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MAN: A MYSTERY TO HIMSELF

1. WHAT A PIECE OF WORK MAN IS!

Thousands of years ago, the psalmist looked at the starry heavens above and, marvelling at God's care and attention for human beings, proclaimed: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps. 8:3-4). The question has been pondered upon throughout history as various thinkers have attempted to contemplate human nature, the purpose and value of human life, and its relationship with the divine.

One such observation comes from Job who intentionally imitates the phrase's form and content to protest the wisdom of the prophet: "What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention, that you examine them every morning and test them every moment? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant?" (Job 7:17–19).

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reminiscences on the same thought, coming to yet another conclusion: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me – no, nor woman neither ..." (*Hamlet* Act 2, Scene 2).

Seen as the apex of God's creation in Psalm 8, Job's "blasphemous parody"[1] sees humanity in a more mundane way, and the humble gratitude of the Psalm morphs into weariness and irritation, as the care of God in the former becomes an intimidating and oppressing act in the latter. Hamlet's soliloquy, on the other hand, quickly turns from admiration to disappointment as he contemplates the transience and insignificance of human existence.

2. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The human being is a seeker and creator of meaning and uses words to shape and assign significance to various aspects of life. Words thus allow the construction and communication of meaning and the etymology of the words used to describe human beings can be useful.

In Hebrew, mankind is referred to as *ben 'adam* (the son of Adam) or as *ben 'enosh* (the son of Enosh). The etymological connection between the words *'adam* and *'adamah* (ground or earth) in the creation narrative found in Genesis emphasizes the double relationship between human beings and the earth: man not only originates from the earth, but was created to cultivate and care for it. At the same time, Adam's intimate association with the *'adamah* may suggest a comparison with the snake which slithers on the ground, thus emphasizing mankind's animal nature[2]. Indeed, according to the Jerusalem Targums God originally thought of making man "go upon his belly" like the serpent, or graze on grass like the animals, but Adam implored: "I pray, [...] O Lord, that we may not be accounted as the cattle to eat the herb of the face of the field. Let us *stand up* and *labour* with the labour of the hands"[3].

Hebrew, however, uses another term for mankind, namely, the noun אנוש (*'enosh*), from the verb אנש (*'anash*), to be weak, even sickly, and mortal (2 Sam 12: 15), and therefore man's tendency to group together, that is, to be friendly and social. Whereas *ben 'adam*, therefore, highlights man's relationship with the divine, *ben 'enosh* emphasises the transient and mortal weakness of humanity. Interestingly, Psalm 8 uses both terms: "what is man (*'enosh*) that you are mindful of him, the son of man (*ben 'adam*) that you care for him?", whereas Job uses *'enosh*.

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[1] J. C. L. Gibson, *Job,* OT Daily Study Bible, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1985, p. 67.

[2] E. A. Abbott, *"The Son of Man" or Contributions to the Study of the Thoughts of Jesus,* Cambridge University Press 1910, p. 23.

[3] E. A. Abbott, *"The Son of Man" or Contributions to the Study of the Thoughts of Jesus*, p. 24. See also https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Genesis.3.1?lang=bi

The Latin word for human beings, *homo*, seems to be similarly derived from the word *humus* (soil), according to the Roman author Gaius Julius Hyginus who, in his *Fabulae* wrote: "because there is some disagreement about the name, it shall be called human (*homo*) because it was clearly created from earth (*humus*)"[4]. The Roman orator Quintilian would later reject this, writing: "Are we to assent to the view that *homo* is derived from *humus*, because man sprang from the earth, as though all other living things had not the same origin or as if primitive man gave the earth a name before giving one to himself?"[5]. The link between the two words, however, seems to remain, for as the classical saying goes: "*Homo humus, fama fumus, finis cinis*" ("Man is dust, fame is smoke, the end is ashes.")

The Greeks, however, called man *anthropos* because, as Plato explains, *"of all the animals man alone is rightly called man (ἄνθρωπος), because he looks up at (ἀναθρεῖ) what he has seen (ὄπωπε)"*[6]. The poet Ovid seems to concur: "While the rest of the stooping animals look at the ground, he gave the human an uplifted countenance, and ordered him to see the sky, and to raise his upturned face to the stars"[7].

