

## A DISCOURSE ON ANTONIO ROSMINI'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY WITH AN IMPRINT OF THE LAW

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### ABSTRACT

Theology cannot make progress unless it is prepared to turn to philosophy for assistance. The notions of the body of a person and of many matters essential to theology cannot be adequately expressed in isolation from philosophical teachings. An investigation into Rosmini's tenets of cosmology, ontology, anthropology and epistemology is essential for a study on his social philosophy. Each of these must enter into the other if the science is to be complete. In fact, Rosmini maintains, it is impossible to speak of being (God and man) in all its universal essence (ontology), without regard to the infinity and absoluteness of being (rational theology), just as it is impossible to consider the world philosophy (cosmology) without taking its cause into consideration. The centre and substance of Rosmini's social philosophy is the teaching about God. The divine characteristics of God spilled over onto man when God infused the soul within man. The soul which is the postulation of the intellect and rational capacity of man enables him to cling to justice and engage in moral ethical decisions when necessary. The natural law precepts which comprises of *sum cuique tribuere* (give to each what belongs to him) and *neminem laedere* (do no harm to another person) enables man to stake his claim to fundamental rights in the civil and political society. Thus the implications of Rosmini's social philosophy serve as a basis for the maintenance of the upholding of fundamental rights in society. Because of the divine characteristic instilled in man everybody and even the state must respect man's fundamental human rights in society.

**Keywords:** Rational theology, philosophy, ontology, epistemology, cosmology, *sum cuique tribuere*, *neminem laedere*, fundamental human rights.

### PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper evolves a thorough explication of what Rosmini's social philosophy entails. Rosmini's leitmotif in regard to his social philosophy is the teaching about God. Herein, Rosmini presents a philosophy that can serve as a basis for various branches of knowledge, especially theology and the law.

### GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE/RESEARCH QUESTION/PROBLEMS

Rosmini's theology and the theological aspects of his philosophical outputs have been largely ignored. He aims principally in his social philosophical renditions to re-addresses the balance between philosophy and theology which had largely been lost as a result of the Enlightenment. Rosmini has read the works of post-Renaissance philosophers and after his dissatisfaction of their ideas, he has developed his own views on philosophical fundamentals. Rosmini especially criticises enlightenment doctrines propagated by Hegel and Fichte.

Best known in Italy, but a controversial figure there during his life and for a century or more after his death, his social philosophical work centred upon God and the dignity of the human person or man.

## **SOCIAL LIFE REALITY**

Theology is of extreme importance to Rosmini. He considers theology as a point of arrival at philosophy. Theology even plays its part in human knowledge by raising questions which would otherwise be totally neglected by philosophy. Rosmini's intellectual enterprise tries to offer new possibilities to Catholic doctrine in the face of the challenges of modern thought.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Some of the literature sources dated back to antiquity during the life-time of Renaissance philosophers as envisaged by Fichte's *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) and the interpretations of Rosmini's works or ideas by Davidson in 1882. It is necessary to consult these antiquarian sources in order to stress Rosmini's treatment of them. It is common knowledge that renaissance philosophers tend to elevate reason above faith and as a result thereof push theology out at the back door. Rosmini remonstrated against this perception by bringing theology and teachings about God back into the fold of intellectual discussion. The study also covers modern day interpretations of Rosmini's works.

Room has also been made for future interpretation of Rosmini's social philosophy when the human being or man is bestowed with fundamental human rights in modern day society.

## **DESIGN/METHODOLOGY OF THE PAPER**

The paper opted for a theoretical study in the disciplines of theology and philosophy. It inclined to the treatment of antiquarian historical documents with a modern day extension to the invitation of fundamental human rights. It is noted in the paper that natural law has been invoked. But it does not mean that a positive law inquiry has been obviated. Natural law precepts extend generally to positive law enactments. Of course, both forms of law traditions are from God and have some moral and ethical implications attached to it.

The methodology of the study presents an innovative, thorough and systematic attempt to address the research question, which is based on the notion whether Rosmini's social philosophy has succeeded to postulate a basis for the appreciation or the enjoyment of fundamental human rights in modern day society.

