

HUMANISM AND HUMAN NATURE: RECOVERING THE INDIVIDUAL

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"Whoever Controls the *Definition* of Human
Nature Controls the Destiny of the World..."

A Proposal: The concepts of humanism and human nature are inexorably entangled. The humanist concept that (individual) human beings are able to think critically, are in charge of their lives, and are free to be, is underlain by a series of "arguments" about what it means to be human; to possess human nature. A critical examination of human nature will reveal the role of the concept of the individual, its vicissitudes and place within humanism.

INTRODUCTION

Humanism is currently under attack. Rather than studied in terms of its content and history, it has been identified by opposition and contrast. Whereas humanism posits a trust in human beings to think constructively, modern complexities evoke a fear of our thinking. Whereas humanism claims the importance of the present, anti-humanists revere earlier times, ignoring or denying change. Whereas humanism thrives on critical inquiry and knowledge, its critics see strength only in ancient texts. In the damnation of humanism as "secular," these critics claim the authority to interpret such texts as they please. Furthermore, humanism has been constructed as anti-religious. In acceding to these oppositional definitions, many humanists appear defensive, using old and static concepts.

Ironically, being American and being a humanist are virtually synonymous. As heirs of Jefferson, most Americans "act" as humanists...participating in a democratic form of life, and studying for a liberal education. Though engaging in these forms, little attention is given to its conceptual substance. In the past decades, we have experienced a widening gap between theory and practice. Sensing this discontinuity, we have gone from texts to cures to the narcissisms of individuality.

Searching to renew some sense of meaning and purpose, humanists have an imperative to move beyond defensiveness. Questions which have arisen in these times, demand that humanists provide a framework for inquiry into the meaning of existence, and the nature of our being.

These cosmological and ontological questions have seemed external to humanism. Individuality, freedom, and thinking have been paramount. Now, however, views about the beginning and end of life, questions of medical and computer technology, the nature of other species, other peoples and their systems of morality, thought and religion, impinge upon us. The world grows smaller and often more fearful. Why we are, who we are, what we are, are issues which must be addressed by humanism.

There is a broader concept, encompassing and underlying all of these questions: What is the nature of being human?

Without understanding (what is happening to) the linked concept of human nature, humanism will not be understood, elaborated, and re-enlivened for this age.

This essay will attempt to show —always heeding human nature concepts —that the key to a vibrant humanism lies within a considered exploration of the notion of the "individual"... no mere declaration of individual hegemony; nor an uncritical acceptance of Jefferson's "created equal"...toward a fuller concept which can change and grow to jibe with experience, and be sustaining in the toughest of times.

HUMAN NATURE - TOWARD CRITICAL SELF-KNOWLEDGE

To study and understand what (all) it means to be human, what should we do?

How did we get here; where are we now; whence do we go? —what history, what stories? Who and what are we not: not animals; not machines?

Many of these questions have been considered; others remain less studied. Clearly, the history and living situations of many peoples have been observed and described. However, in concentrating on the more formal structures of societies, individual and interpersonal questions of mutual understanding, have received less attention. Who we are in the necessary and meaningful aspects of our lives: as persons, technicians, theologians, politicians, economists, thinkers,...are important aspects of being human.

At least as compelling is critical self-examination. We must recognize that we already possess perspectives, prejudices, predilections, and points-of-view. We bring a lifetime of judgments to our thinking. To acknowledge and study our own thinking, and to be able to move beyond these judgments, requires, in my view, the study of three "thought arenas," whose effects on our thinking are over-arching. These are: (1) the history of ideas; (2) the study of comparative thought; (3) the sociology of knowledge.

(1) *History of Ideas*: There is, of course, a linear, chronological history. Even more crucial to our understanding the human, is the importance of studying the history of ideas (Lovejoy 1936), particularly as they inform beliefs and dispositions. Some of these ideas are intellectual; others are aspects of personal biographies.

To illustrate the personal: everyone's upbringing is filled with stories about what it means to be this sort of person; not that kind of creature. Folk-ideas about *being* human are important to acknowledge because we are already educated and intellectually shaped by the time we question: what is human? Being self-critical is difficult because our very thinking and "looking-out," are intricately enmeshed with "who we are." The ideas which underlie the stories, which inform them, have become the "common sense" of parents and friends. Our sense of truth is filled with ideas to which we are heir; their obviousness lurks in our conceptual being.

Intellectual ideas deserve even more consideration. Ideas which remain alive in our thinking often have specific histories and developers whose biography and interests ought to receive our critical attention. Often we can discern how they work-out over time. Powerful in the context of humanism and human nature are, for example, the concepts of "competition" and "survival."

The idea of society as competition between individuals derives principally from Hobbes. Thomas Hobbes was a 17th century thinker who attempted to apply early scientific ideas to the structure of society. His utopic "Leviathan" (1962) depicts society as a closed universe, where everyone is primarily and principally in competition with everyone else. His was a purely competitive society, in which control by authority was a necessary counter-balance to an ultimately "destructive competitive urge." Hobbes' ideas resonate still in our day-to-day thinking. A Hobbesian view adds dimension to observation, but it is singular and incomplete.

