

HUMANITY IN CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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Abstract

Author understands humanity as all the forms of behaviour leading to the protection and maintenance, i.e. development of human life. On the basis of the differences in the objects of our behaviour and conduct, he distinguishes between humanity as a natural-biological quality and a cultural (moral) quality. The moral value of the first kind of behaviour is determined by our biological or social relations to our close ones. In the second case, the moral value of our behaviour to strangers is a pure manifestation of our morality and culture.

Keywords: Humanity, human nature, moral value, professional life

Introduction

Contemporary genetics, neurology, biology, zoology, ethology, etc., present ever-new knowledge of genetic similarity between humans and the animal realm; the similarity between human brain activity and behaviour or conduct and the brain activity and behaviour of many representatives of the animal realm, especially primates or mammals, but also some other kinds of animals.

Paola Cavalieri holds the opinion that contemporary scientific knowledge shows that there is no reason for the existence of a categorical difference between humans and non-humans. The decoding of genome of humans and other animal species has proved quite clearly the existence of evolutionary continuity between the humankind and other animal species. Thus, according to her, moral philosophers are not right if they still persist in claiming the moral superiority of the human species.¹¹⁵ Theresa S. S. Schilhab holds a similar position when stating that contemporary empirical research rejects the preference of the contrast between the humans and apes capable of self-reflection and the mentally inferior animals lacking the concept of Self.¹¹⁶ On the basis of the examination of the similarities in human and animal behaviour, Marc Bekoff has concluded that humans are not necessarily morally superior to animals.¹¹⁷

So, is humanity a specifically human quality that separated man from nature; by which man overcame his animality, i.e. his biological and natural determination, as Kant expressed it? And what is actually humanity?

A Concept of Humanity

According to common sense morality, we often understand humanity, on the one hand, as the respect for, and acceptance of human being, and, on the other hand, as the support of the effort to develop its strengths and abilities. Let us think about these individual aspects of humanity and decide to what extent it is really possible to perceive them as adequately expressing the meaning of the concept of humanity. On the common sense

¹¹⁵ Cavalieri 2002, pp. 78-79.

¹¹⁶ Schilhab 2004, p. 123.

¹¹⁷ Bekoff 2004, pp. 515-516; 2006, p. 80.

morality level humanity is first of all the respect for human being. It means that in the case of others we respect their ontological or metaphysical status of human beings, i.e. that they are above all the bearers of the morphological signs belonging to human being (physiological similarity with people). This results in the duty to behave towards them as to the members of the same species; that is as to the beings that are equal to us. In the case of the support of efforts at the development of someone's powers and abilities it usually means the creation of the economic, social, mental, cultural, intellectual, educational and professional conditions for this human being's achievement of full development.

Taking into account only the points made so far, we could conclude that our respect for the newborn, our satisfaction of its needs, its rearing and education is nothing unique, nothing that is only characteristic of human species. A very similar, in some cases almost identical, behaviour can also be found in animal species, especially mammals. We could pose a question whether such behaviour in people is a sign of humanity at all since the existence of this behaviour in the animal realm indicates that it rather has biological than purely moral or cultural (including professional) roots that could be used as evidence of our own uniqueness. Michael Stingl and John Collier hold an opinion that affection and the partial relationships that are built on it create a basic feature of human life, as well as the life of other primates. Then, in their opinion, we can suppose that these partial relationships will play a very important role in the theory of moral capacity based on evolutionary biology.¹¹⁸

Let us think what could be a really unique, completely specific feature of behaviour in people as the members of the same species that does not exist in the behaviour of the members of the rest of the animal realm? On what basis could we speak of humanity as a moral value having its origin and source not in the biological or natural, but in cultural evolution? The initial thesis of our thinking about humanity, i.e. humanity as the respect for human life, appears to be more a natural or biological than solely moral (or professional) factor. Undoubtedly, it is true that morality has its biological basis related above all to the value of human life.¹¹⁹ Bekoff believes that the origin of virtue and morality is older than human species.¹²⁰ However, if we want to emphasize our uniqueness, or difference from the rest of the animal realm, we have to find something typically human in the behaviour of people, something that we could use as the basis for the value of humanity. What could that be?

