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[BARBARA TUCHAŃSKA:// HUMAN NATURE OR HUMANITY: BETWEEN GENES AND VALUES]

[ABSTRACT]

[We are within nature and culture, conditioned simultaneously by genes and meanings. This form of our self-understanding is the result of fundamental modifications that happened in modern philosophical anthropology and of the impact of the natural Science. In modern philosophy three types of approaches to the human situation were constituted at different times: the idealist, the naturalist, and the culturalist, and the problem of whether humanity is natural (biological) or cultural has begun to take precedence over the issue of human supernatural roots. Both approaches are presented, their presuppositions discussed, and arguments in favor of a version of the culturalist approach. Only the culturalist approach allows us to understand our own self-constitution and, in particular, our self-reflectivity, as well as the naturalist attempts to ignore them and immerse ourselves in nature].

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BARBARA TUCHAŃSKA
UNIVERSITY OF LODZ

HUMAN NATURE OR HUMANITY: BETWEEN GENES AND VALUES[1]

1. Introduction

To be between genes and values is our human condition. This means that we are between nature and culture or rather within both, i.e., within the sphere of natural phenomena and the sphere of meanings, or some naturalists prefer to say in the field of gene-culture co-evolution. This way of conceiving the human situation, this form of our self-understanding is the result of fundamental modifications in philosophical anthropology and the impact of the natural sciences. Let me briefly discuss these modifications.

In ancient philosophy the problem of human nature was a philosophical issue that arose within the context of our knowledge about the Cosmos, i.e., the universal order connecting Logos, the laws of nature, and human fate. From our contemporary perspective it is clear that in ancient philosophy it was not a question for the natural scientist, who aims at founding humanity within nature, or a question for the social scientist, who tries to understand man as a sociocultural and historical being. Nor was it a question for the ethicist of Kantian persuasion, who wants to understand man as a moral subject acting in the reign of freedom. It was an issue of the philosopher, the lover of wisdom as a whole, not wisdom divided into disciplines. However, since ancient philosophy conceptualized the separation

[1] The text is based on my *Introduction* [Tuchańska 1992].

of necessary, eternal, and unchangeable being, on the one hand, and contingent, finite, and mutable phenomena, on the other hand, it divided the problem of human nature into the empirical question of the genetic and functional determination of man within the realm of phenomena, and the metaphysical (later also theological) problem of the ideal humanity. The answer to the latter question requires prior knowledge about being, i.e., the absolute reality that conditions and gives sense to any contingent being. "To know properly what it is to be contingent in a metaphysical sense we have to know what it is to be non-contingent, thus to know what God is" [Kołakowski 1982, 70]. Any answer to the metaphysical problem of humanity follows from the presupposed idea of God and the belief that human beings are akin to God [Scheler 1976, sec. 2]. Plato's conception illustrates this: someone who knows the idea of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty understands man as a subject of moral, cognitive, and artistic acts. Human nature belongs to the ideal order and it bestows reality upon every human being that belongs to the order of empirical objects. However, the gap between perfect eternal being and contingent things does not mean that the philosopher can concentrate either on ideal humanity or on empirical subjects. To study the first without knowing the second would destroy philosophy as **human** wisdom; to become familiar with the second without knowing the first would not give us **wisdom**. One can become a sage, who understands things, is able to de-mystify spurious truths, and may rule a kingdom, only if one relates the empirical world of natural and social phenomena to the ideal world.

The basic structure of this ancient construction was inherited and developed by Medieval philosophers. For St. Augustine it is self-evident that our experience of God as eternal Immutability, Light, and Happiness gives us a fundamental truth about ourselves. Our wandering within the factual realm of nature and history is not constitutive for our human nature. Quite the contrary; our presence among material things is the source of a permanent menace to our humanity. To be a human being is like a task, a call to duty that everyone has to fulfill, fighting against empirical reality and its

temptations. We can know our human nature only through insight into the realm of intentions and ideas of God. This insight, however, allows us to realize that man is not simply a soul, whose embodiment can be ignored without distorting the essence of man. Man is unavoidably a soul invested with bodily form or — to reverse the order — a living being incarnating a spirit. Man belongs simultaneously to the ideal and the empirical order, although humanity is constituted only within the ideal order.

2. Modern views: human nature versus humanity

In modern philosophy, the idealist, the naturalist, and the culturalist approaches were constituted at different times.[2] Descartes and his seventeenth century followers established the idealist reading of the nature of man, in the eighteenth century the thinkers of the French Enlightenment created the boldest version of the naturalist interpretation, and certain thinkers within German nineteenth-century philosophy established the culturalist interpretation.

Descartes did not reject the most evident belief of common sense that we are the unity of body and mind, of extension and thinking. Yet he demonstrated that common sense should and could be overcome in order to discover the truth of human nature. He believed — following traditional metaphysicians — that the essence of human beings is not located within empirical reality. Yet, his way of overcoming commonsensical ways of considering human nature was not metaphysical but epistemological. For him, humanity is located in an act of human self-awareness: it realizes itself in our rational self-identification. In other words, to be a human being is to engage in an act of self-awareness — *cogito*. Humanity exists in the order of pure thinking, which we can uncover only when we entirely neglect the

[2] The term “anthropology” was coined in 1501 by Magnus Hundt and defined in 1594 by Otto Casmann as “the doctrine of human nature” [Stagl 2000, 33].

sphere of bodies and empirical phenomena. The core of the Cartesian construction is the idea that in the course of my conceptual self-reflection I am given to myself directly as a substance, whose activity — in fact, the only activity — is thinking, broadly understood. A human being comes into existence primarily within the ideal order of (self-)thinking, within which I reconstruct — in virtue of my own intellectual activity — first, my subjective existence, i.e., my existence-for-myself, and second, my objective existence, i.e., my existence as a soul created by God, as *res cogitans*, and as *res extensa* entangled in natural mechanisms and dependencies. Therefore, all forms of my objective existence: as God's creature, as a subject of cognition confronted with an independent object of cognition, a physical body, a living being, etc., should be seen — from a philosophical perspective — as correlatives of human self-consciousness. I would not be able to understand myself as a God's creature or an animal without my ability to think, which is — first and foremost — my ability to think-about-myself. My faculty to think about myself is really my ability of thinking-myself.

