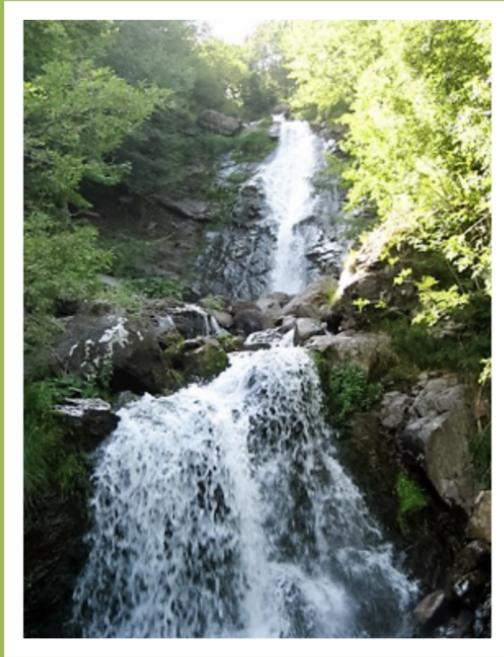

ROSMINI TODAY



At the Springs of Knowledge

A Presentation of Rosmini's Epistemology

AA Belsito I.C.



AT THE SPRINGS OF KNOWLEDGE
WRITTEN BY
ANTONIO BELSITO IC



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2015**

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Blessed Antonio Rosmini

FOREWORD

This is the second book of the series, "*Rosmini Today*" and it deals with Rosmini's foundational work on philosophy, published in Rome in 1830, with the title, "*A New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas*". The work, in three volumes, had an immediate success both in Italy and abroad, and many Universities and Seminaries adopted it as a textbook for their students.

It is a philosophical masterpiece, and the foundation of all his subsequent writings. Rosmini is known as the philosopher of the "*idea of being*", and it is no exaggeration to say that the whole of his powerful system of truth is founded on the discovery of this prodigious idea. The idea of being solves the problem of epistemology, which is the main concern of this work.

It was J Locke who had argued that before committing ourselves to the production of books on philosophy or theology we should first investigate the boundaries and the limits of human wisdom, to avoid the risk of talking nonsense. Epistemology is the science which studies the origin and the status of all our ideas, to find out how secure are the foundations of our knowledge. Is our knowledge truthful? Is the human mind capable of arriving at the truth?

Rene' Descartes started his philosophy by doubting the knowledge he thought he had, subjecting it to a most thorough investigation. The result was, at first, radical scepticism, until he found what he thought was an unassailable truth, "*Cogito, ergo Sum*" [I think, therefore I am]. David Hume and Bishop Berkeley started their works on philosophy by making enquiries on the origin of ideas and on the status of human understanding. The former ended up with radical scepticism, the latter with Idealism which denied the existence of matter.

It is hugely important to produce the “right” epistemology, just as it is hugely important not to build the house on sand. Rosmini’s epistemology is the work of a genius, is solid rock on which to build a system of truth embracing all the fields of human knowledge, from metaphysics to ethics, from psychology to anthropology, from the philosophy of right to politics, from the essence of the human person to natural and supernatural theology.

It was Pius VIII who, in 1829, had urged Rosmini to write books on philosophy, theology, and spirituality. This is how Rosmini remembered their meeting, many years (and many books!) later:

“I still remember his loving and authoritative words: ‘It is the will of God that you write books, this is your vocation. The Church has a great need of writers, I mean, solid writers so extremely few in number. In order to influence people usefully there is no other means today but to take them by means of reason, and by this means to lead them to religion. Be assured that you will benefit your neighbour far more successfully by writing than by exercising any other work of pastoral ministry’” (Introduction to Philosophy, 1850).

Rosmini was in full agreement with the Pope about the need to “take people by means of reason, and by this means to lead them to religion”. He based his philosophy on careful observation and stringent reasoning, advancing his argument not by means of assertions or unproved opinions but by logical analysis and clear conclusions. His criticism of J Locke and D Hume touched on the fact that both had started their philosophical works by accepting as true the statement, “All ideas come to us through the senses”, without bothering to subject it to a critical and thorough analysis to ascertain whether it was true or false.

Rosmini's philosophy is based on reason, and is meant for everyone. There is no hidden agenda, but natural progression. Truth does not require devious ways; it is as clear as light, dispelling the darkness of the mind. We have seen that the system of truth investigated by Rosmini is based on the idea of being, the light which shines before the mind making it "*intelligent*". This light, which comes from without, and is linked to the intellect forever, is the source of human dignity and equality, since it is "*the light that enlightens every man who comes into this world*".

Human reason, enlightened by the truth, can greatly expand its knowledge of all things in the universe; yet, it will not be satisfied until it reaches the full truth about the big questions which make human beings restless and searching for meaningful answers. It is at this stage, and quite naturally, that reason opens up to religion and to God, who alone can fill the human heart and the human mind.

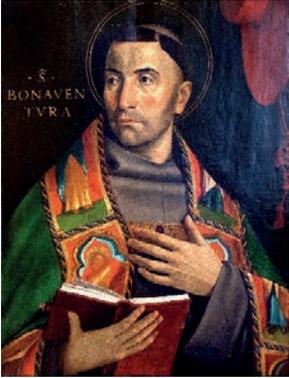
This is what St. Augustine meant when he wrote, "*Fecisti nos Domine ad Te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te*" [Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you]. There cannot be any conflict between reason and faith, between science and religion, since God is the maker of the one and the other. St. John Paul II expressed the same truth in his Encyclical "*Fides et Ratio*":

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth – in a word, to know himself – so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves".

St. Bonaventure had used the same approach when he wrote his "*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*" [The journey of the mind to God]. And it was Cardinal Newman's teaching that the

way to God begins with reason: "...How are we to arrive at truth at all except by reason? It is the appointed method for our guidance" (J H Newman, in 'Loss and Gain').

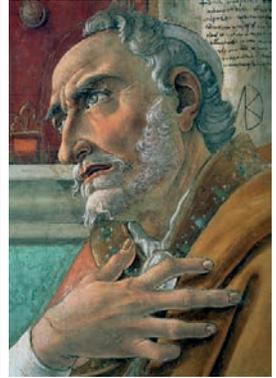
AA Belsito



St. Bonaventure



Blessed Newman



St. Augustine

Introduction

SUMMARY

1. The theory of the "Big Bang" has revolutionized the way we understand the origin of the universe and of all things within it. If true, the evolution of galaxies, stars, planets, and of all matter from an original "single point" appears to the mind as a very clever, economical, and awe inspiring way of creating the universe.

2. Long before the theory of the "Big Bang", Antonio Rosmini had formulated a similar theory in the formation of the immense universe of "ideas" from a "single point", which he called the "idea of being". According to Rosmini, all ideas, and all knowledge have their origin in the idea of being.

3. Ideas have their own existence, we carry them in our mind and they are the source of what we know. The idea of Africa contains all that we know about Africa. They stand before the mind in their objectivity and universality: Babylonians, Egyptians, Chinese, Mexicans had the same idea of man, woman, star, sea, tree, dog, mountain, etc.

4. Ideas are perennial features of the mind, and many philosophers have tried to study them closely to ascertain their origin, their status in relation to the truth. Since ideas contain all that we know, it is important to investigate their truth claim. Is our knowledge truthful? Is our mind made for truth? Are we, perhaps, condemned to scepticism, to the fact that we are incapable of arriving at any truth?

5. Epistemology is the foundation of philosophy and deals with the origin and status of all our ideas. It is clear that if we cannot solve the problem of the origin of ideas there is no point in dealing any further with the study of any science. Doubts about the validity of our knowledge have awful consequences and may bring man and woman to despair.

6. Antonio Rosmini dedicated three volumes to the problem of the origin of ideas. He provided a solution to the problem of epistemology which has the hallmark of the genius.

The Big Bang Theory

In his book, *“New Proofs for the Existence of God”*, Robert J Spitzer argues that the word *“theory”* applied to the *“Big Bang”* should not be taken to mean *“hypothesis”* but a set of firm conclusions about a *“historical event”* which has been accepted by cosmologists on the basis of *“very solidly established and well-tested explanations of a body of phenomena”*.

According to the Big Bang theory, all the matter we see in the universe today would have been in the same place about 13.7 billion years ago. At that point, all the matter was compressed into a fantastically dense, hot mass, which flew apart with inconceivable speed, an explosion.

Fr Georges Lemaitre, the Belgian physicist (and priest) who proposed the Big Bang theory, called this dense hot mass the *“primeval atom”*, a *“single point”*. It was from this *“single point”* that galaxies, stars, planets, trees, animals, and all the vast array of things in the universe have their origin.

We need not enter into a discussion about the merits of the theory; but the creation of the universe, with its infinite variety of things, by means of a *“single point”*, seems a very clever, elegant, and economical way. Early Greek philosophers often spoke of the *“one”* and the *“many”*, of *“unity”* and *“totality”*, debating the possibility that all things may have had their source from one primordial element.

The *“single point”* of all knowledge

If we now consider the *“universe”* of the mind, where we discover an endless variety of ideas, which are the

building blocks of our knowledge, and of the wide spectrum of specialized disciplines such as geography, biology, philosophy, theology, music, art, anthropology, cosmology, literature, morality, religion, aesthetics, physics, mathematics, and many others, we may wonder whether we may be able to detect a "*single point*" which is the source of all ideas, of all knowledge, thus finding the "*totality*" of all our cognitions in the "*unity*" of a "*single*" idea.

Long before the theory of the physical Big Bang, Rosmini discovered "*the single point*" which is the source of all thought, of all ideas in the "*universe*" of the mind. He called this "*single point*" the Idea of Being, and after establishing the validity of his discovery, he went on to prove how this wonderful idea is the original principle of all major sciences, from epistemology to anthropology, from ethics to the philosophy of right, from psychology to natural theology.

The idea of being had been the object of philosophical enquiry from the early Greek philosophers to St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, and others: they had perceived the supreme importance of this apparently simple idea, but it is only fair to say that it was Rosmini who reaped the benefits of a thorough and deep investigation of it. We shall say more about this as we progress in this work.

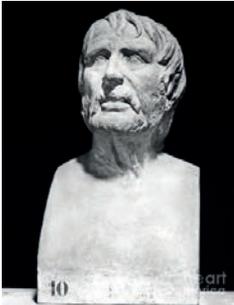


Preliminary Remarks about Ideas

It is a fact that we have a great number of ideas in our mind, and that ideas are what constitute our knowledge. Let us bring to the fore the idea of Africa: at once we draw our attention to all that we know about Africa, e.g. hot continent, extensive deserts, equatorial forests, tropical birds, wild animals, slavery, colonialism, tribes, etc. The more refined is our idea of Africa the more we know. Yet, the idea often lies dormant in the mind; it is there, but we become aware of it only when the opportunity arises.

Ideas are not “*nothing*”. They do not have the “*physical*” existence of the book I am holding now, yet they do have their own mode of existence. My knowledge of Africa is “*ideal*”, but it is knowledge which I carry with me no matter where I am. It was Seneca who was credited with the expression, “*Omnia mea mecum porto*” [I carry with me all my knowledge]. It is estimated that the poet Dante had in his mind the equivalent of 4,000 books in order for him to write his masterpiece, “*The Divine Comedy*”, composed

during his many years of exile, constantly on the move from place to place.



SENECA



DANTE

All ideas have their own objective existence, and they stand before our mind as something different from it. The idea of book is universal, is seen by millions of minds, it has been contemplated by minds in the past, it is seen now, and it will always be the same for future minds. It is true that shapes and material that make up a book vary constantly; what does not change is the essential idea of book. It is the same with all other ideas, e.g. of fish, of lion, of tree, of moon, of stars, etc. The idea of man or of woman was common to Babylonians, Chinese, Indians, Greeks, Romans, Europeans, and Americans throughout their history. It is, therefore, a universal idea, with an existence of its own, although it requires a mind to think it.

Ideas constitute all that we know, and philosophers have attempted to discover their origin in order to ascertain the status of all our knowledge. J Locke, D Hume, G Berkeley, E Kant, R Descartes, A J Ayer, B Russell all wrote books about the origin and status of ideas.

Rosmini's philosophical masterpiece, published in Rome in 1830, had the title, "*A New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas*". In the first of the three volumes, Rosmini presented

a most stringent criticism of the views of Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Stewart, Reid, D'Alembert, and Condillac, all philosophers who tried but failed to solve the problem of the origin of ideas. Having rejected the possibility of "innate" ideas, they were left with the "senses" as the only possible source of ideas.

Rosmini was also unyielding in his criticism of philosophers who had admitted the existence of "innate" ideas, like Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, Descartes, and Kant; for Rosmini, they too failed to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem either because they had admitted too many "innate" ideas or had explained their origin in a purely subjective way.

It is common to label philosophers of the first kind "empiricists", and the others "rationalists". It seems a fair conclusion to say that "empiricism" has been and still is the philosophical mark of the English-speaking world. A J Ayer, a modern exponent of Logical Positivism, admitted that his philosophy followed the principles set out by J Locke and D Hume: *"The view of philosophy which we have adopted may, I think, fairly be described as a form of empiricism. For it is a characteristic of an empiricist to eschew metaphysics, on the ground that every proposition must refer to sense-experience"* (A J Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p.96, Penguin Books, 1946)

The empiricist strand in the philosophical writings of the English-speaking world has produced devastating results. The failure to produce a true and full solution to the problem of the origin of ideas has caused a widespread scepticism about ideas and knowledge. Truth is, by definition, universal, immutable, necessary: but how are we to arrive at truth merely by means of sense-experience which is always particular, subjective, and mutable?

It is obvious that the status of ideas in relation to truth is the fundamental problem in philosophy. Is our knowledge true? Are human minds capable of arriving at the truth? Should we discover, by whatever means, that truth is unreachable or non-existent, we ought to give up all our efforts to acquire more knowledge or to communicate knowledge by means of books, debates, discussions, education.

In his book, *"What is Truth?"* P Vardy, the vice-Chancellor of Heythrop College in London, presented a very bleak scenario of the philosophical views about truth in University circles and modern day writings. The predominant conviction is that any quest for truth is folly; the most we can hope for is relative truth, valid only for those who share the same beliefs or the same form of life.

We shall use some of his findings to illustrate the deep crisis about truth which seems to be the mark of our present culture. The result should be the desire to know better Rosmini's epistemology which is anchored firmly and securely on truth.

Welcome to the world of IDEAS! It is a real world, which knows no boundaries, open only to intelligent beings. We share the senses with animals, but the intellect with Angels and with God. It is worth pursuing that which constitutes the essential characteristic of our human nature. This book deals with IDEAS, their origin and their status in relation to the TRUTH.

Chapter 1

The Crisis about Truth

Summary

1. *The crisis about truth is a dominant feature of our modern world. For some people truth is irrelevant, we are guided by the beliefs of the society in which we live. There is no point in debating whether, over and above our daily routine practices, there is something which is objectively true and universally binding. The quest for truth is not only bound to fail; it is folly.*

2. *The prevalent view among English-speaking philosophers is that truth is constructed, made up by groups, by society, by the individual. It is, therefore, relative. This conclusion applies to religion, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics.*

3. *Religions are true, all of them, relatively to their followers. No one religion is truer than the others; the most we can say is that we like one religion more than we like another. It is a matter of taste, as well as an accident of birth.*

4. *Relativism about truth is originated by faulty epistemologies, and it leads to scepticism and despair. Empiricists are responsible for the modern confusion about truth, but, unfortunately, they have gained the support of many English-speaking philosophical circles.*

5. *Rationalists, on the other hand, have also failed in their attempt to secure firm foundations to knowledge. The epistemological conundrum is not solved by admitting as innate all or some ideas; it is essential that the origin and status of each idea is clearly and persuasively established. Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, and Kant came closer to the solution, but failed to provide full answers about the origin of all ideas.*

6. Rosmini's epistemology is solid and secure. The discovery of the idea of being, solved the immediate epistemological problem; moreover, it opened up the way to all other branches of knowledge, providing foundations to ethics, to rights, to politics, to personhood, to natural and supernatural religion, to ontology, and to metaphysics.

"What is truth?"

"What is truth?" The reading of the Passion on Good Friday puts the question on the lips of Pontius Pilate during the trial of Jesus. It was not an invitation to engage in a discussion about truth; it was meant to be a dismissive question cutting short any talk on truth, seen by Pilate as either unobtainable or irrelevant.

Today, Pilate's question is repeated with the same dismissive tone by many philosophers. There are no absolutes, no rocks of certainty, no truth that can be said to be definitive and valid for everyone. We live in a changing world, and the most we can hope for are the man-made truths that we find in our cultures, our religions, our ethical principles.

In the introduction to his encyclical letter, *"Veritatis Splendor"* [The splendour of truth], Pope John Paul II lamented that *"modern man's capacity to know the truth is darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened. Thus, giving himself over to relativism and scepticism, he goes off in search of an illusory freedom apart from truth itself"*.

The philosophers who are considered relevant to the mood of our times are not Plato or Descartes, or Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, who took the existence of objective truth to be indubitable and demonstrable; but, rather, Hume, Ayer, and Wittgenstein who confessed their inability at discovering any universal, necessary truth beyond what has been established by convention or by the use of language.

They seem to have won the battle for supremacy in today's world of philosophy.

The conclusions, reached by many modern philosophers, could be summarised as follows:

1 Truth is relative

- Modern philosophical thinking rejects any single truth acknowledged equally by all minds and sees it instead as being entirely dependent on the viewpoint from which truth is seen. All human knowledge is constructed by human beings and is therefore dependent on the perspective from which they look at things. Language, culture, society, religion are, as Wittgenstein put it, a "cage" in which we find ourselves since birth. We learn the truths of our "form of life" by means of the words we learn on our mother's knees and of education.

There is no true meaning, whether for life, religion, morality or even for a text (since the way a text is interpreted will depend on the culture within which it is read). Post-modern critics and philosophers will happily explore and discuss the endless perspectives represented by different human cages, but they will strongly resist any attempt to find the one true cage or any suggestion that one cage is to be preferred to another. There are no absolutes, no rocks of certainty on which one can stand firm outside the constant sea of change. The search for certainty or for any rock to cling to is folly.

Think of a newly born baby: she is born into a family and the family is part of a society which has a culture, traditions, standards of behaviour, religion, etc. The baby will be taught the words of the language used in the family/society: with the language, she will be taught the "truths" that belong to the family/society, and she will grow up making use of the language and the truths expressed by it. This "cage" of

truths associated with a family/society is unique. The baby, in our example, is born into an English middle class family, with values and traditions fostered by the modern English culture and society, within a Christian religion which has a set of beliefs and doctrines. If she had been born in Iran, she would have had parents/society with values, traditions, religion, culture, language of a very different kind and she would have been born into another, very different “cage” with truths peculiar to it.

There are a great variety of “cages” in the world, and therefore a great variety of systems of man-made truths: is there a “cage” that is “true” for every thinking being? Post-modernist philosophers agree with Wittgenstein that there is no one cage that is truer than any other: truth is relative to each cage and all cages are true in their own way, since their truths are simply man-made.

Such a view seems to call for tolerance and humility: Islam is true for Muslims, and Christianity for Christians but neither the one nor the other is “objectively, definitely true”. There is no cage which is “superior” to the others since there is no objective truth in any of them. All values are relative. The risk is, however, that all cultures, religions, and ethical systems will be plunged into a meaningless universe, devoid of real truth, and therefore into the profound darkness of scepticism and despair.

2 Morality and Aesthetics are a matter of taste

- In Ethics and Aesthetics what is right and wrong, what is beautiful and ugly is widely accepted as depending on society and tradition and having no truth independent of such settings. For Russell, what is good and bad is simply a matter of individual taste; for Ayer, to say that an action is good is simply to express our emotions in relation to that action.

Debates on abortion, euthanasia, cloning, suicide, homosexuality, marriage, surrogacy, war, torture, etc. are not debates about the truth binding all people endowed with reason, but are simply expressions of personal taste, of personal emotions. *"You find abortion right, I find it wrong: I respect your views, you respect mine since there is no universal truth on which to agree or by which we may be judged. There is no other truth but that which is made up by me, by my society, by my religion"*. All values are relative. Societies, often, create values based purely on the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

The same relativist approach is seen in our modern Art Galleries and debates on Art: there are no objective parameters of what is beautiful or ugly, these are said to depend entirely on taste and emotions.

3 No Religion is the true Religion

- In debates about Religion, there is a growing number of philosophers, who argue that religion is simply a matter of truths internal to a form of life, to a given society or culture. Religious truths, it is held, are not discovered, they are made – religious truths are essentially truths internal to a made up story. The Virgin Birth is a truth for someone who has been brought up in a Christian form of life, but it is a truth which makes sense within the Christian form of life, it is not a *"universal"* truth. For a Muslim, the Koran was dictated word by word by the Archangel Gabriel to Mohammed, and it is a perfect copy of the eternal Koran which is in Heaven: a good Muslim will take this as a fundamental truth, but it is simply a man-made truth which is valid only within the Muslim form of life.

All attempts to establish the existence of God on solid arguments based on reason have been shown to have failed.

St. Thomas' Five Ways, St. Anselm's Ontological Argument, the various versions of the Cosmological, Teleological, Moral Arguments, as well as the Argument from Religious Experience have been demolished by philosophers like Hume, Kant, and the Logical Positivists. The existence of God, it is claimed, cannot be proven by reason.

4 When is a sentence meaningful?

- Logical Positivism claims that the search for any metaphysical theory about meaning is madness. Since the work of Hume, Kant, and the later Wittgenstein, the search for firm foundations for knowledge has been almost entirely abandoned. There is a near total rejection of metaphysics, and any theory that attempts to provide an ultimate explanation of reality is considered worthless and unhelpful.

Modern empiricist philosophers claim that we speak sense only when what we say can be verified through experience. The proposition, "*Ratcliffe College is in Leicestershire*" makes sense, is meaningful, because we can go and see and ask whether such is the case. The propositions, "*God loves me*" or "*Our Father in Heaven*" cannot be verified through sense-experience, hence they are meaningless.

Equally meaningless and for the same reason, are ethical, aesthetical, metaphysical propositions: how can we prove with our senses the proposition, "*La Pieta'- the famous sculpture by Michelangelo - is a sublime work of art*"? Or, "*It is good to help the hungry*"? Or, "*There must be a "substance" holding together the sensible qualities of things*"? Sense experience cannot say anything about the "*sublimity*" of the statue, or the "*goodness*" of helping the hungry, or the "*substance*" which holds together the sensible qualities: all such propositions are therefore meaningless, in the sense

that they do not contain a truth, but are simply expressions of one's taste or emotions.

