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THE THREAD AND THE BEADS

FRANCIS P. LEBUFFE, S. J.

Editorial Staff *America and Thought*

THESE IS an increasingly manifested desire on the part of many thinkers, both Catholic and non-Catholics, to have an answer to the question: "What has traditional Scholastic Philosophy to offer to the modern mind?" Unfortunately, there has been engendered in the minds of many a sense of aloofness from reality, of an idealistic a-prioricity inherent in the philosophy of the Schoolmen which quite blunts its effectiveness. We ourselves are often puzzled to know just how much we can contribute to the solution of present-day problems.

We scholastic thinkers and the non-scholastic thinkers, above all the men and women "in the field," both see the problems, but our viewpoints are quite different, our approaches quite diametrically opposite. We are largely deductivists: they inductivists. We enter the house of learning, if you will, by the front door; they, by the back door. Surely, since it is a house and not a labyrinthine maze, we ought to be able to meet at some definite place.

We can. Where? Well let us see our differing methods of approach. As deductivists we are rather inclined by training to analyze, e. g., human nature as such—*das Ding an sich*. We take it comprehensively, it is true, but stripped of all that makes a Frenchman French, a German German, an Irishman Irish and an American American. *Demptis particularibus* is the motto that sets our intellectual scalpels and even microtomes to work, and cut and pare down we

do until "human nature," sheer, stark and unchanging, stands before us. Then we turn it this way and that, and we use our mental stethoscope and sphygmometer to catch its inner reverberations and the pressure of its essential blood-stream, so that we may find an answer to the question: What is this thing "human nature?" What must it have to be nourished and nurtured unto the fulness of its stature, which is ultimately *moral* stature? What must be its societal environment—conjugal, domestic, political—in order that it may be rounded out into a complete and creditable whole? What societal conditions, *of their nature*, will stunt its growth and bring on moral dwarfism? What others, *of their nature*, will unduly develop it and bring on acromegaly and all the horrid phenomena of animal gigantism precisely there where intellectual and volitional harmony should reign?

These are the questions answered in our entire philosophy, and answered, therefore, from reason alone. Being such, they can be advanced before any body of men. Revelation has no least proof-value in philosophy. It is to philosophy what the red light on the side of the track is to the engineer. The red light does not add one bit of moving power to the engine, but it does tell the engineer whether the switch be open, whether the siding be clear, or whether further advance would mean collision.