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WHAT NORMATIVITY AFTER THE “DEATH OF GOD”? ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF *WEAK THOUGHT**

Abstract. The article aims to analyse the concept of normativity in the philosophy of weak thought developed by Gianni Vattimo. Weak thought refers to the theory of a weakening of being in an era of the end of metaphysics, as well as a challenge to the Cartesian concept of the subject. Such a philosophical theory does not entirely abandon normativity in the moral dimension. Vattimo proposes a weak notion of normativity, i.e. persuasion, without claims to universal applicability. Weak normativity derives from dialogue and respect for tradition, it recommends compliance with specific moral principles, but it does not acknowledge universal ethical obligations. This version of normativity is grounded in cultural heritage, agreement and social contract.

Keywords: weak thought; strong thought; human nature; morality; nihilism; freedom; natural law; cultural heritage; post-metaphysical ethics

1. Introduction. 2. From the “death of God” to *weak thought*. 3. Negation of the concept of nature. 4. Cultural heritage as a source of morality. 5. Conclusions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s a renaissance of Friedrich Nietzsche’s thought began in many countries. *Nietzsche-Renaissance* had a profound impact on philosophy as it was practiced both in Italy and beyond. In the country on the Tiber, it was not easy to speak and write positively about the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* immediately after World War II, due to his association with the birth of fascism and national socialism. Over the years, the Italians’ approach to Nietzsche

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changed significantly, owing primarily to their reception of Martin Heidegger's work which questioned many erroneous and simplistic ways of understanding Nietzsche's thought. In 1964, a critical edition of all works by the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was published in Italy, which contributed to an increased interest in his works.

One of the Italian thinkers who undertook new research on Nietzsche's work in the 1960s was Gianni Vattimo. The author, associated with the University of Turin, is considered in many circles to be one of the most popular European thinkers and one of the main representatives of philosophical postmodernism. He is also the best-known theorist of weak thought (*pensiero debole*) and a major researcher in the phenomenon of nihilism. By referring to the thoughts of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, the Turin philosopher developed one of the contemporary models of post-metaphysical ethics, which considers compassion and mercy as central moral categories.

How should the concept of "God's death" be understood as interpreted by Gianni Vattimo? What is the essence of his concept of weak thought? Is it possible to defend the traditional understanding of human nature and natural law in the era of biotechnological revolution? How can normativity be substantiated without the foundation of nature? Can cultural heritage be a source of normativity? How should normativity grounded in weak thought be evaluated? The main goal of the article is to present the nature of normativity stemming from the philosophy of weak thought, and to discuss concerns regarding the substantiation of moral norms based on cultural heritage, agreement and social contract.

2. FROM THE "DEATH OF GOD" TO WEAK THOUGHT

The "death of God" category was introduced into the public domain by Friedrich Nietzsche. What is the basic meaning of this concept? It is an image that symbolizes the disintegration of our culture's metaphysical foundation and the disappearance of traditional moral values. For Nietzsche, this poignant metaphor became a kind

of Ariadne's thread which helps one navigate through the maze of contemporary culture and properly diagnose the most significant problems of our historical epoch. The "death of God" consists first and foremost in a disintegration of traditional metaphysics, and the end of belief in an objective order of the world which would justify upholding truth and moral principles, regardless of the place, time and circumstances.

Nietzsche repeatedly uses the phrase "God is dead" (*der Gott ist tot*) in his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. According to the philosopher, the God of Christians is not the true God. Therefore, "the death of God" does not in fact mean the demise of a God who really exists, but merely the end of divinity called to existence by man. In this perspective, it is man who is a creator of the Supreme Being. Nietzsche wrote: "God is a conjecture; but I desire that your conjectures should not reach beyond your creative will. (...) God is a conjecture; but I desire that your conjectures should be limited to what is thinkable"¹. For the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the deceased God was the one who, as a ruthless ruler, had controlled man and did not allow people to live independently and freely. Along with the "death of God", a transcendent lawgiver who had ruthlessly enforced man's observance of fixed and immutable moral norms ceased to exist.

