

The ORIGIN of THOUGHT

Rosmini Centre House of Prayer

Saturday 6th February 2010

The Big Bang Theory

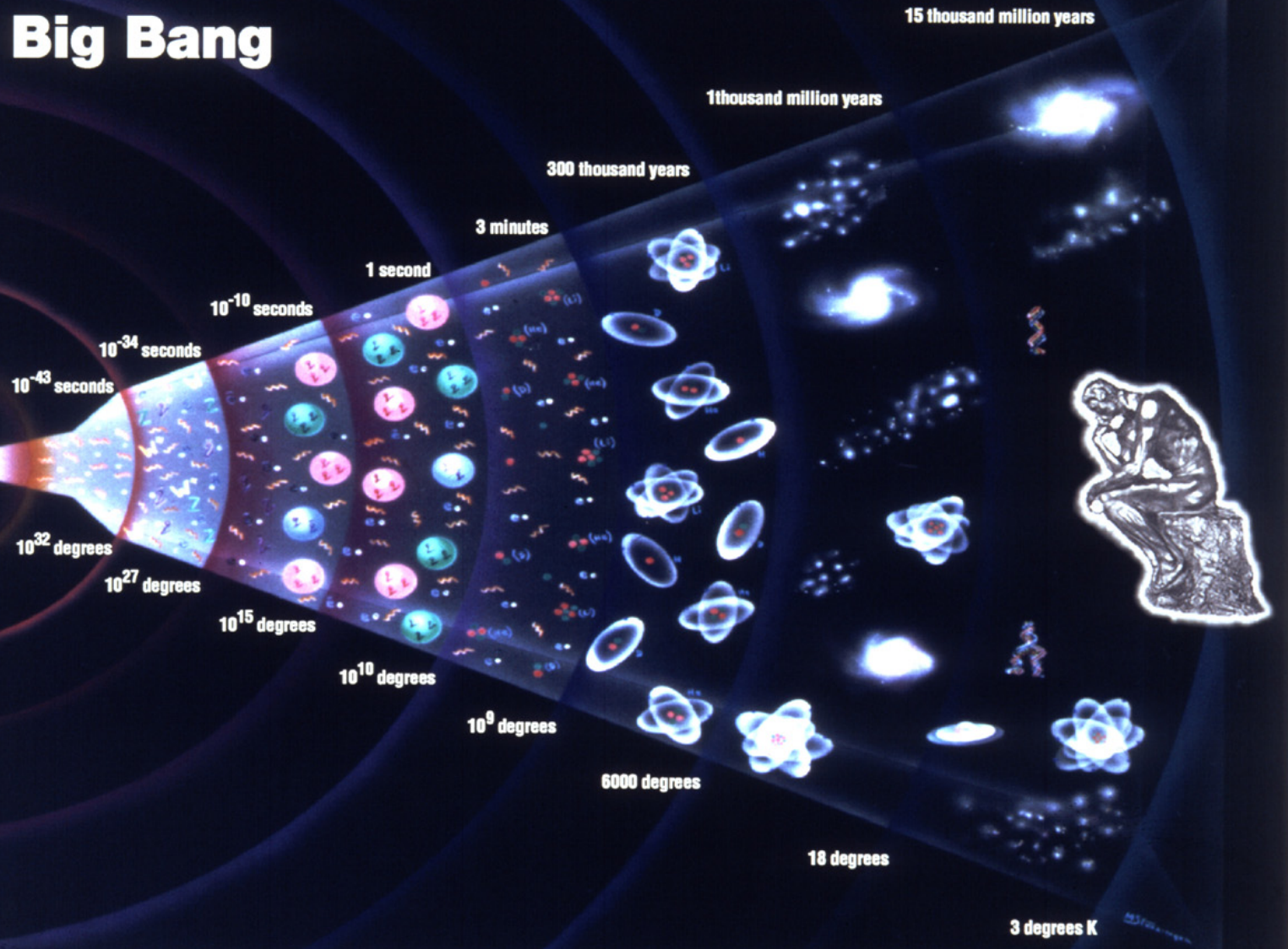
In his book, “New Proofs for the Existence of God”, Robert J. Spitzer argues that the word “theory” applied to the “Big Bang” should not be taken to mean “hypothesis” but a set of firm conclusions about a “historical event” which has been accepted by cosmologists on the basis of *“very solidly established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

Big Bang



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”

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 specialised 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 all know what “thinking” means, we are doing it now! Thinking is putting together the many ideas we have **in the mind** in a more or less logical and coherent manner. Let us think of Africa: ideas of lions and elephants, red dusty roads, forests, minerals, starving people, names of famous cities, rivers and tribes, etc. We could think about Africa for a very long time, linking the ideas in logical sequence.

The real Africa is thousand of miles away, yet our ideas about Africa are at this moment in our minds. We think of Africa by means of ideas. All our thoughts are made of ideas.

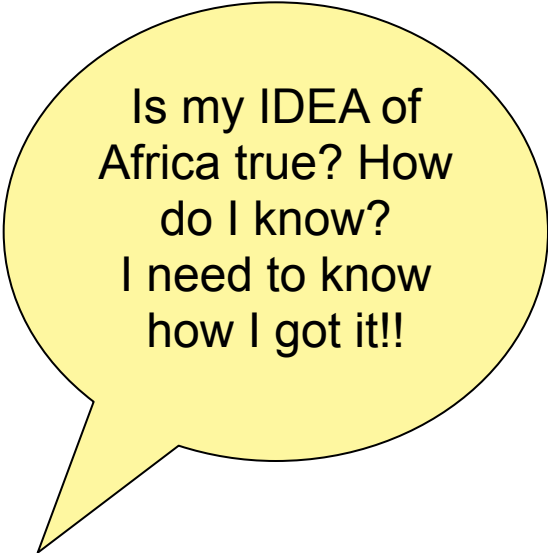


THOUGHTS = IDEAS

How did we get our IDEAS of Africa? How do we get IDEAS of anything?

This question has troubled the greatest minds for thousands of years, from Plato to Aristotle, from Thomas Aquinas to Descartes, from John Locke to Hume, from Kant to Russell.

Why is this an important question?



Is my IDEA of Africa true? How do I know?
I need to know how I got it!!

IDEAS are something! They are there for us to think them, hence they exist.

If we cannot give an account of how we get all our ideas then all our knowledge will be uncertain, mysterious, doubtful.

If, on the contrary, we manage to explain fully the origin of all our IDEAS then we acquire certainty about their truth.

IDEAS are TRUE if we can give an accurate account of their ORIGIN.

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.

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.



How safe is
our
knowledge?

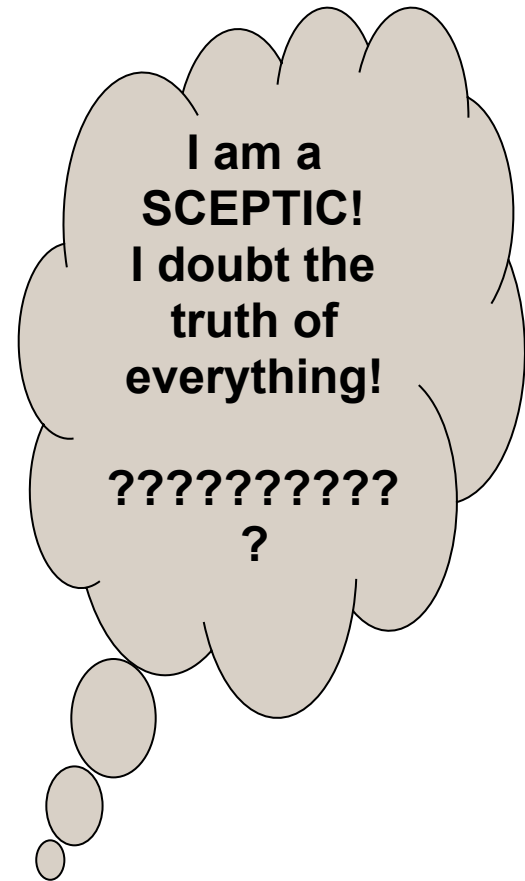
The origin of thought leads us to the origin of truth. If we cannot find the source of all our ideas then we are condemned to SCEPTICISM.

Today, the denial of objective TRUTH is the characteristic of mainstream philosophy.

Universities, and the Media in general, teach that the quest for universal truth is a folly. There is no such thing. Everything is RELATIVE, and truth is relative.

Morality is relative, and religion is relative.

There is no universally binding morality, there is no religion that can claim to be the true religion.

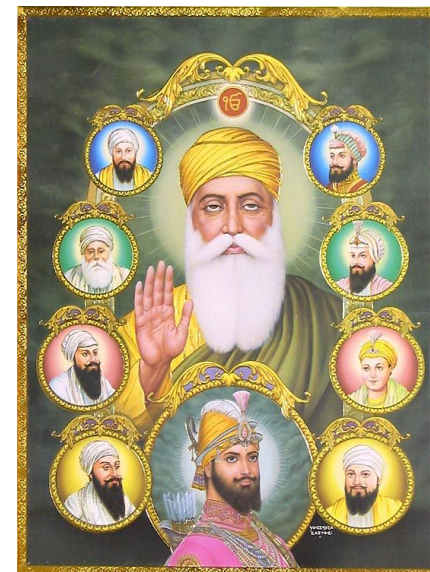
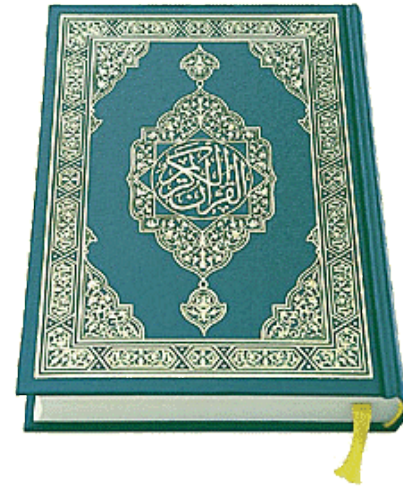
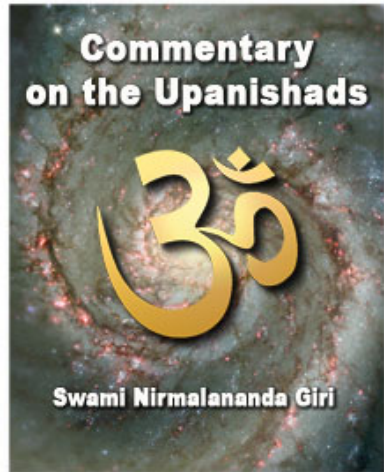


There is no true religion. Religions are true for their followers only.