The criteria of human life can be biological, social and mental qualities or capacities of human being. The biological qualities especially include the already mentioned morphological and functional signs. The social capacities comprise speech and communication capacity and the capacity to form certain social contacts, interpersonal relationships, mobility of an individual, the ability to take care of oneself, moral as well as professional judgement and the ability to plan the future. The mental qualities and capacities include, in our opinion, the existence of consciousness, self-awareness, abstract thinking, free will, moral and professional thinking. These criteria comprise the objectively existing qualities, capacities of human being, i.e. their presence or absence, and not their quality or quantity. The minimal criteria for the definition of the real human life, as different from the pure vegetative state of human organism, have to comprise at least some social and mental qualities or capacities. If a human life does not comprise any of the social and mental qualities or capacities, it only exists on the biological level of human organism and it can be treated accordingly in an effort at its maintenance.

Another frequently mentioned aspect of humanity defined as a moral value is that man helps another man either with the realization of his goals and intentions or in the case of

¹¹⁸ Stingl and Collier 2005, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁹ Bekoff 2004; Ridley 1996, 2001; Ruse 1998; Waller 1997; Wright 1994.

¹²⁰ Bekoff 2004, pp. 515-516.

his misery, or suffering. Are these uniquely human forms of behaviour or can they also be found in the animal realm? If we think about the help with the realization of goals and intentions, we can find something similar in the animal realm in the case of the cooperation of various members of the same species during hunting. We could point out that while man can help the other person unselfishly, animals cooperate in hunting to acquire food in an easier way. A sceptic could claim that even altruistic behaviour of people is not completely unselfish since what these people acquire is at least the good feeling that they helped someone and that is the sole reason why they do it. According to sceptics, only the conduct based on the Kantian pure duty, which excludes any empirical explanation of why we perform the duty, can be accepted as purely unselfish and altruistic. Despite these objections of the sceptics, we can probably perceive altruistic help with the realization of others' goals and intentions as something that goes beyond the limits of the purely biological or natural dimension of our behaviour and conduct. It is especially true if this altruistic help is given to strangers since this feature of behaviour does not exist in the animal realm. Humans can offer assistance to the strangers that they meet in the street, if they need it, or to the strangers in foreign countries, whom they will never meet, if they need aid because of wars or natural disasters that struck the given part of the world.¹²¹ In this case we can state that it is a form of behaviour of man towards another man that transcends the natural dimension and is a result of the cultural evolution, including the moral and professional development. A sceptic can argue that this aid is usually provided on the international level and that it can include also motives that may not be completely unselfish and spontaneous. This can be true, but what I have in mind is the behaviour of the individuals who help others independently from state institutions and with the intention to help the people who need it. An example can be the aid provided for the countries and people suffering the aftermath of earthquakes or floods, but also the aid provided for the children in foster homes. Such behaviour is exclusively human and that is why we can perceive it as a manifestation of humanity, as a moral value that humanity comprises.

However, what about the conduct or help based on the expected reciprocity? Can we also say that such conduct transcends our natural or biological frame and results from our cultural evolution? Can we say that such conduct corresponds with the moral and professional dimension of humanity? Can reciprocity be found in relations among animals? Certainly we can find it in members of the same species, especially if they belong to the same herd, flock, or pack.¹²² In no case it is something that we can perceive as calculative behaviour, as it is usually called if it appears in human relationships, but it is something quite natural in the animal relations because it is expected that every member take part in the maintaining of the life of the herd, flock or pack. A lot of biologists speak in this respect about so called reciprocal altruism, according to which animals in danger try to save, or protect the members of their herd, flock or pack against predators by drawing attention to themselves, so that others could escape safely.¹²³ This even leads to show that also in the animal realm there exists the self-sacrifice for the good of others of the same species that are members of the same herd, flock or pack. Consequently, not even man's capacity for self-sacrifice for the good of others is a completely human quality. Despite the positive value that it comprises, it cannot be considered a typically human quality that is a result of cultural evolution and a purely moral factor. Rather the contrary is true. It becomes clearer and clearer

¹²¹ For clarification, and the preservation of the continuity of the text, I want to explain that in the following pages the concept 'stranger' will be used in the above-defined meaning.

