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Human Being as a Mistery

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Among the most common views in the literature on what is unique in man, the most common is the belief that representatives of the human species have specific anthropological features that make them adapted to life in society. It's worth to outline that humans are the only ones who are capable of socialization.

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Human Being as a Mistery

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Introduction

A good part of science is deeply involved in analyses concerning of human being. This path is very complex but reflections on human being are never-ending story. Each person is unique. It brings *something* new, individual to the world. For this reason, the human being remains something inscrutable for us, it is a kind of mystery. We are constantly looking for an answer to the question "What is a man?". This confirms the view of Karl Jaspers that our knowledge of man is limited. Jaspers constantly emphasizes that "man is always more than what he knows about himself. [...] We can never take stock and say that we know what a man in general or an individual is[1]." He claims that man cannot be reduced to his objectivity.

I will begin my considerations with this uniqueness, i.e. an explanation of what are the characteristics of a human being as such, an individual belonging to the species "homo sapiens"[2], which distinguishes him from other living beings? It is also worth remembering that human beings are distinguished in a very significant way by a deep need to realize who they are? That is identity. A peculiarly human characteristic is also the desire to develop.

Among the most common views in the literature on what is unique in man, the most common is the belief that representatives of the human species have specific anthropological features that make them adapted to life in society. Among the animal kingdom, humans are the only ones who are capable of socialization, which is due, among other things, to their unique biological features in the natural world. Certainly, this includes the social need for contact, a longer period of dependence on parents in childhood, and the ability to use language[3]. Promotion to the level of a creative personality, as we read earlier, is a psychobiological development and consists in the transformation of primitive impulses into a state coupled with moral values. It fulfills the needs of sublimation of existing instinctive forces, and consists in building higher levels of behavior and conduct, but also in weakening and breaking basic impulsive forces. We often encounter the view, already familiar to us, that thanks to the reflexivity unique in the world of animals, people are not passive beings to whom "everything happens", but active subjects deciding about their fate, making life choices. With this wealth of predispositions, they differ from plants, which only passively adapt to the environment, and animals, which are characterized by instinctive behavior.

We are still dealing here with an issue fundamental for the humanities in general. As an example, it is worth recalling the timeless question of Immanuel Kant: What is man? Man (as a being, an individual, a subject) has always been at the center of interest of philosophical, anthropological, psychological and sociological sciences[4]. The answers revolved around the issue of the interaction of material factors and those of an ideal nature in man, as well as the immanent and transcendent dimensions of the relationship between social activity and the fate of man. Scholars have been intrigued by the tensions between the existential concerns we experience as humans and the accompanying socio-historical contexts. Among the views on man and humanity, there were those that treated the human being as the basic criterion of everything that exists in the world. Protagoras of Abdera, initially a sensualist, claimed that "man is the measure of all things, existing that they exist, and non-existent that they do not exist"[5]. These words were most often interpreted as an expression of extreme relativism. But they are also understood as a radically subjectivist

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[1] K. Jaspers, Philosophical Faith, trans. A. Buchner et al., Comer , Toruń, 1995, p. 38.

[2] The term "man" can refer to the human species (Homo - man) as well as to the human species (Homo sapiens - thinking man).

[3] JM Henslin, E. Nelson, Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach, Canadian Edition, Allyn and Bacon, Scarborough, Ontario 1995.

[4] I. Kant, Logic. Lecture Handbook, trans. A. Banaszkiewicz, Gdańsk 2005, p. 37.

[5] Protagoras: Περίθεχαν, cf. D. Laertios: Lives and Views of Famous Philosophers, trans. I. Krońska and others. Warsaw 1988, September, 1.

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position. Many commentators tend to regard them as the basis of anthropocentrism.

In Aristotle's theory, the substantial approach to man is emphasized. In his views, man is composed of changeable matter, which is the body, and forms - the soul, which actualizes being. Aristotle believed that man is an individual substance composed of a material, passive body and an immaterial, rational soul that shapes this body. He defined substance as "a being that exists by itself as in itself, one and separate"[6]. Substance means a being having its existence in itself and not in another subject or object. It is characterized by self-existence, autonomy (so-called subsistencia). Thus, one can see in his views the context of the dualistic theory of man. However, Aristotle, unlike his teacher Plato, did not regard the body as a prison for the soul. He considered man in three essential and complementary dimensions: bodily, cognitive and ethical.

