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Natural Anthropology and Revealed Anthropology

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Abstract: Let's define *revealed anthropology* as the conception of human beings at which we can arrive thanks to the information of the Christian revelation (the Bible, and whatever magisterial documents, if one recognizes such authorities). And let's define *natural anthropology* as the conception of human beings at which we can arrive by the natural light of reason alone, unaided by the revelation. It is tempting for Christian philosophers to concentrate only on revealed anthropology, considered as providing the *true* anthropology. In this paper, I argue that Christian philosophers should investigate more precisely *natural anthropology* and the relationship it has with *revealed anthropology*. I argue that discoveries in natural anthropology can affect our understanding of revealed anthropology itself.

Most Christian philosophers and theologians accept that the Christian revelation involves at least some amount of propositional content, that we get to know through revelation (e.g. knowledge that Jesus is God, that he rose from the dead, that there are exactly three divine persons, etc.). Some of the propositions that we know from revelation have wide-ranging implications for our most basic conception of reality and our place in it. For instance, it might be that some revealed truths about the creation entail that the universe as a whole has a temporal beginning and it might be that some revealed truths about the after-life entail that human beings are not just material bodies but compounds of material bodies and immaterial souls. But of course, revelation is not our only source of information regarding the most basic features of reality: natural reason, unaided by revelation also delivers a certain picture of reality. Some Christian theologians across history have considered natural reason as a completely unreliable source of information, so that revelation would be our only guide to real knowledge. But be that as it may, it is clear that natural reason provides a certain picture of reality (be it reliable or not), and therefore the question arises as to whether the picture of reality delivered by natural reason is congruent, compatible, or in conflict with the picture of reality delivered by revelation. In medieval times, one would have spoken of what is known by the *natural light of reason* vs. what is known by the *supernatural light of grace*.

Experience has shown that tracing the delimitation of these two territories is not always an easy task.

In this paper, I want to address this general question of the relationship between natural knowledge and revealed knowledge, from the standpoint of one particular domain of application, namely the ontology of human persons (i.e. anthropology). The general question will be: how should Christian philosophers and theologians pursue the enquiry about the nature and ontology of human persons? How should they view the relationship between natural anthropology and revealed anthropology and how should this affect their methodology? I will argue, first, that Christian philosophers and theologians should not pursue the anthropological enquiry without having a clear stance on what the natural light of reason tells us in this domain; second, that they should adopt a principle of compatibility between natural anthropology and revealed anthropology; and third, that due to this principle of compatibility, the results in natural anthropology can have effects on what we should take to be the content of revealed anthropology itself.

In the first section, I will make a few qualifications about what I mean by natural anthropology. In section 2, I will present two contemporary conceptions about the relationship between natural and revealed anthropology, which I will call the Jerusalem Monist Stance and the Optimistic Aristotelian Stance. In section 3, I will defend two principles of compatibility between natural and revealed anthropology. In section 4, I will show that these principles of compatibility prescribe some form of coherentist methodology in anthropology, where natural anthropology and revealed anthropology can influence each other in both directions. In section 5, I will briefly indicate what I take to be the most plausible equilibrium for a Christian anthropology today.

1. Stage setting: the notion of natural anthropology

I want to make two remarks in order to clarify what I mean by natural anthropology. First, it is important to notice that the natural light of reason (i.e. human reason unaided by revelation) comes in different levels of technicality or sophistication. At the first level, there is common sense: human beings who have given little or no reflective thought about the nature and structure of reality still have a certain picture of reality, and the part of this picture which is invariant from century to century and from culture to culture is usually called common sense and considered as the starting point of technical and reflective enquiries (philosophical or scientific). Let us call common sense anthropology the conception of human beings that is part of common sense. Another level of sophistication which is also part of natural reason is philosophical anthropology (i.e. the conception of human beings at which we can arrive solely with the use of philosophical reflection). Finally, there is scientific

anthropology (i.e. the conception of human beings that is indicated by the established results of science).

All sorts of relations are possible between these three anthropologies, and yet all three of them count as natural anthropologies, since they do not rely on the data of revelation. In order to determine the relationship between natural and revealed anthropology, we will have to be careful and distinguish these three versions of natural anthropology.

Second remark: an anthropology in the strict sense is a determined model of the nature of human beings. For instance, Platonic dualism is one anthropology (in which a human being is a pure immaterial soul, sometimes attached to a body), and materialism is another one (in which a human being is a purely material substance). Between these two opposite anthropologies, there are several intermediate anthropologies, which I have classified according to their response to the following questions:

- 1) Is the body important or secondary to me?
- 2) What am I (a body, a soul, or a compound of body and soul)?
- 3) Is the soul a substance?
- 4) Can I exist without a body?
- 5) Can the soul exist without a body?