Naturalists — from Democritus, Epicurus, Hobbes, and La Mettrie to modern vitalists and contemporary evolutionary naturalists — have been motivated by a belief that their theories could overcome the metaphysical separation of phenomena from essences, on the grounds that there are no essences. Presupposing that the natural order is neither a reflection nor an embodiment of a supernatural order, modern naturalists claim that the question of humanity as distinguished from the characteristics of the human species does not make any sense. Thus, they reject the question of the supernatural roots of humanity. For (early)modern naturalists, humanity is a purely natural phenomenon, i.e., it is produced by nature and located within the global mechanism of nature. In contemporary naturalism this view has been substantially modified by developments in the biological sciences. For contemporary naturalists, humanity is a particular form of animality constituted during the process of biological evolution but — simultaneously

— culturally shaped, polished, and perfected or — on the contrary — deformed and corrupted.

Without any unjust exaggeration, one can say that in the nineteenth century the pressure of biological and historical facts, which had been just discovered, together with the inherited philosophical program of transcendentalism modified deeply the entire continuum of views referring to human beings and human nature, from the metaphysical to the theological, from the rationalist to the naturalist. Whether these views referred to the characteristics of the human species, to Reason, or to a created soul, they had to recognize the natural genesis of humankind and the sociohistorical aspect of humanity. In German idealism, reason, ethical norms, and self-reflectivity became entangled in the historical development of humanity. Later, reacting against Hegel, philosophers of different persuasion — from Feuerbach and Marx, to Scheler, Plessner, and Cassirer — "attempted to build bridges between empirical description of being human as part of nature and intuitive knowledge of being human as free spiritual activity" ([Smith 2007, 42]; [Cassirer 1978]; [Plessner 1983]; [Scheler 1955]).

One of the consequences of these radical changes was the emergence of a question: how does the natural relate to the sociocultural? Are human beings fundamentally natural or cultural? Is human nature constituted by biological factors (genes, natural selection, etc.), and in this sense universal, or rather by meanings and values and, therefore, radically cultural and historical in character? Are we determined by physical and biological forces primarily, and by psychological and social factors only secondary; or is the natural only a basis upon which our humanity is created in virtue of human sociocultural and historical activity; or — even more radically — are we, our sociohistorical order and our nature, constructed by ourselves? It seems that the problem of whether humanity is natural (biological) or cultural begins to take precedence over the issue of human supernatural roots.

Some of the contemporary naturalist approaches to humanity claim that they supply the psychological and sociocultural views of human beings

with a deeper, more fundamental truth. Such is the case in Freud's psychoanalysis, ethology, sociobiology, and some views within neuroscience, philosophy of mind, and post-humanism. Their claim, however, is fundamentally flawed. As Max Scheler states, to say that humanity develops from animality is to utter nonsense, because from the perspective of the biological sciences we are and remain animals, not humans. What allows us to contrast a human being — as a new being, a new quality — with an animal being does not lie in animality itself [Scheler 1955, sec. 3]. Another source of difficulty for the contemporary biological approach to human nature is the clash between the essence of Darwin's achievement and the commonality of human nature postulated by theoreticians. As Ernst Mayr emphasizes, his theory of evolution "undermined essentialism" and "focused attention on the role of individual" [Mayr 1982, 249]. "The central insight of Darwin's vision of nature was the *diversity* of species and of individuals within a species, not the existence of an essential core of particular characteristics" [Smith 2007, 28]. On the other hand, contemporary adherents of the naturalist view of human nature seem to share with theologians and philosophers the view that human nature is defined by certain universals [Shore 2000, 81–82].

The drawbacks and consequences of the radical reductionist naturalization of humanity have been studied and criticized most profoundly with respect to psychoanalysis. Sociobiology raised similar polemics. It was charged with reductionism, genetic determinism, with spreading all sorts of racial, sexist, and class prejudices, and finally — with approaching the social reality in a dilettantish way (cf.: [Laland, Brown 2011, 65–72]). For Edward Wilson, human nature — in all its aspects, including the spiritual, ethical, and social — is simply the *differentiam specificam* of the human species, and is caused by genes that are unique to the human species. In its early stage, sociobiology's claim was not only that it had the right to explain human

phenomena, but also that it was able to offer their ultimate explanation.[3] However, arguments and empirical data forced sociobiologists to weaken their claim: genes do not determine particular ways of behaving but only multiple alternatives of behavior, and the actualization of a particular behavior is triggered by non-genetic factors, in particular, sociocultural ones. Thus, advocates of a moderate version of sociobiology claim that sociobiology does not (and cannot) eliminate and replace the social, historical, and cultural sciences, but that it is able to contribute to the explanation of human behavior, social institutions, and cultural phenomena. However, it not only extends the knowledge elaborated by the humanities; it offers us an explanation that is more fundamental because biological phenomena and processes constitute the foundation of sociocultural reality. In this way sociobiology can unify the social sciences [Degler 1991, 310–327].