At a stroke, the Logical Positivists, and AJ Ayer in particular, destroy all truth claims of religion, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics. However, their own principle in turn destroys their own truth claim, since the principle itself cannot pass the test of verification, for how can one verify through the senses the proposition, "*All meaningful propositions are those that can be verified through sense experience*"?

Moreover, in their desire to safeguard the validity of scientific propositions which were thought to be produced entirely by experience, they overlooked the fact that even general scientific laws cannot pass the verification test, and are, therefore, meaningless. Let us take, for example, the law, "*All metals, when heated, expand*": such law can be meaningful only if and when all metals in the universe are tested, a truly impossible task.

5 Do we have a spiritual soul?

- In the philosophy of Mind, the view that there is a spiritual substance over and above the body, that survives the death of the body, has fallen into the category of superstitious theories, a relic of an unscientific age. Science, it is said, has banished once and for all the possibility of accepting a spiritual substance that would fall, necessarily, outside scientific investigation.

G. Ryle, for example, claimed that we do not have a soul, a mind, a self as a distinct spiritual entity in us. "*There is no ghost in the machine*"! The words "*soul*", "*mind*", or "*self*" express patterns of behaviour. To say, "*I am in pain*" is not to say that there is a soul, the I, who is in pain; it is simply a way of saying that there are tears in my eyes, contortions in a part of my body, sounds of grief coming from my mouth,

etc. Ryle's view goes back to D Hume, who denied the existence of the "I" as a centre of consciousness; A J Ayer adopted the same opinion.

We are entirely "*material*" beings, open to scientific investigation like any other object of our universe. Hydrogen and Helium were the first elements, soon after the Big Bang took place: the universe is, therefore, entirely "*material*", "*physical*". There is no place for spiritual souls, or for spiritual substances.

For others, the mind is the brain: the more we advance in our understanding of the powerful structure of the millions of connections in the brain the more we understand that all mental processes are identical to physical, brain processes. The "*mind*" or "*soul*" or "*self*" as a spiritual substance is denied and regarded as a superstition of the past; all our thoughts, feelings, expectations, intentions, etc. are identical to physical happenings in the brain. This view, of course, seems to deny the possibility of freedom: how can "*matter*" be free? How can a physical brain break the inflexible chain of cause and effect? We are as determined in our actions as all physical things are. What happens then to morality?

6 What do we mean by "*person*"?

- The denial of the "*spiritual*" as something existent but which does not fall under sense-experience has serious consequences for a proper understanding of the dignity of the human person. If human beings are purely material beings, and totally subject to physical laws, it is difficult to find a reason for their superiority over any other object of the universe. The complexity of the human brain may give us an advantage over other animals and other less complex physical structures, but what could be the reason for treating another human being "*always as an end and never as a means*"?

P Singer, a popular and influential philosopher, argued that a fully grown horse is far more valuable than a human foetus, or a man or woman in an advanced stage of dementia. He based his argument on his own definition of "person": "*Person is a being who is aware of itself, capable of having memories of the past, and expectations and dreams for the future*". He went on to declare "persons" all higher animals, dogs, cats, horses, and so forth, on the ground that they can fulfil all the above requirements; foetuses, on the other hand, severely handicapped babies, people in a permanent coma, elderly people who have lost their mental faculties are "*non-persons*".

For Peter Singer the concept of "person" must be the guiding principle in all important ethical choices. A "person", whether an animal or a human, must be respected and protected; a "non-person" may be disposed of, if necessary. Abortion, euthanasia, embryo experimentation, and even infanticide may be justified since we are not dealing with "persons".

Empiricists and Rationalists

The responsibility for the modern predicament about truth is mainly due to the various strands of empiricism and their faulty epistemologies. The clash between empiricists (*all our ideas have their origin with sense experience*) and rationalists (*all or some ideas are innate or a priori*) has a long history and some philosophers are of the opinion that it all started in ancient Greece.

One of the famous paintings by Raphael is to be found in the Vatican Museum and it bears the title, "*The School of Athens*". In it, among the representation of many of the philosophers of ancient Greece, two stand out and dominate the scene: Plato and Aristotle. Plato is shown with his hand pointing to the Heavens; Aristotle's hand, instead, is firmly pointing

to the earth. It is a very clever and clear representation of two different philosophical standpoints.



Ideas, for Plato, have qualities which cannot come from the physical world or from our senses: they are eternal, immutable, necessary, universal, objective, whereas the senses are particular, finite, mutable, contingent, and subjective. Where do we get our ideas from? It is certain that they cannot originate with the senses, and hence their origin is to be found elsewhere, in the Heavens, where ideas are in the company of the gods. Long before we were born on this earth into the prison of our body we lived in the Heavens, where we had a constant vision of the splendour of the ideas.

The trauma of the birth on earth has obscured such splendour and, although we still have traces of the ideas in us, we need to struggle, through the harshness of the study and with the help of experience, to remember them with some clarity. Plato's famous allegory of the "Cave" is a haunting piece of literature as well as a marvellous description of the human condition in relation to knowledge.

Plato, therefore, taught that ideas are "innate", we are born with them. This view, refined in many ways, has persisted through the centuries, re-emerging from time to time as a fundamental reference in the debate about the origin

of ideas. Descartes, Leibniz, Kant are philosophers who admitted "*innate*" ideas.

In Raphael's painting, Aristotle's hand is pointing to the earth, as a symbol of the view that sense experience plays a far more important role in the formation of ideas than was allowed by Plato. Rejecting his teacher's opinion on the divine origin of ideas, Aristotle taught that all things were made up of form and matter. The form is not to be sought in the Heavens, as a divine idea, but is instead immanent in the matter, as that which reveals its purpose, shape, and organization.

Thus, for Aristotle, the soul is the "*form*" of the body; the form of the axe is the shape and function it has and its matter is the iron from which it is made. Notice that form and matter are always found together: we experience the chair, the dog, the tree as objects made up of form and matter and it is the mind that has the power to distinguish the one from the other, and to create universal ideas by means of abstraction.

Although it is highly debatable whether Aristotle was, in fact, an empiricist in the modern meaning of the word, it is true to say that he looked more keenly at the natural world for answers than at the Heavens. His views on the origin of universal ideas through abstraction are closer to the empiricist J Locke than to the rationalist Descartes. Rosmini placed Aristotle in the company of those who admitted too many innate ideas; in Aristotle's case, however, we should not think of fully formed innate ideas but of innate powers or faculties which become "*active*" on the occasion of sense-experience.

Epistemology is the foundation of philosophy. It deals with the origin of ideas, with the status of our knowledge, with the possibility of truth. It would be a mistake to

think that epistemology bears no relevance to our everyday problems. We have noted the negative consequences of the empiricists' failure to provide an accurate account of the origin of ideas, consequences which touch directly on ethics, metaphysics, religion, art, politics, and society. Empiricism leads to scepticism, and the view that truth is unreachable.

Kant's position on the origin of ideas

On the other hand, there are philosophers who do not agree with the empiricists' starting point and who admit, instead, the presence of "*innate*" ideas. They agree with Plato that ideas have characteristics which cannot come from sense experience, eternity, immutability, universality, necessity, and objectivity. Emmanuel Kant identified in the idea a formal and a material part, the material part being provided by sense experience and the formal by "*innate*" categories. The 14 innate categories were the following: Time and Space; Quantity (Unity, Plurality, and Totality); Quality (Reality, Negation, and Limitation); Relation (Substance and Accident; Cause and Effect; and Community); Modality (Possibility, Existence, and Necessity).

For Kant, when we experience an object, our experience of it provides the matter and our mind provides the innate categories. The resultant idea is thus made up of form and matter, it has universality and necessity, and it is based on the senses - a result which seems to reconcile empiricism with rationalism.

The problem with Kant's epistemology begins with his explanation of the origin of the 14 innate categories. The word "*innate*" is not sufficient to safeguard the objectivity of the ideas; it is one thing to say that innate ideas are produced by our inner spirit, and another to say that we are born with them but they are not made by us. For Kant, the

14 innate categories are generated by our spirit, come from us; and since we are limited, mutable, contingent, finite beings so are our 14 innate categories. Kant's categories are, therefore, "*subjective*", and cannot provide human beings with the truth which is necessarily "*objective*".

Like any other empiricist philosopher, Kant is still in the mud of subjectivism, and far from the truth. The splendour of truth is independent from the human spirit, and it shines on it without being produced by it. Plato was far closer to the truth than any other philosopher – with the exception of those who, like him, believed that truth does not come from man but is independent of man.

Rosmini's position on the problem of epistemology

It is the view of many who have studied his writings that Rosmini has presented the most outstanding epistemology that has ever been produced. Rosmini was well aware that he had discovered the solution to the most intractable problems in epistemology, and his attempts to minimise the magnitude of his discovery only serve to increase our sense of awe before the depth, the clarity, and the simplicity of his views.

For Rosmini, there is only one innate idea, the idea of being. The idea is not produced by our spirit, but comes from without, enlightening our mind and the world of our perceptions. It enters into all ideas, communicating to them its special qualities: necessity, objectivity, immutability, eternity, universality. The idea of being is the principle of all disciplines, is the ultimate reason of all sciences, and is the truth of all things. The idea of being is "*the light that enlightens every man who comes into this world*", and comes from the mind of God, as the light in the physical world comes from the sun, without being the sun. The idea of

being is the “*single point*” from which the universe of the mind has its origin.

Rosmini was aware of moving beyond both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, although he acknowledged at every step their contributions to the problems with which he was dealing; his remark that even a dwarf, perched on the shoulder of a giant, does actually see further around than the giant himself, was his way of claiming for himself the discovery of the simple, unifying principle of all knowledge, the mother of all ideas, the perennial link between God and man, the source of immortality of the human soul, and the foundation of the dignity of the human person.

He regarded the moment of its discovery, at the tender age of eighteen, a form of divine inspiration. This is what he said to his secretary, Francesco Paoli, in 1853:

“When I was eighteen, I was walking one day by myself collected in my thoughts along the street in Rovereto which is called Terra... As I was going over the different objects of my thoughts, I noticed that the reason of a concept is to be found in another wider concept, and the reason of this new concept in another still wider. In such way, ascending from concept to wider and wider concepts I found myself in the presence of the most universal idea of them all, the idea of being, in which all other concepts are contained. I could not ascend any further, because the only thing that was left to take away to ascend higher was being, and by taking away being nothing was left.

I was persuaded then that the idea of being is the ultimate reason of any concept, the principle of all cognitions. I fell silent before the newly discovered truth, rejoicing and thanking God, the Father of all inspirations. And my rejoicing grew even more, when, going back on the travelled road and adding to that idea progressively all the various determinations which I had previously taken away,

I could see that all the concepts I had examined would reappear, even the very first one from which I had started on my journey.

I came to the firm conclusion that the idea of being contains all other ideas, is the mother of all ideas, the ground of all ideas that are nothing but the idea of being more or less determined and circumscribed, the necessary object of any thought, that is within each thought and without which any thought disappears. I believe that it was God that enlightened me". (F Paoli, Vita di Antonio Rosmini-Serbati, Torino 1880, pp.20-21)

Rosmini did not use religion to prop up his philosophy. Following the advice of Pope Pius VIII, he endeavoured to build his philosophy by means of reason, in order to reach every person. He had the inner certainty, however, that the proper use of reason would lead to God by that divine thread which binds God to every person, the idea of being. In the three volumes of his work, "*A New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas*", it is the meticulous observation of all the facts dealing with human knowledge, coupled with stringent reasoning, which leads the arguments forward. The atheist or the agnostic is challenged at the level of reason, not of faith.

KEYWORDS

EMPIRICISM: *empiricists believe that our five SENSES are the source of all our ideas about the world of real things.*

RATIONALISM: *rationalists believe that we are born with all or at least some INNATE ideas. The five senses are important as providers of the matter of an idea, but not of their form which must originate with the mind, either as something which is given to the mind or as something which is produced by the mind alone.*

ROSMINI *believed that we are born with one innate idea, the idea of being, which is given to us at conception.*

SUBJECTIVE: *produced by the subject, as in subjective taste, subjective morality, and subjective truth; having its source within the mind.*

OBJECTIVE: *External to the mind, actually existing and universally valid, as in objective morality, objective truth, objective knowledge.*

LOGICAL POSITIVISM: *the view that for language to be meaningful it must be verifiable by sense experience.*

INNATE IDEA: *Present in the mind since conception, but we advert to it much later. Having ideas and being aware of them are two different things.*

Chapter 2

Epistemology: the difficult problem

Summary

1. A sound epistemology should be able to explain the origin and nature of all ideas, without distinction. The first and fatal error of empiricism was to begin with an unproven principle – “all ideas come to us through the senses” – dismissing any idea which did not fit in with their unproven principle. J Locke, D Hume, A J Ayer took it for granted and were led to declare that the ideas of substance, of necessary connection, and of metaphysical principles and conceptions were essentially false.

2. At a superficial level, the empiricists’ solution seems to go hand in hand with common sense. That ideas have their origins in sense experience is a belief shared by many. The fact that ideas are “universal” is also easily explained: the horse I experience is unique, but the idea of the horse I acquire is universal. This is achieved by the mind through a process of abstraction.

3. Ideas which seem necessarily true, like the principles of logic, or of geometry, can be explained: they are created by convention and the workings of the mind. These are “a priori” ideas, which are independent of experience. They are also “analytic”, in the sense that they are tautological and do not provide any new information about the world of real things.

4. A closer assessment of the empiricists’ claim shows that it cannot solve the problem. The senses are particular, ideas are universal; the five senses create unique modifications in our own body, whereas ideas often refer to a world outside ourselves. Animals have sharp senses, yet they have no ideas. Abstraction cannot explain the essential characteristic of ideas, their universality.

5. It seems gratuitous to deny the validity of important ideas simply because they cannot be produced by sense experience. J Locke, D Hume, Berkeley, Ayer claimed that there is no idea of substance, thus plunging their systems into confusion and scepticism.

A superficial approach to the problem

We think we know many things. In our ordinary life we find no reason to doubt the validity of our knowledge and we go about talking to each other, listening to the media, reading books and papers, and accepting as true, often uncritically, what we say and what we hear. Yet there are times when either ourselves or others question the validity, the truthfulness, of what is being said: we may take it as truth that abortion, euthanasia, suicide, torture, homosexuality are wrong, only to discover that many other people take the opposite view. We may begin to question our truth and search for the “*true*” answer, if there is one.

We may also think that we know the truth concerning our religion or our principles of ethics, until we hear other people and the media questioning our truth, and we may begin to wonder. Today’s world, reduced to a “*global village*” by powerful means of communications, presents to our minds alternative views on almost any “*truth*” we think we have.

Hence, the imperative of searching and finding the truth is even more compelling, not only for the small band of philosophers but for everyone. The quest for truth is a personal responsibility of the greatest importance.

There are many ways of assessing if what we think is true is actually true. We may follow Descartes and his methodical doubt, or we may begin, like Locke, with looking carefully at the limitations of our reason in relation to what we may

be capable of knowing. The fact that both failed to provide sure foundations for the truth may, on the other hand, warn us about the validity of their method.

Rosmini begins with the *“fact”* that we have many ideas in our mind. Our knowledge is entirely based on ideas and therefore if we manage to explain fully the origin of all our ideas then we should be able to know the truth about them.

We should not begin our quest on the origin of ideas by setting up in advance principles which have not been proven. J Locke, D Hume, G Berkeley committed themselves to the principle: *“All ideas are generated by sensations and reflection”*, excluding from the start any other possible origin. We shall see later the serious consequences of such basic mistake.

We need to be open to any possibility; the fact is that we have many ideas and we want to discover their source and origin. We need to be thorough in our quest, and able to explain the origin of *all* ideas, with no exclusions.

Have a go at solving the problem!

One easy way of getting into epistemological issues is to ask yourself: *“I have many ideas in my mind: where do they come from? How did I get all these ideas?”* You may begin an answer by saying that you got your ideas through your senses; you have the idea *“tree”*, the idea *“horse”*, the idea *“body”* simply because you have experienced, that is, you have seen, touched, tasted, smelled, felt the texture, and heard a real tree, a real horse, a real body. At birth you did not have any such ideas, but you have acquired them through experience. This simple answer seems to cover a great number of your ideas: man, woman, lion, dog, light, sun, grass, apple, milk and so on.

Some of your ideas may be complex ideas, of the sort *“a lake of wine”* or *“a mountain of cheese”*: clearly you have never

experienced any such things, but you have experienced separately a lake, wine, mountain, cheese: you acquired the simple ideas through sense-experience; with the help of imagination, you put together simple ideas to create complex ideas.

Both Locke and Hume would agree with you so far: they would say that when you were born you had a blank mind, a "*tabula rasa*", with no ideas at all in it; you acquired most of your ideas through direct experience. They may even quote, approvingly, the Scholastics' maxim: "*Nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*": there is nothing in the mind (no ideas) which has not come to us through the senses. Your senses are the vehicles of your ideas: either directly or indirectly, via reflection, imagination, memory. D Hume had a very simplistic view of ideas: he thought that ideas are memories of previous impressions. You see a horse, you go home, and the idea "*horse*" is nothing more than the mental image of the horse still present in your mind. "*Ideas are copies of impressions*", he said.

Is it true to say that the Scholastics agree with the Empiricists on the origin of ideas?

They said, "There is nothing in the mind which has not come through the senses". Does it mean that they shared their views on the origin of ideas with empiricists like Locke, Hume, and Ayer? By no means, says Rosmini. They did not consider the mind "empty" prior to experience: they were aware that the mind is made intelligent by the vision of being, and that, therefore, the idea of being is present in the mind prior to any experience, as the blanc canvass on which every other idea would emerge on the occasion of experience.

The fact that you can think of an endless number of trees, or horses, or bodies even if you have never experienced an infinite series of any of them is not a big problem: by

“abstracting” what is proper to an individual tree, horse, body you get the universal idea of tree, horse, body; no longer the idea of that particular tree but the general idea of tree. The mind has the faculty of abstracting what is particular, and is left with what is common and universal.

You are acquainted personally with Mary, Sharon, and Monica and therefore you can think of them when you are miles away; if you take away from the idea – i.e. abstract with your mind – what is peculiar to each of them you are left with the universal idea of woman.

It seems that you have been able to explain the origin of many of the ideas you have in your mind, by means of sensations and reflection: simple ideas of people, animals, plants, and of other physical objects in the universe; ideas of your inner world, like love, boredom, anger, hope, patience, pleasure; complex ideas, like flying pigs, aliens, hobbits; and universal ideas, or ideas which can be applied to an infinite number of things, like the idea tree, horse, body, dog, house, universe, apple, etc.

There are, however, other ideas which we have and which require an explanation: mathematical and geometrical ideas, and the ideas contained in the first principles of reasoning, which are: the principle of identity, the principle of contradiction, the principle of cause and effect, and the principle of substance. They seem to have special qualities, like necessity, universality, and independence from sense-experience.

Take, for example, the idea of a *“chiliagon”*, which is a thousand-side polygon: it is most unlikely that you have experienced such a geometrical figure, yet you can talk sense about it, discover the formulas to calculate its area, its perimeter, and its angles. How did you get the idea of the

chiliagon, and of all other similar geometrical ideas? How did you acquire the principles of logic?

Hume argues that it is a matter of putting together ideas by convention, or by creating simple logical connections between ideas or words: we define "*triangle*" a "*three-side figure*" as a convenient logical relation, a conventional definition. We may never see a triangle in the real world but, by our logical convention, a triangle will always be a "*three-side figure*"; we may never see a "*chiliagon*", and yet we have the necessary idea of it as a "*thousand-side polygon*".

These ideas are produced by the logical working of the mind, they are independent of experience; they are called "*a priori*" ideas, always and everywhere necessarily true. The idea $2+2 = 4$ is a necessarily true idea. We do not need to verify its truth by repeatedly counting things; its truth is independent of experience.

A Priori Knowledge: a serious problem for Empiricism

Empiricists agree that we have ideas which are necessarily and universally true, like the ideas of mathematics, geometry, and the principles of logic. A J Ayer admitted that this is a real problem, which could destroy empiricism. There are two possible solutions; the first was produced by J S Mill. He kept untouched the empiricists' principle that all ideas come through the senses, including mathematical and geometrical ideas, and the principles of logic. The necessity and universality we accord to such ideas are based on the fact that, so far, experience has never proven them wrong.

Ayer rejected this solution on the basis that people take it for granted that mathematics and geometry, and the principles of logic are and will always be true and do not allow for any objection against them to count. " $1+1 = 2$ " or "*a square has four sides*" will always be true. His solution was to say that

the propositions of mathematics, geometry, and logic are "*analytic*" and not "*synthetic*". What did he mean?

Analytic propositions are of the type, "*A triangle is a three-side figure*": there is a subject (*a triangle*) and a predicate (*is a three-side figure*). Notice that the predicate is already contained in the subject. If you know the meaning of the word "*triangle*" you already know that it has three sides. Analytic propositions are, therefore, propositions in which the predicate is already contained in the subject; they are "*tautologies*", repetitions. It is like saying, "*A triangle is a triangle*".

Analytic propositions do not tell us anything new about the world; they simply unfold the meaning of words created by convention or by relations of ideas. They have nothing to do with the things of the world, being entirely independent of experience. They are, however, necessarily and universally true, on account of the definitions of words, and relations between ideas. Ideas which are independent of experience are called "*a priori*" ideas. All innate ideas are "*a priori*", and all analytic propositions are "*a priori*".

The fact that analytic propositions are repetitions or tautologies does not mean that they are boring or useless. The idea "*triangle*" contains in itself all the theorems which have been discovered over the years, and geometry is the study of the unfolding of all relations and ideas already contained "*in nuce*" [in a nutshell] in the ideas of geometrical figures. It is an unfolding which is purely intellectual, without any reference to experience, although geometrical or mathematical conclusions could and are frequently used in our dealings with the things of the world – as in applied mathematics.

According to the principles of Empiricism, the truth of the principles of logic, of mathematics, and of geometry is necessary but relative, since it is the human mind that creates it, it is not a truth found in the things of the world or based on something innate and always and everywhere true.

Their conclusion is weak when we consider the amazing reliance we have on the laws of physics, of mathematics, and of geometry which allow human beings to search the heavens with incredible precision and to invent the most sophisticated objects used for the advancement of all sciences.

Their conclusion is false when we consider the logical contradiction between necessary and relative applied to all reasoning a priori. Empiricists have no solution to this problem given their two principles, 1) All ideas are generated by sense-experience; 2) A priori ideas are true because they are the product of convention or of the unfolding of the meaning of ideas.

