Being Humans

Anthropological Universality and Particularity in Transdisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by
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The central importance of the concept of the human makes it necessary to consider the pervasive and persistent ways in which these varying concepts are going to be understood and be able to fit each other. In order to show this, the book brings together contributions from authors working within a transdisciplinary philosophy, sociology, anthropology, literature, and psychology. Contributors build on dual elements: not only do they demonstrate the importance of transdisciplinary work on understanding the human, but we also consider how it is possible to examine the boundaries of their own disciplines. It is a result, the central feature of the relationship between the papers is that, while the authors who contribute are not necessarily writing at the same time, they are contributing to the same transdisciplinary content of the various discussions. Furthermore, this book is aimed at a broad audience, ranging from students to researchers. It is possible to engage with this book from the perspective of another discipline, with whom we see the book begins.

Heartily thanks are due to all the contributors to this volume for their willingness to engage with what we do: in times, different approaches, from the point of view of the Constance Philosophy Department for understanding the context of this volume and to the Constance Philosophy Department for understanding the context of this book.

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
2000
On Being Humans. An Introduction

What then did I formerly think I was? Undoubtedly I judged that I was a man. But what is a man? Shall I say a rational animal? Assuredly not; for it would be necessary forthwith to inquire into what is meant by animal, and what by rational, and thus, from a single question, I should insensibly glide into others, and these more difficult than the first; nor do I now possess enough of leisure to warrant me in wasting my time amid subtleties of this sort.

(Descartes, Meditations on the First Philosophy, 86f.)

Michel Foucault and Niklas Luhmann both shared Descartes' conviction that the concept of the human has no role to play within scientific discourse. For both social theorists, conceptions of the human are the mere by-product of social systemic developments in early modernity. Ethnology for example, in Foucault's view, not only has no need of the concept; it needs systematically to avoid it, at pain of blinding itself to the constitutive properties of its own objects (Foucault 1966, 385ff.; cf. Luhmann 1980, 172ff.). Related views have dominated many debates within the human and social sciences over the last three decades. However, an increasing number of voices have been raised which resist such conclusions. In a highly influential paper, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz called for "a more viable concept of man, one in which culture, and the variability of culture, would be taken into account rather than written off as caprice and prejudice, and yet, at the same time, one in which the governing principle of the field, 'the basic unity of mankind', would not be turned into an empty phrase" (Geertz 1973, 36). For the psychologist Jerome Bruner, the success of particular versions of the cognitive sciences since the 1950s means that psychology is urgently faced with the task of justifying the form that "the proper study of man" has to take (Bruner 1990, 1ff.). Finally, under the rubric "Philosophy as Anthropology", Hilary Putnam has suggested that philosophy's central topic is "the human situation" and that Kant was right to argue that all the important philosophical questions are in some sense grounded in the one question "Was ist der Mensch?" (Putnam 1987, 62; 1989, 40ff.) Kant himself had gone as far as to claim that the key philosophical disciplines can all be seen belonging to "anthropology" (Logic A 25).

Empirical and Philosophical Anthropology

Anthropo-logia is a discourse on humans. The term first appears (in its verbal form) in the Nicomachian Ethics, where Aristotle tells us that holding such a
discourse is one of the things that the “great-souled man” certainly does not do (NE 1125 a 5). The kind of discourse he is referring to is evaluative talk aimed at provoking condemnation or compliments, and the humans who are the objects of such talk are those with whom the speaker is in everyday contact. In short, Aristotle’s anthropologist was a gossip.

Since Aristotle, the objects of “anthropological” discourse have typically become far-removed from everyday contacts. The two strands of research which have gone under the rubric “anthropology” in the English- and German-speaking cultural contexts established the distance of their objects from those of day-to-day interaction in two different ways. In the one case, the distance is geographical and cultural, access to those objects being attained by means of participatory observation; in the other, the distance is logical, established through a process of abstraction from particulars. The former usage, that more familiar in the English-speaking context, is historically more recent. It stands for the study of human life-forms other than those of the researcher. This usage was institutionalised with the founding of the European and American anthropological societies in the 1860s and 1870s after the model of the Société d’anthropologie de Paris (founded 1859) and monumentalised with the publication of Tylor’s *Anthropology* in 1881. Of course, the comparative study of the mores of “other” cultures and societies was not inaugurated with this terminological step. The 1830s and 1840s had already seen a series of European and American “ethnological” societies come into being. The American Ethnological Society, founded 1842, had itself grown out of the American Antiquarian Society, which had been founded in 1812 for the study of indigenous American peoples. The terms “ethnology” and “ethnography” were coined between 1772 and 1787 in the German universities of Göttingen and Halle, along with the German parallel terms “Völkerkunde” and “Volkskunde” (Stagl 1981, 125). The theoretical impulses behind the systematic study associated with these terms were formulated in Humboldt’s *Plan einer vergleichenden Anthropologie* of 1795 or 1797, itself inspired by Herder’s call for an “anthropological map of the earth” in the sixth book of his *Reflections on the Philosophy of History of Mankind* (1784). The type of material which raised the possibility of such an ethnographic project had been gathered by voyagers since the Renaissance, and had been first set in a comparative, i.e. genuinely ethnological perspective by the Jesuit missionary J.F. Lafitau in his *Moeurs des sauvages Américains comparés aux moeurs des premiers temps* (1724) (Mühlmann 1984, 40ff.).

Although “ethnology” and “anthropology” are widely used as synonyms today, the latter being understood as a short form for (American) “cultural anthropology” or (British) “social anthropology”, that was by no means the case when the term “anthropology” was institutionalised in the English-speaking world. In his plan for a syllabus of the newly established subject of anthropology at the University of Oxford (1906), Tylor subdivided the course into seven sections, only two of which were the province of ethnology, the others being dealt with by “zoological”, “palaeontological”, “archaeological”, “sociological” and “technological” branches of the “science of man” (Reed 1906, 56f.). The subsequent slide of meaning from whole to part corresponds to the abandonment of the idea of a comprehensive science of the human capable of integrating evidence of cultural, social and technological diversity with the findings of the biological and physical sciences. Under the ideological conditions of 19th-century scholarship, it had appeared that the concept of “race” could fulfil this function. With the rejection of social evolutionism and positivism and with the discipline’s distancing from the legitimization of colonialism, the idea that both the problems of human diversity and of the relationship between the material and the cultural spheres could be solved by focusing on this concept was, salutarily, abandoned. As a result, “anthropological” research has come to focus almost exclusively on “culture” and, although the results of what is still known as “biological anthropology” are generally taught to students of the discipline, their relevance for specific research projects has often tended to be seen as obscure or even non-existent.