The position of Konrad Lorenz and his ethology is similar, although the reductionist charge would be even more unfair than in the case of Wilson. For Lorenz, the entirety of being can be described with the help of one conceptual apparatus that is developed from the categories of the theory of evolution. Although the sphere of culture is — for Lorenz — a relatively autonomous and isolated level of being, it is the result of human instincts and impulses. All our actions are adaptive; our pro-social behavior, e.g., acts of altruism, love, or friendship, are based on instincts. Even artistic creativeness, appreciation of beauty, or cognitive curiosity stem from "instinctive behavior mechanisms" [Lorenz 1966, 236–248]. Every cultural phenomenon is a factor that complements instinctive mechanisms in human adaptation to the environment. "The equipment of man with phylogenetically programmed

[3] Today brain scientists and philosophers of mind claim the same. Many of them "have declared clearly and emphatically that there is no separate mental stuff" and "that knowledge of brain events explains what goes on when people experience or act." Some "treat 'mind' as the generic term for a number of brain functions" [Smith 2007, 108]. All such declarations downplay or ignore the social and cultural dimensions of human consciousness, self-reflection, and knowledge [Ibidem, 111–112].

norms of behavior is just as dependent on cultural tradition and rational responsibility as, conversely, the function of both the latter is dependent on instinctual motivation" [Lorenz 1966, 265].

Naturalist ways of explaining human behavior, psychological mechanisms, or human cultural traits seem attractive and very convincing to many people. In the twentieth century they obtained both popularity and intensive criticism in different fields of the humanities (e.g., explanations mobilizing heredity, instincts, race, or sex differences in psychology; the reference to the biological concept of human nature or to evolutionary mechanisms in cultural and social anthropology, as well as to ethology and sociobiology in social, anthropological, and political studies).[4] They gain importance again in new (neuroscientific) naturalism and post-humanism. Sociobiology and ethology were replaced by interdisciplinary fields of research: human behavioral ecology, evolutionary psychology, cultural evolution theory, and gene-culture co-evolution models. In these new evolutionary approaches to human mind, behavior, and culture much more emphasis is put on the interrelationship between genetic, ecological, and sociocultural conditioning, the parallels between biological and cultural evolution, and the correlations or even mutual dependencies between genetic and cultural evolutionary changes. In spite of all those changes, what is common to all these evolutionary perspectives is understanding humans as "sophisticated animals," at best "guided by genetic *and* cultural information," and to consider human behavior as usually and essentially adaptive ([Laland, Brown 2011, 211]; italics added — B. T.). The persuasive power of naturalist explanations is probably connected with their scientific stigma: they must be right because they belong to natural science that provides the truth.

There are, however, three issues which must be taken into consideration by a philosophical analysis juxtaposing naturalist and humanist approaches to humans. First is connected with difficulties in merging the

[4] For details see: [Degler 1991].

vocabulary of the evolutionary theory and that of the humanities or social sciences. Second issue is the difference between explanation of human features, in particular genetic or genealogical explanations, and understanding who we are or what constitutes us as humans. Third issue is the unavoidability of philosophical presuppositions in both naturalist (scientific) and non-naturalist approaches. In order to tackle the first issue, let me consider three examples and begin from sociobiology.

Someone who says that sociobiology complements traditional sociological studies of social phenomena tacitly presupposes that the question of what is described and explained by the united forces of sociology and sociobiology is unanimously decided and accepted by both parties. Usually however, this is not the case. There is no agreement between sociologists or cultural anthropologists and sociobiologists as to the definitions of the phenomena studied by both disciplines. Moreover, it is quite possible that agreement will be never achieved and that it cannot be achieved without the complete subordination of the social concepts under biological ones.

For instance, in sociobiology human aggression can be defined as an individual physical act (or a threat of an act) that limits the freedom of another individual's behavior, or the fitness of another individual, that is, its ability to transfer genes [Urbaniak 1984, 167]. In sociology or cultural anthropology, on the other hand, the basis for identifying an act as aggressive is not the threat to individual fitness, or the presence of a gene of aggression, or any other natural factor. In these disciplines it is necessary to make reference to historical systems of meanings, rules of interpreting behavior, moral norms, religious beliefs, or legal regulations. Only by relating a given behavior to these cultural systems of meanings and values we can distinguish an act of aggression from the ritual offering of human life to a deity, the killing of an enemy during a battle, or the inflicting of capital punishment on

someone. For sociobiology all these acts are simply cases of aggressive behavior.[5]

Another example is the statement by Justin Stagl that human nature has "four layers which have had time to interpenetrate and to intermingle their flavours": the biological heritage of the species *Homo sapiens*, the cultural heritage of mankind, particular traditions within humanity, and the utopian potential of humanity [Stagl 2000, 34–5]. Its understanding requires interconnected definitions of "species *Homo sapiens*," "mankind," and "humanity," in which the two latter concepts would not be reduced to the first one. It also requires a clear notion of the interpenetration between the biological heritage of the species *Homo sapiens* and the cultural heritage of mankind. And finally, two concepts "biological heritage" and "social heritage" should be merged carefully since the term "inheritance" does not have (entirely) compatible meanings in genetics and in the human sciences. In genetics the concept of heritability "relates exclusively to those genetic influences that are transmitted from the parents and affect the response to selection" [Laland, Brown 2011, 183, footnote 6]. In the human sciences heritability refers almost to anything, from patterns of behavior, preferences, norms, opinions, knowledge, to rights, titles, and properties received by succession, by will or gift, but also by all forms of enculturation. Moreover, inheritance binds not only parents and offspring but also generations or siblings transmitting outgrown clothes from one to another.

