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AN ORDINARY UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN BEINGS

Abstract: In this article I elucidate the term 'human being' by specifying concepts associated to it with intention of emphasizing the primacy of one concept in particular. This is Wittgenstein's concept of an ordinary human being as it is used in the *Philosophical Investigations* (2009). It is argued that this notion is logically primitive, that is to say, a basic element in our conceptual repertoire that can serve us as a preliminary source for analyzing diverse aspects of this individual. The idea is to outline here a conceptual framework wherein this individual can be studied.

Keywords: human being, person, logically primitive.

UNA COMPRENSIÓN ORDINARIA DE SERES HUMANOS

Resumen: En este artículo clarifico el término 'ser humano' a través de la especificación de conceptos asociados con la intención de enfatizar la primacia de un concepto en particular. Este es el concepto de Wittgenstein de ser humano ordinaro como es usado en las *Investigaciones Filosoficas* (2009). Argumento que esa noción es lógicamente primitiva, esto es, un elemento básico en nuestro repertorio conceptual que nos puede servir como una fuente preliminar para analizar diversos aspectos de este individuo. La idea is presentar aqui un marco conceptual dentro del cual este individuo puede ser estudiado.

Palabras clave: ser humano, persona, lógicamente primitivo.

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1. Introduction

What does it mean to say that an individual is human? It is generally thought that we place others in the 'human being' category insofar as we ascribe them a wide range of properties such as corporeal states like size, weight, and a physical location – and, more importantly, psychological states such as intentions, beliefs, desires, and feelings. Usually we do not have any trouble recognizing that others possess mental states or classifying other people as human. However, once we begin to view this matter from a philosophical perspective, we can question the nature of our knowledge of others as human beings. For how is it that we know for a fact that the individuals we see on the streets, with whom we interact on a daily basis, are actually people? Ultimately, the only mental states that are transparent are my own, whereas those of others lie beyond my realm of experience. If I am aware at all of the existence of these states, it is because *I* perceive my own —but I can only perceive the behavior of others and not the concrete beliefs, desires, and feelings motivating it, so the problem of whether it is an expression of mental states appears to be unsolvable. Thereby, if the only way I can decide whether others are human beings is by verifying that they have psychological states, it seems that I can never determine if I am surrounded by humans.

It could be argued in response that our ability to judge others as human beings rests solely on the capacity of recognizing that they must be attributed the sort of properties mentioned above. Still, this answer does not prove satisfactory as it presupposes that viewing others as human necessarily means recognizing them as worthy of the application of a large set of *human*-like properties. On the other hand, it could be said that we recognize the existence of psychological states in others based on the analogy with our own case, as this analogy provides us with sufficient knowledge about humanity in individuals. Yet, for one thing, the way in which my verbal behavior relates to my own mental states could hardly constitute an adequate basis for inferring that the

behavior of others correlate, in sufficiently similar ways, to their own mental states. The evidence I have so far gathered about my own case is notably limited, so it could not serve in accounting for an indefinite number of cases; it would merely allow hasty generalizations about what occurs in a far greater number of cases where others are involved. Furthermore, the way I verify psychological self-ascriptions significantly differs from the method through which mental properties are usually attributed to others. In contrast to other-ascription of mental predicates, I do not rely on the observation of my own behavior in order to self-ascribe these predicates (see Strawson 394). Given, then, that I cannot know solely on the basis of the analogy with my own case whether others have mental states like my own and which these might turn out to be, it appears that I cannot know, either, whether others are human, that is, if I can only know about the humanity of others after I have determined that they undergo such states.

Even so, it is not clear that we judge others as human beings only after we have reached the conclusion that they (must) have psychological states. An alternative approach to be explored in this article is that we naturally or instinctively treat others as human beings and attend to the psychological states they experience without previously questioning whether or not they possess such states. For if we are ever to know that others are people, it would rather be due to the characteristic reactions and responses they elicit from us.