Whether life experience directs them, whether they are out to win or not-lose, persons attracted to competition (entire academic fields?) are not always open observers. Not understanding the history, not being aware of its implications, they find Hobbesian schemes reasonable and convincing...they observe through the lens of their own competitive urges. Not looking comprehensively, they remain unaware of the entailments which lead to authoritarian anti-humanistic political systems ("because" unrestrained competitive behavior is chaotic)!

Survival is another idea which resonates in our thinking. It derives most directly from that ancient giant who powerfully framed Western thought: Plato. It may take various paths in current thinking: bodily survival; "beyond" life. Consider the view that (all) human behavior is *really* toward "survival" —of genes, say. This may direct us to note primarily or exclusively those aspects of behavior which are obviously toward survival (e.g., reproductive behavior). Or it may direct us to interpret everything we observe, as aspects of survival, no matter how obscurely. Historically such particularism has led to chimerical or "ideal-ized" interpretations, where life is ostensive, and the actual is an illusion; or there is no actual. It is likely to call attention away from experience, and toward the imaginary.

Much of our present thinking is historically derived and remains unexamined. The force of our historical orientation is often very powerful; so powerful, that otherwise careful thinkers and observers often tend to rely on historically derived ideas. Rather than to see and seek out any present actuality, to ask critically where these ideas derive, how they have worked out over time, we often find it common-sensically obvious that a particular question or solution is final and correct. To overcome such habits of thought we must work to distinguish the actualities of the observed, and not impute our own orientations to them, willy nilly.

In the context of humanism, possessing theories in the depths of our intellectual baggage (it seems unavoidable), is less worrisome than their remaining unexamined or denied. In studying the history of ideas, we discern what ideas we possess already; where they have been and gone, historically; what they imply and entail.

(2) *Comparative Thought*: will provide mirrors upon our thinking – elucidating our traditions and habits within the scope of other world views. In the context of a shrinking earth, it has become clear that the Western tradition is one among many. How do we see what is Western or American; how do we think differently from persons raised in other traditions; how obvious or necessary is our "common-sense" what human nature ideas have developed in other philosophical-religious histories? From these contrasts and comparisons, and with these other visions in our awareness, how do we look (back) at ourselves critically?

We are (already) unacknowledged comparative, contrastive thinkers. We see others not only as persons, but as groups, tribes, or peoples; we see humans in contrast with other species; we hear dialects as distinct from our own speech. These habits of contrast and differentiation become discernable in the framework of comparative thought.

Since other thought systems have sustained large numbers of people for extended periods of time, there is some hubris in our claiming to possess the correct or only rationality and vision of what is nature. Other peoples may not be scientific-analytic or technological in outlook. Nevertheless, their ideas and systems of thinking provide meaning and purpose to their lives. How do they see the human condition; what is their sense of living, of nature?

Entire "systems" of thought have been erected on different understandings of reality. Is "reality" experienced primarily when we are awake or asleep; which the more real- death or life; are we, by our nature, good, evil, or neutral; do we have, by our nature, dominion over other species? Or, consider the "grand" traditions, of which only Confucianism seems to seek perfection...within-life. Other traditions, so different, set Western thought in the context of one tradition among several within the human condition.

Other systems of thought do not compare humans with other species, do not focus upon what is unique about humans, but derive more from human experience per se. Where Western thought is concerned more with survival, eternality and the mind or soul, other systems of thought focus on the present. Where Western thought sees some opposition between the finite and the universal aspects of life, other philosophical traditions see these as complementary and cyclical. Enmeshing ourselves in these other systems of thought, of world-views, enables us to see ourselves more critically.

The power of the comparative thought is nowhere as obvious as in the analysis and understanding of language. In Western thought language has been used both as definition and metaphor for what is human. In the past few decades studies of other species have resulted in new insights into nature: the idea that most species are social; more intelligent than had been thought; and likely communicate in complex ways. The new knowledge about other species demands a critical examination of our thinking about humans. However, as heirs to the notion that human uniqueness is due primarily to "language," we resist.

There has been little study of substance, comparing the verbal behavior of other species and human (language). We still do not know if or how language is unique. Study has focused on those aspects of language (grammar, syntax) which have seemed to reflect the human mind (symbolic, objective). It has virtually ignored the potentially comparative contexts of behavior, including gesture and tone-of-voice. The concept of language uniqueness, (though based on very little knowledge of other species), has been powerful in informing who and how we are, and as a method for judging others (Sarles 1985).

Thinking comparatively, consider that other species may (also) be able to think, to have awareness or consciousness (Griffin 1976). To study the "thinking" of other species, or even imagine that they might think, comparative thought is edifying...if only to get some sense for the range of possibilities within one, albeit our, species, earth-bound.

