



FROM NATURAL LAW TO THE GOLDEN RULE: AQUINAS REVISITED

DA LEI NATURAL À REGRA DE OURO: S. TOMÁS REVISITADO

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Abstract. *These days, the Thomistic account of natural law is the object of renewed interest and criticisms. A number of objections are usually lodged against the idea of a human nature and a shared human good, in that it might seem that these ideas are unquestionably culturally related and that cultural boundaries cannot be crossed. At the same time, the concepts of 'human nature' and 'natural law' are often misunderstood to be related to human biology only. To overcome these issues, this paper aims to reinterpret the Thomistic doctrine of natural law as a form of the golden rule ('Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you'; 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you').*

Keywords: *natural law, Aquinas's ethics, golden rule, intercultural ethics.*

Sumário. *Atualmente, a concepção tomista da lei natural é objecto de interesse renovado e de novas críticas. As ideias de natureza humana e de um bem humano partilhado são alvo de várias críticas, na medida em que pode parecer que essas ideias são, definitivamente, relativas à cultura e que os limites da cultura local não podem ser ultrapassados. Ao mesmo tempo, os conceitos de 'natureza humana' e de 'lei natural' são frequentemente mal compreendidos, como se estivessem apenas ligados à biologia humana. Para ultrapassar estas questões, esta comunicação visa reinterpretar a doutrina tomista da lei natural como uma forma da regra de ouro ("Não faças aos outros o que não queres que te façam a ti").*

Palavras-chave: *lei natural, etica tomista, regra de ouro, etica intercultural.*

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o. From the Golden Rule to Natural Law¹

Enquiring into natural law and the golden rule ('Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you'; 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you') means investigating the primary sources of human action. The golden rule, which is part of the heritage of most cultures (Wattles 1996; Vigna 2005; Neusner & Chilton 2008; Gensler 2013; Puka n.d.) and encompasses the structure of an ethics of mutual recognition, shares with natural law a common history, at least within the Christian tradition. We can find the origins of this strong connection in the Patristic custom of a synoptic reading of two biblical settings (du Roy 2008, 2012). The first is St. Paul's letter to the Romans, at 2:14–15, in which the apostle holds that the Gentiles are a law unto themselves in that they do by nature what is ordered by the law because they have the law written in their hearts.² The second is Matthew 7:12, where the positive version of the golden rule is said to be the Law and Prophets.³ This interpretation goes back even to Justine the Apologist (100–165) and to Origen (185–245) and is accepted by the following fathers of the Church (Sciuto 2005; du Roy 2008), including the authorities Basil the Great and Augustine of Hippo.⁴ Thus, it becomes a common reference point for the thinkers that followed, from the medieval to the modern scholastics.⁵

Given these historical connections, in this paper I will revalue them theoretically by reinterpreting the Thomistic account of natural law as a form of the golden rule. To do this, my reference points will be the thought of the Italian ethicist Carmelo Vigna and that of Alasdair MacIntyre. The aims of this theoretical move are (a) to look for the idea of 'common human nature' without

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² 'For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them' (Rom. 2:14–15 New American Bible Version).

³ 'Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets' (Mt 7:12).

⁴ For a systematic perspective on the golden rule in Augustine, see Catapano 2005.

⁵ The case of the Spanish jurist Alfonso de Castro (1495–1558), who even rooted the golden rule in the proper structure of the natural law, seems noteworthy: according to him, the first precept of the natural law is the positive version of the golden rule (1568, book I, chap. I).

neglecting the differences in which it is embodied, and (b) to make room for the contemporary attention to intersubjectivity in the context of a discourse on natural law. First, I will sketch a brief anthropological outline. Second, my enquiry will test the potential for relating the golden rule to the resources of Thomistic natural law. Third, I will focus on objections to this reinterpretation. Finally, I will highlight the strengths of my proposal.

