There is a famous quote of Bob Dylan (I assume my listeners know who he is...) :

"Whadaya mean by *mean* man? "

Similarly we could simply resume the subject of this podcast by posing the question :''

"Whadaya mean by *man* man? "

In the first episodes of this apologetics series we have seen that God exists, now we have to talk about man and how he fits into the picture. But what *do* we mean by "man"? What is man ?

The classical definition of man is very simple : "Man is a rational animal". This is a perfect definition because it gives the genus, that is, the general class of things into which "man" fits, namely : "animal". And then it gives what makes man different from the other things that belong to that class, that is, other animals, namely, the fact that he is "rational".

So let's start with "animal" since that is pretty obvious. By "animal" we mean a body, that is, a material thing, that is alive, and not only alive (because plants are bodies that are alive too) but alive with a life that enables the animal to sense things around it. Now it is true that there are some plants that seem to have a certain sensation of things around them (like these plants that sense the insect near it and snap it up and eat it) but these are exceptions that prove the rule. These plants are on the borderline and show that the borderline is really there.

So man fits into this general category of beings that have sensitive life. Thus if we want to know what man is, what *we* are, we can't leave out the senses, both the five exterior senses : sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch as well as the four interior senses, which are less well known, so we can quickly list them. First there is what is called "common sense", which doesn't mean what it means in normal language, but has the specific sense of that power by which we are conscious of what our external senses tell us. This is a simple fact of personal experience for all of us : we "see" that we "see", that is we are aware of seeing, as we are of hearing, smelling, and the rest. After this comes the interior sense of imagination, this power to store up images of things our exterior senses have experiences. We also have a faculty that recalls to our awareness things that have impressed themselves on our senses : this power is called the memory. And finally there is a rather obscure interior sense called the estimative power, by which the animal "senses" things which, strangely, are not the object of any of the exterior senses. Thus a lamb senses "instinctively", as we say, that it should flee a wolf. If one objects : "it is simply because he smells the wolf", the answer is "but how does the lamb know that the wolf it smells should be fled ?" The lamb doesn't "smell" that, it just "senses" it "instinctively" as we say (and this estimative power is what we usually call, in laymen's terms : "instinct").

So much then for the sensitive life of man, which puts him into the general class or genus of animals. But what makes man *different* from other animals is that he has *reason*, and they do not. Now again here there seem to be some animals that are on the borderline (like monkeys, and, apparently, some say, dolphins, in certain ways, etc.) but again these are just exceptions that prove the rule. And they are very limited exceptions that aren't really exceptions at all : these animals don't *really* have reason and the immediate proof of this is that they don't *talk* (even if they communicate in some way, which is not at all the same thing). To talk means to signify *ideas* by arbitrary symbols which represent them : so if you don't *think* you can't really *talk* for the simple reason that you don't have anything to *say*.

This little fact will lead us a long way if we continue to investigate it. For to have ideas of things means that you have a *universal notion* of them, for that is what the idea expresses, idea that is represented by the word we use to convey the idea we want to communicate. For example, the word "man" is not just an audible sound, like the grunts monkeys make or the squeals of dolphins. It actually *means* something, that is, it represents a universal notion that pretends to apply to several different individual things. Once we have this notion, we can put it together with other similar notions and actually *say* something. Even if this thing we say is just a particular fact, like, for example : "This man is fat", it still involves universal ideas because it is putting this particular fact into universal categories : *This* thing I am pointing at, I affirm that it belong to a class of things called "men" and I also affirm that it has this particular characteristic that is to be "fat".

Now this "little fact" will continue to lead us farther, a lot farther, because the fact of having these universal *ideas* that are separate from particular, *material* things necessarily implies that the being that has these sorts of ideas is – at least as far as this faculty that allows it to do this goes – immaterial itself. In philosophy this is neatly expressed in a three word Latin phrase : *Agere sequitur esse* : action follows being. In other words, what you *do* depends on what you *are*. This is just common sense. What something can do depends on its nature, on what it is. Cows can't fly because they don't have wings : nor do they have intelligence, which could allow them to fly too, like men do. So, since man can *do* something immaterial, namely know universal, immaterial ideas, there is something in him that must *be* immaterial.

