

Review

Reseña

José Enrique Gómez Álvarez*

Burgos, Juan Manuel. *Reconsider human nature.* Siglo XXI Editores/ Universidad Anáhuac. México, 2017. 149 pp.

The purpose of this book is “reconsider the concept of nature in the classical tradition, which means that thinkers like Socrates, Aristotle and Plato, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas, the midlevel philosophies and the realistic anthropologies of the XX Century” (p. 8). In fact, the book is a discussion about the scope and limits of certain interpretations of the human nature. The book in that sense is excellent, for it is difficult to find texts in that line of thinking, with that capability of self-criticism and the presentation of arguments.

The book includes 7 chapters divided into two main sections. The first section (pp. 11-92) titled “the theoretical problem” addresses the conception about human nature, both in its conception of Modernity, as well as the discussion within the classical tradition. The book then studies naturalism, the modern conception of nature and the Aristotelian conception pointing out their similarities and differences: “For the naturalists, human nature and nature simply concur... for the modern conception or culturalist, on the contrary, they are oppose. Man confirms himself precisely

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against or over the biological nature; man is such, due to his intelligence and freedom” (p. 31).

The author demonstrates that there are two types of conflicts between the Modernity and the classical tradition. One is apparent and the other one is real. The apparent one consists in the use of the term human nature in the classical tradition, and the Modernity gives place to a wrong or ambiguous concept, which makes us think in an antagonism. This antagonism is reduced to understand the human nature as a biological reduction, according to the reading of the Modernity to the classical doctrine, and thus it opposes to the Modern conception of freedom. It is apparent, because in the classic, just to mention an element, freedom is admitted and the human action is not reduced to a mere instinct. Nevertheless, there is a real conflict: the metaphysical fundamental basis that justify or provide a basis to a human nature and its dignity, that is to say God, it is denied by many thinkers of modernity and thus, the conflict is not apparent, it is real.

The other great topic, and from which the book becomes very interesting, are the tensions or differences within the same classical tradition, as for example, between the Thomism and the personalism (pp. 44-75).

The concept of classical nature starting from the Greek basis, gave origin to a concept that drags certain biologism that reduces human freedom. Dr. Burgos states: “Human freedom... seems to ask something more... not only a mere acceptance of the trends, even though this is true in part, but a creative and responsible exercise. It seems in fact, much more appropriate, to describe the person not as a trend executer but as a personal being that answers free and creatively to the values, and that exerts his self-determination and his self-possession, determining to a certain extent his own purposes, not following exclusively the human species purposes” (p. 62).

The book in its second part, discusses some implication of the concept of nature and person, as the family (pp. 126-144), the re-

source of moral appeal of the term nature (pp. 95-102) and natural law (10-125). The author shows that in the three cases it is not enough to sustain that, for example, the family is natural. Already in the polysemic and complex character of the term analyzed in the first part of the book, turns unfeasible that argument, due to, among other reasons, there is the problem of oversimplify the notion of "family" as if it would be equal acultural and historically everywhere. The foregone, ethnology has shown that there exist *de facto* and enormous variety of conformations, including polygamy.

The author does not deny that from the beginning, or in an ideological perspective, an ideal model of family could be defended, but being careful of not believing that it exists given this way, or to imagine it separated of culture and of time specific of the concrete life of people.

Thus, in the explanation of human morality, it is not enough to say that it agrees or not to the trends, because that in itself is not sufficient. It is better in Burgos' opinion to describe the trends of man as trends of the person: "What we propose, therefore, is an analysis of the human trend from a personal perspective, that is to say, having an element of judgement and of reference to the person" (p. 121). Thus sexual attraction just to point out an example, "in the male there is a biological dimension which has certain degree of autonomy; but such dimension only exists in the context of the personal reality... the trends are not the ones who are attracted, it is the man or the woman who feel attracted by persons of the opposite sex... The sexual attraction... is an attraction between persons and, therefore unavoidably voluntary and rational" (p. 120).

The book, in a summary, analyzes with solid arguments the simplified difficulties of many representations of the human nature, within and outside the classical tradition that leads to paradoxes that require, as the title points out, a restatement of the human nature, in order to avoid dualisms which carry the term nature, at

the moment separate it of the personal reality. This problem is this way given, not only in modern thinking but in the classical tradition.