For Christians it is true that JESUS was born of a Virgin – this is true only for them!

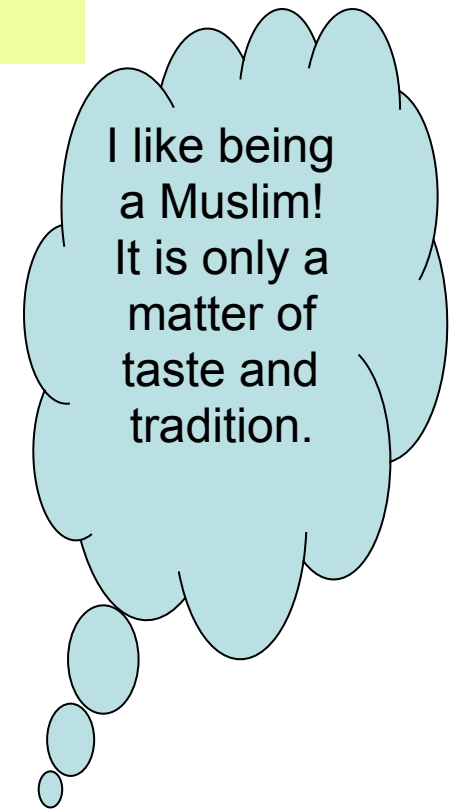
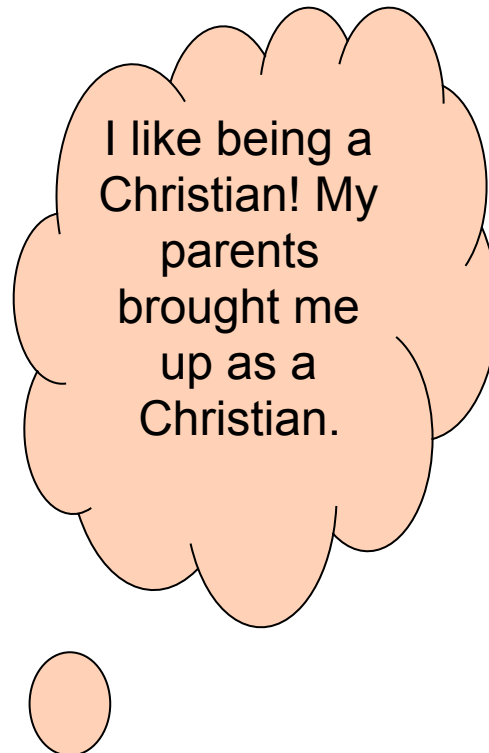
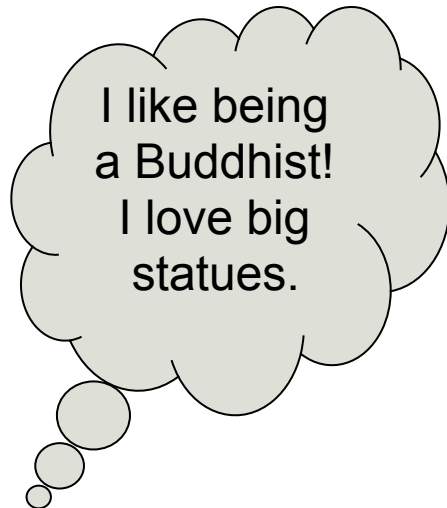
For Muslims it is true that Mohammed received the Koran from the Archangel Gabriel – this is true only for them!

And the same applies to Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, etc.



What cannot be said is that there is one true religion, universal, to be followed by all human beings!

The most we can say is that we do not like one religion and that we prefer one over the other, but not on account of truth!



The same is for **MORALITY**. There is no one true morality, it is all a question of taste, of tradition, of culture.

Abortion, divorce, adultery, stealing, oppression of women and superiority of men, death penalty, war, etc.: there is no objective truth about right and wrong, hence their being right or wrong depends on taste, culture, religion, traditions.

Each Society decides what is right and what is wrong. All Societies are entitled to it, and no morality is superior to another. The most one can say is that he/she does not like the morality of another culture – but no one can say that his/her morality is superior or that it is the true one!

The denial of UNIVERSAL MORALITY brings about the destruction of morality!

GOD

- 1: Do not worship any other gods
- 2: Do not make any idols
- 3: Do not misuse the name of God
- 4: Keep the Sabbath holy

MAN

- 5: Honour your father & mother
- 6: Do not murder
- 7: Do not commit adultery
- 8: Do not steal
- 9: Do not lie
- 10: Do not covet

The root cause of SCEPTICISM is the apparent impossibility to prove that all our IDEAS are solid, valid, truthful.

We shall talk about TRUTH at the next lecture, but today we need to prepare the ground by trying to solve the age long problem about the ORIGIN OF IDEAS or the ORIGIN OF THOUGHT.

Is it possible to solve it?

ROSMINI' solution is the work of a genius! His masterpiece was entitled, "New Essay concerning the ORIGIN of IDEAS", and in it he takes to task various philosophers who offered the wrong solutions that led to the SCEPTICISM of today.

OPERE DI ANTONIO ROSMINI

NUOVO SAGGIO SULL'ORIGINE DELLE IDEE /2

4

Istituto di Studi Filosofici - Roma
Centro di Studi Rosminiani - Stresa
Città Nuova Editrice

The simple question we want to ask is this:

I have many ideas in my mind – star, moon, car, table, grass, horse, etc. They are in their thousands, and through them I know things.

How did they come into my mind? How did I acquire them?

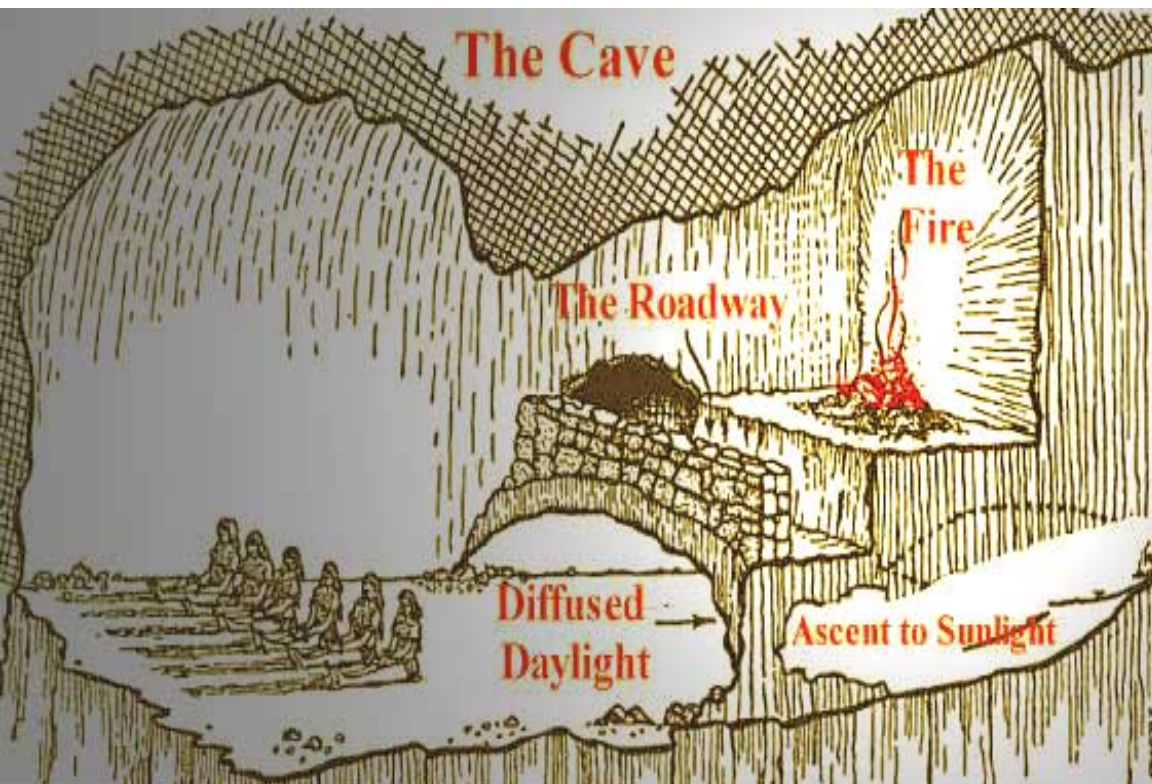
In our reply, we must give an account of all of them; for simplicity we divide them into two large groups:

Ideas of people and all other things in the universe

Ideas of logic, mathematics, and other very abstract ideas.

The science that studies the problem of the origin of all our ideas is called **EPISTEMOLOGY**, a difficult word for a simple question.

Plato thought that all IDEAS were innate, in our minds from conception. IDEAS are in Heaven, like gods, perfect and eternal. The senses are full of darkness and force us to see shadows and images, not things as they are in reality. Reality is in the IDEAS, in the world of FORMS.

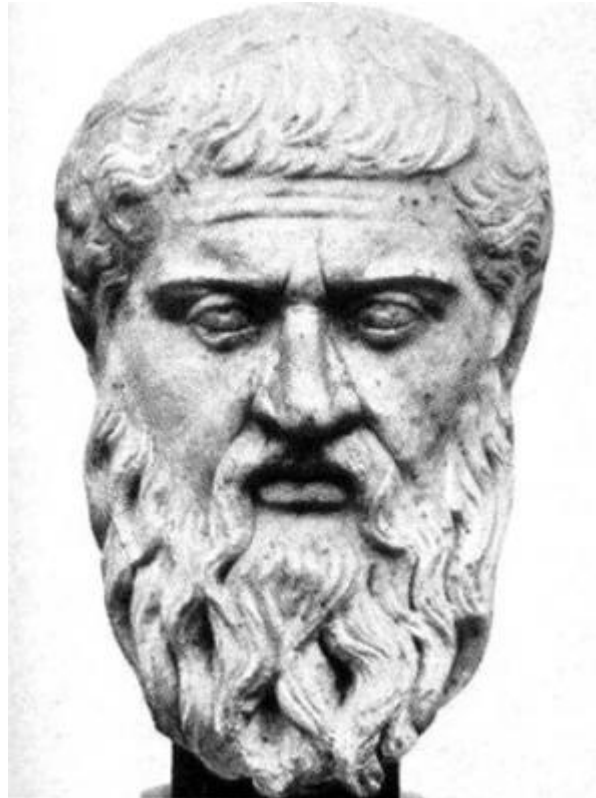


Our task in this world is to go beyond appearances of the senses and to ascend to the real world of IDEAS, the world of Truth, Goodness, Beauty.

