

Introduction

We human beings pride ourselves on two issues: first, that we are of a higher order than all other animals; secondly, that we are free, or rather, are capable of free choice. A classical definition of human being, for instance, is rational animal. But, this definition is unusual in two ways. First, the grammar of this definition specifies that rational is an adjective modifying the noun animal. So, grammatically the noun animal is more important than the adjective rational. Secondly, however, we humans customarily place more emphasis upon the adjective rational than we do on the noun animal. So, we frequently show embarrassment about being animal and boast about being rational. But, are we humans a "higher" order of animal?

If to be human is to be both rational and animal, to attempt to be one or the other is to die.

Whether this is true or not depends not upon the theoretical truth of the statement but upon the practical "how" we human beings act. The sixth century B.C., pagan Heraclitus, for instance, prefers donkeys to human beings since donkeys prefer yellow colored hay to gold because hay nourishes animal life; some humans, on the other hand, choose yellow gold to nourishing food and starve to death. The person who tells others that they should do as s/he says not as s/he does is the person who has a twisted view of the human being. Indeed, the fact that the very life of any newly born animal of whatever species depends upon its ability to imprint parental actions rather than verbal directions. This is why Michael Mails, Professor, University of California Irvine has been so critical of the October, 1995 Carnegie report mentioned in the *P R O L O G U E*, stating that the Carnegie report on ten to fourteen year-old youth blamed them but should have blamed parents for the plight of American youth today. Thus, the title of his new book is: *The Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescence*.

To do what we are told is to be moral; to do what is right is to be ethical.

Words are least active. Worse: our actions frequently contradict our words. Whether we say that we love others is one thing, but our actions toward ourselves and others are something else again. This is why Lao-tse advocates feeling rather than speaking!

The "adult" emphasis upon verbal statements as more important than volitional actions exaggerates the rational aspect of the human being more than the human aspect of living. Indeed, the characteristic Protestant Congregational comment of parent to child was (and is) "do as I say, not as I do" - such a statement is a logical offshoot of the Albigensian immigrants to America, mentioned in the *P R E F A C E*.

If we look into a mirror, what we see might not necessarily be the image reflected. We, for instance, might be looking for something other than what the image reflects. Many of us forget that human beings are both animal and rational. The test of being human is whether or not we can achieve a balance between these two essential components of human nature. The proof of that balance is what we call the **virtue** of being human. Many humans emphasize the rational but ignore the animal. Others revel in the animal and forget about the rational. Those who ignore the animal are condemned to be animals whether

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or not they accept animal as an essential component of being human. The sound and odor of a fart bring laughter and embarrassment during the most dignified dinner party or the most intelligent discussion. Those who forget the animality of being rational must remember it at the most importune times. Over-eating or over-drinking are doomed to the soaring scale-indicator, or the morning-after head aches. They bring reflections of regret, questions of "why?" and statements of "never again" - they might also bring arrest, fines and jail, indeed, even death.

Take the second view that human beings are free, or rather that we humans have the capability of free

choice. The two words **free choice** are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. For instance, free choice means just that: we can choose one of at least two alternatives. If these alternatives are to perform a virtuous or perform a vicious act, then we are able to make a free choice. In other words, freedom means that we human beings are free to be good or bad -- the choice of how we act is ours and how we are means how we live.

[Are we human because we are animal,
because we are rational, or both?
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The issue is not nature; nor is the issue nurture. The fact is free choice. Whatever the contribution of nature and the influence of nurture, the fact is that we human beings each has free choice or s/he is not free. This fact affects how we live as well as whether or not others can live. One example is post-natal alcohol syndrome. PNA curtails the child's, and subsequently, the person's free choice, even, perhaps diminishing it severely. (We do not yet know what the long term effects that chemical using fathers and mothers will have on their children's ability to choose freely since the 1990 school year brought the first "crop" of crack babies into the elementary schools.) We, therefore, are not living "as an island" for ourselves, no, our lives impact other people, sometimes detrimentally.

