

# BIOSPHERICAL ANTHROPOCENTRISM: PERSISTING DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOST ADVANCED SPECIES

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## Introduction

If you would accept the idea that "man is the measure of all things", as stated by the ancient Greek philosopher from Thrace, Protagoras, then the barriers between man-centeredness and what is actually happening in the world might "convincingly" disappear. Let us recall that Protagoras was a Sophist and that the Sophists taught at a price and for practical success. "Small wonder, then," says Bertrand Russell in his historical survey on philosophy, "that the Sophist Thyrasmachus defines justice as the advantage of the stronger."

It is interesting to note that the ancient Hindu physician, a person with an evidently man-centered professional activity, was expected to "care for the good of all living beings" as was mentioned in the beginning of his oath, a text probably written earlier than when the Sophists were discussing "justice" and similar axiological concepts.

The two quotations above, apparently representing two opposing approaches to man's relation to what we call biosphere today, would certainly be relevant and worth considering in the context of our ecological problems in the modern world—those problems evidently shared, from an overall bioethical perspective, by a large section of the realm of living beings. As our values, axiological considerations and ethical concerns about the flora and fauna of the world, including ourselves, allegedly supervene what is going on in the empirical realm—that is, in the world of occurrences and happenings—an internationally oriented university education directed to helping the solution of the existing ecological problems should have a comprehensive curriculum. It could preferably begin, I think, with a postgraduate program in basic and applied sciences with a wide range of topics in sociology, psychology, social psychology as well as biology and others, and with a suitable subject matter in such fields as law, history and anthropology; and due importance must be given to ethical topics, both from a general, philosophical point of view and as far as areas of applied ethics—above all an ecologically oriented bioethics—are concerned.

As for philosophy in general, it must be duly incorporated into the curriculum of the International University for the Bio-Environment (I.U.B.E.), preferably with a stress on the methodology of the above fields; not because ecological issues are strictly or technically philosophical, but with a view to making use of the critically evaluative approach of philosophy to other human activities. However, especially in the case of ethics, the emphasis should certainly be on an others-centered orientation, rather than on I- or we-centered-ness, at different levels of discourse: regional, continental, universal, or biospherical.

## The development of the "most advanced" species

On the bars of the symbolic empty cage and under the descriptive photographs, you could see the following, rather detailed information on that species. Human Animal. Man. The so-called Wise Man-Homo sapiens.

The original habitat: according to recent findings, probably the eastern part of the second largest continent on this planet, Africa. As a result of its ability to adapt to greatly differing geographical conditions, its deployment has been so wide that at the present time it can be seen all over the planet. A rather new species in the evolution of animals. Other species of the related genus have become extinct in the course of the evolutionary development.

Being a gregarious animal, it forms crowded and small, highly organized groups, herds, tribes, religious communities, great societies and, of more recent origin, the nation-states. The more crowded the group, the more highly organized it is in the form of a state—the central governing body with differing authority on the social issues of the community, and possibly on every domain of the lives of its individual members.

It can live up to 100 years or longer, though rarely. It can mate every season, practically always. Estrus in the female is not seasonal but monthly, and though temporally not limited it is more conspicuous in the pre- and post-menstrual periods of her monthly reproductive cycle. Duration of copulation may last long, even up to over an hour—in sharp contrast to what is observed in other primates, the order to which it belongs. During the copulatory activity it can make use of the whole surface of its body as a source of pleasure, its highly developed hands and the soft, practically hairless skin of the female being important factors in this. Having an upright posture, it can "make love" and copulate in various positions, usually preferring, however, to lie with its partner face-to-face. In short, a sexual animal indeed.

Pregnancy lasts approximately 280 days. As a rule, the female bears one, and sometimes two or three offspring. A total of up to six "babies" is rarely seen and generally not compatible with life for all of them. The infant is very dependent on its parents up to puberty-11 to 14 years and even beyond, a vital factor in the nonhereditary transmission of what Homo sapiens calls culture. In essence, culture is the sum of what has developed as a result of mental and manual activity and behavior among the individuals of a given community and been passed on to coming generations during upbringing through the process of education. The latter is the generally guided transfer of knowledge to others, especially to children and young people, and has accentuated and prolonged the dependence of the young individual upon its family and the community.