According to Nietzsche, this omnipresent and omnipotent type of God had to die so that man could start a new life. "But he *had* to die; he saw with eyes that saw everything; he saw man's depths and ultimate grounds, all his concealed disgrace and ugliness. (...) He always saw me: on such a witness I wanted to have revenge or not live myself. The god who saw everything, *even man* - this god had to die! Man cannot bear it that such a witness should live"². For the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the disintegration of the Divine foundation – guaranteeing the world's order, stability and universal moral principles – marks the beginning of a new era of freedom,

1 F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, transl. by Walter Kaufmann, London 1978, 85–86.

2 *Ibid*, 329–330.

which is well expressed by the following passage from *The Gay Science*: “We philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel, when we hear the news that ‘the old god is dead’, as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again”³.

Gianni Vattimo developed the concept of “God’s death” by creating the category of weak thought which may be perceived as one of the possible interpretations of Nietzsche’s thought. Weak thought stems from the negation of strong thought (*pensiero forte*). Strong thought is, above all, the knowledge typical of the metaphysical tradition of the West which sought to define a coherent, monolithic, stable and immutable structure of reality *tout court*. In this context, it is a question of cognition, as Vattimo claims, founded on “Plato’s mistake” which consists in attributing the character of eternity and stability to being. As a result, the world of our concrete existence becomes devastated and shorn of value. For strong thought, knowledge implies, above all, seeking the truth as an independent and stable point of reference that is secure and safe for all⁴. Various forms of strong thought abstract from the affective and interpretative dimension of human subjectivity, evoking Truth, Life, Reality, History and Subject as absolute categories of a dogmatic nature.

In the Turin philosopher’s approach, the decline of strong thought and the birth of weak thought coincide with the end of modernity and the beginning of the postmodern era. At this point, it is worth emphasizing that weak thought is in harmony with the basic paradigms of postmodern culture, which perceives differentiation, fragmentation, diversity and instability as positive and constitutive elements of reality⁵. As a consequence, one should not strive to unify them or arrange in a hierarchy from above or from the outside. Post-

3 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. by Walter Kaufmann, New York 1974, 280.

4 Cf. A. Dal Lago, P. A. Rovatti, *Elogio del pudore. Per un pensiero debole*, Milano 1989, 9–22.

5 Cf. P. Duchliński, A. Kobylński, R. Moń, E. Podrez, *O normatywności w etyce*, Kraków 2015, 253–287.

modern diversity entails the possibility of fragmenting reality and recognizing its immeasurability. Breaking up with the past leads to a regionalization of various fields of knowledge and the abandonment of traditional cultural canons⁶.

Vattimo claims that weak thought is a concept that is conscious of its own limitations and therefore abandons any claims to great global metaphysical visions – it is primarily a theory of weakening the constitutive character of being in an era of the end of metaphysics⁷. Weak thought is a philosophy which rejects certainty for the sake of freedom. In this sense, it is a typical example of postmodern philosophy. Such a philosophical manner of thinking implies that the inaccessibility and concealment of being should not be a cause for grief or despair, but a condition for the proper interpretation of our human condition and creation of a friendly relationship with other people.

3. NEGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF NATURE

An important element of the weak thought concept consists in the rejection of the notion of nature. In 2006, an interesting discussion on the beginning of life, evolution, Darwinism and biological evolutionism between Gianni Vattimo and two well-known Italian scientists was published in the philosophical monthly "Micro-Mega"⁸. In this debate, Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Francesco Cavalli-Sforza represented the standpoint of contemporary genetics and biology, while Vattimo – defending the primacy of philosophy over scientific research – presented the philosophical approach to many of the problems associated with the evolution and biotechnological revolution we are witnessing nowadays.

One important topic in their discussion concerned the concept of nature. During the debate, Vattimo upheld his earlier claim that the concept, that the concept of nature is mythological (*mythologico*) and

6 Cf. G. Vattimo, *Vocazione e responsabilità del filosofo*, Genova 2000, 76–77.

7 Cf. Idem, *Della realtà: fini della filosofia*, Milano 2011.

8 Cf. G. Vattimo, L. L. Cavalli Sforza, F. Cavalli Sforza, *Scienza o filosofia?*, MicroMega 20(2006)1, 7–24.

risky (*rischioso*). Its mythological character consists in that nature is a pure idea, devoid of any real content – an idea inherited from the past and uncritically accepted by successive generations. On the other hand, the risk associated with nature lies in the fact that, in certain currents of thought, it is assigned a normative character – treated as a norm imposing specific moral obligations on people. To avoid the alleged “danger” from the normative nature, it should be rejected *en bloc*. This kind of negation first and foremost regards human nature as a normative structure which can guide us to making specific moral decisions.