Whereas in the context of racial theory the interest in biological aspects of human life-forms concerned features thought to explain cultural differences, the disciplines of human ethnology, sociobiology and evolutionary psychology – the core of what is now taught as “biological anthropology” – all concern themselves primarily with universalisable claims about the human animal. The comparison of the human with other species – the methodological centre of human ethnology (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1967, 11) – is a procedure which, of course, goes back to the beginnings of western thought. It is systematically carried out in Aristotle’s *Parts of Animals* (640 a 25ff.; 643 a 1ff.; 645 a 25ff.; esp. 686 a 30ff.) and illustrated by the myth of the creation attributed by Plato to Protagoras (Prot. 320 c ff.). The latter narrative, which tells how Epimetheus forgot to assign to the human animal a specifically type of food, means of self-defence or covering against the elements, is one of the first recorded attempts in the western tradition to characterise the specifically human life-form. It is thus one of the founding texts of *philosophical anthropology*, understood as the philosophical analysis of what it means to be human, the answer to Kant’s question “Was ist der Mensch?”

Aristotle gave at least four answers to this question, naming reason (NE 1166 a 17; cf. Protrept. B 59-62), life in community (Pol. 1253 a; Hist. An. 488 a 7ff.), a sense of justice (Pol. 1252 b) and the drive to mimesis (Poet. 1448 b). The attempt to provide a systematic answer of this form was first termed “anthropology” in the 16th Century in Magnus Hundt’s *Anthropologium de hominis dignitate, natura et proprietatibus* (1501). In the German tradition inaugurated here, which blossomed above all in the 18th Century (producing a large number of philosophically insignificant tracts), the results of physiological research (and speculation) were placed alongside discussions of those questions of psychology dealt
with in the writings of "philosophes" such as La Mettrie (L'homme machine, 1748) and Helvétius (De l'homme, 1773) and treated most profoundly in the psychologies of the British Empiricists, particularly Hume's Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40). In German-speaking philosophy, "anthropology", understood as a philosophical psychology systematically related to the results of empirical research, is usually biological - research and conceived as foundational for other forms of philosophical investigation, has been hotly debated for the last two centuries. In particular, there has been a repeated oscillation between such anthropological conceptions, as advanced by Kant, Feuerbach (1842), 42) and Scheler (1928, 5ff.), and their historically oriented critique at the hands of such philosophers as Hegel (Encycl. §§388-390, 339ff.), Marx (1846), 6 and Horkheimer (1935), 200ff.). The history of this second sense of the term "anthropology" was particularly shaped by the emergence in the 1920s of a style of thought explicitly calling itself "Philosophical Anthropology" and whose principle representatives, Max Scheler, Helmhuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen, were both philosophers and sociologists, as well as having extensive knowledge of human biology. They repeated the Kantian claim of the foundational character of conceptions of the human, now relating it not just to the various philosophical disciplines, but also to the human and social sciences which had been developed in the intervening years. The past two decades have seen the emergence within English-speaking philosophy of conceptions characterised by the same structure and calling themselves "philosophical anthropology". The prime examples are the ambitious philosophical undertakings of Charles Taylor (1985, 1) and Rom Harré (1993, 1ff.).

Both types of "discourse on the human" practised prior to their designation as "anthropology". It is, however, perhaps not insignificant that the first terminological usage of the word, on the threshold between Enlightenment and Romanticism in Germany, vacillated between the two meanings. Herder's proto-ethnological call for a "gallery" of the divergent forms of human life (Reflections, VI, 7) follows his discussion of what he sees as the specific difference of human from other animals, namely their delayed maturation, weakness and corresponding dependence on formation through culture (IV, 4). Kant's Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798) contains discussions of the psychological capacities central to his epistemology (Anthr. I, 1) and ethics (I, 3), and a characterisation of the human being as an "animal rationabile" (II, E), alongside a discussion of what he sees as the "ethnic characteristics" of certain peoples, namely of various European nations (II, C). Moreover, the founding years of American ethnology are marked by repeated reflections on the significance of cultural diversity for an understanding of the human life-form. This not only so in Boas' "Psychological Problems in Anthropology" of 1910, in which he struggles to disentangle a notion of culture from social evolutionist assumptions (cf. Shore 1996, 19ff.). It also remains the case in those classical texts by Boas' students who, on behaviourist assumptions, most systematically argued for thoroughgoing cultural relativism. Both Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead state explicitly that the epistemic gain to be had from ethnological research lies in coming to distinguish between those psychological claims which are true relative to a particular cultural context and those whose applicability to all humans proves resistant to falsification and thus plausibly names a dimension of "human nature" (Mead [1930], 212ff.; Benedict [1934], 16ff.).

Systematically, one might think it fairly obvious that neither kind of "anthropology" can be sensibly carried out without taking the other into account. This assumption is certainly shared by the two authors mentioned above as examples of contemporary philosophical anthropology: Charles Taylor, who draws on the work of Clifford Geertz (1989, 80; 113), and Rom Harré, who makes extensive use of a variety of ethnological findings in order to illustrate his formal conception of human sociality (1993, 98ff.). Similarly, much research in empirical psychology is now guided by the insight emphasised by Margaret Mead that there can be no plausible pretensions to universal validity without cross-cultural investigations (Bruner/Haste 1987, 1ff.; Harré 1993, 11ff.; Cole 1996, 98ff.). The pioneering work in developmental psychology by Mike Cole (Cole et al. 1971) demonstrated, for instance, that the attempt to apply Piaget's model of development to non-Western children raises telling methodological and theoretical difficulties for the approach. On the other hand, there is widespread agreement among many ethnologists that research into non-Western cultures has to go beyond mere ethnographic description and the tracing of internal cultural patterns, and should encompass an explanatory dimension, in order to clarify why it is that human beings both diverge from and resemble each other in the ways they do (Brown 1991, 98ff., 142ff.; Carrithers 1992, 34ff.; Staff 1992, 150; Shore 1996, 18ff.; Van Dzamme 1996, 6ff.). Whether the focus is on cross-cultural commonality or diversity, it is a central theoretical task to provide insight into what it is about humans that makes the relevant cultural facts possible. Where that task is not broached, there is likely to be an unformulated and thus unjustified conception of the human behind both the research and its interpretation. All in all, one might say that the characterisation with which Bradd Shore introduces his contribution to this volume is correct for both senses of "anthropology": that it is "the study of human nature in light of human variation".