What is missing is that "something" given or innate, which is objective, necessary, universal, and essentially true.

Synthetic propositions are very different. They have a factual content and cannot be necessarily and universally true. "Mary is at prayer in the chapel" is an example of a synthetic proposition. The predicate (*is at prayer in the chapel*) is not contained in the subject (*Mary*), but is a new fact about Mary; it can be true or false, we need experience to find out. Synthetic propositions give new information, say something new about the subject, and are always based on sense-experience. Ideas based on sense-experience are called "*a posteriori*" ideas, i.e. ideas which come through the senses and say something factual about the world.

Is the problem solved?

This account of the origin of all our ideas seems, at a very superficial level, to solve the problem of how we get all

our ideas. This is the claim of the Empiricists: there is no need to assume that we have “*innate*” ideas, all our ideas can be explained by saying that we get them through the senses and through reflection. “*Universal*” ideas – which had troubled Plato so much – are obtained by using our faculty of “*abstraction*”, i.e. of taking away from an idea the particular and concentrating on the common (e.g. take away from the idea “*Rachel*” the particulars and you are left with the more general idea of “*woman*”). A priori ideas are simply logical relations, logical understanding of the meaning of the words, they are not drawn from the real world nor can they tell us anything about the real world.

This theory of knowledge produced by Locke, Hume, and followed by the prevalent empiricist philosophers of our own time appears very neat, very much based on common sense. You too may feel that it is the easiest way of explaining the fact of the origin of your ideas; but, can it be true? Does this theory really do justice to the origin of “*ideas*”? Moreover, why should such innocent looking theory drive its followers to a most radical scepticism, and to the persuasion that human beings cannot arrive at the “*objective*” truth?



A J Ayer



D Hume



J Locke

The Empiricists' solution to the problem of the origin of ideas

- *All ideas about the universe and its content have their origin with sense-experience and reflection (tree, dog, star, beef, stone, sea, etc.);*
- *All complex ideas are the workings of the faculty of imagination which combines simple ideas creating new factitious ideas, like monsters or aliens or angels or demons or even gods;*
- *All a priori ideas have their origin with convention or with the unfolding of the meaning of particular ideas, of numbers or of shapes. All a priori ideas are analytic and tautological; they are independent from experience;*
- *Ideas are made universal by a process of abstraction.*

Criticism of the empiricists' view

There is a passage in the Introduction to a booklet, written by W Lockhart in 1882, in which he takes to task the empiricists' views by giving a colourful example:

"The empiricists say, "We have sensations, and we have ideas; the sensations come first, and they are transformed into ideas by the faculty of reflection." Those who talk thus are not aware that between sensations and ideas they have jumped a gulph which is not less than infinite. This mental condition reminds me of a conversation once overheard in a railway carriage between two countrymen.

"John, said the one, how this railway telegraph; how do they send messages by it?" "Oh, said the other, it is very simple. You see them wires along the line. They run from Lunnington to York. They are fastened to a thing at each end with a dial plate and hands to it like a clock, with letters all around, and when they turn the hand

in Lunnon this 'n and that 'n, the hands in York goes that 'n and this 'n."

"Ah, said the other, it seems very simple when you have it explained."

Much like this is the state of mind of those who do not see any difficulty in the formation of ideas, and serenely talk, as Locke and his school do, of sensations being transformed into ideas by means of the faculty of reflection. They ignore the crucial point in philosophy, much like the countrymen who explained the electric telegraph, omitting all mention of electricity – that occult and mysterious force which is behind the phenomena" (Introduction to Rosmini's "Sketch of Modern Philosophers").

Let us think carefully about the main claim of the theory: *"All our ideas come to us through the senses"*. Imagine that you are sitting at your desk in an office full of people. Your senses are affected by a variety of stimuli, you see colours, hear sounds, you perceive movements, your sense of smell is affected, you feel the surface of your desk, etc. Imagine now that you place on your desk a very tame cat, looking at the same room. The cat sees, hears, smells, and feels the same things that you do. If your ideas come to you through your senses then your cat should have the same ideas; the senses of the cat may even be sharper than yours! Would the empiricists go as far as attributing ideas to your cat? The senses and sensations are present in the cat as much as they are present in you.



Empiricists may claim that humans can “reflect” on their sensations. However, in order to reflect, you need ideas, and all your ideas come to you through the senses. Reflection, therefore, cannot explain why they are reluctant to attribute the same ideas to your cat. In effect, if the senses are the only vehicle for ideas, we humans should be at a disadvantage over a great number of animals who have far more refined senses than we have.

Let us go past this tricky problem for the empiricists and see whether sensations can actually provide us with the universal ideas of tree, horse, body, etc. The empiricists say that we get universal ideas by simply abstracting the particulars from an idea and concentrating instead on the common features. You are looking now at a particular tree: sensations are simply the impressions on your senses, impressions felt by you in a passive way. The green colour of the tree hits your retina and you feel a particular sensation in you, if you touch the tree you feel in you a sensation of hardness, the nerves of your nose receive passively the smell of the tree, etc.

Sensations are only modifications of you caused by the tree. How can such private modifications give you the “idea” of the tree? Moreover, how can such private and

unique sensations give you the universal idea of tree? *"To abstract"* means *"to take away"*: what is left of your private modifications once you have taken them away? Nothing is left, and from nothing you cannot produce the universal idea of tree.

There is more trouble for the empiricists when they try to explain the origin of ideas which cannot come through the senses, and cannot be formed by reflection because sensation does not provide reflection with any matter to reflect on. Take the idea of *"substance"*: the senses cannot experience *"substance"*, they can be modified by the accidents (colour, smell, taste, sound, texture) but not by the substance which, according to Rosmini, is *"the energy by which a thing and all that it possesses actually exists"* or *"the energy in which the actual existence of the thing is grounded"*.

The origin of the idea of substance has given untold trouble to all empiricists. To eliminate the difficulty, they have tended to eliminate the idea of substance altogether. *"I confess, said Locke, that there is another idea which would be of general use for mankind to have, as it is of general talk as if they had it; and that is the idea of substance; which we neither have nor can have by sensation or reflection"*. Rosmini wrote, with a smile no doubt: *"An odd contradiction! An idea exists that does not exist!"* (A New Essay, p. 35)

Let us see what the problem is. Take an apple: your senses give you the colour, the taste, the smell, the sound, the texture. According to the empiricists, these various sensations give you the idea *"apple"*; but all sensations are in you, are what you feel privately when the apple is in your hand; the sensations are in you, yet the apple is outside you. The apple is one, yet your sensations are many, felt by ears, nose, hands, eyes, mouth. How can the sensations give you the idea of the apple, when the only things you experience are your own private modifications?



The Scholastics felt the difficulty and said that the idea "*apple*" cannot be your own sensations; they called the sensible qualities which we experience in sensation "*accidents*", and they claimed that the sensible qualities were sensible qualities of something outside you, that something being the "*substance*" which holds together the sensible qualities which we experience. Your apple, therefore, is a substance which causes the sensible qualities we experience in sensation.

The greenness our eyes see is a modification of us caused by the sensible qualities of the object, or substance of the apple. Is the apple "*really*" green? The green is the result of some power belonging to the apple, creating the sensation of green in me, and the same reasoning can be applied to the other sensations, taste, smell, texture, sound. For the Scholastics, therefore, the apple would still be there when we put it inside a bag and no one can experience it. The accidents belong to "*something*" outside us, and this something is what is called substance. If the "*something*" is not there, it would not be possible for us to know whether there is a world outside us: we could only talk about our own private modifications or sensations.

Bishop Berkeley adopted Locke's empiricism and denied that the apple itself has a substance. He saw further than Locke and claimed, taking the denial of substance to its logical conclusion, that the apple is nothing else but a bundle of "*ideas*", by which he meant what the Scholastics had called "*accidents*". He could not accept "*substance*"

because there is no way it can be experienced through the senses.

Every object is simply a bundle of ideas or of accidents. What happens to the apple in the bag? The bundle of accidents is gone, and there is no substance; the conclusion, therefore, should be that the apple has ceased to exist the moment all sensations have gone. Being a bishop, however, Berkeley saved himself by saying that the apple, a mere collection of accidents, is still in the bag, because God perceives the accidents all the time. For Berkeley, therefore, there was only one substance, God; the universe was made up of "*bundles of ideas*" kept in existence at all times by God. For Berkeley, "*esse est percipi*" i.e. "*to exist is to be perceived*".

The denial of matter, and the sole existence of "*bundles of ideas*" in its place, earned his philosophy the name "*Idealism*". Today, Berkeley's views have been taken up by the followers of "*Phenomenalism*".

For Rene' Descartes, a rationalist, it was obvious that ideas cannot come through the senses. Sensations can only give the "*secondary qualities*" of things, what the Scholastics called "*accidents*"; it was the mind which, going past sensations and secondary qualities, identified the substance or what he called the "*primary qualities*" of things, which for him were extension, motion, quantity, and flexibility. For Descartes, the "*real*" world was made up of primary qualities only, geometrically shaped, and clearly and distinctly known by the mind.

For Emmanuel Kant, ideas are made up of form and matter. Matter comes from sense-experience, from sensations, which he called "*phenomena*" (appearances); the form comes from the mind, which confers on the phenomena the 14 categories, thus creating the ideas. Kant was fully aware that phenomena cannot stand by themselves but require

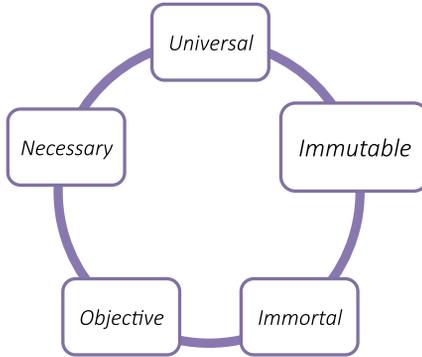
the support of a substance, which he called "*noumenon*" (that which can be thought). The noumenon, or substance, is inferred by the mind since it cannot be an object of experience. Noumena are beyond our field of knowledge, we know that they exist, but we cannot know anything about them. For Kant, the "*real*" world is utterly unknown to us; we can study, research, and argue about the world of phenomena, the world as it appears to human beings.

Bertrand Russell called "*sense-data*" our sensations of things; he was not sure about the existence of the substance, which he called "*physical object*". His admission that it "*probably*" exists was due to the regularity of the return of our sense-data after objects had been taken away or had disappeared from our senses for a while. It is only probable that the apple is in the bag as a physical object when there are no sense-data. We know next to nothing about physical objects, with the exception of the very limited information provided by Physics.

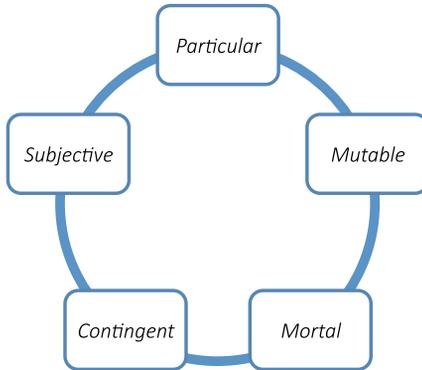
Today's Phenomenalists continue the empirical tradition of denying the existence of substance simply because there is no way of experiencing it through the senses. The denial of substance has catastrophic consequences for the theory of knowledge, opening the door to a most radical scepticism. The denial of substance means that there is nothing else in the universe but our private sensations, or "*bundle*" of ideas. D Hume, and A J Ayer, denied the existence of the "*I*" as a substantial self for the reason that it cannot be experienced. We only experience the fleeting sensations affecting us at any time, but we can never catch that centre in us which we call the "*I*".

A DILEMMA FOR THE EMPIRICISTS

IDEAS



SENSATIONS



How can SENSATIONS produce IDEAS given their completely opposite qualities? A “*particular*” sensation cannot produce a “*universal*” idea

KEYWORDS

IDEAS A PRIORI: *Ideas which are independent of experience and necessarily true. They are prior to experience. Their origin is to be found in the logical relations of ideas and in convention (according to the empiricists) or they are innate (according to the rationalists). Examples: mathematical and geometrical ideas, principles of logic.*

A PRIORI KNOWLEDGE: *is necessarily true and independent of experience.*

IDEAS A POSTERIORI: *Ideas which originate from experience, they are not necessarily true.*

A POSTERIORI KNOWLEDGE: *is knowledge about the world, based on sense-experience and therefore not necessarily true.*

ANALYTIC: *A statement where the predicate is already contained in the subject, for example, "A bachelor is an unmarried man", or "A square is a four-side geometrical figure".*

SYNTHETIC: *A statement where the predicate is not contained in the subject, for example, "Prince Philip is tall and witty", or "The Jewish Temple was in Jerusalem".*

PHENOMENA: *What we experience through the senses. Things as they appear to us (Kant)*

NOUMENA: *Things in themselves, independent of our experience of them. Things that can be thought to be there, but that fall outside our experience (Kant).*

CATEGORIES: *Tools used by the mind to make sense of experience. These are fundamental, innate ideas present in every member of the human race since conception. They are the first products of the human spirit; they are like spectacles worn by the mind according to which the mind judges the world of phenomena (Kant).*

PRINCIPLES OF LOGIC: Rosmini calls them “the supreme principles of reasoning” and they are as pure and true as the Idea of Being is, since they are the Idea of Being in its application. No speech, no reasoning, no writing would be possible without them, and every intelligent being uses them all the time; even the sceptics who deny or doubt them are compelled to use them. They are the following:

Principle of Cognition (or of Knowledge, or of Identity): “The object of thought is being” or “What is, is”

Principle of Contradiction: “Being and not-being cannot be thought at one and the same time”

Principle of Substance: “Accidents cannot be thought without substance”

Principle of Cause: “A new entity cannot be thought without a cause”

Chapter 3

Rosmini's Epistemology

Summary

1. Empiricism cannot give a proper account of the origin of ideas, since it confuses feeling with understanding, and sensations with ideas. Sensations have an important role in the formation of ideas, but something more is required to take up sensations and to form ideas.

2. Kant agreed that sensations by themselves could never form ideas. He came up with the 14 categories, which we draw from our spirit, and to give sensations what is required to transform them into universal ideas.

3. Kant's categories are innate, every human being is born with them. However, it looks as though the 14 categories are generated by our own spirit or mind – hence they are subjective, even if the “subject”, in Kant's case, is the human race.

4. Kant, therefore, like the empiricists, cannot solve the epistemological problem since he falls into the mistake of making objective truth impossible.

5. Rosmini's epistemology starts with two principles: a) We must give an account of the origin of **all** ideas, without pre-conditions; b) In seeking the right solution, we must be as economical as possible, without assuming too little or too much (this is what is called in philosophical jargon, “Ockham's razor”).

6. For Rosmini it is a fact that ideas are universal, and it is a fact that we form ideas by means of a judgment. All universal ideas are the result of a judgement and all judgements require a universal idea. The question is: “If all universal ideas are produced by a judgement and if every judgement requires a universal idea, how did we manage to formulate the very first judgement?”

7. In other words, it is impossible to begin thinking without a universal idea already in the mind. Sense-perception provides the matter, but the thought or idea cannot be produced without the help of an innate universal idea.

8. The first universal innate idea can only be the idea of being since there cannot be first judgements without the idea of being. Thus, the judgements "I am", "This is a horse", "I am a writer" place the "I", the "horse", the "writer" into the category of existing beings and they require the idea of being. I acquire the universal ideas of Myself, of Horse, and of Writer by making a judgement which is possible only on condition that it already contains the idea of being.

9. The problem of epistemology is solved by admitting as innate only one idea, the idea of being. We shall see that it is easy to explain the origin of all other ideas. It is essential to bear in mind that the idea of being is not made by a judgement since it comes before any judgement, and is found in the mind as a given idea not as a product of the mind. The reason for this is that the idea of being, with its characteristics of universality, objectivity, immutability, indeterminateness, etc. cannot be the product of a finite, limited, particular, subjective being.

10. The discovery of the innate idea of being solves the problem of epistemology. Rosmini gives an account of famous theories which failed in their attempt to provide solid basis to their systems for lack of a convincing epistemology. He divides them into two categories: theories which failed through ignorance or neglect of the fundamental dimensions necessary for the formation of ideas (J Locke and D Hume, for example); and theories which multiplied unnecessarily the sources or causes of ideas (Plato and E Kant, for example).

The foundation of Rosmini's Epistemology

Epistemology, it has been said earlier, deals with the origin and status of ideas. We have seen that all ideas are

universal, applicable to an infinite number of things of the same species and genus: dog, horse, star, moon, sun, chair, fish, etc.

Sensations, on the other hand, are always private, particular, and ephemeral, and there is no way they can become universal ideas. It was the Scottish philosopher Reid who said that if we had no other faculty but that of sensation, we would *feel* only, but we would never *think*. Thought is something beyond sensation.

Empiricism, therefore, cannot give a proper account of the origin of ideas, since it confuses feeling with understanding, and sensations with ideas. Sensations have an important role in the formation of ideas, but something more is required to take up sensations and to form ideas.

Kant agreed that sensations by themselves could never form ideas. He came up with the 14 categories, which we draw from our spirit, and give to sensations what is required to transform them into universal ideas. Kant could not say anything precise about the origin of the categories which produce the formal part of ideas giving them universality and necessity. He said that the 14 categories are generated by our spirit, and emerge in all as a special feature of the human mind.

The Kantian categories, therefore, are subjective; thus the subject, the human being, becomes the measure of all knowledge. *"Who can tell", said Kant, "that if there were a mind constituted differently from our own, it would not see things quite differently from what they appear to us? Does not a mirror reflect objects according to the form which these objects assume in it, a convex mirror showing them elongated, a concave mirror on the contrary making them appear shortened? The human mind, therefore, gives its own forms to the objects of its cognitions; it does*

not receive those forms from the objects themselves." (Quoted by A Rosmini in "Sketch of Modern Philosophers")

If ideas are "*subjective*", albeit common to all human beings, truth and knowledge will necessarily be subjective, and hence no truth, no knowledge at all. The distinction between "*subject*" and "*object*" is an essential landmark in the theory of knowledge; the only knowledge worth pursuing is "*objective*" knowledge, which alone is in perfect accordance with the truth.

The epistemological problem is, therefore, clear: sensations provide the "*matter*" of our ideas but cannot provide the "*form*"; they can tell us how our senses are affected but no more. Horses, dogs, and cats have senses and sensations but they do not have ideas. Feeling and thinking are two completely different realities.

On the other hand, the introduction of categories which are meant to take up our sensations and transform them into ideas has not produced the right answer for the reason that categories spring up instinctively from the human spirit, thus making the human spirit the creator of truth and knowledge.

Empiricists of all sorts and of all times have failed to solve the problem; they cannot explain the universality, necessity, and objectivity of all ideas. Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Ayer, Logical Positivists, and Phenomenalists have failed to understand the nature of ideas, and have been unable to give an accurate account of their origin, producing, therefore, faulty epistemologies.

Kant, on the other hand, was closer to solving the problem, having realised that sensations by themselves will never produce ideas; they need something "*innate*" to help sensations. His mistake was to think that this something "*innate*" is produced by our spirit, our mind, thus making

ideas and knowledge subjective. Ideas cannot be subjective, even if the subject, in Kant's case, is the whole human race. True knowledge is contemplated by the mind as the object of thought, being independent of the subject.

Epistemologies built on sand produce shaky and unstable buildings: the fact that we can be sure only of our own private sensations leads to "*solipsism*" or the view that I am alone in the universe, having no way of proving the existence of anything else. The idea of substance cannot come through sensations, but it is the idea which assures me that people and all other things – e.g. other substances – exist.

It is time to take a closer look at Rosmini's epistemology. As we stated before, it solved the problems which had caused shipwreck to so many famous philosophers both ancient and modern. The amazing discovery of the idea of being as "*the single point*" of all knowledge became the shining light not only for the solution of the problem of the origin of ideas, but it manifested itself as being the starting point for all other branches of philosophy, and for natural and supernatural religion.

Rosmini begins his work by stating the method he will follow, which is an application of what is known as Ockham's razor, or the principle of sufficient reason. When we want to explain facts about man or the universe we must be as economical as we can, using only what is required for a complete explanation.

The fact which needs to be explained is the origin of ideas. To explain it, we must not fix principles in advance and then bend the facts to fit our arbitrary principles. It was the mistake made by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume: they presumed in advance the principle that all our ideas come from sensation and from reflection; when they found

ideas which cannot proceed from either, they abolished or explained them away. This was the sad destiny of the idea of substance, of the idea of necessary connection between cause and effect, of the idea of the soul, of the idea of God, and of all metaphysical ideas.

True philosophy starts from a most careful and thorough observation of the facts which need to be explained. To solve the problem of the origin of ideas, we must observe the types of ideas we have; and we must give a full explanation, without pre-conditions, of how we come about possessing them.

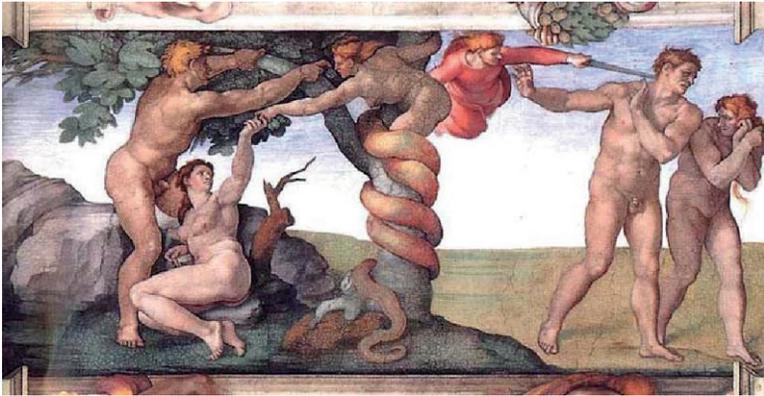
It is a fact that ideas are universal, and it is a fact that we form ideas by means of a judgement. The idea "horse" is universal and was formed by joining a subject to a predicate: "*The animal I feel at this moment is a horse*". By this judgement, I acquire the idea "horse", which I can apply to an infinite number of real or ideal animals which possess all that it takes to be a horse.

The problem is this: when we make judgements we must have in our mind some universal ideas. It is impossible to make a judgement without using a universal idea: "*This sheet of paper is white*", or "*This man is wise*", or "*Nigel is a historian*". The predicates – *is white, is wise, is a historian* – can be applied to an infinite number of people or things and so are universal ideas (*white, wise, historian*). All universal ideas are the result of a judgement and all judgements require a universal idea. The question is: "*If all universal ideas are produced by a judgement and if every judgement requires a universal idea, how did we manage to formulate the very first judgement?*"

How did Adam and Eve begin to think?

