

## REASON AND LIGHT OF REASON IN ROSMINI'S PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY WITH REGARD TO WOLFF AND KANT

*Emanuel Lanzini Stobbe*

Universidade Estadual de Londrina, Brasil

[orcid.org/0009-0006-2627-8475](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2627-8475)

**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to present Antonio Rosmini's notions of reason and light of reason regarding their role in the author's principle of morality as well as influences and contrasts to two specific approaches, namely, Christian Wolff's and Immanuel Kant's. That is, although Rosmini was quite inspired by Kant in several points, his notions also retain key elements of conceptions that predate Kant. The first part of this paper shall present Rosmini's principle of morality – the commandment to recognise and follow the “light of reason”, which he takes to be “being” in its ideal form, leading directly to the commandment of loving all beings in their proper order, the measure by which all being is. The second part will discuss two kinds of influences, directly or indirectly, to the Rosminian conception: at first Christian Wolff's and, afterwards, Immanuel Kant's formulations of the principle of morality.

**KEYWORDS:** Antonio Rosmini. Christian Wolff. Immanuel Kant. Light of Reason. Reason.

## RAZÃO E LUZ DA RAZÃO NO PRINCÍPIO DA MORALIDADE DE ROSMINI EM RELAÇÃO A WOLFF E KANT

**RESUMO:** Este artigo busca apresentar as noções de razão e luz da razão em Antonio Rosmini, considerando seu papel no princípio da moralidade do autor, bem como influências e contrastes quanto a duas abordagens específicas, a saber, de Christian Wolff e Immanuel Kant. Isto é, embora Rosmini tenha sido inspirado por Kant em diversos pontos, suas noções também retêm elementos-chave de concepções que precedem Kant. A primeira parte do artigo apresentará o princípio de moralidade de Rosmini – o mandamento de reconhecer e seguir a “luz da razão”, a qual ele considera ser o “ser” em sua forma ideal, levando diretamente ao mandamento de amar todo o ser em sua própria ordem, a medida pela qual todo ser é. A segunda parte discutirá dois tipos de influência, direta ou indiretamente, da concepção rosminiana: em um primeiro momento, a formulação do primeiro de moralidade de Christian Wolff e, posteriormente, aquela de Immanuel Kant.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Antonio Rosmini. Christian Wolff. Immanuel Kant. Luz da Razão. Razão.

## INTRODUCTION

Antonio Rosmini has sometimes been called the “Italian Kant”.<sup>1</sup> Although his vast philosophical work remains quite unknown to traditional historiography of Philosophy nowadays – Kantians included – his system of philosophy had significant impact in the various Italian<sup>2</sup> states pre-unification. In fact, he is sometimes referred to as the great Italian-speaker philosopher of the XIX century and, particularly, as the responsible for the first attempt of a systematisation of philosophy in Italian language. Born in 1797 at Rovereto (in the historical region of Tyrol, nowadays *Provincia Autonoma di Trento*), Rosmini was only technically speaking direct contemporary of Kant, who died in 1804 in the distant town of Königsberg. The similarities between Rosmini's and Kant's philosophy are not only pointed out by their contemporaries – Rosmini himself attests the Königsberger's influence on his system of philosophy.<sup>3</sup> We will address some of these influences in this paper. For instance, Rosmini's own departing point in his system of philosophy: unlike traditional *Summae* of Theology, which treats Theology and Ontology before considering the human being, Rosmini, similarly to Kant, departs from the *human perspective* itself<sup>4</sup> – at first in its investigation concerning the origin of ideas and, from there, the origin and application of the moral law.

However, our goal in this paper is not only to present Rosmini's principle of morality regarding the notions of reason and light of reason, or to comment upon Kant's influence on Rosmini as such – it is also to show that Rosmini parts from Kant in crucial aspects and, to some extent, seems to advocate for notions and arguments that look somewhat more similar to traditional Metaphysics, both in more general and more specific issues. For that matter, we shall consider his reading of Christian Wolff, predecessor of Kant's, who indeed represents some sort of bridge between late German Scholastics and Modern Philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

This paper is divided in two main parts. In the *first section*, we will present the core of Rosmini's account of the principle of morality (which he takes to be the recognition of being

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<sup>1</sup> According to Sciacca (1999, p. 55), such is, for instance, Giovanni Gentile's interpretation in his book *Rosmini e Gioberti* (1898).

<sup>2</sup> Here, we consider “Italian states” in the sense of the former political structures that correspond to some degree to the divisions between provinces and states within the contemporary Republic of Italy. Indeed, Rosmini himself was born in Rovereto, which was in his time a town in the historical region of Tyrol [*Tirol* or *Tirolo*], also called South Tyrol then, within the Austrian regions of the Holy Roman Empire – remaining part of the Austrian Empire itself after the Napoleonic wars. However, he lived for a significant amount of time in Piemonte, another region that nowadays is a province in Italy.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning Rosmini's interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy, see his chapter in the *Storia comparativa* (Rosmini, 1990b, pp. 240-271) and in the “Storia dell'Etica” (Rosmini, 1998, pp. 218-219).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Wolff is indeed a paradigmatic figure between both periods and is difficult to be categorised altogether. On this point, see, for instance: École, 2001; Hinske, 1983; Leduc, 2018.

as such, and the loving of such being in the order it presents itself to our reason by means of what he calls the “light of reason”). Here, we will examine the different meanings he considers for “reason” (reason itself, light of reason, moral reason, eudaimonological reason, practical reason), as well as its distinction from the intellect (the intellect knows being, while reason applies being in judging). Since, for Rosmini, not only we must *know* being, but also to *will* it, the concepts of “good” (subjective, objective, and moral) and “will” (the agent’s power to act) will come in hand as well for a fuller account of his argumentation.

After carefully considering Rosmini’s account, in the *second section*, we will regard it in a twofold perspective. Firstly, concerning Christian Wolff’s conception of “reason” [*Grund and Vernunft*] and its role in the principle of morality. Here, we will compare Rosmini’s light of reason to Wolff’s insight into the interconnection of reasons, which are distinctive features of both accounts, particularly within the tradition in which they are inserted, namely, that of the “natural light of reason”. Secondly, we will consider similarities and differences between Rosmini’s and Kant’s use of reason in the formulation and foundation of the principle of morality. Although Rosmini and Kant share a common departing point (that is, human being, rather than being itself) – so that there are similarities between Kant’s intuitions and categories.

On the one hand, Rosmini’s “light of reason” and “ideal being”, on the other hand – Rosmini attempts to offer distinctions that, on his account, would not be present in Kant’s principle of morality. For instance, in Rosmini’s terms, Kant’s moral and practical reason would not have been sufficiently distinguished from one another, as well as the moral law from its respective subject. All these remarks will contribute to a better understanding of Rosmini’s account of the role of reason – and light of reason – in the principle of morality, which, on its turn, denotes a heritage of Kantian philosophy largely unknown in contemporary debates that could provide interesting insights on matters such as the possibility of metaphysical thought dialoguing with Kant, but from, perhaps, a different kind of Kant’s own.

## **1 – ROSMINI’S PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY AND THE ROLE OF REASON AND LIGHT OF REASON<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> In this section, we choose to present Rosmini’s main notions and arguments recurring to a larger extent to primary literature. We justify such approach mainly by the fact that Rosmini’s philosophy is vastly ignored in philosophical scholarship nowadays – so that such a direct approach at the reconstruction of his arguments would also provide inside of the author’s argumentation by himself. When available, we use the English translations from Rosmini House Durham. For this paper, we depart mainly from Fr. Terence Watson’s and Fr. Denis Cleary’s translation of Rosmini’s *Principi della Scienza Morale*, published as *Principles of Ethics* (Rosmini, 1989a); and their edition

Rosmini's main work concerning the principle of morality is his *Principi della Scienza Morale* ("Principles of Moral Science", which was translated as "Principles of Ethics" in English). It is divided in seven chapters that we will indicate here the respective titles: the first chapter presents the "first moral law"; the second "the idea of being as the supreme rule for judging about good in general"; the third "the idea of being as the principle of eudaimonology"; the fourth "the idea of being as the principle of ethics"; the fifth "the will as the cause of moral good and evil"; the sixth "the powers involved in moral acts"; and the seventh "the two elements of moral acts", namely, law and will. To consider the role of *reason* – and what he will call *light of reason* – we shall consider the first, second, fourth, and sixth chapters in closer perspective. However, before we arrive at the discussion of the principle of morality as such – which Rosmini takes the "idea of universal being" to be – we need first to consider in what such idea of being indeed consists of. It is, in fact, the main point of his pivotal *Nuovo Saggio sull'origine delle idee* (translated in English as "A New Essay on the Origin of Ideas"). Thus, in this section, we shall consider Rosmini's epistemological approach first, to proceed to the presentation and discussion of his account of morality.