[Note. contrastively. that many thinkers (Sagan 1974) have abandoned this quest. They seek (only) for communication with extra-terrestrials. whom. they hope. may possess "intelligence" in about the same senses in which we attribute it to ourselves! (Sarles 1985: Chap.2)]

While we do not yet know whether other species possess awareness, most of us have some stake in thinking that only humans -have IT. Indeed, comparative thinking provides a critique of human uniqueness, thus about human nature: the "ethological critique."

(3) *Sociology of Ideas*: In the quest for understanding the concept of the individual - a linchpin of any humanism -the so-called marketplace of ideas plays a murky role. The market for ideas, the "sociology" of knowledge, is often powerful in directing us toward certain questions, toward judgments of what is reasonable, which "explanations" satisfy us, or do not. It is difficult to remain objective within this panoply of pressures. There are many attempts and outlooks through which we claim to seek, and find, the truth.

Science generally examines the world, experiments, and arrives at truth by logical and mathematical thinking. Religion's claims to knowledge are based on intuition, on faith, on the mystical or irrational. At different times, in various situations, some approaches are more believable and appealing, as others fade or seem false, less authoritative. Even within science, "knowledge" changes as new ideas emerge and techniques develop.

Truth established within a marketplace of ideas is difficult to disentangle from truth which reflects nature. How do we free descriptions which sell, which convince others because they fit into their thinking, which seem "reasonable" in some context or era...from those which are convincing because they are valid in some over-arching senses (Mannheim 1936)? Just as we attempt to be resistant to product advertising campaigns, we must be aware that ideas exist in intellectual marketplaces. This is a struggle for integrity and honesty; wont to be chipped away, rather than attacked directly.

This marketplace of ideas bounces us hither and yon: first, in the questions we pose; second, in its "playing" with who we are, and how we see ourselves. Especially within the context of humanism and human nature, it is important to examine critically our assumptions about the individual as observer, and the possibilities of remaining objective.

Besides new "truths," older ideas often re-emerge in these same markets. What seems correct or true or reasonable, is frequently a "re-invention."

Clean and clear argument and disagreement is important in the development of knowledge. In the history, comparison and sociology of knowledge, however, arguments are often cast in cloaks and shadows. It is difficult to have - and to evaluate - unpopular or original opinions, questions, observations. Most creative and/ or original work requires and demands individual clarity, as well as the continuing strength and willingness to "locate" oneself (in one's various histories and marketplaces).

Where does good critical, rational thought reside?

CONCEPTS OF FREEDOM AND THE INDIVIDUAL: THE INDIVIDUAL-SOCIAL DIALECTIC

As humanism developed, strong concepts of freedom and individuality prevailed. This had two major sources: (1) responses to forms of government and religion which granted power to persons or groups whose rule favored certain (types of) individuals or outlooks; (2) criticism of frameworks of thought and authority used by these governments and religions to support their positions of power.

The concept of the individual - rational, free to think critically, to establish new forms of government, to objectively observe nature - became a cornerstone of Enlightenment thought. As humanism gained ascendance, many of its tenets were accepted by politics and religion, and the sense of active opposition weakened and disappeared. (As opposition to any concept *raison d'être* often becomes obscure.)

While this concept remains a cornerstone, in the present era "individualism" has a new focus...more existential, more inward. How to find and direct myself, seems a most compelling issue. Additionally, the concept of individual has been cast within broadening contexts: "social biology," hunger, organ transplants, shrinking world, divorce, public health, rich/ poor, religious Messianism, the family, animal rights, education... An alteration in one inevitably affects some other(s).

The notion of individual is neither obvious nor standing-still. It partakes in different meaning domains in the political and existential arenas, as well as in other settings. Perhaps its most important and over-arching context is within the dialectic of social and individual. We are, at once, individual and social; always in juxtaposition.

In this dialogue between individual and social, our existence is often explained by invoking one or the other. How does this "axis" shift when we enter an era of pessimism; or of a perception of great change (Sarles 1985a)?

These shifts of the social/ individual dialogue, may be examined: in the theories of behavioral biology (*Ethology and Sociobiology* - Lorenz [1966] and Wilson [1975]); in the resurgence of fundamentalist religious movements; and, (in the larger sense of the social), the tension between nation or state and its individual citizens...state... versus, church... versus...

It must be remembered, in view of this movement on the individual-social axis, that the important aspect of the individual has to do with rationality. If the individual cannot think critically for her/himself, cannot be consistently objective, then the foundations for a humanistic life are seriously undermined.

CONSIDER...

a) In the arena of education, these issues arise frequently. It is a poignant and complicated arena, because we claim to be teaching each "individual." When, however, the concept of the individual is on the move, this is neither simple nor obvious. When any "individual" does not do well, we tend to blame, rather than to study our own concepts and practices. We seem tempted to ask social, "tribal" questions to explain failures: what gender, color, ethnicity? We seek social, historical, familial, tribal, genealogical, genetic explanations of individual "capabilities."