3. KNOW THEN THYSELF

Ultimately, the upturned face of human beings, filled with curiosity about the heavens and everything around them, reflects their innate drive to explore, understand, and connect with the universe. It is a testament to the human spirit of curiosity, wonder, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge. As Goethe points out, however, "man is ever the most interesting object to man, and perhaps should be the only one that interests"[8]. Though "Individuals may be left to occupy themselves with whatever amuses them, with whatever gives them pleasure, whatever they think useful", the German novelist held that "the proper study of mankind is man"[9]. Goethe is here drawing from the poem "Essay on Man" by Alexander

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[4] Fable 220; *Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae*, tr. R. Scott Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing 2007, p. 167. See also S. A. Barney et al. (eds), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 231 (Book XI: *The human being and portents*, 1, 5).

[5] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book 1, 6, 34 online from http://www.perseus.tufts.edu.

[6] Plato, *Cratylus* 399c, online from http://www.perseus.tufts.edu.

[7] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.84. Cited in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, XI.1.5.

[8] J. W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, tr. T. Carlyle, New York: Collier Books 1962, p. 108.

[9] J. W. von Goethe, *Elective Affinities: A Novel*, tr. D. Constantine, Oxford University Press 1994, p. 169, end of chapter 7.

Pope, in which the English poet wrote: "Why has not man a microscopic eye? // For this plain reason, man is not a fly. // Say what the use, were finer optics given, // To inspect a mite, not comprehend the heaven?[10] [...] Know then thyself, presume not God to scan // The proper study of mankind is man[11]. [...] all our knowledge is, – Ourselves to know"[12].

Yet, though the nature of man remains the most crucial philosophical and religious/spiritual question today, sixty years ago Abraham J. Heschel had pointed out that man continues to be characterised according to his functions rather than according to his being. The eminent Jewish philosopher and theologian asked: "is it not conceivable that our entire civilization is built upon a misinterpretation of man? Or that the tragedy of man is due to the fact that he is a being who has forgotten the question: Who is Man?" Heschel continues: "The failure to identify himself, to know what is authentic human existence, leads him to assume a false identity, to pretend to be what he is unable to be or to fail to accept what is at the very root of his being. Ignorance about man is not lack of knowledge but false knowledge"[13].

Socrates' injunction to "know thyself" thus retains its currency.

4. THE RISKY BUSINESS OF DEFINING MAN

In his discussion on the Statesman or ruler who would know "the art of management of mankind", Plato attempts to distinguish man from other animals, and (not knowing of the existence, say, of kangaroos), defined man as a featherless biped[14]. According to Diogenes Laërtius, Plato was applauded for this definition, so Diogenes the Cynic plucked the feathers from a chicken, brought it to Plato's school, and said: "Behold! There is Plato's man!"[15].

This anecdote certainly does not do any justice to Plato's true understanding of mankind, but it certainly serves as a starting point for a broader philosophical discussion on the nature of humanity and the search for an essential definition of what it means to be human. It encourages us to look beyond superficial appearances and consider the deeper qualities that make us who we are as individuals and as a species. It certainly sobers any effort to arrive at a determination of man's nature.

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[10] A. Pope, *Essay on Man*, in *Essay on Man and Other Poems*, New York: Dover Publications 1994, p. 45–79, 50.

[11] A. Pope, *Essay on Man*, p. 53.

[12] A. Pope, *Essay on Man*, p. 79. This is the ending line of the poem.

[13] A. J. Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, Stanford University Press 1965, p. 5–6.

[14] Plato, Statesman, 266e. https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/.

[15] D. Laërtius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Bk 6, Ch. 2, 40. https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/.

Scientifically, human beings have been defined as *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Considering what was known about humans and animals in the eighteenth century, the taxonomic name Carl Linnaeus gave us might have seemed apt at the time. Today, however, this biological definition seems at best a naive optimism, and at worst a dangerous self-delusion. Human beings do not seem to be as wise as they believe themselves to be. It is of course true that humans have produced enormous technological and scientific progress as well as great cultural achievements. But what wisdom is there in using intelligence to become the dominant inhabitant of the world while concurrently destroying it for themselves and others? In the words of Julian Cribb: "An animal that imperils its own future and that of most other life forms and ecosystems does not merit a single 'sapiens', let alone the two we now bear"[16]. The Australian author and science communicator, who co-founded the Council for the Human Future[17], thus argues that: "We should be formally renamed to more accurately describe a species that is: exterminating thousands of others; releasing carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus in amounts exceeding Earth's natural cycles; devoting 50 times more resources to making weapons than to sustaining the food supply; destroying forests; degrading soil; polluting water; pillaging the oceans; and damaging the atmosphere on a planetary scale"[18]. Rather than using our dominance in the world as a force for good, we have become more of an invasive species[19], significantly affecting the Earth's ecosystem and biodiversity and becoming a severe pest[20]; indeed, "the greatest pest the earth has ever born"[21], "the serial killer of the biosphere"[22]. Human beings thus urgently need wisdom to save them from their arrogance and foolishness which have "finally unbound Prometheus"[23].