PLATO went over the top when he said that all our IDEAS are INNATE, we come down from Heaven with all of them, hidden by the darkness of the senses.

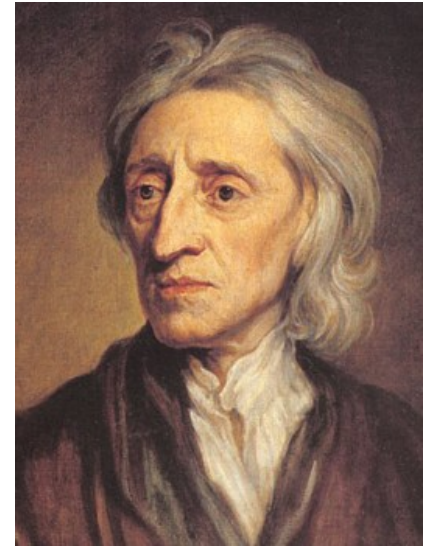
His reason for saying this is a powerful one: he could not see any other way we can acquire our IDEAS in this world. The SENSES cannot produce IDEAS in us, because SENSES are feeling organs peculiar to each individual, whereas IDEAS are spiritual entities, eternal, universal, immutable, simple, objective.

SENSES are
particular,
limited,
mortal,
belonging to
each sentient
being.



IDEAS are
universal,
spiritual,
eternal,
immutable,
divine.

For Plato, IDEAS are in our soul from conception but they have been “forgotten” as a result of the trauma of birth. Sense experience help us to become aware of our IDEAS: we see a horse and we remember the IDEA “Horse”, and the IDEA Horse, properly analysed, gives us true knowledge.



John LOCKE, about 500 years ago, said that Plato had spoken nonsense. He claimed instead that all our IDEAS come to us through the SENSES and through REFLECTION on Sense Experience. He denied the existence of INNATE IDEAS, and said that at birth our mind is a “tabula rasa”, a clean table, a blank sheet, with no ideas at all. He claimed that we acquire IDEAS as we experience the world around us through the five SENSES.



David HUME said that IDEAS are COPIES, IMAGES of what we experience through the SENSES.

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, you may even smell something, you feel the surface of your desk, etc.

Imagine now that you put on your desk **a very tame cat**, looking at the same room. The cat sees, hears, smells, feels the same things that you do. If your ideas come to you through your senses then your cat should have the same ideas that you have; the senses of the cat may even be sharper than yours! Would the empiricists go as far as attributing ideas to your cat? And, if not, why not? The senses and sensations are present in the cat as much as they are present in you.

Empiricists (= followers of Locke, people who say that all our IDEAS come through the senses) may claim that humans can “reflect” on their sensations. But, 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.



Both LOCKE and HUME failed to see what Plato had noticed many years earlier: how can the SENSES, being particular and limited, cause IDEAS which are necessarily universal, eternal, objective? They failed to notice the unique characteristics of IDEAS.

For the same reason, they could not explain the origin of many “abstract” ideas: the idea of substance, of necessity, of identity, of cause and effect.

They could not explain it because these IDEAS cannot be caused by the SENSES. No one has ever “experienced with his/her senses” substance or necessity, or cause, or identity.

Their radical solution was to deny that we have such ideas!

ROSMINI was right when he said that the first of their many mistakes was to start with the assertion that all our ideas come through the senses instead of starting with pure and simple observation.

When they found ideas which could not come through the senses, instead of saying, *“We were mistaken about our initial assertion, there are ideas which do not come through the senses”*, they argued and said that such ideas, which we do have, cannot possibly exist!



There is no valid idea of cause/ effect, no valid idea of necessity, no valid idea of God, no valid idea of substance, etc.

Help! There is no idea of substance!



Is the idea of **SUBSTANCE** important?

If you deny it then you'll get into all kinds of logical mistakes.

What is “**substance**”?

Take a beautiful red apple: look at it carefully, smell it, taste it. The sensations you experience are your own private sensations: the red is what is in your own retina, the taste depends on your own taste buds, the texture is a modification of the nerves in your hands, etc. **SENSATIONS** are private, yet the red apple is public!

Take the red apple and place it in a bag: you can no longer see it, taste it, smell it, etc. Is the red apple still in the bag?

If you say that the apple is what you feel/sense then clearly there is **NOTHING** you are feeling/sensing now – so the apple does not exist!



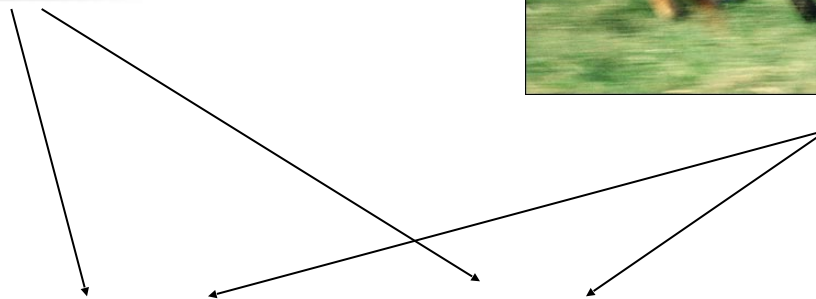
Bishop Berkeley, being a bishop, had a ready answer – even though he did not accept the idea of substance. He said, *“Yes, it is true, if the apple is nothing more than what we experience (colour, smell, texture, sound, taste) then it should not exist in the bag. BUT it exists because GOD is looking at it all the time, so the apple in the bag is identical to the apple we see out of the bag”!*

Let us ask again, **“What is SUBSTANCE?”**

Take the example of the apple: we call “accidents” the various sensations we receive from the apple (colour, texture, smell, sound, taste), we call “substance” what is holding together the sensible qualities in the one object we call apple.

We could say, *“The apple is a substance which has sensible qualities which make us see red, give us a special taste, smell, sound, and texture”.*

Substance must be there if there is to be an apple: substance is what makes the apple a “something” which is in the bag even when no one is receiving any sensation at all from it.



Scholastics	<i>accidents</i>	substance
Descartes	<i>secondary qual.</i>	Primary qualities
Berkeley		bundle of ideas (sensible qualities)
Kant	<i>phenomena</i>	noumena
Russell	<i>sense-data</i>	physical object
Phenomenalism		phenomena
Rosmini	<i>sensible qual.</i>	substance

What is TRANSUBSTANTIATION?

In the EUCHARIST, the substance of bread is changed by the power of God into the substance of the Body of Christ, leaving intact the accidents of bread.

The same is for the wine: its substance is changed into the substance of the Blood of JESUS, leaving intact the accidents of wine.

How do we know it? On the authority of the Son of God.

“Take this all of you and eat it, this is My Body.... This is My Blood”.



HUME denied the validity of our PRINCIPLES OF REASONING, saying that we have no IDEA of cause/effect and of necessity. We will not go into this today, but consider the result of such denial:

1. We use the PRINCIPLES of REASONING all the time: when we say any sentence at all we use them, so they are the tools for all that we think and say. If we cannot trust them as true tools, then whatever we think or we say or we write is doubtful, uncertain, most probably untrue!
2. If we deny the validity of the Principles of REASONING then we have no way out but to be SCEPTIC about everything. There would be no truth at all, no knowledge at all. No Religion can be true, no Morality can be true.
3. We would be lost in a sea of uncertainty and despair.



Many modern philosophers side with LOCKE and HUME. For example A.J. AYER and the Logical Positivists claim that there is no universal truth. Wittgenstein claimed that all truth is relative. Modern Phenomenalists deny objective truth.

PLATO and many others like-minded philosophers after him failed to explain the proper origin of all IDEAS.

Their system is faulty and therefore cannot prove that all our IDEAS are true. We talk, we reason, we write but we cannot be sure that what we say is true.

LOCKE and many others after him, including most of the philosophers of today, failed to explain the origin of ALL our IDEAS. Moreover, they failed to explain the origin of ANY IDEA at all! Their system is particularly misguided and lacking in a correct observation of what IDEAS are and how we come to acquire them. Their sad conclusion is SCEPTICISM – human beings are barred from the TRUTH.

KANT tried to produce a compromise between the two, saying that the senses provide us with the basic matter of IDEAS which is then enlightened by 14 categories (fundamental IDEAS) to form a proper IDEA. For him, the idea “apple” is made up of Matter (given by sensations) and of Form (given by the mind). All human beings have the 14 categories by virtue of being human beings, from birth. Notice, the categories come spontaneously from our spirit, unexplained. We do not know whether they are TRUE, we are simply forced to think them. Hence his system is also doomed and open to SCEPTICISM.

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.