The Turin philosopher claims that the concept of nature is purely cultural. Moreover, nature is supposedly closer to non-being than to being as it is entirely subordinated to and liable to manipulation by science and technology. The threat of manipulation is particularly relevant in modern times, in which the technological man introduces into the natural world the “tyranny” of the laws and principles he creates. As a consequence, the history of our civilization has been dominated not by what is natural, but by what is artificial and man-made. Today, we cannot be certain whether various natural systems inherited from our ancestors are necessary for our biological survival. On the contrary, we can use highly developed technologies which allow us to produce anything artificially. What is more, the Turin philosopher claims that science, technology and modern processes enable the replacement of the old natural order with our creations – without compromising the survival of our species.

Vattimo firmly rejects the notion that nature has any primary or absolute normativity which determines the basis of normative ethics – it is not true that nature conditions and defines our moral choices and decisions. For the Turin philosopher, there is no interference between the natural world and the moral world. “The only value I acknowledge”, says Vattimo, “is my soul, that is, my freedom, my moral conscience, my decision to love my neighbour instead of hating him. And this is what I would like to survive in the world”⁹. The freedom which

⁹ Ibid, 22.

the thinker writes about is cultural and technological in its character, not natural or metaphysical. If freedom is understood in such terms, there is no objective limit to human transformation. As a result, one should abandon the allegedly false nature/culture antithesis and start thinking in terms of all being but history.

The Turin philosopher believes that at our birth we are "thrown" into a historical tradition which defines us, even if this does not happen in accordance with purely mechanical laws. Until today, this "throwing" into history only meant destiny which could but be acknowledged and accepted. Nowadays, this can be deliberately changed. We are called upon to create laws and organize behaviour that is truly free, i.e. independent of any pre-existing rules or standards. According to the creator of the concept of weak thought, the contemporary biotechnological revolution is a manifestation of freedom conceived this way¹⁰.

By emphasizing the dynamic understanding of the human being, Vattimo refers, among others, to the philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola – one of the greatest Italian representatives of Renaissance Platonism. Mirandola was the thinker who claimed that the only essence of man is having no essence. He described man as a being to whom God did not attribute any specific nature, and objected to seeing man as a microcosm which reflects different types of nature existing in the universe. He argued that human dignity is founded on man's freedom. Pico della Mirandola believed that the human being does not have a definite and permanent place in the universe, but was created to become whatever he wanted: an earthly or a heavenly creature; a mortal or an immortal one. Consequently, it is man's responsibility to endow himself with his own essence¹¹.

In his analyses of human nature, Vattimo also refers to the Scottish thinker David Hume. He confirms the validity of "Hume's law", which says that one must not move from a description of a certain state of affairs to the formulation of moral principles. According

10 Cf. G. Vattimo, *Credere di credere. È possibile essere cristiani nonostante la Chiesa?*, Milano 1996, 1999², 70–75.

11 Cf. G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari* – Latin text and translation into Italian, Firenze 1942.

to the Turin philosopher, a reference to the category of natural law in ethical argumentation leads to authoritarian and anti-democratic naturalism; if a truth that is substantiated in terms of nature appears in a political debate, we are undermining the principle of freedom and the democratic coexistence of people.

Any morality which does not respect “Hume’s law” entails violence. This also applies to traditional Christian morality which refers to the metaphysical justification of norms and values. Metaphysical violence affects many of its aspects. The Turin philosopher claims that, although the tradition of natural law very often opposed the use of violence, there were also situations in which it served its legitimation¹².

At this point it is worth emphasizing that Vattimo makes exceedingly harsh accusations against the Catholic Church and its moral teaching. He accuses the institution of philosophical errors, homophobia, sexual morality which is hostile to man, etc. According to the humanist, the greatest mistake which is turning people more and more against Catholicism and betrays the original spirit of the Gospel consists in reading the evangelical truths in the light of an objectifying philosophy (*filosofia oggettivante*) which attempts to uphold the immutable nature of man and defend the category of natural law. Vattimo believes that by doing so, the Catholic Church destroys the very essence of Christianity. Why? Due to the fact that in the name of human nature and natural law, the Church ignores the commandment to love one’s neighbour. The Turin philosopher rejects any natural essence of man, society, or family. He claims that the revolutionary novelty of Christianity lies in the rejection of an objective category, and putting freedom, individuality and the internal dimension of every human being in the spotlight.