### 1.1 – The idea of universal being

In his *Nuovo Saggio*, Rosmini aims to,<sup>7</sup> first and foremost, answer the following question: what is the origin of human thought, of human ideas, of human knowledge?<sup>8</sup> Such question is risen from his evaluation of the philosophical context in which he is inserted. Namely, according to Rosmini, philosophy had become overwhelmed with subjectivism – which had somewhat subjected objective truth to the subjective perspective. For Rosmini, it was the case with English empiricism, French sensism and, finally, German idealism. To avoid the perils of subjectivism, Rosmini deems vital to demonstrate the existence of a first truth, *objective* truth, which he proceeds to investigate with regard to the problem of *conscience* – since this is the main topic of departure for his philosophical counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

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and translation of a part of Rosmini's *Nuovo Saggio* published as *The Origin of Thought* (Rosmini, 1989b). Concerning secondary literature, we choose to focus on two central studies on Rosmini: Umberto Muratore's excellent introduction to Rosmini, called *Conoscere Rosmini. Vita, pensiero, spiritualità* (1999) and Michele Federico Sciacca's *La Filosofia Morale di Antonio Rosmini* (1938, of which we will refer to the 1999 edition).

<sup>7</sup> Concerning this whole departing point, see: Muratore, 1999, pp. 50-52.

<sup>8</sup> He says: "The fact I wish to explain is the existence of human thought or ideas" (Rosmini, 1989a, p. 4).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 51.

Rosmini takes *thinking* as the equivalent of *judging*<sup>10</sup> – a philosophical approach that resembles Kant's own perspective, well known by secondary literature.<sup>11</sup> According to Rosmini, judgments are formed by *ideas*, which are *notions* of the mind: they are the “formal part of every kind of knowledge”.<sup>12</sup> To arrive at a *universal, objective* truth, he must search for the source of all our ideas. In other words, *the* idea that grounds all other ideas. This is the most central aspect of Rosminian philosophy: such first idea is the *idea of universal being* – which he will also call the *ideal being* and, more metaphorically, the *light of reason*. As he synthesises: “*Being*, the light illuminating the spirit and, indeed, making it intelligent, is absolutely unchangeable, eternal and necessary; it is the truth itself”.<sup>13</sup> In his *Nuovo Saggio*, he develops a whole argument which culminates in conceiving that such idea, the idea of being, cannot come from our senses, nor from the feeling of our own existence, nor from abstraction, nor from pre-established harmony, nor from the Kantian categories.<sup>14</sup> His conclusion is, therefore, that the only remaining alternative is that it is an *innate* idea – and in fact *the* innate – that we have as the source of all other ideas.

The core of Rosmini's argument in his pivotal *Nuovo Saggio* may be summarised, in further detail, the following way. He departs from a two-fold principle of method in philosophy: we shall not consider neither less, nor more features than necessary “when explaining facts about the human spirit”.<sup>15</sup> Otherwise, philosophical attempts incur in error. Indeed, it is interesting to point out that he takes such departing principles as “the principle of sufficient reason divided into its parts”<sup>16</sup> – which, although not by itself necessarily a Leibnizian or Wolffian heritage,<sup>17</sup> could give cause for a further investigation.

As said, Rosmini's project, in the *Nuovo Saggio*, may be synthesized as an attempt to explain the origin of ideas – the origin of thought. Indeed, according to him, we need universal notions (or ideas) to form *judgements*, which connect subjects and predicates (different from one another). For Rosmini, some universal idea must pre-exist all judgments in human beings,

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sciacca, 1999, p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> Leibniz and Wolff are often associated with the principle of sufficient reason, due to its central role in both. We will address Wolff's application of such principle in the next section.

because, otherwise, there would be circularity.<sup>18</sup> He considers such universal idea to be the *ideal of universal being*, and indeed states that: “It is a fact that we think of being in general”<sup>19</sup> – which means “thinking of the quality common to all things while ignoring all other qualities, generic, specific or proper”.<sup>20</sup> Thus, for Rosmini, the idea of universal being is the sole idea behind all other ideas, departing from which we have a graduation<sup>21</sup> of the formation of all other ideas. *How*, exactly, such graduation takes place can only be fully considered by examining the nature and character of such idea.

In a nutshell: the idea of being is the idea through which we can obtain any ideas whatsoever. It is only by means of such first idea that knowledge is possible, and it is possible because the idea of being presents only *possibility*. Rosmini arrives at six features concerning the nature,<sup>22</sup> and seven concerning the characteristics<sup>23</sup> of such idea. Its characteristics are: its objectivity, its possibility or ideality, its simplicity, its unity or identity, its universality and necessity, its immutability and eternity, and its indetermination. All these features are understood from the fact that the idea of being is given to us by being itself.

Considering the *origin*<sup>24</sup> of the idea of being, he states, by process of elimination, that: “The idea of being is innate”.<sup>25</sup> His conclusion comes from these premises: (1) “the idea is so necessary and essential to the formation of all our ideas that the faculty of thought is not possible without it”;<sup>26</sup> (2) “it is not found in sensations [...], not extracted by reflection from internal or external sensations”;<sup>27</sup> (3) “it is not created by God at the moment of perception”;<sup>28</sup> and (4) “its emanation from ourselves is an absurdity”.<sup>29</sup> Then, he concludes: “the only possibility left is that the idea of being is innate in our soul; we are born with the vision of possible being, but we advert to it only much later”.<sup>30</sup> According to Rosmini, it is necessarily the case that the idea of universal being is *innate*, because all other possibilities have been exhausted.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989b, p. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Idem, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Idem, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> See: Rosmini, 1989b, p. 9-14.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, pp. 15-25. On this point, see Sciacca's detailed interpretation: Sciacca, 1954, pp. 87-91.

<sup>24</sup> Concerning the nature and origin of the idea of being, see: Sciacca, 1954, pp. 104-119.

<sup>25</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem.



Once proven that the idea of universal being is innate and indeed present in us, Rosmini proceeds as to seek the origin of all other ideas.<sup>32</sup> As he himself puts it, he must prove that all ideas indeed follow from the idea of universal being. To do so, he aims to analyse the elements that constitute human ideas.<sup>33</sup> He distinguishes two parts of human knowledge:<sup>34</sup> form and matter. The form of knowledge is its *a priori* part; the matter of knowledge is its *a posteriori* one. While the former denotes *possible existence*, the latter regards *determination*. Accordingly, Rosmini states that a “twofold cause” is required in order to explain form and matter as elements of all acquired ideas: this twofold cause is constituted, respectively, by the *idea of being*, as well as by *sensation*.<sup>35</sup> In other words, all knowledge we can have consists of a formal and a material part; the formal part indicates the possibility of existence of everything we may come to know, while the material part concerns determination itself,<sup>36</sup> that is, that a thing is not only possible, but real.

The distinction between the formal and the material parts of human knowledge will lead us directly to Rosmini's distinction between *ideal being* and *real being*. These are the “two forms of being”,<sup>37</sup> to use his precise terminology. The *ideal being* is the “foundation of the possibility of things”,<sup>38</sup> which correspond to the formal element of all human knowledge we just considered. It is totally distinct from real being: an “authentic, sublime entity”, and a “pure fact”.<sup>39</sup> It is the idea that proceeds all judgment,<sup>40</sup> and the very source of all ideas. On the other hand, *real being* is the “subsistent” thing (are the subsistent things) – for which not only the formal part of knowledge is provided, but the material part as well (as we saw, by the senses). Indeed, between ideal being and real being there is yet a third form of being – *moral being* – which we will consider in the sequence of the argument.

The central point for us to consider, on such matter, is the *relation* between such *ideal being* and the *light of reason*, which will see as the principle of morality stated by Rosmini. The ideal of universal being is present in human soul – it is, in fact, innate to human beings. It is the opening by which human beings are connected to being itself. How then can human beings *see*

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<sup>32</sup> Regarding the origin of all ideas departing from the idea of being, see also: Sciacca, 1954, pp. 119-149.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989b, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> *Idem*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> Rosmini takes sense to be the “source of the determinations of being” (1989b, p. 43).

<sup>37</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 81.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989b, p. 79.

being? Can human beings *access* being? And what does it mean for human knowledge? As Rosmini crucially states, the experience of the ideal being is the “Light of our spirit”.<sup>41</sup> Being itself illuminates the human soul, thus enabling human beings to *see* being in its ideal form – comprising all possibility, without any determination. Such form is indeterminate and common to all knowledge we have of being. It precedes all knowledge and all ideas, because it is the *source* of all ideas. And the exact point where human soul is illuminated is the innate idea of universal being.

