

---

# UNIT 1    ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN

---

## Contents

- 1.0    Objectives
- 1.1    Introduction
- 1.2    The Inner Conflict
- 1.3    Animal *Symbolicum*
- 1.4    The Phenomena of Human Development
- 1.5    The Human Being in Common with all Observable Reality
- 1.6    Human Being in its Uniqueness
- 1.7    Transcendence
- 1.8    Hermeneutics of Human Development
- 1.9    Consequences
- 1.10   After-Life
- 1.11   Let Us Sum up
- 1.12   Key Words
- 1.13   Further Readings and References

---

## 1.0    OBJECTIVES

---

- To study the uniqueness of human being in the process of evolution of life.
- To familiarize the students with the larger issues related to human development.

---

## 1.1    INTRODUCTION

---

In the unit we want to study the origin and development of human being, not from biological but from philosophical point of view. We start from our normal daily experiences and see how we have evolved in terms of our relatedness to the rest of the universe and to our closest cousins, the animals. We finally show that there are some areas in our human development that make us distinctly unique: we call it *Weltoffenheit* or soul.

---

## 1.2    THE INNER CONFLICT

---

Let us begin our understanding of the origin and growth of the human person not on a too idealistic note, one that blinds us to the shades and darkness in the human psyche. If there is in us a noble quest for meaning, a relentless thirst for God, a drive that sends us out of ourselves to the world (especially the world of persons) in an outreach of love, all of us recognise that there is within us also a drive for power and selfishness. ... a “baser side to our selves”. St. Paul was thinking of these when he wrote: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... I do not do the good I want,

but the evil I do not want is what I do. ... I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.” (Rom 7:15ff) How do we explain this “inner conflict” that divides the very depths of our being? One simple answer is provided by Plato : the spiritual “soul” which is good and seeks to rise up to eternal truths and ideal forms, but the corrupt and corrupting “body” keeps pulling it down to transient, material “shadows”. Assuredly, this is a dualistic, oppressive (because anti-body) understanding of human being.

A slight variation of the above is the traditional (Augustinian-dominated) conception of original sin in Scholastic philosophy. As a result of the “sin of our first parents” (taken to be historical persons) our inner being has somehow been “wounded” or “vitiating” and thus an “inclination to evil” has somehow come down to us along with the “stain of original sin” (like any of the other genes and what not that we have due to heredity). However, it is good for us to remember that the Adam and Eve story is not a primary datum: it is an interpretation of a primary datum. As Ricœur puts it, “the exile is a primary symbol of human alienation. ... [and] the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise is a mythic account of the second degree, bringing into play characters, a locale, a time, fabulous episodes” (Ricoeur). Immeasurable harm has been done to countless millions of dedicated religious believers – as Ricœur himself laments – by forcing them to a literal understanding of the story as one of the requisites of religious faith. No small “agony of conscience” was produced among such sincere people who felt thereby constrained to reconcile their religious faith, to which they intended to remain faithful, with their scientific and professional knowledge, which seems to contradict this Augustinian speculations. The datum is the experienced fact of human alienation of the inner conflict within human being. Could we not put this down to the as yet unfinished working of evolution? That is, we haven’t “quite ungrown” the Law of the Jungle (“might is right”, “survival of the fittest,” etc.) and this final vestige of our lower, beastly nature still lingers on within us to cause disharmony.

---

### 1.3 ANIMAL SYMBOLICUM

---

Contemporary thinkers have often referred to human being as an *animal symbolicum* – which may be translated as “symbol-using animal”. This is another felicitous expression which brings out the basically integrative (and thereby liberative.) understanding of how the traditionally called “spiritual” and “material” elements fuse together in the human person. Firstly, thanks to Maréchal , we see how human person is not just “open” to the world and beyond, right up to the fullness of reality, to God. On the other hand, we also see how the external world collaborates, as it were, in this quest of human being by pointing beyond itself to that same Ultimate. One constitutive element of a symbol is that it points to something other than itself. In this sense “all reality is symbolic”. Again, human person is a being that *needs* symbols. It has been one of our (recently-exploded) contemporary conceits that “modern man” has no need of symbols (nor of myths and, perhaps also, rites – for these are further developments of symbol see Desbruslais, 1984).

