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<sup>5</sup> González Morfín, Efraín. *Cuestiones económicas fundamentales*. Ed. Limusa-Noriega. 1a. reimpresión. México 1991, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Basave, Agustín. *Filosofía del hombre*. Fondo de Cultura Económica. México 1957, p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> *Ídem*, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Reverdy. *Apud* Basave. *Op. cit.*, p. 181.

## EXIGENCES OF ETHICS IN TECHNICAL CULTURE: PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS IN CONCORDANCE WITH NATURE

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In the present period of world history, during which the natural foundation of our technical culture is under attack and the survival of mankind is endangered, the urgency of ethics according to nature springs up: of ethics respecting the whole of nature – and included within the nature of man –and doing justice to it. Therefore, with regard to our technical culture, we have to ask anew for the principles of natural ethics.

This contribution is projected in the context of intercultural encounter and dialogue because the relation to nature seems to differ typically from European to Asiatic culture: the first one intending more a rational and technical mastering and domination of nature, the second one rather a spiritual participation and integration in nature. In order to overcome actual problems of mankind, a cooperation of both intentions seems necessary –a task which will be dealt with in this essay.

In the *first part* we shall expose the “idea of nature” as the dynamic essence of being in an evolutionary context and hence deduce the fundamental ethical principle that nature is to be preserved and protected in its substance, moreover it is also to be disposed as far as that seems to be necessary for the benefit of the whole.

In a *second part* we shall try to apply this principle to three concrete fields of human life: health care medicine, education, religious spirituality.

Finally we have to draw the *Conclusion* concerning a “responsible naturality” in human life habit.

### *I. part: The idea of nature and the principle of ethics according to nature*

#### *1. step: The idea of nature*

##### *a) Classic component*

A source of the idea of nature is expressed by the direct meaning of the term “nature”, as explained for instance by Thomas Aquinas who continues corresponding dispositions of Aristotle<sup>1</sup>. Hence the Latin term “natura” or “nascitura” derives from “nasci”, i.e. “being born”, marking the bringing

forth of living beings. Accordingly, the term "nature" is applied to the intrinsic principle of this bringing forth; in a higher degree of generalization, "nature" means the intrinsic principle of all productive movements, i.e. of all productive beings, even the lifeless ones, as far as those lifeless beings are productive by themselves, by their own essence, and not by something added from outside. Therefore the term "nature of being" very generally stands for the essence of this being as a productive cause, for the essence as principle of its own essential activity, or: the essence of a being regarded as something dynamic. Hence "nature man" signifies: the essence of man, i.e. that what man is and by which man is constituted; "nature man" is the source of the actions and ways of behaviour that are typical of man and that make the difference between the humans and the expression of other beings, such activities as thinking, feeling and corresponding physical actions. Those acts are caused and coined by the nature of man and therefore they are "natural" to him<sup>2</sup>.

#### b) Modern component

In a way typical of modern times the idea of nature is developed further by the *concept of evolution*. According to it, nature of man is in a continuous ontodynamic manner connected with the nature of animal and plant (and in the end with the nature of lifeless matter, too). Hence the term of "whole of nature" (or of "world") signifies the totality of all beings extended in space and time, while the higher kinds of being arise from the lower ones in the course of evolution. Such an evolutionary concept of nature might be recommended to us already by the dynamis-energeia-teaching of Aristotle. According to this, every physical being is formed matter and, and according to its nature it is based 1. upon an universal material substratum and 2. upon essential forms that are different in each single case; forms such as those of crystal, plant, animal and man. In this context materiality is to its forms as possibility (dynamis) is to its gradual realizations (energeia); possibility aims at realization; therefore to possibility realization is the sense of being (its goal, *télos*); to material substratum of all nature, being formed is the sense<sup>3</sup>.