The resulting chart is as follows (for more details about this classification of the different anthropologies, see my *Heaven Before Resurrection*¹):

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
1	Body is secondary	Body is important					
2	<i>I am a soul</i>		<i>I am a compound of soul and body</i>			<i>I am a body</i>	
3	The soul is a <i>substance</i>			The soul isn't a substance			
4	<i>I can survive disembodiment</i>				<i>I cannot survive disembodiment</i>		
5	The <i>soul</i> can survive disembodiment					The soul cannot survive disembodiment	

Chart 1: a panel of possible anthropological models

In this paper, I will use this panel of anthropologies as representative of the various options that are defensible.

¹ Jean-Baptiste Guillon, "Heaven Before Resurrection: Soul, Body, and the Intermediate State," in *Heaven and Philosophy*, ed. Simon Cushing (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 45-76.

Now, my second remark is that the common sense anthropology (for instance) need not correspond to *one* specific anthropology in this chart. It might be that common sense, for instance, dictates a response to *some* questions about human beings (perhaps a response to questions 1 and 4) but not to other questions. In which case, common sense anthropology would be compatible with more than one model. Or in other words, common sense anthropology might be represented, in our chart, by a *disjunction* of several models. The same is true of philosophical anthropology, of scientific anthropology... and for that matter of revealed anthropology as well: it might be that revelation doesn't tell us a complete story about the nature of human beings and leaves certain questions open. This has an important consequence concerning the question of compatibility of revealed and natural anthropology: if we enquire, for instance, about the compatibility between scientific anthropology and revealed anthropology, we do not need to find a complete congruence between the two disjunctive anthropologies; it is sufficient for compatibility that there be some overlap.

The following chart gives an example of a situation where revealed anthropology (RA) and scientific anthropology (SA) would be *compatible* without being fully *congruent*:

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
RA							
SA							

Chart 2: a case of compatibility between revealed and scientific anthropology

My purpose in this paper is to determine how this chart should be filled in. And I will start by presenting two ways of filling it in that have some popularity among contemporary philosophers of religion.

2. Two contemporary conceptions of the relationship between natural and revealed anthropology

I am going to present two popular conceptions of the relationship between natural and revealed anthropology: I will call these the Jerusalem Monist Stance and the Optimistic Aristotelian Stance. These two stances will be familiar to readers who know about the contemporary debates in Christian anthropology. What I want to draw attention to is not the details of the anthropological models they defend but rather the response they give to the question: how are natural and revealed anthropology related?

The Jerusalem Monist Stance is represented by philosophers or theologians who consider that the original anthropology of the Christian (and Hebrew) Scriptures was a monist anthropology, and that the elements of dualism present in the tradition (for instance in catholic ecumenical councils) are due to the influence of Greek philosophy, especially Plato's philosophy, on the thinking of some early Christian thinkers. So, the claim is that *true* revealed anthropology (the anthropology of the first Christians and of the Scripture) is a monist, at least in the sense that there is no such thing as a separable soul that could exist without the body. On the other hand, philosophical anthropology in the first centuries of the Church was mainly Platonist (or at least dualist). This resulted in a conflict between philosophical anthropology and revealed anthropology (and this conflict is what led to the corruption of true revealed anthropology into a dualist tradition of Christian anthropology).

But philosophical fashion changes across the centuries, and according to the Jerusalem Monist Stance contemporary philosophical arguments (perhaps together with scientific data) force us nowadays to adopt a monist – and even a materialist – conception of human beings. This change in philosophical fashion is of course most welcome, from the standpoint of Christian anthropology, because revealed anthropology and philosophical anthropology thereby become compatible (i.e. Christian philosophers do not need anymore to distort the *true* revealed anthropology in order to render it compatible with what philosophy teaches us). Jerusalem always was monist; Athens was once dualist, but has now become monist, in agreement with Jerusalem.

The following charts summarize the two steps of this scenario:

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
PA							
RA							

Chart 3: the Jerusalem Monist Stance, first step (antiquity)

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
PA							
RA							

Chart 4: the Jerusalem Monist Stance, second step (nowadays)

The Optimistic Aristotelian Stance, represented mainly by Thomist philosophers, for instance Eleonore Stump² or John Haldane³, considers that, among the variety of anthropologies defended by philosophers in ancient (and modern) times, hylomorphism was (and is still) the most reasonable and moderate view, *from a purely philosophical point of view*. In other words, according to this position, the *best* philosophical anthropology is (some form of) hylomorphism. What about revealed anthropology? According to this optimistic stance, it so happens that hylomorphism is *also* the view that fits best with the Christian anthropological constraints. Aquinas, according to this picture, represents the great Christian philosopher who showed the harmonious adequacy between reason and faith, Aristotle and the Church Fathers, Athens and Jerusalem. Aquinas, in the middle ages, was also confronted with a variety of philosophical anthropologies, ranging from materialism to dualism, and redefended the *philosophical* adequacy of Aristotelian hylomorphism. And, according to people like Haldane or Stump, contemporary Christian philosophers would be well advised to follow the same example and, confronted with the modern alternatives of physicalism and Cartesianism, should find a reasonable middle-ground in a renewed defence of

² Eleonore Stump, "Resurrection, Reassembly, and Reconstitution: Aquinas On The Soul," in *Die Menschliche Seele: Brauchen wir den Dualismus*, ed. Bruno Niederbacher and Edmund Runggaldier (Frankfurt; Ontos Verlag, 2006), 151-172.