So, rather than saying that human beings simply access being itself, it is being that is given to the human soul. It is only possible because human beings possess, as Rosmini frames it, “an intellectual sense”.<sup>42</sup> The precise term, therefore, is that being is *intuited* by our spirit, and with no mediation. Our intelligence is, therefore, also a kind of “sense” – an intellectual sense –, in that it *intuits* being. And it can only intuit being, because being itself illuminates such intellectual sense.

Being itself illuminates our intellect and reason. Rosmini defines both thus:

We have defined *intellect* as the faculty of seeing indetermined being, and *reason* as the faculty of reasoning and hence primarily of applying being to sensations. Reason sees being determined to a *mode* offered by the sensations, and unites *form* and *matter* of knowledge. But if *being* is the essential object of both intellect and reason, these two faculties (intellect and reason) can exist in us only through our permanent vision of being.<sup>43</sup>

Intellect and reason are *faculties* that concern being: the difference between both is that the intellect *sees* being, while reason *applies* being. By Rosmini's conclusion of the exposition, the intellect sees being by means of the *idea of being*, that is, *being in its ideal form* (ideal being) – and does so only insofar as being is itself given, provided to our spirit by means of the *light of reason* (*light of the soul*). Reason, on the other hand, is not the faculty that *sees*, but the faculty that *applies* being – which, indeed, must be understood as the faculty that *judges*, performs judgment. Such judgment, product of reason, is the unification of the formal and the material parts of our knowledge, that is, between the formal idea of universal being (given by the light of being) and the material determinations of specific beings (provided by our senses).

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<sup>41</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> Idem, p. 80.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, p. 45.



Judgment, therefore, is only possible in the union of both elements, by means of the activity of reason, that *applies* the idea of being and arrives at real being.

Correspondingly, Rosmini continues by stating that:

*Being* as object, therefore, draws our spirit to that essential act we call *intellect*, making it capable of beholding being itself in relationship to the particular modes provided by sensations. We call this capacity, *reason*. In a word, the idea of being joined to our spirit is that which forms our *intellect* and our *reason*; it makes us intelligent being, and rational animals.<sup>44</sup>

The idea of being is, therefore, the *source* of *intellect* and *reason*, without it, human beings would be neither intelligent, not rational beings. This is the feature by which Rosmini will be able to develop his own account of human dignity.

In sum: human beings possess an innate idea that is the source of all ideas. It is the idea of universal being. Being itself illuminates such idea in us and provides, therefore, access to itself. Our intellect sees being, but it is our reason that applies the idea of being to the data apprehended by our senses. Such application takes the form of judgment and connects the formal part of all our knowledge (the idea of being) to its material part (sensations, provided by sensibility). The light by which being illuminates our spirit is called “light of reason”: not only it illuminates us and enables our intellect to see being – it also gives our reason the possibility to apply such first idea to the formation of all our ideas and judgments – thus making human knowledge possible.

However, we must highlight the essential difference between *light of reason*, which is the light by which being illuminates our intellect and reason, and *reason*, as faculty of applying the idea of being in judgments and of producing knowledge. In such regard, an interesting passage may be found in his argument in the *Principi della Scienza Morale*:

If reason, which is the power using the light [of reason], is confused with the light, it falsely takes on the excellence and infallibility of the light. Reason becomes proud and self-reliant; the human being becomes both legislator and God in the moral universe. On the other hand, to note the fallibility of reason but ignore its divine element (the idea of being) is to debase human beings by denying them a true moral state.<sup>45</sup>

We shall see in the next section whether Wolff and Kant are addressed in such criticism. In fact, it is crucial to point out the tradition which Rosmini's account is inserted in: that of the

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<sup>44</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 8.

*natural light of reason*. In such regard, we could not help but notice a somewhat Augustinian influence on Rosmini,<sup>46</sup> and it is, indeed, the case as the author himself affirms<sup>47</sup> to be close, among others, to Saint Jerome, the Church father who translated the Scriptures in Latin (the *Vulgata*); to Saint Bonaventure, who would have called such light of reason the “*apex of the soul*”; but also to Cicero. We leave, thus, this point open to further investigation.

## 1.2 – The principle of morality: light of reason

Now that we have considered Rosmini's approach in his pivotal *Nuovo Saggio*, we may have a closer look at his account of the idea of being (the light of reason) as the principle of morality, the first moral law. To formulate the “first moral law”, Rosmini departs, in his *Principi della Scienza Morale*, from the concept of law in general. He takes the “moral law” to be a “notion of the mind used for making a judgment about the morality of human actions, which must be guided by it”.<sup>48</sup> Law, as *notion*, is an *idea*. Therefore, to reach the *first* moral law, he considers the same procedure from his *Nuovo Saggio*: he departs from notions to reach more general notions, and from there to get a final notion [*nozione ultima*]. Since moral law is also a notion, that is, also an idea, the same follows: from any given moral laws, we may arrive at more general moral laws and, ultimately, at the final moral law – which is also called “first” [*prima*] moral law.<sup>49</sup> Rosmini resumes the idea of universal being as follows: “universal being, therefore, must be the first moral law, the notion we use to produce all moral judgments”.<sup>50</sup>

As we saw, for Rosmini, the “idea of being”, also called “ideal being”, is the “light of reason”.<sup>51</sup> The first moral law reads, in a precise formulation, thus: “In all that you do, follow the *light of reason*”.<sup>52</sup> According to Rosmini, such formulation is more complete than merely stating: “Follow reason”.<sup>53</sup> In fact, it is at that point that our philosopher offers the definitions of “reason” and “reasoning”. He takes reason, resuming his previous definition, as: “the faculty with which the human spirit applies the idea of being”.<sup>54</sup> On its turn, “reasoning” refers to “the

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<sup>46</sup> On the influence of the Church Father in Rosmini's philosophy, see J. Anthony Dewhirst's book *Antonio Rosmini and the Fathers of the Church* (2005).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989a, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Idem*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

application of the idea”.<sup>55</sup> As presented in the previous section, Rosmini distinguishes reason from intellect, which merely *sees* being, while reason *applies* being, in the form of judgment – we shall resume this point later in our exposition.

According to Rosmini, not only the light of being – “the seed of all morality”,<sup>56</sup> “principle and source of all other laws”<sup>57</sup> – is innate to human beings, but it is also indeed “placed in human beings by nature”.<sup>58</sup> This is a consequence of what we saw in the previous section: the idea of being is innate and placed in human beings by nature; the same way, the light of reason – which illuminates the idea of being – is also innate and natural.

Rosmini considers “being” as the “first activity and every activity”<sup>59</sup> of all things and parts of things. Indeed, to state that: “To say something ‘is’, is to say it acts”.<sup>60</sup> Since the notion of being, understood thus, contains in itself every action of everything, it is indeed the “measure”<sup>61</sup> of every thing – a word that, in itself, corresponds to “distinguish”, “judge”, and “perceive things intellectually”.<sup>62</sup> We are capable of making judgments about moral good and evil only insofar *being* and *good* are related. Rosmini himself points out that to clarify the connection between both being and good is his intent with the *Principi*.<sup>63</sup> As we shall see, being and good are identical, but regarded from different perspectives – and it is precisely because of that that “the first rule for all judgments is the first rule for moral judgments and hence the first moral law”.<sup>64</sup>

We saw that, according to Rosmini, *being* can be regarded from two perspectives. On the one hand, *ideal being* is the idea of being, the formal part of all knowledge, and the first idea that is the source of all ideas. On the other hand, *real being* is the subsisting being, being that is determined by means of sensations provided by our sensibility.<sup>65</sup> In short, *ideal being* is being given as an *object*, and *real being* is being taken as *subject*; and *moral being* is being that

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<sup>55</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>58</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Idem, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>64</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> On fundamental sentiment as the origin of the matter of our knowledge, see for instance: Sciacca, 1999, pp. 77-84. In this paper, we choose to focus on the formal element, since it is with regard to the *idea of being* that Rosmini goes on to search for the principle of morality.

unites object and subject.<sup>66</sup> Moral being is indeed the *ultimate* and *perfective* act of being.<sup>67</sup> And it is so, because moral being is being that is *loved*,<sup>68</sup> not only being that is known. In fact, the act that connects ideal being to real being is, therefore, the *moral act*. It is against this background that we must consider morality within Rosmini's system of philosophy. To understand this point plainly, however, we must consider yet another concept, that comes hand in hand with the concept of being: the concept of the good [*bene*].

