

WAS HUGO GROTIUS A RATIONALIST?

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Scholars situate Grotius at the origin of *more geometrico* rationalism. According to this reading, he is responsible for the transition from a dialectical to a deductivist interpretation of the naturally just. Grotius, however, neither deems ethics explainable through mathematics, nor does he think that reason alone determines whether an action is right or wrong. Without nature, he maintains, reason is an empty measure.

Keywords: Hugo Grotius – Modern rationalism – *More geometrico* rationalism – *Etiamsi daremus* hypothesis – Natural law

Intellectual history usually locates Grotius at the origin of a “new vision of things” (Schneewind 2005). He transformed moral agents – it is said – from mere believers into authentic thinking subjects, for he gave up the idea of nature, i.e., heteronomy, and maintained reason alone – which is autonomous and normative in itself (Vormbaum 2009). All of this leads to the “natural law of reason.”

After positing the law of reason, Grotius forgot – so the critics say – the normative value of nature, either because of his misunderstanding of the order of the world or because he had reduced man’s being to a simple abstraction according to the hypothetic-deductive method. Although Grotius, indeed, considers reason as the determining power for defining the good that should be pursued, this reason is based on the inclinations determined by nature (by God, ultimately). Grotius, thus, belongs to the long Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy that identifies natural justice as the primary tool for intercultural dialogue and for the critique of skeptical conceptions of morality.¹ On the other hand, his theory revives the moral ideas of the Stoics, who, like Grotius himself,

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¹ In this regard, Grotius – known today as “the champion of natural law,” “an ardent advocate of the naturally just” – makes natural sociability one of the basic categories of his theory of justice. Thus, the Grotian *Collectanea autographa de iure publico* teaches that men are propelled by the force of nature to socialize, for example, at the level of the family (ff. 287 – 292). See Beatty (2022).

partially support their doctrines in the critique of skepticism (Vander Waerd 2022; Nussbaum 2019; Blom 2018).

As a rule, historians of ideas point out that modern science laid the foundations for a philosophical substitute for Scholasticism. This new philosophical program, namely rationalism, offered the world a new order, free from theology and authorities and subject to reason alone (Herzog 2018; Stolleis 2015; Horn 2016). Rationalism, so, bracketed off God. Ethics and law are no longer seen as “creations of God.” Their transcendent value vanishes, for they now belong solely to our world and are expressed in formulas, axioms, and chains of reasoning (Stolleis 2015; Coing 1985).

Stolleis notes that the “rationalist utopia” offered modern authors a way to formulate a purely rational and timeless order, i.e., a geometrical order, through which the socio-cultural differences that had flourished after the Reformation could be set aside (Stolleis 2014, 43 – 47). This method starts by positing certain principles from which it is possible to draw conclusions of indubitable truth. This procedure, which, as is known, inspired the development of natural science at the beginning of modernity, was seamlessly extrapolated to the naturally just. Thanks to its mathematical and rational approach, for the first time a form of legal theory emerged independent from religious assumptions (Stolleis 2015; Cassirer 2007).

This kind of rationalism considers nature as an abstract and immutable reality. Once nature is given, science should (“speculatively”) read in it the commands and principles of good conduct (Finnis 2011). Since the essence of good action is discovered by the theoretical reason – which is defined as a simple instrument of reading the morality statically determined by the natural order – practical reason and prudence are relegated to a minor role. The moral good, thereby, will depend not on the deliberation of right reason, but on a simple ability to identify general principles and to deduce from them valid and normatively obligatory conclusions for all men of all times and all places (Villey 2016; Scattola 2003).

The article is divided as follows. Firstly, it offers some general reasons for concluding that Grotius cannot be characterized as a rationalist thinker. Secondly, it discusses the problem of so-called *more geometrico* deductivism. Thirdly, it addresses the issue of the *etiamsi daremus* hypothesis. Lastly, some conclusions are offered.

