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THE WALL FALLS – WHAT NEXT?

HOW TO CREATE NEW RELATIONS BETWEEN HUMAN WORLD AND ANIMAL WORLD.

*It is dangerous to make man
see too clearly his equality
with the animals without showing
him his greatness.*

Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*

People were always looking for the answer to the question “What is human nature?”

The easiest way to build identity is to create an opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’. There are many contradictions like there in every culture: ‘we’ are the good ones, legitimated and chosen by God, and ‘they’ are the different, the worse, the strange and the dangerous. The strongest border has been built for thousands of years between nature and culture (*nasci vs. colere*). What is human, is different from what is animal, only humans have subjectivity. Animals are the ‘others’. The border between humanity and animality in Western Civilisation is very clear and strong. When Socrates discovered human subjectivity he found himself distanced from Nature. Another great philosopher, Aristotle, pointed out that human nature consists of nutritive soul (common to vegetables, animals and men) and sensitive soul (common to animals and men) which should be controlled by the higher part of soul which is uniquely and definitely human – the rational soul. Descartes finally separated the rational human from the animal body of pure matter likened to a machine without self-consciousness and even with no capacity of feeling pain. It is the possession of rational soul that defines us as humans. Also Christian religion sustains an image of a human - the lord of all living creatures,

which should be subordinate to him and have been created to serve him (*Bible, Genesis 1, 20-28*). God told the first man, Adam to name the animals so, in other words, to possess them as objects. These are the roots of our culture, which are foundations of our identity.

Let's imagine a great wall or border, which separates us - humans from them - animal others. It is going to be our "mental tool" which will help us understand some processes which are strengthening or destroying this border. But is there anything which could manage to shake this cultural construction?

First crucial tremor – evolutionary theory

Tadeusz Bielicki, an anthropologist, vice-chairman of The European Anthropological Association, says that "modern biology is crushing with the gentleness of a bulldozer one after another the everlasting borders separating the human world from the animal world"¹. Something has changed in our civilisation. Bielicki pointed to biology, let us look at the breakthrough when the main explanatory paradigm in biology has been discovered. In 1859 Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (usually abbreviated to *The Origin of Species*), which established evolution by common descent as the dominant scientific explanation of diversification in nature. In common opinion, this moment in the history caused a huge crack in our 'wall'. We, the human race, have lost our separated and privileged position among beings. It appeared that we are related to animals, they are our ancestors.

Reaction to the theory of evolution was very strong and Darwin's book set off a controversy. There were many critical voices in public discourse (for example portraits of Darwin as a non-human ape in the press) and in Church. Many people felt that Darwin's view of nature destroyed the important distinction between man and beast. That was a terrible shock. Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Humani generis* wrote that biological evolution is only a category of scientific hypothesis not a theory. Only on 22 October 1996 pope John Paul II issued "Magisterium of Church towards evolution", in which he stated that Darwin as a scientist was right². Nevertheless the head of the Roman-Catholic Church judged that there exists an ontological jump between man and animal. Now, in 21st century the theory of evolution still allows space for controversy. In US schools children are taught Darwin's theory and The Intelligent Design Theory (a modern version of creationism³) at the same time. According to Gallup Institute's research 45% of

¹ S. Mizerski: *Przygody człowieka na ziemi niczyjej – rozmowa z profesorem Tadeuszem Bielickim*, "Niezbędnik Inteligenta, POLITYKA", nr 12 (2547), 25 March 2006, (translated by M. S.)

² E. Bendyk: *I Bóg stworzył ewolucję*, "POLITYKA", nr 3 (287), 22 January 2005.

³ The original belief that humans, life, the Earth, and the universe were created by a supreme being or deity's supernatural intervention. The intervention may be seen either as an act of creation from nothing

US citizens believe that man was created by God 10 000 years ago, 40% agree that evolution of *Homo sapiens* lasted millions of years but was managed by God and only 10% believe that man evolved in a natural way from lower life forms without the interference of God⁴. That shows that it is very hard to agree, that we are part of nature and animals are our relatives, which in our culture we should respect. Human privileged position has been shaken.