Understanding, Evaluation and the Human

Incommensurabilities

Certain forms of pure ethnography may be possible without presupposing any general features of the bearers of the cultural patterns thus recorded. There cer-
tarily are theoretical paradigms within sociology, history and literary studies which claim to have disentangled their subject matter entirely from any such presuppositions. Systems theory, discourse analysis and poststructuralism are such theories. Two kinds of consideration may indeed seem to support the complete expulsion of the "the human" from the human sciences, both of which are based in convictions about incommensurability. The first is that the development of the various academic disciplines has led to different sub-components of the human sphere being so strongly differentiated that one can no longer give any specific, non-vacuous sense to the phrase "the human". Psychological processes, social systems, literary mechanisms and cultural dynamics are seen as mutually irreducible and inherently resistant to amalgamation in any one overarching perspective. The second consideration has been given particular currency in the wake of modern ethnological research, although it dates back to historicism. It is rooted in the idea that there are forms of incommensurability which result not from the conceptual tools applied in differing types of analysis, but from the culturally varying systems of practices and categories that are analysed. The radical claim here is that genuine understanding is entirely internal to holistic cultural systems, whose concepts only gain their sense through their internal relations to other elements of the same system. Where this is strictly true, there is clearly no possibility of applying concepts to all members of the species.

Even if one were to accept the claims for both types of incommensurability, there would still be one substantial question about "the human": the question as to what it is about this species which explains it being the bearer of these forms of explanatory irreducibility and hermeneutic incomparability. To my knowledge, nobody has so far argued that the ethology of any other species has to take similar principles into account. A first, basic "anthropological" question for the human and social sciences thus concerns those properties of human nature which ground the plausibility of such forms of conceptual and epistemic relativism - independently of whether, and to what extent, some version of relativism can be shown to be true.

A second question is then whether there aren't some concepts whose applicability to all humans needs to be assumed in order to even make sense of any version of the thesis of cultural relativism. If someone claims that people in different cultures act for reasons which allow of no common standard of comparison, they appear to be presupposing that people everywhere act for reasons. And if it is argued that the modern western self is structured in a way that is radically different from the forms taken on by the self for the ancient Greeks (Feyerabend 1988, 191ff.) or members of contemporary non-western cultures (Geertz 1983, 59), then it appears that there is some sort of common entity which can be identified in the various cultures under scrutiny, in order to show how it differs in each case. Of course, what is common may be of such a formal nature that talk of the "same thing" is apt to be misleading. Nevertheless, there real and far-reaching questions here, questions whose importance and detail are easily lost from view in the face of simple proclamations of "relativist" or "universalist" positions.

Ethics

Such proclamations have themselves generally been the result of a specific cultural or historical context. Significantly, the incommensurability thus proclaimed has more often than not been no purely theoretical matter, but has centrally concerned evaluative and normative issues. This is as obvious in the liberal pleas of Ruth Benedict ([1934], 10ff.) as it is in the anarchist agenda of Feyerabend (1988, 9ff., 243ff.). A significant difference between the two is that, whereas Benedict's arguments concern only what she saw as the relativity of values to a particular context, Feyerabend supports his axiological relativism with arguments for conceptual incommensurability. It is, however, far from clear that the former can be supported by the latter at all: if it cannot be shown that the claims made by members of a certain culture are about the same subject as the claims raised within another culture, then it is difficult to see what sense could be made of the argument that there is an incompatibility between their values (cf. Brandt 1959, 273ff.). The object of ethnological research here has, of course, largely been the extent to which descriptive relativism - i.e. the thesis that in different cultures there are genuinely conflicting evaluations of the same facts - is true. The normative question of whether there are rational grounds for deciding between such competing evaluations is, however, a further matter. A number of cultural anthropologists in the first half of the 20th century either confined the two questions or else thought that a decision on the descriptive issue enabled the derivation of a position on the normative issue. Interestingly, two sorts of pseudo-derivation are to be found in such contexts, corresponding to the two senses of "anthropology" distinguished above.

The first, most widespread pseudo-derivation consists in concluding from the cultural diversity of normative systems that all are equally valid. This position, stated explicitly by Ruth Benedict, is given an interesting variation in the 1947 Declaration on Human Rights of the American Anthropological Association. The document's authors argue, like Benedict, that "scientific knowledge of Man" justifies the claim that "standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive" (1947, 542f.). It is, however, of the essence of a normative declaration which is to apply to "mankind as a whole" that it proclaim principles with transcultural validity. The document's authors appear to assume that such a proclamation is legitimate because the principle of tolerance can be derived from the recognition of normative pluralism. Clearly, neither step - from descriptive to normative relativism; from the latter to a general norm of tolerance - can count
as a derivation. In fact, whereas the first step marks merely an illegitimate move between two claims which are at least logically compatible, the second step attempts to justify one claim by means of another which actually invalidates it. In any case, ascertaining the true extent of normative diversity between cultures – i.e. of descriptive relativism – is not as easy as it may appear, as it requires a methodologically stable combination of empirical fieldwork and conceptual analysis. Indeed, a number of anthropologists, such as Kluckhohn (1955, 671ff.) and Linton (1954, 152ff.), have argued for the opposite conclusion: that the constraints of the general human life-form – survival, reproduction, social organisation – result in genuinely transcontextual adherence to certain values.