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[16] J. Cribb, *New name needed for unwise Homo?*, „Nature" 476 (2011), p. 282.

[17] https://humanfuture.org/. This was established to raise global awareness of humanity's growing existential emergency, comprising ten catastrophic risks, and help devise solutions to them all.

[18] J. Cribb, *New name needed for unwise Homo*?, p. 282.

[19] C. W. Marean, *How Homo sapiens Became the Ultimate Invasive Species*, „Scientific American", August 1, 2015, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-homo-sapiens--became-the-ultimate-invasive-species/

[20] A.R. Jones, *Homo sapiens: overabundant and the ultimate pest?*, in D. Lunney et al. (eds), *Pest or Guest: the zoology of overabundance,* NSW, Australia: Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales 2007, p. 233–248. See also "Trees are massacred, houses go up – faces, faces everywhere. Man is *spreading*. Man is the cancer of the earth." E. M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born,* tr. R. Howard, New York: The Viking Press 1976, p. 172.

[21] G. Heinrich, the German entomologist and ornithologist, in a letter to his son in 1975. In B. Heinrich, *The Snoring Bird: My Family's Journey Through a Century of Biology*, New York: Ecco 2007, p. 419.

[22] E. O. Wilson, *The Future of Life*, New York: Vintage Books 2002, p. 94.

[23] H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984, p. 185. See also p. 178.

5. THE DEATH OF MAN

"God is dead", declared Friedrich Nietzsche; hence, traditional categories and moral frameworks based on objective and universal principles have lost their credibility. The German philosopher thus employed a 'genealogical' approach by investigating the historical, social and psychological factors from which moral values emerge and gain dominance. Individuals may now embrace their own agency and create new meaning and values built on individual will and affirmation of life.

Michel Foucault embraced this Nietzschean 'genealogy'. In his "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", the French historian of ideas explains that Nietzsche had reacted against the assumption (of Paul Ree) "that words had kept their meaning, that desires still pointed in a single direction, that ideas retained their logic"[24]. Essentially, therefore, the metaphysics that posited essences and assumed stability was ending; in other words, everything which was once believed to be immutable has a history.

Foucault thus challenged the universality of the human subject who could be defined by some stable essence which could be objectively studied and understood. He summarised his method as a "systematic scepticism with respect to all anthropological universals" such as "madness", "delinquency", and "sexuality"[25]. The possibilities of human existence are shaped and constrained by historical, cultural and discursive factors which change over time.

Foucault argued that the concept of Man as a timeless, fixed and universal concept emerged only with the rise of disciplinary power and the formation of modern institutions, such as prisons, schools, hospitals, factories, which, through surveillance and control, sought to shape and regulate human behaviour based on an understanding of what it means to be 'normal'. Foucault explains, "[A]s the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared … then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea"[26]. Indeed, for Foucault, "It is comforting [...] and a source of profound relief to think that man [...] will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form"[27].

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[24] M. Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1977, p. 139–164, p. 139.

[25] M. Florence, *Foucault, Michel, 1926-*, in G. Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge University Press 1994, p. 317. The editor claims that Maurice Florence is a pseudonym, probably for Foucault himself (ibid., viii).

[26] M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, tr. A. S. Smith, New York: Random House, Vintage 1973, p. 385–387.

[27] M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences,* p. 385–387.

Discontinuity was so central to his message that even he himself was not static in his ideas. Foucault imagines being asked: "Are you going to change yet again, shift your position [...], declare yet again that you have never been what you have been reproached with being?" His reply is telling: "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality […]"[28].