1. Anthropological Premises

The Thomistic doctrine of natural law should be understood within its specific metaphysical context. Indeed, considering natural law means considering the human being's peculiar way of being subjected to the divine government of the entire creation. This way is rooted in their metaphysical constitution itself: unlike inanimate things, plants, and animals, human beings are able to head towards their end by themselves, thanks to the dynamism of their freedom.

As just seen, the human being is part of the divine government in a specific way. The human being's specificity depends on its exceptional metaphysical status. It is important to understand the etymology of the adjective 'exceptional', which comes from the Latin verb *excipere*: 'taking (*capere*) out (*ex*)'. Accordingly, by its very constitution, the human being is 'the out-taken'. If the human being is the out-taken, then where is it taken out of? The answer may appear paradoxical: it is taken out of the self-closure of every nonrational creature, being at the same time everywhere and nowhere (ST, I 75.5; Pagani 2012, 2014). Far from the nonsense this expression may appear to be, it intends to highlight that the human being is entirely related to an infinite horizon—that is, the horizon of being, and of truth and good, as such (QDV, 1.1).

At this stage, we should note two things. First, here we can find the grounds of human freedom: indeed, being open to an infinite horizon entails that none of the finite realities that can be found within this horizon are bound to compel any human choice. The gap between this opening and the finite status of everything one can find within one's experience allows one to not be entirely captured by every finite reality and to be able to focus on a different choice (ST, I–II 10.2).

The only thing to which the human being is bound is that infinite horizon; therefore, it implies that the human being is looking for an infinite object, even when its eyes lay on a finite one (ST, I–II 10.1; QDV 25.1). Second, it is important to stress that the human being is entirely related to this horizon. This relation does not only involve humans' reason and will, but somehow all their faculties (ST, I 76 and 77.7). Thus, it appears impossible to divide, within the human being, a pure animality from a pure rationality: everything within it is marked by its openness to all being (DE II; De Finance 1993; Vigna 2015, 2016).

This infinite horizon attracts the human being. If we consider the relation in such a way, we can call it 'desire'. Nonetheless, it is a common experience that human desire cannot find a totally fulfilling object within its historical boundaries: such an object must be the plenitude of being in all its aspects. In Thomistic terms, this object must be 'what everyone calls God'. But there is an object in which the human being can find a trace of their appropriate one: another human being, one who is somehow infinite, if their own infinite openness is considered (Vigna 2015). Moreover, the other human being not only is one's historical end, but, in a certain way, one's principle: in fact, the other's sight, when it is a true sight, is what enables one to be aware of one's own 'ex-ceptionality'—that is, transcendental (Vigna 2015; Zanardo 2017).⁶

To summarise: (a) the human being is structurally and totally related to the infinite; (b) when this relation occurs as an appetite, it can be called 'desire'; (c) historically, human desire cannot find a totally fulfilling object; (d) nonetheless, the human being, within intersubjective relationships, can find a partner who makes them aware of their ontological stature and can partially fulfil their desire.

2. From Natural Law to the Golden Rule

Revaluing the historical connection that I have previously brought to light in a theoretical perspective could present many advantages concerning, for instance, the possibility of setting intersubjective and cross-cultural grounds for

⁶ The Hegelian teaching on intersubjectivity given in chapters IV and VI of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* appears to be an essential reference point to develop the Thomistic anthropological account (Hegel 2000).

doing ethics. However, one might ask why we need to deal with common human nature and with appealing to the ancient category of natural law when we could consider individual traditions with their specific sets of values and differences. My answer is threefold. First, if we want to consider the traditions in their uniqueness, we should also consider the premises of every social reality⁷—among them, the existence of others, given that people want to be in social relationships with them. Second, if we want to explain any cross-cultural relationship,⁸ we should admit to a common grammar of every cultural narrative: if two—or more—cultures were completely enclosed worlds, each exclusively governed by their specific logic, any encounter would be inexplicable since any ‘common ground’ (in the case of a cooperative relationship) or any ‘common bone of contention’ (in the case of a conflictual relationship) would be lacking.⁹ Third, if every tradition is to experience cross-cultural encounters as a tool of enhancement, it must be true that every different culture expresses the same common nature.¹⁰