³ John Haldane, *Reasonable Faith* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2010).

hylomorphism or neo-Aristotelianism. *This* is the way to restore an appropriate harmony between faith and natural reason.

In other words, according to the Optimistic Aristotelian Stance, the best philosophical anthropology (then and now) is exactly the same as the anthropology that best fits the data of Christian revelation. (Or perhaps should we say: is *compatible* with the anthropology that best fits the data of Christian revelation.⁴)

Let us summarize the relationship between philosophical anthropology and revealed anthropology (as it is described by the Optimistic Aristotelian Stance) in the following chart:

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
PA							
RA							

Chart 5: the Optimistic Aristotelian Stance. (For this stance, as opposed to the Jerusalem Monist Stance, there is no change over time about what philosophy teaches: the best philosophical anthropology is supposed to have always been hylomorphism – since at least the time of Aristotle, until the present day.)

In these pictures, I have not introduced common sense anthropology and scientific anthropology. This is mainly because there are different ways in which these stances can introduce them.

But *typically*, the Jerusalem Monist Stance will be combined with the view that science in contemporary times speaks in favour of a monist anthropology as well (sometimes, it will be defended that science is precisely what renders monism compulsory from a philosophical perspective; sometimes, contemporary science and contemporary philosophy will just be viewed as converging independently on monism). Regarding common sense anthropology, the Jerusalem Monist Stance can (but doesn't need to) acknowledge that common sense is in favour of some form of dualism: if this were true, it would only show that ancient philosophy was too close to common sense and that our (philosophical and) scientific progress towards truth (and *away* from common sense) brought a welcome confirmation of the (originally surprising) data of religious revelation.

⁴ This is because, as appears in the following chart, there is one form of hylomorphism that doesn't fit so well with Christian revelation as understood by Thomists, namely the form of hylomorphism in which the human (individual) soul does not survive annihilation of the body. This is what we called "Aristotelianism" in our chart, but of course, there is ample historical debate about whether Aristotle's doctrine was compatible or not with survivalism about the human (individual) soul.

Turning to the Optimistic Aristotelian Stance, it will be typically associated with the view that common sense is right in line with hylomorphism (or perhaps should we say that Aristotle's discovery of hylomorphism smoothly captured the anthropology of common sense), and with the view that science hasn't changed the deal (perhaps because science is in fact compatible with *all* philosophical anthropologies, or perhaps even because the scientific talk of *powers* is best interpreted in hylomorphic terms⁵).

In spite of their differences, there is one striking feature that these two stances have in common: they both agree on (and rejoice about) the fact that our best philosophical anthropology is *compatible* with (properly interpreted) revealed anthropology. This is in contrast with some fideistic stances that appeared across history, and according to which revealed anthropology can and does violate natural reason (common sense, philosophical reason and/or scientific reason) and should nonetheless be considered as the ultimate criterion of truth. In other words, the Jerusalem Monist Stance and the Optimistic Aristotelian Stance share a certain principle about the fundamental relationship between revealed and natural anthropology (a principle they do *not* share with fideism). I will call such principle bridge principles, and in the next section, I will put forward two such principles.

3. Two bridge principles

The two principles I will defend are *Compatibility with Science* and *Compatibility with Common Sense*. The first principle is as follows:

Compatibility with Science: Revealed anthropology is compatible with scientific anthropology.

When reading this principle, it is important to keep in mind that *compatibility* is not *congruence*. What the principle says is not that science and revelation dictate two precise models of anthropology that happen to be exactly the same model. What it says is only that the models of anthropology compatible with what revelation teaches must overlap with the models compatible with what science teaches.

The motivation for this principle is obvious and lies in the general principle that truth cannot contradict truth: on the one hand, what is taught by God in revelation can only be truths; on the other hand, what is discovered with firm certainty by science can only be truths (setting aside scenarios of systematic deception). Therefore, the truths taught by revelation about the nature of human beings cannot contradict those taught by science of the same subject (but of course it might be that they don't

⁵ William Jaworski, *Structure and the Metaphysics of Mind: How Hylomorphism Solves the Mind-Body Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

teach the same set of anthropological truths. That's why they only have to be compatible and not congruent).