6. ALL IDEOLOGICAL DISPUTES ARE ANTHROPOLOGICAL

The question of what it means to be human has significant implications for ethics and shapes understanding of moral responsibility and the value of human life. It guides judgements about right and wrong, fairness and justice, and how others are to be treated, leading to the development of ethical frameworks and moral principles. It also informs social interaction and organisation and is therefore important for the development of policies and institutions that promote human flourishing and social progress. Indeed, cultural and societal norms are often rooted in specific conceptions of what it means to be human. No important matter about human beings can be answered without first addressing this question such that one may say that all ideological disputes are anthropological, that is, they involve discussions, disputes, or at least assumptions about the nature of human beings, which lead to different world views.

6.1 COSMIC ORPHAN OR BELOVED CHILD?

The nature of the human being is intrinsically linked to mankind's origin. Evolutionary biology holds that human beings share common ancestors with other species, that modern humans are the result of millions of years of evolution, and that it is possible that early hominids interbred. This may easily lead to a materialistic, mechanical and atheistic view of the human being who thus becomes a "cosmic orphan"[29], merely the result of "blind chance", or, in the words of Bertrand Russell, "accidental collocations of atoms"[30].

If man is not to be measured by a Creator, but by himself, then perhaps Foucault is right to say that there is no human nature: man simply exists; he is what he wills himself to be; existence would precede essence. *Agere sequitur esse*

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28 M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, tr. A. M. S. Smith, New York: Pantheon Books 1972, p. 17.

29 L. Eiseley, cited in W. L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics,* Illinois: Crossway Books 1994, p. 57.

30 B. Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and other essays,* London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1919, p. 46–57, 47.

holds no more; since there is no human nature, then there are no values to legitimise conduct[31]. Man would be unbound in his choices of action and identity, including to "re-create" himself, made clearer today amid discussions of post-humanism and transhumanism.

When human beings are reduced only to their animal status, however, their nobility vanishes, and one might agree with Hamlet that there is no delight in man. From a Christian perspective, however, man is created in the image and likeness of God; in other words, man is always to be seen in relationship to his Creator. Whether God employed evolution to create man certainly concerns the scientist but is not the critical question required by faith which sees mankind as God's beloved children. The Christian, in fact, is heartened by Jesus's promise to his disciples: "I will not leave you orphans"[32].

6.2 THE SOCIAL IDEOLOGIES

Politics is a source of many controversies, and one should not be surprised that these are based on different ideas of human nature. The social ideologies, in fact, are based on very different anthropologies and lead to very different conclusions[33]. Anton Rauscher, for example, the German Jesuit noted for his authoritative works on Catholic Social Teaching, has highlighted how the social ideologies, with their different conceptions of what it means to be human, have strongly attacked three 'indispensable' institutions of social organisation, namely, marriage and the family; "the judicial organization of work" and private property; and the political government of society[34].

Liberalism conceives of human beings as individualistic and sovereign, and society is simply built on contracts, the terms of which are determined by the parties involved rather than by shared values and objectives that can be achieved by social collaboration. Marriage and the family are therefore mere private relationships rather than institutions of social organisation. Reduced to mere social

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[31] Except perhaps a social contract, but this would be problematic. Who is included/excluded? How does power impact the contract? How is the contract to be enforced?

[32] Jn 14:18. For other passages which speak of human beings as God's sons and daughters, see Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1; 2 Cor 6:18; Gal 3:26; Gal 4:7; Gal 4:6.

[33] Thomas Sowell has also argued that ethical and policy disputes arise from two competing visions of human nature which shape debates about justice, equality and power, namely, the 'constrained' vision (which sees human nature as unchanging and selfish) and the 'unconstrained' vision (which believes human nature may be moulded and perfected). T. Sowell, A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles, Rev. ed., Basic Books 2007.

[34] A. Rauscher, *Institutions of Social Organization: Family, Private Property, State*, in D. A. Boileau (ed.), *Principles Of Catholic Social Teaching*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 1998.

contracts between consenting parties, parents are easily reducible to "permanent contact persons" and one can also understand the change in the concept of marriage as involving two human beings of the opposite sex for life; then involving two human beings of the opposite sex as long as they continue to consent; then two persons of whatever gender; and now being expanded to throuples or polyamory[35]. Private property, though still seen as a private right, is separated from any social obligations, and employment is reduced to a contractual relationship negotiated by the employer and employee. Liberalism is therefore unable to recognise the power imbalance between parties and can only provide symptomatic relief rather than solve "the social question", that is, the relationship between capital and labour. The State is also reduced to a social contract, with the content of rights simply based on the choice of the contracting majority, rather than in the pre-existing value of the human person which the state is responsible to protect.