Therefore, my starting point will be the same as Aquinas’s: ‘Bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum’ (ST, I–II 94.2). That is, ‘Good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided’. Indeed, according to Thomas Aquinas, this principle encompasses the entire natural law. Every other specific tenet is nothing more than an expression of this fundamental precept, a precept

⁷ It is a fundamental point highlighted by MacIntyre: ‘If we are to achieve an understanding of good in relation to ourselves as being, as animal, and as rational we shall have to engage with other members of the community in which our learning has to go on in such a way as to be teachable learners. And thus we accomplish the first realization of our good by the most elementary way respecting the good of those others in encounter with whom we have to learn. What we grasp initially in understanding the binding force of the precepts of the natural law are the conditions for entering a community’ (1990, 136–37).

⁸ It is important to stress that I speak of any relationship, regardless of its quality; indeed, both agreement and disagreement presuppose a common reference point (MacIntyre 1988, 1990, 2009).

⁹ MacIntyre writes: ‘Aquinas’ account of the precepts of the natural law, far from being inconsistent with the facts of moral disagreement, provides the best starting point for the explanation of these facts’ (2009, 26); ‘When confronted by some immediate disagreement as to what you or I or we should do here and now, reason requires us to ask who is in the right, and the argument then proceeded by our further noting that, if we are to enquire effectively who is in the right, we must do so in the company of others and more especially of those others with whom we are in disagreement.... It is a condition of the rationality of shared enquiry that the social relationships of those engaged in it should be structured by certain norms, norms that find expression in the primary precepts of the natural law’ (2009, 24–25; see also 2000).

¹⁰ From this perspective, the existence of a common human nature seems to be the theoretical ground of the MacIntyrean dialectic among different traditions, in which every tradition can compare its resources with those of a different one. If a specific tradition were not able to recognise in a diverse one a different way of enquiring into the same aims, the comparison of their resources would be nonsensical (MacIntyre 1988, 1989, 2006).

that reveals the structural human tendency towards good in general.¹¹ As already seen, we can also call this tendency ‘desire’, which, conceived as a tendency towards good *in general*, has an unlimited capacity. Being the appetite for a boundless object, desire brings about the possibility of encompassing every action, practice, or project of life, for they remain, in any case, in the realm of the finite being.

It might seem this conception of desire can be easily accepted these days because of its structural indefiniteness. On the contrary, it appears problematic to posit that this boundlessly open desire expresses itself through a number of more definite tendencies that are universally shared by all human beings as such. Therefore, nowadays there is a need to focus on which particular needs are truly universal.¹² Furthermore, even if we agreed on a number of universal needs, the question of how to live them well would remain open. Finally, the current awareness of the cultural dimension requires that we pay more attention to the role that the concrete ethos plays in knowing and appreciating the human goods.

The Thomistic doctrine of natural law allows room for the above three issues. Aquinas holds that (a) there are a number of human ontologically rooted needs¹³ (according to Aquinas’s jargon, *inclinationes naturales*; ST, I–II 94.2, co), (b) there is a just—that is, rational—manner of living them in the context of

¹¹ ‘All these precepts of the law of nature have the character of one natural law, inasmuch as they flow from one first precept’ (ST, I–II 94.2 ad 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province).

¹² Here ‘universal’ means ‘transcendental’—that is, ‘what is common beyond the differences’.