¹²² Boesch 2002; Schuster 2002.

¹²³ for the discussion about the altruism of humans and animals see, for example, Brosnan and de Waal 2002; Collier and Stingl 1993; Dawkins 1976; Fehr, Fischbacher and Gächter 2002; Hill 2002; Narveson 2000; Price 2003; Ridley 1996, 2001; Rottschaefer 1998; Stich 2007; Wilson, E. 2004; Wright 1994.

that a lot of manifestations of human behaviour that we intuitively or on the common sense morality basis consider human are results of biological or natural evolution and they also exist in members of other animal species. Michael Ruse believes that the features of altruistic behaviour akin to moral behaviour can also be found in higher primates.¹²⁴ Similarly, Lang and Sober and Strier conclude that if we accept man or human species as part of nature, then we have to accept that a number of manifestations of human behaviour are comparable with the manifestations of behaviour in other species, although there can exist qualitative variability.¹²⁵ On the other hand, for example, Catherine Wilson states that behaviour of animals, including the socially living ones, as e.g. ants or chimpanzees, is not moral, although in many cases they behave comparably to humans. According to her, we cannot ascribe to them any moral beliefs or agency. In her opinion, despite the existence of the cooperation among animals, we cannot call their society moral because our idea of morality is based on the ability to abstract and generalize.¹²⁶ However, Marc Bekoff believes that we can find in animals such manifestations of behaviour that evidently have a moral dimension, e.g. honesty. In his opinion a lot of animals, especially mammals, have the sense of honesty because it helps them survive in their environment.¹²⁷

If we are to summarize the so far developed ideas about humanity, then we have to state that a great majority of the manifestations of man's behaviour that we usually call humane have mainly biological or natural dimension that we have in common with other animal species, especially mammals and primates. These manifestations of behaviour include the ones that are related to the protection and maintenance of our own life, the life of our children, relatives, friends and acquaintances. In relation to these people (if we respect and support their lives, interests and goals) we behave essentially in the same way as members of various animal species, especially mammals and primates, behave towards their close ones. Such behaviour, despite the fact that it is very needed and desired, can in no case be seen as uniquely human; as something that can create a basis for the humankind's claim to a special status in relation to other mammals and primates. The basis of our behaviour is biological or natural. People, however, ascribed a moral value to it and it could be discussed whether it was right. Specifically human behaviour that is not based on biological or natural but exclusively moral basis is our behaviour related to the protection of variously disabled forms of human life. It refers in the same way to our behaviour towards strangers if it is aimed at the protection and maintenance of their life, property, physical, mental and professional integrity, their goals and intentions helping to protect and maintain life.

Consequently, we can try to conclude the so far presented thinking about humanity and on this basis define the active and passive forms of the realization of humanity. The active form means the direct involvement of moral agent through his participation in the activity developed for the benefit of the strangers in need of help. The passive form of the realization of humanity means that our behaviour expresses our compassion with the strangers affected by disaster. Especially in the case of the latter form an important role is played by moral feelings. Usually this passive form of humanity forms the basis, or is the condition for the realization of the active form of humanity, i.e. for the providing of assistance to those people who need it. Compassion with the suffering often (though not always) leads to the acting for the benefit of these people. Of course, the active help is always more valuable than mere compassion, but we should not minimize the value or potential of the humanity comprising compassion. Our capacity to forgive comprises a similar potential of being humane. Forgiveness, just like compassion, can be the initial point for our further

¹²⁴ Ruse 1998.