Collectivists ideologies, on the other hand, miss the value of the individual. Karl Marx, for example, was unable to recognise the human being as a being with inherent dignity and fundamental rights and duties on account of his materialistic outlook. In his view, private property was at the root of all social evils, and society was simply reduced to the 'collective' and in particular to class conflict. His anthropology led him to believe that marriage and the family were civil institutions which prioritised individualisation over the ascent of the individual into the community, and that the state was simply a class state that would cease with the proletariat revolution because there would be no longer be any classes[36].

While Catholic Social Teaching has long abandoned the idea of presenting itself as a Third Way between liberalism and collectivism, it can serve as a good corrective to the excesses of both. The way it does this is by basing itself on an "adequate anthropology", or an "anthropology of the person" entailing a vision of human beings in their totality, including spirituality and a theological dimension. This would allow marriage to be seen as eminently connected to the transmission of life to the next generation and the actualisation of essential cultural goals, making it easier for people to experience a security which allows them to trust and develop their capacities, while acquiring virtues and responsibility. An adequate anthropology would also allow labour to be seen not only as a 'factor of production', as Adam Smith held, but rather a result of the human person who employs creativity, initiative, and responsibility to produce economic goods from the world's resources which the Creator intended for all. Work is not necessarily a form of exploitation,

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[35] See for example: S. Page, *And Baby Makes Four: Dealing with Throuples*, „Fertility & Reproduction" 4, no. 3–4 (2022), p. 202–202.

[36] A. Rauscher, *Institutions of Social Organization: Family, Private Property, State,* in D. A. Boileau (ed.), *Principles Of Catholic Social Teaching*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 1998.

but it becomes possible to speak of the dignity of work and of private property at the service of the working person. Such an anthropology would also lead to understanding the organising task of the state to be the pursuit of the common good by guaranteeing order and the safety and wellbeing of its citizens.

6.3 ECONOMICS

What anthropology informs our economic theory? The field of economics – the study of human *choices* under conditions of scarcity – is built around the ideal of the "economic man," an independent, rational being that always acts in his own self-interest to maximise utility. Adam Smith explains this elegantly and lucidly: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their own advantages"[37]. If the fundamental question of economics is how do we manage to have dinner, however, Adam Smith only managed to give a partial answer. For the 'invisible hand' which brought the life-long bachelor food to the table every evening was not the blind forces of the market, but his mother who served him dinner not out of her self-interest but out of love. Unfortunately, however, her efforts and unpaid domestic labour were not considered in her son's reflection on how goods were produced and how men acted in the marketplace. It is interesting, therefore, that Katrine Marçal has set out to correct this and, in *Who cooked Adam Smith's Dinner?*, questions the assumptions embedded in classical economic theory, shedding light on the hidden contributions and unpaid labour (mostly of women) that sustain economics and society[38]. Today, in fact, Smith's tenet that economics is based solely on the self-interest of individual actors is increasing being debated[39], with interdisciplinary studies drawing from sociology and psychology, for example, suggesting that human behaviour is more nuanced and is influenced by factors beyond pure economic self-interest. There is also debate about whether there should be an element of generosity in economic activity[40]. Does man simply act in self--interest, or does he seek cooperation to achieve shared goals?

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[37] A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Prometheus Books 1991, p. 20.

[38] K. Marcal, *Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner? A Story of Women and Economics*, Pegasus Books 2017.

[39] For a more nuanced view of the Smith's view, see R. H. Coase, *Adam Smith's View of Man*, „The Journal of Law & Economics" 19 (1976) no. 3, p. 529–546.