Now, given the multiplicity of meanings of 'human being' such as the genetic and moral acceptations of the term, we should distinguish in the course of this inquiry which notion we have in mind to demarcate the traits of the being we are referring to. This way, we will be able to clarify what we mean when saying that a certain individual is human. I shall thus analyze several notions typically associated to the term 'human'. This analysis will primarily revolve around Wittgenstein's notion of a human being (1953). Other conceptions will be examined as well, particularly, Paul Snowdon's genetic notion (2014). Additionally, I will

advance and defend the claim that Wittgenstein's notion can be interpreted as logically primitive. To substantiate this claim, I will argue that there exists a parity of cases with Strawson's approach to the concept of person.

2. *Human Beings*

In the context of addressing a large set of philosophical assumptions, Wittgenstein appeals in his *Philosophical Investigations* to a common sense of 'human being' that applies to an individual who "has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious" (§ 281). He regards this individual as someone towards whom we possess a natural or instinctual attitude that consists of an extensive range of characteristic reactions, responses and dispositions. This is a creature that we automatically treat as someone in possession of mental states, which partly constitute what he is. This attitude goes hand in hand with the treatment of this creature *as a human being*, which crucially differs from a belief or opinion we form in order to include him in the human being category. As Wittgenstein states, "[m]y attitude towards him [i.e., a human being] is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul" (II, IV, § 22). The notion that human beings have mental states, then, is not just a conclusion we reach based on the observation of their verbal behavior. On the contrary, we have a practical concern towards these beings that results from several interactions with them, a concern particularly shown in reactions that contrast those we have towards other objects of our attention.

David Cockburn accounts for this 'practical orientation' as instinctually given "in part in the fact that certain emotions and actions would come naturally to me in response to certain behavior" on the part of a human being (6). Furthermore, he stresses how important this practical orientation is to Wittgenstein's approach by arguing that he places it in the center of his picture of the human being. What this picture offers is an ordinary context wherein numerous engagements with people already include

a characteristic treatment that reveals the fact that we already conceive them as having mental states. Wittgenstein's framework circumscribes an ordinary understanding of the human being meant to oppose a rationalist portrayal, where one would be in the position to treat others as humans only if one knew for a fact that they have experiences. In principle, this ordinary understanding would assist us in resisting the rationalistic view that leads us to be puzzled about whether others are actually human. Thus, from the ordinary standpoint, we *feel* compelled to react to someone's manifestation of pain, e.g., treating him in consequence as a human being, whether we take pity on him, respond irascibly, or else feel apathy. Indifference would not amount to the absence of a reaction but, rather, to one reaction more amongst others. The main discrepancy with the rationalist picture resides then in the natural fact that we do not usually infer the existence of a psychological state of pain residing somehow 'under the surface' of the human being grimacing in front of us. The target of our reactions is not a putative homunculus expressing his pain through the human being's features. Rather, the target is only the flesh-and-bone human being we are confronted with.

Moreover, conceiving myself as a human being involves in the same sense having a certain attitude towards myself, which is to say, a practically driven concern about me (20). This attitude, again, is instinctual in that it is not the end result of a thought process through which I confirm that I am actually human given that I happen to find 'in myself' psychological states like those of other humans. That I am a proper object of the sort of reactions and responses Wittgenstein has in mind is shown in the several ways I treat myself, while these in turn incite reactions and responses from other human beings. Ultimately, the attitudes I possess towards myself come about instinctually.