The nucleus of the human family is composed of a pair as is the case with many other "advanced" species-the female-male pair and, when present, one or more children. Marriage is the name given to the socially recognized formal process, a contract between the female and the male, necessary for the approval of their living together. The principle of the female purity-the characteristic hymen must be found intact by the male-and the observance of loyalty, particularly on the part of the female, are strictly observed in some groups, although recent social developments in many parts of the human community have made this rather abortive.

The larger family, including the nearest relatives and, above all, the parents of mothers and fathers-so called grand-mothers and grand-fathers-remains evident in many traditional groups. But the general tendency seems to point in the direction of the pair-family, with children leaving home some years after puberty.

As an agricultural (food-producing) and industrial (tool-using) socio-economic unit, the family has lost its previous import, but it presently continues as a sociosexual unit. The polygamous family, with one male cohabiting with several or many females, a characteristic also observed in certain other species, has been the norm in several societies of the past, and is still seen among certain traditional communities. The ruling male could have hundreds of females whose purity would present problems. The polyandric type of family, one female with several males, seems to be of more distant origin.

The most recent developments towards a multi-pair family may alter the form of the family from the sociosexual standpoint, but apparently not its essence. The formation of a family between two males or two females is the most significant deviation sexually and psychosocially, but it has little or no effect on the reproductivity of a community or the species as a whole, as long as the frequency of this practice remains low.

The male has been the dominant, ruling figure between the two sexes, exploiting the other, apparently in most of the human societies. In polyandric communities, however, this superior role was assigned to the female. The radical socioeconomic and sociosexual change or revolution in the role of the female seems to be directed towards a reasonable and realizable balance between the two sexes of this species, evidently not incompatible with their respective biological characteristics.

It is a thoroughly omnivorous species. It eats almost anything, although the kind of food significantly differs from group to group and from individual to individual, and so does the preparation of the food, i.e. cooking.

The human animal has further enhanced its possibilities to adapt itself to differing climatic and geographical conditions thanks to its ability to cover its body with clothing and to use a wide variety of natural and self-made material for this purpose as well as for the making of shelters and dwellings. Solitary living being accepted as a deviation, the species has found settlements varying from those comprising a few individuals to those where millions of them live in an extremely overcrowded and organized spatial complex called a city.

Early city life, together with the use of metals in the making of tools, has been the basic step in the development of the great, highly organized and advanced communities called civilizations. More complex aggregates of the human animal with larger spatio-temporal boundaries represent a drastic change in the development of human communities and in the evolution of the species as a whole. Small and somewhat isolated groups-the primitive societies-have become almost extinct, their surviving individuals having merged with the universally arising nation-states.

One of the most striking and effective characteristics of this species has been its capacity to produce certain tools that greatly extend or enhance the functions of their parts-i.e. limbs, either fore or hind (shovel, wheelbarrow, bicycle)-of their sense organs (microscope, field-glass, telescope, records, tape-recorders)-of their central nervous system (the memory and recording device quipu of the Incas, the calculating device abacus of the Babylonians and the Chinese, the electronic brain of the present time). Tool-making, an almost exclusive characteristic of man, has enabled him to perform immensely complex tasks, to observe the otherwise unreachable domains of nature and the universe, to attain an incomparably high rate of speed in his mental functions such as memory or calculation, and to record his visual and auditory experiences.

His effective deployment and exploitation of the terrestrial environment -means of transportation going on and under the land surface, on and in the water, in the air and in space-have hence been an understandable consequence of this development. Vitally important and underlying all this has been the capacity to communicate more effectively than any other species, through sounds and recorded symbols, which constitute what is called the language. Deliberate and intelligible sound utterance seems to have taken place in the distant past. But the vision-dependent recording system called writing is a more recent discovery about six thousand years old. Sound-recording, which needs rather complicated machinery, has been a new development. The invention of tools for communication through vision and sound has made possible for the human voice to be transmitted from distances of hundreds and thousands of kilometers. Thoughts and feelings can thus be transmitted to other

individuals of the species in a more detailed manner than is the case in other species.