In the course of evolution of the species of life – in phylogenetic development – the simpler and lower species underlie the more complex and higher ones, such as the realm of minerals is the base for the realm of plants, this for the realm of animals, this finally for mankind. But the course of evolution of individual life – the ontogenetic development – according to the often correctly so-called "bio-genetic basic law" is a faint duplication or repetition of the phylogenetic development. Therefore, in the course of evolution of individual life the simpler layers of being are the genetic and constituting foundation of the higher ones. Regarded in this way, materiality in a certain dispositive structure is the base of vegetable life, this underlies

sensitive, and this spiritual life; thus, without an according embryonic formation of the typical human cerebral cortex, mental functions of this man cannot take action later on, violating certain cerebral regions or even altering them by extended abuse of alcohol or drugs affects the mind, too.

It's becoming clear: The lower components constituting what is vegetable and sensitive in man – these lower components constituting what is vegetable and sensitive in man – these lower components are the base for the higher entirety that ultimately is determined by spirit. The entirety employs the potentiality of the lower components creatively, transcending the merely biological sphere, integrating it into a more comprehensive context of meaning; cf., for instance, the field of human sexuality. In examples like these, it can be observed concretely how the biological sphere *can* and *should* be creatively integrated into a more comprehensive context of personal and interpersonal life. Therefore the spiritually determined entirety is the transcending realization of meaning for the biological sphere, its typical human goal or "*télos*"<sup>4</sup>.

#### 2. The principle of ethics according to nature

Hence an ethical maxim arises from this illumination of being of nature which is applicable for actions which respect the dynamic structure of meaning that we have discovered in the whole of nature, applicable for actions which – in this sense – are in accordance with nature and is natural. *This ethical principle is:* Ontically lower beings, as far as possible, have to be preserved, cared for, developed for the sake of themselves and of what is ontically higher, because they are the base for the higher ones and for the whole.

But: They have to be preserved only as far as possible – that means: unless in any single case momentous circumstances occur forcing the destruction of the lower being for the sake of the higher and entire ones. Natural finality proceeds from the lower to the higher being. After all, the higher one doesn't offend the essential dignity of the lower one without a momentous cause; the higher one rather integrates the lower one as its substratum, preserving it in an altering way. (This action is comprehensively expressed by the three meanings of the German word "aufheben": "to preserve", "to remove" and "to raise".)

Hence we see two important issues: a) a conclusion for the "normal case" and b) another one for the "borderline case". A) In the *normal case*, the lower one as the substratum has to be preserved within the higher entirety. B) In the *borderline case* – i.e. whenever the higher one can continue or start

existing by no other means – the lower one, after all, has to be destroyed. On this – and only on this – occasion destruction happens according to the finality of the lower one's very own nature, for its nature is to serve the higher entirety. For example: When a hand suffers from an incurable disease (for instance cancer), this hand must be amputated: for the sake of the whole organism – and this is in concordance with the natural finality of the hand, i.e. to serve the whole organism.

From this point of view, a normative and measuring line referring to the idea of "according to nature" can be drawn: a line reaching from the inorganic-biological to the moral-religious sphere. For instance, within the natural constructive order of life, inorganic forms serve as nutriment of the vegetable organisms, those as food of the animals, and all of this as nourishment of man. In that the destruction of lower forms and beings really is necessary, it is in accordance with nature. Lower forms being destroyed for the benefit of higher ones – that is the way of nature rising by continuous development. Nature, seen from an ontodynamic and evolutionary point of view, reveals itself as bearing the idea of sacrifice deep inside – as told by *Hans-André*<sup>5</sup>. Reality consists of different layers, and the lower layer has to serve the higher one, even by giving up its own essence and existence; and whatever thereby may vanish in favour of the higher and more comprehensive wholeness always stays "aufgehoben": preserved, removed and raised within the higher one.

Acting against nature is something completely contrary. E.g.: Man may torture or kill animals without obeying any convenient necessity based on natural order – just for fun of destruction or – let's think of some experiments on animals – just to satisfy a scientist's desire to play. Acting like this is hostile to nature, it is a contradiction against the structure of meaning we found in nature.