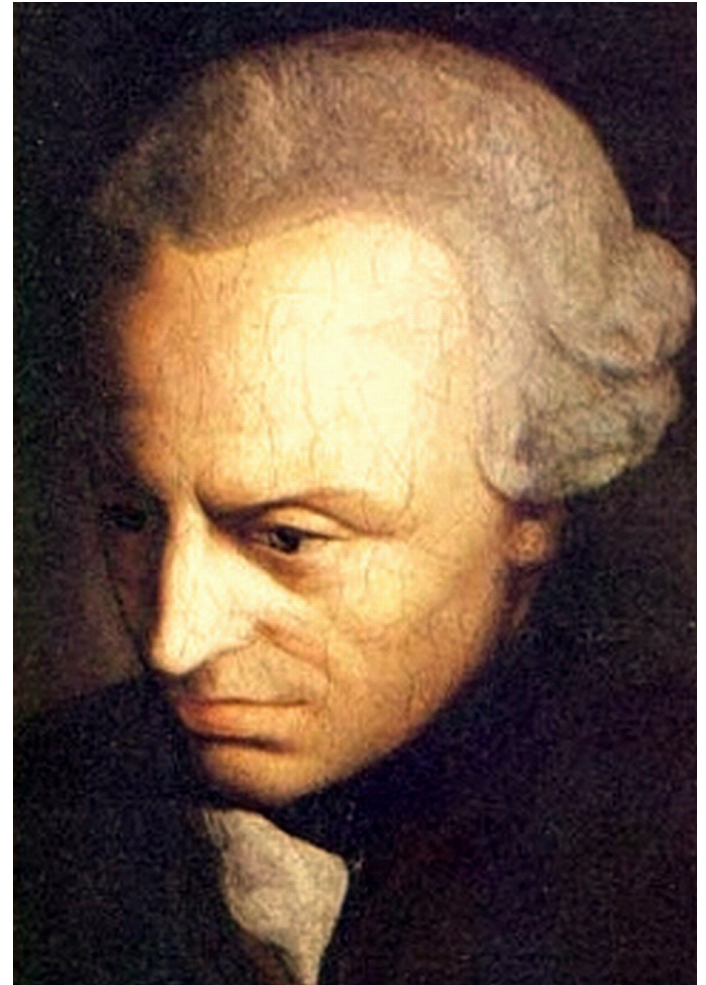
It was Kant who wrote, ***“Metaphysics is a dark and shoreless ocean, marked by no beacons”***. For Kant the real, noumenal world lurks out there, but we must concentrate on knowing the world as we perceive it to be and nothing else is relevant to us.

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”, 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”, “modality”.

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.

Some conclusions:

Modern Philosophy has failed to explain the Origin of Thought.

Modern Philosophy is SCEPTICAL about Truth.
There is no objective Truth.

Modern Philosophy is based on RELATIVISM: all “truths” are relative, to the individual, to society, to culture, to religion.

Tolerance is preached as a means for survival: let us agree that nothing is really true and let us tolerate each others' relative truths.

ROSMINI has solved the problem of the Origin of Thought. He was aware of the greatness of his discovery, but he played it down saying that the answer had already been hinted at by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.

He wrote three volumes on the Origin of Ideas, which he published in Rome in 1830, the first precious stone of his philosophical system.

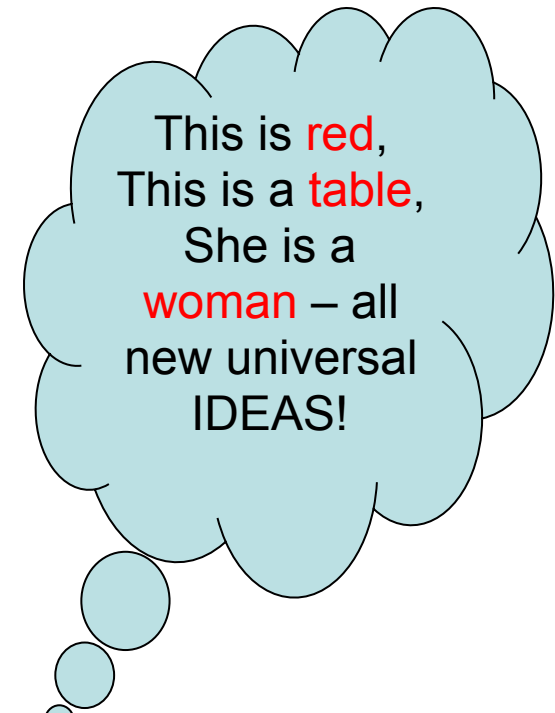
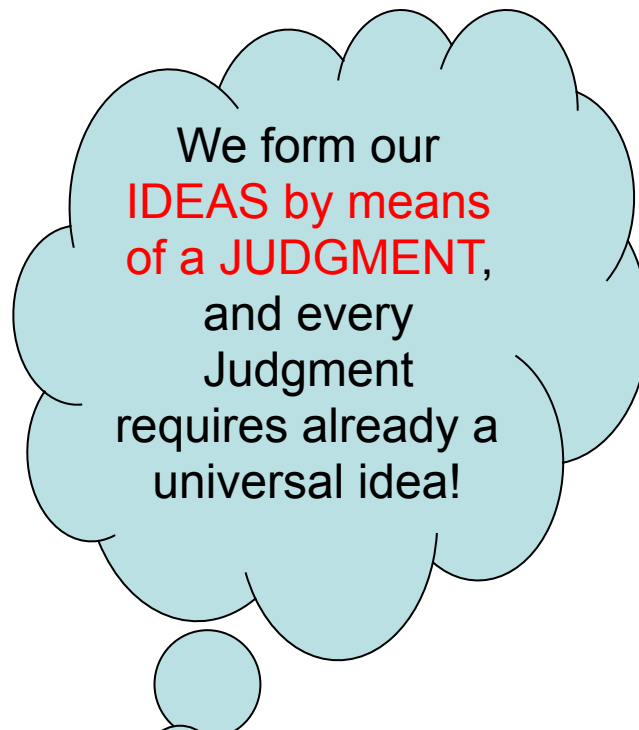
It is no use, he claimed, to write about anything at all UNLESS we know that what we say can be true – that there is a truth which can be grasped fully by our intelligence and reasoning. If we deny the possibility of reaching the truth why write or discuss at all?

EPISTEMOLOGY is the difficult word for the search for truth in our ideas. What is the status of our knowledge? Is it reliable – truthful – or is only a quest for the sake of searching, without ever reaching any solid truth?

Rosmini's Epistemology is solid, clear, and opens the mind to natural and supernatural TRUTH.

Rosmini begins by noticing that IDEAS are UNIVERSAL. The idea “cat” refers to an infinite number of cats, in the past, present, future. The idea “dog” is equally universal, and so all other IDEAS – red, moon, apple, walk, eat, sleep etc.

He then noticed that we form IDEAS by means of a JUDGMENT: I see a lion for the first time – never heard of lions – and I say to myself, with the help of others who give me the word: “This is a lion”. Having made this JUDGMENT I now have the IDEA “lion” in my mind. Notice that the “this” is whatever we are experiencing and we are placing it into the class “lion” (a universal idea).



The problem is this: when we make judgments 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.

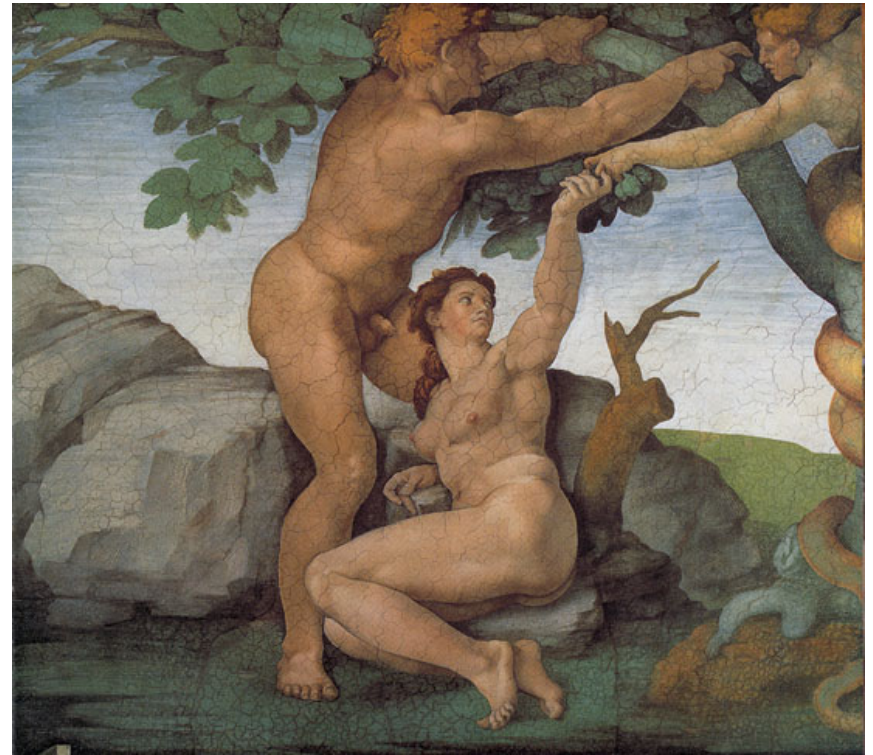
The question is:

“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?”

Imagine Adam in the Garden of Eden, freshly made by God: how could he begin to think, to make his first judgement?

To make that judgement he needed a universal idea, but he could not find any in his mind, since he had not produced it, yet, by judgement.

How did he manage to make his first judgement, perhaps “I am”, since to make that judgement he 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, but he had been created by God with mental tools or categories or spectacles which forced him to think of his world of sensations according to the peculiar form of his categories.

There was an **instinct** in Adam to colour his sensations of himself with the categories, and he would have been in the condition of making that first judgment, "I exist".

Kant's idea of existence, however, could not be truly universal, since, like the other categories, it was a subjective idea, whereas true universal ideas, to be really such, must be objective and endowed with the fullness of truth.

For Rosmini, Adam was a feeling and intelligent being; as a feeling being he had the permanent sensation of his body, a fundamental feeling of it.

As an intelligent being he enjoyed the constant vision of the idea of being. It was easy, therefore, to make the first judgment, “I exist”, since the innate idea of being provided the universal idea required for the first judgment, which was a primitive synthesis in the unity of the human person.



Rosmini drew this most important conclusion: IDEAS are the result of JUDGMENTS, but to make a JUDGMENT we require a previous UNIVERSAL IDEA.

How do we pass from the particular (this, that, he, she, etc.) to the universal (cat, lion, moon, man, woman, etc.)? **WE MUST ALREADY HAVE A UNIVERSAL IDEA THAT MAKES OUR NEW IDEA UNIVERSAL.**

The child who learns by getting ideas, experiences, let's say, a light: the mother tells the child, "This is a light"; and the child learns the new idea of light. But the idea he/she has learned is universal, applicable to all kinds of lights: from where did the child get the skill of passing from his/her particular experience to the universal idea of light? He/She must have already another universal idea to help him/her form the new universal idea of light.



“Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Anselm knew that we have a splendid, divine idea in us, called the **IDEA OF BEING**. But they did not see the huge importance it truly has in all things human and divine.