One hundred ninety third ape

In 1967 a book *Naked ape* by Desmond Morris turned out to be another step in the abolition of the anthropocentric ideas. "There are one hundred ninety three species of apes living in the world. One hundred ninety two of them are hairy. One exception is a naked ape, which called itself *Homo sapiens*. This unusual and highly successful species is devoting lots of time to analyse lofty motives of its behaviour, trying to ignore basic motives at the same time"⁵ – that is how the famous book begins. The author analyses homo sapiens from ethological point of view, just like another animal species, describing its sexual behaviour, exploration, fight, nutrition, body care and its attitude toward other animals. In some parts of the world this book has been forbidden by the Roman-Catholic Church and illegal copies were confiscated and burned. The author has been rained with religious treatises. Morris still states that we have been endowed with the former reflexes exist in us from millions of years and with the new ones only for several thousands of years – and there is no hope to get rid oneself from the genetic basis of all previous evolution. We should understand and accept our animal nature⁶. Biological sciences have stepped into the field traditionally occupied by sociology or philosophy and contribute to the dispute on human nature.

It is generally thought that a biological view on human nature in contemporary social sciences has its origin in Thomas Hobbes' concept of invariability of human nature which is egoistic⁷. *Homo homini lupus est* and *bellum omnium contra omnes* is a concise way of charactering human nature and social relations. Hobbes derived this concept from his way of understanding the biology of man.

What distinguishes humans from animals?

There are some arguments that are repeated by many scientists, anthropologists and philosophers: self-consciousness (e. g. *being for itself* according to J. P. Sartre's qualification), ability to speak and use symbols, rational thinking, producing tools, creating culture etc. But today's science gives us evidence that many

(*ex nihilo*) or the emergence of order from pre-existing chaos (*demiurge*).

⁴ M. Rotkiewicz: *Ten diabeł Darwin!*, "POLITYKA", nr 46 (2530), 19 November 2005.

⁵ D. Morris: *Naga małpa*, Warszawa 1997, p. 23. (translated by M.S.)

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 260.

⁷ See: T. Hobbes: *Lewiatan*, tłum. Cz. Znamierowski, B. Stanosz, Warszawa 2005.

animals (especially primates) possess a lot of these features. Gordon Gallup's experiments with chimpanzees recognizing themselves in the mirror (1977) show that some animals possess self-consciousness. Experiments with teaching chimpanzees and gorillas to use American Sign Languages succeed. Washoe, Lucy and Lana taught at the University of Nevada in Reno, could use about 200 symbols and even created new phrases, for example "orange apple" for orange, or "drinking fruit" for watermelon. Some apes are also producing simple tools, like sticks to eat termites. Some other "inventions" have been observed in Japan among wild group of rhesuses⁸. One of them learned how to separate crops from sand by throwing it into water. Other young monkeys also learned how to do it, and this knowledge has been passed to other generations in the island. Is this a sign of a primitive cultural evolution?

What is the status of monkey as a person? These animals are our closest relatives. In western culture monkeys or apes are considered to be a travesty of human being. It is offensive to be compared to a monkey. But in Malaysian language "orangoutan" means "forest man". Some cultures do not treat monkeys with contempt. In recent times there are many groups of people which are fighting for animal rights. International organisation The Great Ape Project aims at convincing United Nations to give primates rights to live and to be free. But the term 'dignity' is reserved only for humans.

The latest genetic and molecular research shows that human and chimpanzee's genomes are the same in 98,4 %⁹! Only 1,6 % of our DNA is purely human. That rises a question: what would happen if we added those genes to a chimpanzee's genome? Such an experiment could be possible with today's level of science¹⁰. What would happen if this transgenic monkey was able to speak? It shows that the border is very blurred. It is put arbitrarily. In recent times some people were also excluded from humanity: some nations like Pigmies, Native Americans, also black people and women. When in 1776 Thomas Jefferson was writing Declaration of Independence opening with words that all men are equal, he meant only white males who had property. All further history is history of enlarging the idea of humanity.

Sociobiology – fall of the wall or a gate in it?

