, the more my reflection increases: the starry sky above me and the moral law inside me”.¹² He has no uncertainty or doubt: “I see them both before me and I connect them immediately with consciousness of my existence”.¹³ We can say that it is a form of belief, a *Glauben*, in the non-doxic sense of the term, if we reserve the term *doxa* for a degree lower than *episteme* and in the order of the phenomena of nature and also in that of human phenomena liable to being treated themselves as observable. The belief proper of attestation is of another order; it is of the order of conviction and confidence; its opposite is suspicion, not doubt, or doubt as suspicion (P. Ricoeur); it cannot be denied, but refused; it cannot be re-established and strengthened if not through resorting again to attestation, and is rescued by the approval of the other, indeed thanks to some kind of gracious divine support. In this context to which fundamental anthropology refers, one can observe that one is dealing with a truth that is closely connected with the fundamental conviction that the human being has of himself and which is not temporary as is the case with the acquisitions of the arts and sciences and philosophy itself with which, however, it has a close relationship, and thus one speaks of ‘philosophical anthropology’ to refer to its specific genre of knowledge through reflection that takes place by stages.¹⁴

¹¹ “Each one experiences within himself that he has a soul and that acts of the soul are within him”, i.e. “*Unusquisque in se ipso experitur se animam habere et actus animae sibi inesse*” (St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 10, 8 ad 8).

¹² Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, (ed. Felix Meiner, Hamburg 1990, p. 289); *The Critique of Practical Reason*. English translation available online (with my adjustments): <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/ikcpr10.txt>

¹³ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁴ The fact that sensitive knowledge precedes intellectual knowledge in the human being, the

As you can see, the correlation between good or justice and truth is very special. The capacity precedes attestation and in this sense it is of an ontological level; it is the one that is precisely postulated by the attestation as its referent. We could speak of existential possibilities that arise from a practical injunction.

From Attestation to Man's Transcendental Being

If we now try to focus on the metaphysical referent of attestation, i.e. on the fact of being able to speak and do truth, justice and good, it is not at all essential to maintain that this capability which precedes the attestation that says "it is true that I can", "it is true that I am free", must possess an ontological centre that it supports, accompanies and from which each representation of mine emanates.

There is a fragment of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, IX, 6 (1048 b 18-35), where the notion of act is frankly dissociated from that of movement (*kinesis*) and is associated instead to the notion of action in the sense of *praxis*. What makes this text remarkable is the fact that the disjunction between act and movement is supported by a syntactic criterion concerning the function of the verb tenses. This makes it possible to say "together" (*hama*), he has seen and he sees, he has had a good life and he has a good life, he has been happy and he still is. This game of verb tenses and, in a certain sense, the fact of going beyond it, which is based on this difference between movement and human praxis, reveals a fundamental phenomenon that touches upon the temporal nature of human action. The fact that past perfect and present are "together" implies that the past contained in the perfect is recapitulated in the present and vice versa. Therefore the human being is not only capable of measuring a chronological sequence according to a before and an after but he is also, in a certain

sensitive origin of human intellectual knowledge and the affirmation that the soul (the profound self of each of us) can come to know itself as spiritual only through the intellectual species that are abstract from the sensitive one, have prevented most of the time not only the understanding but also the actual reading of the texts of St Thomas who focuses on the real issue in question and shows that "the principle of human knowledge comes from sense. However, it is not necessary for everything that man knows to be submitted to sense or that it is immediately known only by means of a sensitive effect". Indeed, he affirms what we may call the decisive epistemological position of the Socratic principle of "know yourself": "The very intellect knows itself by means of its own act, which is not submitted to sense. In the same way, it also knows the interior act of will, since will is somewhat moved by the intellectual act and since intellectual act is caused in another way by will, like the effect is known by means of the cause and the cause by means of the effect" i.e. "*principium humanae cognitionis est a sensu; non tamen oportet quod quidquid ab homine cognoscitur, sit sensui subiectum, vel per effectum sensibilem immediate cognoscatur; nam et ipse intellectus intelligit seipsum per actum suum, qui non est sensui subiectus: similiter etiam et interiorem actum voluntatis intelligit, in quantum per actum intellectus quodammodo movetur voluntas, et alio modo actus intellectus causatur a voluntate, ut dictum est, sicut effectus cognoscitur per causam, et causa per effectum*" (*De Malo*, q. 6 ad 18).