After all, it was argued, our ancestors were too primitive to be able to attain our sophisticated level of abstract thought. So they had to have recourse to symbol,

myth and so on. But we, enlightened moderns, can dispense with such childish things and come straight to the raw material of metaphysics directly. Well, a full scale rejoinder to this snobbery is out of place here, but in the light of Maréchal’s study we can say a few things. Human being, inasmuch as s/he is embodied, incarnate, enfleshed cannot envisage (much less relate to in any inter-personal depth) a totally disembodied, un-incarnate and unfleshed reality. Somehow her/his embodiedness must also enter into the relationship, else her/his personhood would experience an un-ignorable element of frustration. After all, we aren’t pure spirits but (in Rahner’s phrase) spirit in the world (refer back to earlier pages for some of the implications). Hence, in order to ensure the full meaningfulness of inter-personal relationships, we have to somehow “embody the disembodied”. Thus our bodily dimension can enter into the relationship and find its fulfilment. Now, to “embody the disembodied” is to do none other than make a symbol. That is why, when you love somebody (and love is, in itself, a disembodied thing) we have to embody this love through hand-shakes, embraces, the giving of gifts, going out together and like. For that reason, too, we need statues, holy pictures, religious rites. All of these participates in the nature of symbols and it is important, of course, that we recognise them for what they are: symbols, not idols. “Idols must die so that symbols can live”. Unfortunately, however, just as we mechanistic moderns have a propensity to reduce mystery to problems, so have a parallel perversion which seduces us into distorting symbols into idols (Pandikattu 2000).

Common Parlance

Modern European languages are built on ideas and roots taken from ancient Greek and so it is inevitable that some of the slants and biases of the Hellenistic world should have entered into our everyday life through our usage of such words. When we use the word “man”, we are, in effect, saying that what is most characteristic of human reality is that s/he has a mind (Latin *mens* – of the Sanskrit *manas*, whence our own *manushya* and its derivatives). The incarnate dimension of this “mind” is by-passed. So also, when we talk of “spirituality”, are we not implying that what matters in human development is the cultivation of her/his “spirit”? On the other hand, the word ‘*human*’ suggests a more integrated insight: it reminds us that we are *humus* (Latin, earth) plus *mens* – earthy minds. This is a conception that comes very close to Rahner’s “Spirit in the World”.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) Give two traditional explanations for the inner conflict in us.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) “Symbols are innate to human life”. What is its philosophical explanation?

### 1.4 THE PHENOMENA OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Having defined, more or less, the extent and the limits of the question before us as also given a hint as to with what attitude we intend to approach it, let us plunge boldly into the issue by first sizing up the data. What is the *given* on which we must base our answer/response to the matter? We need to keep this clearly before our eyes. It’s our only recourse to ascertaining whether we, or anyone else for that matter, have overlooked or exaggerated one or other aspect of the multi-faceted reality which is the human person. Approaching the phenomena with as open a mind as possible, it seems that we cannot but recognise two groups of data which, at first sight, seem down-right contrary (if not contradictory or complementary). In certain dimensions of human activity, we are struck by a certain *oneness* with all observable reality. On the other hand, certain human activities stand out as quite *unique* and distinct: no other observable agent on the face of this earth gives evidence of the identical operations (to borrow a term from metaphysics).

### 1.5 THE HUMAN BEING IN COMMON WITH ALL OBSERVABLE REALITY

When we, the human reality, look around us at the world in which we live, we notice three types of beings, basically. First, there is what is traditionally been called the “mineral kingdom” which comprises a vast and multifarious array of elements and compounds, some solid, some gaseous and some liquid – non-living things (we shall have to pause in a moment for a brief reflection on what is meant by us when we speak of life ...). Then there is the “vegetative kingdom”, with which we enter the realm of living things. Under this rubric is another host of things: plants, fruits, vegetables, trees and such like. Finally, there is the “animal kingdom”, living-things that have sensation and are capable of locomotion, with all their species and sub-species. This would include all manner of reptiles, birds, insects, fish and those which, in common parlance we call “animal proper”.