Since every Christian or religious philosopher will consider revealed propositions as *true*, this principle (in this context of discussion) only amounts to a claim about the reliability of science (regarding the propositions that are established as scientifically proved beyond reasonable dispute⁶). But the claim is also a theological claim: it states that God is *not* playing a deception game with us; He is *not* putting in the world some pieces of systematically deceptive evidence (like false dinosaur fossils in the ground) in order to deceive (evil) scientists and put our faith to the test. That is not the kind of thing God would do, at least from a traditional Christian perspective. And for that reason, we should consider the data of science as a reliable source of known truths.

Here is the second principle:

Compatibility with Common Sense: Revealed anthropology is compatible with common sense anthropology.

There are two possible motivations for this principle. The first possible motivation is along the same lines as the motivation for *Compatibility with Science*. Common Sense philosophers consider common sense as a reliable source of known truths. But of course, if what common sense teaches are only truths, and if revelation also teaches truths, then common sense and revelation cannot teach contradictory views about anthropology (nor about anything else, for that matter). The *theological* ground for this first motivation might be as follows: arguably, it would be deceptive on God's part to have given the human kind a common sense that teaches falsehoods (i.e. God would have put in the very nature of human minds some initial convictions that are in fact false). And one might think that God wouldn't have done such a thing. I don't know of any plausible *non*-theological defence of the view that common sense beliefs are all true and un-revisable. And I don't have a firm conviction about the theological defence of (the infallibility of) common sense. Could we not imagine that some restricted kind of (initial) deception is compatible with God's benevolence if that deception is required (for instance) for our own salvation? Because of these doubts, I am more convinced by the second possible motivation for *Compatibility with Common Sense*.

The second motivation is as follows: if the piece of information contained in the Christian revelation were in contradiction with some dictates of common sense, then

⁶ This category of propositions is different from the category of "theories that can presently be regarded as the most promising speculative theories in their domain of enquiry." Notice that the same theory can move, across time, from one category to the other: for instance, there was arguably a time when the theory of evolution was the most promising speculative theory in its domain, and a later time when it became an established scientific fact beyond reasonable dispute.

the non-Christians when first hearing the Gospel, would be epistemically fully justified in rejecting the testimony of the Gospel, because it would contain some propositions that they are fully justified in considering as *non-possibly true*. In other words, the testimony of the Gospel would become *un-receivable information* and accepting the Gospel would become impossible (or possible only by *violating* the legitimate demands of epistemic justification). So, in order for the testimony of the Gospel to be receivable, it is necessary that the data of revelation be compatible (again: not necessarily *congruent*) with the data of common sense.

Let us give two charts as examples of application of these principles. In the first of these charts, both principles are violated. In the second, both are satisfied.

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
CA							
SA							
RA							

Chart 6: a case of violation of both principles

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
CA							
SA							
RA							

Chart 7: a case of satisfaction of both principles

Of course, in a case (like chart 7) where the three anthropologies overlap on some model(s), the most natural thing to do, as a Christian philosopher, would be to consider the intersection of these anthropologies as our best candidate for the true (detailed) anthropology.

But the next chart shows that it is in fact possible to satisfy both principles without having an overlap of all three anthropologies:

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
CA							
SA							
RA							

Chart 8: no overlap of CA and SA

In chart 8, both principles are satisfied because common sense anthropology overlaps with revealed anthropology, and scientific anthropology also overlaps with revealed anthropology... but common sense anthropology and scientific anthropology do *not* overlap with each other. What should we think of such a possibility? Should we add a third bridge principle in order to rule it out? A few remarks are in order here.

First, it is important to notice that if your motivation for accepting the principle of *Compatibility with Common Sense* has to do with the reliability of common sense as an indication of *truth* (first motivation considered above), then common sense anthropology and scientific anthropology will *have* to be compatible (since science is also a reliable indicator of truth and truths cannot be in contradiction with each other). But as I said earlier, my own motivation for *Compatibility with common sense* has more to do with the receivability of the testimony of the Gospel. And *this* motivation does not rule out the possibility that common sense teaches some falsehoods, as long as these falsehoods do not render revealed truths un-receivable.

Second, if we accept such a possibility, then we can describe it, chronologically, in the following way: *initially*, Christian thinkers were justified in believing that the truth about human beings lied somewhere at the intersection of common sense and revelation (say: in Compound Cartesian Dualism in chart 8), but then science proved common sense to be completely wrong about anthropology, and therefore Christian thinkers are now justified to believe that the truth about human beings lies somewhere at the intersection of common sense and revelation (say: in Corruptionist Thomism in chart 8). This implies that the *best theology* of time t1 is different from (and incompatible with) the *best theology* of time t2, even though both are of course compatible with revealed propositions properly speaking. Is that a problem? Not necessarily, but at least it would imply a certain principle of prudence for religious authorities (i.e. councils or other religious authorities should be careful not to declare as dogmas the *best theology* at their time, because this might change later on in history).