Resisting Behaviorism

Although Wittgenstein opposes the rationalist picture of human beings, this does not imply that he advocates for a class of physicalism such as behaviorism (*Philosophical Investigations* §

307). According to him, the object of our natural reactions and responses is not just a human *body*, for what sort of distinction are we making when we say that it is the body that feels pain and not the man? In effect, he asks, "How does it become clear that it is not the *body* [that feels pain]?" (§ 286) After all, there is some absurdity in saying that it is merely a body or a part of it that feels pain: "if someone has a pain in his hand, then the *hand* does not say so (unless it writes it)" (§ 286.). In the end, when it comes to tracking our own reactions and responses to someone's pain, it is the whole human being and not only his body who we sympathize with: "one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his eyes" (§ 286.). It is true that human behavior is a constitutive aspect of Wittgenstein's picture, but to limit the picture to this aspect would exclude several dimensions of the human being that are purposely meant to be encompassed in his depiction.

In this regard, John Cook advises against reading Wittgenstein as embracing behaviorism. When one interprets human beings in terms of their types of actions, one's ordinary judgments are not grounded in "protocol statements," which are propositions merely about humans conduct amounting to "colorless bodily movements" (118). Such an analysis would depart from our ordinary interpretation of the actions of humans, for it is not based upon such statements. Indeed, Cook maintains that the assumption whereby "we are forced to recognize descriptions (or observations) of bodily movements as being epistemologically basic in our knowledge of other persons" is unwarranted (118). Our ordinary perception of human beings does not rest on their description of them as bodies in movement. On the contrary, it is only after we have ordinarily judged the actions of humans that we can move on to a more abstract level of comprehension, thus perceiving them solely as physical objects moving through space. But this level would be derived from the ordinary perception of them and, ultimately, would depend on it.

The Holism of Living Human Beings

It is worth noting that Wittgenstein restricts the logical type of an individual deserving psychological attributions to a living human being and what resembles or behaves like it (*Philosophical Investigations* § 281). As discussed previously, recognizing others as human beings involves possessing a wide range of reactions with which to reciprocate them, insofar as they initially act in ways that provoke such reactions. Now, all of this is possible because of our responses to these individuals as particular forms of life. "Only surrounded by certain normal manifestations of life," Wittgenstein writes in *Zettel*, "is there such a thing as an expression of pain. Only surrounded by an even more far-reaching particular manifestation of life, such a thing as the expression of sorrow or affection" (§ 534). This suggests, broadly speaking, that the presence of human life is a precondition for our ascriptions of mental states. In the absence of human life, the aforementioned reactions and responses to humans could not be provoked and, consequently, people's psychological states would not be a matter of our concern. Actually, we do not include dead human beings in the category of individuals towards whom we react in the ways described by Wittgenstein because we do not regard them as having experience: "a corpse seems to us quite inaccessible to pain. — Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead is not the same. All our reactions are different" (*Philosophical Investigations* § 284). As Wittgenstein observes, this difference does not yet imply that we do not respond to human corpses in a specific manner, which is evidently different from, say, our responses to dead animals and inanimate objects. To be precise, the typical responses we exhibit towards human forms of life compose a distinguished set, the specificity of which delimits the attitudes we would consider to be oriented towards living humans and what resemble them. For example, we do not fear inanimate objects in the same sense that we fear the aggression of human beings. As Cockburn suggests, "[f]or most of us another's intense anger can be disturbing in a way which is quite different from that in which a landslide is generally thought of disturbing" (4).

Then again, we are not usually disturbed only because we have determined that someone must hate us on the basis of observing his demeanor, as if such hatred would potentially bring about harm to us by using his body in a specific way so as to inflict pain on us. Quite the opposite: we *feel* one way or another about a human being as a whole. Consider Merleau-Ponty's illustration:

> Imagine that I am in the presence of someone who, for one reason or another, is extremely annoyed with me. My interlocutor gets angry and I notice that he is expressing his anger by speaking aggressively, by gesticulating and shouting. But where is this anger? People will say that it is in the mind of my interlocutor. What this means is not entirely clear. For I could not imagine the malice and cruelty which I discern in my opponent's looks separated from his gestures, speech and body. None of this takes place in some otherworldly realm, in some shrine located beyond the body of the angry man. It really is here, in this room and in this part of the room, that the anger breaks forth. It is in the space between him and me that it unfolds … anger inhabits him and it blossoms on the surface of his pale or purple cheeks, his blood-shot eyes and wheezing voice. (85)