sense, above time and the foundation of his succession which is matter. Thus it is not essential for an ontological examination of human action that the examples taken from this last register appear both *centralized* and *decentralized* at the same time. Let me explain: if the *energeia-dynamis* were just another way of saying *praxis* (or, worse, of extrapolating in a metaphysical condition a sort of homemade model of action) the ontological lesson would be meaningless. It is when *energeia-dynamis* irrigates other fields of application different from human action that it manifests its fecundity. What is essential is the very decentralization towards the bottom and towards the top, in Aristotle, by virtue of which *energeia-dynamis* indicates a foundation of being, which is at the same time powerful and effective, on which human action stands out. In other words, it appears equally important that human action is the privileged locus for the legibility of this meaning of being, because it is different from all the others, and that the human being as act and potency has other fields of implementation which are different from human action. There is a centrality of action and a decentralization in the direction of a foundation of action and potency which Aristotle himself defines as “first act” because it is different from all the others. This analogy attests to the fact that, if there is a being of “onself”, in other words, if an ontology is possible, it is in conjunction with a foundation of being starting from which the self (or “selfness”) can be defined as agent and patient.

If we decentralize the attestation of what “oneself can do” (of my capability and freedom) downwards and upwards of each of ourselves, we find ourselves at the top or bottom of the ipseity or self (*selfness*) of each of us, with a powerful and effective foundation of being, a first act (says Aristotle), which is not immersed in matter and is of a different kind with respect to the rest of nature. Everybody has the capacity to act according to what they are, therefore if our actions testify to justice, good and truth, it is necessary that the being with this capability that operates spiritually, which makes man a being that is in part heterogeneous to nature, is a being (*esse, actus essendi*) which emerges above corporal matter and is not dependent on the body or on the compound. Therefore this being belongs indissolubly to the intellectual soul, like roundness to a circle. The human soul is a “subsistent form” because it has the being for itself, which it transmits to the body and retains it in itself when the dead body is no longer capable of receiving life from the soul. St Thomas’ reasoning is very convincing: “the most perfect of forms, the human soul, which is the end of all natural forms, has an activity that goes entirely beyond matter, and does not take place through a corporeal organ; namely, understanding. And because the actual being of a thing is proportioned to its activity, as has been said, since each thing acts according as it is a being (*ens*), it must be the case that the actual being of the human soul surpasses corporeal matter, and is not totally included in it, but yet

in some way is touched upon by it. Inasmuch, then, as it surpasses the actual being of corporeal matter, having of itself the power to subsist and to act, the human soul is a spiritual substance; but inasmuch as it is touched upon by matter and shares its own actual being with matter, it is the form of the body”.¹⁵

This will be clear even if we consider the activity that is developed by the capability of the human being. The perfection of understanding and wanting as such resides in the ownership of what is intended as intelligible by the intellect and of what is loved as love in the lover. It thus corresponds to the human capability of having such a potentiality that is proportionate to the assumption of the intelligible and lovable reality. Now, “the potency of prime matter is not of this sort, for prime matter receives form by contracting it to the individual being. But an intelligible form is in the intellect without any such contraction; for thus the intellect understands each intelligible as its form is in it. Now the intellect understands the intelligible chiefly according to a common and universal nature, and so the intelligible form is in the intellect according to its universality. Therefore, an intellectual substance is not made receptive of form by reason of prime matter, but rather through a character which is, in a way, the opposite (*sed magis per oppositam viam*)”.¹⁶

Being an explorer of this metaphysical sublimity, St Thomas makes this astonishing statement regarding the highest dignity of the human being: “Thus therefore we see a certain gradation of infinity in things. For a material substance