In seeking social explanations, we seem to infer that a distinguishable group is predisposed to have certain features: poor math skills, good rhythm... If I am a then I can or cannot! If you are a..., then you can, or cannot. Isn't this, in its very formulation, the urge toward some form of social determinism, toward some form of totalitarianism? Where is the individual-social dialectic in this?

b) The individual-social dialectic translates, like Proteus, into many forms. In a direct sense, humanism is derived from and opposed to the idea of "religionism," particularly of a religionism which claims that the deity or theistic texts pre-determine how humans are and ought to be. Humanism does not, in any necessary way, oppose any religion or the idea of a deity, of God, but it states that we humans can think out our lives: by ourselves. Perhaps we are divinely inspired; but it is we -you and I -who have to think out our own lives. We have to interpret or exegete any text, even when we believe it to be divinely given or inspired.

c) In America, humanism developed without direct oppositional experience. Lacks of individual freedom were subtle, often "psychological," more shaped by dynamic social forces; and by government decree toward the "greater good." As we begin to experience more direct (e.g., religious) opposition, the grounds of humanism appear less solid, less clear, than we had supposed. How will we re-establish a viable humanism without being defensive; i.e., without being tempted to oppose any attacks in the opponents' terms?

d) In this era there is a sense, paradoxically, both of great change and the loss of progress. This often translates into a pessimism which focuses upon limitations, downplaying human possibilities. When applied to the individual, this pessimism about possibilities leads us to wonder if most human traits aren't fixed or determined. If we are not "born free," can we truly engage in free inquiry?

A rich humanism will not deny that there are some individual limitations, but will focus primarily on managing them; not yield to the temptation to offer them as excuse, but meditate on how to move on, in some interesting, personally progressive sense; not permit social pressures and intellectual history to determine what and how to think. The democratic humanistic urge is, I believe, to accept the possibility of restrictions on one's lifeways, ... and to continue to work at going beyond them; to transcend them.

How to think well, usefully, constructively? How to update one's individuality, within the individual-social dialogue? How to find the freedom necessary to oneself without denying the social facts and responsibilities of being (Sarles: 19X6ms)?

KNOWLEDGE AND NATURE

Humanism grew out of a dialectic between faith and reason. Faith, in the word of a deity, revealed in a set of ancient texts, and interpreted by a priestly class: versus reason, observation, critical thought, and experimentation leading to new knowledge. Unlike theism, which proclaims that a super-human concept provides "purpose" to life, which ought to rule how we think and what we do, humanism declares an appeal to nature itself to understand life's meaning: Jefferson's words, "nature's God." (1944)

In the 18th century, reason was equated with (individual) rationality, and both have been translated, this century, into science. Science is the direction and method for posing questions, for experimentation, description and critical thinking. Science is an inquiry into the nature of nature...we have sought, that is, to understand nature, the world, as science claims it to be; based on observing the world and nature.

Scientific inquiry is powerful in its methods and results. Its results are, however, sometimes misapplied. People often "translate" scientifically derived data into the equivalent of a revealed, fixed text; they may "believe" in science without critically thinking what science is. In other words, a disguise of science (a confusion of faith and reason) can make it appear that science has its own super-natural.

Reliance on such faith can captivate our own thinking, especially as a seeming solution to moments of despair, when we may seek surety. And the replacement of science as a method of inquiry, by a reliance on modern technology which is "friendly" and which mostly "works," reduces inquiry and knowledge to the pragmatic. This attitude and intellectual "climate" has enabled some fundamentalist "creationists" to co-opt the notion of "science" to mean a closed belief system, rather than an open method of inquiry (Morris 1974).

Science "claims" to examine nature, usually proceeding with great care. It is self-critical, revising its theories and results when they do not jibe with new observation and experience. In most realms, this works very well. Scientific exploration of the physical universe seems clear and clean.

When sciences move into the life sciences, however, the lines blur - it is sometimes difficult to extricate scientific methods from history, comparison, and the sociology of ideas. This is especially the case in the scientific inquiry of human nature (attempting to "stand outside" ourselves). The "outcome" of such inquiry purports to tell us "how we are." And "how we are" is a convoluted, volatile, pivotal issue: enter a human nature discussion, and we find ourselves immersed in subjects as seemingly diverse as politics, religion, and metaphysics.

Some questions which often arise in such a discussion: Are humans "in" or "out" of nature? Should we be likened to the other forms of life upon this earth? Or are we so distinct and unique that we cannot be compared ...with porpoises or chimps, ants or bacteria? [Note that the Book of Genesis instructs that we humans are not only unique (in the "image" of God), but can do with others as we see fit (we have "dominion" over them)].

Biologists have wavered on this issue: some (Darwin 1871, Griffin) remaining open; others (Lorenz and Wilson) claiming that the human "mind" is indeed different, "outside" of nature. Precisely in this area of "knowledge and nature," it is difficult to stay clear about differences between science (reason) and faith (purpose). Scientific questions of reason, of "what" and "how," somehow slide into questions of faith and purpose: "why?"