That, obviously, leads us still farther, in a very practically important, even a literally *vital* way. For if man, at least as far as his reason goes, is immaterial, then he is immortal. For matter is the principle of corruption in all things. In fact, as Aristotle shows, that is precisely what matter *is* : it is this principle that must exist in things to explain the fact that what was one thing, all of a sudden is something else [[1]](#footnote-1). So if something has no matter, it can't become something else, it remains what it is because all it is is what it is, that is the form.

So we see, then, that the intellectual character of man is a tremendously important thing, from every point of view. It separates him from animals and makes him immortal. It also is going to determine his purpose, for, the purpose of a thing is the activity in which its nature achieves its perfection. For example, a watch is made to keep time and it is insofar as it keeps time that it attains its perfection and, as it were, its "happiness". The perfection and happiness of man then, depends on the fact that his nature is intellectual. By his intellect he is made to know the truth, and so he cannot be happy unless he attains this perfection of knowing the truth. Again, *agere sequitur esse*: it is by his intellect that man is on a higher level of *being* (*esse*) than the beasts and so it is only by the *activity* (*agere*) of that intellect that he will be what he is supposed to be and attain his perfection and his happiness.

Saint Thomas explains this point in great detail at the beginning of the part of his *Summa* which treats of morality, that is, the acts of man considered in their relation to his last end, that is, his ultimate good or perfection. Now "Last end" does not mean "THE END", but, on the contrary, the final goal of everything, which is beatitude. Every single act anyone poses is always and only for the purpose of attaining this goal, beatitude ("This is the word used to name the acquisition of the last end" says St. Thomas). The problem is that to really attain beatitude we have to pose acts that will really lead us to real beatitude.

And so Saint Thomas goes through a whole list of different particular goods men take as their last end and shows how none of them lead to beatitude. As St. Maximilian Kolbe says :

All men seek happiness and hope to attain it but few are they who find it because they look for it there where it is not to be found (SK 994-995).

So Saint Thomas conducts a long investigation into the different goods of man and tries to discover in which of them man can find beatitude.

First of all, beatitude does not consist in riches, because riches are simply means of acquiring natural goods, like food, drink, habitations, means of transportation, etc. and man's beatitude does not consist in them.

"For", says Saint Thomas, " all these things are sought after because of something else, namely, in order to sustain the nature of man, and therefore they cannot be the last end of man but rather are ordered to man as to their end", as it is said in the Psalm : 'Thou hast put all things under his feet' (Ps VIII)".

Neither does beatitude consist in honour, because honour is what is given to excellence, and so it supposes excellence. Beatitude, however is what *makes* man perfect and excellent and so it doesn't consist in honour but rather honour is a consequence of it.

An interesting objection here says that beatitude must consist in honour because honour, according to Aristotle, is the reward of virtue and beatitude is the reward of virtue as well. The response to this is that honour is not the reward of virtue in the sense that one is virtuous *in order* to receive honour (that would not be a virtue but just ambition). Honour rather is a simple consequence of the possession of virtue and exists, not in the virtuous person himself but in other people who honour him. Beatitude, on the contrary, is in the virtuous person himself and is the very *purpose* of his being virtuous, not just a consequence of being virtuous. So beatitude cannot consist in honour but rather honour is a consequence of beatitude (thus we honour the saints, for example, "the blessed").

For the same reason, neither does beatitude consist in glory, which is the knowledge of something accompanied by praise. For example, a great basketball player has glory when his great playing is seen on TV by a multitude of people who praise it. Now this praise doesn't cause the beatitude of this player, which consists rather in his excellent playing : the praise or glory is just a consequence of his beatitude. Saint Thomas adds, however, that in a way our beatitude depends on our glory *before God*, that is, God's knowledge of our excellence, because God's knowledge is the *cause* of our excellence. For God does not praise things because they are good, but rather they are good because God makes them worthy of praise. His "praise" causes good, it is not a result of it because that would mean that God was passive with regard to His creatures, which is impossible.