What should be declared as dogma is only the proper content of revelation (in chart 8, the disjunction of the three models in the centre). Once this principle of prudence is set in place, I don't see (presently) any strong reason to rule the possibility of revisionist models like chart 8 (i.e. models in which science forces us to revise common sense, but in a way which remains compatible with revelation).

4. Reciprocal influence between natural and revealed anthropology

If the bridge principles presented in the previous section are true, then it is not possible for a Christian philosopher to consider natural anthropology and revealed anthropology as two independent enquiries. These enquiries will influence each other, and I will argue in this section that the influence can go both ways. In other words, it will be possible (in some actual cases, or at least in principle) that our understanding of what *revelation* teaches get affected by our understanding of what *science* or *common sense* teaches; and conversely it will also be possible (in some actual cases, or at least in principle) that our understanding of what *science* or *common sense* teaches get affected by our understanding of what *revelation* teaches. This thesis of reciprocal influence can be contrasted with two theses of one-way influence. One such thesis states that our interpretation of religious dogma will always have to stoop to science (but not the other way around); the opposite thesis states that religious dogma is always so clear and certain that the results of science will always have to be interpreted (or re-interpreted) in such a way as to be compatible with religious dogma. My claim is that the influence between the interpretation of religious data and of scientific data can go both ways (and similarly with the interpretation of the data of common sense).

There are four main premises in defence of this claim. Here is the first one:

(Difficulty-R) The interpretation of religious texts and/or authoritative teachings (e.g. conciliar or magisterial) (i.e. the process by which we arrive at a conclusion of the form “revelation teaches that p ”) is a difficult task, the result of which is, in some occasions, affected of a certain degree D_R of uncertainty.

This first premise *doesn't* say that the content revelation can sometimes err. When we are sure, for some proposition p , that “revelation teaches that p ”, this will be conclusive and infallible evidence that “ p is true”. But the problem is that in some occasions – and in particular in anthropology – it is just not completely clear whether “revelation teaches that p ” or not. Does Christian revelation teach that the soul can exist without a body? This is a matter of dispute between Christian scholars, *even* for

Christian scholars who recognize exactly the same religious authorities.⁷ Another point that is worth mentioning here is that I do not claim that it is difficult for *all* propositions p to determine whether or not “revelation teaches that p ”. It is pretty easy (and beyond reasonable doubt) to establish that the Christian revelation teaches that “there is a God”, or that “human beings are creatures of God” (to take a claim in anthropology). I am only claiming here that *some* interpretations of “what revelation teaches” have a certain degree of uncertainty. Because the interpretation of “what revelation teaches” is not always certain, it can be sometimes revised in view of other considerations, and I will argue that scientific data or data from common sense are among the considerations that can bear on such a revision.

But what is true of the interpretation of revelation is also true of the interpretation of the data of science and of the data of common sense:

(Difficulty-S) The interpretation of scientific data (i.e. the process by which we arrive at a conclusion of the form “science teaches that p ”) is a difficult task, the result of which is, in some occasions, affected of a certain degree D_S of uncertainty.

(Difficulty-C) The interpretation of the data of common sense (i.e. the process by which we arrive at a conclusion of the form “common sense teaches that p ”) is a difficult task, the result of which is, in some occasions, affected of a certain degree D_C of uncertainty.

Again, I am not saying here that the teachings of science (or of common sense) are *always* uncertain: it is pretty certain that science now teaches that the earth isn’t flat, and that common sense teaches that there is an external world outside of my individual consciousness. I am only saying that *some* teachings of science (or common sense) require a certain level of (difficult) interpretation, and are thereby affected by a certain degree of uncertainty. It is pretty clear that contemporary neuroscience teaches that Descartes was wrong about the pineal gland being the proper place of human animation; but does contemporary neuroscience clearly rule out Cartesian dualism *per se*? That seems more debatable. There is conclusive empirical evidence that common

⁷ I mean that the issue is not just one of accepting or rejecting the Catholic magisterium : among Catholic scholars, both the monist and the dualist interpretations of the Catholic dogma are defended, and among protestants, both the monist and the dualist interpretations of the Bible are defended (See: John W Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989).

sense treats physical properties and mental properties differently⁸; but whether or not this implies that common sense teaches property dualism, or even substance dualism is a difficult and debated question (see the debate between Paul Bloom⁹ and Mitch Hodge¹⁰).

The fourth and last premise I need for my argument concerns the relative degrees of uncertainty of the interpretation of revelation, common sense and science.

(Relative Degrees) There is no general principle that precludes the degree of uncertainty D_R of some interpretation of religious teaching from being higher or from being lower than the degree of uncertainty D_S of some interpretation of scientific teaching or than the degree of uncertainty D_C of some interpretation of common sense teaching.

In other words, the degrees of uncertainties in the three domains of interpretation can fall in all possible orders: sometimes, some interpretation of religious teaching will be more certain than some other interpretation, but another time it may be the other way around.