[40] "The great challenge before us [...] is to demonstrate, in thinking and behaviour [...] that in commercial relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity". Benedict XVI,

6.4 BIOETHICS

The concept of Man informs discussions on topics related to the beginning of life (such as abortion, reproductive technology, embryonic and stem cell research); end of life issues (such as euthanasia and assisted suicide); and disability. The disagreements are mostly always based on the view of mankind assumed or defended by various authors: on one hand, those who seek to protect human beings and their intrinsic dignity, based on an ontological definition of personhood (e.g. Leon Kass) and, on the other hand, those who propose a functionalistic definition of personhood, which allows them to classify some human beings as non-persons, and therefore as lacking moral status and protection (e.g. Peter Singer). Writing back in 1972, Joseph Fletcher seemed to have drafted bioethics' path when he wrote: "we mean business" about establishing criteria for humanhood[41].

The bioethicists today even question whether human dignity is a meaningful concept[42], and if yes, where does it stem from? If it is not, what are the implications on human rights (since they are usually premised on human dignity), and what would an "undignified bioethics" look like[43]? Does human dignity reside in individuals, or in the human community? In the case of the former, it would most probably mean that autonomous choices of individuals are to be respected; if the latter is true, however, then it is to be expected that the human community would stop, for example, through legislation, individuals from doing things which harm or violate human dignity, such as stopping people from committing suicide, or criminalizing prostitution and drug taking. Indeed, what is the purpose of government, to promote freedom, or virtue[44]? Are human beings autonomous or are they, in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, "rational dependent animals"[45]?

Encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate,* 2009, p. 36. G. Faldetta, *The Logic of Gift and Gratuitousness in Business Relationships*, „Journal of Business Ethics" 100, Suppl. 1 (2011), p. 67–77.

[41] J. Fletcher, *Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man*, "Hastings Center Report" 2, no. 5 (1972), p. 1–4; see also J. Fletcher, *Humanhood: Essays in Biomedical Ethics*, New York: Prometheus Books 1979.

[42] R. Macklin, *Dignity is a Useless Concept*, „British Medical Journal", 327 (2003), p. 1419–1420. For an opposing view, see S. Killmister, *Dignity: Not Such a Useless Concept*, „Journal of Medical Ethics" 36, no. 3 (2010), p. 160–164.

[43] A. Cochrane, *Undignified Bioethics*, „Bioethics" 24, no. 5 (2010), p. 234–241. For an opposing view, see I. De Melo-Martín, *An Undignified Bioethics: There is no Method in this Madness*, „Bioethics" 26, no. 4 (2012), p. 224–230.

[44] See the famous article "Freedom or Virtue" by L[eo] Brent Bozell Jr. originally published in „National Review", September 11, 1962, republished in G. W. Carey (ed.), *Freedom and Virtue: The Conservative/Libertarian Debate*, Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway 1984.

[45] A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals,* Illinois: Open Court 1999.

The ethical implications of human actions on the environment and human obligations towards the natural world also depend on an understanding of the human being. An anthropocentric vision leads to the environment being valued only for its instrumental value for human benefit (such as resource extraction). This worldview is today being challenged in favour of a vision which sees the intrinsic value of the non-human world and the interconnectedness of life.

6.5 CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

How do we conceive of children, and their rights? Chris Jenks, for example, has pointed out two different visions of childhood in the early Western tradition based on two very different anthropological views[46]: the 'Dionysian' child, a view severely influenced by Puritanism, which led to a severe view of obstinate children who must be punished for their own good; and the angelic and innocent 'Apollonian' child, the fruit of a more optimistic Mediterranean (Catholic) anthropology which saw children as having a natural goodness that must be encouraged, enabled and facilitated, not crushed or beaten into submission.

The prevailing view of children today remains the Aristotelian view of children as an unfinished being who is defined not by what the child is, but by what the child is subsequently going to be. As Jens Qvortrup points out, however, children are human beings, not human becomings[47]. Similarly rejecting the formulation of children as potential adults, which would ignore their experiences as children, Martha Minnow has argued for treating children as candidates not for "children's rights", but for "human rights"[48]. The debate as to whether children should have "equal rights" with adults[49], or some rights of adults, and some rights specific to children is ultimately based on an anthropological view. Is childhood, as a time of dependence and guardianship, due to an innate biological immaturity, or is that immaturity the fruit of infantilising children well into adolescence by withholding information and responsibilities? Would granting rights to children

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[46] C. Jenks, *Childhood*, London: Routledge 1996, p. 70.

[47] J. Qvortrup, *Childhood matters: An introduction*, in J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta, H. Wintersberger (eds), *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*, Aldershot: Avebury 1994, p. 1–23.