¹³ ‘I answer that, As Boethius says (De Duabus Nat.) and the Philosopher also (Metaph. v, 4) the word “nature” is used in a manifold sense. For sometimes it stands for the intrinsic principle in movable things. In this sense nature is either matter or the material form, as stated in Phys. ii, 1. In another sense nature stands for any substance, or even for any being. And in this sense, that is said to be natural to a thing which befits it in respect of its substance. And this is that which of itself is in a thing. Now all things that do not of themselves belong to the thing in which they are, are reduced to something which belongs of itself to that thing, as to their principle. Wherefore, taking nature in this sense, it is necessary that the principle of whatever belongs to a thing, be a natural principle. This is evident in regard to the intellect: for the principles of intellectual knowledge are naturally known. In like manner the principle of voluntary movements must be something naturally willed. Now this is good in general, to which the will tends naturally, as does each power to its object; and again it is the last end, which stands in the same relation to things appetible, as the first principles of demonstrations to things intelligible: and, speaking generally, it is all those things which belong to the willer according to his nature. For it is not only things pertaining to the will that the will desires, but also that which pertains to each power, and to the entire man. Wherefore man wills naturally not only the object of the will, but also other things that are appropriate to the other powers; such as the knowledge of truth, which befits the intellect; and to be and to live and other like things which regard the natural well-being; all of which are included in the object of the will, as so many particular goods’ (ST, I–II 10.1 co).

the moral life,¹⁴ and (c) there is a direct proportionality between the knowledge of natural law and the context of practices (be they individual or social) in which it is comprehended. Indeed, Aquinas holds that, on the one hand, virtuous practices deepen people's knowledge and appreciation of human good,¹⁵ and, on the other, vicious practices (*ex mala consuetudine*) are bound to involve a number of difficulties in knowing and appreciating what is really good.¹⁶

However, many difficulties arise in any attempt to articulate and single out specific human needs. In this respect, the golden rule, considered from an intersubjective philosophical perspective, could provide us with valuable ways of rearticulating this Thomistic doctrine while offering solutions to its problems.

In its primary function, the golden rule can help us to discover the structural needs of the human being, untangling them from different customs and individual tastes. Our starting point can be the positive formulation of the golden

14 'All the inclinations of any parts whatsoever of human nature, e.g. of the concupiscible and irascible parts, in so far as they are ruled by reason, belong to the natural law, and are reduced to one first precept, as stated above: so that the precepts of the natural law are many in themselves, but are based on one common foundation' (ST, I-II 94.2 ad 2).

15 'I answer that, We may speak of virtuous acts in two ways: first, under the aspect of virtuous; secondly, as such and such acts considered in their proper species. If then we speak of acts of virtue, considered as virtuous, thus all virtuous acts belong to the natural law. For it has been stated that to the natural law belongs everything to which a man is inclined according to his nature. Now each thing is inclined naturally to an operation that is suitable to it according to its form: thus fire is inclined to give heat. Wherefore, since the rational soul is the proper form of man, there is in every man a natural inclination to act according to reason: and this is to act according to virtue. Consequently, considered thus, all acts of virtue are prescribed by the natural law: since each one's reason naturally dictates to him to act virtuously. But if we speak of virtuous acts, considered in themselves, i.e. in their proper species, thus not all virtuous acts are prescribed by the natural law: for many things are done virtuously, to which nature does not incline at first; but which, through the inquiry of reason, have been found by men to be conducive to well-living' (ST, I-II 94.3 co; see also Campodonico 2013).