I. Grotius, a Rationalist?

Usually, when we speak of modern natural law, we refer to a philosophical current that places all its confidence in reason – hence, it seeks to develop a new and elementary science fixing its gaze on the idea of progress – and asserts that if reason follows the path

of the scientific-demonstrative method, it will not fail in its aspirations.² Along these lines, modern iusnaturalists propose to elaborate an ethical theory capable of explaining itself, insofar as it is the principle of its own principles and it does not depend on the authority of tradition, the pope, or classical law (Herzog 2018, 161 – 162).

Some critics argue that this vision of morality lacks any metaphysical support, as it ignores the notion of the eternal law as well as the theory of participation that links divine and natural law (Rommen 1947; Hervada 1983; Hirschberger 1969). Likewise, rationalist iusnaturalism is criticized for its attempt to separate science from theology; scholars of modern thought have deemed this trend a “de-dogmatization of what is Christian” (Balthasar 2009; Brague 2016; Hartnack 1976). That conceded, rationalist iusnaturalism seems anti-scholastic. Therefore, Grotius was purportedly “the first to break the ice” of Scholasticism and thence spread this trend to every corner of Europe (Barbeyrac 1729, 28 – 29).

When we speak of rationalist iusnaturalism, we mean the philosophical school that, in order to elaborate a system of morality without gaps or fissures, strives for an aprioristically determined natural law and that adheres to the arithmetical-Euclidean ideal (Cruz Prados 2021; Bobbio 2017; Grossi 2011). As a consequence of the above, natural law belongs in modern rationalism to the objects of theoretical reason. Natural law becomes apodictic and immutable in each of its principles (with this, modern iusnaturalists end up assimilating the moral necessity to arithmetical necessity). In the rationalist version of the naturally just, morality is contained in the mandate to act according to one’s own nature, which is, according to the critics of rationalism, purely hypothetical (Cruz Prados 2006, 371 – 372). The critics point out, as a result, that the normativity of natural law depends ultimately not on the normativity of reason – speculative reason does not serve as a measure of praxis – but on the will. Rationalism thus intermingles with voluntarism in ethics (Finnis 2011, 42 – 48).

As for Grotius’ relationship with Scholasticism, we should first remark that he himself regards the scholastics as “the most erudite authors” (Grotius 2009, c. 3). He praises their wit and recommends their writings, especially those of Suárez and Aquinas.³ In this respect, Schaffner (2016) rightly suggests that a proper understanding of scholastic ethics dissuades us from attributing to Grotius any kind of rationalism. While conceding the originality of Grotius’ work, it is possible to trace some links between his theory and Scholasticism. For example, following the logic of eternal law,

² See *Lexikon der Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik*, s.v. “Rationalismus;” *Diccionario de filosofía*, s.v. “Racionalismo;” *Lexikon der Ethik*, s.v. “Naturrecht;” *Dictionnaire philosophique*, s.v. “Rationalisme;” *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. “Rationalismus;” *Dizionario di filosofia*, s.v. “Diritto;” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, s.v. “Philosophical inquiry;” *Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale*, s.v. “Droit;” *Diccionario de los ismos*, s.v. “Racionalismo.”

³ See Grotius (1939, Prol. 52; 1928 – 2001, num. 402 and num. 1884).

Grotius states that God, “who does nothing without purpose or erroneously,” governs things to conserve their being and to procure their good (Grotius 1950, cc. 2 – 3).

Utility or selfish preservation is not, in any case, the founding principle of justice (Grotius 1939, Prol. 5 – 7). Grotius, like the scholastics, criticizes Carneades, who thinks that men have instituted rights only for the sake of their private benefit (Prol. 5). Societies, Grotius adds, do not arise purely for personal gain. For the same reason, even if our nature required no society for survival, we would have socialized politically, “for nature itself drives us to desire life in society” (Prol. 16). Additionally, Grotius remarks that it is in each individual’s interest that the whole be preserved, something made possible by the love and friendship arising from the unity of nature (Grotius 1950, c. 2).