It is a simple, neglected **IDEA**, but it is the foundation of all knowledge, the mother of all ideas, that which makes Angels and Men intelligent, the supreme principle of every science.

I discovered it at Rovereto, one day, as I was immersed in my thoughts at the age of 18! I am sure it was **GOD** who inspired me!”



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.

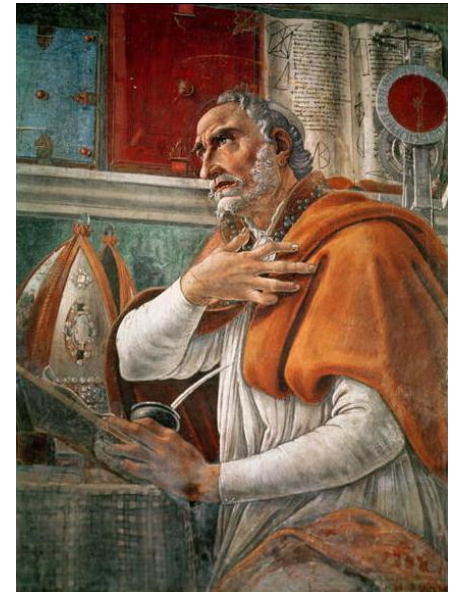
Rosmini was aware of moving beyond both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, although he acknowledged at every step their contributions to the problems with which he was dealing.

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:

“Rosmini moved beyond Augustine and Thomas....”



St. Augustine



St. Thomas

“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”.



The Rosminian poet **Clemente Rebora** believed that we can identify three essential moments of the work of the Holy Spirit on the soul of the young Rosmini:

“The first exceptional moment of grace – when he was 15 years old – was the moment of his spiritual enlightening: “... I knew that there is no true wisdom but in God”.

From this initial experience of “real” being came to him his boundless humility, his clinging lovingly to truth, his limitless love for charity in harmony with being, his abandoning himself completely to the Providence of his Father in Heaven”.

“The second moment, a consequence of the first, is that of his intellectual enlightenment, his discovery and persuasion that ideal being is the first principle of all knowledge, the first truth, the source and principle of certainty.

His philosophy has its roots in this initial experience.

[Rebora is referring to Rosmini’s discovery of the “idea of being” and of its wider implications, in 1815, when he was 18 years old].

“The third moment, is the emergence of his asceticism through the experience of “moral being”, when at the age of 24 and soon after his ordination to the priesthood, God led him to “open his eyes over himself” and to discover the “principle of passivity” which became the foundation of his spiritual life and which implies in effect a constant interior activity of purification and an openness to the voice of God to do His will as soon as it pleases Him to manifest it to him”

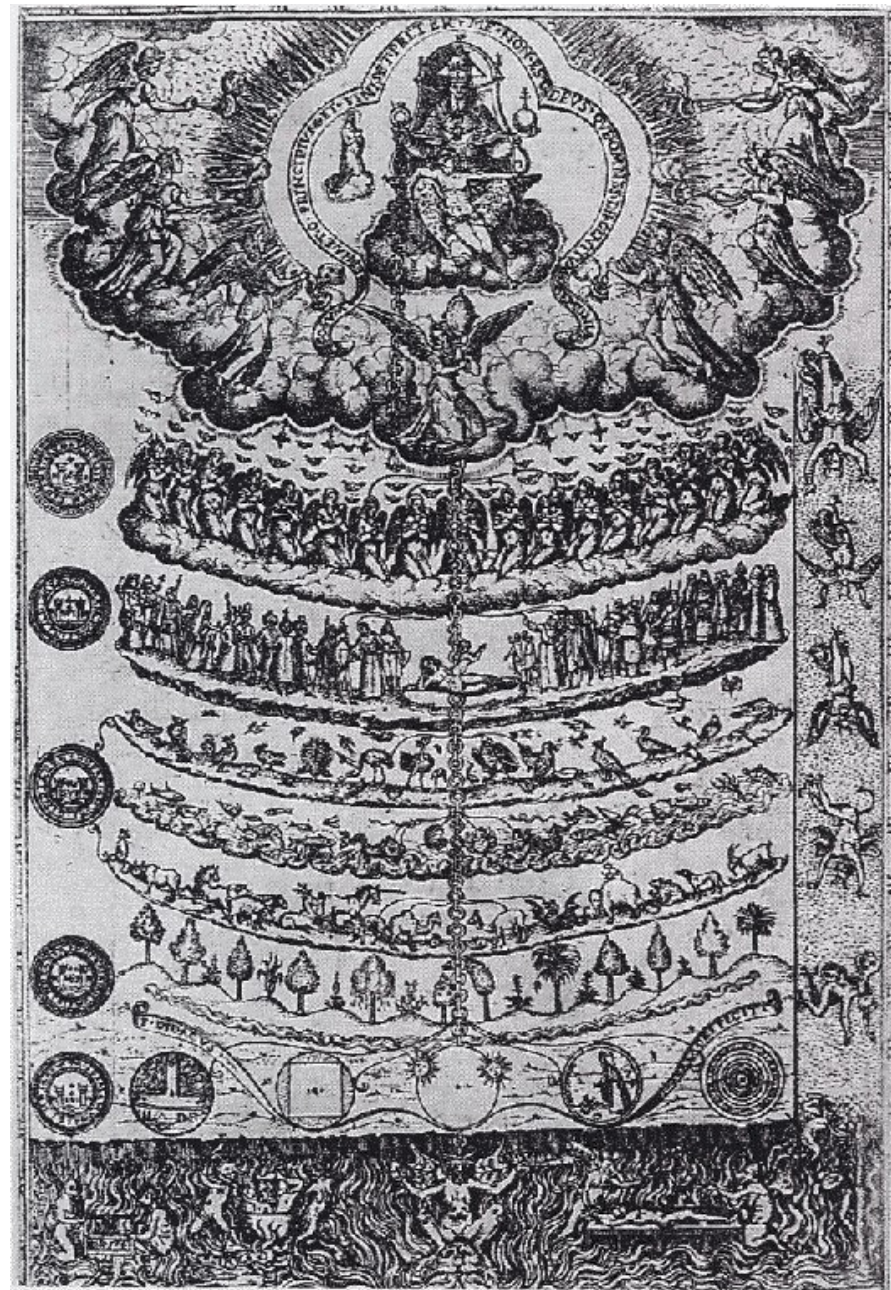
(C Rebora, Rosmini, p. 186).

Clemente Rebora



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 only on the most common feature of all things, ignoring all other qualities, and this is “being”.** Look at the picture, “The chain of Being”: it represents all existing things: galaxies and earth, heaven and hell, all beings and all things. What is the most common feature of them all? It is BEING and we can think being in its universal mode – i.e. devoid of any detail at all.



The chain of Being



Take in your hands three different objects, a pen, a computer, a dog: 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 of 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”.



Beato Antonio Rosmini

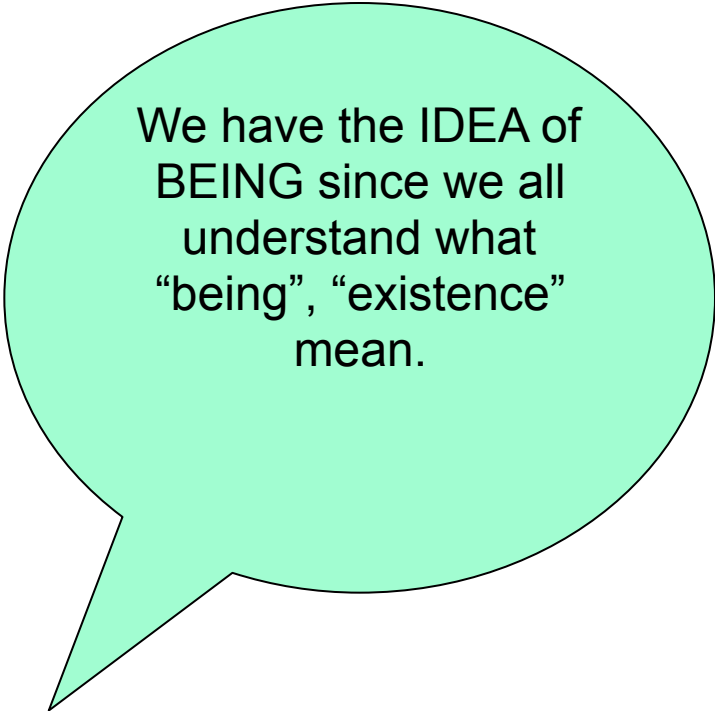
2- Fact: We cannot think of anything without the idea of being.

The first step then is to know the fact, that all human beings have the idea of being, the idea of existence in general. They all know what existence means. Why is this fact of such fundamental importance?