The message of Socrates to the Athenians is a history lesson in ethics: if the Athenians cared more for wealth, honor or reputation than they did for the improvement of their own souls; these Athenians were not free to choose because they themselves had limited their own choices. Their choices were self-limited to wealth, honor or reputation; they decided in favor of the material so any and every "choice" thereafter was determined by that first choice! This decision means they have rejected the spiritual in favor of the material -- this decision meant that they are no longer free to choose and meant that they already had ordered the death of Socrates.

[Neither birth nor environment cause
us to be ethical or to be moral.
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A third issue affects anyone who lives within the A.D. period of history - **anno Domini**, literally, in the year of the Lord, that is, after the historical date of the birth of Jesus

Christ. An example of this third issue is the statement: Jesus Christ was an ethical man, or "I'm ethical because I'm a Christian." Whether or not Jesus Christ was/is an ethical man is one question for which at least two answers are possible. However, only one answer is possible to the latter statement: No. No person is ethical because that person is Christian. If this were the case, then history would require rewriting. Socrates, for example, is ethical, however, he was no Christian; the same is true of Confucius and many other persons living prior to A.D.

Christianity not only does not guarantee that we are ethical, but being

ethical is a requirement which qualifies A.D. humans to be Christian. If, for instance, a current self-styled Christian can read the Apology of Plato, reflect upon the words and actions of Socrates and not say that s/he would agree and have acted in the same manner, then that person cannot claim to be ethical, much less Christian. If, as Thomas Aquinas stated in the thirteenth century, "grace builds on nature", then whether or not we human beings **can be Christian** depends upon whether or not **we are human**. If that is true, then the extent to which we can be Christian is limited only by the extent to which we are human, so the more human we are, the more Christian we can be! Indeed, whether or not we can be Christian depends upon whether or not we are human, notwithstanding Martin Luther's or John Calvin's claims to the contrary!

One caution is necessary here. All of us might seek to be perfect, to be happy, to be virtuous. But, if the example of Socrates is any lesson in being human, it has a message for all of us: to be imperfect is to be perfect. Human perfection consists in being imperfect. Socrates said it best:

Perfection for a human consists
in being imperfect.

So I examined the man - I need not tell you his name, he was a politician - but this was the result, Athenians. When I conversed with him I came to see that, though a great many persons, and most of all he himself, thought that he was wise, yet he was not wise. And then I tried to prove to him that he was not wise, though he fancied that he was: and by so doing I made him, and many of the bystanders, my enemies. So when I went away, I thought to myself, 'I am wiser than this man: neither of us probably knows anything that is really good, but he thinks that he has knowledge, when he has not, while I, having no knowledge, do not think that I have. I seem, at any rate, to be a little wiser than he is on this point: I do not think that I know what I do not know.'

Socratically speaking, to be human is to be truthful about the way things (including we humans) are.

To be a Christian does not
make a human to be ethical.

Essentially the Greeks looked upon *logos*, or *speech*, as the ability to use words and thus as the distinctive quality of being human. Therefore, if and when humans were truthful in speech, they were perfect

according to nature. But, then Socrates concluded: knowing that he did not know and when he did not know meant being wise. So, the perfection of being human was to be wise and being wise meant knowing that we do not know. Wisdom, therefore, for Socrates and the Greeks was the actualization of the human potential; the *virtue*, or *areté* of humanness. Perhaps another pagan, the Chinese gentleman Confucius said it best:

The Master said, Man's very life is honesty, in that without it he will be lucky indeed if he escapes with his life. (Analects Bk. VI, No. 17)z

So, if being honest is being who we are, then to be perfect means to be who we are, that is, perfectly imperfect. An irony exists within this statement and within the fact that each being exists as it is. That irony is simply this: is the purpose of nature and/or of the Old Testament, New Testament, indeed, the

"God" of the various philosophic writers, such as Confucius, Plato, to mention only a few, that each being which exists has but one purpose: namely, to be who that being is? To phrase this question another way: is the human being's purpose on earth to be who each one is? If such is the case, then why does it take nearly a life-time for each human being to discover that his or her purpose for existing is to be who he or she is?

To be ethical means to be human and to be human is the basis for being Christian.

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