Since their early times, humans have trained and used the individuals of certain species through a process called domestication. A domesticated animal, as distinguished from the related "wild" forms, feels dependent and seems attached to Homo sapiens. It can be exploited by the dominating species and used for food (sheep, cow, pig, turkey), transportation (horse, donkey, camel), defense (dog), communication (pigeon), and entertainment (cat, dog, seal, whale). Many plants have also been domesticated. These have become tastier and can be grown separately and at will, and yield much more.

This species is quite sensitive and touchy, and fond of its dignity. Not infrequently it may become aggressive and start a row, sometimes for no reason. Sometimes, too, death may ensue from conflict between individuals. The factors in disputes are those seen in other animal species: sex, food, defense of territory and similar biological and bioeconomic reasons. To settle the disagreement or dispute of any sort between the individuals or groups, the human being has developed courts where specially educated members of the society, the judges, make decisions on the fate of the guilty. The sum of the recorded rules these judges consult constitute the law. The latter has shown changing characteristics throughout the ages according to the changing social circumstances, and still reveals great differences from one organized group to another.

Most importantly, for Homo sapiens as well as other species of the animal and plant world, since the early times of developing tools there has existed war: fighting on a much larger scale within the species covering hundreds of individuals between the small tribal communities, thousands in the major societies of the past and millions of people in the case of today's countries. At the present, several countries unite militarily and form a bloc against others of its kind. Internal strife within organized groups, tribes, larger societies, and countries may also lead to armed struggle. Over time and thanks to its ever more sophisticated technology, the human animal has produced unbelievably efficient tools to kill its co-species on an increasingly larger scale. Division of labor and social differentiation within organized groups have led to the emergence of armies, well-organized bodies whose business has been to apply and teach "the art of killing other men" by means of weapons. There now exist weapons with immense energy to destroy hundreds of thousands and even millions of individuals at one stroke.

Millions have died, been mutilated, or lost their parents, children, homes and other property in recent wars. What they have produced in the course of time, their dwellings, places of information (universities, libraries), places of social aid (hospitals), streets and roads (wide constructed paths), other works (sculptures, monuments), written or other visual sources (documents, films), have all been destroyed in certain areas. Even whole cities-complex, highly organized units composed of dwellings and other buildings-have almost disappeared.

Great damage has been done to life as a whole in certain areas of the earth where human intraspecific and organized killing has taken place. This hardly conceivable and irreparable damage to other living beings brought about by human deployment is the most significant problem from the standpoint of the evolution of life on this planet.

In times of armed struggle the sadistic tendencies of the individuals of this species are expressed. Unsatisfied with plain killing, not few among them seek to quench their cruelty by torturing their opponents, just as they hunt and harm the individuals of other species. They apply pain-giving methods to single individuals or groups of their conspecifics, while deriving pleasure and masking their deeds by rationalizations such as creeds or causesöuncritical, blind beliefs and attachments.

Almost every human society has glorified its wars and its history in general, created its partly true and partly imaginary past, and contrived a story which it passed from generation to generation orally and, more recently, kept in written form such as myths, epics, histories. The latter are supposed to be true records of past events.

Nevertheless, and apparently as a great contrast to what has just been told, the observation that "man is a social animal" has been verified by the idea and practice of aid to fellow human beings, particularly in an organized manner-an almost unique achievement. There has been an ever-growing concern for the needy, the sick, and the lame throughout the evolution of human societies. This is said to have grown from the natural, instinctive cohesive drives of the animal world.

Division of labor is highly developed within this species, leading to great social differentiation, which has become one of its exclusive characteristics, particularly in the highly organized societies of the present. The main social differentiation however has manifested itself in the appearance of three general strata since the earliest times of the development of great societies.