## **INTRODUCTION**

An investigation into Antonio Rosmini's theory of cosmology, ontology, anthropology and epistemology is essential for a study of his philosophy. Man is seeking reasons for things and events. He wants to know why things happen. A knowledge of reality moves man to more universal explanations. What one knows on one level is assumed on the next level of knowledge. Human knowledge seems to be like a pyramid.<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy enables man to reach the highest level of knowledge of reality. New knowledge, in turn, flows from the fundamental knowledge of reality. Certainty about reality is man's reaction to his knowledge. One will know reality if human judgements correspond with what one knows. Rosmini defines certainty of reality as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Cleary (1992) 16.

“[...] [it] is a firm and reasonable persuasion that conforms to the truth. In other words, we not only know something to be true, to be what it is, but we also firmly persuaded that it is what we know it to be, and have a reason for our persuasion. The criterion is always the idea of being, which precedes every judgment and all reasoning and is therefore inviolate.”<sup>2</sup>

Once the foundation for knowledge of reality has been laid, it is important to determine the nature of man. A study of the nature of man requires an analysis of man's physical and divine elements. Therefore a thorough knowledge of Rosmini's anthropology is required.<sup>3</sup> A study of the nature of man (anthropology) moves Rosmini to investigate reality as a whole (cosmology). Cosmology deals with the origin or cause of the world and anthropology deals with the doctrine of man. Anthropology mainly deals with the physical and divine aspects of man. The divine aspect points to the soul which consists of two separate, but inseparable elements.<sup>4</sup>

On account of his soul man possesses reason. The fundamental activities of the soul consist of the intellect, the will, the senses and reason. Rosmini states that the senses are passive whereas the intellect is receptive. Instinct and will derive from the passivity and receptivity of the senses and the intellect. According to Cleary Rosmini believes that man is the unity within whom the intellect and the senses interact.<sup>5</sup>

A theory of knowledge (epistemology) and cosmology ultimately leads to a study of human society. The relevance and practical implications of Rosmini's theory of knowledge can be judged only in human society. He believes that in human society the relationship between people can be judged in the social context. The social context is the frame of reference for other fields of philosophy such as political and juridical philosophy.<sup>6</sup> On the basis of political and juridical philosophy, a social basis can be provided for his fundamental doctrine of rights. Human society is considered: “[...] [not] an external organisation. It is rather a group of persons who will to join together for the attainment of a common end.”<sup>7</sup> The establishment of a human society consists of man's wishes to unite and thus reach a goal which would not be possible otherwise for the individual.<sup>8</sup> On account of this, Rosmini feels an affinity with the teaching of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cleary (1992) 20.

<sup>3</sup> Cleary (1992) 21.

<sup>4</sup> Cleary (1992) 23.

<sup>5</sup> Cleary (1992) 26.

<sup>6</sup> Cleary (1992) 32.

<sup>7</sup> Cleary (1992) 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Cleary (1992) 33. The key to proper understanding of any society lies in the willed desire of the members to be together for the sake of reaching a goal that would be impossible or difficult to achieve otherwise. This willed desire may be ontologically irrevocable, as in the case of marriage, or revocable, as in the case of societies which may be dissolved with the members' consent, but in every society some act of will is needed for the constitution of the corporate body. Without this act of will, the external apparatus of society is a delusion.

<sup>9</sup> D'Entreves (1965) 9. In his work, *De Regimine Principum*, Thomas Aquinas alleges that the co-existence of man in civil society is natural and essential for man: “[...] si ergo natural est homini quod in societate multorum vivat [...]” Thomas Aquinas consequently mentions that a social life is of fundamental importance to man because he as an individual would not be able to provide for all his needs. This implies that social life is beneficial for human existence. Thomas Aquinas states: “[...] Cum autem homini competat in multitudine vivere, quia sibi non sufficit ad necessaria vitae, si solitarius maneat, oportet, quod tanto sit perfectior multitudinis societas, quanto magis per se sufficiens erit ad necessaria vitae. Habetur siquidem aliqua vitae sufficientia in una familia domus unius, quantum scilicet ad naturalis actus nutritionis, et proles generandae, et

Cosmology, ontology, epistemology and anthropology continuously interact with each other. These form the basis of Rosmini's social philosophy.

