

Introduction: Enquiring about Mankind

It is an essential part of being human not only just to exist and live one's life, but in one's existence and with regard to all aspects of life to constantly enquire about who one is and to organize one's life in accordance with the answer to this question and to regulate one's dealings with the world, with oneself and with one's fellow human being. Man is unthinkable without this enquiry about himself and without seeking and finding an answer to this. He is forced – and that defines him as a cultural being – to make some kind of sense of his world and himself, of nature and others, because human life is only thinkable within the context of such meaningful orientation. Some kind of self-awareness of being a person only as a person forms part of this orientation indispensable for leading one's life. This is commonly understood as a concept of humanity. In shaping the cultural conditions of his life man creates his own image. His life is thereby a reflective process. This type of reflection is to be found in all cultures, at all times and in all kinds of places, and of course it manifests itself in various shapes and forms. Depending on the context in which the question of what man is gets posed, the answer can vary. This variety has an *historical*, but also a *cognitive* dimension. From an historical perspective it manifests itself as the multifariousness of cultural life styles, and in the cognitive dimension the knowledge about mankind takes on the form of various cognitive practices. These days those practices are embodied by the sciences. Both dimensions are closely interwoven and cannot be clearly separated. Although certain scientific disciplines have evolved world-wide and within different cultural traditions, they nonetheless have to come to terms with the vitality of these traditions, not least of all because their insights have to be absorbed by the various life practices at work in different cultural contexts. In addition to this, the provenance of the humanities from the tradition of Western thought is becoming increasingly problematic. In a critical perspective their normative demands are contextualized, historicized and thereby potentially relativized. The knowledge about mankind accumulated by the humanities is about to be destroyed by the relativism of its cultural conditioning factors without there being a viable alternative in sight. What is

therefore required is to critically reconnect the insights gained by the humanities with their various cultural contexts. Such a reconnection need not necessarily lead to surrendering all the normative claims made by the various human sciences, but on the contrary: it can enrich these claims with the enormous wealth of cultural experience, which itself is the primary object of research in the humanities. The explicitly intercultural reflection upon the hermeneutical tools the humanities have to develop for this purpose has begun by now and there is no reason to doubt that they are going to be successful. The final aim should be a deepening and an extension for those methods for understanding which the humanities have evolved over the last 200 years of their existence and development.

It would be problematic, however, to regard the insights provided by the humanities as absolutely decisive or as the sole source for our existential orientation, thereby confirming the idea of being human to those forms of the cultural production of meaning the humanities are capable of providing. They are, indeed, necessary but not indispensable, even less so in view of the cognitive status of the epistemology underlying the human sciences currently undergoing a process of critical revision. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that the normative claims of scientific knowledge derived from employing certain methodological procedures is based upon premises that have a limiting effect upon the meaning-making potential of the sciences. Human self-interpretation is not confined to rational acts of cognition but goes far beyond these, for instance in the sphere of the arts, in the field of everyday knowledge and also, of course, in that of religious belief, which even in the secular culture of modern civil society has not entirely lost its appeal. But without systematic thought, without the cognitive potential of reason, a useful self-awareness of human beings is not possible.

Another limitation of the cognitive achievements of the humanities as regards providing some practical orientation for human life consists in their multifariousness and high degree of differentiation, i.e. they appear as forms of knowledge that cannot be immediately equated with certain practical applications. For such a purpose those sciences that are focused on man as their object are too varied and too heterogeneous in terms of their approach and methodology. A comprehensive anthropology capable of viewing and explaining mankind in its totality does not exist: this applies even more because man as a cultural being is also part of nature, and hence nature and culture are thematized and researched in two completely incompatible epistemologies.