According to Vattimo, Christianity has introduced into the world the principle of a radical renewal of classical metaphysics: instead of focusing on the subject and the accepted natural forms seen as permanent and eternal and treated as the source of moral

12 Cf. G. Vattimo, *Dopo la cristianità. Per un cristianesimo non religioso*, Milano 2002, 120.

norms, it now directs its gaze towards freedom and the inner man. He believes that the objective character of natural laws is a myth. A critical mistake of Catholicism consists in combining Christian faith with the objectivity of natural laws and constructing sexual ethics on this foundation. In this perspective, the objective laws of nature are nothing other but nature as it was understood by the society of past epochs – considered as archetypes – which identified them with the eternal truth about man and society.

On the one hand, the Turin philosopher fiercely criticizes Catholicism for its moral teaching about individual life and sexual ethics, while on the other appreciates Christian social ethics and the involvement of Catholics in public life. At this point, it is worth noting that in recent years Vattimo has frequently referred in his philosophical studies to the cultural traditions of South America. He believes that the continent has a postmodern character and therefore represents an alternative to the Western lifestyle. The Turin philosopher is an avid supporter of the South American popular movements and hopes that they will lead to the necessary social and political reforms.

According to Vattimo and the leaders of these movements, the chief, modern enemies of mankind today are globalization, cultural Eurocentrism, and the world domination exercised by the global financial system. In this new 21st century class struggle, the left-wing circles should join forces with Catholics. With this regard, South America, with its specific understanding of religiousness and Christianity, is a kind of laboratory in which the new world postulated by the Turin philosopher is being forged.

What is nature for Vattimo? According to the philosopher, what we call nature is simply our old habits. We oppose changes introduced in the name of nature, which does not exist, while, in fact, we all participate in such changes. The creator of the weak thought concept notes, that in the case of man, it is difficult to limit human nature to what he is and what he can become by allowing nature to operate. For humans, natural is what appears to be such in the particular circumstances of our existence – just as it is natural to

respond to being greeted in the street, even if this is not imposed by any metaphysical law. This natural criterion should apply in view of the rights established in the democratic political order¹³.

While rejecting human nature and the resulting natural law, Vattimo advocates freedom, interpreting nature as a category which competes with and opposes freedom and man's inner self. The philosopher's mistake consists in a static and biological view of human nature – with such an interpretation of human existence it is, of course, difficult to uphold a proper vision of man's freedom. Vattimo is one of those authors who reject the category of nature resulting from the adoption of an absolute and abstract concept of freedom, understood as liberation from all that is not defined by freedom itself. As a consequence, this also applies to liberation from nature. However, human nature does not mean a pure objectivity of passive matter, but also a rational identity that stems from various experiences of man as a being immersed in history.

Vattimo accepts a very general understanding of human nature which entails, for example, a common concern that human body should not be treated as a tradable good. Such an approach to human nature is aimed at protecting man's dignity in an era of biotechnological revolution. The Turin philosopher regards human nature primarily in metaphorical terms – as a form of concern for the protection of human dignity¹⁴. In his anthropological analyses there are no references to other important thinkers who present distinctly different visions of human nature. At this point, it is worth referring to valuable studies by the Italian philosopher Vittorio Possenti¹⁵, as well as some important works of the German thinker Robert Spaemann¹⁶. Unfortunately, the Turin philosopher completely disregards the interesting arguments of these authors.

13 Cf. G. Vattimo, *La vita dell'altro. Bioetica senza metafisica*, Lungro di Cosenza 2006, 43–44.

14 Cf. Idem, *Dopo la cristianità*, op. cit., 87.

15 Cf. V. Possenti, *Il nuovo principio persona*, Roma 2013.

16 Cf. R. Spaemann, *Happiness and Benevolence*, transl. by Jeremiah Alberg, Notre Dame 2000.

4. CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A SOURCE OF MORALITY

On the one hand, the creator of the weak thought concept expresses the conviction that we cannot derive any moral norms or laws from human nature. Since it is the essence of man to have a history, to create culture and technology, all normativity related to the category of human nature must be rejected. On the other hand, Vattimo claims that we cannot agree to a total relativism and moral anarchy, i.e. we need a different form of normativity – not everything is allowed, not every act is approved, not all that is technically possible is necessarily morally acceptable. Where do moral norms originate, then, and how can we substantiate them? Where should we look for a new source of normativity? For the Turin philosopher, the source of moral norms – determining what is acceptable and what is forbidden – is our cultural heritage and dialogue held within a common axiological tradition¹⁷.

