

# Complexities of Human Nature: Critical Overview

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## Abstract

The study is focused on critical appraisal on complexities of human nature, evidenced that man as an animal has commonality with other animals yet distinguished from other animals. Eclectic research methods were adopted that fostered investigation into essential components of human nature, insatiable quest for knowledge, preoccupation with abstraction, logical, rational and irrational, ascetic and religiosity, domineering, traditionalist and modernity, ethical, economic, aesthetic and purposiveness along with dignity as well, organized society that marked humanity off from membership of the animal kingdom. The findings further showcased that man is by nature great, powerful and in intellect par excellence yet weak, miserable, problem to biosphere and to himself. The study stressed that the problematic man has spawned the sciences, a puzzle that equally baffled philosophies, religious and as creature engineered much reflections and philosophizing all over the world.

**Keywords:** Complexities, Human nature, Philosophy, Science, Soul, Will, Conscience, Religion, etc.

## Introduction

Man is not just another object outside himself, but a subject endowed with reason whose highest dignity is in the intellect, which he uses to study others, himself and other objects of nature as well, to speculate about the metaphysical world.

The greatest obstacle to the understanding of the nature of man is the finitude of man. He does not live forever in the world he finds himself. The study of human nature with intent of critical appraisal craves for rigorous positive and negative index of the philosophical, scientific and religious perspectives of the complex nature of man.

The anthropological quest, 'what is man?' Unavoidable preamble to any study undertaken to survey the nature of man. Jacques, a French philosopher, intones that the imperative of the quest underscores philosophical or "ontological" dealing with human nature in its essential being and further, scientific or empirical" index to understand human nature as phenomenal characteristics that lies open to our modern scientists for observation and measurement. Jacques agrees that those imperatives are in no way incompatible; rather complementing each other (1955:63). The anthropological quest cannot be resolved without recourse to theological context that humanity is the direct creation of God. Packer intones that men and women has capacity of self expression, creativity of art, music, and human relationship yet humanity is dependent on God for "providence of clothing, food and breath of life" (1988:28-30).

The problem of "apparent good" and "real good" underscored the unquestionable bias in human nature. Temple says:

The human mind has focus of appreciation with opposing knowledge and when the knowledge is won, human act could be good or evil and man's instinctive reaction to environment led to the fall and evil man is worse than an animal (1962:408-419).

In other words, man cares more about what seems to be good for him than about goods which he does not personally expect to enjoy. Therefore man is subject of his own value judgment, centre, and criterion of his own system values that he is unfit for. The self centeredness in the complexities of human nature has spread through imitation or in self defense. In fact, the spirit is made evil in order that reason be perverted and aspiration corrupted.

Brunner observes that religious formation of irrationalism was overturned by the way of philosophy, by speculative thought, yet philosophical doctrines remain irreconcilable.

Yinger opines that human mind engineers activities, movement within the physical environment, free mind as element within the whole universe, sets other things in motion in the quest to reconcile wisdom with science, rediscover being and in the same vein rediscover love as natural fruit of intuition of existence (1962:202-203).

Cullmann underscores that God finds the corporeal "good" as the body and soul are not in opposition. The distinction of body, soul, inner or outer man, each needs the other to be in full existence. The flesh and spirit are transcendent powers, antagonistic, power of creation seizes the outer and inner man together (1962:471-475).

Jacques says that the object of intellect is universal in the idea of man, of animal, and of atom, yet man is identified with the infinity of individuals, analogy, spiritual nature, indeed, man is of infinite magnitude (1962:470-480).

The principle of life, intellectual power, and spiritual power is the soul. Aquinas underscores that the

soul is the “entelechy of the body, spiritual soul cannot die, cannot be disintegrated, cannot be corrupted and endure without end” (1962:171-178).

Therefore, human nature demands elements of psychology, organic view of man and empirical aspects that adequately unravel the complexities of human nature. Man is not just another biological organism but an animal endowed with intellect, reason, and immortal soul that accord him dignity, rights and privileges as contingent being with intelligence.