“A man for whom his body is an object is a man without a body. He is not a man at all....[D]epersonalization can be traced in the drive for power, in which men are often tempted to seek their perfection. As long as power is linked with the body in a reasonable proportion, as long as I can sense or at least imagine the things over which I have power, I can act as a responsible agent, as a person fully accountable for my acts. But the divorce of power from personal responsibility, the divorce of power from the human body, progressively corrodes the sense of responsibility itself. Thus an airplane pilot, to use an example ..., who would

hesitate to crush out the life of a butterfly, will trigger without the least hesitation the bomb that sends thousands to their death. No longer experiencing any personal responsibility for the power he exercises; aware of power only as an abstract object grasped through the manipulation of handful of gadgets - man soon becomes a prey to his own servant. Cut away from the person, power thus tends to objectify itself and to master its servant. The end is still further dehumanization, the price we must be willing to pay for our refusal to understand the unity and integrity of human person.” (Wilhelmsen 1962, 45-46)

Let's begin with the *mineral kingdom* and *human being*: what do we have in common? Well, to begin with our body is 65% oxygen, 18% carbon, 1½% calcium 1% phosphorous and 1½% other elements. In other words, there is no chemical element (or compound, for that matter – we are 70% water.) in the human body that is not found in nature. As someone has well put it, “We are cousins of stones and our sisters are the stars.” And who has not had a doctor telling us that we need some more iron to our diet (though it wouldn't quite work if we tried to eat a nail.)? Truly are we *of* the planet earth. As for the *vegetative kingdom*, it is characterised by four basic “living” activities: growth, reproduction, nourishment and repair. And so do we share, with it, these basic vegetative functions. We also grow, take in nourishment, produce offspring and wounds and injuries that we undergo (unless too severe) gradually heal themselves. And need we add, all plant life share in the same chemical composition as the various elements and compounds in nature.

Finally, there is the *animal kingdom* which, in addition to the vegetative activities mentioned above, has also locomotion (can get up and go elsewhere for food, not being rooted in one place like a plant) and, in addition, gives clear evidence of sensation (that is, can see, hear, smell, taste and touch – which include feeling pain and pleasure). All these animal activities are ours too.

And maybe we can pause briefly to ask ourselves what we mean when we say that a thing has life, is alive. Actually “life” is a kind of short-hand term for a complex of activities and when a being gives evidence of them, we say that it is “alive”. What is the trait that runs through this whole “complex of activities” we have mentioned? In everyday life, we say things like, “Look, it's moving: it must be alive.” Life, then, would be characterised by movement. But cars move and so do machines (so long as someone drives them or pushes the “start” button – and they're in “working order”). Would we be prepared to call them “alive”? I dare say not. We would, no doubt, revise our “definition” to identify life with “self-motion” (locomotion). A being which is able to move itself without any apparent pulling of strings or shoving or pushing from outside is alive. Here, of course, the meaning of “motion” or “movement” would be widened from its usual connotations of local motion (capacity to transport oneself from one place to another), which is, strictly speaking, a property of the animal kingdom alone and not of plant-life. It would encompass any self-initiative activity (growth, reproduction and the like). But a further refinement might be necessary. Today we know that there is tremendous activity in the sub-atomic world: neutrons, protons and what not whirling around – would we be prepared to say that all sub-atomic reality is alive? To begin with, these activities do not involve growth, nourishment, reproduction and repair. They are all geared to maintaining the *status quo*: at keeping the molecule of oxygen or whatever to be a molecule of oxygen and nothing else. Vegetative activity, on the other hand, does more than



that: it provides the positive dynamic development (perfection) of the organism concerned. Let us then sum up these activities as “self-developmental” or “self-perfective” activities and conclude that “to have life” means to exhibit signs of such activity. This is what life means phenomenologically. It would be interesting to pursue the matter to a deeper, metaphysical level and explore life as a “degree of having-being” (Pandikattu 2011). But that is beyond the scope of this unit.

---

## 1.6 HUMAN BEING IN ITS UNIQUENESS

---

There are other equally evident and undeniable activities of the human being which distinguish her/him from all other observable reality on our planet. The human being, and only the human being, gives evidence of these activities. They can be listed in various ways. We prefer to sum them up as the following trio: use of a conceptual language, creative art, transcendental religion. Some people would prefer to call these by different names. Others would include other activities. We prefer to limit ourselves to just these three for convenience of study and reflection (Desbruslais 1977).