It is thus that Merleau-Ponty rejects the notion that psychological states inhabit something other than an entire human being. "Other human beings," he argues, "are never pure spirit for me: I only know them through their glances, their gestures, their speech – in other words, through their bodies" (82). By the same token, he continues, "*another human being* is certainly more than simply a body to me: rather, this other is a body animated by all manner of intentions, the origin of numerous actions and words" (82). Similarly, we can interpret Wittgenstein as thinking of the human being in a holistic way: namely, as a creature who we ordinarily perceive as undivided, capable of receiving psychological and corporeal ascriptions since he is uniformly the natural bearer of both.

The point, then, seems not to be so much that we are human because we have human bodies and human psychology. Instinctively, we respond to these creatures as having mental states and

processes with the same degree of confidence that we ascribe corporeal traits to them. To the same degree that we may trivially consider others as being of a certain weight and height – although we do not know exactly what those might turn out to be - we can rightly expect others to have intentions, beliefs, desires and dispositions. Therefore, whichever is the way we end up perceiving someone as a human being, we nonetheless treat him as one regardless.

Countering Skepticism of Other Minds

A notable implication of Wittgenstein's approach is that it presents a way out of the Cartesian problem of other minds. His line of argumentation serves as a precedent for contesting radical skepticism about the humanity of others. Insofar as our treatment of others is in accordance with our natural reactions and dispositions towards humans, such treatment demands no justification. The burden of the proof rather lies on the skeptic, who must provide sufficient evidence for questioning humanity in others by doubting the validity of our natural reactions and dispositions towards them. In fact, at times one may have reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the expressions of sorrow or pain of other humans; but in what contexts would one deny the humanity of individuals even though one manifests natural reactions toward them? Without the possibility of error, as Wittgenstein would say, we cannot possibly be right, so the skeptic would have to find plausible reasons to undermine the authenticity of our reactions. In this regard, Cook asks the following:

> If the question is whether they are people or not, we must ask: 'People as opposed to *what*?' And here the answer is not at all clear. If I look at my son playing near by and ask, 'What else might he be?', no answer suggests itself. He is clearly not a statue, nor is he an animated doll of the sort we sometimes see looking very lifelike. He is my own child, my own flesh and blood. (121)

Cook thus interprets Wittgenstein as claiming that, when pushed to the extreme, the skeptic's doubt becomes unsatisfactory. As a consequence of adopting the philosophical ideas of

'body' and 'bodily movement', he thinks that we create a metaphysical fissure between an ordinary human being and his body that cannot exist (128). However, once we take an ordinary human being to be central to our reactions, this fissure cannot exist. Thereby, in the absence of such a gap, the skeptic will have to find other ways to question the humanity of others. The burden of the proof lies with the skeptic, who must provide reasons for doubting our normal understanding of humans. In other words, the burden lies on those who want to deny humanity in the individuals towards whom the skeptics have already displayed natural reactions *as if they were* human beings. These reactions and responses are 'basic' in the sense that we do not need reasons for having them.

A skeptic, though, could try to shift the burden of the proof back and demand evidence from Wittgenstein which would substantiate his ordinary characterization of human beings. Still, at this stage Wittgenstein would claim that we have reached the rock bottom of our beliefs (*Philosophical Investigations* § 248). That we feel inclined to treat others as human beings is already part of what is involved in belonging to a human form of life. The only valid way to err in ascribing humanity to these forms of life would require seeing those individuals from outside a historical, social, and physical context. But, as we are already situated in a given context and we are in constant contact with other humans (Taylor 76), we cannot make sense of such radical doubt. The starting point of our inquiries is precisely a 'rough ground' (Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* § 107) where we ascribe mental properties to people. This ground does not have or need a foundation, inasmuch as one does not ordinarily need proof of the humanity of others to treat them as such.