Neither does man's beatitude consist in power, that is, in having authority over others, says Saint Thomas, "but rather in the *good use* of power which is through virtue, not in power itself".

Nor does it consist in any good of the body (strength, beauty, etc.), since this good is itself ordered to the good of the soul. This is proven by the simple fact that while the body cannot exist without the soul, the soul can exist without the body, as we saw before. Therefore the body exists for the soul and not the other way around, and so the good of the body can't be our beatitude, that is, our ultimate good, because it is ordered to something else.

Neither does beatitude consist in pleasure. Obviously it doesn't consist in *bodily* pleasure because, as we just saw, no bodily good can be the end of man. But neither does it consist in any pleasure at all, even spiritual pleasure, because pleasure or delight is simply a *consequence* of possessing the good, so it cannot be that very possession. We will experience delight when we possess our good, but it isn't that good itself, it just follows it.

Finally, Saint Thomas concludes by the following argument that man's beatitude can only consist in God Himself. For man's beatitude must completely satisfy his desire, and so it must consist in attaining the very object of his will and so fulfill its desire. But the object of man's will is not just any particular good, but the universal good, good in itself, just as the object of the intellect, which the will follows, is universal truth. Thus man's beatitude can consist only in God, because God alone is the universal Good, *the* Good *itself*.

Cajetan explains the key premiss in this argument, which is the parallel drawn between the universal object of the intelligence and the universal object of the will, recalling the difference between the respective objects of the intellect and the will, namely the truth and the good. The truth is in the intellect, because it consists in the correspondence between the intellect and reality : when your intellect understands and asserts something to be such and such, and that thing really is such and such, then there is truth, which is precisely this correspondence. Truth is *adequatio intellectus et rei* says the definition : the correspondence between the intellect and the thing. If this correspondence exists, there is truth, but this correspondence is *in the intellect*, in so far as it corresponds to the thing known.

The good, however, object of the will, is, on the contrary, in things themselves. It does not consist in the correspondence between the will that loves and the thing it loves, as truth consists in the correspondence between the intellect that knows and what it knows. Rather it consists in the thing itself that is loved which is loved precisely because *it* is *good*. So goodness is in the object loved and causes that love, and so it is not in the will but rather in the thing that is good and which is loved because it is good. And so the universal, absolute good, object of the will, is something real and this universal absolute good, then, can not be anything but God HImself. That is why only God can give man the beatitude he seeks because, as Our Himself said to the young rich man who called Him good : "Only God is good", that is, only God is the universal, absolute good that can alone satisfy man's desire. As Saint Augustine said : "Our heart is restless until it rest in Thee". But this will be the object of the subsequent podcast...

To sum up then : neither riches, nor honours, nor glory, nor power, nor pleasure make men happy, because they do not satisfy the innate desire he has for an infinite good. This desire comes to man precisely because of his intellect which, as we say, attains the universal nature of things. Thus no particular good can satisfy man because he has the notion of universal good, that is Good in itself, and knowing this he cannot help but desire it. The freedom of the will, of which modern man makes so much, is actually based precisely on this fact that no particular good can satisfy man completely, because it cannot fulfill his desire for a universal, infinite good. Only God can fulfill this desire, and thus "Only God is good".

1. – For example what was a piece of wood a minute ago is now a pile of ashes. For the Greeks, who were the first (and practically the last, perhaps) people who actually *thought* about things, this fact of "substantial change", that is, the fact that what was one thing suddenly changes and becomes something *entirely* different, was a great mystery. The real problem consists in the fact that the wood doesn't just "disappear into thin air", but actually *becomes* something different. It is this *wood* that is not wood anymore but ashes, which is something completely different. How can that be ? Wood is wood and ashes are ashes : how can this same thing that was wood now be ashes? The answer Aristotle came up with is that there must be something "underneath" the wood that has now become ashes. This underlying thing is what we call "matter", the principle discovered by Aristotle that explains substantial change. So if there is no matter, there can be no substantial change : thus all immaterial forms are immortal. They are also intellectual, which simply means that they can receive forms not as matter receives them, but "intentionally". But I don't think we can get into that right now... [↑](#footnote-ref-1)