The second type of pseudo-derivation sees such putative universal givens as themselves justifying universal ethical principles. This is of course the type of move which within philosophical ethics has more usually been a criticised as a “naturalistic fallacy”. It is particularly interesting in this context that ostensibly relativist documents often contain a substratum of universalist assumptions which play a significant, if unacknowledged role in the justification of the normative conclusions drawn. The Statement on Human Rights presupposes that self-realisation is a universal goal; and Margaret Mead’s description of the sexual practices of Samoan adolescents in their difference from those of her American contemporaries transports the assumption that humans in any cultural context are likely to benefit from a certain amount of freedom in these matters (cf. Pocock 1986, 9).

The debates about both descriptive and normative relativism tend, moreover, to make presuppositions about conceptual issues. On the one hand, these are of the kind dealt with in general debates about conceptual incommensurability and concern the ontologies of the cultures to be compared. On the other hand, they concern specifically ethical concepts, particularly that of morality itself, but also notions that are candidates for central justificatory roles within ethics, concepts such as well-being, freedom, rights and needs. Here again, the questions as to whether other cultures have these concepts, different versions of the same concepts or no equivalents at all can only be answered by a combination of empirical and conceptual work.

**Aesthetics**

The axiological questions repeatedly raised, with varying degrees of explicitness, in such ethical contexts are also relevant within another dimension of human existence, although they have not been discussed with quite the same fervour. This is the sphere of *art and the aesthetic*. The study of non-western aesthetic products, like that of the norms of non-western cultures, took place at first under the shadow of colonialism and sought confirmation of the “primitiveness” of its objects. The evaluative transformation which then took place – from explicit or implicit denigration to admiration – was brought about not by ethnologists, but by artists, in particular from 1905 onwards the Fauves and the Cubists (Firth 1992, 19ff.).

The first systematic attempt to tackle both the conceptual and evaluative issues thus raised was Boas’ *Primitive Art* of 1927. In this respect, Boas’ text retains a paradigmatic status today. He firstly advances definitions of the aesthetic and of art, secondly proposes criteria for aesthetic value and then goes on to argue empirically for the presence of the relevant phenomena in “primitive” cultures ([1927], 9ff.). Whatever one may think of his specific proposals, Boas was clearly correct to seek clarification of his subject-matter before providing his survey of the relevant empirical findings at the time. In doing so, he found himself asking the central questions of philosophical aesthetics in a context in which the prioritising of western artistic solutions had been abandoned. However, Boas’ methodological rigour reveals a problem of circularity. On the one hand, as he saw, no answer to the question “How universal is art?” can be given without first determining the criteria for calling something “art”; on the other hand, the definition of art is going to depend on the extension one thinks is appropriate to the concept, i.e. which empirical phenomena one thinks ought to be subsumed under it.

In a sense, this is purely a verbal problem. However, more tends to be at stake because of the interweaving of descriptive and axiological considerations in the everyday concept of art. This is of course entirely unhelpful, as it confuses the question of what falls under the concept with the question of whether particular examples of phenomena thus classified are good or bad *at* phenomena of this kind. A plausible solution might consist in seeking purely sociological criteria for distinguishing the institution of art from religious or cultic institutions, before going on to ask evaluative questions.

Boas’ own criterion, however, is of a different sort, deriving from considerations that belong to a *philosophical* anthropology. For Boas, it seems that art-works are those human products conducive to aesthetic experience. And aesthetic experience is in turn conceived as pleasure in the *form* of objects, a type of pleasure which Boas plausibly claims is “in one way or another ... felt by all members of mankind” ([1927], 9). In this way, Boas’ concept of art grounds in a claim about a specifically human capacity or, as Kant put it, a specific form of “receptivity” (CJ §5, BA 8-9). Conceptions of specifically human capacities necessary for a kind of experience foregrounded in dealings with art have played a significant role in philosophical art theory from Baumgarten to Dewey and have resurfaced recently within cultural anthropology in the work of Jacques Macquet (*Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology*, 1979, 12ff.). However, as the precise form of Boas’ own argument shows, the grounding of artistic practices in a philosophical anthropology requires more than the specification of purely hedonic propensities.

On the one hand, Boas differentiates his formalist criterion, arguing that the relevant kind of hedonic susceptibility can be activated by one of two sorts of
cause: either by products which manifest a high level of control of culturally specific techniques or by certain formal properties, in particular symmetry ([1927], 32ff.), which have universal appeal. Aesthetic value is thus far seen to be in part universal, and in part culturally specific, although based on a universal susceptibility. On the other hand, his formalist argument is complicated by the recognition that there are also forms of "representative art", which derive their value from semiotic mechanisms that transcend the purely formal. Here, artistic value appears to be a kind of cognitive value and thus grounds in capacities of the understanding. On the level of a philosophical anthropology, this raises the central question of the relationship between humans' hedonic and hermeneutic capacities. Where, however, we are concerned with evaluating particular cultural products, we require criteria of successful or accurate representation. Here, the discussion of aesthetic products leads back to the general hermeneutic problem of transcultural understanding and its anthropological preconditions.

Whether it is the ethical or the aesthetic sphere which is the focus of study, there are three central types of question the answers to which are likely to bear the traces of some conception of the human. The conceptual questions -- what is morality, or what is the ethical? What is art, or what is the aesthetic? -- are generally answered in the light of convictions about the universal or non-universal applicability of the particular concept. Theoretical suggestions here are usually supported by assumptions such as that humans are animals capable of feeling resentment or of entering agreements, beings that enjoy imitation or have a hedonic susceptibility to pure form. Answers to hermeneutic questions as to the extent to which the actions, cultural products and evaluative standards of other peoples can be understood tend to rely on presuppositions about the existence or non-existence of universal structures of the causation of human behaviour, of emotional experience and of representative categories. Finally, approaches to axiological questions concerning the validity of evaluative and normative standards can hardly proceed without assumptions about the needs, wants and susceptibilities of the bearers of such standards. There are undoubtedly logical barriers to deriving values or norms from facts; nevertheless, if there are properties of actions or objects that all humans either want, enjoy, need, are averse to or dislike, then such properties are at the very least going to be good candidates for the objects of justifiable norms.