Imagine Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, freshly made by God: how could they begin to think, to make their

first judgement? To make that judgement they needed a universal idea, but they could not find any in their mind, since they had not produced it, yet, by judgement. How did they manage to make their first judgement, by affirming, perhaps without words, their liveliest sensation? Whatever it might have been, in order to affirm it, that is, to make a judgment about it, they would have needed the universal idea of existence.



This is an impossible question for the empiricists since neither sensations nor reflection can produce universal ideas. For Kant, there was no innate idea in Adam and Eve, but they had been created by God with mental tools or categories or spectacles which forced them to think of their world of sensations according to the peculiar form of their categories. There was an instinct in Adam and Eve to colour their sensations with the categories; but Kant's failure to understand that each of the categories in the mind of Adam and Eve required as a first given the "*idea of being*" would necessarily deny him the solution to the problem.

For Rosmini, Adam and Eve were feeling and intelligent beings; as feeling beings, they had the permanent sensation of their body, a fundamental feeling of it and, through it, a feeling of the world around them. As intelligent beings,

they enjoyed the constant vision of the idea of being. It was easy, therefore, to make the first judgement, since the innate idea of being provided the universal idea required for whatever liveliest sensation they had at the time.

As we shall see later, the discovery of the innate idea of being brings to an end the age old problem of epistemology. The first judgement is easily explained and all other subsequent judgements. The idea of being is not a creation of the mind, nor does it spring up from our spirit on the occasion of sensations. It comes to us from without, since it has all the characteristics of ideas: universality, necessity, possibility, immutability, and eternity; moreover, it is utterly indeterminate and objective. It is an "*a priori*" idea, and the source of all ideas and of all knowledge, but it is very different from Kant's 14 categories, or from A J Ayer's "*a priori*" ideas.

We have seen that for Rosmini the epistemological problem took the form of a question: "*How is our first judgement possible if we assume that we do not previously have an innate, universal idea?*" It is clear, however, that not every universal idea will be sufficient; it has to be a special one, the idea of existence.

To think is to judge, and judgements are the building blocks of our knowledge. When we say, "*This is a tree*", "*This is a horse*", or "*David is a good man*" we gain new knowledge; notice, however, that what we do in judgements is to place the subject into the universal world of existing things of a particular kind. The subjects of the examples above are placed into the universal idea of "*something*" called tree, horse, and good man. To do this, we need the idea of existence, the idea of being. The idea of being is, therefore, the light of the mind, and we use it to acknowledge being in whatever object our internal or external sensations make us feel.

Neither Locke nor Kant can explain satisfactorily the origin of the idea of existence, the former trying to find it where it cannot be, in sensations, through abstraction; the latter having the inner self draw it from itself, necessarily, and instinctively. If we take both philosophers to be representative of others who had similar views, we can conclude that none of them provided a true account for the origin of the idea of existence, and of universal ideas in general.

It is not necessary to go through the full list of philosophers examined by Rosmini in the first volume of *A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*, of those who missed the point by defect, and of those who missed it by excess. We shall give a very brief description of some of their systems.

False theories assigning an insufficient cause of ideas.



John Locke (1632-1704): He is considered the father of empiricism; according to him all ideas are acquired by sensation aided by reflection. He denied to the mind the presence of innate ideas.

Rosmini's criticism of Locke centred on his treatment of the idea of "*substance*". Locke recognised the usefulness of such an idea, admitting that it is an idea which everyone has, but since the idea cannot originate either with sensation or with reflection he rejected it as a valid idea.

It is obvious that the idea of substance cannot originate with sensations. Sensations are modifications of ourselves, do not exist independently, and are the stimulations we feel in our senses. Substance, on the other hand is something that exists in itself, is the subject causing our sensations, is what is left once we have taken away the sensible qualities that are one with our sensations, and is that which cannot

be perceived in sensation but is seen by the mind. Without substance, a red rose is simply a *"bundle of sensations"*, modifications of our senses, private feelings we experience. There would be nothing *"over there"*, no *"object"* which causes the sensations.

Locke was forced to reject the idea of substance because the idea cannot come through sensation. What is the origin of the idea of substance? The idea of substance is the result of the following judgement, *"The sensible qualities need a support"*, the same way as the Mona Lisa's smile requires the Mona Lisa! Sensible qualities are what we feel in sensation, the red we see, the sound we hear, etc. These sensible qualities must belong to *"something"*, must be qualities of *"something"*, and must be one with *"something"* that supports them.

This *"something"* cannot be given by sensation, it can only be given by our understanding that makes the judgement, *"Such and such sensible qualities need a support"*, which is equivalent to the judgement: *"Sensible qualities cannot exist by themselves"*. The red rose cannot be *"the red we see, the smell we experience, the texture we feel"*, because these sensations are modifications of our senses; these modifications of ourselves are caused by something which is the subject of the sensible qualities we experience.

Our mind makes the judgement that the sensible qualities of the rose which we experience in sensation are united to a subject, belong to a *"thing"*, or are qualities of a *"substance"*. Our understanding cannot think of *"qualities"* without thinking of *"something"* to which the qualities belong. It is our mind, therefore, that provides what the sensations cannot provide, that is, the idea of *"something"*: qualities exist in a subject, in a substance.

Moreover, if our ideas are the sensations we experience, they cannot contain anything which is universal. Locke believed that our particular ideas can become universal ideas by way of abstraction. When we have seen many trees, we take away what is particular to the idea of each tree and we are left with what is common, the universal idea of the tree.

But, says Rosmini, if each particular idea did not contain the "*universal*", how can we abstract it from the idea? There is no universal in there to be abstracted. Abstraction cannot give universal ideas unless we admit that, from the beginning, each idea contains the universal. This is easy to understand if we agree with Rosmini that each particular idea contains the idea of being which is the most common, and the most universal idea of them all. Locke therefore cannot explain in any way how we get universal ideas.

Locke cannot explain how we come to possess the idea of existence. He claims that the idea of existence is acquired through abstraction: take away all the particulars from ideas and you are left with the pure idea of existence. Yet again, there is a creation *ex nihilo*, because if each particular idea does not contain the idea of existence, how can we find it by taking away all particulars?

Sensations, therefore, cannot provide universal ideas nor the idea of existence. Sensations are entirely limited and particular, and cannot provide the common (*existence*) and the proper (*species*). It is the intellect that provides what is common and proper in ideas, something which cannot be provided by any sensation. All ideas, for Rosmini, contain the idea of being right from the beginning; the idea of being is the means whereby our sensations become ideas through what he calls "*intellective perception*". The idea of being, however, cannot proceed from experience or from a judgement, and therefore it must be innate.



Bishop Berkeley accepted Locke's principle that all our ideas come from sensations, and denied that we have the idea of substance. Substance, he said, is unnecessary; there are no "things" or "objects" out there causing our sensations but what is there are "bundles of sensible qualities" which he called ideas.

Trees, houses, dogs, and stones are nothing more than collections of sensations, ideas in the mind of a perceiver. "*Esse est percipi*" i.e. "to exist is to be perceived". If things are not perceived they do not exist; the good Bishop, however, who wanted to prove the existence of God, argued that we need God to keep all things in existence by perceiving them all the time, especially when there are no "senses" around to perceive them.

Today's Phenomenalists accept Berkeley's view that "*esse est percipi*"; they do not agree that we need God to keep in existence our bundles of sensations, nor do they think that there is a *real* world of "*noumena*" (Kant) or a world of "*physical objects*" (Russell) beyond our world of phenomena. There is only the "*possibility*" of new perceptions.



Jean Baptiste d'Alembert (1717-1783): He accepted Locke's principles, even though he raised two strong objections: a) Sensations are internal modifications of our body; how can we "go out" of ourselves and conceive the idea of things which are

"outside"? b) Sensations are detached from each other and truly different from each other: the sensation of the sweet smell [of the rose] is different from its colour red, and the sensation of the velvety texture we feel is very different from the other sensations; yet, the idea of the rose is of a single object possessing the various sensible qualities we experience separately. How can this happen if ideas are

generated by sensations? Good questions, which he did not pursue any further.



Etienne de Condillac (1714-1780): He simplified the ideological system of Locke by reducing the source of ideas to sensations. He rejected reflection as a separate faculty and stated that intelligence, memory, reflection, and imagination are all part of the faculty of sensation. This was

bad news for ethics, since it now fell on the faculty of sensation to be the judge of what is good or evil, on the basis of agreeable or disagreeable sensations. This view was adopted by J Bentham, the founder of Utilitarianism, who came up with the principle: *“Good is the greatest pleasure of the greatest number”*.



David Hume (1711-1776): He was one of the most influential thinkers in the English-speaking world. A J Ayer and the Logical Positivists adopted many of his ideas and agreed with him that propositions are either *“a priori”* or *“a posteriori”* (*“Hume’s Fork”*), the former being analytic,

tautological, saying nothing about the real world; the latter being the result of experience, meaningful, and informative. Propositions which deal with God or metaphysics or ethics are meaningless in the sense that they contain no truth value.

He denied the validity of the idea of necessary connection between cause and effect, on the basis that necessity falls outside experience. The destruction of the principle of cause and effect produced a system which is marked by a most radical scepticism. Hume’s claim to philosophical glory rests on his profound examination of the principle of cause and effect. It was his conclusion on cause and effect

that woke Kant from his "*philosophical slumber*", although he did not agree with Hume's arguments.

As a good empiricist, Hume came to realise that all our knowledge about the world rests ultimately on the principle of cause and effect. It was important, therefore, to test its validity, to ascertain the truthfulness of what we think we know.

The starting point was his conviction that the principle of cause and effect cannot be an a priori principle, contrary to the views of the majority of philosophers before him. It is a posteriori, and based entirely on experience. Hume proved this by arguing that our mind cannot fathom the cause or the effect of anything without experience. It is easy to see how experience alone provides the knowledge that two things are cause/effect, in "*unusual cases*": the knowledge that a kind of white powder causes an explosion if placed near a flame; or that a magnet attracts iron, or that smooth slabs of marble or of glass slide easily on each other but require greater effort to separate them by pulling them apart, is learned only through experience, and it cannot be given a priori.

Moreover, said Hume, even in the most "*obvious*" of cases like, for example, the case of a billiard ball hitting another, we do not discover the effect by reasoning a priori, but only after repeated experience. Adam, continued Hume, did not have any a priori knowledge about the connection of things which surrounded him: he did not know that fire caused heat or that apples nourished him, or that rain made things grow, but he learned through experiencing the constant connection between one event and the other, thus developing the skill of inferring a cause or an effect.

This was not all. We know that the principle is a posteriori, but does experience tell us the "*reason*" why things are

apparently necessarily connected as cause and effect? We know, for example, that fire and heat are linked as cause and effect, but do we know the "*reason*" for the connection? Hume's reply sowed the seeds for the most radical scepticism: experience, he said, cannot and does not provide or show any reason for the necessary linking of a cause to its effect. Will the sun rise tomorrow? Will bread nourish or gravity continue to be of the same kind tomorrow? Constant past experience is not a reason, and yet this is all that we have; our claim to knowledge is, therefore, without justification.

Experience finds things together but does not reveal the reason for their constant connection; hence we have "*no reason*" to expect the future to be like the past (we always do), and neither rationality nor science can be of any help. Hume called "*inference*" the principle we constantly use to expect the future to be like the past; it is also referred to as the "*principle of induction*". Induction or inference persuades us that the future will be like the past, but for Hume there is no rational justification for our belief.

This conclusion opens the way to the most profound form of scepticism: we cannot be sure that anything we hold now as cause and effect will hold as cause and effect in the immediate, intermediate, and distant future. What assurance is there that tomorrow morning we will not wake up in the shape of a millipede? How do we know that the next bar of chocolate will not turn into a snake in our mouth? What guarantee do we have that the law of gravity will continue to have the same intensity or effect which it has had until today?

Hume, however, claimed that he was not a radical sceptic. Reason, he said, is not a very good guide for human beings; in opposition to the French Positivists of his time who had erected a throne to the goddess "*Reason*", he argued that

reason must be removed from its throne and that its place should be occupied by “*instinct, custom, and habit*” as a far more useful and powerful guides of human life.

It is custom and habit that allow us to disregard the rational fears about the future, and it is on custom and habit that inference and induction are based. Why will you still eat your bread tomorrow? Not because of reason, but because of custom and habit. Clearly, custom and habit come by degrees: if you have always experienced two events linked as cause and effect in the past without exceptions, your reliance on inference will be very high; if there were exceptions, your persuasion will be proportioned accordingly. Hume claimed that custom and habit are the guides for both infants and animals, thus showing that reason does not play a role in induction.

Kant was shaken by Hume’s account of the principle of cause and effect and by its sceptical consequences. Against Hume, he argued that the principle was a priori, being one of the tools our mind uses since birth. We are forced to link things up, under certain conditions, as cause and effect, and we use the principle to make sense of the world around us, in the same way as the mind imposes the other categories on to the world of phenomena. Kant’s view on causality, far from defeating scepticism, strengthens it by claiming that the principle is subjective and applies only to the world of phenomena.



Thomas Reid (1710-1796): He was a Scottish philosopher who, in opposition to Locke, claimed that the “*common sense*” of mankind was sufficient to destroy the scepticism of Hume and the Idealism of Berkeley. We have sensations and we instinctively know that they are caused by something outside us which we call bodies. It is a *fact*, he said, that we perceive substance and

being, things which do not fall under our senses, which are entirely different from sensations, but which we perceive on the occasion of sensations.

We must therefore admit that the human mind has, of its own nature, an instinct, a *primitive faculty* which must be accepted as an ultimate and inexplicable fact. According to Reid, there is in us a "*suggestion of nature*" by which, on experiencing the sensations we are necessitated not to stop there, but to pass beyond them by an act of thought, to the persuasion of *the existence of real beings*, which are the causes of our sensations, and to which we give the name of *bodies*. Reid was convinced that he had given a serious blow both to Berkeley's Idealism and to Hume's scepticism. The Kantian categories of knowledge found their immediate source in Reid's "*primitive faculty*".



Dugald Stewart (1753-1828): He was a disciple of Reid, and a major contributor to the "*common sense*" approach of the Scottish philosophy. It is surprising that Rosmini dedicated a rather large section to his views; it was, perhaps, due to the fact that Stewart's teaching on "*nominalism*" was gaining a foothold in European circles. Stewart denied the existence of universal ideas, saying that they were conventional names, empty of content, indicating collections of individual objects.

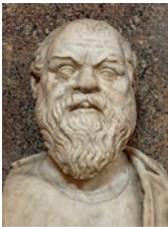
He believed, with Adam Smith, that primitive man named his most useful objects with *proper nouns*: cave, tree, stream, etc. which became *common nouns* later, after experiencing similar objects. Rosmini criticised him for ignoring the meaning of universal ideas and common nouns. A name is "*common*" when it is derived from the common qualities of things. The primitive man noticed in the cave the main feature which he described by the common name of cave.

Thus, common nouns came long before proper nouns, and far from being empty sounds they described the common feature expressed by them.

It was the *common quality* which inspired the name; and when the primitive man saw other caves he gave them the same name. Against Stewart who thought that names were words empty of meaning, indicating collections of individual objects, Rosmini stressed that every universal idea or common noun was the result of a meaningful judgement.

2- False Theories assigning a superfluous cause of ideas

The list includes the names of Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, and Kant. We shall begin with Socrates and his disciple Plato.



Socrates (c.470-399BC) was born and lived in Athens. Most of what we know about him comes from the writings of his brilliant disciple Plato (c.428-c.348BC) who was the first Greek philosopher to leave writings of his own. Plato's writings are among the most important ever written and take the form of dialogues, usually with Socrates as the main character and philosopher. Socrates' driving force was truth. Socrates' questions were ethical and not scientific. He did not speculate about the nature of the world, but about how human beings should live. In the "Apology" he stated, "*God orders me to fulfil the philosopher's mission of searching into myself and other men*"; and again, "*I have nothing to do with physical speculations*".

Early platonic dialogues – reckoned by scholars to be the closest to Socrates' actual teaching – are concerned with definitions of ethical terms, temperance, moderation, friendship, courage. Socrates is presented by Plato as the wisest of all people, always sharp and humorous. Socrates himself, however, constantly states that he is wiser than

others only because he knows that he knows nothing. What is more important for him is the search for truth. Seeking, rather than finding, is the mark of the true philosopher.

In 399BC, after the restoration of democracy in Athens, Socrates was tried on a charge of disbelief in the gods and corrupting the young. He was condemned to death. The charge was, "*Socrates is an evil-doer and a curious person, searching into things under the earth and above the heavens; and making the worse appear the better cause, and teaching all this to others*".

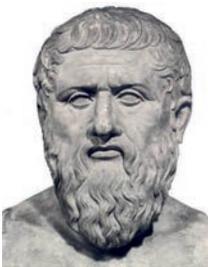
The effect on Plato of his teacher's death was profound and he included Socrates' death in several of his dialogues: in the "*Apology*", he presented Socrates' spirited defence at his trial; in the "*Crito*" he discussed Socrates' noble reasons for not trying to make an easy escape, days before his execution; in the "*Phaedo*" he described Socrates' final hours, spent in arguing for the immortality of the soul. Socrates took hemlock (a poison) and continued to talk with his friends gathered round him until the poison took effect. As he died, he was happy that in the next world he could go on asking questions, unable to be put to death again since he would be immortal (see B Russell's "*History of Western Philosophy*" for further references on Socrates and Plato).

For Rosmini, Socrates and Plato came very close to solving the most intricate problem in philosophy, the one that opens the way to a solution of many other problems, and to the truth, the problem of the origin of ideas. In the "*Meno*", Socrates was asked by him, a sophist, to explain how one can search for things that he does not know, and how one can search for things that he does know: how can you search for what you do not know to exist, and how can you search for things which are under your eyes?

The word “*search*” does not seem to apply either to ignorance or to knowledge. In order to investigate, the mind needs something in between ignorance and knowledge, something known only in part, not as dark as ignorance or as bright as knowledge, but a mixture of the two. The sophist Meno took Socrates to task for claiming that he did not know anything: if this was true, Socrates would stay in his ignorance for ever, since the mind cannot search for that about which is in total darkness.

Socrates acknowledged the seriousness of the problem, and came up with a solution. If the mind searches for something it means that it already has in itself some traces of it, and possesses innately some notions which have been “*forgotten*”. Socrates tested this view by calling to himself an unlearned slave, and by asking him questions he succeeded in getting from the young boy the right answers to mathematical and geometrical problems.

He compared himself to a “*midwife*”, helping people to deliver what already they have in their soul. There must be something innate in us which makes searching and discovering possible. Socrates claimed that we do not “*learn*”, we “*remember*”; to know is to remember, since we possess innately traces of all knowledge.



Plato (c. 428BC – c. 348BC) lived in Athens. He was the son of a well-to-do citizen and he had no need to work in order to live comfortably; but he believed that it was a man’s duty to contribute to the welfare of his fellow citizens. He founded the Academy at Athens, the very first University, which was to provide a liberal education for young men who would be leaders in the polis (city state). The tragic events surrounding Socrates’ death caused a profound disillusionment with Athenian politics.

Plato's most famous Dialogue was "*The Republic*", and the long section on knowledge and the philosopher in books V-VII is undoubtedly its most famous passage. The passage fits into the context of the whole Republic in the following way. Socrates, the main character in the dialogue, has been discussing with two friends, Glaucon and Adeimantus, what justice is, both in the individual and the State. Socrates argued that a State would be governed according to justice only if it were ruled by a special type of persons whom he called "*Guardians*" – people who are both intelligent and have good qualities of character.

He based his claim that a State will be just if Guardians ruled it, on the ground that only they have the ability to care for the good of the whole polis, rather than for their own selfish concerns or the interests of a class. Since Plato's time many political thinkers have had similar thoughts; but hardly anybody has gone as far as to take the surprising step which Plato took in Book V – that is, to claim that the ideal rulers should not just be intelligent and disinterested, but should be "*philosophers*". Plato was quite aware that this is, to most people, a highly peculiar claim to make, and this is doubtless why when he defended it in books V-VII he wrote in the way he did – in a very urgent and vivid style.

Socrates has been describing the "*ideal*" state in great detail. Glaucon presses him to prove that such a State can actually come about. Socrates' reply was: "*...There will be no end to the troubles of States, or of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers*".

Plato's philosopher

1. The philosopher has the capacity to grasp the eternal and immutable... while the non-philosopher is lost in multiplicity and change
2. The philosopher has true knowledge of reality and clear standards of perfection
3. The philosopher has practical experience and human excellence in all fields
4. The philosopher loves all branches of learning that reveal eternal reality
5. The philosopher will be truthful; and will hate untruth just as he/she loves truth, and will yearn for the whole truth from his/her earliest years
6. The philosopher will be in things purely of the mind, and physical pleasures will pass him/her by
7. The philosopher will be self-controlled and not grasping about money
8. The philosopher will have no touch of meanness or pettiness of mind
9. The philosopher will not fear death
10. The philosopher will be just and civilized not uncooperative and savage
11. The philosopher must learn easily and possess a good memory
12. The philosopher will have a mind which has grace and a sense of proportion and style.

Plato distinguishes philosophers from "sight-lovers": sight-lovers are those *"who love looking and listening and are delighted by beautiful sounds and colours and shapes, but their minds are incapable of seeing and delighting in the essential nature of beauty itself"*. The sight-lover is stuck at the level of particulars, of uncritical sense-experiences; he accumulates perceptions, facts, but does not *"see"* the essential nature of such particulars. He experiences many beautiful things but does not understand what beauty in itself is; he perceives appearances, shadows, images, but not the real things. He

is “*dreaming*”, i.e., seeing images; the philosopher instead is “*awake*” because he “*understands*” the real essence or nature of things. Such nature or essence is to be found only in the Forms or Ideas: all particular beautiful things simply partake of “*beauty itself*” or of the Form of Beauty which is one, simple, eternal, immutable.

All particular things partake of a Form or Idea which contains the real nature; acts which are “*just*” are found to be such only because they share in the Form of Justice. The Forms, from a logical point of view, are universal ideas expressed by universal or common nouns: dog, house, man, etc. From a metaphysical point of view, the Forms constitute the Real World, are “*real*” things deriving from the supreme Form of the Good. At the end of our earthly life in this world of “*opinion*”, of “*images*”, of “*dreams*” we shall go to the real world of the Forms, of pure knowledge, of pure intelligibility, a world dominated by the supreme form of the Good, the originator of all other Forms.