¹²⁵ Lang 2002, p. 668.

¹²⁶ Wilson, C. 2004, pp. 3; 21.

¹²⁷ Bekoff 2004, p. 506.

acting, the active realization of humanity in the form of assistance to others. The passive humanity can also be reflected in not acting, i.e. not causing harm to other person despite the fact that the moral agent could do it while realizing his rightful intentions and goals. This passive form of humanity can be seen as a certain minimal level of humanity related to the fact that if the moral agent cannot help other man, he at least expresses his compassion, or at least does not act in the way that could harm the other in the realization of his rightful intentions and aims. The active form of the realization of humanity can be divided into positive and negative. The positive form means a direct assistance to a stranger who needs it in the realization of his positive intentions and goals. The negative formulation means to prevent other person from the realization of harmful aims, intentions that could affect some stranger.

My thinking, developed so far, has brought me to the conclusion that it is possible to respect humanity from the metaphysical or ontological perspective, i.e. to perceive someone as a human being on the basis of his morphological and functional signs belonging to human beings. This, however, does not say anything about the moral or professional aspect of humanity. We can only latently create conditions for the formulation of a definition of the moral value of humanity. From the ethical, moral or professional perspective, humanity has to be realized and not only respected because it implies acting to the benefit of the strangers in need. It is latently present also in the passive form of humanity, i.e. in the feeling of compassion with the suffering or misfortune of strangers or in the case of forgiving someone. The moral and professional value of humanity can be realized only through our behaviour and conduct in relation to strangers.

I think that we have to distinguish between the generic behaviour and conduct of humans that, despite having a biological-natural basis, also comprises positive moral dimension related to the protection and maintenance of human life from the behaviour that too has a biological-natural basis, but comprises a negative moral dimension. In the animal realm the protection and maintenance of life, on the one hand, or its destruction, on the other hand, have no moral dimension, or effect. Both manifestations of behaviour, protective and destructive, are the natural manifestations of animal behaviour and do not evoke any wider reaction among the members of the animal realm. Their effect is temporary and impact limited to the local area. In the case of human society the reaction to such behaviour is wider and, owing to the media, can cross the local borders in which certain kind of behaviour happened very quickly, especially if this behaviour represses or destroys human lives.

That is why I suggest that we speak about humanity in all the cases in which human life is protected and maintained (including professional life) since it brings positive consequences for human life; with the specification that if it is the protection and maintenance of one's own life, the lives of our close ones, friends or acquaintances, it is the humanity based on a biological-natural foundation that, however, has also its moral as well as professional dimension and effect. On the contrary, the manifestations of the protection and maintenance of life in relation to strangers represent the real moral and professional value of humanity, i.e. they are the results of our cultural evolution, our moral and professional development. In this way we accept all the positive manifestations of our behaviour in relation to other people. Especially, we emphasize the value of helping, the protection and maintenance of the handicapped forms of human life and the strangers who need it because such behaviour transcends our biological-natural dimension, or the basis that we have in common with many other representatives of the animal realm.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Bruce N. Waller in this respect speaks about the morality of care and the morality of duty. In his opinion, human rationalistic morality is an improved animal morality of care. Ethics of care is in its essence valid because affection, care, trust and generosity form a moral basis. The attitude based on rational principles is an important means of the widening, improving and supporting of moral behaviour when affection reaches its

In the first case we understand humanity as a generic, natural-biological, quality typical of the behaviour of the members of human species, while in the second case we understand it as a moral as well as professional quality, which despite having features of similarity with the first quality, differs in respect to the object of its realization. Despite the fact that in the first case we understand humanity as a biological-natural quality of man, this understanding of humanity cannot be identified with the biologism of humanity because my understanding of humanity is related only to the behaviour leading to the protection and maintenance of human life. If this understanding of humanity is not to be influenced by speciesism, then we have to accept that in the animal realm, especially in mammals and primates, the protection and maintenance of one's own life, the life of offspring and other members of the herd, flock or pack is a natural-biological quality typical of their species, and that we can call it animality and see it as equal in its forms or manifestations of behaviour to humanity as a natural-biological but not moral quality typical of human species.