According to Vattimo, today's disappearance of ethical discourse based on universal and ultimate principles is global in nature and results primarily from the prevailing cultural pluralism and a change in the Western attitude toward other cultural circles which have become emancipated in recent decades from the status of colonies into independence and self-determination. The decline of the ethics of first principles also results from the criticism of traditional morality by the three great "masters of suspicion": Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud¹⁸. Such philosophical theories reflect the profound social and cultural transformation of the last two centuries. However, overthrowing of the first principles does not imply the acceptance of situational ethics. What we are dealing with here is the fundamental difference between post-metaphysical ethics and ordinary, pure relativism. "The claim that the reliability of the first principles has fallen apart cannot be translated into considering our

17 Cf. G. Giorgio, *Il pensiero di Gianni Vattimo. L'emancipazione della metafisica tra dialettica ed ermeneutica*, Milano 2006, 239–240.

18 Cf. G. Vattimo, *Addio alla verità*, Roma 2009, 95.

historical condition and being part of a community to be the only absolute. If the real world (the first principles) has become a fairy tale, Nietzsche writes, the fairy tale has been destroyed as well (and so it cannot be absolutized either)¹⁹.

How can normativity founded on weak thought be defined, then? It is worth to emphasizing that normativity in the moral sphere comprises a number of objective and subjective elements. This has been pointed out by the authors of the latest scientific studies devoted to this issue²⁰. Essentially, there are two basic sources of moral normativity, i.e., a particular reality and the subject's will. Normativity appears to be derived from the decisions of a subject or subjects, yet it also depends on a particular frame of reference which "is recognized as the most appropriate here and now. An action that is in accordance with its contents is what may be referred to as an obligation (*Gesollt*), in other words – that which ought to be done. Such action is both rational and moral"²¹.

The frame of reference may be referred to in a variety of ways: as the ideal orders of obligation, natural law, the idiom of conduct, a person's the person's reality, or still otherwise. Ryszard Moń claims that "it depends on the sensitivity of a person, the sharpness of their mind, what action or way of life they will undertake in order to satisfy the demands of a particular frame of reference, a particular idiom of conduct. Thus, normativity appears to result from the will to live happily and the rational idiom of human activity"²².

The creator of the weak thought concept stresses that we must draw on cultural heritage and traditions to which we belong. Cultural heritage and tradition is the set of all elements and objects,

19 Ibid, 98.

20 Cf. C. Gill, *Virtue, Norms and Objectivity: Issues in Ancient and Modern Ethics*, Oxford 2005; J. D. Wallace, *Norms and Practices*, Ithaca 2008; G. Brennan, L. Eriksson, R. Goodin, *Explaining Norms*, Oxford 2013; E. Colzani, A. Rossetti, *Mente, azione, normatività*, Milano 2014; C. Korsgaard, *Le origini della normatività*, Pisa 2014.

21 R. Moń, *Warto czy należy? Studium na temat istoty i źródeł normatywności*, Warszawa 2011, 495–496.

22 Ibid, 543.

within which we make our choices when confronted with other people. We choose not based on the criterion of absolute truth, but on the basis of love. We choose those interpretations and solutions which allow us to look at the other person without feeling shame: truth should go hand in hand with love.

Paying heed to cultural heritage and interpreting tradition does not result solely in a reevaluation of all values, but also in the discovery of the contents we inherit. Many rules which apply in social life are not automatically suspended or abolished by post-metaphysical ethics. A number of them had been previously treated as natural norms. Recognized as cultural heritage rather than as the nature and essence of things, they may remain valid in our historical epoch as well; not as natural norms, however, but as rational norms, recognized by human reason.