Regarding the desire for systematization, rather than delineating a deductive system of duties and rights, Grotius wishes to deal in an orderly manner with political and moral questions. Grotius himself makes this point clear. He sets out to explain everything concerning the law of war and peace in due order (Grotius 1939, Prol. 1). More clearly, his interest lies in explaining everything “with good order,” “seeing first what is true universally and generally and then contracting it to the particular” (1939, Prol. 56; 1950, c. 1). Moreover, he focuses more on the right than on law, i.e., on the so-called *ipsa res iusta*. Hence, Grotius contends that justice cannot be understood as a virtue that merely applies to each case a solution defined *ex ante* as correct according to some deductive system. What is just in each case depends instead on the judgment of right reason – which always accompanies justice.

Given the place of *recta ratio* in Grotius’ philosophy, he most likely rejects that morality is an object of theoretical reason. Natural rights themselves are “practical rights.” Even if natural law is described as immutable *quantum ad essentiam*, Grotius admits a certain kind of change in the naturally just *quantum ad usum*. Change in circumstances alone causes a natural rule to apply differently or to temporarily cease. For Grotius, as well as for the scholastics, natural law often mutates according to changing circumstances. In that sense, if God commands us to kill someone or to take what belongs to another, “neither homicide nor theft will be given, because God is the lord of life and of all that exists” (Grotius 1939, 1.1.10.6). Grotius’ explanation, so, allows for a historical consideration of natural law, since the precise way of particularizing that law is conditioned by time, culture, geography, usage, etc. (Grotius 1950, c. 2). Then, to present Grotius as a geometrical rationalist is, to say the least, debatable (Contreras 2023).

Furthermore, from the moral point of view, Grotius holds that “nature” and “practical reason” are necessarily connected concepts (Grotius 1939, Prol. 9; 1.1.10.1). Practical reason, as the direct rule of what should be done or avoided, bases its

judgement on the order and normativity of nature (for example, on the order of man's inclinations or the order manifested in final causes).⁴ Thus, nature acts as a normative framework within which practical reason operates meaningfully. In this context, Grotius establishes that the reasonable and correct use of external goods is that which corresponds to their nature (Grotius 2009, c. 3).⁵ He applies this principle to the use of the sea, which, by the order of nature, cannot be taken in property and is at the service of all men without distinction (c. 5).⁶ Natural law, therefore, is neither a norm of sole reason nor of sole nature: it is the normative order established by practical reason taking into account the teleology and normativity of man's nature and nature in general.

II. Modern Rationalism and *more geometrico* Natural Law

Guided by Descartes' intuitions, modern rationalists consider valid only the kind of knowledge that can be expressed mathematically, because this is purportedly the only rational and transparent language (Gambra 2019; Höffe 2018; Störig 2016; Dufour 1980).⁷ Against this background, the most typical understanding of moral rationalism describes it as a theory that assimilates ethics to natural science, that reduces morality to logic, and that, on the basis of the hypothetic-deductive method, starts from abstract definitions alien to reality, such as the notions of "pure nature" or "the state of nature." Since rationalism has reduced truth to a merely abstract entity, ethics has faded away – so the critics say (Maritain 2009; Pinckaers 2007; Casanova 2013).

Grotius – who, so the story goes, inaugurated this understanding of morality – supposedly maximized the mathematical spirit of law. Tuck, in this regard, holds that Grotius' views leave no space for practical reason. Tuck adds that, for Grotius, there is no distinction between theoretical and practical science; hence, Grotius reduces the act of calculative reason to the simple application of a clear-cut rule (Tuck 1991).

⁴ *Nature* is neither a mathematical concept nor a hypothesis nor an *a priori*. Grotius argues that nature is a source of law for many reasons: because nature has certain inclinations, because man acts in a determined way, because there are some real goods to which nature is directed. So, the concept of nature depends on its metaphysical reality.

⁵ In the same vein, *De iure belli ac pacis* stresses that we must reasonably take and protect fruit trees and crops (Grotius 1939, 3.12.4).