Take another example: In the regular case maintaining, tending and improving physical health is an action according to human nature, also in order to intensify mental efficiency. Given the borderline cases – and they may be very numerous –, cases of conflict: Suppose the situation that an urgent human task can be carried out in no other way, it may seem to be justifiable, if not required, to tolerate damaging health as an inevitable lesser evil. Take for instance a student, studying for his examination, thereby suffering from exaggerated intellectual strain; or a doctor doing his night-duty at hospital, continuously sacrificing his sleep. On the contrary the following cases are hostile to the order of meaning discovered in human nature: A way of studying tolerating injuries to health without any urgency, just because of grim fanaticism stirred by particular inclination to investigation and learning, or because of personal ambition – this would be against nature, for thereby

the body is actually despised. Similarly, in a manner which is also discordant to nature, a doctor would act when allowing his sleep to be robbed by an obvious hypochondriac, expecting advantages from the visit to that patient. Of course this example shows that in the concrete single case discerning and apt judgement can be difficult and has to be based on an accurate sense of responsibility.

Therefore the *cognitive conditions* of the – maybe numerous – "borderline cases" of natural behaviour are getting clear. Passively tolerating or even actively causing an evil – e.g. an injury to health – has to take place only under these two circumstances. 1) The *evil* obviously has to be *the lesser one* compared with the evil that is to be avoided, e.g. failing the examination. And 2) the thus ensuing other evil, the violation of nature, recognizably has to be *the only practicable means* by which under the given circumstances the greater evil can be avoided. E.g. postponing the examination or compensation by sports, diet or mild medications must seem to be an or no sufficient solution.

We see. These ethical principles, though plausible, are very difficult to be applied and put in action in some single concrete cases. In every given case one has to realize that health, e.g., isn't an absolute and highest value; just by accepting physical suffering which is inevitable or imposed by life a way towards spiritual and moral maturing can be opened. The normal case founded by nature-related ethics, which is natural and according to nature, needn't be preferred by the course of the life and fate in the majority of all cases.

## II. part: "Ethics of naturalness" in some concrete fields of culture

Hence from the attempt to throw light on the structure of meaning of nature and of a corresponding principle of ethical behaviour according to this structure, now in a *second part* of our consideration let's try to outline the meaning of "natural ethics" by *examples of different fields of application*: 1. from the already mentioned field of *health care and medicine*, 2. from the attached field of *education*, and 3. in the context of a *spiritual religious view of life*.

1. The principle of *medicine* according to nature shouldn't primarily have to be fighting disease, but maintaining, tending and strengthening health. It's told that in ancient China the doctor whose patient fell ill was punished for having neglected his most important duty. The first step towards health care would have to be, at any rate, deciding to respect one's own body: not only as a necessary instrument for higher intellectual efforts, in the context of a merely technical thinking of means and purpose, not only even primarily as

an object of crude or refined pleasure of life, lost in hedonistically idolizing the body – but: as an integrating link of a meaningful human way of life. Respectfully attending the senseful contexture of the body prepares for a way of nourishment not opposed, but according to nature; it also prepares for an order of life that provides a natural change between work and sufficient sleep, fresh air, light and relaxation.

This approach is continued by the principle of medical ethics according to nature: “On the side of nature, not contrary to it!” or: in concordance with nature, not in *discordance* with it, i.e. not primarily fighting disease, as our technical way of thinking may suggest us, but addressing and strengthening healing powers from within the organism. This also implies: In the case of doubt at first those means must be chosen that are least violent against nature. According to the sequence of treatment already demanded by *Hippocrates*: “*Verbis, Herbis, Lapide*” (i.e.: by words, by plants, by scalpel), constantly the mildest way that is possible has to be chosen in the first place: the word, i.e. medical advice which ought to make the patient conscious of his way of living and – if necessary – motivate a change, e.g. within the range of nourishment towards dietetics. This way being not successful, the next step is the “plant”, i.e. treatment by remedies. By that one has to prefer milder and less dangerous drugs. Only if this is hopeless, too, the scalpel may exercise its right. Even a violent operation can be according to nature, if it is the last resort and if a healthy human life cannot be reached by other means, as it is in the case of cancer mentioned above. The natural rule for such a kind of operation – “As much as necessary, as little as possible” – seems to be inverted in practice frequently – herein we see anew the temptation of technical culture. In contrast to this the sound nucleus of the body, remaining even during disease, ought not to be offended<sup>6</sup>. According to an understanding of culture based on nature, it is the task of the physician to restore the order, the absence of which is the disease.