Plato’s fundamental discovery was that the “*senses*”, the world of “*perception*” cannot give us knowledge, but simply opinion. Everything in the world of the senses is in a constant flux, changing all the time; things are never fixed, immutable, necessary, and our sensations of things are always different, varied, contingent. How can knowledge be possible in a constantly changing world? Plato, therefore, rejected the view that knowledge may be acquired merely through the senses.

In the “*Theaetetus*”, Plato argued that there is an unceasing battle between those who take as true the instinctive belief that the senses give knowledge and those who argue that knowledge can be found only in the eternal, universal, immutable Ideas or Forms. He called this “*the battle of the Giants and the Gods*”: the former holding that sense perception gives knowledge of what is, the latter holding

that true knowledge, true reality, is to be found in the incorporeal Ideas or Forms which are the objects of the mind.



Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German philosopher who is widely considered to be a central figure of modern philosophy. Although Kant was placed by Rosmini in the second group of philosophers who made too many assumptions and postulated more than was necessary to explain the origin of all ideas, his philosophy follows logically from the intuitions of the philosophers of the first group, Reid's philosophy in particular.

Like the theories of the empiricists, Kant's own views lead to radical scepticism. It must be said that Kant's philosophy is very influential today; many of Wittgenstein's theories have in Kant their immediate predecessor, especially his views on the relativity of truth and on the impossibility of metaphysics. It was Kant who wrote, "*Metaphysics is a dark and shoreless ocean, marked by no beacons*". For Kant the real, noumenal world lurks out there, but we must concentrate on knowing the world as we perceive it to be and nothing else is relevant to us. The phenomenal world, the world of human beings, is the only one available for study.

Kant begins by saying that all our ideas come through experience; however, he does not agree with the empiricists who claim that all ideas come through the senses. Each idea is made up of two parts: there is an a priori, necessary and universal part, and there is the contingent and particular given by the senses. He called "*form*" the a priori element of the idea and "*matter*" the a posteriori or sense-given element of the idea.

The apple we know in the idea is made up of "*matter*", i.e. all the sensations we receive through the senses, and of "*form*", which is the a priori element that our mind adds to the matter. Universality and necessity, Kant agrees, cannot come through the senses; yet we do discover such qualities in every idea we have. If matter cannot provide such qualities, it must be said that it is our mind that draws out of itself such qualities.

When we perceive objects, the senses give us the matter of the idea, and the form is produced by the mind. What is called "*form*" is in effect a combination of 14 universal notions, all a priori, and all entering into the making of the full idea. The a priori notions added by the mind are: space and time and 12 further categories, divided into the four general classes of "*quantity*", "*quality*", "*relation*", and "*modality*".

According to Kant, it is impossible to perceive any object without perceiving it as furnished with a certain "*quantity*", and a certain "*quality*", without perceiving some "*relationship*" such as substance or accident, and some "*mode*" of existence such as contingency or necessity. It is also impossible for us not to perceive objects within the categories of time and space.

Note, however, that all such a priori categories added to sensations by the mind are not strictly speaking "*objective*", independent of the mind, intuited as absolutely true by the mind; rather, they spring forth from our own spirit, our own mind. Time and space do not exist independently of our mind; the human mind is forced, by inner necessity, to locate all our experiences into such categories.

It could be that a being other than a human being, views the world under completely different categories. God alone, on this theory, can be said to know the world as it is in itself.

Kant's views open the door to idealism and to scepticism. Idealism, because all our ideas spring from ourselves: objects are simply a combination of our sensations and our categories, they are products of our mind. Scepticism follows, since there is no way for us to know whether the noumenal world of real things actually exists. The apple is made up of sensations and categories: but is there a real apple over there? The "*phenomena*" are certain; the "*noumena*" are only a possibility. It is this uncertainty that brings scepticism into Kant's philosophy.

Rosmini praised Kant for stressing, against the empiricists, that there is an immense difference between feeling and understanding. Our cat feels, but does not understand. Understanding is an operation of the mind and has qualities completely different from the particular and circumscribed sensations. Kant also understood that all our ideas begin with a judgement. He introduced in philosophy the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements.

Analytic judgements are of the type, "*A triangle is a three-side figure*"; and "*A bachelor is an unmarried man*": these are judgements in which the predicate is already comprised in the subject. Analytic judgements are tautological, unfolding the meaning of the subject without adding anything not already included in it. Analytic judgements are necessarily true, and cannot be contradicted; but they do not give new knowledge about the world.

Synthetic judgements, on the other hand, can be of two types. Synthetic judgements a posteriori are judgements drawn from experience, in which the predicate is not already contained in the subject. "*The wall is white*" is a synthetic a posteriori judgement since the subject "*wall*" does not contain the predicate "*white*", we learn this through experience. Most of our judgements about the world are of

this type. It is through these judgements that we learn new things about the world.

Kant claimed that we also have another type of synthetic judgements, and he called them synthetic a priori judgements. These are judgements which are synthetic because the predicate is not already part of the subject, the predicate adds new knowledge to the subject; they are a priori because such predicates do not originate from experience and sensations but come directly from the mind. Kant thought that mathematics and geometry were examples of synthetic a priori judgements. Take the example $2+2=4$: for Kant the predicate 4 is not contained in the concept of adding together 2+2; or take the example, "*The sum of the angles in a triangle is equal to 180 degrees*"; for Kant the subject "*the sum of the angles in a triangle*" does not contain the predicate, "*is equal to 180 degrees*". This is new knowledge, not contained in the subject.

Kant also claimed that the principle of cause and effect is a synthetic a priori judgement. Rosmini disagreed with Kant about synthetic a priori judgements. He analysed the examples given by Kant and found them all analytic; for example, said Rosmini, the idea "*effect*", contains necessarily the idea "*cause*".

Kant is right to say that our ideas originate with judgements, both analytic and synthetic; but no judgement is possible without the innate idea of being. Kant's categories cannot do the work he thinks they do. Firstly, Kant's categories spring forth from the human mind, are not objectively true; they are, in a sense, an instinctive way of making sense of our experiences. Secondly, each of the 14 categories is shown by Rosmini to be contained in the universal idea of being; categories are, therefore, unnecessary and superfluous in explaining the origin of ideas.

Chapter 4

The Idea of Being

Summary

1. *What is the idea of being? Rosmini starts with the fact that we think "being", that is, we know what being is, what existence is. We use the verb "to be" all the time, "I am" or "She is" or "The moon exists" or "This is white paper", etc. We can think being in a universal way, without any determination. This is a simple fact which is granted by everyone.*

2. *The next step is surprising but equally true: we cannot think of anything without the idea of being. The last abstraction from any idea is always being, and every idea terminates in being. Without being the idea cannot exist, is nothing. The consequence is astonishing: the idea of being is the mother of all ideas and is in every idea as that which gives it universality, objectivity, immortality, immutability, etc.*

3. *What is the origin of the idea of being? It cannot originate from sense-perception, or from the subject, or from our own spirit since the idea of being has attributes which are the opposite of the particular, finite, mortal, mutable, contingent, determinate qualities of any sensation, or of any subject in this universe. The idea of being has qualities which are more divine than human. The idea of being is, therefore, innate, all human beings have it, and it is there from conception.*

4. *The idea of being is the source of all other ideas. This is another extraordinary fact. The principles of logic and the other important elementary concepts derive directly from the idea of being. Ideas about the world have the idea of being as their form, and the matter is given by the objects of perception. The joining of the form to the matter to generate ideas is called by Rosmini "**intellective perception**".*

5. *Intellective perception is possible because human beings have, since conception, two innate faculties: 1- The **intellect** which is constituted by the constant vision of the idea of being; 2- The **fundamental feeling** which is the constant perception of ourselves, the basis of all other subsequent and fleeting sense-perceptions. We feel the horse we see or touch and our intellect makes the judgement, using the idea of being: "This thing which I feel is a horse", generating in this manner the universal idea of horse.*

6. *Rosmini provides a variety of proofs to establish the existence of the **fundamental feeling**.*

1- Fact: we think "being", we have the idea of being.

Rosmini, faithful to his method, begins with a fact: all human beings think "being" in a universal mode. What does it mean? It means that we can, with our thought, concentrate on the most common feature of all things, ignoring all other qualities, and this is "being". When we say, "*Reason is proper to humans, who have feeling in common with animals, and vegetable life in common with plants, but "being" in common with everything*" we are actually thinking of the most common feature of all things, and that is "being" in a universal mode.

Let us try to understand this simple fact: to say that we have the idea of being is to say that we can think "being" in a universal mode, without any determination, as the last thing that remains in all our thoughts when we take away from each of them all their qualities and characteristics. When we say, "*To be or not to be*" or "*The Loch Ness monster does not exist*" we are thinking "being". Take in your hands three different objects, a pen, a computer, a book: if you disregard all their particular characteristics you will be left with existence as their most common feature. To think of existence without any determinations, any specific

characteristics is to think “being” in a universal mode. All of us, therefore, can and do think “being” in a universal mode.

“This fact is so obvious – writes Rosmini – that to mention it would be sufficient. Yet it is the extremely simple foundation of the entire theory of the origin of ideas. To think being in a universal mode means that we have the idea of being in all its universality; without the idea of being we cannot think being”.

2- Fact: we cannot think of anything without the idea of being.

The first step is to know that all human beings possess the idea of being, or the idea of existence in general. They all know what existence means. Why is this fact so important? Take the next step which is to notice that we cannot think of anything without the idea of being, we cannot have any thought without the idea of being. All our ideas have the idea of being. This is the discovery: there is no thought that does not contain the idea of being. And vice-versa, without the idea of being no thought, no idea is possible. No other philosopher had ever come to this clear conclusion which is of extreme importance. Let us see what it means to say that the idea of being is present in all other ideas.



Think of the dog you left at home and that you know so well, with all its little quirks and habits. Now, take away with your mind all the specific traits of your dog: you are

left with the idea of dog in general. Continue to take away with your mind all the characteristics of the dog in general, and you are left with the idea of animal, of something which has life, motion, etc. Continue with the process: take away from the idea of animal in general all life, all motion, and you are left with the idea of a thing in general. Notice that you are constantly thinking "*something*", that is, having the idea. You can still progress further in your thinking: from your idea of a thing in general take away the idea of real existence, of a real entity and you are left with the very last possible object of your thought, which is the idea of possible existence, the idea of being. You cannot go any further, since if you now take away even the idea of possible existence, then nothing is left for you to think, the object of your thought is gone.

The idea of being is, therefore, the very last source of the idea of your dog, and, without it, the idea of your dog cannot exist, cannot be thought. Notice that the particular idea of your dog is contained in the more general idea of dog, the more general idea of dog is contained in the general idea of animal, and the general idea of animal is contained in the even more general idea of something which is, and the more general idea of something which is, is contained in the idea of being. In the same way that you cannot think of your dog without thinking that it is an animal, in the same way you cannot think of your dog without thinking of something which "*is*".

You can repeat the same process for any idea: the result will always be that the very last possible abstraction from any idea whatsoever is the idea of being. You should begin to realise the importance of such an idea: it is to be found in all other ideas, and no other idea is even thinkable without the idea of being! You are thinking now: you are thinking "*being*"! You may say, "*But I am not aware of thinking 'being' when I am thinking*", and yet you are necessarily thinking

“being” because “being” is contained in all your ideas, and there is no idea without “being”. You are right to say that you are not aware of it, but the fact is that if you think, you think being. This is how Rosmini puts it:

*“Let us give an example. Take the concrete idea of a particular person, Maurice. Now when I take away from Maurice what is particular and individual to him, I am left with what is common to human beings. Next, by a second abstraction, I remove the human elements such as reason and freedom, and now I have a more general idea, that of an animal. Abstracting animal qualities I am left with a body that has vegetable life without sensitivity. After this I take away all physical organisation and vegetable life, fixing my attention on what is common to minerals; my idea is now that of a body in general. Finally I withdraw my attention from what is proper to body; my idea is now of an ens [thing] in all its universality. But during this process of abstraction, my mind has dealt with something, and has never ceased thinking; it has always had as the object of its action, although this idea has become consistently more universal until my mind arrived at the most universal of all ideas, the idea of an ens [thing], undetermined by any quality known or fixed by me. I can finally think that this ens is an ens because it has **being**. Abstraction can go no further without losing every object of thought and destroying every idea in my mind. The idea of being, therefore, is the most universal idea, and remains after the last possible abstraction; without it, all thinking ceases and all other ideas are impossible” (NE, n. 410).*

One immediate consequence of this fact is that the idea of being is the source of all other ideas and, therefore, the source of all knowledge. A comparison was made, at the beginning of this book, between the “single point” from which the vast array of all things in the universe had their origin, and the “single point” from which all ideas, all knowledge have their source. The mind’s universe, Rosmini discovered, has its own “big bang”, its “single point”, and the discovery is as revolutionary as the discovery of the physical “big bang”.

We are aware of the infinite variety of our knowledge: geography, history, physics, anthropology, psychology, biology, politics, ethics, philosophy, and so on. Today, even more than in the past, we pursue specialisations in all fields and are aware of the immensity of all forms of knowledge. The idea that all this infinite number of pieces of knowledge can be given unity by one single idea, the idea of being, is mind-boggling. Yet, this amazing fact has just been analysed and found to be true: the idea of being, present in all possible ideas, is the mother idea of them all, and all knowledge has its source in it.

Rosmini, writing in 1830, could not use the comparison of the “*big bang*”, but he used the example of a “*pyramid*”: at the lower end of the pyramid we find the infinite number of particular ideas, the higher we ascend the more general the ideas become, fewer in number, and such that they contain what is under them; when we reach the top we find only one idea, the idea of being, the most universal and containing in itself all other ideas found below.



“All human knowledge could be represented by a pyramid in the form of a tetrahedron. Its base is immense and made up of countless individual truths, like so many stones. On top of these is laid another row of the universal truths closest to particular truths. There are a large number of them, but not as many as in the first row. As one gradually ascends to the tiers above, each

row has a smaller number of truths with ever greater potentiality and universality until, at the summit, number itself disappears into unity. At this stage, universality has reached its full, infinite potential in the last tetrahedron at the summit of the pyramid" (Introduction to Philosophy, no.8)

3- What is the origin of the idea of being?

Let us proceed: we have seen, so far, that we have the idea of being, we can and do think "*being*". Then we have seen that this incredible idea is actually part of all our ideas, it enters in all of them – therefore in all our thoughts. Indeed, there would be no thought should the idea of being be missing. We can now ask: "*Where does this prodigious idea come from? What is the origin of the idea of being?*"

Rosmini now begins a complete and exhaustive search of all possible sources for this idea. He begins by explaining in great detail that the idea of being cannot come from sources suggested by other major philosophers. In particular it cannot come from:

- Bodily sensations
- Feeling of Myself
- Locke's reflection
- Reid's act of perception
- Kant's emanation of categories from our spirit.

The empiricists claim that all ideas come through the senses. You see a horse, and your bodily sensation of the horse becomes your idea of horse. This is simply impossible, for many reasons, one of which is that your cat also sees the horse and does not acquire the idea horse. A second reason is that bodily sensations cannot provide universality since a bodily sensation is what you yourself feel and no one else. Bodily sensations cannot be the source of the idea of being because they have characteristics completely different from those proper to the idea of being, which are:

1. *Objectivity* (sensations are our modifications; but things are independent of us)
2. *Possibility* (the idea of being is intuition of possible beings)
3. *Simplicity* (absence of anything material, anything extended)
4. *Unity or Identity* (the idea of being is one and the same)
5. *Universality* (sensation is particular, the idea of being is applicable to an infinite number of things)
6. *Necessity* (what is possible can never be impossible)
7. *Immutability* (the idea of being is always the same)
8. *Eternity* (the possibility of “being” is not limited by time)
9. *Indetermination* (“being”, in all its universality, is devoid of any determination).

The idea of being, furnished with such characters, cannot possibly derive from sensations, which are particular, beginning and ending within our temporary modifications. It cannot come from Locke’s reflection which is a reflection on sensations. It cannot come from the feeling of *myself* because this feeling, like all other sensations, is particular and restricted whereas the idea of being has completely different characteristics. Moreover, in order to have the intellectual perception of *myself*, I need to have already the idea of being. The feeling of *myself* is, in a sense, innate since it is with us right from the beginning of our particular existence; but the universal idea of *myself*, the intellectual perception of *myself*, is acquired by putting together the feeling of *myself* and the universal idea of being.

Reid and Kant claimed that the idea of existence is drawn instinctively from our own spirit on the occasion of

perception or sensation. They both agreed that such an idea cannot come from the senses; Reid claimed that it proceeds naturally and mysteriously from ourselves, and Kant stated that, like all other universal a priori categories, it emanates from our own spirit. These sceptical conclusions failed to explain the source of all our knowledge in a fully rational way, making it instead an automatic production of our own spirit, condemning human beings to subjectivism and hence to scepticism. Our spirit is our spirit, that is, the spirit of a particular individual.

What is produced instinctively, by natural force, by an individual mind would still be particular, reflecting the structure of the individual mind. It can never be universal, objective, immutable, necessary, undetermined, etc. as the idea of being is. The idea of being, therefore, cannot have its source in the restriction and peculiarity of the individual mind. Its characteristics are more akin to the divine than to the limited make-up of the individual mind.

Having carefully examined all possible sources for the idea of being and failing to find a satisfactory one, Rosmini concludes that this universal idea, mother of all ideas and the unifying principle of all knowledge, is given to us in all its light as the means whereby we can acquire knowledge. The idea of being is innate in us, is the *"light of reason"* that shines before our mind, and it is not a production of our own spirit; on the contrary, our mind contemplates the idea of being in its complete objectivity.

"That the idea of being is innate follows from what has been said:

- 1. If the idea is so necessary and essential to the formation of all our ideas that the faculty of thought is impossible without it;*
- 2. If it is not found in sensations, nor extracted by reflection from internal or external sensations;*

3. *If it is not created by God at the moment of perception;*

4. *If finally its emanation from ourselves is an absurdity;*

Then the only possibility left is that the idea of being is innate in our soul; we are born with the vision of possible being but we advert to it only much later" (NE 467).

The idea of being is the light that enlightens our darkness, is the light that humans have and animals do not have. The cat we have been talking about has sensations like ours, even better than ours, but it does not have the idea of being therefore it cannot have any idea at all. It has instinct and therefore instinctively moves towards pleasure and draws back from pain, but it cannot be aware of itself nor of the things of the world around so that it can pass judgments of the type, *"This is I, this is a chair, this is a book"*.

Human beings, instead, are made intelligent from birth by the constant vision of the idea of being. The idea is independent of them –is given to them, always unchanging – and its light makes them intelligent. If you put a cat in a completely dark room and you stimulate it in various ways, it feels the actions made on itself and it will instinctively move according to feelings of physical pleasures or pains, but it will not know, it will not have ideas of anything. A human being, instead, has the natural light of intelligence, the idea of being, that allows him to know, to be aware of himself, and of the world around.

It has been objected that, if the idea of being is innate, we should be aware of it right from the beginning of our life, it should be the clearest idea of them all, whereas many find it difficult to understand it even in their mature age.

It is a fact that we have many ideas in the mind, all the time, of which we are not aware until sensations or other experiences force us to think them. The idea of being is in

the mind from conception and we make a constant use of it as we learn many concepts and acquire many ideas through our experiences; but, being the most abstract idea of all, it does require great concentration of the mind to capture it in its brightness. This process of abstraction is gradual in us, and it becomes more sophisticated as we advance in knowledge and maturity. Without the idea of being we would be devoid of any knowledge whatsoever, our minds would be in darkness, and we would be like the biblical mule that has no understanding.

4- The idea of being is the source of all other ideas.

The discovery of the innate idea of being solves the problem of the origin of ideas and provides a secure basis for all knowledge. Plato, Leibniz, and Kant failed to solve the problem by admitting far too many innate ideas: all our ideas are innate, for Plato; only "*traces*" of ideas are innate, for Leibniz; and for Kant, the 14 categories are innate. By admitting too many innate ideas, all of them failed to identify the "*mother of all ideas*", the fundamental idea which is at the basis of all ideas, the idea of being; their systems therefore cannot provide sure foundations for philosophy.

The empiricists, on the other hand, did not admit any innate idea and failed, therefore, to explain the origin of many fundamental ideas; moreover, they failed to explain the characteristics of all ideas, their universality, immutability, eternity, necessity, etc. Their systems therefore are seriously vitiated and cannot be true.

The innate idea of being solves the problem of how we can make the very first judgement. Every judgement requires, as a predicate, a universal idea; but all universal ideas are the product of a judgement. How was the first judgement possible if we did not have, innately, a universal idea? The answer is now simple, since we know that we

have the idea of being innately since conception; with the help of the universal idea of being we can make the first judgement, and all other subsequent judgements.

Origin of the Principles of Logic

The four principles of logic are derived from the idea of being. They are:

1. The principle of cognition, *“The object of thought is being”*;
2. The principle of contradiction, *“What is cannot not be”* or *“We cannot think being and not being at the same time”*;
3. The principle of substance, *“We cannot think of an accident without a substance”*
4. The principle of cause and effect, *“We cannot think of an effect without a cause”*.

We use the principles of logic in all our conversations, writings, and reasoning. They are the means whereby we understand each other, and are able to follow or to create a series of logical thoughts. It is not easy to explain their origin: the empiricists denied the validity of the principles of substance and of cause and effect, and Kant claimed that such principles emanate from within ourselves, spontaneously, making them subjective and true only for the human race.

For Rosmini, the principles of logic are applications of the idea of being, as it can be seen from the way they are formulated, and are as certain and true as the idea of being is.

Origin of pure a priori ideas

There are other qualities of the idea of being which form some precious elementary concepts, making human reasoning possible. They are:

1. *The concept of unity*
2. *The concept of numbers*
3. *The concept of possibility*
4. *The concept of universality*
5. *The concept of necessity*
6. *The concept of immutability*
7. *The concept of the absolute*

All such concepts are qualities of the idea of being and are given with the idea itself. They too enjoy the perfect clarity of the idea of being. Needless to say, the origin and the truth of such elementary concepts caused immense trouble to many other philosophers who either denied them or gave no satisfactory explanation for them. Hume, for example, denied the validity of the idea of necessity, arguing that he could not find its origin anywhere. He went on to destroy the principle of cause and effect saying that there is no “*necessary*” connection between the two, destroying in the process all our knowledge acquired through the principle of cause and effect.

Origin of “*a posteriori*” ideas

So far we have given an account of the origin of the idea of being, of the principles of logic, and of the elementary concepts.