And yet, what is required is a comprehensive synthesis, or else the cultural orientation indispensable for human life-practices would have to have recourse to a kind of knowledge whose fragmentariness and heterogeneity runs counter to the demands made upon its ability to provide some orientation. Orientation

in this context means supplying a horizon of meaning for human life both in theoretical and practical terms, i. e. making part of the general objective guiding human action and of the way in which human beings cope with the experience of suffering. Horizons encompass the entire world and provide some point of reference for the human beings living in this world so that they know where they are, where and whence they move, and how their paths intersect with those of other humans.

If it is our concern to thematize humanity within a cognitive horizon and thus produce some knowledge about mankind that, though its form of scientific procedure, fulfils certain basic cultural criteria of plausibility (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) – which is indispensable for the culture of modern societies – then we are confronted with the fundamental problem of cultural orientation: the integration of the entire accumulated stock of knowledge into a coherent form which would correspond to an “idea of mankind” capable of informing all our activities.

These days the question of what it means to be human poses itself as part of the unbroken continuity of self-problematization mankind has been undergoing with regard to its cultural status, and also within the context of new challenges. Among these can be counted the provocations issued by new insights on the part of the natural sciences. Those have extended and deepened the disposal of man over his own nature tight down to interfering with his genetic equipment as well as making the processes of his mental activities visible, and thereby rendering them capable of manipulation. Another challenge is issued by the conflictual potential resulting from intercultural interaction through the process of globalization: here ideas of mankind are competing – and quite often – clashing with one another. Such conflicts can go so far as to annihilate the other side in order to force upon it one’s own idea of humanity. The sciences – if they want to or not – are involved in this clash. They can either supply it with intellectual weaponry, or they can also enter the fight in their own specific way, i. e. with the intention of reflecting upon its causes and showing up ways of its peaceful resolution. What is to be done within the continuity of our cultural enquiry into what fundamentally constitutes the humanity of human beings in the face of these challenges from the natural sciences? First of all it is important to investigate the humanity of mankind from the multiple perspectives opened up by a variety of disciplines, but also from that of the diversity of cultural traditions, in order to come to cognitive grips with humanity. The demand for the totality of cultural orientation is thereby confronted with the multi-perspectivism of scientific research and – in a completely different dimension – diverse cultural traditions (which can also influence the scientific disciplines). The first move away from this irritating plurality of perspectives to the concept of total meaning consists in acknowledging perspectivism as such. This realization and acceptance of the

ineluctable perspectivism of all scientific knowledge is the first step towards a higher coherence of meaning. Because in accepting this, the limits of particular insights are made visible and – in doing so – already transgressed in the direction of other disciplines and their respective forms of cognition.

Knowledge alone is incapable of fulfilling the need for orientation required by the mental effort of producing meaning. What is also needed for such an orientation are norms and values and meaningful symbols (such as those provided by art) that go beyond the rational reach of the sciences. If one wants to raise modern culture (and it has to be raised because it is of vital importance), then one also questions the ability of scientific knowledge to be connected and mediated with other achievements human anatomy, and whether it can be integrated into the horizon of cultural self-definition.

The following texts are attempting to supply an answer to the question after the humanity of human beings that take both aspects into consideration: the multiplicity of perspectives from which man has to be studied, and in an equal measure the aspects under which one can attempt to integrate this plurality into a whole. One should not expect more than just a sketchy outline of the entire field of human self-thematization because the gaps in the argumentative context of various disciplines and traditions are only too obvious. For instance there are no contributions on religion or economics, and philosophy is only referred to somewhat obliquely. Also the cultural diversity of such powerful traditions in the need for orientation that the process of globalization and the effect of technological-scientific civilization upon people's lives have given rise to could only be addressed by way of example.

In spite of the sketchiness and temporariness of the arguments presented here there are some more comprehensive themes emerging that are capable of lending the intercultural debate on the future perspectives of cultural science-making about man and his world a specific profile. It appears that the new challenges so forcefully issued to human self-understanding by globalization demand a response whereby the different traditions ascribing an intrinsic value to human beings can be summarized under the heading of *new humanism*.