It is not a small feat to understand man as he is today let alone to enquire how man was at the beginning of his life on earth. Natural endowment of man is the principle of operation for which animalistic tendencies point to animal nature, humanistic actions designate human nature while ascetics and religiosity direct inference to divine nature.

### **Philosophical View on Human Nature**

Boethius in Omeregbe gives classical concept of a person as “an individual substance of rational nature”. It seems that a person must be a rational being, or rather, a rational substance. A rational being, necessarily possesses self-consciousness or, in other words, reflective consciousness. It is not enough for a person to be conscious, he must be conscious of the fact that he is conscious. In other words, he must be aware of his consciousness. When, in his second meditation, Rene Descartes, a philosopher and a mathematician, became conscious of himself as a thinking being, his consciousness became, as were, conscious of itself which enabled him to affirm his existence- “Cogito ergo sum” (“I think therefore I exist”). Descartes might just as well have affirmed his personality. But in that case he would have had to add the fact that he knew that he was thinking. He could have said something such as: “I am thinking, and I know that I am thinking, therefore I am a person” as such I exist which Boethius affirms in Omeregbe (1996:36).

Man as biosocial being endowed with articulate speech, reasoning power and consciousness. As biosocial being, he does not possess dual nature although has biological factors of major importance. Man, genetically linked with other forms of life stands out due to ability to produce instruments of labor. Man an essential concept of existentialism always inimical to human being, obstructs his freedom of action and deprives him of his individuality. To existentialists, individual breaks through the clutches of man by taking border line position in other words, between life and death as such fears death and becomes free as well, responsible for his action (Heidegger, 1973 & Frolor, 1984:140-241). The fact that the concept of personality is inseparably linked with that of rationality makes it also inseparably linked with concept of morality. Therefore, only a rational being can be a moral being, just as only a rational being can be a person.

To say that a person is a moral being does not mean that such a person always does what is morally right. It simply implies that he is subject to the moral laws and that he is consequently liable to be held responsible for his actions or inactions, whether they are good or bad. It further intones that he deserves to be blamed or praised, punished or rewarded for his actions, depending on whether the actions in question were morally wrong or right. But the concept of morality presupposes freedom. No being could be a moral being if it is not a free being. To be a moral being therefore is to be a free being. It follows that a person is not only a rational and a moral being but also a free being. A rational, free and moral being has to be a social being that is capable of interpersonal relationship. We can say that a person must be a rational being, a free being, a moral being, and a being capable of interpersonal relationship. Those attributes apply to human nature. Other essential attributes of human nature therefore follows, namely, individuality. The nature of man are rationality, freewill, moral responsibility, interpersonal relationship, and individuality.

### **Scientific View on the Nature of Man**

Science recognizes orders that exist in the world and correlates those laws that are apparent in their workings in visible things, in other words, astronomy observes and classifies order in heaven, biology states the unchanging laws of life and chemistry notes the unchanging reactions of inorganic elements. Hesburgh further asserts that the church claims “divine intervention in procreation of human beings and that such intervention is not observable as well, not subject for study by natural science” (1960: 04-113).

Clark intones that evolutionary concept that deals with vertebrate animals that live both on land and in water according to situation give ground of living in the ancestry of man as adaptation of life in the trees such adaptation would make it possible for animals to pass restricted and shrinking world area to another (1955:12).

Pierre (1959) cited by Hesburgh said that “the world is in a state of evolution, matter revolving towards life, life evolving towards intelligence, and intelligence towards God” (1960:113). Evolutionary concept underscores that man descended from Ape and that man and ape descended from common stock in the order of Primates. The stock that terminates in the modern ape has been known as “Pongids and that that terminates in man are known as Hominids”. The Hominids similitude’s of Homo erectus or erects posture and gait, the intelligent man. Evolution of man is in the direction of grater adaptability rather than greater adaptation.

Clark lays claim to remote antiquity that have been made for skulls and skeletons of modern human

type that led to the Paleolithic or Stone Age that used rough or chipped stone implements. The Neolithic or New stone Age- man used polished stone implements, pottery making, domestication of animals, and cultivation of grain and fruit trees. Great scientific advances came with the dawn of civilization in the third millennium BC in which the history of man up to the present has been essentially regarded as an extension of the Neolithic Era. The sequence began with Australopithecus to Pithecanthropus that ends with Homo. The environmental changes affect the structure of animals and plants capable of being transferred to their off springs. Darwinism advocates for natural selection as process of survival of the fittest that rejects all poorly adapted forms (1955:237).