Boethius, in the sixth century after Christ, was the first to define a "person" as a complete, independently existing substance of a rational nature, which distinguished it from other beings.

We can see the continuation of the thread of being as a substance of rational nature in the views of Saint Thomas Aquinas. He treated man as a substantial, psychosomatic unity. Aquinas understood man as a substance composed of a rational soul as a form and of matter (bodily substance)[7].

The thread of Platonic dualism returned in the views of Descartes which assumed the duality of man, consisting in the fact that he consists of two substances: corporeal and spiritual. Descartes' views were strictly rationalistic. The Cartesian man is a thinking being, which is emphasized by the famous saying of the philosopher: "I think, therefore I am" (Latin cogito ergo sum). If there is a thought, there must also be someone who thinks[8]. The theme of reason as the key feature of man was also taken up by Pascal, who claimed that "Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but a thinking reed".

We can see the rejection of the concept of man in the substantial approach in empiricist theories. One of his leading critics was John Locke. In the first place, his argument against the concept of a human being as a substance was the difficulty of defining this concept. He believed that we cannot know what a substance is because we do not have a clear idea of it. Locke defined the human person as a thinking being, possessing reason, aware of himself, that is, as a subject of his own intellectual activities [9].

George Berkeley argued that there is no corporeal substance, only spiritual. Thus he found error in both the rationalist conception of Cartesianism and Lockean empiricism. Like Locke, he questioned the existence of innate knowledge and treated experience only in the dimension of the senses. He believed that man uses sensations and ideas in cognition. Hume strongly questioned the substantiality of the person.

Immanuel Kant presented man as an autonomous, free being with the ability to know the world and give it value. From his writings emerges a vision of the human being as a self-conscious being, detached and free from other individuals, society and nature[10]. There is therefore also a pragmatic perspective, thanks to which man could be called by Kant an "earthly rational being". Thanks to his inborn predispositions[11], especially intellectual ones, he can develop his nature, striving for perfection. He presented man as a being whose all possibilities are focused on the realization of specific life goals. The uniqueness of man is demonstrated by the use of reason. Kant wrote: "For the fact that he has reason does not elevate it in value above mere animality, if this reason is to serve him only for what instinct fulfills in animals[12]." According to Kant, man, being a sensual and empirical being, belongs to the natural world, and his possession of reason and free will allows him to make choices and make decisions.

Kant's anthropological theory also assumes the transcendental aspect of humanity, which is related to its dignity. The human being, precisely because of his dignity, appears to us as a value in itself, which must not be used as a means to achieve any end. As noted by Janusz Mariański, Kant's views had a huge impact on the contemporary understanding of dignity as an absolute value, as the goal of all conduct. A Polish scholar wrote: "Act in such a way that you use humanity, both in your person and in the person of everyone else, always at the same time as an end, never only as a means" [13]. Dignity, then, this sublime value, is an end in itself and is presented as the foundation of humanity. Man has a bodily nature, but also a noumenal one, namely thanks to free will. Therefore, it is worth

[6] Aristotle, On Origin and Perishing, trans. L. Regner, Warsaw 1981, p. VII (Introduction).
[7] St. Tomasz, A Selection of Writings, Rosłan A. – transl. WAM, Kraków 2009 , p. 85.
[8] Descartes, Discourse on Method, trans. Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, Modern Poland Foundation, p. 4. http://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/rozprawa-o-metodzie.
[9] Ibidem, p. 471.
[10] I. Kant, Pragmatic Anthropology, trans. E. Drzazgowska, P. Sosnowska, Wyd. IFiS PAN, Warsaw 2005 .
[11] Kant distinguishes the following predispositions: technical predisposition leading to the mechanical handling of things, pragmatic predisposition enabling the shaping of culture and civilized relations with people, and moral predisposition. See: A. Bobko, Introduction. Man in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, [in:] I. Kant, Anthropology in practical terms…, op. cit , p. XXVIII.
[12] I. Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. J. Gałecki, PWN, Warszawa1984 , p.103.
[13] J. Mariański, Human dignity as a socio-moral value: myth or reality? Interdisciplinary study, Toruń 2016 , pp. 59-60.