We must now see how we obtain the ideas that provide us with knowledge about the real things of the universe, the ideas of things like “*myself*”, “*tree*”, “*star*”, “*dog*”, etc. The origin of all such ideas is easily explained once we recognise that the human subject is at once an intelligent and feeling being: he has the constant vision of the idea of being which makes him intelligent, and has feeling which allows him to

perceive the sensations caused by the sensible qualities of bodies. The feeling subject is at the same time the intelligent subject. The matter of such ideas is given in the sensations felt by the human subject, and the formal part of all ideas is given by the intellect which has, as a constant object, the idea of being.

It was Kant who said that all our ideas of the world are made up of form and matter; the matter provided by sensations, the form given by the mind. His mistake was to say that the form consisted of 14 categories spontaneously produced by the mind on occasion of sensations. Rosmini argues instead that the form which is given by the mind – which is independent of the mind – is the simple idea of being which contains in itself all the 14 categories of Kant.

When we see a tree, we feel the sensations caused by the tree. Yet, feeling the sensations is not having the idea; the sensations remain in total darkness, like in animals. We have the idea when our intellect provides the idea of being and makes the interior judgment, *“There is an object that causes the sensible qualities which are felt by me in sensation”*. We can easily pass this judgement since we are at the same time intelligent and feeling subjects, we have all the ingredients for making the judgement and thus for acquiring the idea. This process is called by Rosmini, **“intellective perception”**, and is the way we acquire all our ideas of bodies, including our own body.

In the unity of the human subject we find intelligence and feeling, both innate, both necessary for the acquisition of all other ideas. We have seen that intelligence is the permanent vision of the idea of being, and we have noted the extreme importance of this discovery; but Rosmini’s brilliance is again in evidence in his profound assessment of feeling, dealing with it in a way that had never been done before.

5- The discovery of the Fundamental Feeling.

Rosmini claims that we have a “*fundamental feeling*” of ourselves since conception. “*Life*”, for Rosmini, is the intimate conjunction of spirit and matter, of soul and body, which produces a fundamental feeling that remains constant and permanent until there is life. This fundamental feeling is at the basis of all other particular feelings; these are felt in a part of the body simply because the whole body is constantly felt by the fundamental feeling. The fundamental feeling is the feeling of our body reached by the nervous system, through which we feel our own life. It is through this feeling that we have a most intimate and unique perception of our own body which we feel as one entity with us.

If we did not feel our body in a constant and permanent way, we would have great difficulty in explaining how we become aware of particular sensations in parts of our body; if we admit to its existence then it becomes clear that since we feel our body in a constant way we immediately become aware and feel the particular sensation that alters the status of the fundamental feeling in that part of the body.

It is true that it is very difficult to become aware of the fundamental feeling which is innate and constant. Yet, having a feeling and being aware of it are two different things. Rosmini suggests an exercise to try to catch this feeling: “*Place yourself in a dark, peaceful room and keep still for a long time, trying to rid your mind of images and ideas of things; you will notice then that you can no longer perceive the boundaries of your body, the location of your hands, feet, and of all other parts. At that stage you should begin to perceive this fundamental feeling of the life of your body*”.

The fundamental feeling is an original datum. There is no way of explaining "feeling" to a person who has not got it, in the same way that it is impossible to explain colours to a person born blind. *"Philosophers who imagine that human beings begin to exist without feeling, truly make statues of them, and then go on to claim that sensations arise in these statues when they are touched by external bodies. Such a sequence of events, however, only creates inexplicable difficulties at odds with nature's normal way of acting. That feeling should suddenly arise where no feeling had previously existed would be as difficult to understand as creation from nothing."*

According to this hypothesis, sensation, which comes about in the statue when exterior bodies act upon it, informs us of our own existence. In this case, we feel something different from ourselves without being able to feel ourselves!" (NE, n.718)

There are other ways of proving the existence of the fundamental feeling. When one of our own sense organs is stimulated, the sensation we experience is a fresh confirmation of the existence of the fundamental feeling, which precedes the sensation. For how could we locate the sensation at a certain part of our body if we had no feeling in it? Such a fact would be inexplicable.

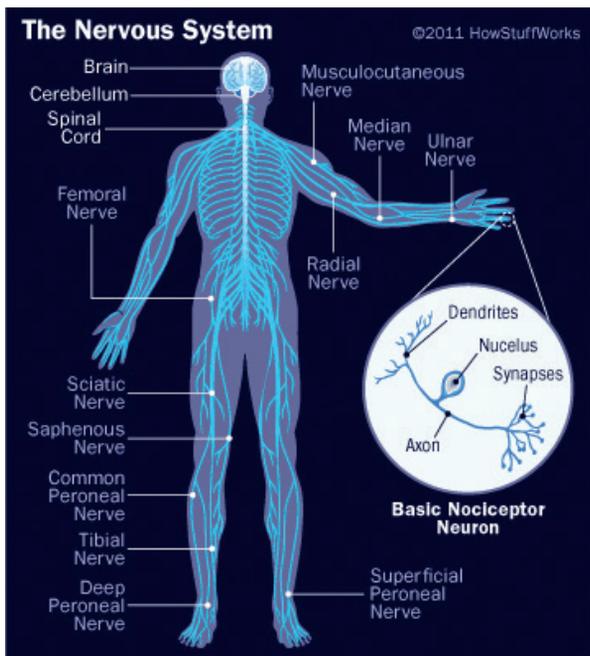
The same can be said about the capacity for moving our limbs. If these were not naturally felt by us, they would be extraneous to us, and our will would not be able to move the limbs it wished with its internal act. Without the fundamental feeling, therefore, two kinds of acts of our spirit would remain inexplicable, and even absurd: the act by which our spirit locates a sensation it experiences at different parts of the body; and the act that imparts movement to them as it pleases. We must understand that it is "*myself*" which locates sensation and produces movement as an effect of its own very activity.

In the first of his four volumes on *Psychology*, Rosmini adds new proofs for the existence of the fundamental feeling:

- If I think at this moment about myself I notice that I have many memories of sensations, of thoughts. Even now I have various sensations and thoughts. Each of these sensations and thoughts are separate. Yet, "*myself*" who have the memories, the sensations, and the thoughts am always the same. It is I myself who think, perceive, and do all these things. If it were not I, the same myself, who carries them out, I could not compare two sensations or two thoughts and come to know their diversity. This I, or myself, therefore is not the sensations and the thoughts. The "*I*" or myself is the subject who possesses the sensations and the thoughts. If I now begin to remove mentally some particular thought or sensation, I soon realise that I am not destroying myself. The "*I*" or myself remains, even when deprived of all secondary thoughts and sensations. In this way I come to form the idea of the fundamental feeling which I express by the word "*I*" or "*Myself*", pure and simple, my soul.

- When I want to express the fact of feeling, I say, "*I feel*". Let us cancel the "*feel*": have I cancelled "*myself*" with the feeling? Certainly not! But what if I cancel "*I*", and am left with "*feel*" alone? "*Feel*" completely alone would have no meaning. So we see that the feeling expressed by the word "*I*" or "*Myself*" exists independently of any particular sensation; on the other hand, the particular sensation, if it is to exist, needs the fundamental feeling (*Psychology*, 96-103).

It is the fundamental feeling which constitutes the pure substance of the soul. The soul therefore is known to us, and as a simple feeling principle which is present in all parts of our body, is a spiritual subject which excludes all possibilities of being made up of matter which is essentially "*extended*", and therefore separate in all points.



The Fundamental Feeling is intimately Connected to the Nervous System

Chapter 5

The Human Subject

Summary

1. *Feeling and the idea of being are innate; they are the two basic elements of all human knowledge, but they also open the way to a fuller understanding of the human subject.*

2. *What is man/woman? Rosmini mentions the famous definitions provided by Plato and Aristotle and adds his own definitions. For Rosmini, a full and accurate definition of the human subject must include feeling, intelligence, and will.*

3. *Most English-speaking philosophers today tend to dismiss the spiritual or immaterial, relying instead on scientific investigation and verification. Science is the new religion, and only that is true which can be observed and verified through scientific means.*

4. *The abolition of the spiritual gives a highly distorted view of the human being, and wrong definitions. Moreover, it makes it impossible to find a ground for morality, and for the soul. Today, philosophers have removed the word "soul" and use the word "mind", meaning by it not so much the spiritual Cartesian mind but the material brain.*

5. *For Rosmini, the human soul is spiritual and essentially "sensitive", "intelligent", and "volitive". The "I" is the soul that affirms itself; and it is the same I or soul that feels, understands, and wills in the unity of the human subject.*

Definitions of the Human Subject

Feeling and the idea of being are the two basic elements of all human knowledge. Being is known of itself, since if we did not know what existence was, we could not think anything at all. If being is what is first known it cannot be defined.

Equally, we cannot define feeling but we must take it for granted. We experience feeling, and we know what it is; if we did not experience feeling we would never be able to explain it or to understand what it is.

Meticulous observation discovers the two basic data for the solution of the epistemological conundrum, but it also opens the door to an understanding of the reality of the human subject. The constant presence to the mind of the idea of being, and the fact of the fundamental feeling from conception explain the origin of every possible idea and hence of every possible knowledge, but it also serves as the basis for a definition of the human subject.

Rosmini provides two definitions of the human subject, the second of which is a more detailed explanation of the first.

1- The human being is an intellective and volitive animal subject.

2- The human being is an animal subject endowed with the intuition of indeterminate ideal being and with the perception of its own corporeal fundamental feeling, and operating in accordance with animality and intelligence.

Plato had defined the human subject "*an intelligence aided by organs*", and Aristotle provided the definition which was adopted by the Scholastics, "*The human being is a rational animal*".

Of the two, Aristotle's definition is by far the better; it ignores, however, the active part of the human being which is the will, and it neglects the fact that the intellect precedes reason.

Rosmini's first definition contains both the passive faculty, the intellect, and the active faculty, the will; and it makes it clear that the intellect, as that which constantly intuits

indeterminate-ideal being, is the faculty which makes human beings intelligent. Reason is the faculty which applies indeterminate being to feelings, and to real and ideal beings; it is this application which gives rise to reasoning.

The will is the faculty which inclines towards a known object, and the act of the will is called volition. Freedom is the faculty which determines the will to a particular volition or to its contrary.

Notice, in the definitions, the unity of the human subject: it is the human subject that possesses equally feeling, intellect, and will in such a manner that it is the same subject who feels, who understands, and who wills.

Science and the decline of the Spiritual

It was the sociologist Max Weber who highlighted the power of some ideas to bring forth dramatic changes in the course of events in history. In his *"Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"*, he suggested that modern capitalism was brought about by the specific ethical principles of Protestantism, and of Calvinism in particular. Calvinism, in fact, with its extreme views on predestination, that stressed the stern doctrine of a humanity, a *"massa damnata"*, condemned to the fire of hell, with very few chosen for the joy of Heaven, had the effect of fostering a life of austere severity with oneself, of continuous hard work, and of flight from amusements and pleasures.

Life in Geneva, at the time of Calvin, was not dissimilar to life in a strict monastery: *"Work and pray"*, in the hope that the almighty God has predestined you for heaven! For the first time in history, the wealth produced by hard work was not spent on pleasures and good living, but was accumulated, creating vast capitals which in turn were invested back into the business. Weber claimed that modern

capitalism originated in Calvinist nations as a result of their doctrinal and ethical ideas.

We may disagree with Weber's specific assessment, but perhaps not with the view that ideas have great power to bring about what Tillich calls a "*paradigm shift*" in our conception of the world, a great stride forward, not always necessarily for the better.



Max Weber



Auguste Comte

The philosophical world of today seems to have embraced the idea that science is the answer to all problems. It is not a new idea: the French philosopher Auguste Comte had already declared, two hundred years ago, that he was inaugurating the final and most fruitful stage in the history of humanity, the "*scientific stage*", having left behind the previous two, the "*polytheistic stage*" and the "*monotheistic stage*". Early humanity had created "*gods*" first, and then "*god*" in order to explain the mysterious character of the world; but now we have science, and it will bring humanity to a full and positive understanding of the universe, including the depths of the human being.

The extraordinary success of science has created a "*paradigm shift*" in our view of the world and has opened up for us a wider and deeper knowledge of the workings of every aspect of nature, and the belief is that what is still obscure will be laid open and made clear by scientific progress. It is not surprising therefore, that modern philosophy has adopted a "*scientific*" approach to the problems which have

been debated over thousands of years with varying degrees of success.

One such fundamental problem is the definition of the human being, whether he/she is made up of two substances, a spiritual substance and a physical one, and the relation of the "soul" to the "body", or whether he/she is an entirely "material" being, like all other things that evolved from the initial ball of gas, galaxies and minerals, trees and animals. The modern scientific interpretation of the human being is that he/she is entirely explicable in terms of the same physical causal connections that hold together the entire fabric of the universe.

The exclusion, however, of the spiritual soul or mind brings about new complicated problems: are human beings free? Is morality possible? What is consciousness? What does "understanding" mean? Is there life after death? What are "out of body" experiences? What is the definition of "person"? In what way is a material "human being" more worthy than a material "chair" or a material "cat"? And so on.

Descartes believed that he had proved his existence because of his private thoughts, *Cogito ergo Sum* [I think therefore I am]. Wittgenstein argued that individuals cannot create a private language: how would they know that they were using words correctly? Language is a social product and therefore thoughts are not expressed in private but in public words, with socially agreed rules on how they are to be used and understood. Wittgenstein denied the first-person certainty that had underlined both rationalist and empiricist approaches to philosophy. He was in agreement with A J Ayer who had denied the existence of a "substantive self":

"Our reasoning on the self, as on so many others, is in conformity with Hume's. He, too, rejected the notion of a substantive ego

on the ground that no such entity was observable. For, he said, whenever he entered most intimately into what he called himself, he always stumbled on some particular perception or other – of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. He never could catch himself at any time without a perception, and never could observe anything but the perception. And this led him to assert that a self was “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions” (A J Ayer in Language, Truth, and Logic).

For Hume, Ayer, Wittgenstein, and G. Ryle there is no “*substantive self*”, there is no permanent subject or soul occupying our body. What we call the self is nothing more than the fleeting perceptions of an endless number of sense-experiences. “*There is no ghost in the machine*”, said G. Ryle criticizing Descartes’ view that the mind is a substance entirely different from the body and yet interacting with the body. For Ryle, your mind, or soul, or I is your behaviour. When we say, “*He is in pain*” it is not the case that there is a mind, a permanent self that experiences in an entirely private way a pain; what we mean are the public facts of tears, contortions, jumping about, uttering of cries; there is no one hidden who suffers all these things, we are entirely public, there is no more to the self than our behaviour.

Logical Positivism, and Ryle in particular, prepared the way for the modern theories of mind that reject the existence of a spiritual substance called mind or soul. The universe is entirely “*material*”, hence all mental phenomena are reducible to matter.

The brain is at the centre of all modern day debates about the mind or soul, from theories that stress identity between the mind and the brain, to theories that claim that all mental states are caused entirely by physical states in the brain as a result of constant stimuli from the external or internal world. As science advances, we become more aware of the

possibilities of the extremely complicated biological system that is our brain. Some modern philosophers have stressed the analogy between the functioning of the human brain and the functioning of digital computers; some have said that the brain is just a very sophisticated computer and the mind a computer program, that is, the mind is to the brain what the program is to the computer hardware.

On the other hand, the belief that a human being is made up of two completely different "*substances*", soul and body, spirit and matter, has been very constant and widespread in the history of the human race. Belief in the immortality of the soul is to be found everywhere, right from the beginning of human evolution, and all major religions have always subscribed to some forms of life after death.

For Socrates and Plato, the pre-existent immortal soul is forced into the prison of the body from which it will be released again with death, to live blissfully in heaven or to be re-incarnated for another chance of bettering itself. For the Hindu sacred book, *The Upanishad*, the body is like a garment that is discarded at death, leaving the soul free to join God if it has achieved perfection.

Modern philosophers, however, credit Descartes for producing the most systematic theory of man as a being made up of two different "*substances*", the mind and the body. In the *Meditations*, Descartes proves, systematically, that whereas we can have absolute certainty that we exist as minds, we may doubt that we have a body; and we can prove the existence of the body only after proving the existence of God.

For Descartes the essential man is mind; his body is not essential to him. Whether I have a body or not, I am totally myself while I perceive myself as a thinking being. Indeed, when my body dies, I am still myself. Given this view of

two separate substances, the thinking substance and the bodily substance, how do the two substances interact?



Rene' Descartes

This is the famous Cartesian Dualism. We are made up of two opposite things: the mind (spiritual, indivisible, unextended, immortal, thinking) and the body (material, divisible, extended, mortal, non-thinking). How can these two opposite substances go together in an individual?

Descartes' solution was to say that mind and body "*interact*" in a most intimate manner, communicating with one another through the pineal gland in the brain. The body sends messages to the mind and the mind to the body and the two interact continuously. The mind is not like "*a pilot in a ship*"; on the contrary, if the body is hurt the mind feels pain; if the stomach is empty the mind feels hunger, etc. There is a most profound interaction between mind and body.

However, the problem is still there: how can two opposite substances work together? How can a spiritual substance cause motions in a material substance? In science we know that matter moves matter; we have no instance of spirit moving matter, of spiritual minds causing physical events and vice-versa. Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia asked Descartes to explain this mysterious interaction between

spirit and matter: *“How can the soul of man, being only a thinking substance, determine his bodily spirits to perform voluntary actions?”* Leibniz himself wrote, *“I find no way to explain how the body causes anything to take place in the soul, or vice versa; Descartes gave up the struggle over this problem, as far as we can know from his writings”*.

Modern philosophy rarely speaks of the *“soul”*. For Descartes the soul became the *“mind”*: the mind is the thinking substance, immortal and spiritual and essential; the body, on the contrary, is not essential and is more like a machine that operates according to its own physical laws than an organism with a *“soul”*. Today we have a philosophy of the mind, but not a philosophy of the soul: and this is perhaps the beginning of the difficulties in understanding the composition of the human being. Talk about the *“soul”* is rejected because it is felt that soul and religion are linked closely together, and no philosopher wishes to be seen dealing with religious or semi-religious ideas. The word *“mind”* is more secular, but it indicates today all the features traditionally associated with the concept of soul.



The prevalent philosophical view of the soul/mind today is essentially materialist, and all efforts are directed at acquiring a deeper understanding of the workings of the brain. Few philosophers today doubt that the brain is the seat of all mental phenomena which will find a full explanation through science. The brain contains more than 100 billion nerve cells and each of these electrically-active units can be connected with up to 10,000 others – creating a structure of mind-boggling complexity. Scientists

believe that the human brain represents one of the last great mysteries of biology. If it can be understood – they claim – we might finally know the true nature of consciousness, a concept which is at the heart of the philosophical debate over what it means to be human.

The Human Soul

Many people believe in the existence of the soul, but they would have great difficulty in trying to express their views on what the soul actually is. Some may say that the soul is a spiritual “*something*” present in each person and created directly by God. They would also readily agree that we do not know much else about the soul, which remains in their minds as a mysterious ghostly presence that detaches itself from the body at death flying, perhaps, to God.

Yet, the soul, like the idea of being, is the most common reality of our being, is what makes us “*alive*” from the very first moment of our conception. We affirm our soul every time we say “*I*”, or talk about ourselves and our perceptions of the world. Far from being a mysterious ghost, the soul is at the very centre of our everyday life.

Our soul is united to the body from the moment of conception; and the body is the term of its fundamental feeling through which it feels all other sensations, and is united to the idea of being, the object of pure intuition, and through which it forms all other ideas with the help of the senses.

“Feeling and the idea of being are the two basic elements of all human knowledge, the seminal reasons, to use an expression of St. Augustine, of all natures and of all entities composing the universe” (AMS, 16,20). Both elements are “*given*”, are “*innate*”: no one can have any idea without the innate idea of being, and no one can teach another what “*feeling*” is, either we have it innately or we would never understand what it is.

The human soul is the principle of an active, substantial feeling which, identically the same, has as its terms 1-extension (and in it a body) and 2- being. It is therefore at one and the same time sensitive and intellective (rational).

The human soul is that first principle of feeling and understanding which, without ceasing to be one and to have a single radical activity, is constituted by something felt, extended and corporeal, and by something understood, that is, indeterminate being.

The soul is, therefore, a substantial feeling. Observe carefully, however, this word "*feeling*". In the same way that one cannot have a Cheshire cat's grin without the cat, there cannot be "*feeling*" without that which feels and that which is felt, without the soul that feels and the body that is felt. The conjunction of the soul to the body is what we call "*life*", hence we can see how intimate the connection of soul and body is.

Life always refer to sensation, and properly speaking, resides in the soul where alone sensation is present. However, life can be attributed to the body but only in so far as the body is intimately conjoined to the soul. Feeling is the distinguishing mark of a "*living*" creature, and animals are defined by Rosmini as "*subjective beings with feeling*". The feeling principle in animals and in human beings is the soul.

However, soul and body are completely different and even opposed in their natures: the soul "*feels*", the body does not feel but is the cause of sensation or feeling, the means whereby the soul feels. The brain, being body, cannot feel anything; the soul is the subject of sensations. Yet, it is the most common mistake today among philosophers of mind to say that it is the brain that feels!

Let us imagine a man who shows signs of being in great pain: the face is red, the eyes wide open, the movements are uncontrolled, and there are tears and groans. At the sight of the signs we become convinced that the man is in pain. But do we experience his pain? Do we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch his pain with our own senses?

The answer is clearly negative, our sense organs experience bodies only in so far as bodies are coloured, hard, impenetrable, sonorous, and tasteful or possess other qualities which we can feel. The pain of the man we see is not a body, and therefore we cannot experience it. If we still doubt whether the pain is a body, we can go on to ask ourselves what colour, shape, hardness, weight, movement, smell or taste it manifests. The question shows immediately how absurd it is to suppose that the pain is a body, or possesses the qualities proper to bodies.

There is no doubt that the body of the suffering person, which shows signs of pain, and the sensation of his pain are two totally different things. His body falls under my senses, and produces sensations in me; his pain does not fall under my senses, but remains in him alone, it is felt only by his own soul. No matter what G. Ryle and the behaviourists say, the pain is felt by the soul of the man, and it is not the external features that he shows.

The human soul feels in three ways: it has an "*intellective*" feeling, a "*volitive*" feeling, and a "*corporeal*" feeling. We feel ourselves "*thinking*", and sometimes we are moved by the feelings aroused by our thoughts. A painter, for example, died of joy at the sight of a Raffaello's painting, and Newton could not bring himself to work after experiencing great happiness at the discovery of a principle.