Rosmini deals with the concept of the good at length in his *Principi*. In accordance with the traditional – Ancient and Scholastic – understanding of the *good*, he takes it to be “that which is *desired*”.<sup>69</sup> In short, good *is* being, but regarded from a particular perspective: while being is *known* to us, good is *desired* by us. Rosmini defines it thus:

*Being and good therefore are the same. 'Good' is 'being considered in its order', and the order, when known, is enjoyed by the intelligence. 'Good' is 'being as felt, in relationship with the intelligence, in so far as the intelligence sees both what every nature requires and that to which it tends with its forces in the way described.*<sup>70</sup>

In other words, being is the object of intellect and reason,<sup>71</sup> and good is the object of morality<sup>72</sup> – which is also informed by intellect and reason, but comprises it another crucial feature: the will, which we will consider in the sequence of our exposition. Good is not only simply being: it is being that presents itself in its proper order, it is *ordered being*.<sup>73</sup> In other words, good is *harmony* or *concordance* with being,<sup>74</sup> according to its own order.<sup>75</sup>

There are also three kinds of *good*. On the one hand, something can be a *subjective good*, in that it is good for a subject. That is, its measure of good refers to the subject, and only to the subject. Such subjective good can only ground the discipline of *eudaimonology* – the science that concerns the attaining of happiness, but it cannot ground morality<sup>76</sup> – precisely due to its lack of objectivity. Rosmini is concerned with the dangers of nihilism and subjectivation

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<sup>66</sup> See also: Sciacca, 1999, p. 95; pp. 113-16.

<sup>67</sup> Idem, p. 115.

<sup>68</sup> Idem, p. 114.

<sup>69</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Idem, p. 29.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989b, p. 45.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 92.

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>74</sup> This point has crucial implications as to how we can understand the role of moral perfection in Rosmini's principle of morality, which will be the topic of a further research.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 92.

<sup>76</sup> On *eudaimonology* and subjective (eudaimonological) good, see: Rosmini, 1989a, pp. 33-45.

reaching morality as it had reached the search of theoretical truth in his time<sup>77</sup> and, therefore, is focused on grounding necessary morality based on firm true principles. On the other hand, thus, an *objective good* is not only something that is good for the subject alone, but it is also good by itself.

Finally, the third kind is that of *moral good*. Rosmini argues<sup>78</sup> that moral good cannot be merely a subjective good, it must be – and indeed is – a kind of objective good. But not only that: it is an objective good *known by our intelligence and willed by our will*.<sup>79</sup> Morality, for Rosmini, comprises two elements: *intelligence*, and *will*. We considered the former at length in the previous section, by considering how being illuminates our intellect and reason. This is the way human beings *know* objective good. However, to *will* such objective good, the *will* is required, which is defined as “the power with which the intelligent subject works to become author of his own actions”.<sup>80</sup> So, objective good becomes moral good – and morality is finally grounded.

Moral good is *moral* in the sense that it concerns *action*. Regarding the above-presented distinction between ideal being (the object), real being (the subject), and moral being (the connection between both), such way of relation also applies with regard to the good. Moral good connects the subject of action to its object – and it does so in the form of an actualisation<sup>81</sup> of the subject toward the object. To state precisely, moral good corresponds to the act by which the subject seeks and enters into concordance with its own essence. Such act is indeed the *moral act*, because it is action that constitutes morality – action that is only possible by the connection between intelligence and will.

To address this actualisation more precisely, we must consider the subject of human being, which is indeed the moral subject from which Rosmini departs in his approach. A human being is a sentient-intelligent subject.<sup>82</sup> Since good is that which we all tend to, as stated previously, we all, as human beings, tend to two classes of good. On the one hand, towards

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 51.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989a, pp. 51-53.

<sup>79</sup> Rosmini attempts to provide an account of morality that is not intellectualist. His goal is to show that our will has a decisive role in morality, which consists both of intelligence and will. Correspondingly, the two key elements of morality are, according to him, the law (the light of reason, our cognition of the idea of universal being) and the will (our recognition of the idea of being as the principle of morality). Rosmini provides a detailed account concerning the way our will operates, which involves our practical judgment, practical esteem, and practical love. We intend to research further in the subject in future papers.

<sup>80</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 54.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 92.

<sup>82</sup> *Idem*, p. 93.

subjective goods, those that lead us to our happiness, because of our sentient nature. On the other hand, because of our intelligent nature, we also tend to objective goods, those that make us tend towards the participation of being itself.<sup>83</sup>

Now, since human beings are sentient and intelligent, they possess fundamental *sense* (source of all sensations) and *intellect* (that sees being by means of the idea of universal being, the light of reason). Thus, human beings can *know* being. However, since we also possess *will* – defined, as we previously saw, as the power by which human beings *operate* – we can *love* being (to *action*). The moral act, indeed, the *moral being*, is only possible by means of the cooperation of both these elements. Human beings are capable of the knowledge of being by means of the ideal of being innate to us. Nevertheless, such knowledge, by itself, does not *bind*<sup>84</sup> human beings to actions as such, because it merely constitutes a theoretical knowledge of being. For morality to take place, something else is required. This is where our *will* comes in. Human beings can only be motivated towards the good – the concordance with being – by the *practical knowledge* of being, which takes place in the form of *practical recognition* of being and, consequently, of the good. The point Rosmini emphasises is that mere knowledge (cognition) of a thing (its being and its good) does not suffice for action; *recognition*, and indeed *practical recognition* is required. Such practical recognition can only take place by the coming together of our intelligence and our will.<sup>85</sup> The full process of practical recognition comprises the following steps: direct knowledge of things, voluntary reflection, meditation, vital apprehension, practical judgment or practical esteem, intellectual delight or pain, practical love, and finally external acts.<sup>86</sup>

What exactly does it all mean in terms of *principle of morality*? Let us examine Rosmini's two main formulations of the principle of morality:<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> As Umberto Muratore (1999, p. 93) correctly asserts, human being's participation of the infinite ideal being rests ultimately on the fact that our intelligence directs us towards the absolute Being, which is indeed God. For Rosmini, the good of the intelligent natures is indeed the final purpose of Creation. Since there are but two kinds of intelligent beings – God and human beings – it is their good that is intended as such final purpose, in that human beings in fact *participate* God's glory. The philosophical implications concerning this point are vast and crucial for the precise understanding of Rosmini's practical philosophy and will be the subject of further inquiry.

<sup>84</sup> Rosmini's account of *obligation* will also be the topic for another research paper.

<sup>85</sup> See also: Muratore, pp. 96-97; Sciacca, 1999, pp. 134-135. We shall not dwell at length concerning such point, but leave it open for further research.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989a, p. 76. About Rosmini's full account of such process, see: Rosmini, 1989, pp. 68-79.

<sup>87</sup> In fact, Rosmini offers other possible formulations of such principle as well (see, for instance, his list in: Rosmini, 1989a, pp. 62-63). Here, we will focus on only two, which summarise well the two crucial features of the principle of morality: following the light of reason (knowledge of being), and loving all being in general according to its order (practical recognition).



(1) "In all that you do, follow the *light* of reason".<sup>88</sup>

(2) "Desire or love being, wherever you know it, in the order or degree in which it presents itself to your intelligence".<sup>89</sup>

Rosmini presents his first formulation already in the second chapter, concerning "The first moral law", particularly in the section about what such law is. His main goal, by presenting it already at the beginning of his whole argument, may be understood from different perspectives. Firstly, it serves to connect his system of ethics to his system of thought as a whole, which is plainly grounded on the idea of universal being as the source of all knowledge. Secondly, it also clarifies his purpose in showing that the principle of morality defended by him intends to be a principle that is grounded on objectivity, therefore scaping from the dangers of subjectivism. As such, Rosmini's main formulation states that the first moral law, the first and more central commandment is that of following the light of reason, which, in other words, means to aim to know being by means of our innate idea of universal being – which is an objective criterion for truth and knowledge.

The second formulation follows from the first, elucidated particularly by the concept of good we presented before. Not only we are obligated to *know* being and its proper order, we are obligated to *love* being, *all being*, in its proper order. Such love does not derive from a mere intellection of the idea of being. By itself, as discussed previously, such idea cannot simply bind us to act neither to knowing it, nor to loving it. However, it is because being is *also* good – that is, not only object of our knowing, but also of our willing, and from there of our acting – we are obligated to cognise and recognise it, to use Rosmini's own phraseology, and to act accordingly.

It is crucial to notice, however, that Rosmini's principle of morality commands that we follow the *light of reason*, and not merely *reason*. This distinction summons up his main difference between his philosophy and that of philosophers such as Wolff and Kant, as we shall address in the next section. Indeed, for Rosmini our reason does play a role in the process of acting – but not because it *grounds* morality. As we saw, he defines the intellect as the faculty of *seeing* being, and reason as the faculty to *apply* being. But what does it mean in terms of morality? By seeing being, we receive the light of reason in the form of our innate idea of

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<sup>88</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 8. In Italian: "*Segui, nel tuo operare, il lume della ragione*" (Rosmini, 1990a, p. 56).