These premises being in place, I reason as follows. From the premises of difficulty, I draw the following conclusion:

(Least Certain) When an interpreted religious teaching (with uncertain D_R) and an interpreted scientific teaching (with uncertainty D_S) are in contradiction with each other, the most reasonable thing to do is to revise our interpretation that has the strongest degree of uncertainty. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the interpreted teachings of common sense.

Now, if we accept this principle of revision of the least certain interpretation, and if we add the premise of (Relative Degrees), i.e. that the least certain interpretation can be sometimes the interpretation of the religious teaching and some other times the interpretation of the scientific teaching, it follows that:

⁸ Jesse M. Bering and David F. Bjorklund, "The Natural Emergence of Reasoning About the Afterlife as a Developmental Regularity," *Developmental Psychology* 40, no 2 (2004), 217. Also, Jesse Bering, "The Folk Psychology of Souls," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29, no 5 (2006), 453-462.

⁹ Paul Bloom, *Descartes' Baby, How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014).

¹⁰ K. Mitch Hodge, "Descartes' Mistake: How Afterlife Beliefs Challenge the Assumption that Humans are Intuitive Cartesian Substance Dualists," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8, no 3 (2008): 387-415.

(Reciprocal Influence) In cases where an interpreted religious teaching and an interpreted scientific teaching are in contradiction with each other, there may be cases where the most reasonable thing to do is to revise our interpretation of the religious teaching in view of what science seems to teach, *and also cases* in which the most reasonable thing to do is to revise our interpretation of the scientific teaching in view of what revelation seems to teach. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the interpreted teachings of common sense.

This thesis of (Reciprocal Influence) is the main conclusion I want to arrive at in this paper. I don't take it to be particularly controversial. But, when one explicitly reflects on that thesis, it does indicate a certain methodology for approaching anthropology. In particular, it follows from this thesis that a Christian philosopher (or theologian) should not engage in the enterprise of analysing revealed anthropology without having a clear knowledge of what natural anthropology teaches or seems to teach. And conversely, a Christian philosopher should not engage in enterprise of natural anthropology without having a clear knowledge of what revelation commits him/her to or seems to commit him/her to. Furthermore, a Christian philosopher (or theologian) should be prepared to *accommodate* his/her revealed anthropology or his/her natural anthropology, in cases of conflicting interpretations.

In the last section, I will give, as an example of this methodology, my own personal evaluation of where we now stand in terms of the relationship between natural and revealed anthropology.

But before that, I want to give a historical example of the principle of reciprocal influence, which concerns another domain of potential tension between science and revelation, namely cosmology.

The example I have in mind is the famous debate between Cardinal Bellarmine and Foscarini about Galileo's heliocentrism. I will concentrate here on Bellarmine's letter from April 12, 1612.¹¹ In this letter, Bellarmine makes three points:

1) Galileo's heliocentrism raises no problem as long as it is proposed only suppositionally and not absolutely (i.e. as a means to simplify mathematical calculus and not as a description of actual reality). There is potential conflict with revelation only when the heliocentrism is taken as a description of reality.

2) The conflict between (absolute) heliocentrism and revelation arises from a couple of Biblical texts *together with* the following principle of interpretation, namely that "the Council [of Trent] prohibits interpreting Scripture against the common

¹¹ Galileo Galilei, *The Essential Galileo* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 146-167.

consensus of the Holy Fathers”. And, Bellarmine tells us, there seems to be a clear consensus of the Holy Fathers in interpreting the Scripture as being geocentric.

3) Bellarmine’s third point is the most important for us, clearly displaying his methodology. Here is what he says:

Third, I say that if there were a true demonstration that the sun is at the center of the world and the earth in the third heaven, and that the sun does not circle the earth but the earth circles the sun, then one would have to proceed with great care in explaining the Scriptures that appear contrary, and say rather that we do not understand them than that what is demonstrated is false. But I will not believe that there is such a demonstration, until it is shown me. Nor is it the same to demonstrate that by assuming the sun to be at the center and the earth in heaven one can save the appearances, and to demonstrate that in truth the sun is at the center and the earth in heaven; for I believe the first demonstration may be available, but I have very great doubts about the second, and in case of doubt one must not abandon the Holy Scripture as interpreted by the Holy Fathers.¹²

In this response, we can see clearly two things about Bellarmine’s position:

i) clearly, Bellarmine thinks that science, as it stood at his time, did not provide any true demonstration of heliocentrism. And Christopher Graney has argued persuasively that this evaluation of the scientific data was quite defensible at his time, because heliocentrism was confronted with a strong anomaly (namely the apparent sizes of the stars) which Galileo was not able to account for, and convinced some prominent contemporary astronomers (including Tycho Brahe, but also Simon Marius or Georg Locher) to defend geocentrism.¹³ This first point shows that, according to Bellarmine, the interpretation of the scientific data in favour of heliocentrism was *at his time* subject to reasonable scientific doubt.

ii) But the second point is more important: it concerns what Bellarmine *would have said* if he had considered the scientific data to indicate heliocentrism beyond reasonable scientific doubt. The first part of the quote answers this question with no ambiguity: in that case (which Bellarmine doesn’t rule out as impossible, but only as

¹² Ibid., 147.

