

## Leseprobe

Prof. Albert Bagood

The following pages of this volume which you will hopefully browse and read further is a product of a sincere search for a workable meaning and more importantly, for a less imperfect understanding of the term fragility. Of course, this paperwork that has resulted from a very engaging but lively discussion among the participants of a closed door February 2010 seminar in Tholey, Germany does not intend to give 'the' explanation or 'the' ultimate description of the fragile and fragility. Moreover, a philological clarification or a semantic response has served well our immediate sincere aim, but this is in view of a possible commitment from our part and hopefully and the part of the readers to see the fragile in a positive way, and not just a simple burden on one's shoulder. To see in the last statement is neither just a sensible nor an intellectual question but rather a moral one that invites sharing life with the fragile.

I believe that it is providential that the February Seminar, which focused on the issue of human fragility, was held in the Benedictine Abbey of Tholey. Caring for the fragile is not unfamiliar to the Benedictine monks. In the Rule of St. Benedict where Mt 25, 36f is also cited (I was sick and you came to visit me...), the care of the sick in the community is considered as an absolute priority (RB 36). A similar concern is given to the care of the elderly (RB 37). We hope that with the blessing and the intercession of St. Benedict the following pages of this book may encourage more people to foster care for the more fragile in our world today.

The first three articles are the polished versions of the texts presented in three different sessions by their respective authors. They served as the point of departure for the long but fruitful discussions that followed each presentation of the seminar papers. The first paper entitled "The biological and anthropological meaning of biological plasticity" and presented by Prof. Dominique Lambert speaks of fragility as a constituent element of biological processes and evolution. This fragility, however, is not an isolated quality but rather incorporated in the so-called 'plasticity' of a biological organism. Fragility in itself is not positive, but when viewed in the dynamism of plasticity, it becomes a necessary gateway to development and evolution. This dynamism also includes the aspect of robustness that coherently interacts with the organism's fragility. The manner in which the dynamism of plasticity is promoted by the environment determines the quality life-span of the human person. Very essential to this quality life span is the social network that arises from the

awareness that each one of us is fragile and thus dependent on others. We can then speak of quality life despite of our fragile nature when our fragility and that of others bring about more caring individuals.

"Life is fragile. Illness and dying are parts of life" was the second source for reflection presented by Dr. Dietrich Wördehoff. He focused on the importance of palliative medicine which deals more with the symptoms of incurable patients, and giving them a quality of life despite of their limitations. Palliative medical care, Dr. Wördehoff explains, reaches out for the sick person (and not just the sick organ), considering the patient's psychological problems and spiritual needs. When palliative care is effective, then the death-talk becomes less taboo and, as Dr. Wördehoff points out, people can learn to live their lives intensely, giving more importance to "quality-life".

Prof. Luke Buckles' "Sacraments and Human Fragility" provided the third source for the seminar's reflection and discussion. Prof. Buckles spoke about the infinite distinction between the fragile human being and his Creator quoting St. Catherine of Siena, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. This infinite distinction did not stop Christ to give a new dignity to human fragility by assuming it in his divine person. This act is prolonged in the reality of the sacraments which, as Prof. Buckles has noted, can be considered theologically as the Lord condescending to our fragility and human way of knowledge through the senses. Moreover, Jesus Christ, our divine physician, continues to heal us and embrace our frail humanity through the sacraments.

A short summary of the discussions that followed the presentation of three lectures or conferences is written by Matthias Naumann. The first task was to search for a definition of fragility. Obviously, in this search, it cannot be overemphasized that there is a difference between talking about the fragility of physical non-living things and the human fragility of a bed-ridden hospital patient. While looking for a definition, the discussion was extended to more philosophical and bioethical questions like the concept of finality and the problem of euthanasia. The link between original sin and human fragility was also considered very briefly.