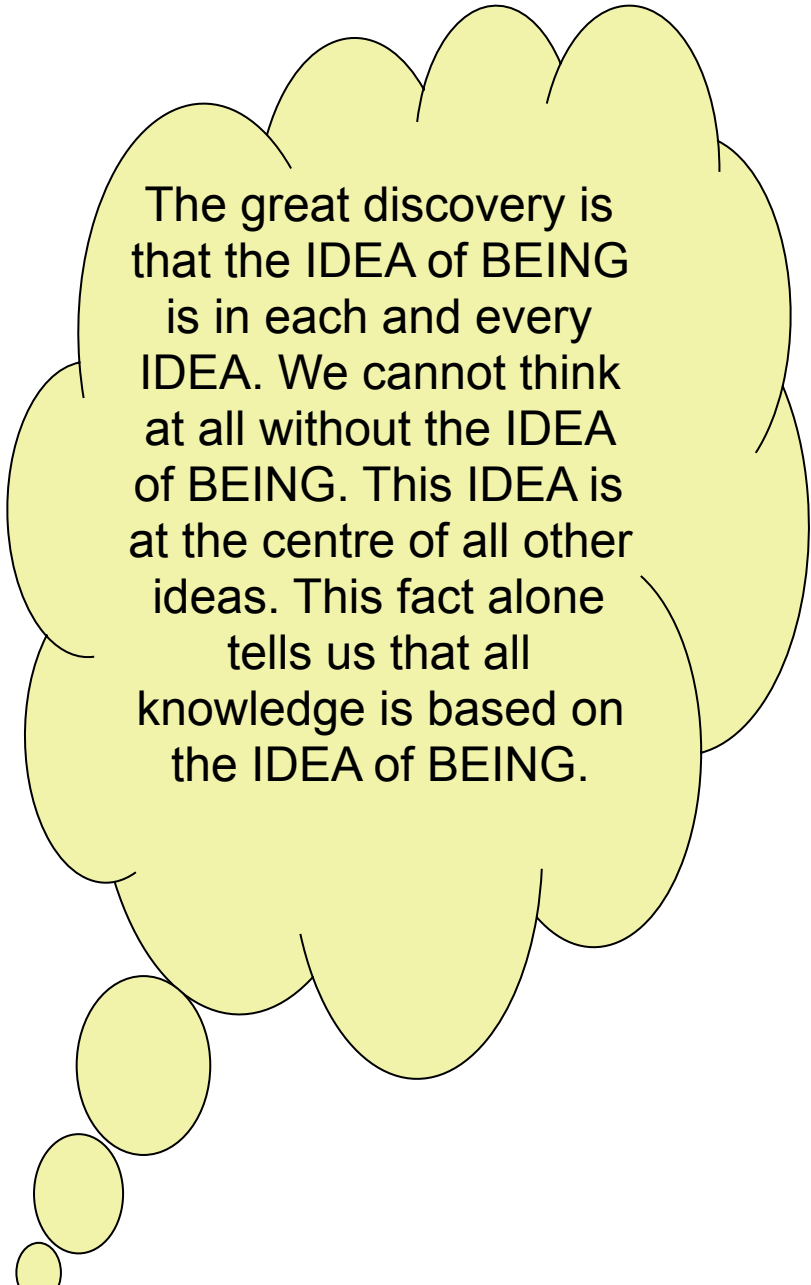
Take the next step which is to notice that we cannot think anything at all without the idea of being, we cannot have any thought without the idea of being. All our ideas have the idea of being.

This is the amazing 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.



We have the IDEA of
BEING since we all
understand what
“being”, “existence”
mean.



The great discovery is
that the IDEA of BEING
is in each and every
IDEA. We cannot think
at all without the IDEA
of BEING. This IDEA is
at the centre of all other
ideas. This fact alone
tells us that all
knowledge is based on
the IDEA of BEING.

**It is the IDEA of
BEING**

It is real being in general

Member of things which ARE

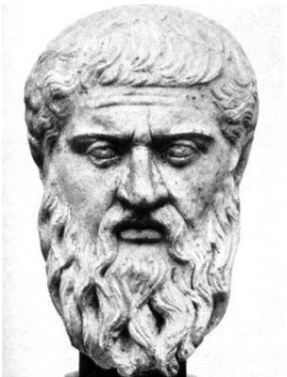
Member of Mineral Kingdom

Member of Vegetative Kingdom

Member of Animal Kingdom

Member of the human race

**This is the IDEA of PLATO, the philosopher who lived in
ATHENS around 400BC**



Think of the dog you left at home 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 that has life, motion, etc. Continue 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 all the time 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, 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.



BRUNO

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.** You 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. And yet, this amazing fact has just been analysed by us and found to be true: the idea of being, being contained in all possible ideas, is the mother idea of them all, and all knowledge has its source in it.

Rosmini compares all possible knowledge to a pyramid: at the lower end of the pyramid we find the infinite number of particular ideas, the higher we ascend the more general are the ideas, fewer in numbers, 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).

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, 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 mind-boggling and revolutionary as the discovery of the physical “big bang”.



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

Let us proceed: so far we have seen that we all 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 our ideas – therefore in all our thoughts. Indeed, there would be no other thought, no other idea if the idea of being should be missing.

We can now ask: “Where does this prodigious idea come from? What is the origin of the idea of being?”.

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, 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 (eternal, immutable, necessary, objective, universal).

Rosmini 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.

*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:*

Objectivity (sensations are our modifications; entia are independent of us)

Possibility or Ideality (idea of being is intuition of possible beings)

Simplicity (absence of anything material, anything extended)

Unity or Identity (same idea of being is applied to endless number of things)

Universality (sensation is particular, idea of being applicable to infinite things)

Necessity (what is possible can never be impossible)

Immutability (idea of being is always the same, even if applied to many things)

Eternity (possibility of being is not limited by time)

Indetermination (being in all its universality is devoid of any determination).

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

*If the idea is so necessary and essential to the formation of all our ideas that the faculty of thought is impossible without it;
If it is not found in sensations, nor extracted by reflection from internal or external sensations;
If it is not created by God at the moment of perception;
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 has not got the idea of being therefore it cannot have any idea at all.

It has instinct and therefore instinctively moves towards pleasure and recoils 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 be aware, will not know, 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 then 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 birth 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 the darkness about the reason of things and about understanding any of our experiences and sensations.

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 the “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 also seriously vitiated and cannot be true

The Idea of Being is that which forms our INTELLECT and our REASON.

INTELLIGENCE is nothing else but the constant vision of the Idea of Being without determinations – a blank sheet or the infinite surface of the sea without a ripple, or a radar which is on alert with nothing determined on the screen.

”Determinations” are caused by real existing things, perceived by the senses and understood by the mind.

REASON is the faculty of reasoning, i.e. of applying the idea of being to sensations, of uniting form to matter in all our cognitions.

The Idea of Being is the **FORM** of all our ideas; **MATTER**, however, is provided by the senses.

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

The principle of cognition, *“The object of thought is being”*;

The principle of contradiction, *“What is cannot not be” or “We cannot think being and not being at the same time”*;

The principle of substance, *“We cannot think of an accident without a substance”*

The principle of cause and effect, *“We cannot think of an effect without a cause”*.

The principles of logic are used by us in all our conversations, in all our reasoning, in all our writing. They are what allow us to understand each other, to follow or to create a series of logical thoughts. Other philosophers failed to explain their origin: the empiricists denied the validity of the principles of substance and of cause and effect; Kant claimed that such principles emanate from within ourselves spontaneously.

Origin of the **elementary concepts** of being, used in all our reasoning. They are:

- **Unity**
- **Number**
- **Possibility**
- **Universality**
- **Necessity**
- **Immutability**
- **Absolute**

The elementary concepts are the characteristics of the Idea of Being, and hence are derived directly from it. All human beings have them by virtue of having the Idea of Being.

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 get all the other ideas that provide us with knowledge about the real things of the universe, the ideas of things like “myself”, “tree”, “star”, “dog”, etc.**



But the origin of all such ideas is easily explained once we recognise that **the human subject is at once intelligent and feeling**, has the constant vision of the idea of being that makes him intelligent and has feeling which allows him to perceive all the sensations which the sensible qualities of bodies produce on him.

The feeling subject is at the same time the intelligent subject.

The matter of all our ideas is given in sensations felt by the human subject, the formal part of all ideas is given by the intellect that has as a constant object the idea of being.

It was Kant who had discovered 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.

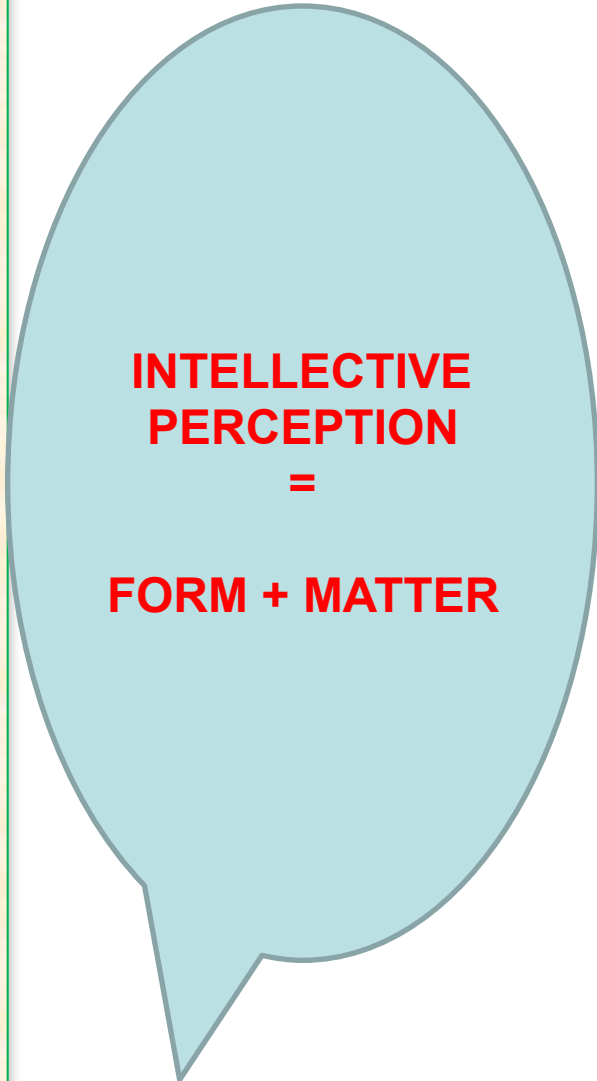
Rosmini argues that the form which is given by the mind – which is independent of the mind – is the simple idea of being which contains in itself all the 14 categories of Kant.

When we see a tree, all the sensations caused by the tree in us are felt by us. But 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 judgment since we are at once intelligent and feeling subjects, we have all the ingredients for making the judgment and thus for acquiring the idea.

This process is called by Rosmini, **“intellective perception”**, and it is the way we acquire all our ideas of bodies, including our own body.



**INTELLECTIVE
PERCEPTION
=
FORM + MATTER**

In the unity of the human subject we find intelligence and feeling, **both innate**, both necessary for the acquisition of all other ideas.