[5] Similar remark was made by Joseph Fracchia and Richard Lewontin in reference to two culturally different "acts of barbarism in Western history": the genocide of Native Americans and the Nazi Holocaust. Cultural evolutionists "may subject both to the same explanatory principle as just two examples of human aggression explained through some selectionist variation or combination of inclusive fitness, innate aggression, the stress of overpopulation, and/or the need for *Lebensraum*." Such an explanation would, however, "lead to a gross misunderstanding of each and would tell us little about their historically and politically significant differences" [Fracchia, Lewontin 1999, 77].

Similarly, to understand a phrase "self-interpreting animals" [Taylor 1985, 45] as internally coherent we need either a biological definition of self-interpretation or a culturalist definition of an animal. Contrariwise, we must either admit that culturally acquired ability to interpret oneself transfers human beings from the world of animals to the world of humans or acknowledge that we are simply animals and culture is a pure fiction.

Analogous discrepancies appear in explanations of social and cultural phenomena offered by naturalists and anti-naturalists.

First, it is worth remembering that there is a fundamental difference between naturalist (e.g., biological) and culturalist (e.g., sociological) explanations of cultural phenomena. If the naturalist concepts are used "substantially," and not as metaphors or analogies, the naturalist explanations are conceptually heterogeneous: their *explanandum* are social (cultural) phenomena described in social (culturalist) terms, whereas their *explanans* are biological facts. The construction of such a heterogeneous explanation requires particular caution and care. When it is done without caution and care we face situation described by Fracchia and Lewontin: "Darwinian theorists of cultural evolution universally agree that selection is *the* explanatory law, the key to explaining all 'evolutionary' or 'historical' developments at any sociocultural and historical coordinates. In this way human history is reduced to a unitary process, its complex dynamics to a rather singular logic, and the particularity of historical time is reduced to 'empty abstract time' (Walter Benjamin)" [Fracchia, Lewontin 1999, 59]. The blunt claim of Fracchia and Lewontin may be an exaggeration because evolutionary studies of culture have undergone a transition from simply applying evolutionary biology to formulating (mathematical) models of cultural evolution more or less analogues to the biological evolution or even models of co-evolution. Nevertheless, at the end some reference to biological concepts of selection, successful variants, adaptation or similar ones has to be made in those studies.

Second, there are no ultimately convincing arguments that evolutionary or co-evolutionary explanations are better that those given by the students of the humanities or social sciences in their own terms. They claim that to explain a social or cultural fact — as a fact of society or culture — is to discover social or cultural factors that determine, condition, or constitute it (make it what it is). The reason that justifies the anti-naturalist explanatory strategy is exactly the same as the reason that justifies a biological explanation of a biological phenomenon or a physical explanation of a physical phenomenon: explaining the physical phenomenon of free-fall, a physicist refers to physical factors and not to biological or psychological features of falling bodies, even if they are cats or suicides. So, like the physicist, the sociologist is entitled to construct a sociological explanation of sociological phenomenon and the cultural anthropologist — to give a culturalist explanation. We can even say that the construction of such explanations is their obligation. Moreover, it seems that there are human phenomena that cannot be explained by reference to genetic selection or other mechanisms described by evolutionary biology. Biological explanation cannot account for values and evaluative statements or substitute for a sociological explanation that refers "to inherently social rules and intentions" [Smith 2007, 29].[6] In general, an adherent of sociological or anthropological approach to humans still can argue "that the understanding we seek about human subjects fundamentally, and irreducibly, concerns meaning, values, social rules and the expressive world made possible by language" [Ibidem, 110]. These phenomena cannot be reduced to the

[6] Jerzy Kmita argues that in order to explain, for instance, a connection between an act of the placing of a crown on one's head and constituting this person as a monarch, it is simpler and more convincing to refer to cultural rules then to a physical causal explanation [Kmita 1995, 221]. Similarly, Thomas Szasz states: "No one claims to be able to explain the economic or emotional value of a wedding ring by identifying its material composition; scientists do not insists that a physicalist account of its structure is superior to a cultural and personal account of its meaning" [Szasz 2008, 579].

workings of human brain, to the biological processes of adaptation, or to the effects of the mechanism of genetic variation and natural selection.

To clarify the second issue, i.e., the difference between explanation of human features and understanding who we are I would like to refer to the statement of Hubert Marki, an animal behaviorist, who says: "The question of why humans have developed a unique style of mental contents should be answered according to the usual paradigm of Darwinian evolutionary theory" [Marki 2008, 209]. His question is a clear example of a problem leading to that what I have called a genetic or genealogical explanation. It presupposes that "a unique style of mental contents" was developed or singled out from an evolutionary more primordial or more universal form of mental contents. It is quite understandable that while answering it one would refer to a scientific theory that refers to developmental processes in living beings and shows mechanisms that produce these processes. It is, however, a completely different matter to answer the question referring to human "unique style of mental content." This means giving its definition or — as I prefer to formulate it — to understand it. Marki himself defines it not in biological, evolutionary terms, but in psychological ones. Moreover, it seems to me that he presupposes that these terms are able to grasp both the uniqueness of human mental contents and their historical, social, and cultural universality. The recognition of the presence of such presuppositions leads me to the third issue.