⁶ "... the sea is included among those things which are not articles of commerce, that is to say, the things that cannot become part of anyone's private domain. Hence it follows, to speak strictly, that no part of the sea may be regarded as pertaining to the domain of any given nation."

⁷ Therefore, modern rationalists aspire to reduce "the higher and more complex orders of reality to the lower ones, up to the mathematical, which is purely rational." It is thus said that rationalist philosophers seek "to reduce religion to psychological phenomena; psychology to physiology; physiology to physics; physics, finally, to mathematics. Or, which is the same thing... to understand the whole of reality as an essence, as something rationally or mathematically necessary" (Gambra 2019, 192).

Such an interpretation, which does not conform to facts, ignores that Grotius expressly rejects the reduction of ethics to mathematics, supported by Aristotle's well-known theorem that the same degree of certainty cannot be demanded from every line of reasoning (*EN* 1094b12 – 15; *Met.* 995a15 – 16). Thus, in Grotius' terms, "that which Aristotle explains about the moral disciplines, namely, that they do not have the same certainty as mathematics, is indisputably true" (Grotius 1939, 2.23.1). The problem, Grotius thinks, is that mathematical concepts, unlike moral notions, do not admit of a middle ground: in moral matters, reason orders to strive for a "middle course," something like "the prudential utmost" we are capable of (Prol. 43 – 45).⁸ If Grotius is an Aristotelian – as I believe he is – then whatever is said of the Aristotle's ethics, namely, that it is topical, is also true of Grotian ethics.

Grotius reasons practically like Aristotle when, for instance, he discusses the problem of mixed acts. As we read in *De iure belli ac pacis*, if a promise results from the mixture of voluntary and involuntary, the promisor must honor his obligations. The promisor, like the navigator who dumps merchandise into the sea to avoid the shipwreck, chooses to act in a certain way and not in another (Grotius 1939, 2.11.7.2).⁹ The decision to make a promise or to throw the merchandise into the sea in an undesired context does not follow axiomatically from universal principles. It is clearly a prudential decision – all this is undoubtedly Aristotelian and, so, alien to the rationalist way of thinking.¹⁰

Moreover, practical disciplines – Grotius knows this well – are conditioned by change and the contingency of circumstances. Surprisingly, Grotius' critics claim that only he and "his school" reduce morality to long chains of deductions that start from the most general precepts and end in the most concrete of individual decisions. Along these lines, it has been written that in Grotius, as well as in rationalists in general, the naturally just descends to the tiniest detail, for instance, to granting the possessor in good faith the right of reimbursement for expenses incurred in obtaining the fruits of another person's property – and even the right of retention for unreimbursed expenses (Ugarte 2020, 629). Grotius, however, does not say that this is commanded by moral law; he only says that it is just that the possessor in good faith should be reimbursed for what he has spent in caring for what belongs to somebody else (Grotius 1939, 2.8.23).

Grotius' detachment from the mathematizing spirit is confirmed when he maintains that the legally just modifies the naturally just, as well as when he defends

⁸ See Simmonds (2002).

⁹ See Geddert (2016).

¹⁰ Along these lines, Grotius defends the thesis that the judgment of the good man is the measure of the good (Grotius 2009, c. 13).

the freedom of the ruler in legislative matters. Grotius, in this sense, teaches that the laws of the republic, which emanate from its own will as a moral entity (Grotius 1950, c. 2),¹¹ can arbitrarily, but not irrationally, determine many things beyond the natural order – albeit they cannot command anything against nature (Grotius 2001, c. 3, nn. 3 – 5; c. 8, n. 15; 1939, 1.1.10.4; 2.3.6; 1926, 1.2.6). Similarly, vindicating the union of what is honorable and what is useful, he describes utility as one of the elements of the political good, emphasizing that what is useful here and now cannot be derived by deductions from, for example, the principle of not doing evil (Grotius 1950, c. 2).¹²