In this respect, Wittgenstein observes a type of immediateness in the way that we become aware of the fact that others undergo mental states, particularly, as we naturally feel compelled to respond to the feelings, beliefs, and desires of others. Such immediacy takes place in the context of a 'rough ground' (§ 107) where everyday human beings interact with each other in several

ways. Notice, though, that Wittgenstein is not simply pointing out that there is a connection between having instinctive attitudes towards others and recognizing them as human beings. Instead, he provides a picture of this connection where the rationalist assumption that there is something more basic or fundamental than these attitudes – such as *recognizing* others as humans – is excluded. "The attitude," Cockburn explains, "is what is basic in our relations with each other; it does not have, or need, any underpinning in the form of a 'belief' about the character of what we are confronted with" (23). The reason is that we immediately and spontaneously come up with such a belief: "To 'recognize these as people', we might say, just is to have the attitude" (*Ibid.*). This explains why Wittgenstein does not see the need to justify our reactions and responses to individuals, since forming a belief about the character of others is one more attitude amongst others. Therefore, insofar as ascribing mental states to others occurs instinctively – i.e., as effortlessly as treating others like human beings –, forming an opinion about their psychological states is not in and of itself a 'basic' process on which our reactions and responses to others could be grounded.

Let us now turn to Strawson's conception of a person in order to establish the basis for arguing later on that Wittgenstein's human being concept can be shown to connote similar attributes.

3. Persons

In *Individuals* (1959), Strawson refers to a concept of a person that denotes a logical type of entity that can be ascribed different types of predicates, regardless of their class. This is, "the concept of a type of entity such that *both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation, etc. are applicable to a single individual of that single type" (388). These predicates apply to such an individual in virtue of the fact that *person* is a logically primitive notion, meaning that it has a central place in our conceptual scheme and in our linguistic practices. The fact that it is an elementary tool in our linguistic repertoire explains how it shapes

our attributions of states of consciousness. The concept of a person, he stresses, is logically prior to that of an individual consciousness or body (389), so that ascriptions of psychological and bodily properties are logically secondary, derived from the notion of a person (389). By implication, a person cannot be analyzed in terms of those psychological or corporeal concepts, i.e., either as "an animated body or … an embodied anima." (389). On the contrary, "states of consciousness could not be ascribed at all, unless they were ascribed to persons" (389) in that the existence of persons is a requisite for mental ascriptions. In other words, the primitive character of this notion is "a necessary condition of states of consciousness being ascribed at all," because they are ascribed "to the *very same things* as certain corporeal characteristic, a certain physical situation, etc." (389).

It follows that the idea of a 'pure individual consciousness' understood as a logical ingredient of persons could not exist, or, at least, he thinks that it could not exist as a primitive concept by appeal to which the concept of person could be explained. Rather, if such a notion exists at all, it must be "a secondary, non-primitive concept, which is itself explained, analyzed, in terms of the concept of person." (389). A person is thus conceived as a "two-sided thing," and not as the combination of "two one-sided things" (389) — i.e., as a mind or pure consciousness, on the one hand, and a discrete body, on the other. Therefore, affirming that an individual is a person would not involve conceiving it as an entity made out of a mind and a body (see Descartes 1997 48). From one perspective, a person is said to have a body, not to be one (Hacker "Strawson's Concept of a Person" 39). From another, mental states like beliefs and desires apply not merely to a body but to a person undergoing those states. According to Strawson, then, 'I' does not refer to an 'inner' subject of experience or else to someone's body. Instead, it refers to the *person* employing the pronoun, which is the genuine bearer of both psychological and material ascriptions. The genuine bearer of mental predicates – *a* person – is naturally suitable for 'I' "because I am a person among others. And the [mental] predicates

which would, *per impossibile*, belong to the pure subject [of experience] if it could be referred to, belong properly to the person to which "I" does refer" (390).