Are humans "in" nature? If so, then what, precisely, is human: do we include/ exclude deaf, women, "other races," the "retarded?" If not, whom do we include/ exclude...? Are only our bodies "in nature," and our "minds" outside? What is a mind; the body? what "normal"; what ideal?

Seeking direct solutions to these questions takes us on labyrinthine paths. We move from biology to metaphysics and politics - nor have we yet probed deeply. How subtle this can be, is illustrated by the ironic "double-face" of current biology.

One face exists in the oppositional dialectic with religious thought (the same context from which humanism springs). Religion places the universe in the hands of an "everlasting" deity, where (apparent) change is an illusion; there is no significant change. The world, life, species, were created - once, and for all of time; was, is, will be ... as it was. If we (seem to) experience change, it is an illusion; a chimera. We must come to see all of nature as if it were pre-determined ... irrespective of experience. Our human experience - which is abundant with change and process - is to be interpreted as false, if it clashes with the texts of theology.

Biology-as-evolution views the natural world as dynamic, changing, adapting - a world whose life forms are in transit. Biology studies fossils and living forms, describing how life has actually evolved upon this earth. In this context, biology notes and champions the concept of change; adaptation

toward survival in an undetermined universe. During the past century, biological thought has ascended, and most of us have truly become evolutionary thinkers.

The other face of biology arose with the application of biological theories to human society. Immediately after Darwin, Hobbesian as well as evolutionary theories were used to "explain" behavior and society. Galton's book, *Hereditary Genius* (1914), resurfaced earlier arguments used by monarchs to bolster their claims to rule. Spencer used Darwin's (1859) ideas of the "origin" of species, to justify an aristocracy within the context of the "survival of the fittest" - *Social Darwinism* (Hofstadter). [Note that these outlooks, highly popularized around the turn of this century, still resonate within our common experience and knowledge.]

The ghost of Hobbes, incarnate within *Social Darwinism*, resurfaces as the other face of biology; the face which focuses on fixity. The obviousness of change prompted the wonder of how any species remains that species. Theories of heredity emerged to address these questions. Biology assumed the task of elucidating the hereditary-continuity aspects of living creatures. From the genetics of Mendel (1866) on, a concern with the "ultimacy" of survival, overshadowed the "proximate" biology of our present being. Gradually, the sense that human nature is no longer evolving, has shifted emphasis into the context of fixity.

Once fixity became a focus of biological thinking, the step from constancy to permanence and eternity, began to be bridged. Recent works in "socio-biology" have resurfaced questions about the "why's" of existence (Lumsden and Wilson). Evolution as change and process, has been transformed into an historical explanation for why we are here.

In the attempt to explain continuity of species, notions of the everlasting have crept in: as the gene is reified and granted "agency." The "genes" are held to promote "self-interest," and to possess a kind of natural "immortality" (Dawkins 1976). One is suspicious that the "immortal coil" again thrusts our thought into a search for the "why's" of existence. It is difficult, within the history and sociology of ideas to discern nature from "theo-politics." In a sense, the biologists have joined their religious opposition, as the "immortal soul" is re-placed by the "immortal coil" of double helix.

In this realm of knowledge and nature, there is much confusion-all in the name of reason; all motivated by the search for truth. Is it nature which is being observed and examined; or is it some metaphysics or older philosophy or theopolitics which is being dressed up in modern garb?

At this point, there is some temptation to throw up one's hands, become cynical, proclaim the vastness of modern knowledge, and try to find other amusements. Nietzsche's prophecy of last century, that we would tend toward nihilism in the aftermath of "the death of God," now haunts our mentalities. If it is so difficult to penetrate the ideology surrounding nature, perhaps there is...no way to seek truth...no truth. And we may move, full circle, back to ancient texts and the super-human. Abandoning reason, we slide down the tipping see-saw of destiny, and try to find faith.

Instead, humanism demands that we trust our own abilities: strength to confront our thoughts and worries directly; wisdom to study and discuss the history, the sociology, the comparative senses of knowledge by which we can come to discover who we are; perseverance to pursue being the individual, self-critical thinkers who can find objectivity and continue to search nature.

WHITHER THE INDIVIDUAL?

Rational, objective, "cool" - these concepts of the individual are crucial to humanism.

Some of the foundations of the idea of the individual have, however, been changing. The "clean slate" of Locke (1690), in which the individual is born totally "new," seems naive in these times of fetal conditioning and pre-birth learning. The idea of each one's being "born free" in nature, so important to Rousseau's (1762) enlightenment theories, contrasts with the idea that humans evolved, already, as social creatures - an idea coming from comparative ethology.

No doubt the modern concept of the individual, seems somewhat wispy and weakened. But it, too, has a history from which it can be unpacked, deciphered, and understood anew. Perhaps the era of the "assertion" of individuality as primary, evident, and independent, merely on the grounds of our being, is past. But consider...