The Structure of Being Humans

*Being Humans* is a collection of papers motivated by the conviction that conceptions of the human play a significant role in structuring the research carried out by scholars in the various fields of the human and social sciences, whether explicitly or implicitly. It is divided into four parts which focus in turn on the following issues:

1. What precisely is a conception of the human? How can such a conception be justified?
2. How are such conceptions related to particular contexts? Are they themselves inevitably dependent on unjustifiable background assumptions? How do they relate to scientific conceptions of objectivity?
3. What is the significance of such conceptions for hermeneutic and axiological issues in literature and the arts?
4. What is their significance for conceptual, axiological and normative issues in morality and politics?

The answers collected here come from philosophy, anthropology, psychology, sociology and literary scholarship. They focus on differing aspects of the above questions, reflecting both the authors' disciplinary positions and individual approaches to the issues. Nevertheless, the varying approaches to a set of recurrent themes constitute a discussion which crosses the boundaries both of the disciplines and of the book's thematic divisions. The remainder of this introduction provides an overview over the collection, both presenting the main claims made by the contributors and indicating the structure of the issues played out more or less explicitly between the contributions.

I. Conceptualising the Human

Part I brings together sociological, philosophical, psychological and anthropological conceptions of human nature. It begins with a paper by the sociologist of culture, Justin Stagl, who argues in the tradition of German Philosophical Anthropology that the central characteristic of the human life-form is that of *world-openness*. This characteristic is seen, on the one hand, as the basis of specifically human cultural capacities; on the other hand, as intimately bound up with paleontological and ethological facts about the ontogenesis and behavioural constitution of the human animal. Further, Stagl argues that criteria of the human are necessary in order to deal with those normative issues raised dramatically by modern medical technology and widely dealt with under the rubric of "medical ethics".

The philosopher Mary Midgley agrees with Stagl that there is both a theoretical and practical necessity of some "essentialist" conception of human nature. In the first part of her paper, she attempts to clarify the reasons why so much suspicion has been shed on this notion, before going on to give an account of the form such a conception ought to take. In particular, she criticises simplistic attempts to apply the genus/differentia specifica schema to the human case, as well as rejecting the assumption that any such characterisation has to be honorific. The re-
quired form of such a conception, she argues, is that of an integrated cluster of structural properties, a stricture to which any adequate understanding of even such a prominent property as language-use has to conform.

The psychological perspective developed in the contribution of Michael Cole and Carl Levinson focuses less on capacities seen as characterising individual members of the species, emphasising instead the peculiar way that the human life-form involves processes of enculturation, in which both the developing child and its human environment play an active, "co-constructive" role. For Cole and Levinson, being human is being involved in cultural practices, mediated by one's social environment and supported by specific imaginative processes, which give cultural data coherence and relate them to their bearer. They illustrate the significance of the process of enculturation for human development with the case of blind-deaf children, where the requirement of mutual, imaginative activity is particularly visible.

The final contribution to Part I, that of the anthropologist Bradd Shore, is, like that of Mary Midgley, a historical narrative with a clear systematic point. In order to gain an adequate grasp of the relationship between universal and particular elements in the human life-form, Shore discusses problems in the early attempts to deal with the issue within ethnology and evolutionary theory, relating them back to theological issues in the pre-history of anthropological thought. Where Midgley emphasises the political significance that has been attached to the rejection of "human nature", Shore argues that the idea of "psychic unity" itself is best explained as a conceptual bulwark against racism. For Shore, as for Cole and Levinson, the essential dimension of human existence is its culturality. A correct understanding of this dimension, so he claims, would make it clear that no distinction between natural and culture can ground the difference between universal and particular properties of members of the species, indeed that the distinction can be given no non-vacuous sense.

All four authors are in agreement that a conception of human nature has to integrate facts of human existence which are studied both by the natural sciences and by the human or social sciences. They also agree that any such conception will have to be able to say what it is about humans that explains the radical diversity of their cultural, and indeed individual, forms of life. In order to do this, Stagl, Midgley and Shore draw on the findings of ethology; Shore and Cole/Levinson also turn to neuroscience. For Midgley, ethology provides functional analogies between human traits and those of other animals, analogies which should allow a naturalistic, but not necessarily reductive understanding of human constitution. For Stagl and Shore, the most significant findings of physical anthropology are those which mark the biological possibility, and necessity, of the cultural dimension of human life. From Stagl's phylogenetic perspective, these lie in the facts of upright position, enlargement of the field of vision and liberation of the hands; in Shore's more ontogenetic orientation, the central morphological facts concern the delayed maturation of the human foetus. The enormous significance of this fact resides in the formative power which thus accrues to the cultural surroundings of the human neonate, whose mental traits and effective neurological structure only come into being as a result of exposure to cultural causes. In this point both Shore and Colé/Lévinson see their contributions as deepening the insight of Clifford Geertz that humans are animals with a biological need for "completion" by culture. This notion is very close to what Stagl, following Scheler and Gehlen, calls "world-openness". The discussion between Stagl and Neil Roughley highlights the difficulties involved in giving precision to this concept and the causal role of the mechanisms it covers. Finally, Shore uses certain ideas of evolutionary biology to justify a claim of considerable weight: the claim that the dynamics of evolutionary selection mean that there can be no unchanging human "essence" and that there are only varying degrees of stability in human properties.

In the context of the whole volume, it is worth noting that, in spite of their differences, all four concepts appear to have a common opponent, mentioned explicitly by both Midgley and Shore. This is the adaptationist theory of our mental powers known as evolutionary psychology, which is represented by two contributions that appear later in the volume, those of Don Brown (Part II) and Wilfried van Damme (Part III). An analogy commonly used within this paradigm, indeed one which is often unquestioned in cognitive science, is that of the brain with computer hardware and the mind with software. Both Shore and Cole/Levinson argue that the neurological evidence lends no support to such an analogy and that the plasticity of human neural structures suggests instead some intermediate metaphor such as "mushware" (Shore) or "cultural firmware" (Cole/Levinson).