No matter whether one talks about human nature that has its roots in the evolutionary process or about humanity understood in a humanist, social, anthropological, or philosophical terms, one has to do it on the ground of certain beliefs that are necessary, very often tacitly taken for granted, but by no means self-evident and ultimately justifiable. They become visible after some time or from a different perspective, and then they are often identified as prejudices, partial prejudgments, and their holders are accused of bigotry, unfairness, or plain stupidity.

Let us have a closer look at the presuppositions of any naturalist explanation of cultural phenomena. First of all, there is the epistemological assumption of scientism that **knowledge of different scientific disciplines is compatible and can be unified**. This presupposition is based on realism and cognitive objectivism. According to it, there are no historical, disciplinary, or paradigmatic gaps or breaks in knowledge that cannot be bridged. In other words, views of a given phenomenon established from different perspectives can be unified, and **for every thing, process, or phenomenon there is one coherent truth**.

Only on the basis of this assumption can one claim that scientific studies in various historical epochs, in different disciplines, and under many paradigms refer to the same objects. Only on the basis of this assumption can one claim that conceptual diversity, the selective nature of scientific cognition, its historical situatedness, non-conclusive nature, and other factors do not limit the objectivity of scientific research, and are not sources of the insurmountable constructive nature of scientific research.

On the ground of this assumption it is obvious that the Earth considered by Ptolemy is the Earth of Copernicus; that motion described by Einstein is exactly the same physical phenomenon as the one described earlier by Newton, Galileo, and Aristotle; and that — by analogy — the human being of sociology, cultural studies, or cultural anthropology is exactly the same as the human being of sociobiology, behavioral ecology, cultural evolution theory or a model of gene-culture co-evolution. Presupposing this, one can believe that, for instance, a sociobiological explanation of a social phenomenon and its sociological description compose a coherent whole.

Another assumption of the naturalist strategy of reductionist unification (not accepted by the gene-culture co-evolution theory) is **the idea of the asymmetry in the relation between the social and natural disciplines**. They are not equivalent, they do not possess equal rights, and do not co-explain social phenomena. From the naturalist perspective they cannot be equivalent because **only the social is influenced and modified by the natural**;

the natural is not influenced and modified by the social. Thus, either sociology must be reduced to biology (as in the radical version of sociobiology) or — at least — recognized as not self-sufficient. Acceptance of the strategy of reductionist unification means for the social sciences and the humanities either self-destruction or fundamental self-limitation.

The humanities are not, however, doomed to self-destruction or self-limitation. As Leszek Kołakowski emphasizes [1984], the belief that biology gives us insight into biological processes as the reality from which the human originates, and in which it is grounded, may be an important heuristic principle, but it does not lead to a better answer to the question of who we are.

3. Humanity not reduced to human nature

Radically anti-naturalist approaches to humanity can be found in the contemporary interpretive and hermeneutic traditions in the humanities and philosophy. There are good reasons to claim that an important part of contemporary Continental philosophy is the philosophy of culture or — more precisely — culturalist philosophy [Siemek 1982, 54–55]. It is anti-reductionst in its articulation of the self-reflexive consciousness of modernity, which "knows itself as culture and as one among many." The culturalist philosophy recognizes and makes modernity the world of culture, in a broad anthropological sense of the term, or, "as Hegel would say, defines it as the world-epoch of *Bildung*" [Markus 2011, 18]. Culture conceived in this way is "the outcome of the way the Enlightenment invented and defined itself" [Ibidem, 19]. Modern ways of live are not "simply natural, or God-ordained," they are "man-made and re-makable" [Ibidem, 18].

It is true that from the perspective of a culturalist philosophy "to be modern is to have a human-centered view of the universe," to recognize human beings "as the source of all meaning and value, the agents in all action, the eye in the storm of existence itself" [Nimmo 2011, 60], but

anthropocentrism does not entail a dualist view of culture as opposed to nature. Rather, the modern culturalist philosophy tries to go beyond the traditional epistemological subject/object dichotomy as well as beyond the culture/nature opposition. From its perspective culture is the primordial sphere in which all reality, objective and subjective, is constituted.

We participate in a culture (and society), and the relation between us and cultural reality is not a form of objective causal determination. We are human beings as participants in historical cultural realities, and our humanity, both who and what we are, is culturally situated: we are cultural beings. Thus, the objectivist belief that cultural reality can be studied from outside, as an object independent from us, is illusory because any attempt to establish the subject/object opposition between ourselves and our culture is itself a cultural act. When we undertake a study of culture we always and already participate in it.

In this tradition the problem of humanity ceases to be a metaphysical problem of human nature that preexists human being (existence) and awaits actualization, or a scientific question of what differs human species from other species. It becomes an **existential-ethical** question. As it is rightly emphasized by Stefan Amsterdamski: the concept of humanity "is not a zoological but a moral concept" [Amsterdamski 1994, 25].

From this perspective, humanity is projected and constituted by us in the course of our transcending beyond what has been established so far by us and our ancestors toward what is not yet present. In other words, from the existentialist perspective humanity is neither an essence nor a fact of a more primordial status than our being. It does not exist by itself. It is the content of our acts of overcoming ourselves as we are at the moment as well as acts of going beyond the existing order and projecting the future. From the existentialist perspective, the existing order is the reality of depersonifying objective determination, and while going beyond it, we direct ourselves toward Transcendence, even if it is nothingness.