These are called socioeconomic classes because they are linked to the production of any significant product of service within the group-food, clothing, shelter, means of transport, weapons, and so on. Concrete work is performed by the majority of the communityöthe working class-which primarily uses its hands and could be referred to as the manual class from a biological standpoint. A small minority organizes who will do what and when, and rules the others, controlling the majority who perform the concrete work; this is the ruling class. Holding the reins of society, this class collects the fruits of others' labor and lives a prosperous life. Socioeconomically, there is also a third group-the middle class-whose individuals perform the cerebral work in a static, mechanistic way, by routinely writing and planning. Rarely, individuals of this class have done the creative work that has led to novelties in abstract thought and concrete, material situations. Otherwise, there would have been no inventions, no human adaptability to so much varying geographical and evolutionary conditions. Some of the middle class individuals are advantageous in that they are closer to the ruling upper class; others, especially the creative ones, have been in a less advantageous position

because they have identified themselves with the interests of the lower, working class.

There has been a strong tendency in recent times to change this state of affairs and to dispense with the upper class and the related section of the middle class altogether. This has caused great internal strife in certain parts of the planet and also between those countries in the process of change and those where the traditional order prevails. The inevitable internal conflict within the boundaries of a state has produced difficulties, not only because the ruling class has recourse to almost any means of preserving its existence and superior position but also because a new, managing class, with the known characteristics of the middle and the advantageous position of the former upper classes, has emerged. In the long run, it seems highly probable that this radical endeavour to realize equality, liberty and fraternity among the individuals of communities, and within the human species as a whole, is going to be a success. The historical tendency in the development of human societies supports this.

Homo sapiens is the only species on earth whose individuals are able to think of objects even when they are not present. Mental faculties such as imagination and abstract thinking and the emergence of art, science, philosophy proves this. The first is the way of expressing one's feelings and thoughts through different media by appealing to vision (painting, sculpture, photography) or hearing (music). The second is a systematic, analytic way of understanding nature and the universe at their different levels of organizationö atomic, molecular, biomolecular, organic, economic and psychosocial. The third is considered the highest, most distinguished form of human achievement: the sum of knowledge obtained not by observing nature directly but rather by reasoning and by making use of the scientific data of general importance, thus arriving at the most generalized or abstract conclusions.

The human animal is very fond of what it calls property -possessions of any sort, especially the place it has occupied in its natural or artificial environment, and, above all, the shelter it inhabits and its surroundings. The same is true of its moveable possessionsöcalled personal property- in contrast to the nontransportable ones, called real property. These may belong to a family or group as well as to a single individual. The right to possess may have been gained through inheritance, family ties or by war or other means of seizing by force, or through some kind of exchange. For the sake of not giving away its possessions, sometimes even for an unimportant piece, the human animal can give its life.

Economic power of the upper classesöthe possession of the means of productionöis rightly seen by those who are the vanguard of the new movement, as the most important obstacle in the way of uprooting the traditional order and building up a new order. In this, they believe that equality and other positive social conditions will be realized and that a new type of human being, with many constructive and few possessive characteristics will emerge. The new human will be, so it seems, much more at home with nature as well as with its conspecifics.

As a result of a very high degree of biochemical organization and complexity in its genetical make-up-genotype-and in the composition of the extrauterine organism-phenotype-there exist great differences among the individuals of this species in respect to body size and weight, color of the skin, hair and eyes, shape of the head and other parts of the body. Thus, the largest community formed with similarities of the chief characteristics is a race, in reality a subspecies of the human animal. There are four such subspecies, the yellow, the white, the red and the black. The red race, however, is apparently on the way to extinction as an independent group, primarily due to a certain group of the white race deployed in the same area. The idea that one race is superior to another or all of the others is called racism, at bottom an unfounded claim, and also a means for the exploitation of other races for economic or psychological gain.

In addition to the biological differences are those observed in the so-called cultural of social characteristicsöhabits of child-rearing, behaviour towards other individuals, beliefs and views on various matters and so forth. Particularly when coupled with these differences and in addition to economic interests, the racially distinguishing features have not infrequently become important factors in conflicts and wars.

The great increase in the population of this species, whose individuals believe that they are superior to other living beings, and its too effective deployment has become a real threat to the existence of other species. Certain species of plants and animals have thus become extinct or exposed to extinction in a much shorter period than would have been the case under truly natural selection.

Its much more recent deployment to the moonöa satellite of the planetöand to other planets of the solar system, directly or by means of unmanned vessels, may produce results which cannot be yet foreseen.

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