<sup>89</sup> Rosmini, 1989b, p. 56. In Italian: "*Vuogli, o sia ama l'essere ovunque lo conosci, in quell'ordine ch'egli presenta alla tua intelligenza*" (Rosmini, 1990a, p. 110).

universal being. The same follows concerning the good – which we also receive by means of our intellect, since good is being itself, presented to us in its proper order. Thus, the same way we receive the idea the grounds all ideas in terms of *knowledge*, we receive the first moral law that grounds all our moral laws, which concerns our *acting* (bringing together intelligence and will). It is by means of our reason that we *apply* the idea of being to form all judgments in our process of gaining knowledge – and also by means of our reason that we *apply* the first moral law to all our actions, in the process of *practical recognition* of the good. Reason, therefore, gives us the *rule* for the application of the idea of being – both in the process of obtaining theoretical knowledge of being (our ideas in general) and in the process of establishing our practical rules of conduct (the moral laws) – even though it does not, by itself, motivate us to act.

If reason gives us the rule for the application of the idea of being in practical matters, Rosmini distinguishes several uses of *reason* concerning morality – which constitute the precise way by which such application takes place. He provides the following definitions:

- (a) Moral reason: “*Moral reason* is the power to form perceptions and ideas as moral laws, to deduce secondary laws from the first, universal law, and to define just and unjust actions. In other words, it is the faculty for making moral judgments”;<sup>90</sup>
- (b) Eudaimonological reason: “*Reason* is called *eudaimonological* when it is concerned with human happiness. It is the power to apply being as a rule for judging our own subjective good”;<sup>91</sup>
- (c) Practical reason: “*Practical reason* is the capacity of voluntary reflection to form decisive esteem of an object, and consequently, of an action concerning it; an esteem followed immediately by decisive love, which itself is followed by an external act”.<sup>92</sup>

On the one hand, have *eudaimonological reason* as reason that we apply in the pursuit of our subjective good.<sup>93</sup> It shows us how to obtain happiness, and as such it is but conditioned by morality, and not the other way around.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, we have *moral reason*, which we apply in the search for the objective good.<sup>95</sup> Here, it does not lead us to happiness, but to

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<sup>90</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, pp. 88-89.

<sup>91</sup> Idem, p. 89.

<sup>92</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 91.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989a, pp. 88-89.

probity [*onestà*], morality as such. Indeed, moral reason *applies being as moral law*, the first law from which we are to deduct all other moral laws. Interestingly, Rosmini accounts for yet a third use of reason in terms of our actions: between eudaimonological and moral reason, we have *practical reason*, which serves as their arbiter:

*Practical reason* acts as a kind of arbiter between the *utility* and the *probity* of actions. It judges what is better for us to do here and now, and is based on moral as well as eudaimonological reason. Hence both ethical and eudaimonological reason are included in *practical reason*. Both are theoretical and speculative and reduced to practice by an appropriate function of the spirit. Properly speaking it is this function of the spirit that constitutes *practical reason*, and it produces its effect when a human being is about to act. He compares the moral and eudaimonological motives, weighs their importance, and finally pronounces his interior operative judgment. Affection and action follow immediately. This final judgment, immediately preceding human action, is called 'practical' to distinguish it from 'speculative' judgment. 'Practical reason is the faculty controlling it.'<sup>96</sup>

As sentient beings, human beings seek their own subjective good, their happiness, and therefore they apply the idea of being to such intent (eudaimonological reason); but they are also intelligent beings, thus aiming for the objective good as well, morality as probity, to which purpose they also apply the idea of being (moral reason). It is the role of practical reason to coordinate both realities of human beings in such way that moral reason has the upper hand, without suppressing eudaimonological reason – since both are essential parts of our humanity. In the next section, we shall see implications of such account regarding Wolff and Kant.

A last general comment: Rosmini's principle of morality is inserted, we must highlight, in the Cristian tradition of Charity. Love all being in its proper order, in its proper hierarchy, as the first moral law, is indeed consonant to the same tradition as Augustine, Bonaventure, and others. However, it is precisely because this is the case that Rosmini's account seems particularly *sui generis*, and indeed in a good connotation. As we commented previously, Rosmini does not depart from traditional Scholastic methodology, preferring – in a curious way – a mix between Patristics, on the one hand, and Kant's departing point of the human perspective. Exactly because of this, we shall address, in the second part of this paper, Rosmini's relationship not only with Kant, but also with Christian Wolff – the last great proponent of German Scholasticism.

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Rosmini, 1989a, pp. 89-90.

## **2 – TWO PREDECESSORS' INFLUENCE ON ROSMINI'S PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY CONCERNING REASON AND LIGHT OF REASON**

### **2.1 – Christian Wolff**

Wolff's influence of Rosmini is far from a throughout examined topic of secondary literature, although commentators like Pier Paolo Ottonello (1995) and Federico Marcolungo (1988) must be mentioned in such regard. Ottonello himself addresses, in a paper called "Wolff in Rosmini", main passages where Rosmini explicitly mentions, discusses, or even quotes Wolff. Concerning morality, two points shall interest us the most: his interpretation of the Wolffian principle of morality (in his *Storia comparativa e critica de' sistemi intorno al principio della morale*); and his discussion about the concept of perfection (in his *Teosofia*).<sup>97</sup> In this paper, we shall focus on the similarities between Rosmini's and Wolff's principles of morality, particularly from the perspective of the concept of reason (and its relation to the light of reason).

Beforehand, however, it is important to point out some biographical and bibliographical aspects of Rosmini's reception of Wolff. As Ottonello remarks, Rosmini shares, at least in principle, Wolff's program of "metaphysical fulfillment of that which remained from the scholastic tradition"<sup>98</sup> – which, in Rosmini's case, would take place in the form of an attempt of "renewal of philosophy".<sup>99</sup> To such purpose, Rosmini aims to address Western philosophical tradition in a fuller extension – taking into account Ancient philosophy (mainly influenced by Aristoteles), Patristics, Scholastics, *as well as* modern thought (from Bacon to Hegel, but with particular account for Kantian thought). Wolff, indeed, is also inserted in such program. Per Ottonello,<sup>100</sup> Rosmini first got in contact with "Leibnizian-Wolffian" philosophy – initially in such unificatory terms – in his young years of study at the university of Padova, between 1816 and 1819. Ottonello refers to Marcolungo's key study<sup>101</sup> on the matter, which depicted Padova as a centre of Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy at the time. Such point should be understood also with regard to the fact that several of Wolff's Latin works had been published in the near town of Verona between 1735 and 1779.

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<sup>97</sup> We shall discuss Rosmini's fuller consideration of Wolff's *moral perfection* in another study.

<sup>98</sup> Ottonello, 1995, p. 172, my translation.

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem, my translation.

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Marcolungo, 1988, pp. 79-130; Ottonello, 1995, p. 172.

Wolff's bibliographical presence in Rosmini's philosophical formation is also attested by accounting for the works – mainly from his later works in Latin – present in his libraries, notably at his *Casa Natale* at Rovereto<sup>102</sup> (Trentino), and at his final home at the *palazzo* at Stresa (Piemonte). Ottonello lists several works, from which we deem important to emphasise: Wolff's *Theologia Naturalis* (in the two-volume 1739 edition, published in Verona); his *Philosophia Practica Universalis* (two editions: the two-volume 1739-1742 edition, also published in Verona; and a posterior 1779 edition, also published in Verona); his *Philosophia moralis sive Ethics* (the five-volume 1768-1769 edition).<sup>103</sup>

It is, therefore, patent to say that Rosmini was, at the very least, reasonably acquainted with Wolffian philosophy, even though it had already started to collapse in front of the expansion of Kantian philosophy at his time. Indeed, Rosmini also seems somewhat to be able to sketch at some distinction between Wolff's philosophy and Leibniz's philosophy, at least to some degree.<sup>104</sup> This point is remarkable, considering how the philosophical reception of Wolff, as almost a whole, started to amalgamate Leibnizianism and Wolffianism as synonymous already in Wolff's time. This led to the expression "Leibnizian-Wolffianism" famously known still today, even though being revised step by step in favour of a more precise account that distinguishes between both.<sup>105</sup>

Let us focus on the matter at hand, however: the role of reason and light of reason in the principle of morality. Rosmini understands the discipline of "philosophy" as the answer to the question of *why*<sup>106</sup> – posed by human beings as intelligent being, to which the idea of universal being is innate. Indeed, it does not only concern single answers to such questioning: it is well-defined as the *science of the final reasons*.<sup>107</sup> To be sure, we shall not argue that Rosmini is necessarily compromised with a Wolffianism of any sort. However, there is a striking similarity with Wolff's own account of philosophy, and its relation to the concept of reason [*Grund*]: "Philosophy is a science of all possible things, how and why they are possible",<sup>108</sup> "I call

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<sup>102</sup> I would like to thank the staff from Rosmini's *Casa Natale* at Rovereto, which kindly offered a guided tour on the house in November 2022, as well as for providing bibliographical hints and material for research on Rosmini.