¹³ Christopher M. Graney, “Seeds of a Tyconic Revolution: Telescopic Observations of the Stars by Galileo Galilei and Simon Marius,” *Physics in Perspective* 12, no 1(2010): 4-24; Also, Christopher M. Graney, “The Inquisitions Semicolon: Punctuation, Translation, and Science in the 1616 Condemnation of The Copernican System,” *arXivpreprint arXiv:1402.6168* (2014).

something he has “very great doubts” about), Bellarmine says that “one would have to proceed with great care in explaining the Scriptures that appear contrary and say rather that we do not understand them than that what is demonstrated is false.” In other words, Bellarmine clearly states here that the interpretation of Scripture (with the hermeneutical criterion of the interpretation of the Holy Fathers) is something that is not so absolutely certain that it cannot be outweighed by greater countervailing evidence. The evidence of Scripture is judged by Bellarmine as stronger than the evidence of Galileo’s observations *in the present state of the observations*, but nothing in Bellarmine’s methodology rules out that things might be turned around. And arguably, this is exactly what happened historically: evidence in favour of heliocentrism became stronger and stronger with time (responses were found to the anomaly of the apparent sizes of the stars), and at one point the degree of possible doubt of heliocentrism became very small, and much smaller than the degree of possible doubt of the geocentric interpretation of the Scripture. At *that* point, heliocentrism became the most justified position to hold in cosmology for the Christian thinker. But *before* that point, geocentrism was still the most reasonable thing to believe for them.

In other words, Bellarmine gives a good example of the methodology I am arguing for in this paper: the interpretation of scientific data and the interpretation of revelation are both difficult processes, affected by a certain degree of uncertainty, and (in cases of conflict) they can influence each other in both directions according to which of them is the most uncertain at a given stage. Bellarmine also shows that the relative uncertainty of both processes can also evolve across time, as we make progress and get clearer in the interpretation of scientific data or in the interpretation of revelation.

5. A personal evaluation of the present state of anthropology

In this last section, I will give a sketch of how I personally apply this methodology to the particular question of anthropology.

Let us start with common sense anthropology. The investigation of common sense anthropology is a relatively recent enterprise, and as noted above, there is still a lively debate as to what this *folk theory of souls* is committed to. Nevertheless, in the present state of the debate, it seems fair to say that empirical data such as Jesse Bering’s dead mouse,¹⁴ strongly favour the view that, according to the common sense picture of human beings, the person (or the subject, or the “I”) can exist without a body. In our classification of anthropologies above, that would leave us with four possible options: Platonism, Pure Cartesian Dualism, Compound Cartesian Dualism, and Survivalist Thomism. Furthermore, though I don’t have any empirical data to

¹⁴ See: Bering and Bjorklund, “The Natural Emergence of Reasoning” and Bering, “The Folk Psychology of Souls.”

quote in support of these claims, it seems clear to me that the human body is important in a common sense anthropology (as opposed to the Platonist picture of the body as a tomb); and I am disinclined to think that common sense has the conceptual apparatus required to think of the soul as a subsistent form in the sense of Survivalist Thomism. For that reason, it seems to me that the two most plausible accounts of common sense anthropology as the versions of Cartesian Dualism (Pure or Compound). But I don't claim that this interpretation of the dictates of common sense is absolutely certain, and therefore, I will keep the other options as live option (marked in light grey in the following chart).

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
CA							

Chart 9: Common Sense anthropology (present state)

Let us turn now to revealed anthropology. The most certain element in Christian anthropology is the importance of the body, which is revealed by the importance of the resurrection of the flesh. In that sense, I think we can consider as certain that revealed anthropology is incompatible with Platonism (the teachings of the Church Fathers are pretty clear about that point)¹⁵. The second element of Christian anthropology is less certain: is it part of Christian revelation that the soul can exist in a disembodied state? The majority view among Christian theologians in the history of Christianity is that it can; but again, the majority view of past theologians about cosmology at the time of Bellarmine was geocentrism. So that cannot suffice to make a decisive point about revealed anthropology. That being said, Cooper has made a convincing case that Biblical teachings about the afterlife (in particular, the fact that the faithful will be immediately *with the Lord*, even though the general resurrection is presented as a future event) seem to commit one to the affirmation of an intermediate state of the (disembodied) soul between death and resurrection.¹⁶ Furthermore, for Catholics, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued in 1979 a pronouncement which seems to clearly commit the faithful to the existence of an

¹⁵ Harry Austryn Wolfson, "Immortality and Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers," in *Religious Philosophy: A Group of Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 69-103.