Grotius also holds that each group of people can choose for itself its own form of government, since none is best for all according to nature. In the same vein, he clarifies that the expletive justice does not require that exchanged goods be arithmetically equivalent, but that the reciprocal obligations of the parties “be regarded as equal” (Grotius 1939, 2.7.2.1). In matters of buying and selling, even the “natural price” is not axiomatically deduced from general principles of what is just by nature. The price depends on the free will of the involved parties, meaning that the same thing may be sold at a different price even in the same place (Grotius 2009, c. 8). By contrast, the protection of dominion performed by the parties according to the settlement of a pact does belong to the naturally just.

Natural law empowers men to freely define their own rules (it grants them a certain normative autonomy). Thus, while he thinks that law is that which God commands, Grotius remarks that law is also what peoples in common and each republic in particular establish as an obligation (Grotius 1950, c. 2). The shift from one normative circle to another is not guided by the logic of deduction. Only those laws that are directly commanded by nature, or which are necessary for the preservation of rational life, can be deduced. That is to say, starting from the precepts that God imprints on our conscience, only a few truths can be concluded, such as that “there must be reciprocity in exchange” or that “one must reward what is well done.” Everything else – everything that cannot be deduced with certainty from the common principles of natural law – is provided by the will (Grotius 1939, Prol. 40). Complementarily, Grotius postulates that the appropriate punishment for each crime derives not from the moral law, but from the arbitrary will of the legislator, who, for instance, orders that a fourfold or fivefold fine be imposed for a theft (1939, 2.20.32.1; 2.20.3.1).

On account of all this, Grotius rejects the ideal of exactitude in moral matters. Like Aristotle, he thinks that the moralist must be content with schematic truths. To my mind, he cannot be described as a deductivist thinker. Unlike Hobbes, whose

¹¹ Grotius, in this respect, points out that “the state is the result of collective agreement... [it arises] from a deliberate design” (Grotius 1950, c. 8).

¹² See Blom (2015) and Blom (2021).

vision of morality he rejects (Grotius 1928 – 2001, num. 6166), Grotius does not understand the moral order as a set of maxims deduced from one another; he does not even elaborate a theory of the deduction of tertiary moral precepts from secondary ones, as Aquinas does. Bobbio, regarding the non-deductivist character of Grotius' ethics, argues that Grotius does not reach the Hobbesian absurdity of justifying the prohibition of drunkenness on the basis of an endless chain of syllogisms starting from the *prima principia* (Bobbio 2017, 38). If we accept Bobbio's thesis, we must affirm that Hobbes founded the *more geometrico* natural law (Bobbio 1962).

III. The *etiamsi daremus* and Secularizing Rationalism

Kaufmann (1997), Spaemann (2014), Brague (2005), etc., assume that modern natural law is necessarily a secularized law. According to this interpretation, Grotius' *etiamsi daremus* constitutes the principle of modern rationalism. This principle instantiates the ideal of immanentist–worldly ethics, which, it is said, shifts the center of gravity “from God to the world in which we live” (Gambra 2019). To tell the truth, Grotius' rationalism (if rationalism really describes him) allows for God and his providence: God, Grotius notes, is the creator and ruler of all that is, the origin of all that is good; he should be honored, served and worshipped (Grotius 2019, f. 12r). Grotius' thought, for that reason, detaches itself from Descartes' rationalism and that of any of the secularists who emerged thereafter. Nonetheless, some scholars persist to this date in portraying Grotius' ethics as “desacralizing” (Kennedy 2022).