¹⁵ St Thomas Aquinas, *De spiritualibus creaturis*, 2 co.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 1 co. In another parallel passage from the last period the Angelic Doctor expresses an analogous thought: “The matter of corporeal things, however, receives the form in a particular way, that is, not according to the common nature of form. Nor does corporeal matter act in this way insofar as it is subject to dimensions or to a corporeal form, since corporeal matter receives the corporeal form itself in an individual way. Accordingly, it becomes clear that this befits such a matter from the very nature of the matter which, since it is the lowest reality, receives form in the weakest manner; for reception takes place according to the mode of the receiver. Thereby matter, by receiving that form in a particular way, falls short in the greatest degree of that complete reception of form which is according to the totality of the form. Now it is clear that every intellectual substance receives the intellected form according to its totality, or otherwise it would not be able to know it in its totality. For it is thus that the intellect understands a thing insofar as the form of that thing exists in it. It remains therefore that if there be a matter in spiritual substances, it is not the same as the matter of corporeal things, but much nobler and finer, since it receives form according to its totality”, i.e. “*materia autem corporalium rerum suscipit formam particulariter, idest non secundum communem rationem formae. Nec hoc habet materia corporalis in quantum dimensionibus subiicitur aut formae corporali, quia etiam ipsam formam corporalem individualiter materia corporalis recipit. Unde manifestum fit quod hoc convenit tali materiae, ex ipsa natura materiae, quae quia est infima, debilissimo modo recipit formam: fit enim receptio secundum modum recipientis. Et per hoc maxime deficit a completa receptione formae, quae est secundum totalitatem ipsius particulariter ipsam recipiens. Manifestum est autem quod omnis substantia intellectualis recipit formam intellectam secundum suam totalitatem; alioquin eam in sua totalitate intelligere non valeret. Sic enim intellectus intelligit rem secundum quod forma eius in ipso existit. Relinquitur igitur quod materia, si qua sit in spiritualibus substantiis, non est eadem cum materia corporalium rerum, sed multo altior et sublimior, utpote recipientis formam secundum eius totalitatem” (De substantiis separatis, c. 7)*

is finite in a two-fold manner, namely, on the part of the form which is received in matter and on the part of the being itself, in which it shares according to its own mode, as being finite from below and from above. A spiritual substance, however – the Angel and the human soul– is finite from above, inasmuch as it receives “to be” from the First Principle according to its proper mode; it is infinite from below, insofar as it is not received in a [material] subject. But the First Principle, God, is infinite in every way”.¹⁷

The human person, therefore, from his first intellection and volition, that is, from the first passage from potency to act, with the dynamic perception of truth in good and of good in truth, perceives, in short, the *ens* and is in relation and in contact (he participates) with the Absolute. The will that has justice and good as its object, that is the *bonum*, the *ens perfectum et perfectivum*, is by itself, thanks to the being (*esse*), an act of the *ens* equipped with a subsistent form, which is not only *capax* in general in the horizontal order but also and especially *capax Dei*, that is, openly capable of the transcendent Absolute inasmuch as the end of all ends (i.e. the ultimate end) and therefore equipped with freedom which is the master of the act and the object. “But goodness, since it has the aspect of desirable, implies the idea of a final cause, the causality of which is first among causes, since an agent does not act except for some end; and by an agent matter is moved to its form. Hence the end is called the cause of causes (*causa causarum*).¹⁸ Thus goodness, as a cause, is prior to being, as is the end to the form”.¹⁹ Rather: “the power to which the principle end pertains always moves to act the power to which pertains that which is for the end, for example the military art moves the bridle-maker to operate. And in this way the will moves both itself and all the other powers: for I understand because I will to, and likewise I use all the other powers and habits because I will to do so”.²⁰ Therefore, justice as a human good and good as the object of will, is in the convergence of all