The essential features of this kind of humanism are evident: it is grounded upon anthropological universals; it integrates new insights into human nature as the basis for mankind's cultural achievements; it develops cross-cultural perspectives on historical development; finally it opens up human self-understanding to the multifariousness and changeability of the cultural life forms mankind has evolved.

In the *first part* of the volume the anthropological, neuro-biological and evolutionary aspects are presented that form our idea of being human at the interface of three research-paradigms – biology, ethnology and sociology.

Biology comes first. The concept of 'humanity' and most all of 'humanness'

designate a human quality that mark man as a cultural being, which serves all his ties with natural conditioning factors. Nonetheless man as a cultural being also remains part of nature. The interdependence of both, nature and culture, their synthesis through the humanity of humans, is a fact, but fully grasping this fact meets with great difficulties. These are principally caused that nature is the object of a branch of science which, for methodological reasons, is not concerned with the question of meaning that is so relevant for the humanities. How can such a way of thinking possibly comprehend the nature of man that is constantly being converted into culture if exactly that aspect of nature is not mentioned at all which defines culture? Conversely, those branches of science that occupy themselves with culture are, for epistemological reasons, incapable of systematically transcending the horizon of mankind's cultural dimension towards its natural qualities. This would, indeed, be beyond the scope of the cultural sciences.

This tension also manifests itself in the current discourse about human nature and its influence on determining man's cultural life practices. Recent insights into the genetic equipment of man and the genetic structure as well as function of his brain have led scientists to assume that mankind's cultural aspirations are determined by nature. This went so far that some of the key-terms of man's cultural self-reflection, such as freedom, have had their cognitive relevance abrogated. There is of course no doubt about the conditioning of human life by the natural equipment he has come endowed with as a member of the species of *homo sapiens*, but the extent of this conditioning is still a matter of controversy.

The essay by Gerald Hüther shows in an impressive manner that it would be rather more appropriate to speak of the cultural conditioning of natural processes in the brain than conversely to regard the cultural activities initiated by the brain as being conditioned by nature. It is culture, the social context into which human beings have been born, in which they grow up and spend their lives that largely determine the formation and structure of the brain. In Hüther's argument the entity 'brain' is not conceived as an object among other objects, but in terms of its quality and in specific contribution to organizing human life it stands revealed as an essentially social phenomenon. Only within a social context does the brain evolve into the natural locus of what constitutes human life.

From the perspective of brain research being human is a life-long process of becoming human. Through this insight the category of education acquires a new degree of plausibility. With such research findings anthropological study comes close to a synthesis of body and mind, nature and nurture, which has to be taken into account and explained more than ever. Due to the insights provided by brain research, nature as a category external to man and something he has to come to term with, especially in views of today's urgent environmental problems, in

order to safeguard his humanity is thereby shifted into man himself. This is exactly where a new understanding of man's relationship with nature becomes visible which one could apply to the ecological problems of securing the survival of the species.

Any attempt at determining the humanity of human beings in such a way that transcultural features we all have in common are to serve as the basis for intercultural understanding meets with massive objections. These are grounded on the undeniable fact that there exist fundamental cultural differences which are not just empirically obvious, but which are also deeply embedded within the mental processes of every human being and which serve as a specific quality by means of which it distinguished itself from other people, whether as an individual, whether as the member of a larger community. Nevertheless, anthropological universals might be drawn upon in order to render more plausible the attempt to use a universalizing idea of mankind for resolving the current problems arising from globalization. *Christoph Antweiler* is supplying strong arguments in support of this view. His argument runs counter to the tendency to make cultural difference into the paramount aspect of intercultural communication, as a result of which anthropological universals (if they are perceived and recognized at all) on the one hand, and the particularity and difference of concrete human life styles ('cultures') on the other are played off against each other as supposedly unbridgeable opposites. Only if universals and differences can thought of in terms of their complementarity, when they are thought 'into one another', as it were, is it possible to gain a proper perspective on mankind that is both empirically enriched and normatively promising by way of serving as a point of reference for cultural orientation. Antweiler emphasizes the complexity of difference and similarity, thereby not denying the power of difference while at the same time integrating it into a referential system of transcultural communality among humans.