II. Contexts of the Human

The contributions to Part II consider the plausibility and significance of conceptualisations of the human in the very different contexts of emotion theory, epistemology, gender studies and anthropology. In his paper, Rom Harré argues that the investigation of particular cultural contexts reveals an enormous variety of phenomena that are falsified by the tendency of western investigators to take their own categories as natural. This, he claims, is particularly true in the sphere of the emotions, where the "affect theory" has distorted our understanding of cultural difference, a claim challenged both in Part II by Donald Brown and later in the volume in the contributions of Ronald de Sousa and Wolfgang Friedelmeier (Part IV). However, in spite of Harré's strongly developed contextualism, he insists that analyses of specific cultural contexts — exercises in empirical anthropology — are dependent on a general psychology or philosophical anthropology. For Harré, the objects of philosophical anthropology are the powers and capacities of
human beings that enable them to follow the norms constitutive of particular cultures; and the objects of empirical anthropology are those norms themselves. His discussion with Thomas Luckmann concerns primarily the adequacy of Wittgenstein's concept of “grammar” as a tool for describing these norms. Harré demonstrates his approach for the two areas of emotions and the self.

The philosopher David Cockburn sides with Harré on the question of the paradigmatic importance of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy for an understanding of the human. For Cockburn however, this is not a question of developing an appropriate theoretical framework that might be designated a philosophical anthropology; instead he sees an understanding of the human as primarily practical, a matter of the way in which humans interact with, and experience each other prior to forming theoretical abstractions. Starting from this “bedrock”, he develops a critique of the Cartesian conception of objectivity and its defence by modern philosophers, in particular by Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel. The Cartesian notion of a “view from nowhere” is, according to Cockburn, radically flawed by its lack of human contextualisation, i.e. by the failure to acknowledge the specifically human conditions of the generation of such a perspective. He sees these conditions in the intersubjectivity necessary for epistemic processes and the corporeality of the bearers of knowledge. An objective view is thus, he claims, always going to be from somewhere, namely from within a community of embodied beings with shared practices.

The notion of a view from nowhere is also the target of critique of the psychologist Helen Haste. However, whereas Cockburn argues for the human contextualisation of all knowledge, Haste argues that the determining contexts are inevitably infra-human in character. She sees warranted assertability as systematically tied to the perspectives of particular sub-sets of the species, perspectives constituted firstly by particular interests and secondly by the metaphors made possible by technological developments. In particular, she argues that the conception according to which this is not the case is itself the product of a particular western tradition of conceiving the human subject, a tradition characterised accurately by Geertz. Haste’s paper is an extended critique of what she interprets as the myth of the western, male, autonomous subject, as well as of those critical reactions to it which fail to escape its logic. Among these are both dualistic, feminist responses and humanist responses which attempt to reincorporate those aspects of the human shut out by such mythical constructions.

The paper with which Part IV concludes is a discussion by the anthropologist Donald Brown of the topic of human universals, whose study he argues is essential to an understanding of what it is to be human. According to Brown, there are many universal properties of the human life-form, where “universal” means “present in all ethnographically or historically studied cultural contexts”. One reason for their neglect, he claims, is the lack of differentiation between types of such “uni-

versality”, a lack he seeks to rectify by providing an extensive typology of universals. Most significant for the questions at issue in this volume are the distinctions between emic and etic and between manifest and innate universals. The former distinction presupposes that there is no strict conceptual incommensurability between cultures, a point emphasised by Brown later when he argues that both universals of communication and the capacity for empathy can break down such cultural barriers. The latter distinction is the basis of the concept of human nature Brown takes from evolutionary psychology and which he specifies as that set of innate universal dispositions which has been selected for and encoded in the genetic make-up of the species. In sharp contrast to the culturalist positions of Cole/Levitin and Shore, Brown argues that the modular conception of mind, according to which mental traits are the product of selection processes independent of one another, has shown the explanatory role of culture to be considerably smaller than has often been assumed. The diversity of cultural contexts merely helps to account for the differences in realisation of those dispositional properties that make up human nature, as phenotypical traits only come into being when the conditions for the actualisation of the genotype are given. The relationship between the universal and the particular not only maps onto that between genotype and phenotype: there are also a whole set of universally instantiated human properties - Brown mentions agency and intention - without whose presupposition no forms of particularity could be made sense of.

Like Part I, Part II contains various perspectives on the appropriateness of the computer analogy for an understanding of the human. Where Brown argues that culturists have failed to see that mental “programming” does not primarily take place through the influence of culture, but through the “design” of natural selection, he clearly assumes the appropriateness of the analogy. For Harré, the number of significant analogies between brain and computer is less than their significant disanalogies. For Haste, the computer model is a central example of the power of convenient metaphors to structure scientific thought about - among other things - the human. She provides us with a further phase of the ideological history of the concepts of the human and the natural, concentrating on their uses within feminist debates. Her contribution is undoubtedly the one which most radically rejects the claims of science in such debates, arguing that artificial intelligence, ethology and evolutionary biology are all constructed around metaphors or narratives, devices whose cognitive status is that of providing more or less useful heuristics for making sense of the human, and the female, conditions. The contrast with the uncompromisingly realist (or “supra-human”) conception of objectivity at work in Brown’s conception could not be more stark.
III. Anthropology, Literature and the Aesthetic

The papers brought together in Part III discuss the status of conceptions of the human for the understanding and evaluation of representational artefacts and other objects of aesthetic attention. The first two contributions, by the philosopher Bernard Williams and the literary scholar Aleida Assmann, discuss the relationships between literary understanding and the two senses of “anthropology” distinguished above. Firstly, they both see parallels between literary hermeneutics and the task of the ethnologist in the face of another culture. And secondly, they ask whether universal claims about the human are either presuppositions of such understanding in particular cases or reflections of the general capacity for literary production and reception. The second pair of papers, authored by the anthropologist Wilfried van Damme and the philosopher Andrew Harrison, focus on aesthetic responsiveness to visual properties as a central feature of being human.