Another great tremor which could be dangerous to our imagined wall came in 1975, when the book *Sociobiology: The new synthesis* by Edward O. Wilson was published. This date is considered as the formal date of the rise of the new science – sociobiology. Its creator defined it as "the systematic studies on biological basis

⁸ A. Mościkier: *Spór o naturę ludzką. Socjologia czy socjobiologia?*, Warszawa 1998.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 69.

¹⁰ However, we should note, that it is quality, not quantity, that counts.

of all social behaviour”¹¹ (human and animal). Human nature in the field of sociobiology is a category of genetic inheritance and evolutionary natural selection.

Three years later Wilson published *About Human Nature* devoted to sociobiology of human culture. In this book he seeks biological justifications of all cultural aspects. Cultural and biological evolution are coupled together and called “coevolution”. Social behaviour of humans and animals derives from the same genetical basis and should be considered in close connection. Does it mean that the new science is building a bridge between the two separated worlds? What is the status of this science and what kind of influence does it have on the image of human being? I will try to answer these questions further on.

According to Wilson “it is time when ethics should be taken from hands of philosophers for a while and should be biologised”¹². Knowledge about animal behaviour, especially primates, led to a conclusion that their behaviour can be expressed in categories of good and evil.

Another famous sociobiological theory is a concept of “selfish gene” by Richard Dawkins. Dawkins is probably best known for his popularisation of the gene-centered view of evolution – a view most clearly set out in his books *The Selfish Gene* (1976), where he notes that all life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities, and *The Extended Phenotype* (1982), in which he describes natural selection as the process whereby replicators out-propagate each other. Genes are just like Leibnitz’s monads - they are the basic units of life and have no windows. As an ethologist, interested in animal behaviour and its relation to natural selection, Dawkins advocates the idea that the gene is the principal unit of selection in evolution. But are we just containers for genes? He has been accused of reductionism many times. That is because many sociobiologists tend to generalize and easily transplant their view on the consequences of natural selection to the human society. For example, the thesis about different male and female strategies to maximize the chances to multiply their genes in future generations, so that men are “naturally” promiscuous and women faithful and caring, is derived from the fact of asymmetry of a spermatozoid and an egg cell. That over-simplifying statement has been criticised *inter alia* by feminist theorists.

Dawkins also coined the term *meme* (analogous to the gene) to describe how Darwinian principles might be extended to explain the spread of ideas and cultural phenomena, which spawned the theory of memetics. This theory could be considered as symbiosis of biological sciences and humanistic sociology or as an attempt sociobiology’s to step into the field of social sciences.

¹¹ E. O. Wilson: *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, Harvard 1975, p. 322.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 562.

Modern biotechnology and transhumanism

People are able to create new organisms, manipulate genes, clone human embryos, create an organism from one tissue, make bacteria produce an insulin hormone, increase immunity of plants or animals and many more. Genetic modifications stepped into our world, we eat transgenic plants, we can have test-tube babies and cure some genetic diseases. The humans privileged position let us manipulate other organisms and play God.

In 1996 the famous sheep Dolly was cloned in Roslin Institute in Scotland. In 2003 human cells were implanted to a rabbit's ovum - a human-animal hybrid came into being. It was created by scientists from Medical University in Shanghai. In 2004 people from Mayo Clinic in Minnesota created a pig with human blood. In 2005 Irv Weissman from Stanford's Medicine and Cellular Biology Centre created mice with human nerve cells¹³. Thousands of experiments with transmitting human genes into animal embryos are conducted. The question is: what is the status of those hybrids? How should we treat them? Those organisms exist on the borderline and they do not belong to any known category. According to Francis Fukuyama the concept of transhumanism¹⁴ can be very dangerous.

Of course another question arises: why do we develop such experiments? Is it just curiosity driven research or do those manipulations actually help us in understanding some processes and develop science? In my opinion there are many totally useless experiments, which do not explore any field of science. It is also very naïve to think that human and animal reactions to some substances are identical. For example, mice are able to tolerate 700% potassium cyanide dose, lethal for human¹⁵. Also ethical controversies are crucial in this point. Many times experimenters assume that animals do not feel pain, so we can manipulate their bodies, which are just objects, in a mechanical Cartesian way of thinking, which leads to instrumentalization of the non-human world.