Prof. Laura Rizzerio's "Fragility as Structural Dimension of Becoming: A Dialogue between Miguel Benasayag and a Contemporary Reading of St. Thomas Aquinas' Ontology" offers an elaboration of the metaphysical basis of human fragility considered as an essential aspect of a human being. Prof. Rizzerio took Benasayag's human structural fragility as a point of departure. While she considered Benasayag's insistence on a network of human relationships as essential to man's self-realization,

Prof. Rizzerio firmly opposes the 'dissolved human identity' that results from such network. She appeals to St. Thomas' ontology to explain that it is necessary for all being to enter into relationship with one's "environment" in order to subsist, but not necessarily renouncing one's proper identity. In particular, it is in the 'Operation' that a constant oscillation between identity and difference takes place.

Dr. Bernard Ars writes about the possible positive understanding and role of fragility. In his paper "Medical Practice and Human Fragility" he remarks on the negative understanding of fragility in medicine, i.e., a term associated with the handicapped and the suffering, or those who deviate from what the society in general labels as 'normal'. In the midst of the negative meaning of 'fragility', Dr. Ars sees a possible opening towards its positive significance, saying that "this opening is initiated by certain early experiences where, in the midst of the fragility of the, handicapped, and of suffering, one liberates the force of love which values the human person and/or contributes to the evolution of the human society." Furthermore, Dr. Ars underlines the fact that the handicapped can also be a source of life and inspiration for others.

In his paper entitled "Soular Eclipse? Dementia and mental disease according to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas" Prof. Niko Strobach traces the fragility (i.e., soular eclipse - reduced efficiency of the soul) of Aristotle's *Nous* & Thomas' *Intellectus* not in themselves as in terms of their proper 'capacity' but rather in their being "associated" with a poorly conditioned organ. The extent of this association is discussed. Prof. Strobach acutely notes however, a major difference between the two thinkers, that is, whereas the question of resurrection is an issue for Thomas, this is not the case in Aristotle. The author writes: " In that respect probably differing from Aristotle, Aquinas has hope that after a state in which all those activities do not take place at all they shall take place again once a new body is provided which is promised to be in an extremely good and incorruptible state. So his hope is for the end of all fragility together with the fullest exercise of all capacities which are still of any importance then. What is fragile is just our present body."

David Doat critically comments on the connection between madness and reason as presented by Leibniz, Foucault and Stiker. His paper "Madness: Revealing a Vulnerable Reason" aims at leading the attention of the readers to a possible opening towards the transrational and inter-relational dimensions of madness. In doing so, he believes that we can get away from the exclusive consideration of madness in the context of pathology. Doat hints on the usefulness of Georges Canguilhem's biological philosophy to a more dynamic philosophy of nature that may

put madness not in radical Opposition to reason but possibly a source of dynamism.

Prof. Stipan Juric's "Fragile and Vulnerable in the Synoptics" writes that although Jesus refused to draw any equivalence between illness and sin, the Synoptics consider fragility and weakness as consequences of original sin. Jesus' ideas about the nature of man are essentially those of the Old Testament. However, his attitude towards the sick and the fragile is an enormous advance in comparison to the previous traditional consensus. The Old Testament's disregard and contempt for the fragile is in contrast with Jesus' identification of his ministry with the fragile in body and soul. His healing miracles for example, were spontaneous expressions of his compassion for the fragile and at the same time a sign of the dawning of God's Kingdom against the dark realm of Satan.

In the last article, "The Complexity of Fragile Human Nature", Prof. Albert Bagood notes that when we speak of fragility, we do not uniformly apply this term to everything. Moreover, Prof. Bagood traces the metaphysical origin of a creature's fragility from its being a composed structure with an easy tendency towards decomposition. Then the author passes to an ethical anthropology of fragility, that is, the issue of accompanying the fragile. Understandably, the model survival of the fittest is not helpful in explaining this point. Prof. Bagood shows that even some lower animals do not follow always this model. Finally, the author remarks that when a fragile sick person is considered in the context of time-faith and is attended by a compassionate medical team, this same fragile human person becomes a converging point of God's mysterious presence, of Divine Love. And this is what gives us the force to continue "breathing".

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