## DISCUSSION

### Rosmini's Cosmology

Rosmini divides cosmology into theology and natural philosophy.<sup>10</sup> In dealing with cosmology, he discusses the cosmic law as those laws that are common to all people. It is obvious from the literature that cosmic laws imply natural law.<sup>11</sup> Although this is not pertinently stated in the sources, it appears that cosmic laws would be natural law because these laws organise man's relationship with God and man, mutually with each other.<sup>12</sup> There is thus an analogy between the cosmic laws and natural law.<sup>13</sup> Cosmology sets out to determine the nature of reality. Reality means in this context:

“[...] a feeling, which in turn leads us to that first act or intimate essence of what is real, by which we know things in our perception of them.”<sup>14</sup>

Cosmology which forms part of metaphysics deals with the issue(s) of the origin of the world. The origin of the world can be explained by the discovery of the true nature of man. In cosmology man stands in a relationship with God and the world (cosmos). If man shows the same characteristics as God, for example necessity, universality and eternity, he should always have existed. If on the other hand, man has the characteristics of contingency, particularity and temporality, he must have had a beginning. The latter is acceptable because cosmology provides that man is not his own existence but that he has a cause and origin exerted from outside, namely God.

Cosmology cannot be fully dealt with without associating ontology, in particular theology with it.<sup>15</sup> One cannot understand cosmology (the existence of the world) without dealing with the nature and operation of its author, God. Knowledge of God's existence is an essential requirement for man to enable him/her to understand God's decree of natural law. This Thomist perception forms part of Rosmini's theory of knowledge (epistemology). Ontology

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aliorum huiusmodi; in uno autem vico, quantum ad ea quae ad unum artificium pertinent; in civitate vero, quae est perfecta communitas, quantum ad Omnia necessaria vitae; sed adhuc magis in provinciali una propter necessitate compagnationis et mutui auxilii contra hostes [...]” (A social life is desirable for humanity because man will not be able to provide for his life if he leads a sole existence. This therefore means that a social co-existence is more perfect because man can as such provide for his life needs. There is a self-sufficiency in every household as far as the elementary necessities of food and raising children is concerned. Similarly everything that is needed for a job or profession is found in one place. The city, for example, is a perfect society because it provides everything that is essential for the preservation of life. A province is a better example because there is social support against hostilities).

<sup>10</sup> Davidson (1882) 324.

<sup>11</sup> Davidson (1882) 323-24.

<sup>12</sup> Cleary (1992) 37-44. Rosmini's treatment of the law differs from that of Thomas Aquinas, but it has a similar application and intention. Both Rosmini and Thomas Aquinas are of the opinion that the law holds out the prospect of reaching the general welfare of the individual and society. However, unlike Thomas Aquinas fourfold classification of the law, Rosmini distinguishes between individual and social rights. Although their classifications of rights differ, it is clear that their content undoubtedly overlaps.

<sup>13</sup> D'Entrevés (1965) 109. Thomas Aquinas postulates that there are a threefold order in man, namely reason, divine law and man's relationship with his neighbour.

<sup>14</sup> Cleary (1992) 53.

<sup>15</sup> Davidson (1882) 321.

deals with man's knowledge of the existence of God. One cannot understand metaphysical or spiritual issues without understanding the temporal issues (cosmology). On its own, cosmology can thus not be a whole or independent science in itself. It can only form part of a higher science, namely ontology, in particular theology.<sup>16</sup>

### Rosmini's Ontology

Rosmini divides the science of ontology into two parts, namely ontology itself and natural theology.<sup>17</sup> He is of the opinion that ontology deals with being and its essence. As far as the essence of being is concerned, three forms are identified, namely the ideal, the real and the moral.<sup>18</sup>

The essence of being must be identical in all three forms, although these forms differ from each other. Rosmini contrives these differentiations from the reference to God and man. He therefore remarks that God is an ideal Being, whereas man is limited. God as ideal Being is perfect, whereas man as real being is imperfect. The moral form serves as a bridge between God and man. Man must unite with God. It is the task of the moral form to effect the unity between God and man. Rosmini states therefore: "[...] moral good is infinite in its nature, always having infinite being for its object. Limited being is never seen by perception as alone and as having no relation but to itself, but always as united to the ideal [...]"<sup>19</sup>

Although man is identical with the divine image, God, man and God differ in essence from each other. Man though shares in the ideal (God), the real and the moral by means of his soul component.<sup>20</sup> This divine entity, the soul, points to the presence of natural law (law of God) in and among people. Natural law delimits man's actions towards other Man must be guided by reason to organise his actions so that he can imitate the sublimity of these divine characteristics.