According to the Turin philosopher, the truth about destroyed foundations becomes a new foundation today. One may develop an ethical discourse based on the tradition of origins and cultural heritage, or create maxims referring to our actions. One may also develop guidelines which define behaviour and the hierarchy of values. Adopting as the ultimate point reference of the more specific affiliations – such as race, nation, social class, or family – implies reducing one's own ethical perspective right at the very source. While the rules of human conduct derive from this type of concrete affiliations, they do not constitute an absolute imperative, but only a broadening of our horizons. According to Vattimo, this way origin and affiliation become the main point of reference for ethics.

What maxims and behaviours may be derived from our tradition, origin and cultural heritage? First and foremost, those characterized by criticism. This is accompanied by constantly paying heed to the contents of the heritage and origins, in order not to overestimate the past perspective and to maintain an awareness of responsibility in relation to one's own cultural tradition. "Paying heed to the heritage", says the Turin philosopher, "does not only lead to 're-evaluating' all values, but also to elevating and imitating certain contents we have inherited"²³.

23 G. Vattimo, *Addio alla verità*, op. cit., 102.

Moral principles derived from cultural heritage and the norms we recognize as rational, represent a limited form of the normativity of post-metaphysical ethics proposed by Vattimo. In the work of the Turin philosopher, we will not find an adequate answer to the question of what constitutes the content and foundation of moral obligation, or any in-depth analysis of various ways of understanding normativity. According to the author of the weak thought concept, the objective moment of the normativity of post-metaphysical ethics is cultural heritage and interpretable tradition, while the decision of the subject, who considers moral principles derived from tradition as rational norms, is its subjective moment²⁴.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Gianni Vattimo's post-metaphysical ethics, built on the foundation of weak thought, preserves a limited form of normativity instead of completely abandoning it. Moral principles derived from cultural heritage and recognized as rational norms should be considered a weaker version of normativity. It is difficult to find any other form of normative ethics within the framework of a philosophy which negates the idea of strong thought and continues the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. The most important reason for it being impossible to develop alternative forms of normativity is Vattimo's rejection of human nature and natural law.

The philosopher claims that in our time, science and technology transform nature into history. In a world where all becomes history, there is no room for objective moral norms, as human existence does not have an internal structure from which permanent and immutable ethical principles might be derived. The only acceptable ethics is that of interpretation. While searching for his own individual rules of conduct, man should only interpret events and thoughts, deeds and

²⁴ Cf. A. Kobylński, *O możliwości zbudowania etyki nihilistycznej. Propozycja Gianniego Vattimo*, Warsaw 2014, 189–196; Idem, *Nihilism and Ethics in the Philosophy of Weak Thought of Gianni Vattimo*, *Seminare. Poszukiwania Naukowe* 37(2016)4, 55–67.

words. Such a perception of morality does not mean consent to relativism, since it also assumes a weak version of normativity.

Vattimo's attitude to the Christian message and his profound redefinition of the religion's basic moral categories raises objections. It is also difficult to agree with the author's rejection of nature and natural law as sources of morality. Unfortunately, the Turin philosopher regards human nature primarily in metaphorical terms – as a form of concern for the protection of human dignity. One may have the impression that one of the main reasons for the negation of human nature and natural law consists in the defense of human freedom and self-fulfillment. Unfortunately, the creator of weak thought fails to note that nature and freedom are not contradictory concepts. In fact, human nature implies specific goals which human beings pursue in a conscious, rational and free manner.

It appears that the greatest deficiency of the weak version of normativity consists in its limited ability to impose certain behaviours on the moral subject. The German thinker Romano Guardini, while analyzing Immanuel Kant's ethical system, talked about the problem of the binding force (*die Verpflichtungskraft*) of truth, goodness, and value. Guardini believed that the greatest shortcoming of an autonomous vision of morality consists in the very limited binding force of orders and prohibitions defined by the categorical imperative. Similar concerns may be raised with regard to moral norms derived from cultural heritage.

On the one hand, the weak version of normativity protects man from extreme relativism and moral anarchy, while on the other, in an era of biotechnological revolution, this type of normativity is not enough to effectively defend the human species against various forms of manipulation and interference in the basis of our existential structure. Faced with the current challenges of civilization, only a return to the traditional understanding of human nature can effectively protect human dignity and our species' uniqueness among other living organisms. The adoption of a dynamic concept of human nature, and pointing to dialogue, agreement or cultural tradition as a source of moral norms creates a breeding ground for biotechnological manipulations and various attempts to change the essence of our humanity.

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