2. Analogous aspects as in medicine can be found in *education* – our second example. The educator confronted with psychical and social chaos has got this chance: Primarily he hasn't to fight negative symptoms and fix them by doing so. He rather should address what is positive in the young person, setting that free and strengthening it. Surely, an adequate education sees the mistakes of man, sees evil, destructive inclinations and attitudes, such as presumption, lust of cruelty, boundless retaliation and so on, and certainly it can be claimed that there is nearly no undisturbed order. Consequently disorder can be overcome by making conscious of the underlying order and by affirming this order. I.e. in the midst of obvious inhumanity one hasn't only to threaten and to work by the means of frightening and deterrence. That may be helpful and necessary additional measure. Moreover, basically

the repressed and refused capacity of humaneness has to be addressed; by this solely the power of overcoming can arise.

This happens through so-called *positive* educational methods, such as appreciation and praise, stimulation and encouragement. By those means the positive has to be emphasized. So-called *negative* educational methods, such as ignoring someone in a deliberate manner, or blame and punishment, can, yes must assist. Directly facing and attacking a negative action and attitude. But all “negation of the negative” – through negative means – can be efficient in the long run only on the condition that there is a further linking “position of the already (or still) positive” – through positive means. That is: In accordance with human nature and in this sense “natural” a moderate way of education crystallizes which finds the golden mean between a naively positive and an equally one-sided negative attitude, sensitively gaining the adequate proportion – this way is based upon a fundamental affirmations of man<sup>7</sup>.

3. Hence the access to *religious spirituality* and to the concept of a natural spirituality which is in accordance with human nature finally discloses itself. Nature of man causes and coins longing for the experience of the beautiful, the true and the good, the longing for being understood and accepted as a person. But: Those contents of meaning obviously are not limited by themselves; therefore our longing is unlimited and insatiable. No limited creature can be satisfactory; who could understand us thoroughly, who is able to love us without any reservation? That is why the movement of our nature tends by itself through the whole of finite being to the infinite and divine.

Certainly this movement is in a practice exposed to confusions and perversions, the horizon of the true God is darkened by the deceptive appearances of self-made idols we are chasing. Our nature, originally a good one, with its longing for love and for God, is in a very bad state. Spirituality, the life-shaping mentality, the movement of love related to God must bear especially resistance that is to be faced. Spirituality is to stand the test when confronted with what seems to be absurd. But whence can arise the power of conquest, if not from an even more original positive which, however buried, underlies the whole of negativity – as it is just this positivity that is neglected and distorted?

What is the expression of spirituality according to its very meaning? Certainly it's not the violation of our limiting physical nature by the spirit's impatient striving for unification with God – another temptation of our technically thinking culture, rather is it an attitude of receptivity and trusting

calmness and serenity, calmly permitting the positive and divine to come through the patience and courage of everyday life<sup>8</sup>.

### III. Conclusion

Summing up: We have started from a philosophical illumination of "nature" and have considered phenomena of medicine, education and religious spirituality. What is meant, in this context, by "natural ethics" or "ethics of naturalness" – especially with regard to our technical culture?

"Naturalness" is a habit, a positive state of our very human nature. This state partly has to be developed by working patiently on oneself, by self-conquest and practice. In the state of "naturalness" man is able to act more authentically; to this extent, it is an ability and virtue concerning morality. As Aristotle puts in: "Nature is an aim, a *télos*, according to which we call the state of perfection of each thing the nature of each thing."<sup>9</sup> That is to say: Naturalness always is the best, perfect state of a being. It is a state of our being: the state by which our aptitudes come into play freely, in a senseful proportion. A kind of behaviour that deserves to be called "natural" therefore is realized "as by itself", because it freely results from the full nature of man and is according to it. For that reason a deep, creative freedom and calmness and a plain simpleness, verity and beauty is often typical of mature naturalness.