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assuming that Kant understood man as a being living on the border of two worlds: nature and values.

In Hegel's theory, man comes from the world of material nature, in relation to which he transcends. Thus, he negated the essence of anthropological dualism. He presented an anti-substantial image of the human being, while questioning the treatment of the soul as an independent substance. He placed emphasis on active human activity, carried out through deeds. In Hegel's conception, at the beginning man is a substance, although he is not aware of it. Only then will it become a subject, realizing itself. Man, in Hegel's view, as a substance, is "a being for itself". It is consciousness that is the decisive factor that makes a person a subject. As a result, as Fr. S. Kowalczyk: "His dynamic-idealistic pantheism reduced the individual human person to the role of a moment in the continuous process of self-creation of an absolute spirit."[14]

Schopenhauer believed that man only knows phenomena. The human mind does not copy things, but makes sense of them using categories such as causality, space, and time. He also believed that although we do not have the possibility of knowing ourselves as an object of knowledge so as to reach ourselves from the outside, we do have the opportunity to discover our subjectivity from the inside. Knowing ourselves from the inside, from the side of our self, we can see ourselves as self-knowledge.

In Dilthey's theory, the historical aspect of humanity is emphasized. Man is a historical being because he is distinguished by a way of thinking and acting common to people of a given era. The same applies to culture and axiological issues that are reflected in the historical process[15]. It can be said that our life is a creative foundation for the social world and culture. Everything depends on the potential of man and the conditions in which he lives and creates.

George Simmel was a representative of Enlightenment individualism. As he wrote, "when man is freed from all that is not himself, when he finds himself, the proper substance of his existence will remain man as such, humanity that lives in him as in everyone else, always the same fundamental being, disguised, diminished and distorted by empirical-historical conditions [16].

This is clearly visible in the beliefs of Émil Durkheim regarding the duality of human nature, presenting the human being as composed of the biological and social spheres. Jacques Maritain repeated after St. Thomas that a person is a substance of an intellectual nature, autonomous and free, directing his actions and setting goals for himself[17]. Maritain emphasized one more essential feature of being a person, namely the desire to contact other people and to live in a community. He distinguished a person from an individual. According to the author, a person is a complete, individual substance of a rational nature, responsible for his actions and maintaining his autonomy.

The recognition of the human being as a substance has been negated within phenomenological theory. One of the main opponents of treating the human person as a substance was Max Scheler. The philosopher wrote about himself: "The questions: What is man and what is his position in being, from the first awakening of my philosophical consciousness, occupied me much more than all other philosophical questions"[18]. He claimed that man cannot be understood either on naturalistic or materialistic grounds. He proposed a personalistic position - he defined the person as "a center of acts: sensations, experiences, decisions, observations"[19]. As far as phenomenological sources are concerned, the views of the Cracow philosopher, Roman Ingarden, would be important for understanding the concept of the human being, according to whom man is a being with a psychophysical structure, he is a subject, a person, constituted of soul and body, guided in life by responsibility and values [20].

The existentialists abandoned the concept of substance and replaced it with the concept of existence. It is impossible not to mention in this context the philosophy of the representative of Christian existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard, who (although he did not use the term itself) agreed with the later assertion, even the slogan of the existentialists, that the existence of man precedes his essence. He was convinced that the essence and meaning of human life is to know and experience oneself. Man is a material and spiritual being. Because of the soul, man is a subject, not a thing-object. Human life is dynamic through and through. In this experience of one's own existence, Kierkegaard accorded the primacy of faith, not reason [21].

In contrast, it is worth recalling the view of Jean-Paul Sartre, who believed that man is "a being for himself" (étrepour soi), which proves that he has the potential to be a conscious, free, and at the same time

[14] S. Kowalczyk, Outline of human philosophy, Diocesan Publishing House, Sandomierz 2002 , p. 120.
[15] See Z. Kuderowicz, Dilthey, Wiadomości Powszechna, 1987.
[16] G. Simmel, Sociology, trans. M. Łukasiewicz, Warsaw 1975 , p. 87.
[17] J. Maritain, Humanisme Integral, Fernand Aubier, Paris 1936.
[18] M. Scheler, The position of man in the cosmos, in: Writings on philosophical anthropology and the theory of knowledge, transl. A. Węgrzecki, S. Czerniak, Warsaw 1987 , p. 43.
[19] Znaniecki F., The concept of a person in M. Scheler, "Roczniki Filozoficzne" 6 (1958), pp. 23–38.
[20] R. Ingarden, Book about man , Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1972.
[21] See: S. Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling. Sickness unto death, Iwaszkiewicz J. - transl., PWN, Warsaw, p. 62.