Also all interpretive trends in contemporary sociology, such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, or constructivism, carry an anti-naturalist view of humanity. They concentrate on social interactions or on everyday life and emphasize the we constitute ourselves through mutual interpretations and re-interpretations. Radical adherents of the sociology of everyday life interactions reject any need for establishing an objectifying distance between themselves as sociologists and the social reality, in which they take part as members of a society and participants in interactions of everyday life. Even if their research project cannot be realized, the interpretive perspective should not be ignored.

Philosophy of culture and the interpretive tradition in the social sciences contribute to the decline of scientism as well as to the demise of its beliefs: that scientific method is historically, disciplinary, and paradigmatically universal, and that scientific cognition is applicable to everything that exists and can be known and. Moreover, it seems that we witness not just an act of destroying a particular, local form of scientism but the process of the devastation of the entire scientistic ideology.[7]

4. Who are we?

Undoubtedly, to answer the question of who we are is not a simple matter. I believe that there is insight in the philosophical position that does not locate humanity in the uniqueness of the human species, in the unsurpassed sensitivity of human beings, or even in human consciousness but in self-consciousness. It is very possible that no single feature or ability distinguishes humans from animals, but their combination certainly does, and self-consciousness is in the core of that combination. Only a human being can become an object for himself or herself; only a human being can refer to the

[7] There is, of course, an opposite trend, namely post-humanistic naturalism. Its anti-anthropocentrism is, however, equally illusory as that of traditional naturalism.

world and — moreover — to his/her own referring to the world; only a human being can have the consciousness of being conscious. “It is not the fact that we are feeling and sensitive *subjects* that distinguishes us among living creatures, but the fact that we can be *objects* for ourselves, that is, be capable of splitting our consciousness so that it becomes its own observer” [Kołakowski 1989, 115].

What needs emphasizing at this point is the fact that our capability of “splitting our consciousness so that it becomes its own observer” is an ability exercised by individuals but it is socially and culturally created. Moreover, it is not only socially created, it does not exists without language, social relations, and cultural rules; it is social and cultural in the sense that self-referring is our communal activity. Self-consciousness is but an element of our self-referring practice. We do different things to our bodies, we self-train and self-disciple ourselves.

The view that conscious self-referring is constitutive for humanity has important consequences. It allows us to see that naturalist conceptions of humanity discovering objectively our real immersion in nature, fundamental for who/what we are, cannot illuminate our self-consciousness. They allow us to identify ourselves with nature in our reflection on ourselves but they have no conceptual tools at their disposal to naturalize our reflection on our reflection. When we self-reflectively refer to our own consciousness we cannot identify ourselves with any natural phenomenon; the ability of our thinking to reflect upon itself appears to us as radically different from the natural and the animal. Moreover, it is our self-reflection that is the condition of our objectifying view of nature, ourselves, and our own being in the world. “The awareness of one’s being in the world itself therefore transcends the being in the world, and is an irreversible abandonment of the spontaneous consent to its natural position; it is the irreversible loss of a ready-made location in nature.” [Ibidem, 116] In other words, human subjectivity that divides itself into the reflecting subject and the subject matter of self-reflection, self-experience, ceases to be part of nature. Even if I conceive

human consciousness as an element of nature, I — as a subject performing this understanding — am not within nature; otherwise I would not be able to treat nature as an object of my cognition and conceive my cognition as different from me myself who is its subject.

Consequently, any biological characteristics that can be an element of my self-experience is no longer simply and purely natural; it requires understanding [Ibidem, 116]. To the extent to which humanity consists in self-consciousness we do not belong to nature but stick our heads out of it; and our self-consciousness cannot be reduced to what we know about ourselves as natural beings. "Even if we did know precisely who we are in nature, we would be unable to cease knowing that we know — and this state of duality is enough to prevent our being completely integrated into the order of nature" [Ibidem, 115–116]. My being-within-nature and my being-within-nature-knowing-that-I-am-within-nature are two radically different ontological situations. The second, exclusively human, situation is — in fact — even more complicated because it contains an element of self-awareness. Thus, my being means that I-am-within-nature-knowing-that-I-know-that-I-am-within-nature.

The fact that we are not humans on the basis of the *differentiam specificam* of the species *Homo sapiens* but — in a nutshell — by our own self-referential making does not lead to any of presuppostions usually attributed to anthropocentrism. One is the claim to human superiority, the other — dualistic ontology.

Anthropocentrism is often characterized not only as a position stressing "human centredness" but also "as the view that humanity has been conditioned to regard itself as a superior species" [Jonge 2011, 307]. The belief in human superiority is "deeply rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of domination" and — possibly — in the "worldview of technocratic-industrialised societies" (Ibidem, 308). However, none of those "paradigms of domination" is an unavoidable element of anthropocentrism, and I do not feel compelled to accept the claim to human superiority.

The dualist ontology is a result of human experience that can accompany the self-reflective recognition of human uniqueness. It "presents the world as precisely that which I am not, as a phenomenon which is primarily characterized by its inability to absorb my existence; it is therefore characterized as otherness, indifference, and passivity" [Kołakowski 1989, 117]. However, no matter how keen this experience is, it should not be turned into the basis for a philosophical position. Instead of ontological dualism let me outline a monistic view that recognizes its own limitations.