16 'We must say that the natural law, as to general principles, is the same for all, both as to rectitude and as to knowledge. But as to certain matters of detail, which are conclusions, as it were, of those general principles, it is the same for all in the majority of cases, both as to rectitude and as to knowledge; and yet in some few cases it may fail, both as to rectitude, by reason of certain obstacles (just as natures subject to generation and corruption fail in some few cases on account of some obstacle), and as to knowledge, since in some the reason is perverted by passion, or evil habit, or an evil disposition of nature; thus formerly, theft, although it is expressly contrary to the natural law, was not considered wrong among the Germans, as Julius Caesar relates (*De Bello Gall. vi*)' (ST, I-II 94.4 co). 'I answer that, As stated above, there belong to the natural law, first, certain most general precepts, that are known to all; and secondly, certain secondary and more detailed precepts, which are, as it were, conclusions following closely from first principles. As to those general principles, the natural law, in the abstract, can nowise be blotted out from men's hearts. But it is blotted out in the case of a particular action, in so far as reason is hindered from applying the general principle to a particular point of practice, on account of concupiscence or some other passion, as stated above. But as to the other, i.e. the secondary precepts, the natural law can be blotted out from the human heart, either by evil persuasions, just as in speculative matters errors occur in respect of necessary conclusions; or by vicious customs and corrupt habits, as among some men, theft, and even unnatural vices, as the Apostle states (*Romans 1*), were not esteemed sinful' (ST, I-II 94.6 co).

rule:¹⁷ ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’. At first sight, the golden rule might appear an empty tenet. However, if we proceed to invert its maxim, we will have an effective heuristic tool: ‘As you would have them do unto you, so do you unto others’. If we take into account the inverted maxim in its first part, the golden rule basically orders one to put oneself in the other’s place and to look at oneself from the perspective of one who recognises us (Vigna 2005, 2008, 2015). Although this discovering process lives within concrete relationships, we can attempt to outline how it works.

Why do we need to invert the maxim? The answer is based on the anthropological account outlined before: far from being only a set of categorial needs, the human being, qua human being, has a transcendental—that is, boundlessly open—desire that looks for a fulfilling object. This object—within our actual experience—can only be another human being (Vigna 2015). This fact reveals the need for intersubjective relationships to fulfil human desire. However, not just any relationship can satisfy human desire, but only a relationship of mutual recognition, since it is necessary that the other be allowed to maintain their stature.¹⁸ If one is considered a mere object, one will be reduced to a completely finite being and bound to disappoint the other’s infinite desire. Given this ontologically grounded starting point, we can consider what one who recognises us has to do unto us. First of all, one must allow our *existence* in our *dignity*—the former since the existence of a partner is a necessary condition for any relationship, and the latter since one has to grant oneself a partner in their stature as a transcendental subjectivity. Furthermore, to have a balanced relationship, one must accept a mutuality. In this way, the other must recognise our relationality and safeguard our equality. What is more, such a relationship entails wishing to deepen the true good of the partner in order to be oriented towards reciprocal flourishing. Hence the knowledge of one’s own true good is considered vital. In the end, a balanced relationship calls for the possibility of

¹⁷ Indeed, the negative one (‘Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you’) depends on this positive formulation, whose is the safeguarding side (Vigna 2015).

¹⁸ Vigna writes: ‘The mutual-recognition relationship would seem to be *the only practical intersubjective relation in which two (or more) subjectivities are able to coexist in all the magnificence of their universality/transcendentality*. Each subjectivity needs to be recognized as an unsurpassable horizon of meaning, that is as intentionally unconditioned (and this is so on account of the universality/transcendentality present in it)’ (2008, 217).

cultivating a religious dimension, understood in the broadest sense. As we have already seen, human desire has unlimited width and looks for a fulfilling object—that is, within our actual experience, another human being. Nonetheless, the other human being is not entirely unlimited, for they are also situated within specific boundaries (first and foremost, within the boundaries of their mortal life). Thus, the possibility of an enquiry into the existence of a subjectivity that really is unlimited regarding all aspects must be left open.

By this deepening of the relationship of mutual recognition, we have been able to bring to light the same fundamental spheres of needs as those Aquinas sketches out in several places in his works—existence, life, knowledge, and so on¹⁹ (see, e.g., ST, I-II 10.1; QDV, 22.5; QDM 16.4 ad 5; ST, I-II 94.2).