The notion of ontology alludes to analogia entis between God and man and this perception is implied by the principle of imago Dei (image of man to God). According to Rosmini's ontology, God can only be understood as the true Being. Since God cannot be thought of except as real, He is not a mere ideal postulate of reason, but a subsistent reality.<sup>21</sup> Under the influence of Stoicism, the imago Dei, is viewed as the spark of the divine which is present in man. Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas considered human reason as the sign of the image of God.<sup>22</sup> The Being, therefore is the object of reason and serves as the principle for reality as expresses in ontology.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Davidson (1882) 324.

Cleary (1992) 53.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/antonio-rosmini> . Accessed 17 October 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Davidson (1882) 326.

<sup>18</sup> Davidson (1882) 326.

<sup>19</sup> Davidson (1882) 328-29.

<sup>20</sup> Davidson (1882) 328-29.

<sup>21</sup> Davidson (1882) 333.

<sup>22</sup> Davidson (1882) 333. God instituted the natural law for the rational ordering of the civil and political community. Reason is the medium whereby man interprets natural law. On account of man's upholding of natural law precepts, he is thus brought closer to God. Davidson means Rosmini would have followed a similar approach.

<sup>23</sup> Davidson (1882) 333.

The moral form, in relation to reality, forms the ideal Being. Man's moral form (thesis) combines with the real form (the maintenance of the law) (antithesis) in order to realise the ideal form (God) (synthesis).<sup>24</sup> The ideal Being is endless and essentially perfect. One can therefore assume that moral goodness is according to its nature endless, namely that God is the endless Being. The endless perfect Being can thus not be man. The imperfect limited being (man) is not self-dependent but usually combines with the ideal Being which is perfect and endless. This forms the real characteristics of what is moral and which includes the entire being. Insofar as the being is moral, it has the capacity to bring the subject or man in harmony with his object, namely God. Man's alignment with God perfects man as subject with respect to the compliance with his rights and duties in the civic and political community.

### **Rosmini's Natural Theology**

In his theological discourses Rosmini deals with the ideal Being, namely God primarily. According to Rosmini, man does not have the ability to reach a full science of the ideal Being, God. The ideal Being (God) in His totality and completeness is thus not subject to human knowledge. Human intellect can only know that which is revealed to man by nature. Man tends to link something positive to God with which human intelligence shows similarities. These similarities are accompanied by differences so that the one cannot form an adequate understanding of the ideal Being, God. One knows that God exists rather than what He is. On the question how human intelligence knows God, Rosmini answers that when one mentions that God is intelligent, this does not mean that God is subject to the same standards for human intelligence. The term analogy should rather be used in this context. Copleston mentions that what regard to the aforesaid, Rosmini unwittingly aligned himself with the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas when the latter avers:

“[...] we cannot mean that God is intelligent in precisely the same way that a man is intelligent: we cannot, that is, by using the term in a univocal sense. Nor can we be using it purely equivocally. If we were, the term would have no meaning when applied to a being transcending our natural experience [...] we predicate of God something positive to which human intelligence bears some resemblance [...]”<sup>25</sup>

One can know God in a way that exceeds human intelligence. One can, however, not form a positive understanding of God, but rather a negative one. This sort of cognition is called negative and is the only sort possible in natural theology, which treats of being in its absoluteness, of being not as known to man, but as it is in itself.<sup>26</sup>

Natural theology reveals the existence of the ideal and perfect Being (God) and thus offers offshoots for a Christian foundation of fundamental rights in the civic or political society. Rosmini identifies four proofs for the existence of God, thus establish himself as an independent thinker by designing his own natural theology which differs in some instances

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<sup>24</sup> The triad thesis, antithesis and synthesis is often used to describe the thought of the German philosopher, Hegel (Phenomenology). This term, however originated from Fichte (Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre – 1794). Hegel attributed the terminology to Immanuel Kant. The terminology was developed by Johan Gottlieb Fichte. This philosophy was also identified as German idealism: (1) the thesis is an intellectual proposition; (2) the antithesis is simply the negation of the thesis or is a reaction to the proposition; (3) the synthesis solves the conflict between the thesis and antithesis by reconciling their common truths and forming a new thesis.