In the first place, we do not say that only human being has a language, a means of communication: even bees and ants have some kind of language – they inform each other (by tapping their feelers on the ground, or whatever) as to where recently discovered food supplies may be found. But their communication is limited to very concrete and limited topics. Whereas we humans can, by means of abstract ideas and concepts, communicate to each other about theories and notions that go far beyond the immediately visible. And then there is the phenomenon of art and creativity. The human being is ever creating new styles of architecture, dress and so on; s/he is able to express her/his imaginative insights in a variety of ways from batik to sculpture to dance and painting. Animals have some instinctive know-how: how to construct their nests, burrows or whatever form of dwelling places they have. Some of them have a more or less elaborate mating “dance”. But they remain singularly devoid of any creative or artistic variations here. The same species or sub-species has always built its nest in the same way as far as we can reach back in recorded knowledge of these things. The scorpions and snakes haven’t come out with any new dance steps to vary their mating game. But look at the variety of styles and fads in architecture, dress, dance and what have you which characterise human social life.

Finally, human person is the only observable reality which has been able to form some sort of an understanding of the deity, be it gods, goddesses or spirits. Only human being has evolved a religion which concerns this whole area of her/his life. Various rites and rituals and religious beliefs have existed among men since the dawn of human history. There is nothing comparable to this in the animal kingdom. These three things together constitute the human culture.

---

## 1.7 TRANSCENDENCE

---

Can we suggest a word that will sum up what characterises these three unique activities of human being: conceptual language, creative art and religion? The word that comes to my mind would be *transcendence*, the capacity to go beyond, to pass over the immediately accessible. This is the quality that Wolfhart Pannenberg calls, in the German, *Weltoffenheit* (literally world-open-ness). We

shall soon be seeing that this is, perhaps, too passive sounding a word to designate a powerfully dynamic human trait. We are not just “open” to the world, like a door. On the contrary, we are driven from within to go forth to the world. Whence comes this drive and how it operates are questions that we must postpone for a little while.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What is life phenomenologically?

2) On what do you base human uniqueness?

1.8 HERMENEUTICS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Alternatives

Though in our chemical composition we are no different than the other things around us, yet we are capable of some activities that no other observable being can come out with. Shall we say that this is because there is in us two beings or principles of being, one which is in common with everything around us and one which is unique to the human reality alone and that it is the presence of the latter within us which makes it possible for us to do what other beings of this earth cannot? Or shall we say that we can do what others cannot only because we are more evolved, have – somehow or the other – been able to refine those some fundamental constituents so that they have become capable of transcendence? It all depends on how or why we set limits to the possibilities of the former element, call it matter, body or whatever (Desbruslais 1977).

Clarifying Terms

History has given us a legacy of terms to call these two constituents: spirit or soul and matter or body. Some thinkers have seen these two as fundamentally inimical to each other (Plato, for one). Others have seen them as not so inimical, perhaps, but make them such complete beings and so vastly unlike each other that they have not known how to save the unity of the human person nor explain how one can act upon the other. Many thinkers (and the whole Indian tradition in

general is heavily weighted in this direction) see the human person as fundamentally spirit or soul or mind and the body element as some kind of unfortunate appendage or prison-house or what have you. Obviously, in such a conception of things the body and its needs will not be taken seriously. It may be worthwhile to point out, at this juncture, that according to Thomistic philosophy, the human person is not a composite of “body and soul” as we may be led to think: it is prime matter informed by the human soul, which is its substantial form, that accounts for the human reality (Pandikattu 2011).