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creative subject, shaping his own identity[22]. These features of man make him willing to participate in relations with other beings. Sartre presented a theory according to which man in his being must constantly choose his own path, thus shaping himself. To exist is to be free and in this freedom to realize one's own existential project, because man, being aware of his existence, creates his own fate. Sartre reduced human existence to freedom. His anthropology referred to Descartes' idea of *Cogito* and Kant's voluntarism.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, unlike Sartre, saw man in the context of the external world, which he treated as a reference horizon. Firstly, he criticized the materialistic, and in fact objective, view of the human being as one of many things in the universe. He shared the views of Descartes, recognizing that man, among other beings, is distinguished by consciousness. At the same time, he referred to Hegel, treating man as a self-sufficient being seeking self-understanding. In an interesting way, Merleau-Ponty referred to the transcendence of man, which he defined above all as his development and constantly exceeding his capabilities[23].

Martin Heidegger used the term Dasein, understood as "Being in the world", "being"[24]. He presented a theory in which, firstly, he places man in the context of utility (*besorgen*), and secondly, in relation to people, which is an attitude of care *(fursorgen).* It is worth noting that Heidegger's ontology involves the proposition "I am, therefore I think", as opposed to the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" [25]. The being that we are, whose "being" we ask, was called by Heidegger "being" ("Dasein"). The existence of man makes him know the world and other people. In this way, it shapes the awareness of one's own existence and the understanding of the existence of other people. Unlike the world of things, it is an unconscious being, it is a "being-in-itself"; the human world is a "being for itself", and therefore conscious. The fact that man exists in the world is therefore at the same time a threat to him. The world of things, this "being-in-itself", can destroy at any moment. The human world can destroy it as well. Man's existence is therefore "fragile", and therefore he must constantly "care" for it. Care is an attribute of human existence, as Heidegger used to say.

Karol Wojtyła's concept combines the thomistic and phenomenological traditions. He accepted the way of understanding man proposed by Boethius. It is therefore a real substance. Personalism of St. Thomas, Wojtyla explains, was derived from his theory of the person, which is mainly theological in nature, which means that it primarily concerns God. The phenomenological perspective was adopted by Wojtyła, not without some reserve. He wrote: "The phenomenalist position seems to exclude such a unity of many experiences, and in an individual experience it sees only a set of impressions or emotions, which the mind, in turn, organizes. Certainly, experience is something individual and each time unique and unrepeatable, and yet there is something that can be called human experience on the basis of the entire continuity of empirical moments. The object of experience is not only the moment, but also the man who emerges from all the moments…" [26]. His concept of the human person is quite complicated. It takes into account both corporeality and spirituality. The key category is the notion of an act. In it, a man expresses himself, transcends himself, constitutes, communicates with others and the world of culture. As he wrote: "The full picture of the integration of a person in action must always take into account the fact of complementarity: integration completes transcendence, which is realized through self-determination and agency. In this dimension, human action is a conscious response to values through a decision or choice. However, this response always somehow benefits from the dynamism of somatics and psyche. The integration of the person in the act means a strictly concrete and each time unique introduction of somatic reactivity and psychological emotiveness into the unity of the act: to the unity with the transcendence of the person, expressed in causative self-determination, which is also a conscious response to values [27].