<sup>25</sup> Copleston (1952) 93.

<sup>26</sup> Davidson (1882) 334.



with that of Thomas Aquinas. There are, however, certain tangents between Rosmini's natural theology and the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas. Two of Rosmini's proves of the existence of God correspond with Thomas Aquinas's natural theology.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Rosmini's other proofs of God differ from those of Thomas Aquinas does not mean that Rosmini did not maintain a Christian view of God. As indicated clear tangents can be identified by some of these two astute theologian-philosopher's natural theology doctrines.

An explication of Rosmini's natural theology or proves for the existence of God is as follows:

- (i) The first proof is that the essence of Being is not merely nothing, but rather something that is eternal and essential. The essence of the perfect Being which is eternal and essential must also have substance and morality. The essence of Being is endless and exists under all three forms (ideal, real and moral).<sup>28</sup> It is God.
- (ii) The second proof for the existence of God is derived from the ideal form of the perfect Being. The ideal form is the light that creates intelligence. This light is the eternal light and the eternal object.<sup>29</sup> The subject as eternal light must have complete, non-transient knowledge. God is perfect knowledge, God is eternal light and God is everlasting. The subject which also exists as endless object will be the endless action of goodness and more perfection. The perfect Being is thus absolute. It is God.
- (iii) The third proof is derived from the real form. According to this precept, reason or thought moves from the contingent to the real – to the First Cause of everything.<sup>30</sup> It is God.
- (iv) The fourth proof is derived from the moral form. Moral law and virtue are endless. The worthiness of moral law is eternal, essential and absolute. God would have been nothing if it did not have an absolute existence. There is thus an Absolute Being, namely God.<sup>31</sup>

According to Thomas Aquinas, natural theology proves that we know God through our reason. Rosmini, on the contrary, assumes that we can know God by means of the "light of reason." Rosmini argues further that we cannot know more about God than is allowed by the necessity

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<sup>27</sup> Strauss et al (1978) 18-9. According to Strauss et al, there are parallel readings between Thomas Aquinas's first proof of the existence of God and Rosmini's third proof. Thomas Aquinas's first proof of God provides that nothing can move without being moved and this contributory moving thing, in turn, moves. An endless series is impossible and therefore there must be a First Calm Mover. Thomas Aquinas calls this First Calm Mover God. This first proof of the existence of God finds affinity with that of Rosmini who bases his First Cause of everything on the fact that reason moves from the contingent to the essential. Both recognise a first cause of everything, namely God. The fourth proof of Thomas Aquinas for God's existence finds affinity with Rosmini's fourth proof of God. Thomas Aquinas's fourth proof reads as follows: There are degrees of goodness, truth, and so on. There is a best, a truest, and so on and consequently also something that exists in the superlative. There must thus be something that is the origin of the existence, goodness, and so on of all existing things. Thomas Aquinas calls this God.

<sup>28</sup> Davidson (1882) 326.

<sup>29</sup> Davidson (1882) 335-36.

<sup>30</sup> Venter (1970) 14. The third proof of Rosmini's existence of God shows parallels with that of Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. Aristotle determines the first proof of God's existence in the following way: No thing can itself be the cause of its own movement or change. The cosmos must have a cause, an origin that is beyond it. Since Aristotle considers the cosmos eternal, its origin must also be eternal. In addition, its origin must be perfect because he is the norm against which everything in the material world must be tested. He is also the first cause of everything that moves and changes on earth. He Himself can however not move. The Greeks detests movement and assimilate it with impurity. To Aristotle and also Thomas Aquinas, God is the cause of all movement which can itself not move. God is the pure Form, the end goal of perfection towards which everything must endeavour.