[48] M. Minnow, *What ever happened to children's rights*?, in „Minnesota Law Review" 80 (1995), p. 267–298, 296. Minnow holds that the human rights formulation rejects the 'pretence' that children are just like adults in all respects relevant to the law, while granting children the dignity, respect and freedom from arbitrary treatment that rights signal which, rather than undermining parents, reminds them and other adults of their responsibility towards children.

[49] L. Purdy, *In Their Best Interest? The Case Against Equal Rights for Children*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1992*;* L. Purdy, *Why children shouldn't have equal rights*, in „International Journal of Children's Rights" 1 (1994), p. 223–241; L. Purdy, *Why children still shouldn't have equal rights*, in „International Journal of Children's Rights" 2 (1994), p. 395–398.

lead to "abandoning children to their rights"[50] and depriving them of the right to be a child? Who is best suited to decide on the best interests of the child: parents, or the government (through government agents, such as family services or the courts? Where do parental rights come from? And when are parents negligent, say, in refusing (or insisting upon) medical treatment for their child? The answers to such vexed questions all presuppose a particular view about the human being.

7. *ECCE HOMO*

Pontius Pilate has gone down in history as presenting Jesus, beaten and mocked, to the crowd with the words: *Ecce homo,* or "Behold the man!" (Jn 19:5). These words have been referenced in various forms of art and literature throughout the ages. In a parody of the original context, however, Friedrich Nietzsche titled his own autobiographical work *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is,* in which the German philosopher pens his self-presentation of his ideas and reflections. In a philosophical context, therefore, the phrase has come to represent the contemplation of the human condition, the vulnerability of the human being, the embodiment of suffering, the human capacity for self-sacrifice and sacrificial love, and the evil human beings are capable of inflicting on others. Theologically, the phrase takes on a particular meaning when viewed in the context of the Catholic teaching that Jesus Christ "fully reveals man to man himself"[51].

Ecce homo, therefore. But what do human beings behold when, as *anthropoi*, they look at others, at the non-human world, or at themselves, wondering: What is man?; Who am I? These existential inquiries invite individuals to explore philosophical, spiritual, or religious dimensions as they seek understanding, purpose, and fulfilment in their existence, and draw attention to their perception of and relationship to others.

Emanuel Levinas was right to point out that our ethical responsibility emerges from our encounters with the other. The face of the other disrupts our self-centeredness and calls us to respond with compassion, empathy, and responsibility such that, for the French Jewish philosopher, ethics precedes ontology. Thus, when beholding another, do I perceive another like me, sharing the same humanity, or someone unlike me; someone to be admired, pitied, or envied; my brother or my competitor; my friend and ally or my enemy? Is the other someone to be cared for, or to be mindful of? Or perhaps someone who is not worthy of my care or someone to be left alone? Does the other delight me, or do I find the other

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[50] J. O. Hafen, *Abandoning children to their rights*, in „First Things" 55 (1995), p. 18–24.
[51] Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

abhorrent? When thinking of the Divine, as the totally Other, do I perceive a father (theism), an oppressor (deism?), or simply a pie in the sky (atheism)? When beholding the natural world, do I see beauty or profit; instrumental or intrinsic value; the environment or Creation; something outside of me, or something of which I am part? Looking at oneself is also important, for it allows introspection and self-examination in order to understand one's identity, desires, fears, values and aspirations. At the same time, the question of what is beholden is not only subjective and deeply personal, but also debateable in a wider political context: What do we, as a political community, see? And how do we, as a society, respond?

While "on earth the brute creation bends its gaze"[52], may we as *anthropoi* continue to stand upright in order to examine and consider man[53], observing him not with a cold, Foucauldian "gaze" but, in line with the etymology of the word (*ob + servare*; towards, attend to), continue to care, serve and be mindful of him, for: *Ecce homo*: what a piece of work man is!