Originally "naturalness" is a gift given to everyone; once lost, one can never force it back but solely permit its coming anew. Thereby an alert knowledge of nature and what is in accordance with nature is required – and a resolute personal effort. Therefore "naturalness" always is in the perspective of nature, but it extensively transcends natural powers, due to the commonly poor state of our nature. Thus one could almost say: There is nothing more supernatural than the natural.

### Summary

#### I. part: The idea of nature and the principle of ethics according to nature

##### 1. The concept of nature

- a) classic component: dynamic essence of being
- b) modern component: evolutionary context of the beings

##### 2. The principle of ethics according to nature

- a) normal case: perserving the lower laying for saker of the higher whole
- b) borderline case: destroying the lower layer for sake of the higher whole

and its cognitive conditions: aa) = the lesser evil  
bb) = the only practicable way

#### II. part: Application of this principle: "Ethics of naturalness" in some concrete fields of culture

1. Health care and medicine
2. Education
3. Religious spirituality

### III. Conclusion

### Notas bibliográficas

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E.g. Thomas Aquinas STh III q2 a1 i.c. in its relation to Aristotle Phys. II, 1. 192 b21 and Mataph. IV, 4.1014 b16-1015; *idem*, Comm. In Phis. Arist. lib. II lect. 14. 268 (8) in its relation to Aristotle Phys. II, 8.199 a26-33.- As for the history of concept "nature" of Heribert N. Nobis. Die Ummwandlung der mittelalterlichen Naturvorstellung. Ihre Ursachen und ihre wissenschaftsgeschichtlichen Folgen [The transformation of the medieval conception of nature. Its causes and its consequences for the history of sciences]. In Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte XIII (1969) p. 34-57. *Idem*, Frühneuzeitliche Verständnisweisen der Natur und ihr Wandel bis zum 18. Jahrhundert [Understandings of nature in the beginning of modern times and their change until the 18<sup>th</sup> century]. In: Ztschr. F Philos. Forsch. XX (1966) p. 525-538; for the concept of right rooted in nature see Nikolitsa Georgopoulou-Nikolakakou, Zur Problematik eines natürlichen Rechtes [Problems concerning natural right]. Published in the context of habilitation, Bamberg 1975.- Furthermore: Friederich Rapp (ed.), Naturverständnis und Naturbeherrschung. Philosophiegeschichtliche Entwicklung und gegenwärtiger Kontext [Concept of nature and domination of nature. The development in the course of history of philosophy and today's context], München [Munic] 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Dealing with the question whether human nature can be perceived, one basically has to see: Man is no merely spiritual being, but essentially co-implies a physical body. Therefore man does not possess an immediate view of his intrinsic nature, he rather is to elaborate spiritual insight from (sensual) experience. I.e.: From human behaviour and actions given in experience and their continuous peculiarities the underlying reality of "human-being" can be disclosed. The entire structure of human behaviour cannot be understood except as an expression of "human-being".- Typical human behaviour reveals itself e.g. as speaking (and listening) related to a body, disclosing meaning. Thereby a fourfold relation is expressed: 1) to the fellow-man (for I speak "to" him), 2) to myself (for I know about myself as a speaking one), 3) to the