<sup>103</sup> According to Ottonello (1995, p. 174), even if Rosmini quotes from Wolff's *Ontologia* and *Psychologia Empirica*, they seem not to be found nowadays among his libraries.

<sup>104</sup> Ottonello, 1995, p. 174.

<sup>105</sup> Concerning the relationship between Leibniz and Wolff, see for instance: Leduc, 2018, pp. 44-51.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Muratore, 1999, p. 45.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Ibidem; Sciacca, 1999, p. 65.

<sup>108</sup> *Deutsche Logik*, § 1, my translation.

possible everything that can be, either it being actual, or not”;<sup>109</sup> and “Since nothing can be thought from nothing; so everything that can be must have a sufficient reason (or as *raison*) from which one can see why it is, rather than is not”.<sup>110</sup>

Wolff's philosophy can be considered a form of “rationalism”<sup>111</sup>. However, contrarily to a common understanding of rationalism as focused on the *faculty* of reason, which in German is denoted by the word *Vernunft*, it is a rationalism ground on the concept of reason as foundation, as *Grund*. The philosopher from Breslau defines both thus:<sup>112</sup>

- (1) Reason as *Grund*: “When a thing A contains something in itself, by means of which one can understand why B is, either B being in A, or outside of A; so, one calls that which is found in A the reason [*Grund*] of B: A itself is called the cause, and one says about B that it is grounded in A”.<sup>113</sup>
- (2) Reason as *Vernunft*: “The insight we have into the interconnection of truths, or the faculty of having an insight into the interconnection of truths is called reason [*Vernunft*]”<sup>114</sup> (also: “Reason is the faculty to contemplate or perceive the interconnection of universal truths”)<sup>115</sup>

In short, for Wolff: “the sufficient reason [*zureichender Grund*] of our reason [*Vernunft*] is to know the reason [*Grund*]”:<sup>116</sup> which is to say that it is by means of the faculty of reason that we know the reason of all things. Wolff's rationalism, in such terms, is directly connected with his assumption of the Leibnizian account of the principle of sufficient reason, which is well-documented in secondary literature.<sup>117</sup> In Wolff's philosophy, such principle reads: “If a thing A contains in itself something through which one can understand why B is, B may be either in A or outside of A; so, one calls that which is to be found in A the reason of B: A itself is called the cause, and about B we say that it is grounded in A”.<sup>118</sup> However, Wolff himself

<sup>109</sup> *Deutsche Logik*, § 3, my translation.

<sup>110</sup> *Deutsche Logik*, § 4, my translation.

<sup>111</sup> To a fuller account of Wolff's accounts of reason, see: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 23-52. Concerning the implications concerning the principle of morality, see also: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 53-70.

<sup>112</sup> About reason as *Grund* in Wolff, see Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 24-26, pp. 41-44; on reason as *Vernunft*, see: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 26-32, 44-48; and on the relation between both meanings of reason, see: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 48-52.

<sup>113</sup> *Deutsche Metaphysik*, § 29, my translation.

<sup>114</sup> *Deutsche Metaphysik*, § 368, my translation.

<sup>115</sup> *Psychologia empirica*, § 483, my translation.

<sup>116</sup> Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, p. 52.

<sup>117</sup> See also: Klemme, 2019, pp. 44-49; Schwaiger, 2011, pp. 148-151; Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 153-154.

<sup>118</sup> *Deutsche Metaphysik*, § 29 (translation from: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 25).



develops much in such regard, to the extent that his philosophy entails traces of originality when regarding its relationship with pure Leibnizianism.<sup>119</sup>

In what way could Rosmini's account of reason and light of reason be related, or at least compared, to the Wolffian distinction between *Grund* and *Vernunft*? The first and most prominent resemblance is that both are inserted in the same philosophical tradition of the *natural light of reason*<sup>120</sup> – at least in a broader sense. Wolff indeed criticises many of his predecessors for the lack of rigor when regarding the concept of light of reason. According to him, it does not suffice to say that we obtain knowledge because of a light that illuminates our soul: we must give precise definitions of intellect and reason, which are the main notions of such a conception. We saw that reason, for Wolff, is the faculty of insight in the interconnection of reasons of things. “Thing” is, indeed, defined as that which is possible: “everything that can be, either it being actual or not”,<sup>121</sup> on which no contradiction is found.<sup>122</sup> Wolff's account of the intellect goes along these lines. It is defined as: “a faculty to think what is possible”;<sup>123</sup> and, more precisely, as: “the faculty to represent distinctly the possible”.<sup>124</sup> In short, the intellect is the faculty to *think*, and indeed to *think* that which is *possible* (which does not involve contradiction).

To think means to have representations, which Wolff distinguish as clear or unclear representations, on the one hand, and distinct and indistinct representations, on the other hand.<sup>125</sup> The difference between both axes of classification of representations is that representations are *clear* when enable us to distinguish one thing from another, and *unclear* when it is not the case. They are *distinct*, when we obtain knowledge of the *Grund* of a thing, and *indistinct* when we do not obtain such knowledge. So, discussing the *inner light of the soul* from Wolff's perspective, we have that our intellect can be said to be illuminated when it obtains a *clear* representation of things.

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<sup>119</sup> Secondary literature nowadays also focusses on distinguishing Leibnizian from Wolffian philosophy.

<sup>120</sup> Concerning Wolff's relation with such tradition, also with regard to Leibniz and with the *recta ratio* tradition, see: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 38-41.

<sup>121</sup> *Deutsche Metaphysik*, § 16, my translation.

<sup>122</sup> In his philosophy, the reason of everything that exists is interconnected because of the principle of sufficient reason, that ultimately point at God as the reason of everything. We cannot address all features and particularities of Wolff's account here, but it is relevant to point out that, the same way the reasons of all things are connected with one another, they all *concur* to God as the ultimate reason in the sense of their ultimate purpose, which Wolff considers to be the final purpose of Creation. We will address this issue in future research.

<sup>123</sup> *Deutsche Logik*, Vorbericht, § 10, my translation. See also: *Deutsche Logik*, Cap. 1, § 15, 36; Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 44-48.

<sup>124</sup> *Deutsche Metaphysik*, § 277, my translation.

<sup>125</sup> About Wolff's account of representations, see also: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 44-48.

However, it is not enough for rational knowledge: for such, a clear *and distinct* representation is required. That is, a representation that enables us to distinguish other thing from another, as not to confuse both; and that permits us to know *why* such thing is the case instead of not being. Here, reason comes on display. Wolff states that the intellect *grounds* reason:<sup>126</sup> it is only because we can represent that which is possible that we can obtain knowledge concerning the *Grund* of such a thing. The role of reason [*Vernunft*] is precisely to obtain rational knowledge: knowledge of the reason [*Grund*] of things.<sup>127</sup>

We may now compare such perspective with the Rosminian one. While Wolff takes the intellect to be the faculty to represent that which is possible, Rosmini defines it as the faculty of knowing being. Indeed, a possible point of contact between both is precisely the notion of “possible”. In Rosmini’s account, the intellect sees being – but indeed the idea of universal being. Such idea is, in fact, purely formal and empty – that is, it concerns *possible being*. It is only by means of the sensations received from our sensibility that being becomes *real* being. To be sure, Rosmini does not follow the same argumentative steps Wolff follows: he has indeed a different approach, notably marked by a Kantian influence of the strong distinction between sensibility and reason.<sup>128</sup> However, the similarity between both approaches is curious from the perspective of the centrality of the notion of *possible* – which is a distinctive feature of Wolffian metaphysics as well known in secondary literature.

Furthermore, concerning Wolff’s definition of reason as “insight” – *Einsicht* in German, which then became “*intuendi*” and “*perspiciendi*” in Latin – can perhaps not be as distant from Rosmini’s notion of “*lume della ragione*” as at a first glance. That is, although they seem to be diametrically opposed – *Einsicht* consists of looking *inside*, whereas the *lume* of reason refers to being that *gives* itself to us – they might be considered the same process regarded from different perspectives. In other words: when our intellect is illuminated by being in the form of the ideal of universal being, it *sees* being, because being is given to it. Similarly, our *Vernunft* sees the interconnected reasons of all things, because its proper function is already given as to know reason.

This point will have relevant implications concerning practical philosophy, as Wolff formulates it, and moral science, as Rosmini does. Wolff’s principle of morality is indeed the

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. *DM*, § 372.

<sup>127</sup> Wolff is inserted in the *recta ratio* tradition. On this matter, also in connection with Leibniz and the natural light tradition, see also: Lanzini Stobbe, pp. 32-41.