5. Mythical foundations of naturalism and anti-naturalism

If humanity is not simply a form of animality, if it constitutes itself in the sphere of culture, the biological order remains outside the horizon within which the human is established, and it is impossible to cross over this horizon, no matter whether the attempt is made from inside or from outside: any horizon moves together with the voyager. Thus, for the humanities, encircled within the horizon of the human, the natural and biological appear as unknown conditions of what is its subject matter. These conditions are necessary and *a priori* because the humanities can neither deny the existence of nature nor offer positive knowledge of it. On the other hand, for the natural (biological) sciences, the human appears as alienated from nature and, thus, unknowable for them, i.e., located outside their horizon. Moreover, since natural scientists cannot deny — without violating their own self-experience — that their ability for self-reflection confirms the fact that they protrude beyond nature, the human is for the natural sciences also a condition. It is a necessary condition of their existence: they are products of cognitive acts of humans.

The idea that both the human and the natural sciences are within their own horizons allows us to realize that the choice between the naturalist and anti-naturalist answers to the question of human nature is a mythical option in the sense that any of them is based on certain beliefs that are

neither empirically verifiable nor deductively demonstrable. They are prior to any empirical or deductive procedures, and must be accepted *per fiat*, which means — simply — that they are inherited from tradition and very often not even recognized or articulated. To characterize both approaches to human nature as mythical options is not — in my intention — pejorative, but purely descriptive. It means to reveal their axiological foundations because "all reasons in which the mythical consciousness is rooted, both in its initial variant, and in its metaphyscial extensions, are acts of affirming values" [Ibidem, 5]. Myths perform both cognitive and social roles. And — as Kołakowski puts it — "both the bond-creating role of myth in communal life and its integrational functions in organizing personal consciousness, appear irreplaceable"; in particular, they cannot be replaced by "beliefs regulated by the criteria of scientific knowledge" [Ibidem, 118]. I understand, however, that the claim that scientific answer to the question of what we are is based on a myth, namely the myth of Science, requires further careful clarification because it must seem completely unjustified to the adherents of the naturalist approach, who believe that scientism (and naturalism) means the rejection of all myths. In fact, it means specifically the abandonment of the myth of Reason and consequently the myth of Man.

The **myth of Man** allows people to understand their reference to the Transcendence, and to view themselves as supernatural, spiritual beings. It soothes human feeling of the indifference of nature and shows both the human and the natural as rooted within the ideal (divine) order. It reassures human beings that their position in the universe is exceptional, that they are superior to other living creatures. The **myth of Reason** supplements the myth of Man because it gives people the certitude that the order of ideas or of God's plans and commands can be known by men. It gives people certainty that they can unite with a deity through mythical rituals, mystical experience, or intellectual intuition.[8]

[8] I discuss these myths more broadly in [Tuchańska 1995].

Scientism, as an ideology of (empirical) scientific research, not only rejects the possibility of unity with a deity and its mystical experiencing, but it also abandons the nativist and intuitionist conceptions of traditional rationalism. Thus, there is a fundamental clash between the myths of Man and Reason and scientism, in general, and naturalist view of humanity, in particular. These myths do not allow us to accept and justify science's claim to ultimate descriptive and explanatory truth. Scientism, on the other hand, states that there are no limits to scientific cognition, but it is — by definition — the cognition of phenomena accessible to scientific research that is empirical and theoretical. Therefore, it is specific and to be distinguished from the metaphysical, the speculative, the religious, or the mystical. Even the weakest versions of the criterion of demarcation between science and non-science (e.g., metaphysics) implies that ideas, which cannot be empirically tested or deductively proved, are not acceptable in the sphere of knowledge *per se.* This is, in a nutshell, the content of the **myth of Science**.

From the perspective of the myth of Science, there is no place for the myth of Man within the sphere of knowledge: man must be reduced to an empirical, natural phenomena that can be studied by the natural sciences and by the humanities, if they use scientific procedures. For scientism, the most radical (and the simplest) way of solving the conflict between it and the myths of Man and Reason is to eliminate both myths. A less radical solution is to claim that the myth of Man may be present, as necessary or useful, in the sphere of religion, metaphysics, or everyday life, but not in the scientific study of human nature: the scientific knowledge of man can and should be free from myths. In other words, the claim of the naturalist approach to human beings is that scientific cognition has the right to reduce humanity to a phenomenon that is accessible through its empirical-theoretical procedures.

There are, however, few fundamental difficulties connected with the scientistic belief that neither the myth of Man nor the myth of Reason is necessary for our self-understanding. Let me mention two of them. First, the

scientific view of humanity is doomed to inconsistency with human self-experience that contains a view of ourselves as supernatural beings and a view of the world as unable to absorb our existence; views that are revived again and again in human history. Second, the naturalist view cannot absorb human ethical-experience.[9] Lorenz is right when he states that the behaviorist concept of full plasticity of the human personality that is entirely shaped by social influences grants dispensation from individual moral obligations; but an opposite view of human activity governed by biological instincts and impulses also grants moral irresponsibility. The evolutionary ontology of Lorenz, who stresses the innate biological abilities of human beings, is as doubtful a foundation of the "civilizational concern" referring to cultural regress as is behaviorism, which he criticizes. The value of ethological or sociobiological programs of the moral restoration of the humankind depends on the ontological limitation of the biological determination of human praxis. Without such limitation there would be no opening within which non-biological phenomena, such as human self-consciousness, responsible reason, conscience, or moral values, could appear. Without the myth of Man the civilizational concern, so vivid in the work of both Lorenz and Wilson, is groundless. In fact, both Lorenz and Wilson appeal to our Reason, which they do not identify with a function and activity of our brain; and they do it in the name of moral values, which they do not reduce to the survival of human genes.