The golden rule provides us not only with a tool of discovery, but with a regulative one. Having highlighted the basic objects of human desire, we should ask ourselves how they ought to be sought. For instance, we saw that life is one of these fundamental needs. We should take care of it by staying healthy, by avoiding dangers, by being concerned for our own safety, and so on. However, this inclination ought to be lived not as if it were the only human good, but within the overall architectonic structure of human needs. The standpoint of the other who recognises us is able to help us to reach an ordered desire. The otherness of the other's perspective guarantees less involvement with our own specific situation. Therefore, the perspective can provide an impartial view of what we need. At the same time, this other perspective does not turn out to be extraneous and cold, for it is coloured by an attitude of care.²⁰

¹⁹ The goods concerning the human relationships are, within this perspective, at the same time a class among the human goods and the context in which all the human needs can be discovered.

²⁰ In this way Vigna stresses the regulative role of the (friendly) mediation of one's own desire: 'Since we are usually aware that passions affect judgement, we ask a friend for a counsel, because a friend not directly involved in the passions that affect us in that given moment is in a better position to cast an "objective" eye on the matter, or he is simply in a better position anyway.... [B]ut there is also a second reason to be considered. If the object of my desire is not for the sake of me, but of others, I will surely be inclined to avoid any kind of excess in using my strengths, since the strengths are mine whereas the object is for others, but not for me. In short, a certain wise economy in the energy I put into my efforts is definitely to be expected.... A third reason is that, when we do something for the other's sake, we generally do so in response to a more or less explicit request. But this request always comes with, and looks like, a burden, a limitation on our freedom of movement; we quickly perceive the excess contained in the requests coming from the others, and we feel deprived of our freedom to decide correctly on the appropriate response. We do want to do something for the others, but at the same time we make an effort to understand what they *really* need, precisely so as not to live that constriction as violence brought to bear upon ourselves. This is why, when acting for the benefit of others, we naturally tend to follow a reasonable

Finally, as partially said before, the golden rule reminds us of the essential role of involvement in a concrete relationship in order to know human needs. First and foremost, the relationship has to be concrete: if it were only envisaged speculatively, the golden rule would be bound to be a self-centred mental experiment, whereas one of the main features of this principle is the mediation of one's own desire through another's perspective. Moreover, this concrete relationship also has to be oriented towards mutual existence and flourishing. Using classical jargon, we can say that one's relationship must involve a virtuous²¹ partner. Conversely, being involved with a vicious²² partner (that is, one who does not recognise us) would contradict the very nature of the golden rule. Indeed, in this situation, if one wants to know one's own good, one will refer to the perspective of another who is disinterested or, even worse, hostile; as a result, one will turn out to desire what one in truth would not desire.

3. Objections

Besides the opportunities for an intercultural and intersubjective approach to natural law, it seems that the objection can be raised that this interpretation is able to work only within virtuous practices (or ethos). It appears that the possibility of referring back to some sure guidelines for behaviour is, in a certain way, undermined because it depends on a previous favourable attitude towards the other. In Hegelian terms, it depends on the willingness to recognise the other as a transcendental subjectivity (Vigna 2015).

Conversely, it can be also noted that no strong justification of the structural human tendencies can be found in Thomistic works unless we consider the metaphysical framework of the human soul.²³ To sketch his anthropological

consideration of their needs, which we never abandon. So it is that we arrive, almost physiologically, at a measure of "normality" contained in the [Golden] Rule both as an objective and as a result' (2008, 220).

²¹ Within the Thomistic perspective, the virtue in question is that of 'friendliness' (*affabilitas*), a part of the virtue of justice. See ST, II-II 114.

²² Generally speaking, according to Aquinas, vices opposed to friendliness are 'flattery' (*adulatio*; ST, II-II 115) and 'quarrelling' (*litigium*; ST, II-II 116).

²³ On this metaphysical structure many natural-law theorists of the modern age used to base directly the main principles of the natural law: the abstract essence of the human being was considered the reference point for a deduction (e.g., Suárez 1872, book II, chap. VIII ; Grotius 1712, book I, chap. I, § XII). This attitude contributed in tightening up the doctrine of natural law, which certainly turned

model, Aquinas starts from the shared ethos of his time, which does not require any particular effort in identifying what the specific fundamental needs of human beings are. This might explain also why Aquinas makes a sketch, rather than a precise list of these human needs.