Neo-Darwinians as contemporary biologists delved into genetic engineering in which radiation causes genetic changes and that nuclear energy can be dangerous to humanity. In other words, scientific and technological advances have given man power over his own evolution. Science has developed human intelligence such that man has power to bring about genetic changes, power to introduce artificial selection and power to prevent natural selection. Simply put that evolution has passed from biological level to intellectualism. The biologists seem to see no difference between prehistoric man of Neolithic Era and historic man but intellectual difference occur between primitive man and civilized man.

Man may misuse his power to produce genetic changes and bring about artificial selection in human race as if his progressive evolution was bodily instead of intellectual. God's intervention is in the evolution of human intelligence just as God's intervention is in the form of the creative activity by which God draws the evolving matter from nothing. God's intervention is in the evolution of life from creation and infusion of immortal soul into human body. In the evolution of intelligence, God's intervention takes the form of revelation. God's intervention in the form of revelation culminated in the incarnation of the Word when the invisible God made His incarnation visible by becoming man. Yet the evolution of man's intelligence did not cease with revelation completed in the Word incarnate rather the content of revelation becomes subject matter of intellectual evolution. In this life, the goal is never attained but approached more and more closely. God is not only the Alpha but also the Omegh, the beginning of all things and their end.

Man lacks physical protection, having feeble tusks and claws and virtually no body- covering of hair. Further, as Wells put it when man took to standing upright he made a hostage of his stomach. He is still imperfectly adjusted to an upright gait and he is encumbered with vestigial tissues, muscles, and organs (such as the vermiform appendix) for which he has no use. He has to a large extent lost his sense of smell, and thought, his sight is binocular and acute, and his hearing is neither as sensitive nor as discriminatory as that of most other animals. It would be difficult to find another animal less fitted to survive, yet the remarkable increase in the size and complexity of his brain had proved more than sufficient to compensate for all his weaknesses. He has done much more than learn to make substitutes for his coat of fur and his natural weapons, for he has improved on them beyond measures, and when need arises he protects himself with amour beside which the natural products of evolution pale into insignificance.

Edward surveys man's insatiable quest for knowledge and his preoccupation with abstract ideas, religious, ethical and aesthetic experiences, as well as his long-term purposiveness all marked him off from the other members of the animal kingdom (1967:3834-6). His conquest of nature has many benefits but his advances have not all been virtuous. Pierre asserts that man invented war. found delight in cruelty and other perversions, became avaricious far beyond his needs, acquired an insane passion for speed of motion, squandered the natural resources available to him with incredible lack of foresight, and continues deliberately to multiply his manorial necessities, all of which show that his advance in knowledge has not been tempered by a comparable advance dom. It is doubtful, indeed, if he has made any general progress in wisdom for several millennia. He is changing the condition of his own life and must therefore inevitably continue to evolve, but in which direction is unpredictable. He almost certainly on the decline physically, owes in part to the substitution of machines for even mild human labor, and in part to the plentitude of luxuries (1965:25-26). But, unlike any other animal, he has it in his power to foresee disaster and against it, so that in a limited sense he controls his own destiny. This faculty, which is the crowing product of his evolution, is sufficient to place him at the helm of the animal kingdom.

### **Religious View on the Nature of Man**

Man is not man without body, soul and spirit for which the intellect, will and sense faculties are nature of man. Hesburgh says the intrinsic natural aspect of man requires divine occurrence apart from which no man can live or act while the extrinsic natural requirements of air, food etc enables man to live and act. Man the highest creature in the universe was constituted with human nature (1960:134-136).

Man naturally has two sets of appetites, the body calls for immediate attention directed to pleasurable and attractive things that appeal to senses that could be attained at once. The appetite of the soul is directed toward less obvious but more important, long range objectives like happiness, honor, virtue and salvation. This is why conflict is inherent in human nature (Gal 6: 17- 26).