Aleida Assmann’s paper presents various research projects which the term literary anthropology is used to designate. She distinguishes two main forms (the relationship between which is the core issue in her discussion with Gottfried Sebass): the first form employs literature as a heuristic mode of access to specific properties characteristic of the human life-form in general. The second investigates literary texts as components in specific cultural contexts, constituted by particular conditions of production and distribution and particular meaning-systems. Echoing Harré’s distinction between philosophical and empirical anthropology, she labels these two approaches abstract and empirical. However, whereas Harré claims that a pre-empirical conception of the human is a necessary foundation for empirical anthropology, Assmann, like Haste, argues that any such conception will inevitably bear the mark of the interests behind its generation. In particular, she sees this as true of the conception of Wolfgang Iser, according to which literature is the medium that allows a specifically reflexive realisation of human freedom via “the imaginary”. In this, she joins the ranks of those contributors who argue that the purported universal validity of conceptions of freedom or autonomy is radically restricted by the conditions of their genesis. Her reduction of Plessner’s Philosophical Anthropology to an expression of the post-War German spirit of reconstruction parallels Midgley’s reading of the Sartrean Ego as a political requirement of the French Resistance. A grander version of such “Ideologiekritik”, Geertz’s thesis that all conceptions of the autonomous self are the reflection of western socio-cultural formations, is discussed by both Haste and Michael Carrithers (in part IV).

Like Assmann and Harré, Bernard Williams emphasises the advisability of extreme caution in attributing properties of one’s own life-form to another culture under study. When one is dealing with “literature”, i.e. writings of a society with a marked reflexive stance, the difficulties in understanding the culture which produced it are increased as a result of the intervention of stylistic devices whose relationship to the life of the audience is far from straightforward. Nevertheless, following Davidson, Williams argues that interpretation would be impossible without certain assumptions about the aims and beliefs of the interpreters, a principle he sees as valid not only for the flesh-and-blood members of other cultures, but also for the characters represented in their texts. Thus understood, an anthropological principle of charity is unavoidable not only in the participant observation of ethnological fieldwork, but also in what Williams calls ideal anthropology: the anthropology without participation undertaken when attempting to understand a culture no longer existent, for instance that of Homeric Greece. For Williams, the content and status of the assumptions at work here are the object of a philosophy of anthropology – rather than a philosophical anthropology. He insists that we have no grounds for any kind of aprioricity in making such claims; instead, there is simply an enormous burden of proof to be shouldered by anyone who argues for radical incommensurability in the face of the task of understanding the behaviour and interaction of other humans. The point is similar to what Brown calls the asymmetry between universals and particulars; the difference being that Williams is extremely cautious as to what can be claimed here to be fact, whereas Brown has no qualms about the straightforward claim that concepts of intention and action are universal givens.

Of the two contributions dealing with visual aesthetics, neither is overly worried by questions of incommensurability. The paper by Andrew Harrison begins with the claim that, alongside certain deeply mysterious marked surfaces, easy-to-recognize pictures are a universal human institution. His project is the investigation of the implications of that universality for an understanding of the human in general. He concludes that, if linguistic capacity can universally be ascribed to humans and constitutes a significant ground of their rationality, then humans are also beings with a further irreducible cognitive, yet non-epistemic capacity, which has to be part of an inclusive account of human thought. This is the ability to make spatial sense of one’s surroundings, an ability which involves establishing patterns of spatial salience and which is expressed in, and developed through dealings with those structural analogues to spatial organisation known as pictures. Harrison expresses a certain skepsis towards both the suggestion of evolutionary psychology that there is a language instinct, and towards Fodor’s idea of a language of thought; but again maintains that if plausible arguments can be developed for these hypotheses, then an equally good case can be made for a pictorial instinct or a proto-pictorial mental capacity. An analysis of such a capacity, Harrison contends, is an essential component in understanding the sociality which both Aristotle and Kant saw as at the core of what it is to be human. Following Kant, Harrison claims that this aspect of our humanity involves the ability to engage in “universal communication without recourse to concepts”, shared aesthetic re-
sponses which, so it seems, bridge the gap between culturally diverse forms of cognition — independently of whether the epistemic commensurability can be established which Williams argues we must presuppose.

Wilfried van Damme’s paper also focuses on the issue of shared aesthetic responses. However, whereas the responses Harrison has in mind are hermeneutic in character, Van Damme’s discussion of “visual aesthetics” in cross-cultural contexts does not restrict its subject matter to representations, but examines those (primarily) visual properties possessed both by sculptures and by other members of the species that are experienced as pleasing in three contemporary African cultures. Van Damme begins, in a manner reminiscent of Boas’ treatment of formal aesthetic characteristics, by examining the evidence for the cross-cultural prevalence of positive reactions to properties such as symmetry, clarity and smoothness. He then goes on to look in some detail at the close correlation between varying “socio-cultural ideals” and the sources of visually pleasant experience. In both cases he argues, firstly, that regularities can be established and, secondly, that explanations can be given in terms of evolutionary selection. His main argument concerns the possibility of explaining culturally relative aesthetic preferences in terms of underlying “epigenetic rules”, which “prescribe” the experience of pleasure when the values of the population to which one belongs are symbolised. Such an adaptively advantageous hedonic tie to ones community would be part of what Brown, following Le Vine and Campbell, calls “the universal syndrome of ethnocentrism”.

IV. Humanity, Morality and Politics

In contrast to the metaphor of “prescriptions” being “followed” by neural mechanisms, the papers collected in the Part IV are concerned with the norms literally conformed to by human agents. Whether or not one agrees with Harré’s characterisation of culture as exclusively constituted by norms, he is surely right that normativity is a central characteristic of the human life-form. The four contributions here approach the relationship between normativity and the human from two different angles. The papers by Christopher Berry and Michael Carrithers offer conceptions of normativity that embed them in a conception of being human. The papers by Ronald de Sousa and David Copp focus on general axiological issues, specifically on the question of whether, and if so how, particular human properties — in the one case, needs, in the other, emotions — can be the source of normative reasons.