<sup>128</sup> We shall address this point in the next section.

principle of perfection as concordance. In his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen, zu Beförderung ihrer Glückseligkeit* (the so-called *Deutsche Ethik*), it reads thus: “do what makes you and your or other’s state more perfect: omit that which makes it more imperfect”.<sup>129</sup> Human beings are obligated – that is, given reason (motive) to<sup>130</sup> - perfect themselves, help other perfect themselves, and promote perfection in general (and vice-versa to avoid imperfection). We shall address the similarities between Wolff’s and Rosmini’s accounts of perfection in practical philosophy in future research. For now, it is important to point out that such process of perfecting does entail a process of actualisation of our essence and nature as human beings, as it reads in Wolff’s formulations in the *Philosophia Practica Universalis*,<sup>131</sup> as well as in Rosmini’s account of moral being as the connection between ideal and real being, which we presented above.

One final comment about Rosmini’s account of reason and Wolff concerns his distinction between eudaimonological and moral reason. Wolff, as a pre-critical philosopher, does not distinguish between theoretical and practical philosophy in Kantian terms. Indeed, the same use of reason that we operate to *know* the reasons of things does also concern our motivation to *act* in accordance with such knowledge. In fact, Wolff is a moral intellectualist in such regard.<sup>132</sup> However, Wolff seems to sketch some sort of distinction between acting as to promote happiness, on the one hand, and to promote perfection, on the other.<sup>133</sup> We can only truly perfect ourselves by acting rationally – that is, by using our reason [*Vernunft*] in the way it is properly intended to be used: to know reason [*Grund*]. We can only do so by means of clear *and* distinct representations. The search for happiness, however, concerns what Wolff calls our soul’s inferior faculties of the appetite, for which merely clear (but not distinct representations) suffice. In other words, we can only perfect ourselves by the correct exercise of reason, even if, for Wolff, attaining happiness is connected to achieving perfection. Nevertheless, as stated above, Wolff seems merely to sketch at such distinction, leaving it ironically unclear, or at least indistinct. Rosmini, on the other hand, following Kant’s distinction between the search for

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<sup>129</sup> *Deutsche Ethik*, § 12, my translation; see also: *Deutsche Ethik*, § 19.

<sup>130</sup> Wolff’s precise definition of *obligation* in the *Deutsche Ethik* is this: „Einen verbinden etwas zu thun, oder zu lassen, ist nichts anders als einen Bewegungs-Grund des Wollens und Nicht-Wollens damit verknüpfen“ (*Deutsche Ethik*, § 8). On Wolff’s conception of obligation, see: Klemme, 2018; 2019; Hüning, 2004; Walsh, 2024; Cunha, 2015; Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 147-170.

<sup>131</sup> See: *Philosophia Practica Universalis*, II, § 122, 125, 127, 128; also: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 108-122.

<sup>132</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Andrea Faggion for her comments about Wolff’s intellectualistic implications.

<sup>133</sup> For an interpretation of Wolff’s practical philosophy as not eudaimonistic, see: Lanzini Stobbe, 2024.

happiness and for morality,<sup>134</sup> does distinguish between these two uses of reason, as we saw in the previous section.

In short: it is known that Rosmini had direct contact with Wolff's philosophy, although it is not necessarily clear as to the extent of such knowledge. The similarities of both concerning their accounts of reason and, respectively, light of reason and inner light of the soul may perhaps be somewhat circumstantial – that is, Rosmini's goal is *not* to revive Wolffian philosophy as such, particularly against the background of Critical philosophy. However, we should not simply dismiss the possibility that he was inspired by Wolffian philosophy in some key points of his philosophy, which seems particularly the case when we regard the relevant role of the notion of “possible”, for instance. This way, Rosmini's philosophy may perhaps be seen as a philosophy that assumes insights from pre-critical philosophy and incorporates them in a philosophy that is well-informed by Critical philosophy. To some extent, we can say that it will be the case with the role of perfection in practical philosophy, which, as mentioned, will be the topic of yet another research paper.

## 2.2 – Immanuel Kant

Unlike Wolff's influence on Rosmini, Immanuel Kant's influence has already been the topic of several researchers in secondary literature.<sup>135</sup> Even so, we could make the case that such topic was not yet exhausted, particularly from the perspective that there seems to be waves of interest in the relationship between the philosopher of Königsberg and that of Rovereto – in the sense of Rosmini's *reception* of Kant, as well as concerning the rather systematic debates between both systems of philosophy. In this paper, our goal is to tackle a somewhat particular issue, that is not only historiographical, but also systematic: Rosmini's criticism of Kant regarding the role and uses of reason concerning the principle of morality. To such intend, we shall consider initial similarities between the philosophical projects of both, proceeding to the points in which they disagree.

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<sup>134</sup> Kant's distinction between happiness and morality is present in texts such as the *Grundlegung* and the second *Kritik*. Nevertheless, even though he is sometimes considered as the first philosopher to clearly draw such distinction, Clemens Schwaiger's studies on Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten show that it is already present in Baumgarten's account. See, for instance: Schwaiger, 2010.

<sup>135</sup> About the relation between Rosmini and Kant, particularly concerning key differences between both, see for instance: Sciacca, 1968, p. 125. More recently, several studies have been published at the journal *Rosmini Studies* (Università degli Studi di Trento).

It is well-known, among secondary literature concerning Kant and Rosmini, that both philosophers share – at least in the broader sense – the same kind of departing point for the foundation of their respective systems of philosophy. That is, if not the same point altogether: the *human perspective* of knowledge. Kant's Copernican revolution famously turned the philosophical world upside down by proposing that we consider the objects of knowledge with reference to their subject, human being, and not the other way around – which would be, from Kant's perspective, the Traditional approach coming from Greek philosophy to Medieval and Early Modern philosophy. It is against this background that Kant goes on to examine human nature in search for the *a priori* features of human reason that enable us to *know*.

Kant distinguishes two distinct faculties in human beings: sensibility and understanding<sup>136</sup> [*Verstand*]. In traditional systems of philosophy, such as Wolffian rationalism, both faculties are not clearly separated from one another. To use Wolff's example, the human mind entails two kinds of faculties:<sup>137</sup> of knowledge, and of appetite. Both kinds are also divided into two different kinds: superior faculties (grounded on reason), and inferior faculties (not grounded on reason). The superior faculty of knowledge is *reason*, grounded on the intellect. The inferior faculties of knowledge are *senses* and *imagination*. The superior faculty of appetite is *rational appetite*, whereas the inferior faculty of appetite are our affects. Wolff – and, for that matter, a major part of the tradition in which he is inserted – does not clearly separate superior and inferior faculties as *different branches* of knowledge,<sup>138</sup> since the criterion for the distinction between superior and inferior is the quality of the representations provided by each faculty. Superior faculties provide clear *and* distinct representations, while inferior faculties provide merely clear, but indistinct ones.

Rosmini does indeed follow, at least in principle, the Kantian separation from the sensibility and understanding. However, departing from such insight, he builds his system of philosophy in a significantly different way. A crucial difference lies in the fact that Rosmini does not follow Kant's conclusions as to which are the *a priori* structures of human reason.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Traditionally, Kant's concept of *Verstand* is translated into English as “understanding”. On this paper, we shall use “understanding” when talking about the Kantian concept and keep “intellect” where concerning Rosmini's concept of *intelletto*.

<sup>137</sup> See also: Lanzini Stobbe, 2023, pp. 53-58.

<sup>138</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Bruno Cunha for his comments on this distinction between Wolff's and Kant's philosophies.

<sup>139</sup> Sciacca emphasises that Kant's and Rosmini's accounts of the *a priori* do differ from one another. He says: “*L'a priori di Kant ha validità limitata all'esperienza (è forma trascendentale), quello rosminiano è oggettivo o lume infinito della mente e di essa costitutivo; il suo valore è metafisico, è principio del conoscere e non soltanto forma*



For Kant, if we are to assure universality for our knowledge, we must consider which are the *a priori* structures by which we *think* and *know*. These are the famously known *a priori* forms of intuition (regarding sensibility), that is, space and time; and the *a priori* categories of concepts (concerning understanding), which follow from the *a priori* categories of judgments.