CZŁOWIEK: TAJEMNICA DLA SAMEGO SIEBIE

Abstrakt

Już Psalmista zastanawiał się, dlaczego Bóg miałby pamiętać o człowieku, ale tysiące lat później człowiek pozostaje nadal tajemnicą dla samego siebie oraz w swojej relacji z Bogiem i innymi. Niniejszy artykuł rozpoczyna się od przyjrzenia się etymologiom nazw używanych dla określenia człowieka w języku hebrajskim, łacińskim i greckim, a następnie argumentuje, że chociaż istoty ludzkie mogą studiować wszystkie otaczające je rzeczy, ważne jest, aby studiować samą ludzkość, ponieważ ignorancja na temat człowieka prowadzi do błędnych wyobrażeń o tym, kim są istoty ludzkie. Jednocześnie zdefiniowanie człowieczeństwa nie jest łatwe, a niektórzy, jak Foucault, stanowczo argumentowali przeciwko domniemanej istocie rzeczy. W tym ujęciu natura ludzka nie istnieje i wkrótce nadejdzie czas, gdy „człowiek" umrze. Jednocześnie jednak nasze dzisiejsze dyskusje i spory są wynikiem różnych poglądów na to, kim jest człowiek. Jest to omawiane w kontekście biologicznego pochodzenia człowieka, ideologii społecznych liberalizmu i socjalizmu, ekonomii, bioetyki i wreszcie w odniesieniu do dzieci. Artykuł kończy się wezwaniem do szerokiego spojrzenia na człowieka i udzielenia starannej odpowiedzi.

S ł o w a   k l u c z o w e : natura ludzka, bioetyka, ekonomia, dzieciństwo, Foucault, Levinas, Potter.

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52 Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 1.84. Online from http://www.perseus.tufts.edu.

53 According to Socrates, "The name 'man' (ἄνθρωπος) indicates that the other animals do not examine, or consider, or look up at (ἀναθρεῖ) any of the things that they see, but man has no sooner seen [...] than he looks up at and considers that which he has seen." Plato, *Cratylus* 399c.

MAN: MYSTERY FOR HIMSELF

Abstract

The Psalmist wonders why God should be mindful of man, but thousands of years later, man remains a mystery to himself, and in his relationship with God and others. The article starts by looking at etymologies of the names used for the human being in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, and then goes to argue that while human beings may study all the things around them, it is important to study mankind itself, for ignorance about man leads to wrong ideas about who human beings are. At the same time, defining mankind is not easy, and some, like Foucault, have forcefully argued against a presumed essence of things. In this view, therefore, human nature does not exist, and soon there will come a time when 'man' will die. At the same time, however, our discussion and disputes today are the result of different views of what man is. This is discussed in the context of man's biological origins, the social ideologies of liberalism and socialism, economics, bioethics, and finally with respect to children. The article concludes with a call to behold man in a broad way and to respond with care.

K e y w o r d s : human nature, bioethics, economics, childhood, Foucault, Levinas, Potter.

DER MENSCH: EIN RÄTSEL FÜR SICH SELBST

Abstrakt

Der Psalmist fragt sich, warum Gott sich um den Menschen kümmert, aber auch Tausende von Jahren später bleibt der Mensch für sich selbst und in seiner Beziehung zu Gott und den anderen ein Rätsel. Der Artikel beginnt mit einem Blick auf die Etymologien der Namen, die im Hebräischen, Lateinischen und Griechischen für den Menschen verwendet werden, und argumentiert dann, dass der Mensch zwar alle Dinge um sich herum studieren kann, es aber wichtig ist, den Menschen selbst zu studieren, denn Unwissenheit über den Menschen führt zu falschen Vorstellungen darüber, wer der Mensch ist. Gleichzeitig ist es nicht einfach, den Menschen zu definieren, und einige, wie Foucault, haben sich nachdrücklich gegen eine angenommene Essenz der Dinge ausgesprochen. Nach dieser Auffassung gibt es also keine menschliche Natur, und es wird bald eine Zeit kommen, in der der "Mensch" sterben wird. Gleichzeitig sind unsere heutigen Diskussionen und Auseinandersetzungen aber auch das Ergebnis unterschiedlicher Auffassungen darüber, was der Mensch ist. Dies wird im Zusammenhang mit den biologischen Ursprüngen des Menschen, den gesellschaftlichen Ideologien des Liberalismus und des Sozialismus, der Ökonomie, der Bioethik und schließlich im Hinblick auf die Kinder diskutiert. Der Artikel schließt mit einem Aufruf, den Menschen in seiner ganzen Breite zu betrachten und mit Sorgfalt zu reagieren.

S c h l ü s s e l w ö r t e r : menschliche Natur, Bioethik, Wirtschaft, Kindheit, Foucault, Levinas, Potter.

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