¹⁷ “Sic igitur apparet gradus quidam infinitatis in rebus. Nam materiales substantiae finitae quidem sunt dupliciter: scilicet ex parte formae, quae in materia recipitur, et ex parte ipsius esse, quod participat secundum proprium modum, quasi superius et inferius finita existens. Substantia vero spiritualis est quidem finita superius, in quantum a primo principio participat esse secundum proprium modum; est autem infinita inferius, in quantum non participatur in subiecto. Primum vero principium, quod Deus est, est modis omnibus infinitum” (*De substantiis separatis*, cap. 8). Cf. also the general principle: “According to the Philosopher (*Phys.* ii) there is a [metaphysical] order of precedence even in formal causes: so that nothing prevents a form resulting from the participation of another form: and thus God who is pure being, is in a fashion the species of all subsistent forms that participate of being [in a necessary way] but are not their own being [per essence]” i.e. “*secundum philosophum, etiam in causis formalibus prius et posterius invenitur; unde nihil prohibet unam formam per alterius formae participationem formari; et sic ipse Deus, qui est esse tantum, est quodammodo species omnium formarum subsistentium quae esse participant et non sunt suum esse*” (*De Pot.*, q. 6, a. 6 ad 5).

¹⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Met.*, II, 2 994 b 9 s.; *Eth. Nic.*, I, 5, 1097 a 56 ff.

¹⁹ *S.Th.*, I, 2, 5 ad 1.

²⁰ *De Malo*, q. 6, a. un. co.

the faculties and habits, including intelligence, regarding the unitary apprehension of the *ens*.

We might add that the transcendences which the activities of intelligence and will are capable of, in this dialectic of the transcendentals, in themselves, do not correspond fully to the praxis of the human person. In particular, the direction which is no longer scientific but metaphysical towards the soul and towards God, which constitutes the act of transcendence of the human being par excellence, is different when it refers to intelligence rather than will. The transcendence of intelligence as it is accomplished in speculative thought does not fully respond to the desire to possess and be gratified by the good on behalf of the human being's original wish. In this sense, will as a radical capability of the human being aspires to a real presence and to an immediate contact with God, Good per essence, without being completely satisfied by a presence that is merely mediated by intelligence with natural light. With St Thomas, as read in modern times, especially in post-Kantian and post-Kierkegaardian times, we can affirm that this supreme aspiration of the possession of God as absolute Good becomes something more than the mere intellectual contact, which always moves on this earth "in a mirror dimly, but then face to face".²¹ It is a real participation in the plenitude of life with God, similar to the one that can take place in the interpersonal relationship both from God to the world and, consequently, in the personal relationship from man to God just as from Son to Father. This is the participation of grace and friendship, both of "me to you", which gives sonority and splendour to the divine Symphony of the Psalms and of "us" that opens and concretizes the Lord's prayer and the divine liturgy, especially the Eucharistic one. It is this relationship to the capital Grace of Christ which constitutes the Church both militant and celestial and makes Christ the leader of humanity. Therefore the relation of practical reason with God is different from theoretical reason, which is what Kant tried to show by taking another path. Although the activity of theoretical reason is necessary and can and must operate in itself a certain objective presence of God, thus demonstrating its existence and its main attributes (against certain statements by the philosopher of Königsberg), as St Paul affirmed, and with him the great theologians, in the measure in which *cognitio contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente* and since the act of faith does not end in the enunciated but in reality itself (*actus fidei non terminatur ad enuntiabile sed ad rem*),²² this activity cannot thus operate in itself a presence "face to face" with the absolute as it is promised with the *lumen gloriae*, because it has the narrowness of the feeble natural light of intelligence (even though

²¹ Cf. 1 Cor 13, 12.

²² "*Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem: non enim formamus enuntiabilia nisi ut per ea de rebus cognitionem habeamus, sicut in scientia, ita et in fide*" (S. Th., II-II, 1, 2 ad 2).

the latter is reinvigorated by the light of grace), and of a certain disproportionate idea (and even of ghosts or images),²³ as the corollary of the very principle of *cognitum est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis*:²⁴ God would not be God if the human intellect could understand His Divine Essence directly as the *Ipsum Esse per se Subsistens*. Even though the human intellect can acquire more and more knowledge about the existence of God and His attributes during the course of its earthly life, it cannot directly understand His Essence.