The notion of the individual is paradoxical; we both are - and are not - individuals. I am, you are, simultaneously myself, a child, son, sister, husband, parent. Myself (I think) is uniquely me; I am spouse to J., parent to A. and to S., teacher... to my students. Yet the boundaries of my being many, as well as individual, are not so confused.

The history of the concept - the individual - is labyrinthine. As unwitting Platonists, we fasten onto the idea that the individual is a singularity, an entity; continuous, yet separable from "experience." More important, within this singularity we see the individual as "dual:" body and mind. In this dualism, the reasoning individual is attributed to the mind; the body is... cast aside, left aside, disregarded or forgotten, often "opposed." The social facts of our existence also remain outside of this concentration upon the mind or soul or spirit - which we accept as the essence of the individual.

The life history - of the actual individual - is "more than" any singularity. To begin, parents (mothers) "have" children. The infant, delivered, breathing on its own, delineated anatomically, delimited physiologically, seems to be whole, complete: an individual. Yet it would not survive long, alone! Viability in an anatomical sense is not an individual being. The infant is - but is still mostly potential.

In other words, individuality does not come ready-made as an aspect or accompaniment to one's anatomic individuality. It must be learned, gleaned, discovered. The material body does not merely get "filled" with knowledge. For parents, the infant is "representational" of a person: their child, a future

adult, essentially like them. It is seen, reacted to, treated as that developing person. It literally survives as the person whom the parents conceptualize.

The developing child must "discover" the "I": the persona who states and questions...and proposes (as logicians would have it). There is nothing, as far as I can tell, in the universe of talk and discourse, which can tell anyone that he or she is to be an "I." It is a "reciprocal" word. Parents, nor siblings, nor anyone can tell another that he is to consider himself an "I" - if I tell anyone to say "I am well, it cannot be done. The child must figure this out. Parents must demand that the child consider himself/ herself and "I." The persona and character whom they see, must transform into a person, who is. Here is the seat of individuality!

A crucial part - of becoming an individual- is that parents conceptualize and treat their infant as an individual- a person with futurity and with destiny: at once a body; yet more than body. Upon first seeing the infant, scrutinizing its visage, what do parents see. actually? What do they say, in their scannings? Who? Who...does he, she...look like? Folk-genetic theories invoked from unformalized taxonomies, explain something to them. What it does, (this viewing, this seeing of persona "into" their infant's face) is to "characterize" the infant. (Often, this is the person they see for all of life.)

Individuality is later elaborated. consciously considered as we are able to stand "outside" ourselves. We become objective as we understand that the "I" who lives as me, is conceptually existing; existing actually. We also come to realize that there are other individuals.

Seeing and defining others is not confined to parent-child relationships. We are all deeply, students and judges of others; we "read" character...into them. *How* we view and image others, is heavily invested in faces (Sarles 1985: Chap. 12-14). There are, of course, many other "images" and aspects of how we read character: obvious categories (gender, age, weight,...); to subtle (ethnicity, style, attractiveness...).

Being aware that we "read" others, we also have some awareness that others "read" us. Being seen by (significant) others as someone, has a powerful influence on our being. How does anyone keep clear the character whom he/ she is or wants to be, from the attributions and stereotypic categories which others see? Where, in this compounding circularity, is *the* individual?

A humanism must ask the questions: Do they -the (attributive) categories - change? When/ how? How open; how restrictive are they? What is a face? What matter heredity or environment - when we see in our infants their futurity; see out from our own stereotypes, into others' lives?

In a sense, this is all well-known, understood at a level of being and doing. But our being and experiencing, is subordinated to theories of existence which obscure individuality. *Talk* about being is referenced to the duality of body and mind, which reduces the dynamics and complexity of being someone, to the simplicity of an either-or. More talk about being an individual is referenced to the dialectic of individual and social...

The rational individual is not a direct given, a feature inherent in our anatomical existence; it is an aspect of our being-in-relation. Our individuality is in tension with our various kinds of sociality. How to keep clear who I am in relation, and who I am in all the others senses of being and becoming: this underscores the challenges of modern humanism.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND HUMAN NATURE

It is vital to remember that ideas enter our thinking as "arguments" and "claims." Enlightenment ideas directed us primarily - and prematurely - to the individual as the total essence of being human; and left sociality, experience, the on-goingness of life, as after-thought. One cannot, I believe, "escape" history, sociology and comparison of ideas. This is not to deny the individual, not to deny objectivity, personal freedom, or self-determination. It is to state that individuality is not any mere given, a priori to human experience: we are not (merely) "born free."

How do we approach this study? How can we avoid the dualisms and dichotomizing of human and nature? There are many pitfalls: humans in nature! Separate from nature? Both in and outside of nature? How to study nature?

In comparative study, one contrasts entities and their features, looking for samenesses and differences. It is difficult to keep both similarities and differences in mind, and not subjugate one to the other; if differences emerge early, similarities are often obscured; likewise . . . Ideally, these will be illuminated by study and experience.