Who is going to propose new relations between human and animal world ?

I tried to show that the wall falls into pieces. Humankind did not come from nowhere, we evolved from lower animals. Denying our affinity with animals is hopeless. We have built the border and now it is crumbling. We have to think what to do with it. Should we replace it with something else or sustain it?

Whose job will it be to propose something else - philosophers' or sociobiologists'?

¹³ B. Kastory: *Zabawa w Pana Boga*, "Newsweek", 17 April 2006.

¹⁴ Transhumanism is an international intellectual and cultural movement supporting the use of new sciences and technologies to enhance human physical and cognitive abilities and ameliorate what it regards as harsh aspects of the human condition, such as disease and aging.

¹⁵ H. Korpikiewicz: *Wpisani w Naturę. Spojrzenie holistyczne*, in: H. Korpikiewicz (ed.): *Człowiek, zwierzę, cywilizacja. Aspekt humanistyczny*, Poznań 2001, p. 370.

S. Rose, L. J. Kamin and R. C. Lewontin proposed a dialectical view, which aims at understanding relations between biological and social attitudes¹⁶. Basic assumption of dialectical point of view is a mutual connection and determination of features of parts and a whole. Features of an individual human being do not exist in isolation but they are a consequence of its social life as a human being, not for example a plant or a horse. Dialectical concept is far from dividing the world into separate classes of phenomena, culture and biology, mind and body, which are explained in different ways. Also a whole range of ecological theories show that human being is part of the circle of life; to mention deep ecology or holistic ecological point of view, which state that it is useless to deny our connection with animals. Those theories draw a lot of knowledge from modern science, biology, genetics or physics. Each atom of our body exist for billion of years, being a part of minerals, plants and animals. Individual atoms are invariable, so they are circulating amongst organism all the time. Another important paradigm of ecological theories is an ethical rule of responsibility. There are many levels of responsibility, and it is important to note that some of them are still very anthropocentric, like deriving the rule of being responsible (which concerns only human) from anxiety of preserving only our species or the nature for further generations (for example the imperative of responsibility by Hans Jonas). If we widen our moral universe and include interests of other living creatures, we abandon this anthropocentric outlook. It could be a first step to a new humanism which would be able to value the biological processes of life.

Luc Ferry, a French philosopher, reminds us in his book *What is men?* that even very convincing results of scientific research must not give decisive arguments to create moral systems¹⁷.

David Hume pointed out that science finds out what *is*. But from statements about what *is*, you can not create sentences about what *should be*. One must not derive ethical norms from scientific facts. Many scientists do not understand that rule (for example Edward O. Wilson or Richard Dawkins) and try to explain morality and religion using scientific method. Doing so, they abandon hard ground of science and step into the field of metaphysics. Science, which is trying to create ethics becomes scientism, a kind of belief like religion. For another great philosopher, Spinoza, science was very important, but not as the egocentric technical domination over the Nature, but rather as a way of self-improvement of human being. Only a perfect, rational man is able to find his place in the world, and to understand Nature.

Do we lose something if we acknowledge that we are products of evolution? I think that we do not, if we understand that scientific knowledge about ourselves

¹⁶ A. Mościkier: op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁷ E. Bendyk: *Dlaczego jesteściey dobrzy albo źli*, "Niezbędnik Inteligenta, POLITYKA", nr 50 (2482), 11 December 2004.

does not limit our freedom. It does deprive us of illusions. But do we regret that Copernicus deprived us of the illusion that Earth is the centre of the Universe?

We should not be afraid of scientific knowledge about human being dangerous. It might be if boors interpret it. Biological conditionings of human behaviour does not mean that we will become beasts.

The wall is not such a strong construction as we could expect it to be. The builder of it is destroying its structure. In my opinion it is obvious that the border between animal being and human is put arbitrarily and is very fluent. If one looks closer it is not a hard brick wall, but rather a living hedge. Some theories, books, experiments or facts can show it to us. We should not be indifferent to it.