The only way to operate an immediate Presence of God consists in transporting oneself towards Him through prayer, in reaching out to Him through the movement pertaining to freedom that is love. In a certain sense we must understand the union with God through prayer as a very high and direct form of union in love, not dragging the Divine to what we are, but rather establishing all the reality outside of us in God.²⁵ Only love and prayer establish an interpersonal relationship with God, analogous to the subsistent relationship of the Divine Persons – let us say the subsistent transcendentals – and suited to our ontological reality, which is a situation of indigence in the immediacy on behalf of the vision of God in theoretical activity, including with the help of faith. For every human being, prayer is thus the highest possible form of expressing love for God and the most adequate decision of freedom, as a response to the free gift of the natural and supernatural being (*esse naturae et gratiae*) and as a personal decision of becoming transparent with the Foundation. The decision towards God that the human being implements in prayer is the highest form of realizing his being *capax Dei* and his freedom, given its character of conscious response and active and complete abandonment in the gift of his own natural and supernatural being, to and in the Being per essence.

In the awareness that the love of God, especially in present life, is something more than its knowledge, although presupposing it, and since knowledge does not stop at created realities but, by using them, tends towards a higher reality thanks to the elevation of prayer, thus love starts precisely with God and then extends from Him to the other beings, in a sort of ascending and descending helical movement through the transcendentals: the knowledge of the truth starting from the creatures

²³ “Although by the revelation of grace in this life we cannot know of God “what He is”, and thus are united to Him as to one unknown; still we know Him more fully according as many and more excellent of His effects are demonstrated to us, and according as we attribute to Him some things known by divine revelation, to which natural reason cannot reach, as, for instance, that God is Three and One” (*S. Th.*, I, 12, 13 ad 1).

²⁴ *S. Th.*, I, 12, 4.

²⁵ “Oportet ergo ut intelligamus divina secundum hanc unionem gratiae, quasi non trahendo divina ad ea quae sunt secundum nos, sed magis totos nos statuantes extra nos in Deum, ita ut per praedictam unionem totaliter deificemur” (St Thomas Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 1).

rises towards the truth of God; and the love of justice and good, moving from God as from the final end, reaches the self, the human beings, our brothers and the world to insert them transparently in the common foundation of the Absolute.²⁶ Finally, and consequently, reflecting on the world, on human actions, and on the self, as effects caused by God, there is again a return to God as *Ipsum esse subsistens*, which is the fount of fullness and total possession of the perfections and actualities that operate in the world and in the self as participations of God, as images of the human being, as vestiges – that is, footsteps and fingerprints of God.

Thus each subsistent single individual, as Kierkegaard also demonstrated in modern times, has his vertical origin as a created person. Therefore the human being is *capax Dei*, capable of God, as it is rightly affirmed at the beginning of the *Compendium of the Catechism* promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI.

Peace is the Work of Truth and Justice

At this very grave moment in history, we must go from the truth to the good – justice, and from the good-justice to the truth. We must implement that circular movement that goes from the truth of science to the human good of justice and from justice to anthropological and scientific truth. Together with St Bernard we have to ask for the charity of knowledge and the knowledge of charity which “builds peace”. Peace is a gift of God offered to men and women of goodwill. St Bernard’s words are now addressed to all men and women of goodwill no matter their faith, and first and foremost to Christian men and women.

The science, which brings together those engaged in research, specialists and workers, which mobilises political and economic powers, which transforms society at all levels and in all its institutions, has a task today which is proving more urgent and indispensable than ever, namely the task of cooperating in preserving and building up peace.