Our soul feels "*our acts of will*", since our volitions are activities whereby our soul is drawn "*affectively*" to the object presented by the intellect.

And finally our soul feels the *"objects of the outside world"* and even our own body, and in order to feel external bodies the soul must feel first of all itself with a constant, fundamental feeling.

The soul, therefore, is essentially a principle that feels. All the feeling activities of the soul are expressed by us with the word *"I"* or *"Myself"*. The I is not the pure soul, because babies or whoever cannot say *"I"* have nonetheless their soul: the I is the soul that reflects on itself, is the soul perceiving itself, becoming aware of itself in its various operations. When we say *"I read, I see, I wish..."* the words express that we are doing the actions, and the soul is aware of itself doing the actions. When I say, *"I write"* I mean to say that 1- there is someone who is writing, 2- that this someone becomes aware that he is writing, 3- that this someone says that he is writing, and 4- that this someone is aware that he is the same person that is writing and that knows and says that he is writing, and expresses it by saying, *"I write"*.

"I cannot doubt that I who feel, think, speak, am the soul. The soul, therefore, as I presently conceive it, is that being which I intend to express when I use the word "I". The person who says "I" performs an interior act by which he enunciates his own soul. "I", therefore, is the vocal sign enunciated by an intellective soul of his own act when he turns attention internally to himself and perceives himself". (Psychology, 69)

The way of acquiring knowledge of our soul is to begin from *"myself"*, from my *"I"*. It is in consciousness of our own soul that we can discover what the soul is. If we did not feel the soul in ourselves we would not be able to say anything positive about the soul.

The soul manifests the unity of the human subject, since the same soul intuits the idea of being and perceives his body, the *"I who feels is the same I who understands"*. The

primordial intellectual perception in a human being is the intellectual perception of himself: the feeling soul perceives the body with a fundamental and constant feeling, but this perception remains obscure and not an object of knowledge until it is enlightened by the light of the idea of being which is present in the human soul. The soul applies the idea of being to the felt body and perceives it as its own body intellectually, thus acquiring knowledge of itself.

The soul in animals is a feeling principle, but it has only corporeal sensations. Animals do not intuit being, do not have the idea of being, therefore they can never reach awareness of themselves, they can never say "I", their feeling of the body remains constant but in total darkness. They react to the stimulations of their body and of bodies by the force of instinct.

The soul is spiritual

The human soul cannot be a "*body*", an extended substance. Every "*body*" can be divided ad infinitum, and each part of it will always be a separate unit, no matter how small. Even atoms are one outside the other; and if atoms are bodies, then they are extended and can be divided even further, in parts which will again be one outside the other. Extension is what makes a body a body.

This divisibility of extended matter into an infinite number of parts each separate from the other, forced ancient philosophers to admit to the existence of the soul, or of a principle which being un-extended and spiritual could give unity to the multiplicity of material points.

The soul can feel every part of an extended body, the soul can smell a rose while at the same time looking at its beauty and feeling the texture of the petals. This simple unity of feeling could not be possible if the soul were to be an extended body. If the soul should be said to reside in each

part of the body, being part of the body itself, again it would be impossible for the soul in the toe to be aware at the same time of the soul in the shoulder, or of the soul in the brain. There would have to be as many souls as there are parts in the body, each separate from the others.

This is not our experience. Our feeling principle is one and through the fundamental feeling of itself reaches out to all other secondary feelings in any part of our body. It is the same I that smells the rose, admires its beauty, and feels the smoothness of its petals. It is the same I that feels every single part of the body. Only a spiritual, un-extended principle can join together so many different sensations and be the subject of all of them.

St. Augustine wrote, "*Sentire non est corporis, sed animae per corpus*", that is, "***The body cannot feel, but it is the soul that feels through the body***". It is not right to say, "*It is the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the brain that thinks*"; we should with more accuracy say, "*It is the soul that sees through the eye, and that hears through the ears, and that thinks through the brain*", etc.

It is a most common mistake among modern philosophers of the mind to attribute to the senses all sensations, and to the brain all perceptions and thoughts. But the senses and the brain are simply parts of the body, that is, parts of an extended body which can be divided ad infinitum. It is true that the senses carry the impressions that will generate sensations. It is true that millions of neurons are on the move whenever we perceive anything or we think anything; but the "*feeling*" does not belong to the senses, nor the "*understanding*" – itself a spiritual feeling – to the brain: it is the soul, a simple, spiritual substance that feels and understands. It cannot be otherwise.

Chapter 6

Truth and Certainty

SUMMARY

1. *"The Creator God has bound man to truth by the bowels", says Rosmini. It is important to distinguish "certainty" from "truth" since we may entertain the greatest certainty for that which is false!*
2. *Today's trend among philosophers is to deny the existence of absolute or objective truth, and to consider truth as constructed by society, religion, traditions; truth, they say, is a man-made reality.*
3. *For Rosmini, we are bound to truth by the bowels from the moment of conception. Truth is the idea of being, the mother of all ideas, and the ultimate reason of any proposition. Truth, therefore, is not man-made, it comes to us from without, and is the light that enlightens every person.*
4. *There are as many truths as there are ideas. The idea is the "exemplar" of things, since it contains the essence of things. An animal is a horse if it corresponds to its exemplar of horse, its idea. The truth about the horse, the moon, and the whale is to be found in the ideas of horse, moon, and whale, being the ideas the exemplar containing the essential features of the horse, moon, and whale. The popular saying, "To call a spade a spade", or its equivalent, is expressing the same truth.*
5. *Truth, with a capital letter, is the idea of being, the exemplar of all exemplars. "Truth is that which manifests what is", said St. Augustine.*
6. *"Certainty is a firm and reasonable persuasion which conforms to the truth". All certainties are ultimately based on the idea of being, the reason of all reasons.*

7. *Scepticism is logically impossible, is a contradiction. "Truth cannot be known", says the sceptic: is this a true statement? If it is true, there is at least one truth which can be known!*

8. *The idea of being, objective, simple, and indeterminate cannot be touched by any sceptical attack. It is the pure truth.*

What is truth?

The quest for truth and certainty is the most noble and pressing duty for human beings. Fundamentalists claim that they have the truth and are utterly persuaded to the point that they are willing to give up their life, and even to kill, for the sake of it. But, can they provide a "rational" explanation for their certainty? Or is their persuasion based entirely on blind faith?

"Certainty" and "Truth" are not the same thing: I may entertain the greatest certainty for something which is not in accordance with the truth. Certainty based on truth requires a reason which displays the splendour of truth. All our certainties must be based on valid reasons, not on blind faith. It is true that often we have certainties without thinking of the reasons behind them; yet, they are reasonable certainties because we can provide a reason if necessary.

Some of our certainties may be based on authorities who demand our assent: such certainties may be in accordance with truth if we have valid reasons for accepting the word of such authorities. The certainty Christians entertain for the mystery of the Incarnation is based on the reasonableness of believing the word God has spoken to us.

It seems that modern philosophy, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, has resigned itself to the view that truth is simply unobtainable, and that we must remain satisfied with "truths" that originate from within our "form of life",

our culture, our language; truths, therefore, which are man-made and relative.

Scepticism about truth is the most dramatic feature of our modern world; hence all our certainties are based on the shifting sands of relativism and subjectivism.

Descartes tackled the problem of truth head on. He understood that before we can talk sense about anything we need to know whether we can reach certainty about truth. Can we be sure that there is an objective truth? Can we be sure that the human mind has the ability to arrive at the objective truth? Do we possess any truth that can be seen rationally and universally as unassailable from any doubt whatsoever?

In his *Meditations*, Descartes argued that truth is available to us. He discovered the fundamental truth "*Cogito ergo sum*" - I think therefore I am - which he thought was the unshakeable rock on which to build the edifice of truth. Rosmini criticized Descartes' claim on the basis that the *Cogito ergo sum* cannot be the very first truth since it is already a "*reflection*" presuming other truths which had not been explained, e.g. the idea of existence and the idea of the "*I*".

For Rosmini, the quest for truth does not take us far from ourselves, it does not imply the most laborious and painful investigation. Truth is with us since our conception! We are made "*intelligent*" by truth, which is the "*idea of being*": we make use of the idea of being at all times since childhood, and there is no idea which is not "*informed*" by the idea of being, by truth. Truth walks with us, is always before us: what an astonishing fact, capable of destroying the darkness of skepticism, and of giving great hope to modern man.

We have been using the words "*truth*" and "*idea of being*" as synonyms, as interchangeable. In what sense can one say

that the idea of being is the common truth? In what sense can one say that the light that enlightens every man that comes into this world is at the same time the idea of being and the truth?

What is the intimate connection between the idea of being and truth? We have seen that the idea of being is present in all our ideas, is the formal part of any idea, and is the last possible abstraction from any idea. We have seen that the idea of being, the source of all ideas, is the origin of all our knowledge, which is, therefore, one in its totality. The idea of being contains all the other ideas and all possible knowledge. We can rightly say that the idea of being is the principle of knowledge.

But, what is truth? This is where we begin having problems, because people often have different views of what they mean by the word "*truth*".

According to Rosmini, if we examine the different senses normally given by people to the word "*truth*" we can see that its most extensive meaning, its general notion, and the unique essence properly indicated by it, is that of "*exemplar*" or "*original*". He defines truth as the "*exemplar of things*". The concept of exemplar includes a relationship with what is drawn from the exemplar, that is, with its copy. The copy is true when it is perfectly like its exemplar. Truth is the exemplar, and things are true when they conform to their exemplar.

We also speak of the "*truth of a thing*", and mean the "*likeness*" of the thing with its exemplar. We use this meaning because the "*likeness*" of the thing with its exemplar is its truth. To possess a clear concept of the truth we must first have in our mind an exact, clear concept of "*likeness*". "*Likeness*" is the only concept by which we understand how things are true or false.

The exemplar of any object is its idea. The exemplar of the horse we see is the full specific idea of horse through which we know the truth about the horse. We know that the “essence” of anything is that which is thought in the idea of the thing; and the essence of anything is precisely the truth of the thing. The idea, the exemplar, contains the truth, hence Rosmini’s other definition of truth: *“Truth is an idea in so far as an idea is an exemplar of things”*.

There are as many “truths” as there are exemplar-ideas of things. There is the “truth” about the horse, the “truth” about the sun, the “truth” about the chair, etc. But there is also the “Truth” with an absolute sense, and always in the singular: this is the Truth which is attacked by the sceptics, or which we say is in “crisis” today. We know that all ideas converge ultimately in the idea of being which contains them all; the idea of being is the mother of all ideas. Truth, therefore, is eminently contained in the idea of being; the idea of being is the Truth by which we know all things, is the Exemplar of all exemplars.

“The idea of being is that which represents all beings of any species whatever, and by which all beings are known. It is the idea to which all species are reduced, and could for this reason be called the “species of species”. The idea of being therefore can be called “truth” when it is considered as the exemplar of things in so far as they are known by us. Hence, the idea of being is the one, universal, absolute “truth” by which we know all things, because it is the universal exemplar in which the equality of all things is expressed. St. Augustine gave truth this absolute sense when he defined it, “That which indicates being”, and again, “Truth is that which manifests what is”” (NE, Vol.3).

The presence of the idea of being in every human being is a fact, hence the presence of the Truth in every human being is also a fact.

The sole form of human reason is *“being”* in general, which is both the principle of knowledge and of certainty. *“Being”* in general, considered as the *“principle of knowledge”* is called IDEA, the first or mother idea; considered as the *“principle of certainty”*, is generally called *“final reason”*, and TRUTH of our thoughts. Truth is, therefore, the sole form of human reason.

When can we acquire *“certainty”* about the knowledge we possess? What can give us the certainty needed for our progress in the field of knowledge and for our own peace of mind? In what sense is the idea of being the *“principle of certainty”*? Notice that we often know many things without being *“certain”*: how or when can we become *“certain”* of the knowledge we possess? By analyzing *“certainty”* we will arrive at another definition of truth and at the same identification of the idea of being with truth!

Rosmini defines *“certainty”* a *“firm and reasonable persuasion that conforms to the truth”*, therefore it results from three elements, 1- truth in the object, 2- firm persuasion in the subject, 3- a reason producing the persuasion.

Because *“certainty”* depends upon a *“reason”* which convinces us and compels us to assent to a proposition, it can never be blind, or a purely instinctive action of our spirit.

According to Reid, a Scottish philosopher, common beliefs and principles of logic cannot be proved or justified rationally, but rest upon an irresistible necessity to assent, upon a law of nature to which human beings are subject. Kant himself declared that the basic principles of logic and reason cannot be proven but that they originate by means of some kind of suggestion from our own spirit which forces us to believe them.

Their tradition is alive today in the teaching of the philosophers who accept that we human beings make a constant use of the principles of logic purely because we are so determined by our mental structure. True logic may well be far above us, and there may be other intelligent creatures in the universe who may be using principles of logic completely different from ours.

These sceptical views are very far from Rosmini's teaching that our principles of logic are absolutely true anywhere in the universe and beyond, because they are based on "*reason*" and can be justified rationally, not on instinct or inner suggestion.

For Rosmini, truth is the ultimate or supreme reason of a proposition. When we want to know whether a proposition is true or false, we seek its reason. This reason can be expressed by another proposition, whose reason we also want to know. In order to be completely satisfied, we move from one proposition to another, from one reason to another, until we reach the self-evident ultimate reason. We then say we have grasped the truth of the first proposition intuitively, because we have the supreme principle of its certainty, the supreme reason. As soon as we know the ultimate reason, we say we see the truth of the matter. Thus, a reason is the general cause of certainty. Persuasion in us is produced by a reason that manifests the truth of the proposition.

Whenever I can see the truth in what is presented to my mind, I need no other motive or reason for being certain of the thing thought.

Truth is therefore identical with the ultimate or supreme reason of any proposition. Each proposition can have only one ultimate reason, which is the truth of the proposition and before which our mind immediately gives its assent; it is this ultimate reason that generates a firm and reasonable

persuasion. It is true that we reach the final reason by a series of subordinate reasons; these minor reasons do not give us certainty until we reach the final reason, or the truth of the proposition.

Let us consider, as an example, a number of subordinate reasons that become more and more general as they ascend towards the final reason, confirming the truth of the first proposition:

“The human being is the noblest of animals”

1. *“Because the intelligence with which the human being is endowed is nobler than feeling”*
2. *“Because intelligence has being in general as its object, while feeling is confined to a body”*
3. *“Because the being seen by the intelligence has the divine qualities of objectivity, immutability, eternity, necessity, universality, simplicity, and absoluteness, while the bodily feeling is particular, finite, temporary, limited, subjective, and mutable”*
4. *“Because the human being has the eternal and the universal as his/her field whereas the animal cannot move outside its own limited and temporal feelings”*
5. *“Because the eternal and universal seen in the idea of being will find its rest in the absolute Real Being, God; whereas the corporeal, temporal feelings of the animal will disintegrate and perish”, and so on.*

Once we reach the final reason we know the truth of the first proposition and of all propositions following the first; at this stage, knowledge and truth, become one. It is clear that the final reason must be seen immediately as true by our faculty of intuition, so that our mind can find rest

and assurance in the truth which it sees now clearly and distinctly.

We have already seen that the idea of being is the form of all other ideas, is the last possible thinkable part of any idea after all possible abstractions. The idea of being is therefore the last possible “*reason*” of all propositions, the ultimate reason of all propositions. We have called the ultimate reason of any proposition the truth of the proposition, hence the idea of being – the ultimate reason of any proposition – is the truth of all propositions. Here we have again that the idea of being is the truth of all things in so far as they are known.

“Throughout the whole of “A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas” we have seen that there is only one principle of all human acts of knowledge, BEING IN GENERAL. If, therefore, the principle of certainty exists, it can only be one for all possible propositions, and must in fact be this unique idea of being, inserted in us by nature to make us intelligent, that is, to make us capable of perceiving the truth” (NE, Vol.3).

Scepticism is impossible

Truth, which is the idea of being, is completely unassailable from any attack of the sceptics. Rosmini handles with absolute mastery every possible form of scepticism and proves that none can succeed when applied to the idea of being. Sceptics may be successful when they direct their blows against other parts of knowledge which they consider in isolation, without their unshakeable foundation, the idea of being, of which they are not even aware.

“The part is taken for the whole without any realization that research is confined to only one section of deduced knowledge; but another part, which is never subject to attacks is passed over unnoticed. Like a shadow or a tiny, disregarded seed, it is left

abandoned in a corner of the mind, or rather treated as a servant of the lowest order, unworthy of notice...

Sceptics never imagine that this humble scrap of knowledge should be exempt from their criticism of truth... But here too the lowly must be exalted; the foundation of all certainty is found in a tiny, unobtrusive point of knowledge which is firm and rock-solid, a suitable resting place for the lever of reason to move human thought to extremely effective operations.

This point is the idea of being from which all the ideas that human beings possess derive their source and their being as ideas. We maintain, therefore, that the first element of knowledge (which exists, but is normally unobserved) cannot be included in a general argument intended to annihilate all knowledge. The idea of being can be attacked only directly, and then will be seen as unassailable" (NE, Vol. 3).

Sceptical objections against the idea of being can be reduced to the following:

1- *"Could not the thought of existence in general itself be an illusion?"*

2- *"How can we perceive something different from ourselves?"*

3- *"Perhaps the spirit communicates its own forms to what it sees, altering and transforming things from what they are?"*

4- *And finally, all forms of scepticism can be reduced to the formula, "Truth cannot be known".*

The first three doubts can be resolved through the analysis of truth, or idea of being, which provides three characteristics, each of which is suitable for refuting one of the doubts. These three characteristics of being intuited by us are: 1- its simplicity (it represents itself alone); 2- its objectivity, and 3- its perfect indetermination.

“Could not the thought of existence in general itself be an illusion?”

In its **simplicity**, the idea of being neither represents anything outside itself, nor contains any judgment; its presence to us is a fact. Illusion is the result of judging that something is what it is not: I see movement in the distance and I judge wrongly that it is the passing of a rabbit, when in truth it is simply the effect of the wind on the grass. I deceive and delude myself when I judge that something truly is, which only appears to me, and in fact is not. But there could be no deception if there is no judgement. The idea of being is perfectly simple, it is a pure intellectual intuition, devoid of all judgement, and cannot therefore be the source of illusion.

“How can we perceive something different from ourselves?”

In its **objectivity**, the idea of being is different from and contrary to the subject which perceives it. It constitutes the subject’s intellect, that is, a power without subjective reference which sees things outside place and time.

“Perhaps the spirit communicates its own forms to what it sees, altering and transforming things from what they are?”

In its **indeterminateness**, it cannot determine anything, although it can receive the determinations furnished by the things presented to it. To think being in general is to think being in itself without any form or mode. Each of our ideas is a determination of being, but if we abstract from each of our ideas all determinations then we shall be left with undetermined being.

Rosmini deals with these doubts at length, drawing important consequences; you will find the complete

answers to these sceptical doubts in the third volume of *The New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas*.

The fundamental doubt of the sceptics is found in their maxim that *"Truth cannot be known"*. To refute this, Rosmini uses the traditional argument of the *"invincibility of the contradiction"* present in every maxim that can be produced by the sceptic. We can change the above contradictory maxim into the following, *"The only truth that can be known is that truth cannot be known"*. The sceptics may wish to try to escape the contradiction by adding other denials, *"No truth can be known except this truth, "That no truth can be known except this truth, "That no truth can be known..."* etc. and so on ad infinitum. The contradiction is always there.

Things are no better for the sceptics even if they change their maxim to a very cautious, *"I doubt"* since the moment they pronounce the words they are making an affirmation, a statement of truth and it is no good for them to add, *"I doubt that I doubt that I doubt that I doubt..."* since the affirmation is always there, to contradict what they are saying.

To think is to affirm, therefore all doubts, all denials are necessarily expressed as affirmation, which is the opposite of what the sceptics are trying to say. Hence scepticism is impossible. A perfect sceptic should stop talking and thinking altogether!

Chapter 7

The Mind that thinks the Idea of Being from eternity

SUMMARY

- 1. Ideas exist, but always in a mind. We have many ideas in the mind and are able to think them at will. The idea of being comes to us "from without", and we have it since conception. It is this idea that makes man/woman intelligent. We can ask, however, the question: "Which Mind thinks the idea of being from eternity?"*
- 2. The Idea of Being comes from God, is in God's mind from eternity, is divine without being God, in the same way that the light of the sun is not the sun. God, of course, is not an idea, is the absolute Real Being.*
- 3. The Son is the infinite wisdom of the Father. All that the Father knows is in the Son, who is the perfect image of the Father. The Father abstracts the idea of being from the Son, and creates the universe "in Him, with Him, and through Him".*
- 4. The idea of being is divine, and, once given by God, is the divine in man/woman. This is the supreme origin of the infinite dignity of every person, sacred from the moment of conception.*
- 5. It is not surprising that the purest light of the idea of being, coming from God and originating in God, should be the truth carrying with it the highest degree of certainty.*
- 6. The idea of being, rooted in the innermost part of the intellective and volitive soul, is active in guiding the mind of man towards God. Our hearts are restless in their searching until they find rest in God.*

7. A good will is the will that follows the light of reason. But whereas the light is infallible, reason by itself can fall into error and sin. The intellective free will is the pinnacle of the dignity of the human being; personhood is rooted in our free will, since the will is the master of all our other faculties.

8. Good education deals with the education of the will, so that it may follow in all things the light of reason. Intellectual charity is helping people to use reason in order to discover the beauty of God, the Absolute Real Being.

9. The idea of being is the guarantee that the soul is immortal. The soul is made intelligent by the idea of being which is eternal and divine; hence the intelligent soul will continue to keep this essential link for ever and ever.

10. The idea of being is the deepest reason for the equality of all human beings, for their infinite dignity, and for their inalienable rights.

The divine origin of the Idea of Being

Earlier in the book, it was said that ideas have their own existence but that they require a mind to think them. The ideas of stars, moon, waterfalls, elephants, and tulips exist in my mind and I think of them whenever I wish.

We have also seen that we form the ideas of “*myself*” and of all other things in the universe by a process of synthesis, by putting together the idea of being, which we have from conception, and the sensations we acquire through our senses. Rosmini called this process “*intellective perception*”.