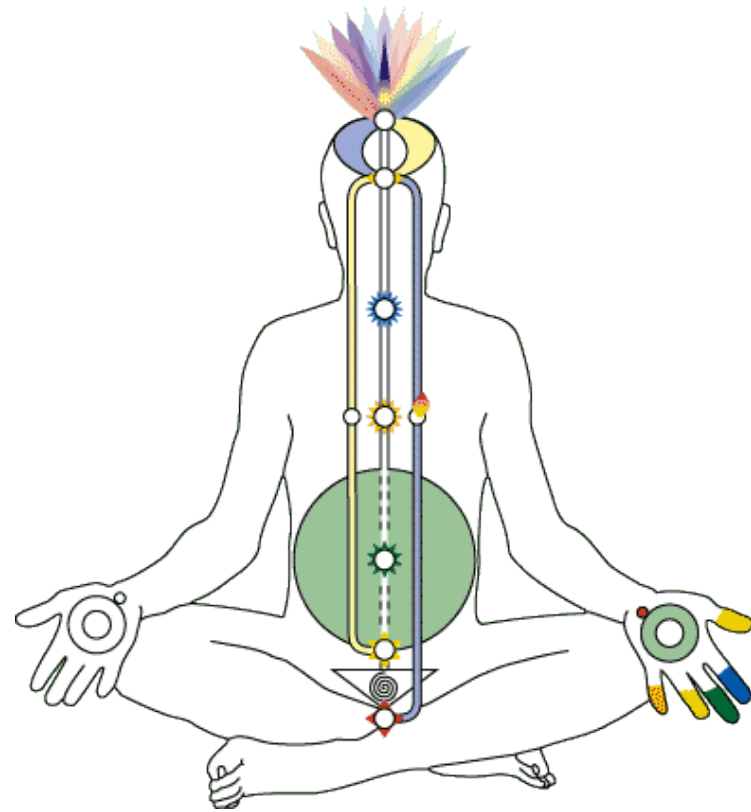
We have seen that intelligence is the permanent vision of the idea of being, and we have noted the extreme importance of his discovery.

But Rosmini's greatness 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.

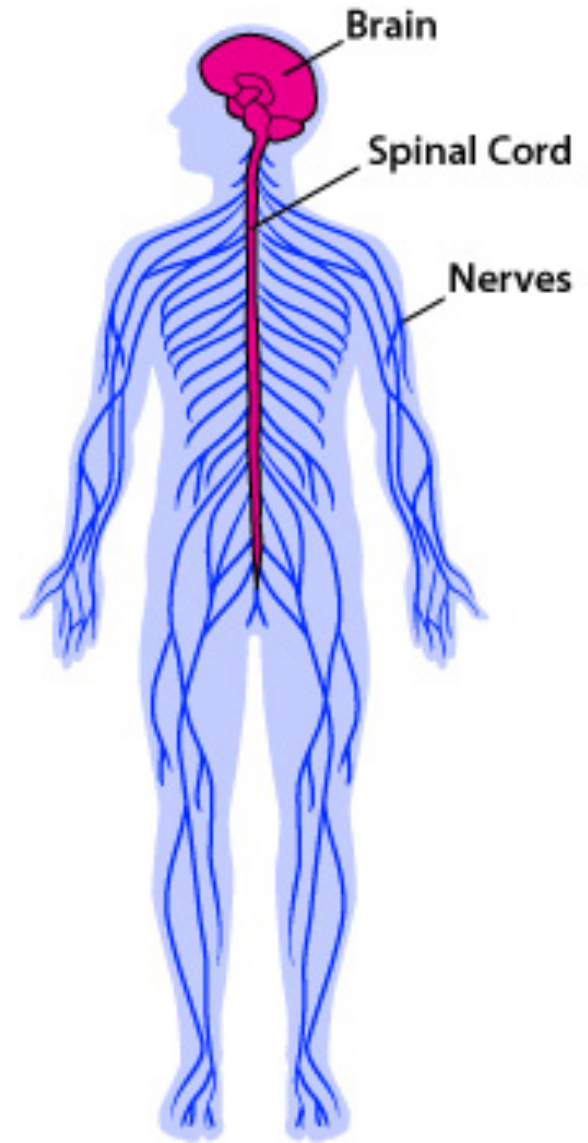
“Life”, for Rosmini, is the intimate conjunction of spirit and matter, of soul and body, which produces a fundamental feeling that remains constant and permanent until there is life.



This fundamental feeling is at the basis of all other particular feelings which 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.



■ Central Nervous System (CNS)
■ Peripheral Nervous System (PNS)

It is true that it is very difficult to become aware of the fundamental feeling which is innate and constant. But having a feeling and being aware of it are two different things. Rosmini suggests an exercise to try to catch this feeling:

“Put yourself in a dark, peaceful place 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”.

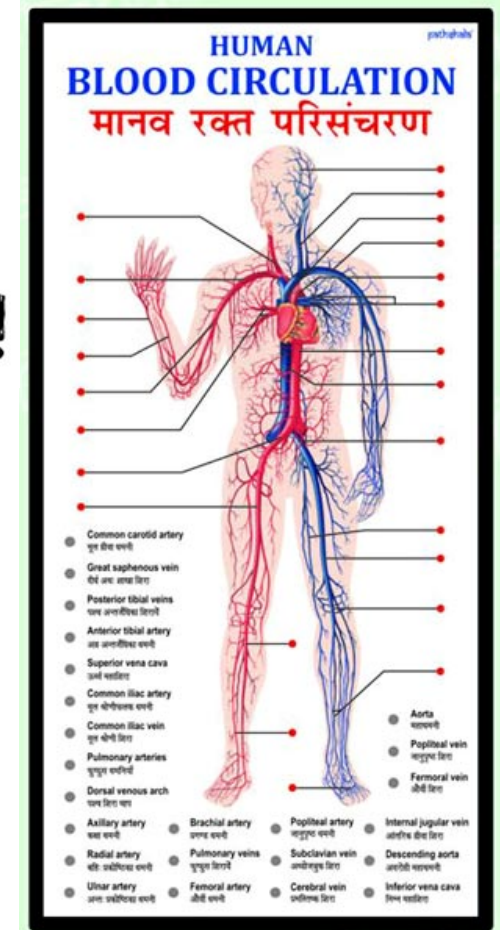
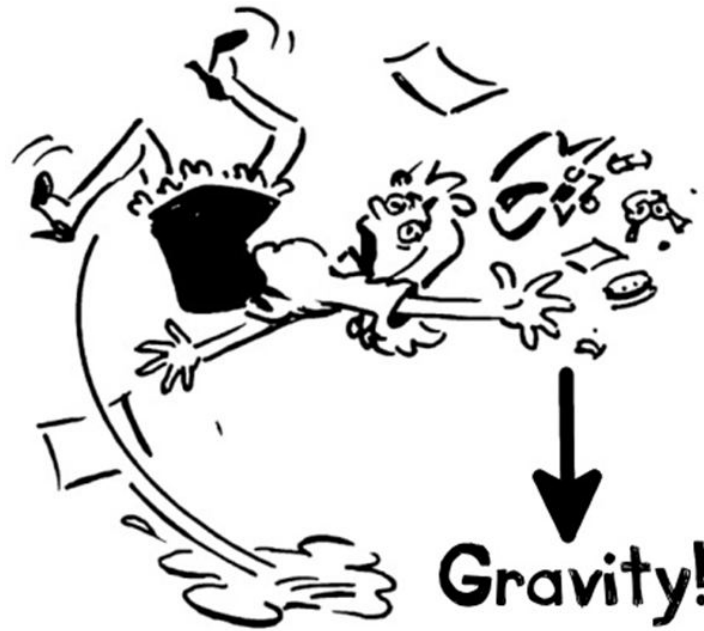
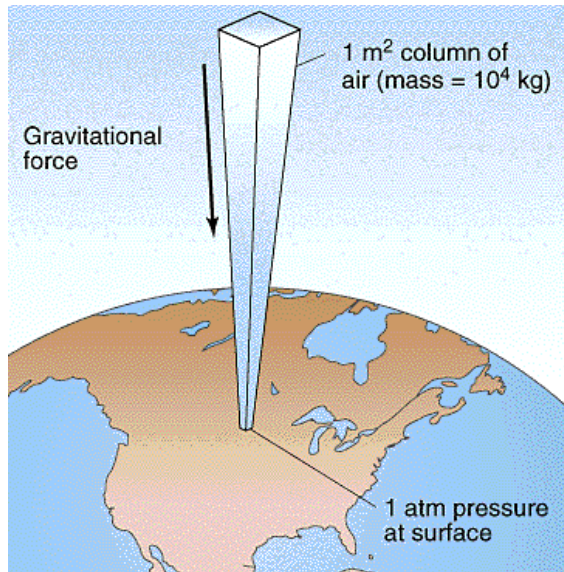
Rosmini uses four examples to help us understand the presence of the fundamental feeling.

Our body is pressed all around by **the great pressure of the atmosphere**, yet we are not aware of such force in us; but if we go where the pressure is less or more then at once we feel the increase, as it happens when we climb high mountains or we dive at great depth into the sea. We feel the alteration simply because we feel constantly, but without noticing, the normal weight of the atmosphere.

The **circulation of the blood** causes a constant feeling to which we are so used that we do not notice it, until some sudden surge in the speed and power of the circulation makes us advert to what normally we do not pay attention.

The feeling of the **temperature of the body** is not commonly noticed, until it varies for some reason, and then we do feel the change.

The force of **gravity** pulls constantly all our molecules towards the earth, but we do not notice it, unless there should be a sudden change in the force of gravity that causes us to become aware of it.



The innate Idea of Being explains:

- The reason why all our ideas have the qualities of universality, eternity, etc. It is the idea of being in them that confers such qualities;
- The reason why we are able to pass from the particular to the universal, and to make the very first judgment;
- The reason why the principles of logic are in accordance with truth;
- The reason why the idea of being is what makes us intelligent;
- The reason why there is unity in the diversity of sciences

Did ROSMINI truly solve the age long problem of the Origin of Thought?

Yes, he did, by means of his factual observation and analysis of the IDEA OF BEING.

The IDEA of BEING is INNATE, we are given it at the moment of conception by the Almighty God “enlightening” with it our mind – permanently.

The IDEA of BEING explains the existence of the Principles of Logic and of all other abstract ideas, all derived from it.

The IDEA of BEING and our own FUNDAMENTAL FEELING explains the origin of all other ideas about the real objects of the world.

Our mind can form new ideas by means of the IDEA of BEING.

BUT, which MIND has ever thought the IDEA of BEING? Given its qualities, it can only come from the Mind of GOD. God is, therefore, the ultimate source of the IDEA of BEING, which is a reflection of the eternal reality of the SUPREME BEING - I AM WHO I AM – GOD is perfect, infinite, real BEING.