<sup>31</sup> Davidson (1882) 336.

of the essence of Being. According to Davidson, Rosmini would have believed that this formed the restriction of our knowledge which we have from God in the natural domain.<sup>32</sup>

Rosmini reiterates that our knowledge of God is negative knowledge.<sup>33</sup> Negative knowledge which man has of God lies for instance in the fact that it is illogical to state that God also has fundamental rights. One cannot form a perception of God without exceeding human intelligence or reason:

“[...] but this absolute being, which we neither intuit nor perceive, we can know no more than is shown us by the essence of being, the object of the idea. This is the limit of the knowledge which we can have of God in the natural order, and hence our knowledge of the divine nature may be called a negative-ideal knowledge.”<sup>34</sup>

Fundamental rights can only be applied in respect of man and not in respect to God. God is the ontological source from which fundamental rights in the civic or political society derive:

“[...] [man [...]] mean a substantial relationship, that is, a relationship found in the intrinsic order of being of a substance. When these constitutive, ontological elements of a person are found in the human subject, we have arrived at the concept of human person [...] ‘person’ as the fount of moral, human action, is the foundation of all right in human relationship because its very own worth is drawn from that which ultimately forms the human intellectual subject. The moral excellence and superiority by right, which elevates the human person above the whole of nature, must have the same source as all morality and right [...] we find ourselves in need of a suitable basis for the development of our understanding of the nature of human rights [...]”<sup>35</sup>

Cleary argues that according to Rosmini human rights can be traced ontologically to God. The innate dignity of man is conferred by God on human beings by their existence as intelligent beings (the creation of the soul in man). In so far as ontology concerns, man becomes moral and partake in the infinite and acquire an infinite value. Man thus spontaneously moves to unite himself to all beings and loving them. He gives himself to all beings and they give of themselves to him. Such is the end of human beings, which can invoke respect for the upholding of fundamental human rights in society.<sup>36</sup>

The essence of a natural theology shows similarities with some characteristics of traditional natural law. The natural law elements, such as eternity, necessity and so on are comparable to the factors in Rosmini’s natural theology dictates. Eternity and necessity which comprises of the attributes of God implicate also the precepts of natural law. Rosmini states:

“[...] [natural law] is absolute, unchangeable, impassible and eternal because these are all properties essential to the law of justice and uprightness.”<sup>37</sup>

The divine and sublime characteristics give natural law its higher status. Natural law is a God-given law from which one can deduce the principles of law, justice and the upholding of good

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<sup>32</sup> Davidson (1882) 342-47.

<sup>33</sup> Davidson (1882) 340.

<sup>34</sup> Davidson (1882) 337.

<sup>35</sup> Cleary (1992) 29.

<sup>36</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) 480.

<sup>37</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) 384.



morals.<sup>38</sup> Human reason enabled man to autonomously know that part of natural law that attached to him when making good and moral decisions that is bolstered by law. According to this perception, man can deduce his claim to human rights from the Christian precepts of natural law.

### Rosmini's Epistemology

Rosmini explains the recognisability of the theory of knowledge as follows:

"[...] we must not make fewer assumptions that are required to explain them [...] [nor must we] make more assumptions than are needed to explain facts."

With this quotation as basis for his methodology, Rosmini considers, on the one hand, Locke, Condillac, Reid and Stewart's explanations on the theory of epistemology as incomplete. Rosmini, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz and Kant's explanations are in many respects exaggerated. Rosmini believes these two schools of thought could not postulate or were not able to explain "the origin of ideas." He asserts that should these two schools have done so, they could have instituted a doctrine of epistemology. Rather these two schools invoked less and more ideas or forms than is necessary respectively.<sup>39</sup>

For man to recognise truth as a reality, it is necessary that human thought can serve as a base for epistemology. Epistemology denotes the innate idea of being as a reality or as a postulate for the truth. The idea of being determines the intellectual principles of thought (epistemology). Rosmini's epistemology connotes or conforms to the truth.<sup>40</sup> The criterion for truth is *a priori* knowledge whereby it can be shown how far thought can go without the help of the senses. One can deduce the existence of God with the help of reason by using *a priori* knowledge (truth) as is postulated earlier in the research under natural theology.<sup>41</sup> Davidson asserts that Rosmini's epistemology is directed towards the truth or faith in a sublime reality, namely God.<sup>42</sup>

Truth in or of God is essential for man's existence and for the sake of epistemology. For instance, man needs a higher or supernatural entity for the maintenance of fundamental rights in the civic or political society. The practice or maintenance of fundamental rights is only possible if man accepts his primary duty towards God and believes in Him. This line of thought corresponds with that of Seneca:

"[...] the first duty towards God is to believe in his existence."<sup>43</sup>

On account of this quotation, God's existence can be explained with the help of reason. The epistemology and the reality of an Absolute Being may thus not be doubted, not even by the critical philosophy of Kant and Hegel.<sup>44</sup> Rosmini refers to the philosophical system of Kant and Hegel, which contains form of scepticism. Rosmini maintains that sceptics' philosophy can be found in the following paraphrase:

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<sup>38</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) 384.