¹⁶ See: Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*. Also, John W. Cooper, "Biblical Anthropology and the Soul," in *Soul, Body, and Survival*, ed. Kevin J. Corcoran (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 218-228.

intermediate state.¹⁷ Nonetheless, there are biblical scholars who disagree with Cooper’s interpretation, and there are also some Catholic theologians who argue that the Catholic Magisterium does not commit one to the possibility of a disembodied soul. For that reason, I will not consider the anthropologies that rule the disembodied soul as *certainly* incompatible with revelation (I will mark them in light grey). In that sense, revealed anthropology is consonant with common sense anthropology in that it *favours* the possibility of disembodiment, without *clearly* ruling out anthropologies that are incompatible with disembodiment. I would make two qualifications to this convergence: first, it seems to me that revealed anthropology is less compatible with Pure Cartesian Dualism than is common sense anthropology. (The respect given to the body of the dead, and even the cult of the reliques in the history of the Church, seem to indicate that the body is really part of the person, and not just a physical stuff to which the person happens to be attached). Second, I don’t think anything in revelation rules out Survivalist Thomism (even though it is probably too complex to count as a common sense view).

The following chart summarizes where we stand for common sense anthropology and for revealed anthropology:

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
CA							
RA							

Chart 10: common sense anthropology and revealed anthropology (present state)

If common sense and revelation were our only sources of knowledge of human beings, then this chart gives a sense of what (I take to be) the most plausible anthropology (in the present state of the discussion): the anthropology that fits best with both common sense and revelation would be Compound Cartesian Dualism (though other options should remain prudently open, except for Platonism).

Finally, let us consider what science tells us about anthropology. Many philosophers would say that contemporary science has ruled out the possibility of a disembodied soul (or a disembodied person). Sometimes, this view is motivated by arguments that have nothing to do with the data of science, and everything to do with some particular philosophical views, which presently enjoy the status of philosophical fashion, but in no way can be presented as established scientific facts. I am quite

¹⁷ “The church affirms that a spiritual element survives and subsists after death, an element endowed with consciousness and will, so that the ‘human self’ subsists, [while lacking in the interim the complement of its body].” (Letter “Recentiores Episcoporum Synodi”, DS 4653).

sceptical that the consensus of philosophers (or rather: the *majority view* of philosophers) at some time of history has any strong epistemological impact on what should or shouldn't be believed in anthropology. So, I will restrict myself here to specifically scientific data pertaining to anthropology. One important argument which *does* have a scientific basis is the problem of physical closure: if the physical world is closed, many philosophers argue, then interactionist dualism is rule out by science. I will consider here that the problem of physical closure rules out any anthropology in which the soul is a sufficiently self-subsistent entity that it can exist without a body; in other words, if the problem of physical closure rules out dualism, it also rules out Thomistic forms of hylomorphism. But I will not consider that the problem of physical closure is so strong that it rules out these anthropologies *with certainty* (in fact, I'm not sure that scientific data rule out *any* of the proposed anthropologies with certainty).

The resulting chart is as follows:

	Platonism	Pure Cartesian Dualism	Compound Cartesian Dualism	Survivalist Thomism	Corruptionist Thomism	Aristotelianism	Materialism
CA							
RA							
SA							

Chart 11: natural and revealed anthropology (present state)

As we saw in the previous chart, the most plausible anthropology *before* taking into account the scientific problem of physical closure was probably Compound Cartesian Dualism. But once the physical data enter into play, we are confronted with a problem: the anthropologies that are *clearly* compatible with revelation do not overlap with those that are *clearly* compatible with science. This situation is similar with the tension encountered by Bellarmine about cosmology; and in such cases of tension, we have to revise our scientific anthropology *or* our revealed anthropology according to which one is the most uncertain (i.e. we have to adopt an anthropology marked in light grey, at least in one of the two last lines of the chart).

In the chart itself, I haven't indicated *how* uncertain the responses were. And degrees of uncertainty are obviously a difficult matter to establish. My personal take is that, in the present state of our knowledge, it seems *more certain* that revelation commits to the possibility of disembodiment than that science commits to the impossibility of interaction. For that reason, I am inclined to think that the most reasonable option to adopt, for a Christian philosopher, is either Compound Cartesian Dualism or Survivalist Thomism. And since the former fits better with common sense

anthropology (and no worse with science), I would think that, nowadays (and so far as science hasn't given a more decisive proof of monism), the most plausible anthropology is Compound Cartesian Dualism.

But this last section was not intended to offer a full-fledged defence of the kind of anthropology I consider as (presently) the most reasonable. It was rather intended as an example of the methodology I have been defending in this paper, namely the methodology of pursuing natural and revealed anthropology explicitly and simultaneously, in order to be able to clearly indicate which elements come from natural reason, and which come from revelation, and (if it so happens) how the two of them influence each other.

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