As we have already stated, from the earliest times, and especially from Aristotle or Boethius, the theme of man as a thinking substance has been important. In many of the philosophical views cited here, the distinctive feature of humanity is reason. In this sense, it should be understood as "what is authentically human in man", and the power of reason as the possibility of humanizing life "by controlling irrational forces". In Enlightenment thought, especially in the tradition initiated by Descartes, we can often see a process of reification, linking the awareness of the existence of certain phenomena with themselves. This later became the subject of protest by phenomenologists. There were also reservations that giving the primacy of reason over other attributes of a complex human being is a manifestation of reductionism, often reducing a complex human being to only a better or worse functioning organism, or - to summarize this idea in great simplification - a cluster of cells. In some varieties of phenomenology, but also

[22] J.P. Sartre, Being and nothingness. An Outline of Phenomenological Ontology, trans. J. Kiełbasa, P. Mróz, R. Abramciów, R. Ryziński, P. Małochleb, Krakow 2007, p. 757.
[23] M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of perception, M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński - trans., Aletheia Foundation, Warsaw 2001.
[24] M. Heidegger, Being and Time, B. Baran - transl., PWN, Warsaw 1994 , p. 125.
[25] Ibidem, p. 605.
[26] K. Wojtyła, Person and act, Polish Theological Society, Krakow 1969 , p. 6.
[27] Ibidem, p. 243.

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postmodernism or other similar intellectual orientations, man dissolves completely or partially, along with his subjectivity in cognitive acts, imaginations, creations of self-awareness or deconstruction practices.

Continuing my considerations, it is worth noting that the uniqueness of man as a person is quite clearly emphasized in the theory of critical realism, widely developed by Margaret Archer. It is worth emphasizing that the British sociologist is particularly opposed to reductionism, which is often present in philosophical theories, i.e. distortion of a human being to aspects of reason, will, feelings, body or social, mental or other functions. Archer does not agree that man should be recognized only in the context of his mental powers, and deprive him of many other human properties, such as emotionality, normativity, intentionality or transcendence. Instead, it emphasizes the relational properties of man.

According to Archer, man is not a reducible being, thus he is not something passive like *homo oeconomicus* or *homo sociologicus* - beings that are not morally responsible for their lives. Archer writes, "The rational man, the bargain hunter, seems more active than he really is because he pursues his interests without scruple. However, he is programmed by a fixed pattern of his preferences, he is incapable of moral reflection on his set of preferences [28]. The British sociologist negates the anthropocentric ideas of man, a being who dominates the world. In the Archerian vision, man is also not a logocentric, rational being. But neither is it annihilated in social discourse. It is not a substance, a monad, a matter.

I have tried to outline the main ideas of understanding the phenomenon of man and humanity, as well as the doubts they raise and the difficulties associated with such an ambitious task. In summary, much of Western philosophy places man above all other beings that inhabit the earth. We can distinguish the two most common views regarding the analysis of man and humanity. In the first place, it is the consideration of man in the substantial approach, and the second in the relational approach. In the first case, characteristic of e.g. for Aristotle, Boethius and St. Thomas, man is a spiritual and bodily being who maintains his independence and even immutability in the world around him. Humanity in this case refers primarily to reason and free will of man. Other thinkers considered man in relation to his relations with other beings and with the surrounding world. Thus, on the one hand, man is treated in nature as a biological species, but on the other hand he has many features that distinguish him so significantly that he cannot be compared with any other creature. It is this particular set of characteristics that is referred to as humanity. Its essence has been described in various ways. In the humanities, many questions have been raised about the nature and essence of humanity. One of the main questions arising in this context is the question of the meaning of his life, the purpose of wandering around the Earth, in the context of his own development, but also of learning and the ability to make changes in the world.

It is worth noting that in each epoch the idea of man was understood differently. In antiquity, views recognizing the human being as a unity of matter and form prevailed. In the current of eighteenth-century materialism, humanity was limited only to bodily reactions. And in the twentieth century, man was treated not only in relation to his potential, when his cognitive aspects were emphasized, but also a broader context was often taken into account: social, historical and cultural.

From centuries of philosophical considerations, an image emerges of a man who has vegetative and sensual properties, but above all he is characterized by intellect, manifested in the rational nature of his cognitive processes and in rational and free action. Such human qualities as rationality and wisdom give him the ability to distinguish between good and evil, truth and untruth. Man is the only creature in the world of nature that is curious about its existence. Hence, he constantly formulates existential questions about the meaning of his own life. Our mind, apart from learning about the world, learns first of all about itself. The concept of man as an independent, independent substance appears in centuries-old philosophical theories.

[28] MS Archer, Humanity..., op. cit., p. 80.

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