Georg Oesterdiekhoff's contribution fulfils a similar function in the way of supplying a foundational system for understanding human beings in the multifariousness of their life forms. In doing so he focuses on one capacity for dealing with the world. Taking as his starting point the insights of developmental psychology such as they have been evolved by Jean Piaget and others he develops a theory of cultural evolution whereby our understanding of what it means to be human is placed within the context of the universal unfolding of our cognitive capacity. In doing so he generalizes the insights of modern developmental psychology through widening its scope to such an extent that it can serve as the universal history of the way in which our human life forms have evolved. Thus the variety of human life forms can be categorized by subsuming them under the different stages of our cognitive development, and as such they can be understood as stages within a structured genetical process. The notion of such a

developmental process refers back to the old enlightenment trope of progress as the on-going change mankind is made to undergo in the course of history, while additionally supporting it by supplying a lot of empirical data. Universal history is thereby conceived as a continuous process of 'humanizing humankind' with our current understanding of humanity, i.e. the abstract norms of universal ethics, serving as the standard.

Oesterdiekhoff's main argument, i.e. of distinguishing between premodern and modern life forms and using this distinction by way of proving the evidence of social evolution, would have to be historicized much more extensively in order to be able to analyze more closely the differences between various historical epochs and, of course also between cultures and civilizations.

In the *second part* of the book, as opposed to the transcultural, generalizing and fundamental concerns of the first part, the focus will be on cultural difference by drawing on the example of some selected large civilizations. This is all about confronting Western civilization with non-Western cultural developments which can justifiably be regarded as contributions to the understanding of humanity or humanness.

Hubert Cancik gives a survey of Western humanism. He makes it clear that humanism in all its varieties cannot be understood without taking into consideration its roots in classical antiquity, especially by the Greek and Roman one. He elaborates on the special and temporal dimensions of Western humanism while emphasizing the special role played by education in the process of forming the humanity of humans (or more precisely, for the becoming human of mankind both onto- and phylogenetically). However, Western humanism is not just reduced to some basic assumptions as a result of which these assume the quality of an invariable historical phenomenon. Such sweeping characterizations are nothing but generalizations compared to the multiple and differentiated manifestations. In this regard it is not only regional but also epochal differences that play an important role. Admittedly, the central concepts of humanist thinking have been evolved in Roman antiquity and has remained an important point of reference for this kind of thought right up to the threshold of Modernity; however, as an identifiable intellectual movement, as a discourse delimiting itself from other intellectual discourses it did not come into existence until the early Modern Age. In Modernity it finally acquires not only its name but also its own people, and at the same the dynamism inherent in its divergencies and tension.

In his contribution on Confucianism *Heiner Roetz* indicates the possibility of historically locating and making plausible a genuinely non-Western humanism. This has systematic implications for the current treatment on the topic of humanism far exceeding the isolated case of China. Although the term bears a Western imprint, but when one considers the essential elements of this concept with regard to the relationship of man with himself (as man) the whole issue

attains a universal dimension: Culturally different concepts of humanity can be examined and critically compared with each other. Roetz develops Chinese humanism within the context of the specific historical situation that gave rise to Confucianism and its varieties. However, he is not so much concerned with historically distinguishing it from the Western tradition (as is frequently the case with Chinese authors who maintain a critical stance vis-à-vis the West). On the contrary, for him Chinese humanism with its historical particulars is nothing but a variety of human thought that came into existence with the epochal rupture of axial time in diverse cultures. Little though the specifically Chinese character of Confucianism can be denied, it is on the other hand relevant to point up those of its features that it has in common with other versions of human thought, especially as regards its universalizing tendencies. It is this very universalism which lends Chinese humanism its intercultural relevance, however, only without its nationalist overtone whereby it gets instrumentalized as the cultural means of securing political power. Roetz is positioning himself in the current confrontation of the Confucian with the Western tradition often to be found among East Asian intellectuals. He does not do this just with regard to human rights, but he also introduces bioethical aspects into a debate in which normative claims connected with the Western concepts of human dignity are often refuted. Without playing off Western arguments against East Asian ones he shows that the Confucian tradition can be interpreted in a different way that is compatible with Western arguments. In doing so he implicitly introduces a humanist dimension into the intercultural controversy over different varieties of humanist thought.