<sup>39</sup> Rosmini (2001) 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> Rosmini (1991(b)) 4.

<sup>41</sup> Davidson (1882) 335.

<sup>42</sup> Davidson (1882) 345.

<sup>43</sup> Seneca Epistles 95, In Rosmini (1991(b)) 241-47.

<sup>44</sup> Rosmini (1991(b)) 238-39.

“[...] they are three phases, three results, of critical philosophy. The first is characterised by despair of finding the truth. The second tries to remedy this unfortunate state of things through faith in practical reason floating in mid-air, without any theoretic foundation. The third is distinguished by philosophic pride, which feeling everything vanish from its grasp, invites humanity to a show, in which it promises to take all out of nothing, before the eyes of its public, which it warns to be very attentive, just like those prestidigitators who, from under an empty dice-box, bring a large, various-coloured ball, four times as big as the box itself.”<sup>45</sup>

On account of the a priori epistemology or knowledge, Rosmini avers that one can have only a negative truth or understanding of God.<sup>46</sup> The positive understanding contains essential characteristics that contradict the notion or essence of God. Rosmini states:

“[...] it would be absurd to attribute these characteristics to the divine essence [...]”<sup>47</sup>

According to Rosmini, positive knowledge gives us the real essence of a thing. He considers knowledge to be like the comprehension of an idea. Anyone who considers all ideas to be comprehension will fall into pantheism. Rosmini means such a person is forced to compose imaginary and false imitations of beings of which he has only empty ideas. He is forced to create his own fabrications, and amongst them a God composed of the characteristics and properties of our limited spirit and of matter. This person creates a God made of foreign elements put together in a thousand different ways, and does so without following any law because the ceaseless wandering of a disordered phantasy has no law.

God is the criterion for epistemology and truth. God is the reality concerning “things.” Rosmini says:

“[...] But the supreme real ground is not given to man by nature, since this reality is God Himself [...]” It does not suffice that a “thing” is described as real. There must also be a motive that echoes the fixed conviction about reality or that which is reasonable. Then that “thing” shall be the truth.

Reality rests on two components, namely the intellectual principle (subject) and the being (object). If one thinks of something independently of one, one considers that something as a way of existence, different from one’s own (subjective) existence. When one thinks, one as subject will become the subject of one’s own thought. Thought ends in object. This is different from the thinking subject.<sup>48</sup> The object of one’s thought is human reason which is linked to God on account of the analogia entis doctrine and the principle of imago Dei:

“[...] just as he said image [...] he also said likeness in order that we may render ourselves like God according to human forces.”<sup>49</sup> God produces the divine synthesis in which he unites initial being with the limited realities He ‘imagines’ [...] All these beings can in their turn reach out to Him by means of the humans in their midst who, as the apex of creation, can in some way know God, communicate with Him, enjoy Him and unite themselves with Him. All other

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<sup>45</sup> Davidson (1882) 142-43.

<sup>46</sup> Rosmini (1991(b)) 243.

<sup>47</sup> Rosmini (1991(b)) 243.

<sup>48</sup> Rosmini (1991(b)) 34.

<sup>49</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) 447.

beings on earth are subordinate to human beings, whose nature is destined, through grace, to deified, that is, to share in the divinity itself on a supernatural level.”<sup>50</sup>

The subject is a sentient individual, in so far as it contains within itself a supreme active principle. Subject assumes man. Man thus has both an intelligent and an animal soul part. The animal soul part reveals the feeling nature of feeling, while the rational soul part has an intellectual nature. God is the origin of the intelligent soul component:

“[...] the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”<sup>51</sup>

Rosmini epistemology is engineered so that man endeavour to know God. With approval Rosmini refers to Athanasius who states:

“God, maker of the world, formed through His Word the human race in His own image, and gave it understanding, and knowledge of his eternity.”<sup>52</sup>