The idea of being, therefore, is the golden link between God and Man, is the “divine in human beings”, is the constant call to ascend to the source, GOD.

The idea of being is what we call TRUTH. Something is true when it is what it is!

Being is truth, hence we possess truth from the moment we possess the idea of being. We shall talk about TRUTH at the next meeting.

The IDEA of BEING is the reason for the following:

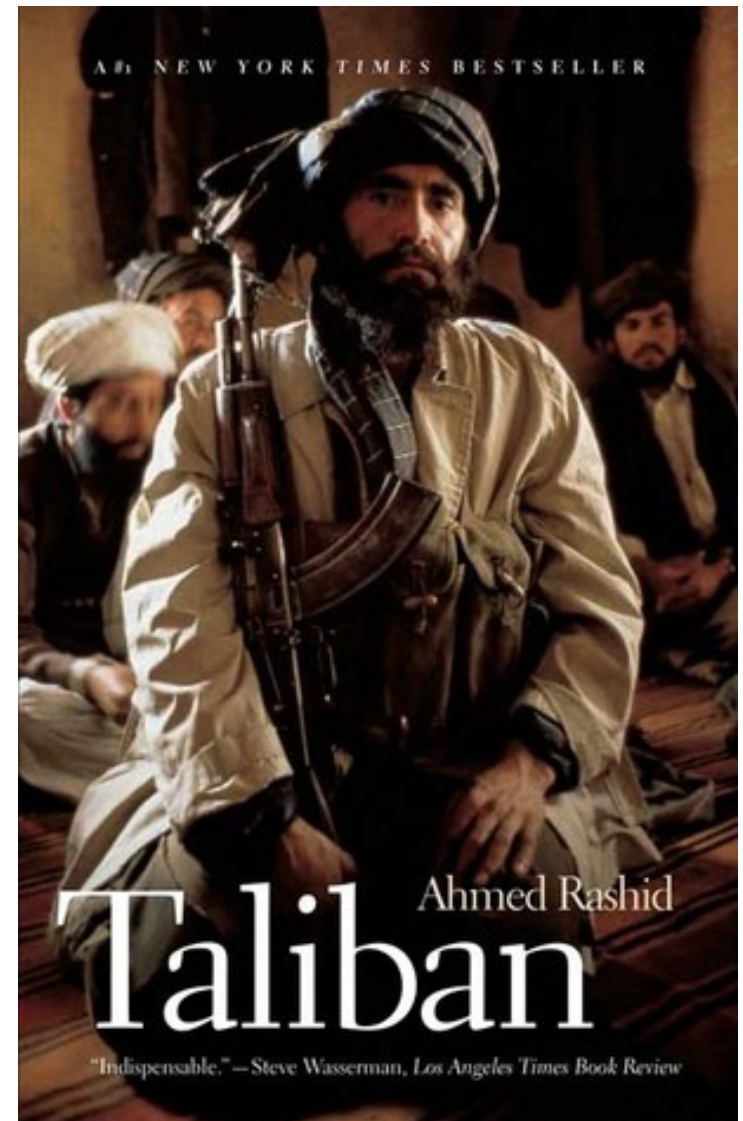
- The equality of all intelligent persons from conception (we have the same IDEA of Being enlightening our minds);
- Infinite dignity of every intelligent person (idea of being comes from GOD)
- The immortality of the human soul (locked on to the eternal Idea of Being)
- The principle of Morality is to acknowledge Being in its proper order
- The principle of Human Rights is to give each Being its due – in the proper order of Beings (God, Angels, Men/Women, Animals, Vegetation, Mineral world)
- The principle of Aesthetics or of Beauty is to express the richness of Being as it is in its harmony and order
- The principle of all sciences is Being in relation to its infinite applications
- The Supreme Being is GOD, in three Persons – Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- Being has three modes: ideal, real, moral – reflecting the Persons of the Blessed Trinity.



The quest for certainty, for truth is the most noble and pressing endeavour for many persons.

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 Truth.

But, can they provide a “rational” explanation of their certainty? Or is their persuasion based entirely on blind faith?



Modern philosophy in what we call the western world – especially in the Anglo-Saxon world – has resigned itself to the view that truth is simply unobtainable, that we must remain satisfied with “truths” that originate within our “form of life”, our cultures, our languages; man made, relative truths therefore.

Scepticism about truth is the most dramatic feature of our modern world; we live in a world that is deeply affected by a “crisis about truth”.



What is truth?

Descartes had 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 human beings can reach an objective truth? Do we possess any truth that can be seen rationally and universally as unassailable from any doubt whatsoever?

Descartes argued in his Meditations that **truth is indeed there and is available to us.**

He discovered the fundamental truth

“Cogito ergo sum” – I think
therefore I am –

which he thought was the rock solid truth to constitute the unshakeable foundation of the edifice of truth.

Rosmini criticised Descartes' discovery claiming that the Cogito ergo sum cannot be the very first truth since the maxim is already a “reflection” which presumes other truths of which Descartes had not been aware.



Descartes

For Rosmini, the quest for truth does not take us far from ourselves, does not imply the most laborious and painful investigations.

Truth is with us since our conception! We are made “intelligent” by truth, which is the “idea of being.

**TRUTH
=
IDEA OF
BEING**

“The Creator GOD has bound man to truth by the bowels” (Rosmini)

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 scepticism and of giving great hope to modern man!

We have been using the word **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?**

Let us see 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 whatsoever, is the last possible abstraction from any idea.

We have seen that the idea of being, being the source of all ideas, is the source of all our knowledge, which is therefore one in its totality. The idea of being contains all 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”. If you want to put people in difficulty just ask for a definition of 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, things are true when they conform to their exemplar.

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 contained 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.**



**IDEA of
MAN is
the
TRUTH
about
MAN**

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**””.*

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.

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 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.

Rosmini gives us an example of subordinate reasons in a number of propositions that become more and more general as they ascend towards the final reason:

1- *“The human being is the noblest of animals”,*

2- *“Because the intelligence with which the human being is endowed is more noble than feeling”,*

3- *“Because intelligence has being in general as its object, while feeling is confined to a body”,*

4- *“Because being has characteristics of a divine nature, objectivity, immutability, eternity, necessity, universality, etc.”,*

5- *“Because ideal being in God is the second Person of the Trinity”.*

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.

Truth as 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 realisation 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”.

The fundamental doubt of the sceptics is found in their maxim that "*Truth cannot be known*". Here Rosmini uses traditional arguments: 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!

Rosmini for 'Beginners

LECTURE 2/5

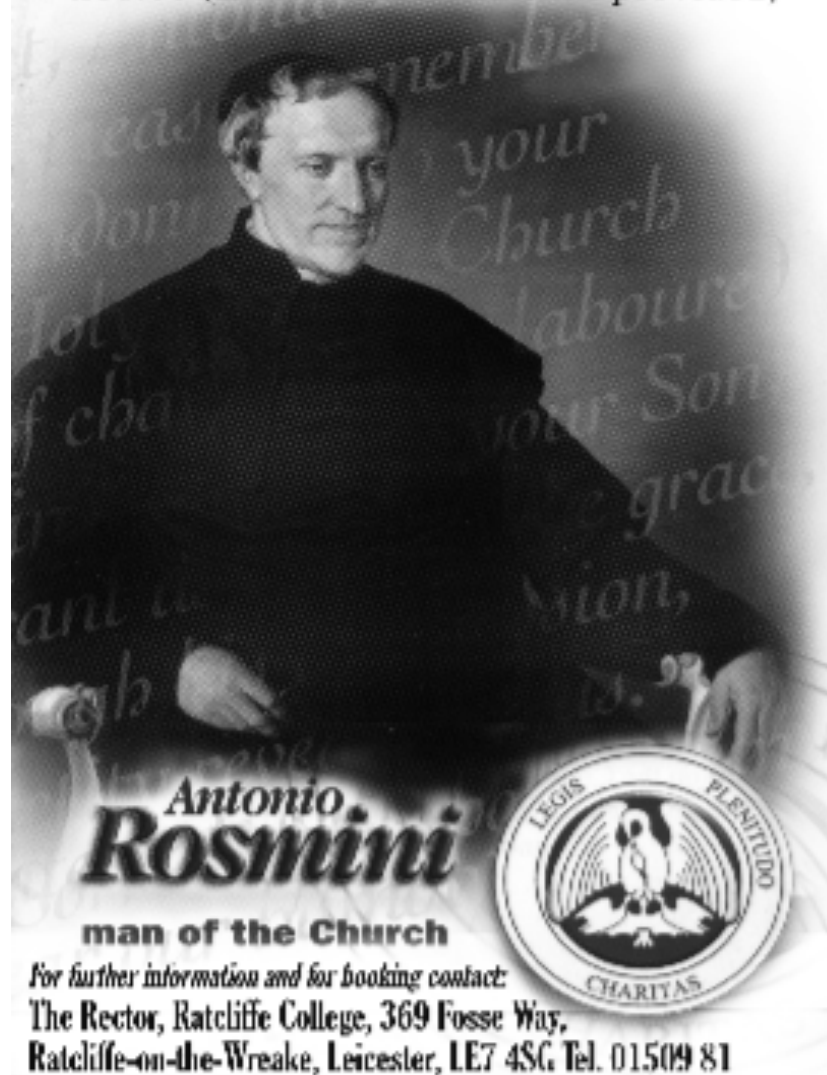
IS THE HUMAN QUEST FOR TRUTH A FOLLY?

by Antonio Belisto

SAT 12TH FEB 2005 * 10.00 AM - 4.00 PM


Venue: RATCLIFFE COLLEGE

£10.00 (Lunch & refreshments provided)

A black and white portrait of Antonio Rosmini, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark clerical garment. He is seated and looking slightly to the right. The background of the portrait is a faded, repeating pattern of the words "Remember your Church" and "laboured your Son" in a script font.

**Antonio
Rosmini**
man of the Church

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A circular seal of Ratcliffe College. The outer ring contains the text "LEGIS" at the top and "PLENTUDO" at the bottom. The inner circle features a central emblem of a bird (possibly a phoenix or eagle) with its wings spread, perched on a base. Below the emblem, the word "CHARITAS" is inscribed.