Umesh Chattopadhyaya presents Indian humanism in view of its long historical development from the classical texts of the Vedanta via the critical debate with Western culture up to the concept of a new humanism. Against the background of a long tradition with a strong religious bias Indian humanism is marked by its attempt to conclusively connect the essential elements of this tradition with those aspects that systematically take into account the historical specificity of Modernity. In this respect Indian humanism indeed distinguishes itself from the Western and other varieties of humanist thought, but at the same time this distinctiveness acknowledges the fact that what had been distinguished was not outright rejected or limited off but integrated and adapted. Especially with regard to India the traditional distinction made in the discourse on Hinduism are thus becoming obfuscated: secular and religious elements no longer appear as strict opposites but appear in different constellations. In an intercultural perspective this raises the question if our traditional understanding of religion is at all adequate for interpreting (Western) humanism when it comes to growing awareness of the immanent and transcendent dimensions in several versions of humanism (not only the Western variety) and being able to appre-

ciate the relevance of their mediation in an idea of humanity. Something similar applies to the clear-cut distinction between Western and non-Western aspects of humanist thought. Can the political humanism of Mahatma Ghandi or the poetical one of Rabindranath Tagore at all be understood in terms of such a difference? Especially with regard to Indian culture interculturality can be defined as one of those intellectual operations whereby opposites are not just removed, but where non-oppositional thinking becomes viable. In the context of the question whether an inclusive humanism is at all possible India therefore acquires not only an historical degree of relevance but also in systematic-theoretical terms. My own contribution is the attempt to delineate the development of the concept of being human and humanity, and to show how it culminates in the rise of modern humanism. In doing so I am guided by a theoretical intention. The historical particularity of humanism, such as it manifested itself as the humanist concept of the European Modern Age, is to be placed within the general context of the philosophy of history, which will make it interculturally relevant.

The argument is based on an outline of the various periods as defined by the philosophy of history, which relies on the concept of axial time. This concept makes it possible to combine cultural variety with a universal history common to all, which would – beating in mind the notion of Modernity as a ‘second axial time’ – secure for the present historical scheme of things as regards the idea of humanity and humanism. This historical reconstruction results in a problematic whereby the current thinking about mankind in an intercultural perspective is faces with the task of being renewed in conceptual terms: the various and usually exclusive idea, regarding mankind so far evolved in different cultural traditions have to be reinterpreted and developed further on the basis of their inclusive features because these can be regarded as the highest form of any internal universalism. Through this manoeuvre the temporal distancing that the historicizing of the category of humanity and humanism inevitably entails is capable of paving the way for a future perspective, which makes historiography into an indispensable partner in the current discourse about the humanity of humans.

Oliver Kozlarek expounds the Latin American variety of humanist thought by referring to its most distinguished exponents. It is composed of a peculiar combination of Western and indigenous tradition or ways of thinking. In Latin America, and Kozlarek does not leave this in any kind of doubt, Western thought can be perceived itself in the mirror of critique in which its dark sides stand out much more clearly than in its usual historical self-perception that totally excluded non-Western humanism on trial before the court of ideological critique, but by pointing up its limitations its potential for further development is also indicated. Its alienation from itself by being absorbed into colonial forms of life

can therefore be seen as a chance for its enrichment, which can also be made productive for the intercultural debate on a new humanism.