It is important to understand some propensities we have already, as speakers of any language, to gather and to distinguish entities, features, motion, etc. To "name" something, is to have decided what it has - in common - with others of a similar "kind." This is true of "tables" and "goings" as much as of "dogs" or "men," "quiches" or "gods." Some of these arise from experience (dogs "bark"); some from more abstract judgments (white is "pure"). Part of our task is to "see-through" prior habits, to re-consider what is what.

In the arena of human nature, we enter into study with some predilections:

As we have noted, the study of human nature has (in Western thought) been cast as humans being both in and out of nature: we "share" body with others (in nature); and hold our minds to be UNIQUE (outside of nature). Our history of thought about human nature has focused on what has been considered unique - the "mind." This has involved, at various times, the "soul," language, rationality, maturity, intelligence, symbols, etc.

The very notion of rationality was based on separating humans from nature, *because* of our unique minds. As our understanding of nature changes (as it has been), then our thinking about rationality will be affected!

[Contrast the theory of humans being both in and out of nature. with the idea that humans reside outside of nature (e.g.. in Confucianism.) Here. bats are

bats. bees are hees. and we are human. and there is really no point of comparing one with the other. The body is not "nearer" to nature (not "sinfu"?); body is what we are.]

Western thought has humans "juxtaposed" with nature. And (as above), a change in our thinking about one, will likely affect our thinking about the other.

Consider us more "in nature," and our theories about human uniqueness and mind will weaken (thus, "animal consciousness" and "animal rights"). Note also, that our being more "in nature" also provokes a response from fundamentalist religious thinkers, whose humans "in the image of God," define the "real" us, the individual, as outside of our bodily nature.

The "theo-politics" which informs this issue -describing what is human, and what our (political) relations to other species, is -the Book of Genesis: 1.26. Man (read: men) is made in the image of God; Man (read: men) have dominion over animals. And, some would say, we are busy creating the god(s) which support the image of humans which we (read: us) pretend to. Vanity? Vanity! Not theology, not a proper study of human/ nature, but a "theo-politics," where we engage in justification, rather than critical thought.

The dichotomous thinking of juxtaposition theory (humans both in and out of nature), extends to our judgement of persons, as well. Who is similar to "us"; who is different? In identifying ourselves as unique, we judge others by contrast: we are "ideal" or "normal"; others who differ from "us" in body (physical appearance), we regard as more in nature; i.e. more like "animals." Persons whom we consider to be different from us, we tend to depreciate... in the direction of their being like animals!

Examples: "Deaf and dumb" (dumb-mute, like animals); those whose facial appearance is peculiar in certain ways, we call "retarded" and infer from face to intellection; women, men claim, have poorer math skills and thus are "closer" to nature ... meaning more like how we have imagined other species.

Juxtaposition theory lends itself easily to a blatant racism: for example, black persons are claimed to be good athletes (bodies, but nOL.), have good "rhythm," but (it is claimed) do poorly on intellectual skills (mind). Until recently, American Indians were called "savages" or "primitives," ...meaning they were cast into some linear historical development schema whose axes are: animal-human. Thus we compare those whom we consider to be "the" people (read: us), with "them": we are normal; they are abnormal (read: they are more like animals).

With the recent increase in actual knowledge of other species, observing them in detail on their own turf, we have begun to appreciate that most other species are social, are much more complex in being and in interaction than we had thought, and evidence a great deal of moral behavior, at least within species. Thinking about other species, upgrading them in our thinking, has caused us to think anew about humans, especially to appreciate how truly rich and complex is the human condition.

Since the 1960's, thinking has shifted with respect to humans, whom we formerly judged as "lesser." I include not just other cultures whom we have gotten to know, but those among us whom we had judged as "more like animals" -the deaf, the "retarded," other "races," women, the handicapped. We have become critical thinkers about our former theories of human nature, taken these ideas into our lives, and actualized some of them in behavior and in social policy. We have not yet become critically self-conscious and thoughtful about what this all means, implies, entails. But there is no doubt that this is a large shift in our thinking about what is human.

In our humanistic rethinking of these issues, we can come to some broader, overarching (fused) notions of mind and body. In previous accountings of the human condition, much has been "left-out": (gestures, appearance, surfaces, beauty,...interaction and mutual understanding with others...). As we link more of these aspects to life, they will, inevitably, recast our thinking about rationality.

The role of language is illustrative of the power, circularity and seductiveness of dualistic thinking within this theory of juxtaposition.

The "pivotal concept" in depicting humans, concentrating on our uniqueness contrasted with other species, has been "language." We have assumed (and, still, it is assumption, not knowledge), that humans alone possess language. In body-mind dualism, we have cast about for what is mind; and see language as its realization. Other animals (it is claimed) do not possess language.

