Chapter Three – Human Nature
Who or What Are We, And What Are We Doing Here?

Roots of Wisdom
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Chapter Review

The Issued Defined

- What is human nature?
- If a computer can pass for a human being, does this mean there are no essential differences between humans and computers?
- Are human beings unique among animals?
- Is there something that sets us apart and makes us human?

A Case Study

- An African Grey parrot, named Alex by his owner Professor Irene Pepperberg, had a parrot's capacity to imitate human speech sounds. However, with the brain size of a shelled walnut, Alex demonstrated his capacity for thought and intention.

- Sometimes, Alex even used to give the right answer to.

- What distinguishes Alex the African Grey parrot from human beings?

Human Nature

- Avocado View
  - An enduring, stable self is seen as existing at the core of a person

- Artichoke View
  - A person is understood as protean with no enduring stable core

Human Nature
Avocado View

- Effect of Western Essentialism on Women

  - Plato and Aristotle valued reason as defining human nature; both identified men more with the rational element and women more with the irrational element – emotions and the body

  - Plato did assert that women and men with the right nature could aspire to be philosopher-king

  - However, in the fourth century, the Christian Church debated whether women were made in the image of God – or, instead, in the image of man

Human Nature
Avocado View

- The Islamic Tradition

  - humans (male and female) are created in the "form of God [Allah]"

  - no original sin – instead, forgetfulness

  - humans have dual status, as servant and viceregent of God

  - nafs – the false, temporary identities that keep humans from experiencing their true spiritual essence

Human Nature
Artichoke View

- Existentialism or the self-created self

  - stands in contrast with the essentialist views of Plato and Aristotle

  - asserts that a person comes into being as a bare existence and exists without a fixed essence

  - by choosing and standing accountable for our choices, we can create a "self"

Human Nature
Artichoke View

- Nahua Three Element Balance Model

  - Tonalli, which resides in the head, provides vigor and vital energy for growth and development

  - Teyolia, which resides in the heart, provides memory, emotion, knowledge, and wisdom

  - Ihiyotl, which resides in the liver, provides passion, bravery, and happiness

  - only during human life on earth are these three forces fully commingled in a human person

  - working in harmony they can produce a mentally, physically, and morally pure, upright, whole, and balanced person

Non-Western Views

- Hinduism and Buddhism
  - in some Hindu thinking, a stable core self, or atman, persists and is identical with Brahman, the ultimate ground of being
  - in contrast, Buddhist doctrines propose the opposite of atman, i.e. "anatman" to describe the nature of the human person: there is no permanent, separate self

Non-Western Views

- Chinese Five Element View
  - Some Taoist thinking portrays the person as composed of the same five elements (fire, wood, metal, earth and water) that make up the rest of the cosmos

- African Synthesis Model
  - Some African thought understands a complementary equality of male and female principles evidenced in the same figure – whether it be a High God or a human child.

Meaning of Life

- Non-Western Views
  - creativity in African thought
  - harmony and balance in Taoist thought
  - enlightenment in Buddhist thought

- Western Views

  Sense of a unique human nature has led to conceiving of the meaning of life in terms of the meaning of being human

Human Identity and Freedom

- To what extent do racial and ethnic labels, as well as gender, shape how we think of ourselves?

- Is it even possible to ignore our physical characteristics?

- Is it possible to be color-blind or gender-blind?

- Are race, gender and sexual orientation the source of prejudice and the basis of discrimination? Or the foundation for pride and group solidarity?

- Race, gender and sexual orientation as examples of the variables sometimes involved in addressing questions of the meaning of life and/or of being human

Key Terms

- Hadith
- Al-ghaflah
- Al-fitrah
- Al-'abd
- Al-khalifah
- Jihad
- Nafs
- Patriarchy
- Feminism
- pathe

- Modernism
- Postmodernism
- Atman
- Anatman
- Skandhas
- Enlightenment
- Nirvana
- Ch'i
- Tonalli
- Teyolia
- Ihiyotl
- Mawu/Lisa
- Okra
- Behaviorism
- Androgyny
- Plastic