

Man – The Supernatural

By Felician Stancioiu, 2010

With successive generations, at some point in history that can be archeologically dated to around 40-50 millennia B.C., man essentially separated himself from the animal kingdom, raised above the primitive state in which bodily needs occupy all of one's existence and showed proof of an activity that is singular and defining: symbolic representation and abstract thinking.

Symbols, abstract representations and language were the concrete emanations of a realm of existence that essentially raised and continue to elevate man above the natural world (the world that we perceive with our five senses). This represents THE defining moment in human existence, the birth of the first beings that physically are planted in nature but at the same time are present and functioning on a different level of existence, one that is constantly and continually present and developed – spiritual realm. The conscious mind, reasoning, thinking – all processes that are present yet immaterial, intangible and not captured by our biological senses, has allowed man to progress in more ways that nature itself has done within the boundaries of known natural laws.

Humans unlike other earthly species were able to create things from own imagination rather than given by nature, things that made life easier and allowed accelerated progress of its own kind. Using and making fire to get warm and provide for better nutrition, drawing to communicate, using the wheel for better transportation, domesticating other species, growing (cultivating) plants from their seeds, constructing permanent dwellings; all these meant “raising above” the natural element by means of the immaterial, spiritual world of thinking, either analytical or creative.

It can be argued that other species show signs of superior cerebral capacities, such as the use of tools. Some birds and primates use twigs to gain access to food, many species communicate via sounds or otherwise, some species are organized in populations that include one or more families with specific individual roles, but there are clear limitations. The display of logical reasoning (other than use of tools) is only tied to food or survival (natural elements) and has been observed so far in primates that have been in close contact with humans for some time and with intensive training (outside of their natural habitats). This behavior is not the norm, but the exception in those species, and it is difficult to show the presence of elicited logical behavior outside of triggering stimuli (food), which make this kind of activity closer to a pavlovian reflex than abstract reasoning. Another important aspect is that this behavior is individual and has limited horizontal transmission (it cannot be conveyed by words or other abstract representation to other individuals of the species, which is the fastest and more efficient way of learning and progress).

Let's go back to the human brain and the defining moment of human existence - when man has become truly human, has raised above his environment and began existence as a new, qualitatively superior being with infinite potential of becoming and progress. This special moment has been present in various forms in most human cultures – defined as the repository of major human experiences and

achievements – and described as eating from the tree of knowledge with subsequent exile from the Garden of Eden, or the opening of Pandora’s Box. These are defining moments in human existence not only because they mark the beginning of a brave new world, the man-made world, where possibilities are seemingly endless, but also they mark the beginning of a trial-and error process in which man discovers good versus bad at his own expense, after leaving the shelter of what is already known to be good. In both accounts of this moment – biblical and that of Greek mythology – this moment of huge importance is presented as a drama and not as a source of unabated joy, perhaps because man was pushed into it unprepared, so it is inevitable that the journey is rough and there is no guarantee for a happy ending. However, later on this balance is corrected in the favor of man by appealing to God and respectively morals and ethics for atheists.

In this new brave, man-made world, knowledge – though essential – is not sufficient, and in fact history proved that *morals and ethics are necessary alongside progress* for a better world. Ethical behavior in itself is firstly a departure from selfishness, an extension of self; it does not make much sense at an individual level but makes perfect sense for a multitude of individuals, at a supra-individual level. Ethical behavior can be observed in some animals (those exhibiting social behavior), but it’s not an inherent nor essential characteristic of either animal or man, perhaps because ethical behavior is the furthest from survival instinct.

Personally I consider ethics being best represented by the laws of Decalogue; I believe this was the first and only system that has delegated supreme authority not to man, but to something – God – that is above man. Other codes of behavior (Hammurabi, etc) were written – emanated - from a man in position of authority and serve primarily to preserve their status; the Decalogue makes no difference in social status; all laws apply to everyone equally.

I also consider that ethics and morals can be seen as part of the Decalogue – or deriving from the Decalogue -, and the most encompassing definition of ethics is summed up by the first to laws of the Decalogue: Love God and your neighbor as yourself. Indeed, if you love others as yourself you’ll never need to wonder if what you’re doing is ethical, because you won’t be able to hurt them.

Even with ethics, God is needed to provide a final answer to what is good for man and what is not, because there are situations (war) where ethics simply cannot be fully observed (and therefore peacemakers are blessed, since they impede large-scale evil)

The best example of ethical behavior is the existence of Jesus Christ, in two major ways: not only of being the best proof of a superior realm of existence (Kingdom of Heaven) that is inaccessible to our senses, but also sacrificed himself as a supreme proof of love, so that others can benefit too from this gracious state of being.