To summarize our points, we can state that humanity is understood as all the forms of behaviour leading to the protection and maintenance, i.e. development of human life (including professional life). On the basis of the differences in the objects of our behaviour and conduct, we distinguish between humanity as a natural-biological quality and a moral quality. The moral value of the first kind of behaviour is determined by our biological or social relations to our close ones. In the second case, the moral and professional value of our behaviour to strangers is a pure manifestation of our morality. In the first case the protection and the maintenance of life is a result of our basic value orientation, including our moral values that result from this orientation. In the second case our behaviour and conduct for the benefit of strangers brings an additional moral and professional value. The basic form of humanity resides, then, in the protection and maintenance of one's own life and the lives of our close ones, relatives, friends and acquaintances. It is the alpha and omega of our behaviour, which creates the basic natural-biological framework for our morality. It also creates the foundation for the basic rights and duties related to the protection and maintenance of human life. On the other hand, the protection and maintenance of the life of strangers is the moral and also professional surplus value by which we create a new, higher quality in our behaviour in relation to other people. In this case we can really speak about humanity as a moral and professional quality, or value. It is something that is really specifically human and which deserves respect and admiration. By such behaviour man proves that he can, at least to certain extent, transcend the natural-biological framework of his determination.

Conclusion

This can be achieved through the moral principles and particular moral as well as professional norms that define some ways of pursuing humanity in the individual and social life of moral communities (including professional life). I do not think that humanity as a moral quality is unachievable and abstract moral ideal that is too far from moral practice of the moral agents. I mean that humanity as an additional moral and professional value is the expression of actual requirements and interests of the individuals and humankind in general. Human beings hope for their rational existence and survival through the application of humanity, its principles and respect for human dignity. Human existence also depends on the solution of environmental issues which represents an external condition for the preservation of human life in general. However, what is important is the fact that the moral agent should try to perform humanity in his life.

limits. The moral basis of the morality of duty resides in care and affection. The affection is rooted in biology, supported by direct and indirect reciprocity and exists prior to rationality. The rational morality of duty is an adaptive complement of the morality based on affection and care (Waller 1997, pp. 353-354).

Humanity is one of the most significant moral and professional principles on which the human society is based as a society of the co-operating individuals (including professional life). We can see that the future of humankind is possible only if we accept and apply the principle of humanity as one of the fundamental principles. There are not only the basic duties of mankind towards the preservation of the future existence of humankind, but there is also a danger of the environmental disaster. It is so urgent that it is necessary to overcome narrow anthropological views on the future of the world and its life.

The idea of the preservation of human existence must be associated with the respect for and the application of humanity as moral and professional quality and it is only possible response to the future of humankind. The international co-operation of states and nations is the means of fulfilling humanity in ordinary life of the individual and whole human society (including professional life). The co-operation brings a perspective of preservation of human life. One of the most significant conclusions of this reasoning is an idea that the meaningful existence of the moral agents, communities and whole humankind is possible only through acceptance and application of humanity. I do not think that it is an abstract and unachievable goal for most people during their lives. To respect and apply humanity in our lives, we do not need necessarily be the saints. Being human is enough. That is why I think we can justify the attribute human and moral being by our action regardless the unfavourable character of contemporary period which perhaps tend to stimulate opposite position. Despite this, I think no other alternative than the acceptance and application of humanity in the world is possible.

I conclude with Thomas Garique Masaryk's quotation: "[H]umanistic ideal, [authentic] humaneness, is the foundation of all strivings of our time-particularly those that prevail at present in our national life. It is this which Kollár means when he says: 'When you cry, Slav, may it always mean Man'"¹²⁹

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¹²⁹ Masaryk 1971, p. 61.

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