---

## 1.9 CONSEQUENCES

---

When we speak of the body-soul nature of human beings, it seems to indicate where one’s fundamental values lie. The more one opts for an integrated vision of human person, the more difficult is it to account philosophically for life after death. On the other hand, the more one feels a kindred spirit with all that surrounds us in this world, the more one is inclined *not* to subscribe to the view that “there is in us something that the rest hasn’t got”. No one would deny that the human person evinces certain activities – call it abstraction, transcendence or what you will – that no other observable being is capable of. Nevertheless, on what grounds can we say that such activity is completely beyond the powers and capacities of matter? Traditional Thomistic philosophy assumes this to be the case. That is one valid enough interpretation of the facts. However, there is another possible interpretation, along the lines of Teilhard de Chardin’s views. Could it not be that we are capable of these acts while “sub-human reality” is not? It is not because we have in us something special that they don’t have (a spiritual soul), but because the same ingredients have attained a higher “threshold” level of “complexification” (complexity) in us and such types of activity can only proceed when this threshold has been crossed? For by what right can we be sure that matter (by definition that which is extended, spread out or “has parts outside of parts”) can never refine itself, evolve or become sufficiently complex that consciousness (presence to self) and thereby abstraction and transcendence cannot emerge? Indeed, the doctrine of the Incarnation would have us envision matter and spirit as not such diametrical opposite, for if they were the very idea of God (Spirit *par excellence*) becoming en-fleshed would be an absurdity. Nor is there anything blasphemous or irreligious in this unorthodox-seeming view. All is seen in the perspective of God’s creative act: S/he it is who has willed that matter should be able to transcend itself when a certain level of complexity has been attained in the evolutionary process that s/he has willed.

---

## 1.10 AFTER-LIFE

---

The less integrated view, even in its Thomistic refinement which saves the human composite from blatant Cartesian dualism, assuredly makes “life after death” more credible inasmuch as it provides an easy hand with which to churn out neat proof of the same. After all, if there is in the human person something extra, something “more than or above matter”, then death would be the process whereby the merely material part of the person fell apart (corrupted, to use the metaphysical term) whereas the more spiritual element would remain untouched and would go marching on. This will be done in more detail when we take up precisely this issue in the next chapter. And, obviously, if we opt seriously for the integrity of the human composite and its oneness with all observable reality, we shall be



hard but to show what in us could possibly survive the undeniable phenomenon of death. However, as we shall see, there is a way out of the impasse – not a very satisfactory one for everyone, but a way out nevertheless. That will be the challenge for us today: to be open to the ethos of the world where we emphasise our worldliness and body without giving up the human quest for enduring values and the possibility of life after death (Desbruslais 1977).

### 1.11 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, after studying human’s evolutionary nature in general we have seen how humans are composed of the same material and chemical elements like any other animal or plant. At the same time we saw how we are unique in terms of conceptual language, creative art and transcendental religion. This leads us to posit a unique soul or *Weltoffenheit* in human beings, which does not deny our body and integrate it with other dimensions of human existence.

**Check Your Progress III**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) Is human beings made of body and soul according to Thomistic Philosophy?

2) How does Teilhard understand human uniqueness?

### 1.12 KEY WORDS

<b>Weltoffenheit</b>	:	Literally world-open-ness and it indicates human uniqueness as understood by Wolfhart Pannenberg.
<b>Animal symbolicum</b>	:	Symbol using animals. Humans are the only such animals.
<b>Complexification</b>	:	Teilhard de Chardin uses the term complexification to denote that matter, with increased complexity and nuances takes on new properties. He affirms that soul is the result of the complexification of matter.
<b>Life</b>	:	“To have life” means to have “self-developmental” or “self-perfective” activities

---

## 1.13 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

Desbruslais, Cyril. *The Philosophy of Human Person*. Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1977.

Desbruslais, Cyril. *Rites and Rituals*. Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1984.

Pandikattu, Kuruvilla. *Idols to Die, Symbols to Live : Dynamic Interaction between Language, Reality, and the Divine*. New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 2000.

Pandikattu, Kuruvila. *The Human Search: Issues in Philosophical Anthropology*. New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2011.

Donceel, J. F. *Philosophical Anthropology*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967.

Mann, Jesse Aloysius and Gerald F. Kreyche. *Reflections on Man; Readings in Philosophical Psychology from Classical Philosophy to Existentialism, under the General Editorship of Jesse A. Mann [and] General F. Kreyche*. New York: Harcourt, 1966.

Pasnau, Robert. *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature : A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae 1a, 75-89*. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Rahner, Karl. *Hearers of the Word*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.

Rahner, Karl. *Spirit in the World*. New York: Continuum, 1994.

Wilhelmsen, Frederick D. *The Metaphysics of Love*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962.