Returning to the objection, does this interpretation require too stringent conditions, since a relationship of mutual recognition is needed? It does not seem so, if we refer to the nature of human desire, which is boundlessly open to all things. As said earlier, its fulfilling object—within our concrete experience—is another human being, who has to be treated with regard to his or her ontological stature. If the other is treated like a mere finite being, a very significant gap between the request of desire and the subsequent response will remain. Thus the attitude is bound to bring about dissatisfaction, which might open the possibility of reconsidering one's approach to the other from a different perspective: that of recognition.

To summarise: It is true that this proposal can work only within a virtuous intersubjective context. Nonetheless, it seems also that every vicious practice (or ethos) is unstable because of the disequilibrium in relationships it brings about. Thus, the requests of human desire may turn the tide towards mutual recognition, which is the starting point for building virtuous human practices.

4. Positive Suggestions

Turning to the strengths of our interpretation, we can first of all say that it can play a significant role in building an intercultural ethics, avoiding at the same time abstract perspectives and relativistic solutions. In fact, since the golden rule is part of the heritage of most cultures, every human tradition is internally provided with a resource that is simultaneously particular (that is, formulated in a certain way, with unique connections to its symbolic universe) and universal. This resource can become a vital starting point for a shared ethics, following the

out to lose its historical plasticity—for example, within the system of Christian Wolff (1744, pt. I, chap. II). These versions of the doctrine of natural law deeply influenced the following theorists and contributed to the consideration of the natural law as a rigid discourse incompatible with the challenges of historical and cultural diversity (Fuchs 1996). For a contribution to overcoming this idea of natural law, see Hall 1994.

MacIntyrean aim to find a moral universality within the different traditions (MacIntyre 1990).

Second, this interpretation does justice to human nature's ordinate intertwining of transcendental and empiricity. The primacy of the transcendental dimension²⁴ within human nature justifies the enquiry into all human needs within the context of intersubjectivity. Moreover, the fact that the human being is entirely related to the transcendental horizon explains the concern about understanding the different cultural interpretations of human needs: in fact, being related to the transcendental horizon means these needs have a symbolic dimension. Given the intersubjective nature of the human being, it appears inevitable that that symbolic dimension flourishes within intersubjective practices.²⁵

Third, it seems this reading could easily connect natural law, virtues, and traditions, seen as a unified development, in that we can distinguish natural law as the condition of possibility (see ST, I–II 94.3) of a disposition to act morally—that is, virtue. In turn, the virtues underpin different practices, which give substance to each particular tradition (MacIntyre 2007).

I can conclude that the connection between natural law and the golden rule may open new possibilities in both the debates on intercultural ethics and on natural law. As we saw, this perspective is not devoid of weaknesses; nonetheless, it promises further fruitful results in the future.

²⁴ Within its history, the natural law has often been interpreted in an anthropological background in which the transcendental dimension of the human being is neglected. Upon neglecting this dimension, the cultural elaboration of human needs turns out to be forgotten and the natural law runs the risk of being considered as a mere focus on human biology.

²⁵ Jean Porter remarks correctly: 'While the scholastics hold that we can understand our fundamental inclinations by analogy with the inclinations exhibited by nonrational animals, they also recognize that even the most fundamental human inclinations are not experienced as the other animals would experience them. Normal adults experience these inclinations in and through the mediation of some kind of rational reflection, and this experience is further qualified and shaped by the cultural forms through which the inclination is expressed. In this way, even our most basic inclinations are inextricably bound up with the exigencies of our life as rational and social creatures, and we cannot adequately interpret them unless we see them within the context of human life considered as a whole' (2005, 75). See also Hall 1994.

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