On the First Person/Third Person Asymmetry

When it comes to ascribing mental states, though, Strawson notices an asymmetry between first- and third-person methods of correction. It can be verified by contrasting how a subclass of psychological predicates is applied to oneself and how it applies to others. According to him, one attributes these predicates to oneself without the help of any behavioral criterion, but judges the correctness of their ascription to others solely on the basis of their behavior (394). Other-ascription of this set of predicates entails an intention or a state of consciousness which is shown in an action, that is, a pattern of bodily movements (398): "I mean such things as 'going for a walk,' 'furling a rope,' 'playing ball,' 'writing a letter'" (398). For instance, 'going for a walk' is a psychological predicate that we can ascribe to others based on the observation of their actions. The asymmetry, though, resides in the natural fact that I can self-ascribe this property without external basis of observation. To be sure, I can predict my actions without interpreting my own behavior. Strawson claims that that the basis for self-ascriptions of mental properties is "entirely adequate," and yet, "this basis is quite distinct from those on which one ascribes the predicate to another" (394), as this subset is other-ascribable only on the basis of behavioral criterion.

At the same time, Strawson considers that first- and third-person methods of correction of mental ascriptions are interdependent. Such interdependence lies in the fact that we can interpret others as suitable objects of mental predicates *only if* we are disposed to self-ascribe them. The reverse is also true: namely, we can predicate these psychological properties to ourselves without any observational criterion because we are disposed to ascribe them to others. Moreover, in order to interpret the bodily movements of others as *actions*, one conceives oneself in function of the concept of a person: "It is easier to understand

how we can see each other, and ourselves, as persons, if we think first of the fact that we act, and act on, each other, and act in accord with a common human nature" (399). As Hacker points out, the methods through which self-ascribable and other-ascribable psychological predicates are applied are not processes with absolutely nothing in common. They rather represent "two sides of a single coin" ("Strawson's Concept of a Person" 27). Indeed, he finds that "we interpret … the movements of the bodies of others only by seeing them as elements of plans of action akin to our own, of which we know the present course and future developments without observation of the present movements of our own body" (27). Strawson's idea, then, is that we ascribe *intentions* to the persons whose bodily movements we can observe because of a displayed pattern of action *only* to the extent that we are also disposed to ascribe such actions to ourselves. If one is to make sense of one's own intentions, one must have a sense of what it means to be a person with intentions or dispositions to actions, which can be developed only by conceiving others as relating to one another on the basis of what they intend to do. Therefore, the asymmetry existing between first- and third-person methods of verification does not make any one of these methods more indispensable over the other, for they complement each another in the process of learning how to apply psychological predicates pertaining to the subclass mentioned above.

Now that we have examined Wittgenstein's notion of a human being and Strawson's concept of a person, let us see in what ways there is a parity of cases between these approaches.

4. On the Logical Status of the Human Being Concept

"Human being" is an ambiguous expression that connotes at least four notions. First, there is the genetic sense of the term referring to a member of the *Homo sapiens* species (Cf. Snowdon 2014). Secondly, there is the moral sense that applies to a member of the moral community (Cf. Warren 1973). Furthermore, Aristotle defines a human being essentially as a rational animal,

offering thus a third notion that focuses on the cognitive capacities of this creature. Lastly, there is the ordinary notion instantiated in Wittgenstein's usage of the expression. I will now elaborate on the status of Wittgenstein's notion of a human being by considering whether it can be interpreted as primitive in our conceptual scheme. Then, I will describe the ways it relates to the genetic notion to further explain the central place it has in our conceptual scheme.

The Human Being in a Primitive Conception

As previously discussed, Strawson speaks of the primitiveness of 'person' in relation to the secondary status of notions like 'consciousness', 'mind', and 'body'. He argues that the notion of a person cannot be analyzed as that of an individual consciousness or body (389), while maintaining that ascriptions of states of consciousness, together with corporeal ascriptions, can be explained relative to a holistic understanding of a person. Even more, he conceives of the presence of a person as a necessary condition for the ascription of mental and physical states.