It is precisely this conceptual framework that Rosmini does not incorporate to his system of philosophy. In a way, to some extent we can say that Rosmini radicalises the Kantian project. He does so by assuming two principles from the start of his investigation in the *Nuovo Saggio*: (1) “When explaining facts about the human spirit, we must not take into account less than is necessary for the explanation”,<sup>140</sup> and (2) “In our explanation of these facts, we must not take into account more than is required”.<sup>141</sup> In other words, his explanation must explain with the exact number of features required for such explanation – which may seem trivial but is indeed a distinctive mark of philosophical precision. Curiously, Rosmini asserts<sup>142</sup> that both principles are indeed the constituting parts of the *principle of sufficient reason* – which, as we presented in the previous section, is emphasised, even not exclusive to, both Leibniz’s and Wolff’s philosophies. So, Rosmini’s application of such principles lead, in his argument, to assuming only one category necessary to human knowledge: the *idea of universal being*, the first idea behind all other human ideas.<sup>143</sup>

It is also well-known that Kant distinguishes between the theoretical use and the practical use of reason. Such distinction is also new to philosophical tradition. Let us consider again Wolff’s example. For Wolff, as we discussed previously, human beings possess the faculty of reason [*Vernunft*] as the faculty to have an insight into the interconnection of all reasons [*Gründe*]. The same way a human being uses reason to *know* something – for instance: to know specific degrees of perfection of a thing – that human being also uses reason when regarding actions. That is, it is by this rather theoretical use of reason that one examines the degree of perfection of an action to be performed, in which way such action can make one more perfect, and so on. By acknowledging that an action is good and therefore to be performed, a

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*di esso, valida solo nei limiti dell’esperienza o del reale. Il Rosmini, inoltre, riduce le categorie kantiane ad una sola”* (Sciacca, 1999, pp. 66-67).

<sup>140</sup> Rosmini, 1989a, p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>143</sup> The implications of the contrast between Rosmini and Kant are numerous and may be the topic for further research. On this paper, however, we shall focus on a specific set of implications: those that concern the use of reason with respect to the principle of morality.



human being is rationally bound – *obligated* – to perform it. In other words: there is no *practical* use of reason in Wolff's obligation towards perfection, only a *theoretical* use.

Kant, on the other hand, aims to distinguish both theoretical and practical use of reason. He defines reason thus: "Reason is the faculty which gives us the *a priori* principles of knowledge. Therefore, pure reason is that which contains the principles to know absolutely *a priori* something".<sup>144</sup> Reason, on that account, is famously known as the faculty of principles – and Kant's investigation of a critique of pure reason is precisely an inquiry on the principles by which our reason necessarily and universally operates. The practical use of reason, on the other hand, is the *will* – understood as "a faculty to determine oneself to act in accordance with the representation of a certain law. And such a faculty can only be found in rational beings".<sup>145</sup> In other words, practical reason is the faculty of establishing by itself the law which a human agent is obligated to follow, which leads directly to Kant's notion of autonomy.<sup>146</sup>

Rosmini criticises Kant's practical use of reason. When discussing the idea of being as the first moral law, Rosmini states that Kant confuses the subject of the law (the human being) and the law itself. In Kant, such a law is indeed the moral law, characterised as the much discussed *categorical imperative*. Kant's formulations of such imperative have already been the subject of several generations of researchers. In short, the categorical imperative commands that a human agent elects as maxim of his action only maxims that can be conceived as a universal law, valid necessarily and universally.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, the human agent ought to respect humanity in general (himself and other) always as an end in itself, and never as merely a means. As it is known in scholarship, Kant aims to present the categorical imperative as *the sole* autonomous alternative for a system of morality: a system in which one gives by oneself the law which one shall act. Human reason is, by itself, the moral law to be followed.

It is precisely this point that Rosmini criticises. Rosmini's moral law is *not* human reason as such. It is, in fact, the *light of reason* – by which being itself illuminates our reason.<sup>148</sup> This

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<sup>144</sup> *KrV*, B25, my translation.

<sup>145</sup> *GMS*, AA04: 427, my translation.

<sup>146</sup> See, for instance: *GMS*, AA04: 440-441.

<sup>147</sup> Necessity and universality are Kant's well-known criteria for his Critical project: „*Notwendigkeit und strenge Allgemeinheit sind also sichere Kennzeichen einer Erkenntnis a priori, und gehören auch unzertrennlich zu einander*“ (*KrV*, B4).

<sup>148</sup> We leave the question open as to whether Kant would consider Rosmini's principle of morality as heteronomous – since, even though it could perhaps seem to due to its relationship with being (which, from the Kantian perspective, would seem an ungranted access to the things in themselves), Rosmini's departing point seem to aim as well for an account of morality that is not heteronomous in the sense of a value that is simply foreign to human beings.

is the main difference between Rosmini's and Kant's account of reason. On the one hand, for Kant, human beings cannot access the things in themselves: we can at best follow their own reason to guide us in the process of obtaining true – universally valid – knowledge by means of the *a priori* features of reason; reason that gives us the moral law which we ought rationally to follow. For Rosmini, on the other hand, the function of human reason is to apply the idea of being in the process of obtaining theoretical and practical knowledge. Being is the ultimate category of knowledge, essential to knowledge and acting. *Being*, the *light* of reason, and not *reason* itself.

Furthermore, Rosmini criticises Kant's notion and use of "practical reason". For Kant, practical reason is ultimately the *will* – the faculty of setting ends and attributing values.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps the formulation of the categorical imperative that best elucidates this point is the so-called "formula of humanity".<sup>150</sup> To be sure, in Kant's terminology, the emphasis is indeed on it being *practical* reason, not *moral* reason – although we could certainly understand, from Kant's concepts and argumentation, how and in what way practical reason is moral reason: that is, reason that is concerned with human will, and therefore with morality. Rosmini's precise criticism against Kant in such regard is that the philosopher of Königsberg does not sufficiently distinguish between a *practical* reason and a *moral* reason.

As we discussed previously, Rosmini conceives three uses of reason in matters of human acting. *Reason*, indeed, is the power to *apply* being, or precisely the idea of being. What distinguishes these three uses of reason is indeed the end aimed by each one: *eudaimonological* reason applies being as the law for the achievement of *happiness* (the subjective good), while *moral* reason applies it as *moral law*, aiming for *morality* as such, probity (the objective good willed by our will, thus becoming moral good). To be sure, Rosmini praises Kant for having fully distinguished these two spheres – the search for happiness and the search for morality.<sup>151</sup> However, he feels the need for yet a third kind of use of reason, a referee between both. He calls such third use of reason *practical* reason. It applies being not only aiming for happiness, on the one hand, or morality, on the other; but precisely to serve as a middle term between both. Subjective good is indeed a kind of good that is relevant to human beings, who are also sentient

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<sup>149</sup> This whole topic is controversial in secondary literature, particularly as to whether we could consider Kant's moral philosophy as a kind of moral realism, antirealism, or rather *sui generis* as such. On the matter, see for instance: Santos, 2017. Rosmini (1990b, pp. 264-265) himself interprets it to be, in Kant, the faculty of appetite.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. *GMS*, AA04: 429.

<sup>151</sup> See, for instance: Rosmini, 1998, p. 220.

beings, and that has to be accounted for in matters of practical philosophy; but the upper hand lies with the objective good, regarded by the intellectual aspect of human nature, and indeed with the moral good, in the sense that the moral good is necessarily objective, rather than subjective.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to present and discuss Antonio Rosmini's principle of morality, particularly from the perspective of the role played by the concepts of reason and light of reason. In the first section, we saw how it is *light of reason*, and not *reason* itself, that counts as the source of all human ideas and knowledge – the idea of universal being which is being in its ideal form. Such idea is also the source of all moral laws: it is, in fact, the first moral law that commands us to follow the light of reason (the idea of being) and to love all being in the order it presents to us. In the second section, we discussed Rosmini's relationship with two predecessors of his: Christian Wolff and Immanuel Kant. On the one hand, we saw features of similarity between Wolff and Rosmini to some degree – for instance, the fact that both are part of the philosophical tradition of the natural light of the soul, but, more specifically, also concerning similarities between both approaches on the concept of reason and its relationship with the concept of possible. On the other hand, we also saw that Rosmini follows Kant's approach to some extent, thus dissociating himself from Wolff – particularly due to his departing point (human being, instead of being in itself) and to his assumption of the Kantian distinction between sensibility and understanding. However, Rosmini's account parts from Kant in the sense that their conceptions of reason differ from one another: Rosmini focuses on the distinction between reason and light of reason, which is an assumption that Kant could not make, and that have relevant repercussions in practical philosophy. We left several philosophical and historiographical topics open for further inquiries, so that this paper serves as a possible introductory study about Rosmini's philosophy and its relationship with more widespread philosophies, such as Kantian philosophy.

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## I – INFORMAÇÕES SOBRE O AUTOR

Doutor em Filosofia (2023) em co-tutela pela *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* (MLU) e pela Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP). Atualmente é pós-doutorando





*Reason and Light of Reason in Rosmini's principle of morality with regard to Wolff and Kant*

LANZINI STOBBE, E.

pela Universidade Estadual de Londrina (UEL) desde 2023. Pesquisa nas áreas de: (a) metafísica e filosofia prática de Christian Wolff; (b) relação entre metafísica e filosofia prática em Antonio Rosmini; (c) filosofia moral de Kant. E-mail: [emanuel.stobbe@gmail.com](mailto:emanuel.stobbe@gmail.com)

## **II – INFORMAÇÕES SOBRE O ARTIGO**

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