According to Scheeben, it was preternatural for man to be "completely free from death" which

demolishes man for which he was placed under trial in the Garden of Eden. The immortality of man implies that man would have eventually passed “from earth to Heaven without separation of the body from the soul”. In other words, man could have been translated from earth to Heaven (1946:146-147).

Hesburgh asserts the power of speech in man is one of the best signs of man’s superior intelligence. Man’s intelligence was first asserted through the naming of all things, his knowledge of elements in nature that surrounded him and intuitive knowledge of the nature and purpose of woman he had never seen nor ever had as wife. He had no previous experience and did not learn from school man as such has knowledge infused into his mind from creation, man has infused knowledge of natural and supernatural truth (1960:145-14.7).

Man is a creature destined to live in two worlds. He is surrounded first by the realities of this world, he lives among things, plants, animals, and in the society of other persons like himself and is active among them in thought, work, and love. On the other hand he is called to live with divine realities. Man is a substantial unit made up of body and soul, matter and form. He is human, earthly and temporal. At the same time he is spiritual, heavenly and immortal. How can man be mortal and at the same time immortal, human and spiritual, earthly’ and heavenly’? It is at this juncture of paradox that religion manifest itself’ in the life of man. The impulse towards religion is an essential part of man’s endowment. Religiosity manifests itself’ as a totality of belief’s relating to a reality which is not deduced empirically but experientially. It is not something tangible or concrete. It cannot be seen as an entity or externals but its significance can be approached through the inner life of man. Wherever man lives on earth, religion springs into being.

Omeregb (2003) intones the root meaning of religion from Latin words *ligare* meaning “to bind”, “relegare” meaning “to unite” or “to link” and “religio” meaning relationship. The researches of ethnologists, anthropologists and pre-historians have not uncovered any man without religion. Religion is vital and pervasive feature of human life.

Religion, like music is hard to define, but like music also it lives in the interplay of soul and body, of reality akin and yet beyond ourselves. In its broadest sense, religion may be defined as the relationship between man and the superhuman power he believes in and feels himself to be dependent on. Belief is so important to the life of man that human nature, human history’ and human life cannot be understood without religion. Religion builds the human mind and shapes the goal of humanity which is built on fixed ends and values.

According to Schoeps:

*Among all the factors on which the objectification and organization of the mind founded, religion assumes a special, central place... the element that leads beyond life is established in life itself (1966:5).*

Man’s religion is the expression of ultimate attitude to the universe, the summed up meaning and purport of his whole consciousness of things. Spencer (1966) says that religion is the recognition that all things are manifestations of a power which transcends our knowledge. The above conception of religion point to the belief in a supernatural Being a power above man, “ the feeling of an absolute dependence” or in Rudolf Otto’s assertion” the experience of the Numinous, the feeling of awe, dread, mystery and fascination men experience when confronted with what is holy uncanny or supernatural. Religion is essentially’ a relationship, a link established between two persons; divine person and human person believed to exist. It exists between two unequalled beings in which the inferior worships the superior. Man’s awareness and response to existence of the Supreme Being spurs him to yearn for avenue of contact with this Supreme Being. Man’s yearning eventually brings about a relationship that binds and unites the inferior (man) being to the superior (divine) Being believed to exist. Religion is a complex network of belief that connotes morality, nature of individual, the purpose of life, ultimate explanation of things and mysteries. Njoku intones that religion is what people do and what they’ say about what they do that determine their dependence upon a reality that guides the totality of their existence (2008:45-50).

The Supernatural Being is the persistent value in the world. The essence of religion lies in the belief in the supernatural being, who though may not he seen physically is believed to be existent and imbued with superhuman qualities.

### **Conclusion**

Man ought to be reasonable, humane, wonderful and active, capable of appreciating beauty, full of integrity, all-round developed personality, and an endowment of all essential human powers combing spiritual and physical perfections to face the future. The nature of man has been constituted with natural and spiritual endowments that distinguish him from other creatures and enabled him not only to rule but dominated, exploited, devastated the environment and has remained the problem to the world, animal kingdom, humanity and himself as well, repudiated irrationalism to concepts and deity.

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