From the depths of centuries past there rises the voice of an unarmed prophet, Isaiah: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”²⁷

²⁶ “*Quia dilectio Dei est maius aliquid quam eius cognitio, maxime secundum statum viae, ideo praesupponit ipsam. Et quia cognitio non quiescit in rebus creatis, sed per eas in aliud tendit, in illo dilectio incipit, et per hoc ad alia derivatur, per modum cuiusdam circulationis: dum cognitio, a creaturis incipiens, tendit in Deum; et dilectio, a Deo incipiens sicut ad ultimo fine, ad creaturas derivatur*” (St Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, II-II. 27 4 ad 2).

²⁷ Is 2:4.

In recent times, at a moment when war was imminent, there rose with biblical force the prophetic voice of an unarmed Pope Pius XI, who quoted the Psalm: *Dissipa gentes quae bella volunt*.²⁸

Unarmed prophets have been the object of derision in every age, especially on the part of shrewd politicians, the supporters of power. But today should not our civilisation recognise that humanity needs them? Should not they alone be heard by the whole of the world's scientific community, so that the laboratories and factories of death may give place to laboratories of life? The scientist can exercise his or her freedom to choose the field of his or her own research. When, in a particular historical situation, it is all but inevitable that a certain form of scientific research will be used for purposes of aggression, he or she must make a choice that will enable him or her to work for the good of people, for the building up of peace. An example of this is one of the most distinguished members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Franco Rasetti, a friend of Enrico Fermi, who firmly opposed the use of nuclear energy in war on the eve of the final stages of the Second World War and stated that, "Physics cannot sell its soul to the devil".²⁹ By refusing certain fields of research which, under concrete historical circumstances, are inevitably going to be devoted to deadly purposes, the scientists of the whole world should come together in a common readiness to disarm science and to form a providential force for peace.

Faced with this great patient in danger of death which is humanity as a whole, scientists, in collaboration with all the other members of the world of culture and with the social institutions, must carry out a work of salvation analogous to that of the doctor who has sworn to use all his powers to heal the sick.

Peace is born not only from the elimination of theatres of war. Even if all the latter were eliminated others would inevitably appear, if injustice and oppression continue to govern the world. Peace is born of justice: *Opus iustitiae pax*.³⁰

Now science, which seeks the truth and is free from all ideologies, can and must promote justice in the world; while not remaining a slave of the economically privileged peoples, it can and must spread everywhere, in order to ensure, through appropriate technological means, that all peoples and all individuals are given their due. The modern world awaits the liberation of science that is a result of the liberation of the mind and heart. The globalised world makes it possible more than ever to join forces in defending truth and freedom to build world peace through justice.

²⁸ Ps 67:31.

²⁹ Cf. Nicola Cabibbo, *Commemoration of Franco Rasetti*, in "The Cultural Values of Sciences", The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Scripta Varia 105, Vatican City 2003, p. XXXIV.

³⁰ Is 32:17.

With an acute sense of history, the Second Vatican Council warned us of this: “The common good of people is in its basic sense determined by the eternal law. Still the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on. Hence peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly”.³¹

Pax perpetuo aedificanda: peace has to be ceaselessly built up. Peace is a continuous effort which is entrusted to research, to technological applications aimed at promoting justice, through the authority of the sciences, with that freedom of thought and will that enables other choices to be made to contrast violence and the exploitation of research and discoveries against justice and human rights. Pope Benedict XVI adds that “Peace is a gift that God entrusts to the responsibility of human beings, so that they may cultivate it through dialogue and respect for everyone’s rights, reconciliation and forgiveness”.³² ■



H.E. Most Rev. Msgr. Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo is the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in Vatican City. He received in 1974 a Ph.D. in Sacred Theology at the St. Thomas Aquinas University of Rome with the maximum possible grade of *summa cum laude*. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Lateran University in Rome for three consecutive terms from 1987 to 1996. He is a full professor of the history of philosophy at the Libera Università Maria SS. Assunta in Rome. In 2001, he was consecrated by Pope John Paul II as Titular Bishop of Forum Novum.

³¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 78

³² Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 28 March 2010.