The *etiamsi daremus* hypothesis, often alluded out of context (Chotaš 2022), is no more than a counterfactual or methodological rule (Wieacker 2016; Kaufmann 2011; Irwin 2008; Melina 2007; Contreras 2022). It was widely invoked by scholastic theologians since the fourteenth century, who used this argument to demonstrate the absurdity of the nominalist ideas concerning the *potentia Dei*. Along these lines, Grotius invokes the so-called “impious hypothesis” to point out that God is somehow limited by the order of rationality and non-contradiction governing nature, which prevents him from commanding anything or making good what is bad and bad what is good.¹³ On the other hand, Grotius, like Vitoria, Medina and Suarez (Vitoria 2015, q. 18, a. 5; Medina 1582, q. 19, a. 4; Suárez unknown, ff. 96r – 97r), also invokes the hypothesis to emphasize the self-evident and strictly natural character of the naturally just, as well as to reject the

¹³ Eyffinger (2022), in this line, has recently underlined that Grotius' use of the hypothesis fits into a very particular context.

voluntarism of some Reformed currents¹⁴ – consequently, Grotius remarks that God has implanted some innate notions into the soul (Grotius 1679, c. 2; 1939, Prol. 39),¹⁵ some laws which are sufficient to induce obligation “even if no reason is apparent” (Grotius 2004).

Both Schneewind and Korsgaard correctly note that the *etiamsi daremus* argument is not a Grotian novelty; instead, they hold that Grotius’ true innovation consists in stating that, whether God exists or not, man would at any rate be bound by moral laws and not only by natural goods to pursue or natural evils to avoid (Schneewind 2003, 90; Korsgaard 2014, 7). Thus, according to Grotius, there would be precepts, moral values, legal bonds, etc., even if God did not exist. If Grotius had only affirmed that there are goods and evils independent of God’s existence, his moral theory would not have been particularly original: Suarez had already maintained that there are goods and evils by nature which do not give rise by themselves to any obligation – unless the legislator adds the sanction that causes the duty. So, Schneewind highlights, Grotius’ innovation consists in asserting that there would be obligations, and not just goods and evils, even if God did not exist (Schneewind 2003, 88 – 89).

Schneewind’s reading overlooks the fact that Grotius, when examining natural law, says nothing about obligations in general or about the need of a divine command to make moral norms compulsory. Thereby, even if Schneewind were right, that does not make Grotius’ theory innovative. On that assumption, Irwin (2008) explains, Grotius would only be repeating Vazquez’s doctrine and, possibly, even Aquinas’ implicit position.

It seems that Grotius did not banish God from ethics. Although modern philosophers themselves – Thomasius (1963), particularly – present Grotius as the initiator of secular ethics, in reality, he deems God as one of the presuppositions of morality: without God, ethics cannot even be thought of. In this respect, the existence of God becomes a postulate of practical life. Like this, Grotius holds that religion is one of the main elements of life (life has a theological meaning for him¹⁶), not only because it educates men in the fulfilment of law, but also because, he affirms, closeness to God and piety are goods in themselves: they render man happy (Grotius 2001, c. 1, n. 13; 1928 – 2001, num. 187a).¹⁷

¹⁴ Grotius, therefore, neither denies that God exists, nor that God is the ordering principle of the universe. Grotius’ point is that the natural rights and rules can be discovered even by those who live as if God did not exist – in that sense, moral goods could also be known by those who do not recognize God as the cause of the order of the world. See Geddert (2017).

¹⁵ See Boisen (2017).

¹⁶ See Oosterhuis (2021).

¹⁷ According to Somos (2021), Grotius is probably thinking of a tolerant and minimalist Christianity.

Despite Grotius' impact on secularist theorists, he only reaffirms God's fundamental role in morality and rejects the nominalist thesis that God could prescribe anything, even that men hate him. According to Grotius, once God has decided to create rational beings, by that very fact he is compelled to respect the order of reality.¹⁸ That order is the cause behind the fact that the measure of human good is ultimately in nature and not in the act of the will, not even of the divine will.¹⁹ Moreover, as we read in *De jure prædæ*, God imprints a certain rationality and teleology on things, giving to each of them the properties necessary for achieving their perfection (Grotius 2012, 1.7; 1950, c. 2). The world, under this assumption, is revealed to us as endowed with moral sense (Haakonssen 1996, 102).