Of course, reason or intellect makes knowledge of God possible.<sup>53</sup>

### **Rosmini’s Anthropology**

Cleary interpretes Rosmini’s views on anthropology by exerting that there happens to be a close relationship between Rosmini’s anthropology and cosmology. Man is an intrinsic component of Rosmini’s cosmology. In cosmology man must unite with others and with God. Man can only be understood in terms of cosmology. On the basis of these contentions, man is relative and incomplete. Man, however differs from God who is absolutely complete, but shares in what belongs to God alone.<sup>54</sup>

Rosmini distinguishes God, man and the world as the essential aspects of cosmology and he is of the opinion that the origin of the world can be explained by the discovery of the true nature of man. In cosmology man is in a relationship with God and the world (cosmos). If man reveals the same characteristics as God, for example necessity, universality and eternity, he must then have existed always. If the contrary is true and man has the characteristics of contingency, particularity and temporality, he then must have had a beginning. Rosmini avers that cosmology deals with the nature of man and his cause. This creative cause is God.<sup>55</sup>

Cosmology (the creation of the world) is inferred from an analysis of perception, on the basis of which man and the world interact. Anthropology cannot be considered without examining cosmology. Every rounded-off philosophy is obliged to design an anthropology. Anthropology examines the nature and role of man in the cosmic reality. Rosmini’s theory on epistemology and cosmology thus forms the starting point of his anthropology. His anthropology mainly focuses on the intellect (soul) and the physical perception (body) of

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<sup>50</sup> Cleary (1992) 52.

<sup>51</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) 442.

Genesis 2: 7.

<sup>52</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) 446.

<sup>53</sup> Rosmini (1991(b)) 238.

<sup>54</sup> Cleary (1992) 53.

<sup>55</sup> Davidson (1882) 320.

man.<sup>56</sup> These two elements (soul and body) are necessary to formulate an adequate doctrine on anthropology. The soul provides the basis for all other expressions of feeling within man. The two substances may not be dealt with separately. Man is the result of both the reasonable (soul) and the physical (body). In light of this contention, Rosmini emphasises:

“[...] myself is not two subjects but one, which undertakes simultaneously animal and rational activities. I who understand, feel, and I who feel, understand.”<sup>57</sup>

This alludes that the rational element (the soul) which is the source of spiritual perceptions or actions is found in man (the physical body component).

This approach moves Rosmini to a definition of man. He states that man is an intellectual subject in so far as he contains a supreme active principle.<sup>58</sup> The active principle mentioned in the definition connotes to the soul which shows divine characteristics. An analogy between God and the human soul is therefore assumed. Rosmini's view of man (anthropology) shows similarities with Thomas Aquinas teaching which denote that the soul is divine and the physical not.

On account of the divine and not so divine postulates of man, Rosmini's anthropology would therefore serve as basis for moral actions and the origin of rights and duties in the civic or political society.

## CONCLUSION

After the construction of a synthesis between the soul and the body, Rosmini arrives at a view of the unity of man. Rosmini believes the soul is unthinkable without the body.<sup>59</sup> The soul thus leads to the divine which makes man the subject of moral actions in the civic or political society.

Moral actions must intractably form part of man's conduct in society. On this basis, man will show respect for others, and he is going to uphold the norms of rights and duties in law, which adumbrates to the fundamental human rights of each individual in the civic or political society. This moral object of the law serves as man's search for virtue. Because virtue makes the owner thereof good, the aim of the law will be the well-being of those for whom the law is promulgated.

Man must be led by the principles of natural law, “*suum cuique tribuere*” (give to each what belongs to him) and *neminem laedere* (do no harm to another person). These rules, which show offshoots with fundamental human rights, serve as basis for the maintenance of fundamental rights in the civic or political society.

From this frame of mind one can proceed from the approach that man is a reasonable and moral being and thus a bearer of fundamental rights. Rosmini's anthropology thus provides a basis for a theory of fundamental rights in society. On the basis of his anthropology, Rosmini succeeds to contrive an assimilation between God and man in the sense that the latter elevated

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<sup>56</sup> Cleary (1992) 22.

<sup>57</sup> Cleary (1992) 24.

<sup>58</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) x.

<sup>59</sup> Rosmini (1991(a)) xi.

by the former possesses fundamental rights which must be respected by all, even by the civil authority or state.

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