subhuman resp. to the material world (for I speak about it), and 4) to the "super-human" (for when speaking I experience myself being demanded by the obliging absolute call of truth).- It is according to this fourfold essential relation of man to respect the fellow-man, one self, subhuman nature and the absolute and divine. Hence certain outlines of behaviour according to nature and of "natural ethics" result from the (mediate) knowledge about the relational intrinsic nature of man.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Aristotle*, *Metaph.* IX, 6-8 (1048 a.25 -1051 a.3); *ibid.* VIII,3 (1029 a.2 f.), VIII,1 (1042 a.26-30); *De anima* II,1 (412 a.4 -10); moreover *Josef Stallmach*, *Dinamis und Energeia. Untersuchungen am Werk des Aristoteles zur Problemgeschichte von Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit* [Dynamis and Energeia. Inquiries into the work of Aristotle about the history of the problem of possibility and actuality], Meisenheim a. Gl. 1959.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of stratification of being at all times was articulating during the history of philosophy (and even of biology, psychology and sociology) in different ways. Cf. e.g. the "ontological layer model" of man in *Aristotle* (*De anima*), *Duns Scotus* (Quaest., supra lib. Arist. de anima), *Karl Marx* (Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, In: K. Marx/F. Engels, *Ausgew. Werke*, Moskau 1983, S. 186-190), *Nicolai Hartmann* (*Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, Berlin 1964), *Philipp Lersch* (*Aufbau der Person*, München 1970) etc.- For the sake of apt understanding one thereby has to keep in mind - as must be emphasized in confrontation with a dualistic concept of man (especially that of Descartes) - that "layers of being" never can be regarded as "complete substances"; rather they express the hierarchically ordered structure found as content of the human person's self-experience. This person experiences itself as the identical "subject" of all of its "layers". The discernability and plurality of those "layers" results - as especially Aristotle and Thomas of Aquinas have shown - from the ontological body-spirit-constitution of man, whereby the intellectual spirit forms and fills the matter of the body - remaining in substantial unity with it -, gradually expressing itself through matter and being experienced by it ("anima forma corporis"). This meaningful order of the "lower one" and "higher one" can axiologically be falsified by devaluating (or even despising) the lower one and taking as absolute the higher one. For a critical discussion of dualistic-technical objectification of the physical sphere by the spirit, see: *author*, *Kulturphilosophie de Technik. Perspektiven zu Technik - Menschheit - Zukunft*, Trier 1979, pp. 102-107..

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Hans André*, *Vom Sinnenreich des Lebens. Eine Ontologie gläubiger Wurzelfassung* [About the sensual realm of life. An ontology of believing root-tracing]. Salzburg 1952, *idem*, *Annäherung durch Abstand. Der Begegnungsweg der Schöpfung* [Approximation through distance. The encounter-orientated way of creation]. Salzburg 1957; see also the *author's* *Natur - Geschichte - Mysterium. Die Materie als Vermittlungsgrund der Seinsereignung im Denken von Hans André* [Nature - History - Mystery. Matter as basis of mediation for the actualization of Being according to the conception of Hans André], in: *Salzb. Jahrb. F. Philos.* XII/XIII (1968/69) 95-129.

<sup>6</sup> For appropriate perspectives on medical ethics based on philosophical principles of Thomas Aquinas cf.: *Eberhard Sievers*, *Natur als Weg. Thomas von Aquin und gesundes Leben* [Nature as Way. Thomas Aquinas and healthy life], Köln [Cologne] 1966. In connection to this the *author's* recension in: *Salzb. Jahrb. F. Philos.* XII-XII (1968-69) 446-450. Regarding the consequences of a "natural ethics of sexuality" cf. *Heinrich Beck*, *Arnulf Rieber*, *Antropologie und Ethik der Sexualität. Zur ideologischen Auseinandersetzung um körperliche Liebe* [Anthropology and Ethics of Sexuality. About the ideological discussion on physical love]. München [Munich] - Salzburg 1982, esp. chap 13 (ethik der Ehe und der nicht-ehelichen Sexualität [Ethics of Marriage and of extramarital sexuality]) and chap. 14 (Familienplanung und Geburtenkontrolle als Problem der Verantwortung [Family planning and birth control as a problem of responsibility]).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the *author's* *Philosophie der Erziehung* [Philosophy of education]. Freiburg-Basel-Wien [Vienna] 1979, p. 202.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the *author's* *Antropologischer Zugang zum Glauben. Eine rationale Meditation* [Anthropological access to faith. A rational meditation], Salzburg-München [Munich]. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1982, and *idem*, *Natürliche Theologie. Grundriss philosophischer Gotteserkenntnis* [Natural Theology. Outlines of philosophical knowledge about God], München [Munich]-Salzburg 1986.

<sup>9</sup> *Aristotle*, *Politics* I,1,8; 1252 b.33-35.