Similarly, we can characterize Wittgenstein's concept of a human being as primitive if it cannot be explained or analyzed either into the genetic, moral, or Aristotelian conception of a human being. Inasmuch as Strawson considers the concept of body to be derived from 'person', the ordinary concept of a human being is primitive or basic in relation to the (secondary) status of the genetic notion of a human being. If this is the case, the genetic, moral, and Aristotelian notions of a human being are not logical ingredients of the ordinary concept. Conversely, the ordinary notion must be a logical ingredient of the genetic, moral, and Aristotelian conceptions.

Moreover, Wittgenstein considers the human being holistically, which can be interpreted – like Strawson's conception of a person – as a unified object of our concern. To the same extent, then, it can be inferred that the common concept we possess of individuals must be present in our conceptual repertoire in a primitive form. For, in the end, through this concept we ulti-

mately attend to the common man. Practically speaking, from Wittgenstein's perspective we react to the ordinary human being and not just to *some* of its attributes, that is, regardless of what is our attitude towards the individual in its entirety. For instance, we are instinctively prone to attend to the person's suffering; his pain is part of our concern, but only insofar as it is a concern for his individual wellbeing. The ordinary human being, then, is not something we find in the world already categorized either according to a biological, moral, or psychological set of properties. On the contrary, it is after we grasp the common notion that we are able to develop other notions of a human being, depending on the interests and necessities of our endeavor.

Thus, since the ordinary concept occupies a central position in our conceptual network, it serves as a starting point on which the questions driving our inquiries about human beings are based. It would thus be possible to explain our ascriptions of biological, moral, and cognitive properties relative to humans based on our primitive understanding and employment of the human being notion, since these properties can all be traced to the common human. Either a biological, moral, or psychological examination has its own advantages and disadvantages. For although it serves to explain a series of aspects of the ordinary human, since it is interested in one sense of 'human being' over the rest, either investigation cannot do justice to all of the dimensions of the human being. Either way, as each secondary notion of the human being emerges by emphasizing aspects or characteristics of the ordinary individual, each can be said to derive from our ordinary understanding of this being, which is not yet categorized from either perspective.

Now, another way in which Wittgenstein's approach resembles Strawson's is that the presence of an ordinary human being can be interpreted as a necessary condition for the ascriptions of biological, moral, and cognitive characteristics. Let us examine as a case study how the genetic characterization of a human being presupposes the existence of the ordinary human being, to which we attribute biological properties that fix the latter within

the category of a species. What we need to find out, then, is whether the set of properties ascribable to the ordinary human can be exhausted in a complete and accurate biological description of this creature. Specifically, we need to determine if our applications of the ordinary sense of 'human being' can be satisfactorily explained in function of a biological account of this individual. With this intention, let us see how the genetic notion of a human being is employed in an animalist approach.

A Vantage Perspective on the Ordinary Human Being

According to Paul Snowdon, what persists over the course of a person's life is the bodily continuity of an animal. This view is supported on an identity thesis whereby "[e]ach of us is identical with, is one and the same as, an animal" (7). The person one is would amount to no more or less than a human animal situated in a discernible space, so that ultimately "[t]he person is the animal (where the person is)" (4). From his perspective, then, the person does not differ in any relevant way from the *Homo sapiens*. He suggests that many traits we would assign to the ordinary person or human being are explained by evolutionary theory, so that psychology, for example, is irrelevant to animal persistence over time. Its cognitive and linguistic capacities have thus arisen in the course of evolution, just as any other device from which this animal has benefited from (4). The development of these capacities is explained in terms of the ways this organism has thought about its environment.

