

THE HUMAN DIFFERENCE

I. Introduction

A. One of the major questions of our time is: Who is man? The question arises in many issues of our day

1. In the issue of abortion, is a fetus human? When does it become human or have worth?
2. In euthanasia, when does man cease having value?
3. In questions of ecology, is man more important than a snail darter?
4. Ultimately, how is man different from other living things? Is there a human difference?

B. Examples:

1. Abortion: In senate hearings it was discussed: Is a fetus just a cluster of cells? Is it significant if it sucks its thumb at two or three months. When does personhood emerge if it isn't inherent?
2. Euthanasia: When does death occur? How long should we treat a body with dignity? What is the distinction between a human being and a corpse?
3. In Ecology: How do we determine man's place in the ecological cycle? Is man *qualitative* or only *quantitatively* different from other things?
 - a. John Lilly (noted biologist): *The day that communication is established, the dolphin becomes a legal, ethical, moral, and social problem.* (See *Man and the Dolphins*, p. 211-212.
 - b. Former Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas suggested that the wilderness itself could possibly have the right to sue for its preservation. (See: *Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects*, by Christopher Stone.
4. In Entertainment: This problem of *What is man?* was graphically

illustrated in the movie *Star Wars* in which machine and beast had equal billing with man.

- C. The Problem: Will man as we have known him survive? B.F. Skinner has already pronounced man dead when he wrote: *To man qua man we readily say 'Good riddance.'* (From: ***Beyond Freedom and Dignity.***)

II. The Nature of Human Nature: Three Views

Our view of Human Nature depends upon our worldview.

A. The Theistic View

1. Man was created by a personal God in His own image (*imago Dei*). Therefore, man is a physico-spiritual being.
2. Man was created for a purpose.
3. He has infinite worth to his Creator. Worth then is absolute and inherent. (As expressed in the Declaration of Independence).
4. Man is a fellow creature but is *qualitatively* different from other living things.
5. Summary: This view gave rise to Western Civilization and has given us more freedom and dignity than any other, but is now being challenged.

B. The Pantheistic View

1. This is the world view of much of the East but since the 60's has been invading the west in very subtle ways, i.e. the New Age Movement.
2. It does not emphasize distinctions in life, only its unity.
3. It plays down the physical. The physical is illusion.
4. Consciousness of self and personality are the ultimate problem. Dissolution of personality is the ultimate end.
5. Summary: The Eastern view of man sees all living things as equal--a kind of democracy.

C. The Modern Humanistic View

We are talking here of the humanism that had its roots in the Enlightenment, sometimes referred to as secular humanism.

1. Man is the product of chance in a closed system of natural law.

Jacques Monod: *The universe was not pregnant with life nor the biosphere with man. Our number came up in the Monte Carlo game. **Chance and Necessity**, p. 145.*

2. Man is only material, a complex machine.

Victor Frankl: *Man is nothing but a complex biochemical mechanism powered by a combustion system which energizes a computer with prodigious storage facilities for retaining encoded information.*

3. His behavior is determined. Freedom is an illusion.
4. Man's dignity is the result of where he stands on the evolutionary scale. He is more complex. Man is different only in *quantity*. He is only a *part* of nature. Man is what he is today (according to evolution) because of his ability to survive and adapt.

III. Two implications of Our View of Human Nature

A. How I view myself. Upon what do I base my self-worth?

1. Theistic: I have infinite value. God entered the human sphere to redeem man at great expense--His own death on the cross. My value is not arbitrary; it is inherent in what I am--a being created in God's image.
2. Pantheistic: My value is not any greater than other things. All life is sacred. Hence killing an animal for food is murder. (When I mow my grass!).
3. Humanistic: Human value is arbitrary and subjective. Since there is no objective or transcendent source of value, all value is assigned by my peers, based on certain criteria.

- a. Physical: Francis Crick has advocated that newborn babies not be declared legally alive until after two days when they have been certified as healthy by medical examiners. In other words, they must meet certain physical criteria.
- b. Economical: Value is derived by the person's contribution to society. Hitler decided to get rid of useless eaters. Some say today abortion is better than welfare which strains our resources.
- c. Mental: Winston L. Duke, a nuclear physicist, states that *A philosophy of reason will define a human being as life which demonstrates self-awareness, volition, and rationality. Thus it should be recognized that not all men are human...it would seem...to be more inhumane to kill an adult chimpanzee than a newborn baby, since the chimpanzee has a greater mental awareness.* **Reason**, (August, 1972).
- d. Social and Cultural: Ashley Montagu, a British anthropologist, believes that a baby is not born human. Instead, it is born more or less with a capacity for becoming human as he or she is molded by social and cultural influences. Human worth is not an endowment but an accomplishment.

B. How I treat other Human Beings.

1. Theistic: Other men are not something to be used as a means. Man is viewed as unique. Man is qualitatively different from animals. We use them, not exploit or abuse, but as a means. Our treatment is based on this qualitative difference.
2. Pantheistic: Others are view indifferently, almost in a fatalistic sense. This world view by its very nature cannot be the stimulus for social good because good does not exist.
3. Humanistic: It talks a great deal about social good, i.e., eliminating poverty, disease, ignorance, etc. It talks about man in lofty language. *Man is the measure of all things.* But does humanism have a sound basis for treating man any differently than animals? We think not. Consider the following questions:
 - a. If a man is essentially no different from a pig or an ox, except that

he has more brain cells, and if a computer is more powerful mentally than man, man is neither unique nor significant. If man is different only in degree, then why would not a superior man not be justified in treating an inferior man in a way that is only different in degree from his treatment of a sub-human? There is no valid basis for treating all men equal.

- b. If human worth is arbitrarily assigned according to certain criteria what happens when the criteria are removed? For instance, if dolphins are given civil rights if they should develop communicative ability with humans, what happens to humans who lose this function? What happens if one ceases to be a productive unit and become inconvenient to society?

IV. Conclusion

Humanism which has been vying for cultural consensus in our society does not have an adequate base for humane treatment of all men. In the end, humanism must borrow moral values from Christianity. Julian Huxley said *Evolution leads to bad ethics*. Bertrand Russell said *What the world needs more is Christian love*.

For Further Reading:

Adler, Mortimer J. *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*.

Evans, C. Stephen. *Preserving the Person*.

Machen, J. Gresham. *The Christian View of Man*.

McDonald, H.D. *The Christian View of Man*.

Stevenson, Leslie. *Seven Theories of Human Nature*.