Grotius, following the scholastic-Aristotelian tradition, postulates that "natural law is so immutable that not even God can change it, for, although his power is immense, nevertheless we may say that there are some things to which that infinite power does not extend... thus, just as God cannot make that twice two should not be four, so neither can he make what is intrinsically evil cease to be evil" (Grotius 1939, 1.1.10.5). Grotius adds that this is what Aristotle teaches, who points out that there are some things whose name imply evil, such as adultery, murder, and theft (Grotius 1939, 1.1.10.5; Aristotle *EN* 1107a9 – 19). Grotius, then, agrees with Aristotle, St. Thomas, Suarez, etc., in recognizing a natural basis for ethics. He therefore defends a naturalist conception of morality (Irwin 2008; Olsthoorn 2019).

Just like Scholasticism, which moves from eternal to human law, Grotius teaches that, first and foremost, what God establishes as just is right (1950, c. 2). God, notwithstanding, is insurmountably good and faithful (Grotius 1988, c. 1; 1617, c. 6), hence he cannot go against the natural order, and he cannot command what is evil *secundum se* (1939, 1.1.10.5; 1.1.17.2). In line with Scholasticism, Grotius explains that the right is simply what is just (1.1.3.1), and that whatever God declares as his will is right, in the sense that all goodness and righteousness comes from God (1950, c. 2). Without becoming a voluntarist, Grotius yet emphasizes that God is the foundation of the legal order.

¹⁸ In this context, Grotius writes that what is just "by nature," which might well be called "divine," "is the dictum of right reason which helps us to determine whether such conduct is necessarily honest or morally dishonest because of its conformity or dissent with rational nature, and that, by this simple fact, is forbidden or commanded by God." Likewise, "Natural law in man is an intuitive judgement, making known what things from their own nature are honourable or dishonourable, involving a duty to follow the same imposed by God" (Grotius 1939, 1.1.10.1; 1926, 1.2.5).

¹⁹ According to Miller (2020), Grotius "thought a nonvoluntarist case could be made for the natural law simply by looking into nature." This distances him from voluntarists, who thought that morality depended wholly on God's will.

IV. Conclusions

Most scholars place Grotius at the origin of the so-called *more geometrico* rationalism. This way, Grotius is allegedly responsible for the transition from the topical-hermeneutic to the mathematical conception of morality, in which the ideals of exactitude and systematization displaced the *recta ratio* and the historical value of natural law. However, Grotius does not believe that ethics can be explained by mathematics. Since he considers that the human good consists in the observance of what is naturally honest, it must be said that Grotius advocates a naturalist view of morality. In Grotius' mind, the natural order and the teleology of things are relevant to ethics, in such a way that reason without nature becomes an empty measure: the judgment of reason aims at resolving whether a given conduct is in conformity with our rational nature.²⁰

Rather than a pioneer or founder of a new school, Grotius is the thinker who links the scholastic theory of justice to enlightened natural law. He is neither an absolute innovator nor is he simply parroting scholastic ideas – he rather belongs to the logic of continuity than that of discontinuity, as Haggemacher notes (1983). That being so, his achievement was to fully legitimize the Aristotelian justification of morality in the Protestant world, and to popularize this current of thought among extra-academic groups.

This study of Grotius dispels two great prejudices. On the one hand, he is presented as the initiator of a new vision of things, and, on the other, as a simple repeater of scholastic theorems. I think that both opinions rest on a very partial reading of Grotius' philosophy: they concentrate on a few statements of *De iure belli ac pacis* and *De jure praedae*, without attempting to read Grotius' juridical doctrines in the broader context of his ethics, his theology, and his theory of society.

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²⁰ Grotius strikes a healthy balance between conceptions of natural law as a “right of nature” and as a “right of reason.” He is not a secularist or deductivist rationalist, because he accepts a natural basis for ethics and, above all, because he refuses to reduce moral necessity to mathematical necessity and recognizes the importance of God in the justification of morality.

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