If I am right that scientism is unavoidably incommensurable with the myths of Man and Reason, the decline of scientism may mean either the restitution of both myths or the elaboration of a new philosophical position.

It seems that Bruno Latour and the adherents of his actor-network-theory believe this is a post-humanist sociology of associations that avoids disadvantages and contradictions of both scientism and humanism

[9] Any possible concept of moral responsibility as a purely biological phenomenon seems to be even a greater misunderstanding than the sociobiological concept of aggression.

(anthropocentrism). He may be right in claiming that it overcomes difficulties that he has pointed out, in particular a tendency present in both approaches to consider their own explanation as final or an inclination of social theorist to reify the social. However, this does not mean that an actor-network-theory does not generate its own troubles. It seems anthropomorphic and it is not myth free. Its radical anthropomorphism is visible in statements like this one: "In addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'back-drop for human action', things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" [Latour 2005, 72]. The meanings of human actions are extended here to non-human actors. Such a move is not in-itself impossible or contradictory. It seems, however, to be a case of anthropocentrism and it requires careful conceptual analysis, similar to the one that is necessary in the case of the biological use of humanist categories. Even if adherents of the actor-network-theory accept — like Nik Taylor [2011, 266–267] — an anthropomorphic way of explaining non-humans, exposing themselves to Latour's accusation of anthropocentrism, they still need to clarify what does it mean, for instance, that a thing forbids an event? Does it refer to a procedural rule, like a technician who forbids us to do certain things to our car, to a social custom, like a mother commanding a child not to behave in a certain way, to a moral norm, or a religious command, or does it simply cause an opposite event?

As an attempt to overcome the subject/object opposition, to describe non-human action in an exactly the same way as activity of human actors, and to see all traditional (metaphysical) divisions as artifacts the actor-network-theory is based on some mythical beliefs. First, it is a belief in **homogeneous reality** in which the nature/culture divide is not constitutive but completely spurious, and second, an equally mythical belief that **we can cognize the world without using oppositions**.

One of the oppositions that seem unavoidable to me is the distinction between human and non-human participants in networks of interrelations and events. We cannot ignore the fact that we build our own (individual or

communal) self-consciousness and we cannot build something else's self-consciousness. We should not disregard the fact that it is us who use either objectifying or anthropomorphic descriptions. Does it make us superior to non-human actants? By any means! But it makes us different, and no matter how we describe and explain us or them and how we conceive the difference between us and them all those acts are our acts. We can no more separate ourselves from these acts than we can dissociate them from us. Similarly, we can act ethically not only toward other humans but also toward non-humans. However, we rather shouldn't expect that a scorpion whom we didn't kill for ethical reasons will act ethically in revenge.

I believe that nature/culture conundrum can be tackled differently. I believe that it is possible to construct a philosophical position that would contain a less universalist view of science, a different ideal of scientific cognition, and would be free from dreams of superiority haunting both ideologies: a scientistic and anthropocentric one. It would be — naturally — based on another myth, namely, the **myth of human (historical) self-constitution**, understood in an existentialist (as in Heidegger) or a collective sense.[10]

6. Summary

If there are always certain mythical options at the origin of our self-understanding, e.g., the myth of Man and the myth of Reason, or the myth of Science, or the myth of human self-constitution, the historical separation of the scientific (naturalist) question of what is man (as a natural being) from the metaphysical issue of humanity and the existentialist-ethical problem of who we should become is spurious. Essentially they are still united. There is, of course, a fundamental difference between asking what are we, and asking who are we, but the view of myself as simply "a thing among things" or "an

[10] The search for such a position was continued in [McGuire, Tuchańska 2000].

automaton in disguise" is equally illusory as the view of myself as "pure self-consciousness." The search for what we are is objectified: we treat ourselves as objects, the search for who we are is personalized: we treat ourselves as persons.

The answer to the question: Who are we? requires engaging in the act of self-consciousness and conceiving self-consciousness as constitutive for humanity. In other words, it requires the transition from being to intentionality: it is not our being and features of ourselves as beings that constitute our human nature, but our intentionality and — in particular — the fact that we are aware of our intentionality. And it is intentionality that separates us from animals and escapes an analysis in naturalist terms. However, the fact that we cannot know who we are without engaging in the acts of self-understanding does not turn us into pure thinking substances; we are more than we think (about ourselves) and know.

As distancing ourselves from the world is the necessary condition of any act of thinking-about-the-world, so to see the world as separated from ourselves is the necessary condition of any act of our self-understanding. If we agree that — contrary to radical naturalism — we are not constituted as humans within nature, we still have to realize that without the establishment of the world as the frame of reference for us, we would not be able to see ourselves in non-naturalist terms. And it is of secondary importance whether we understand the world as a home in which we dwell or as a natural system which determines us. However, the act of the separation of ourselves from the world neither discovers the absolute priority of the world nor constitutes it as an unavoidable conclusion. The belief in absolute priority of the world over us is a proposition inferred within the myth of Science and based on the neglect of the fact that this world is not just a world-existing-by-itself, it is always and already our world, the world of human experience and practice. Hence, theoretically it is possible to claim that we are constituted as humans partially within nature and partially within culture; the obstacle to such an integrated view is, however, the inability to understand this contribution of

nature and culture as equal on the ground of present science. This is why I opt for a third position: we are constituted as humans within culture. Only this position allows us to understand our own self-constitution and, in particular, our self-reflectivity, as well as the naturalist attempts to ignore them and immerse ourselves in nature.

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