The political theorist Christopher Berry and the anthropologist Michael Carrithers take two different routes — in the first case, an historical route, via an interpretation of Hume; in the second case, an empirical route, via a discussion of biographies taken from diverse cultural contexts — to the same topic: the signific-

cance of what Geertz called the biological “incompleteness” of the human animal for an understanding of normativity. Christopher J. Berry takes from Hume the phrase unnatural infirmity to designate the lack of instinctual regulation of human behaviour. His aim is to move from an analysis of the specific type of sociality characteristic of humans to an understanding of what makes them political animals in the more restricted sense of the word. His argument, which bears certain similarities to the institutional theory of Gehlen, is that the relative flexibility of human motivational constitution confronts groups of a size larger than the breeding pool with the necessity of developing shared responses to certain ineluctable features of their existence. Shared responses which take on a certain fixity are the conventions under which, according to an ancient dictum, it is in the nature of humans to live. Berry argues that the specific feature of political conventions, one which makes the characterisation of chimpanzees as “Machiavellian” purely metaphorical, is the recognition of authority.

Michael Carrithers’ main concern is a critique of what he argues is a widespread error in anthropological and social theory, an error which derives from a misconception of the character of human agency. He starts from the same claim of Clifford Geertz with which Haste begins her discussion: the claim that the modern western self is essentially characterised by cognitive and motivational distance from its social environment. Where Haste accepts this as a description both of the myth and of the reality, before going on to discuss strategies of its feminist critique, Carrithers questions the premises of the diagnosis. The central premise in question is expressed in Geertz’ argument that the biological under-determination of human nature needs completion by “cultural programs”. This metaphor implies that the various systems of collective representations, such as the programme “western individualist self”, can be installed in their bearers and simply “run”. Carrithers argues that there is a philosophical anthropology at the base of conceptions of this kind: that the single disposition common to members of all human societies is their limitless cognitive and motivational plasticity, their total malleability at the hands of socio-cultural structures. This is the same grounding anthropological premiss Stagi identifies at the core of historicism. Against this, Carrithers uses biographical material from India and East Germany to show that no social theory for which the primary agents are impersonal ideological systems can explain either individual action or the dynamics of social change. These tasks, he claims, can only be fulfilled by a theory which makes conceptual space for the active and, above all, interactive relationship of humans to the symbolic systems which in part make them who they are. In his emphasis on the creative possibilities open to humans in their relationship to normative cultural systems, Carrithers picks up a theme which is central in other contributions, particularly in that of Cole/Levitin, for whose active imagination is an enabling condition of human culturality, and thus of the characteristic human life-form.
The contributions of both Carrithers and Berry concern the general question of what it means to be a creature with an irreducibly normative form of life. Although the focus of neither paper is the justifiability of particular norms, Berry does argue that human “infirmity” opens up a set of alternative political possibilities between which a decision has to be taken on the basis of justificatory criteria other than “human nature”. In contrast, the papers of David Copp and Ronald de Sousa claim that there are characteristics of humans which are the sources of justification within normative contexts.

David Copp argues that a certain set of relational properties possessed by all human persons, their basic needs, provide them with reasons for their actions, independently of the values they may have. Rejecting analyses for which the basic needs are all-purpose means, requirements of a normal life or of biological flourishing, Copp focuses the conceptual issue on the question of what these needs are requirements for. This is not dictated by “nature” in any biological sense. His suggestion is that the basic needs are the necessary conditions for the upholding of an agent’s autonomy, explicated as the capacity to act on the values one has formed oneself. In answer to the question as to why it should be important to us to comply with our values, Copp claims that our values are a central part of our character structure or identity and that failure to act in accordance with them generally leads to guilt or shame. The anchor of Copp’s argument for the significance of needs in practical deliberation is thus the claim that at bottom all human persons have a desire to avoid the loss of self-esteem or damage to their identity, a bottom-line desire which explains the striving for autonomy, even in cultures in which autonomy is not positively valued. This grounds what Copp calls the needs and values standard of rationality, which prescribes action according to ones values except where such action would endanger ones basic needs. According to this conception, humans have two sorts of reasons for action, which correspond to two of their central properties: being valuing creatures and being creatures with needs. As he argues against Bernard Williams, the former sort of reasons is accounted for by axiological subjectivism; the latter, however, is not.

A very different attempt to found normative demands in the natures of human beings is advanced by Ronald de Sousa. He sets the scene for his constructive suggestion with two negative claims, both of which are also advanced by other contributors. The first is that no purely descriptive conception of human nature is to be had, an argument also to be found in the texts of Stagl and Assmann. The second is that evolutionary biology’s rejection of all but genealogical criteria for the definition of species means that there is no such thing as a universal human nature, a claim also made by Shore. De Sousa, however, goes on to argue not for a rejection of normative arguments from nature, but instead for the grounding of norms in the particular natures of individuals. In effect, what is “natural” for an individual reduces to what gives her satisfaction, and may be expected to originate in, and reflect, the possibilities and necessities of specific socio-cultural contexts. According to de Sousa, finding out what that is involves attending – critically – to ones emotional experiences. His central claim is that the human emotions are a specifically human mode of simultaneous access to, and constitution of, axiological reality. In spite of the fact that this value-dimension is neither universal nor timeless, it still makes sense to think of it as the nature of individual humans, because of its being pre-given in their dispositions and passively actualised in emotional experience. For de Sousa, there are thus facts about what is good for each of us, and it is through our emotions that we have cognitive access to those facts. A central topic of de Sousa’s discussion with the psychologist Wolfgang Friedmleiner concerns the extent to which the good for individuals thus conceived permits a derivation of the moral good for some collective.

The papers collected here by no means delineate exhaustively the significance of conceptions of the human within the human and social sciences. Indeed, they show that the formation of such conceptions is in part dependent on the way in which more specialised issues are dealt with within specific disciplinary contexts. Nevertheless, they clearly demonstrate that there is a highly significant common set of issues at stake in disciplinary contexts largely considered as independent of one another and that the respective discussions can only benefit from familiarity with the way in which other disciplines deal with the issues. A careful reading of the contributions also shows that a considerable number of what appear to be indissoluble controversies are rooted in differing uses of terms, which at times lead to confusion about the relationship between the varying referents of the terms in question. As this is particularly the case with the expression “human nature”, the collection ends with an Afterword which attempts to provide an overview over the various uses the term is given, as well as over the problems raised by those uses.