Yet, Snowdon seems to expand the notion of 'animal' so as to capture diverse types of properties we generally attribute to the ordinary human. In his appeal to natural selection, he privileges the biological dimension of the ordinary human being by selecting the genetic category as the most 'basic' perspective to be taken on the human being. This way, the genetic concept is appealed to in order to argue that bodily continuity is what really matters when it comes to deciding what persists during the course of a human life. But it is not clear how this expansion of meaning would be justified. First, in its common sense, "human

being" is not meant to apply exclusively to the *body* of a human being. We rather denote with it a single entity, an individual of a primitive logical class. Actually, our instinct is to respond to the other as a human being with physical characteristics, and not particularly as a *homo sapiens*. Secondly, this use of 'animal' would at least not be completely justified by evolutionary theory, since, for all we know, the cognitive and linguistic faculties of this animal make it a special case in evolutionary biology. Indeed, we only attribute some traits to human beings – such as using language and having culture, which entails passing on knowledge to future generations. Thus, it is not clear how this broad conception of 'animal' would be supported through the appeal to natural selection.

Then again, the theoretical advantages of evolutionary theory are not in question. The expansion of the meaning of 'animal' could in turn be justified as offering one vantage perspective on the human being based on the background of evolutionary biology. That is, a standpoint on the ordinary human being from which we can predict and explain much of his behavior. Nonetheless, the point is rather that we do not *ordinarily* conceive of the human being as a *homo sapiens*: our understanding of a human being as pertaining to a species comes after the fact, when we classify what type of animal we are from the vantage point offered by evolutionary theory. Our primitive comprehension of the human being would thereby not presuppose or require the biological grounds afforded by evolutionary theory, as we can explain the actions and reactions of common human beings without its help. The issue then with how Snowdon expands the genetic notion of animal is that it sets stringent boundaries on the ordinary notion of a human being, whilst actually the ordinary concept lacks such limitations. Our primitive understanding of a human being does not involve a distinction between a genetic, moral, or psychological category. From Wittgenstein's perspective, the ordinary expression "human being" has no fixed or definite rules of application (see *Philosophical Investigations* § 81), just as any other ordinary expression. In consequence, we cannot

strictly define what an ordinary human being is based on necessary and sufficient conditions, given that this ordinary notion has no such sharp boundaries. Setting, then, those strict limitations would not actually solve the natural imprecision of the ordinary sense of "human being."

A Sense in which the Ordinary Human is Favored

But is not the ordinary sense of "human being" *just another sense* of the expression, so that in the end it is not logically primitive? For why should the ordinary concept be privileged over the other notions of a human being? At this stage, it is important to notice that, if the ordinary concept of a human being were primitive, it would only acquire this status in virtue of its relationship with other notions such as the genetic, moral, and Aristotelian. As the latter derive from it, the ordinary concept would be primitive in a relative way. There would not be, so to speak, a *real* sense of "human being" to be favored, for it is clear that this expression is ordinarily ambiguous — favoring such *real* sense would thus be artificial. The common sense, though, is preferred for its practical advantages, to the extent that it plays a central role in our conceptual practices, particularly, in relation to the use of notions derived from it. The ordinary notion is a precondition in our understanding of the different possible senses of "human being," so that without it we could not benefit from the theoretical advantages offered by adopting any particular notion connoted by it. Thereby, we only favor the ordinary concept insofar as it is the logical beginning of our biological, moral, and psychological inquiries.

On a final note, it is not clear though that metaphysical questions about the nature of human beings can be answered by favoring any secondary sense of "human being" over the rest. All one can do is point out the theoretical advantages and disadvantages of the biologist's viewpoint, who might be interested in the genetic sense; the psychologist's stance, who might be concerned with the cognitive-capacity sense; or, finally, the philosopher's (or someone else's) stance, who might be interested in the moral

sense. In our day-to-day life, however, we seem rather prone to viewing others as ordinary human beings in virtue of our practical concerns. The ordinary sense is thus favored insofar as we naturally fall back on it when it comes to characterizing others as human beings.

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