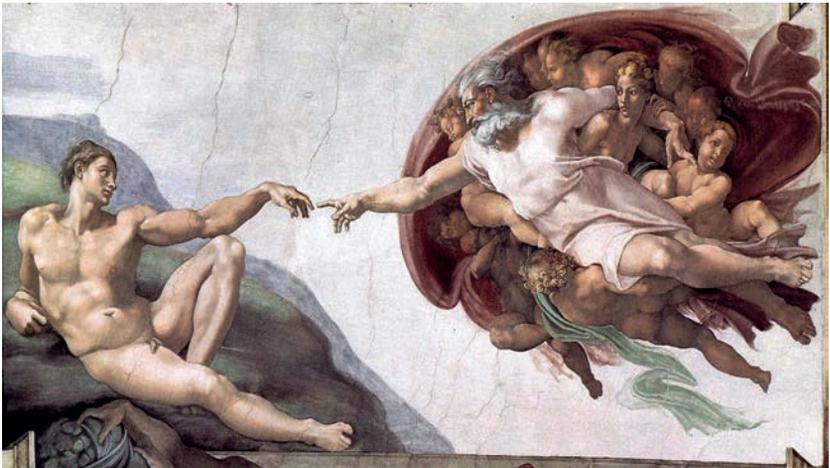
We thus acquire the idea of chair by joining the idea of being to the sensations we feel as we experience the sensible qualities belonging to the chair. We make the judgement: “*The sensible qualities I feel in me are caused by “something” outside me which people call chair*”.

We have learned that the idea of being is different from all other ideas, and cannot be the result of abstraction, or of any other ordinary means for acquiring ideas. The idea of being is **given** *“to everyone who comes into this world”*, it comes from without, from conception.

In *“A New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas”*, Rosmini proves beyond doubt the fundamental role of the idea of being in solving the problem of epistemology. The discovery of the idea of being opens up a new universe, and its existence enlightens the mind over all the substantial problems facing philosophy and natural theology.

Sound reason assures us that the idea of being, given equally to all, is not the product of the human mind. Coming to us from without, it is reasonable to ask, *“Which Mind thinks the idea of being from eternity?”*

The idea of being is often compared to the light of the sun, which is **given** to us, and which comes forth from the sun, without being the sun. The idea of being enlightens the mind making it *“intelligent”*, and it comes from the Mind of God, without being God.



Rosmini's views on Creation

In order to understand its genesis, we need to know Rosmini's views on Creation. According to Rosmini, the Creation of the Universe required three different moments of activity, which in God did not take place chronologically but in the eternal "now" of divine life and operations.

1- Divine Abstraction: This is the moment of the eternal genesis of the Idea of Being, abstracted by the Father from the absolute Real Being, the eternal Wisdom and Logos of the Father, the Son. The Idea of Being is not the Son, who is the absolutely Real Second Person of the Trinity; but all that is in the idea of being is in the Son; the idea is, therefore, "something" of God, without being God. The idea is indeterminate, objective, immutable, eternal, and divine.

2- Divine Imagination: The Father, using the idea abstracted from the Son, creates the whole array of real things, tracing them, so to speak, on the infinite blank canvas of the idea of being, which He had abstracted from the Son, who is also, with the Holy Spirit, the Creator of the Universe.

3- Divine Synthesis: This is the moment when the eternal intelligibility and light proper to the idea of being is joined to every created being, making them all intelligible to the mind. This synthesis is analogous to the synthesis human beings make when they come to know things through "intellective perception".

This elementary presentation of Rosmini's views on Creation, which can be found fully explained and at a great depth in his books, *Theosophy*, *An Introduction to the Gospel of St. John*, and *Supernatural Anthropology*, should be sufficient to highlight the extreme importance of the Idea of Being, and of the consequences it produces on human beings.

At the springs of knowledge

It would be too long to deal in detail with each of the consequences produced by the Idea of Being, as it is given to human beings. For Rosmini, the book in three volumes of "*A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*" was the starting point of his philosophy. Soon after, and in short sequence, he published books on Ethics, on Anthropology, on Psychology, on Conscience, on Rights, on Supernatural Anthropology, on Theosophy, on Politics, on Society, and others.

This book of the series, *Rosmini Today*, deals specifically with the Idea of Being in relation to Epistemology. Other books will follow which will make clear the importance of this idea in dealing with other fundamental issues relevant today. In this final chapter of the book we shall present, briefly, the golden threads deriving from the study of the Idea of Being.

- The simple, "*often neglected*" Idea of Being has a divine origin, abstracted by the Father from the Son, and it carries with it the divine attributes of immutability, eternity, universality, simplicity, and objectivity. It is the divine in man/woman, and a most reassuring presence in relation to the truth.
- The divine origin of the Idea of Being is not a matter of faith but of pure reason. The qualities or attributes of the Idea of Being, and of all other ideas by participation, are so special that they cannot originate from any created mind, hence they must come from the eternal, immutable, infinite, necessary Being, God. Honest thinkers should arrive at the same conclusion. The Idea of Being is the mighty link between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith. Plato had a full understanding of the divine origin of Ideas.

- Every human being is enlightened by the Idea of Being coming from God into our mind making it intelligent. This is the basis for the infinite dignity and equality of all human beings.
- The fundamental principle of Ethics is *“Follow the light of reason”*, or *“Acknowledge being in its proper order”*. A good will is a will that embraces wholeheartedly the demands of pure reason. Notice that, whereas the *“light”* of reason [the Idea of Being] is infallible because divine, *“reason”* which is the application of the Idea to our experiences and feelings may fall into error.
- Personhood is the pinnacle of every human being, and personhood resides in the intellective free will, the master of all other human faculties. The person is the permanent seat of rights, is right itself.
- Intelligence is the constant vision of truth, of being; to say *“yes”* to truth and being is to fall in love with its beauty. Hence, a good will that freely says yes to the demands of truth seen by the intelligent mind is a will that acts always out of love, and is rewarded with inner peace and joy.
- A good education is primarily the formation of a good will, that is, a will that follows in all things the light of reason, embracing it both with the mind and the heart, and directing all its actions accordingly. There is a distinction to be made between the education of the person (the summit of what a human being is) and the education of its nature (the talents and the tendencies each individual has). An education which neglects the former is not education at all. A school or college may well develop its pupils into becoming brilliant doctors or athletes, or engineers, but without a sound formation of the person it becomes an education into skills rather than

education into personhood. A brilliant doctor or scientist may well be a morally rotten person.

- Intellectual charity is helping people to embrace the principles of a solid and truthful philosophy in order to lead them naturally to God. The family, the school, the Church should engage in intellectual charity, educating people to see the golden thread, the Idea of Being, that links up forever human intelligence to God. It is only in God that intelligent beings can find fulfilment and happiness: *“Lord, you have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You”* (St. Augustine).
- The points above deal with some of the consequences of the presence of the divine Idea of Being in people’s souls, at the natural level. At this level, all human beings are enlightened by the light which comes from the Son of God. There is a veiled presence of the Son of God, therefore, in every person. In this sense, we can say with K Rainer that every human being is an *“anonymous Christian”*, i.e. has something of Christ as the source of his/her intelligence.
- Divine grace opens up a new, supernatural world. The world of *“nature”* can be an awe-inspiring and beautiful world, at the physical, intellectual, and spiritual level. The world of *“super-nature”* is, in a sense, the fulfilment and completion of the world of *“nature”*, with the passing from the world of the *“Idea”* of Being to the world of the absolute *“Real”* Being, God. Grace is, in fact, the touch of the Humanity of JESUS, a real supernatural touch which creates anew a supernatural feeling, intelligence, and will. The Gospels define the operation of grace as a *“being born again”*, and as the *“old self”* giving way to the *“new man”* born of water and the Holy Spirit.
- In the world of nature, we can arrive at the certainty that God exists, like blind people who can be certain

that colours exist. It is a “*negative*” knowledge, since we cannot “*feel*” God through experience. Blind persons do not experience colours, and they cannot have a “*positive*” knowledge; let their eyes be opened and at once they will “*feel*”, they will experience colours, and they will acquire a positive, full knowledge of colours.

- Through grace we touch God, we experience Him as the absolute Real Being, not as a merely negative idea. In order to achieve this, through grace we are given a new supernatural fundamental feeling, a new supernatural intellect, a new supernatural will; in a word, we are “*born again*” in the supernatural world, in which we can experience the Father as the almighty Creator, the Son as our Wisdom and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit as power and love.
- There is, therefore, an immense difference between a baptized and a non-baptized person: the former enjoys the new supernatural faculties and the “*experience*” of God, given by grace, the latter enjoying only the natural faculties and the negative knowledge of God’s existence.
- It is not the case that a person in grace has a dual personality, one natural and the other supernatural. The person in grace has his/her natural fundamental feeling, intelligence, and will increased by the new creation in him/her of the new supernatural faculties, the former finding completion and fulfilment in the latter.
- Christ is, therefore, at the centre of the universe: through the Idea of Being, He is present in every person, from conception and always; through grace, He is present as the absolute Real Being, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the souls of all baptized people and of all those to whom His grace communicates His real presence.

- In grace, we feel God really but not clearly: the full grace of seeing Him *“face to face”* will be ours only in the beatific vision in Heaven.



“Touched by the Humanity of Christ, a new supernatural world opens up to every baptized person”

Brief Biography of Blessed Antonio Rosmini

- 1797 24th March: Antonio Francesco Davide Ambrogio Rosmini was born at Rovereto, a small town in Trentino, North Italy. The Rosmini family enjoyed great wealth and belonged to the nobility of the Austrian Empire. His father, Pier Modesto, was an upright and conservative man, and his mother, Giovanna dei Conti Formenti, was an amiable woman, discreet, warm, educated, and very religious. Antonio had an older sister, Gioseffa-Margherita, and two younger brothers, Giuseppe and Felice, who died during the first year of his life.
- 25th March: Antonio was baptised on the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- 1804-1812 His father chose for Antonio the public school rather than the private education at home by tutors, as it was the custom for aristocratic families. He was a happy child, with a special gift for friendship.
- 1812-1814 Antonio studied the Humanities and Rhetoric in the Gymnasium at Rovereto. During 1813-1814 he wrote "*A Day of Solitude*", and in 1813 wrote in his Personal Diary, "*This year was for me a year of grace: God opened my eyes over many things, and I knew that there is no true wisdom but in God*", the start of his priestly vocation.

- 1814-1816 He studied Philosophy, Mathematics, and Physics at Rovereto with a small group of friends. The course was done privately, in the house of his cousin Antonio Fedrigotti, guided by the priest Pietro Orsi.
- 1816 12th August: Antonio took his examinations on Literature, History, Philosophy, Mathematics, Geometry, Algebra, and Physics at the Imperial Lyceum at Trento achieving brilliant results.
- 22nd November: Rosmini arrived at Padua to study Theology at the University. He met Niccolo' Tommaseo, who became a life-long friend.
- 1818 16th and 17th May: Antonio received the tonsure and the Minor Orders. He planned with friends to write a Christian Encyclopaedia as an answer to the atheist Encyclopedie written by Diderot and D'Alembert.
- 1819 21st November: He returned to Rovereto to prepare for the priesthood. He made plans for a "Society of Friends".
- 1820 January: his father, Pier Modesto, died at the age of 75, leaving Antonio heir of the Rosmini Serbati fortune.
- 24th February: He accompanied his sister Gioseffa Margherita to Verona to visit the holy Countess Magdalene of Canossa. She invited Rosmini to found a religious Institute for men, in line with her own religious Institute for women. He declined, for the time being.

- September: Gioseffa Margherita opened a new orphanage for girls in Rovereto, and Antonio wrote for the occasion the book, *On Christian Education*, a gift to his sister,
- 1821 21th April: Antonio was ordained priest at Chioggia, and on 3rd of May he celebrated a solemn Mass in his parish Church of St. Mark in Rovereto. In line with his “principle of passivity” he withdrew, quietly, engaged in the task of purification, acquisition of virtues, and union with God, waiting for God to call him into action.
- 1822 During Lent he was sent by the Bishop to Lizzana, to help the dying parish priest.
 22nd June: He discussed his doctoral thesis, “De Sibyllis lucubrationum” [on pagan prophecies foretelling the coming of Christ] and was made Doctor of Theology and Canon Law.
- 1823 6th – 29th April: the Patriarch of Venice, Mons. Ladislaus Pyrcher, asked Antonio to accompany him on his journey to Rome. Pope Pius VII encouraged Rosmini to write books.
 20th August: at the death of Pius VII, the priests in Rovereto asked Rosmini to give the *Panegyric on the holy and glorious memory of Pius VII*. In it he elevated to God a passionate prayer for the independence of Italy, which marked the start of the persecution of Rosmini by the Austrian authorities.
- 1824 His sister, Gioseffa Margherita, joined in Verona the religious Institute founded by the

Countess Magdalene di Canossa. She died in 1833 at the age of 39, consumed by her dedication and love for the poor.

1825 Rosmini wrote the book, *On the Unity of Education*, and another on Divine Providence, which became the second volume of his *Theodicy*.

10th December: he wrote in his Diary, “*On this day I conceived in a flash the plan of the Institute of Charity*”. He communicated his religious experience and his thoughts to the Countess Magdalene of Canossa.

1826 He left Rovereto for Milan for two years permanence, doing research and writing his work on *Politics*. He met Count Mellerio [ex-Governor of Milan] and Alessandro Manzoni [the most famous of Italian poets and novelists of the 19th century]. They established very strong friendships for life.

1827 He wrote the first volume of his *Theodicy*, and other works on Italian Literature.

8th June: he met John Baptist Loewenbruck, a fiery priest from Lorraine, who urged Antonio to start with him the founding of a religious Order. They agreed to meet at Domodossola, where there was a retreat house and a shrine dedicated to the crucified JESUS.

1828 20th February, Ash Wednesday: Rosmini was alone at Calvario in Domodossola and started a period of prayer and fasting, writing the Constitutions of the Institute of Charity. Loewenbruck would join him much

later, in June. The date marked the birth of the Institute of Charity.

November: Rosmini was in Rome, seeking directions from the Pope, and planning to publish his fundamental works on Spirituality [*The Maxims of Christian Perfection*] and Philosophy [*A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*].

1829

15th May: Rosmini's friend, Cardinal Cappellari [later Pope Gregory XVI], organised the meeting of Rosmini with the Pope, Pius VIII. It was a truly memorable meeting during which the Pope confirmed Rosmini's double mission as a Catholic thinker and as a founder of a new religious Order. The words of the Pope were the following: "*It is the will of God that you write books, this is your vocation*" and "*If you intend to begin in a small way, leaving the Lord to do the rest, we give our approval and are very happy for you to continue*".

1830

He published in Rome the *Maxims of Christian Perfection* and *A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*. The latter brought him fame and admiration in philosophical circles in Italy and abroad.

As Rosmini was recovering in Rome from smallpox, he was visited by a very talented young solicitor, Luigi Gentili, who wanted to know more about Rosmini and his Institute. After a series of meetings, Gentili decided to join the Institute, soon after his ordination to the priesthood in Rome.

- 31st October: Rosmini, with a small band of brothers and priests, began his novitiate at Calvario following the Rules. He wrote and published *Principles of Ethics*.
- 1832-1833 He wrote the book, *The Five Wounds of the Church*, but he did not publish it until 1846, when Cardinal Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti was elected Pope with the name of Pius IX. During this time Rosmini took charge of the Sisters of Providence giving them the Constitutions and receiving their vows in the month of October 1838.
- 1834-1835 Rosmini was parish priest at Rovereto, at the request of clergy and people. He was forced to resign after only one year of intense pastoral work, owing to the constant harassment of the Austrian police. He wrote the important book on the *Renewal of Philosophy*.
- 15th June 1835: Rosmini sent Luigi Gentili with two companions to England at the request of Bishop Baines. It was the beginning of the Institute of Charity in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Rosmini's words to Gentili, "*Adopt the English way of life little by little in all that is not sinful*".
- 1837 Rosmini sent the Constitutions of the Institute of Charity to Pope Gregory XVI for formal approval. After months of unexpected difficulties, the Pope gave his full approval on 20th December 1838. In a letter to his brethren, Rosmini wrote, "*How good is the Child JESUS, He has given us today a great gift, adding happiness to happiness*". In

the Apostolic Letters of Approval, the Pope said of Rosmini: “*Antonio Rosmini is a man of eminent intellect, adorned with noble qualities of soul, exceedingly famous for his knowledge of things human and divine, outstanding for his remarkable piety, religion, virtue, probity, prudence and integrity, conspicuous for his wonderful love and loyalty to the Catholic religion and to this Apostolic See*”.

- 1839 Rosmini moved his residence to Stresa. He wrote *A Treatise on Moral Conscience*, which was fiercely opposed by anonymous critics. Rosmini was accused of holding heretical views, and Cardinals and Bishops received copies of slanderous and anonymous booklets written by Eusebio Cristiano (a pseudonym). Rosmini defended his views, but to no avail. It was the start of a long and harsh campaign to have Rosmini’s works on philosophy and theology condemned by the Church.
- 1841-1843 Rosmini published in two volumes of 1700 pages his work on *The Philosophy of Right*.
- 1842 15th January: Rosmini’s mother, Giovanna, died at the age of 85.
- 1843 7th March: Pope Gregory XVI intervened in the controversy between Rosmini and some members of the Company of JESUS (Jesuits), imposing silence on both parties. The Pope, however, stood by Rosmini, knowing that the attacks against him were caused by jealousy.
- 1843-1848 A period of relative calm, during which Rosmini dedicated his energy to the Institute

of Charity and the Sisters of Providence (Rosminian Sisters). He wrote and published the three volumes of the *Theodicy*, and other philosophical and theological works.

1847 Rosmini was once again attacked as a heretic of the worst kind, and a collection of 327 propositions taken indiscriminately from his works was published anonymously with the title "Postille". The booklet was sent to Cardinals and Bishops with the request that all the works of Rosmini be condemned by the Church.

1848 Rosmini published the *Five Wounds of the Church* and the *Constitutions according to social justice*.

3rd August: the Government of Piedmont sent Rosmini to the Pope with the double mission of fostering a Concordat between the Church and Piedmont and of persuading the Pope to accept to be the President of a Confederation of free Italian States.

15th August: Pius IX welcomed Rosmini and told him to prepare for the cardinalate. He was told of the intentions of the Pope of appointing him Secretary of State. He had free and frequent access to the Pope.

15th November: the Prime Minister of the Papal States was assassinated signalling the start of an insurrection in Rome. The Pope was advised to flee the city in disguise and was welcomed in Gaeta by the king of Naples. The Pope ordered Rosmini to follow him into exile in Gaeta, with the Pope's brother. Cardinal Antonelli, a staunch

supporter of Austria, began his work of discrediting Rosmini in the eyes of the Pope, making life difficult and closing all avenues to Rosmini who was unable to see or to get in touch with the Pope.

1849

January: Rosmini left Gaeta for Naples, to see to the publications of minor works. His enemies took advantage to rush through the condemnation of two of Rosmini's works: *The Five Wounds of Holy Church* and *The Constitutions according to social justice*.

6th of June: The Pope gave his formal approval to the condemnation.

9th of June: Rosmini was back in Gaeta and had an audience with the Pope; Pius IX was kind and friendly, as usual, but did not mention the condemnation of the two books. Soon after, Rosmini was told by the local police to leave the kingdom of Naples, and he was denied the opportunity of saying goodbye to the Pope.

15th August: Rosmini, on his way back to Stresa, was informed by letter of the condemnation of his two works and submitted at once in full obedience to the will of the Church.

2nd November: Rosmini was back in Stresa. During the troubled times at Gaeta, Naples, and on the way to Stresa he wrote one of the most profound of his books, *An Introduction to the Gospel of St. John*.

1850

Rosmini published the *Introduction to Philosophy*. During the year, a small group

of Jesuits re-launched their attacks on Rosmini with the anonymous publications of malicious books.

- 1851 12th March: Pius IX renewed to both opposing parties (Jesuits and supporters of Rosmini) the imposition of silence. The Pope, in his desire to clear the problem once and for all, instructed the Congregation of the Index to examine all the works of Antonio Rosmini.
- 1854 3rd July: The General Congregation of the Index, presided on the occasion by the Pope himself, declared free from errors all the works of Antonio Rosmini (*Dimittantur Opera Omnia Antonii Rosmini*).
- 1855 22nd February: Due to severe illness, Rosmini was forced to interrupt his work on *Theosophy*.
- 1855 1st July: After a most painful agony which lasted 8 hours, Antonio Rosmini died in the early hours, on the feast-day of the most Precious Blood of JESUS. He was 58 years old.
- 2006 26th June: The Holy See declared the “heroic virtues” of the Venerable Antonio Rosmini.
- 2007 18 November: Antonio Rosmini was declared Blessed; he had begun his book on *The Five Wounds of Holy Church* on 18th November 1832.



Works of Antonio Rosmini available in English

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Vol. 1, *About the Author's Studies*

A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas, 3 volumes

Principles of Ethics

Conscience

Anthropology as an aid to Moral Science

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Autobiography

Antonio Belsito is the Director of Rosmini Publications, a charity trust based in the UK with the objective of making known to the English-speaking world the works of Blessed Antonio Rosmini, who was a great Catholic philosopher, theologian, and spiritual master, as well as being the Founder of the Institute of Charity and of the Sisters of Providence.

After many years of teaching philosophy and theology to students preparing for a University Degree, Antonio Belsito became involved in the direction of Ratcliffe College, whilst at the same time founding and directing the Rosmini Centre House of Prayer in Leicestershire.

As Director of Rosmini Publications, he is dedicated to translating, publishing, and distributing the works of Blessed Rosmini, while, at the same time, lecturing and writing books on the relevance and importance for today of the teaching of Blessed Antonio Rosmini.

A Collective Summary

Antonio Rosmini is the greatest, most original, prophetic Catholic thinker of the last few centuries, little known in the English-speaking world. Following the advice of Popes and Cardinals, he wrote extensively on philosophy, theology, and spirituality, and his teaching is extremely relevant to the major issues confronting the world and the Church of today. His books on spirituality are firmly rooted on Scripture from which they draw the perennial call to holiness, and the means for achieving it through the three steps of purification from sin, constant exercise of the virtues, and union with God. His books on philosophy are full of light for the enquiring mind, ranging from the problem of Truth and Epistemology, to the foundation of Morality, of Right, of Politics, of Natural Anthropology and Natural Religion, and of the Essence of the Human Soul. His work on Theosophy is a most profound study of “being”, in its three modes – ideal being, real being, moral being. Faith and Reason, for Rosmini, far from being in opposition are in fact the two wings which allow human beings to rise from the natural to the supernatural world, the one calling on the other, faith calling on reason and reason on faith. His theological masterpiece is undoubtedly the Supernatural Anthropology, which deals with grace, with the “supernatural person”, and with the Sacraments. Other important works deal with the Church, in particular with the “wounds” of the Church.

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