It is no exaggeration to claim that most of Western thought IS the analysis of language. And it is useful to consider how the category "mind," the "up" side of the human, has been filled. Where is the concept at present? Do those who invoke language, when they claim to be depicting human, know what they are talking about; or are they merely reciting modernized Aristotle (Yes, mostly!); and for what purposes (Wilson 1975:555)? If we come to a new realization of language, will this alter how we think about what is human?

In the study of language, it becomes clear that much of human verbal behavior is literally excluded from its study. Tone-of-voice ("para-language"), the social and other verbal contexts, have not yet been considered as basic aspects of what it means to be human; not to mention the bodily aspects of gesture, of facial expression. The communicative or rhetorical aspects of language, the facts of human interaction, of generational development and learning, have come into this story only as epiphenomena - constructed upon the "basic," language. Once again, as we become more inclusive about language, our thinking - about thinking, about ourselves - will change as well.

Presently, linguistics, which has claimed (!) to own the study of language, has run out of steam; at impasse. It has foundered on the ancient issue of the nature of meaning; of knowledge. It claimed, quite successfully for a while, that the grammar or structure of language - how "sentences" are created, analyzed and put together - was somehow an external realization of the mind. Look deeply into sentence and phrase structure, and we will see... Humanity? Destiny? (Chomsky 1968). Grammar had seemed to "solve" the problem of

human "creativity": how humans are, at once, finite and infinite. However, this "formal structure" of language cannot inform questions of meaning, context, experience, or knowledge. These issues have become a central area of inquiry in current thinking: what is the meaning of meaning?

As naturalistic observation has informed us in the past decades, other species are quite different from how we had thought and imagined them. The field of ethology / behavioral biology, has taught us that most species live complex social lives; that they raise and teach their young with some care; that they live in different sensory worlds, orientate and navigate differently from humans. But they are not so simplex and savage as we had thought. They seem to communicate with one another, suggesting that they possess some senses of "meaning" - at least within their own species. Seeing other species as they actually live: as "feral" (not "wild"); in social intercourse (not as marauding solitaires); and knowing much more about their sensory abilities and their "surrounds" - ethology provides a comparative framework for looking "back" at humans from the perspectives of other species, as well as a "critique" for the re-examination of our comparative habits and thinking.

The behavioral study of other species has provided a critique of the notion of human nature based on the uniqueness of language. Other species are (also) social, interact, and communicate. Language is an aspect of social communication, not something confined to humans.

Within this ethological critique, the place of humans with respect to nature, indeed, the very idea of nature, is up for debate! Since concepts of human nature are tied intimately with concepts of nature...

For those who will study the history of ideas and the sociology of knowledge, the ethological perspective directs us toward a more comprehensive study of humans than was earlier conceived. [Caution: if we are not careful, it can provide an "out," a simple solution to complex human problems which seem beyond human capacities; a denial of our conceptual freedoms; an apparent answer - to "listen" to our hard-wired selves (Lorenz).]

If, as humanists, we do not lose our way, the critique will direct us to study the human condition in its greater complexities: to begin to enrich our theories of humanity; and to expand them to include our actualities and experiences. For, to be human, is to continue, in each and all of our lives, to think and to grow, to debate and to move on to each next day and place.

We are born, conceived, and live in many contexts: at once, individual and other-involved. Freedom and individuality are concepts and states of being. It is not "individual vs. society," not any either-or dialectical theory of being human, that we seek. We seek that which jibes with experience, and drives us onward with some hope and confidence. It is a fuller notion of being human which we seek in understanding, in studying what it means to be human, and what is human nature.

Before concluding, it is useful to repeat what Charles Darwin, in his late, "expressive" work, outlined for inclusion in the study of behavior: all humans, all animals, infants, the aged, art, and the insane (1872). Not a bad

place to begin our reconsiderations. What he left out, in the large, are questions of the nature of homo politicus, religiosus, economicus...and a few others: history, the marketplace of ideas, comparative thought.

What is missing, existentially - implied perhaps in Darwin's categories of infants and the aged - is the territory of experience and the subjective. What is human includes what we all experience: and not just collectively. I, you, are not merely an individual with respect to, as opposed to, a social creature...but more.

I am, you are, some set of balancing acts, more than a few paradoxes, of the ongoing dynamics in life - out of which we try to make some sense, to see clearly, to be fully human, and to figure what that means...each day, toward all tomorrows. I have neither to deny my own history nor allow it to cripple me; not to accept simple solutions to complications of experience; not to clarify my own identity in such ways that I close off others; not to avoid what I should not.

What it means to be human and what human means is our story.

Much is yet to be told.

SUMMARY

Humanism rests upon the idea that individuals are rational, thoughtful, and capable of being independent observers. The concept of the individual is not, however, located solely within humanism, but within a broader sphere of human nature. Enlightenment ideas which postulated an ahistorical individual, have been changing and weakening since they were formulated. These ideas must be rethought in order to "recover" a concept of the individual which is sufficiently broad and deep to substantiate a viable humanism. This essay explores the various arenas in which our notions of human nature are embedded, offers a critical review of each, and points toward a redefinition of the individual.

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