The *third part* is concerned with making the philosophizing about mankind, together with its humanist aspirations, applicable to present-day problems, i. e. relating concepts of humanity, within the context of Modernity, to those problems of orientation caused by the process of globalization. Of course not all the issues within this context can be addressed, but in an exemplary way questions will be raised concerning economic distributional justice, gender-relations and the attendant overcoming of inequality, as well as the psychological dimensions in which humanity can articulate itself in the context of Modernity. In conclusion we shall ponder the chances of an intercultural humanism for the future.

In his article *Günter Dux* combines insights from the fields of cognitive theory, the idea of history as well as sociology and the theory of history. His argument takes its point of departure the current problems of orientation resulting from the threat to long-established humane life forms posed by the development of market-economy (capitalism). Modern thought, which revolves around man as the source, the end and the be-all of his orientation in the world, is positioned within the comprehensive framework of the evolution of mankind's cultural self-definition, and this in turn is made understandable by resorting to the decisive cognitive move of relating it to the cognitive achievements of the natural sciences. On the basis of these no orientational norms whatsoever can be proclaimed that would be grounded upon, as it were, meta-anthropological presuppositions. Humanity is the fundamental category of a 'recursive' definition of mankind. Cognitively enabled by nature, man constructs his own world and makes himself, so to speak, at home in it. This process of accommodation occurs over a long historical process of development also definable as evolution, which sits athwart the development of cultural difference. Dux sets out the logic of this evolution as the unfolding of cognitive competence inherent in all human action.

This humanity, from a theoretical perspective enriched with empirical data is described as an historical process. This finally leads to certain human life practices that we today perceive as being specifically humanist. According to Dux, humanism can be defined as the self-determined relationship man establishes with himself. This relationship gets, through the dominance of market economy, into an inner contradiction between the economic production of material riches and the political demand for human self-determination. The potential inclusion of all individuals, due to their being human, in life forms that are considered to be humane by all concerned is fundamentally put in question by distribution of wealth produced in a capitalist system. From this insight Dux derives political strategies for a humanization that remains loyal to the standards of humanity achieved in the course of universal history.

In *Ilse Lenz*' contribution the fundamental fact that being human is principally and always and everywhere conceived in terms of gender occupies center stage of her argument. For a long time (and occasionally still today) mention has been made of 'man as such', thereby completely leaving the gender-specific aspects of being human out of the picture. This resulted in viewing human beings first and foremost as a generalized male being, as a result of which the human potential of being female has been totally marginalized. In a detailed overview of modern feminist movements and the political and academic discourses associated with these, a vast and highly complex vista of being human is opened up in which inequality and difference become visible both as a danger to, as well as a chance for, humanity.

The dangers – in the form of a structural imbalance in the relation between the genders along with serious discrimination – are evident and still virulent. At the same time, however, the sociological perspective in the global dimension of gender inequality among humans alters us to the experience of a fundamental change that is occurring world-wide. It is definitely moving in the direction of doing away with this imbalance.

Within the context of an unconditional recognition of cultural difference transcultural phenomena like gender inequality as the source of conflict and violence are easily lost sight of or are at least played down in their importance from a culturally relativist point of view. That is the reason why *Ilse Lenz* expressly comes out in favor of not subsuming social difference, along with its central feature of gender difference, under cultural difference, thereby permitting the culturalist legitimization of evident inhumanity. At the same time she pleads in favor of a hermeneutical sensitivity in dealing with gender-determined life forms and their changes. In this regard *Lenz* develops the concept of a 'reflective universalism' that systematically takes cognizance of 'cultural difference', while at the same time adhering to transcultural experiences and perspectives in terms of their interpretation (along with the practical strategies allied with these).

With the concept of personal identity *Jürgen Straub* analyzes one of the principal notions for understanding human beings within the context of modern societies. The psychological phenomena coming within the purview of this concept for him amount to a specific configuration of those mental forces that constitute human subjectivity and make it into a project for those involved that they have to cope with on an individual basis. Thereby he introduces a differentiation that is relevant for the historical analysis of humanism: No longer can there be any talk of an essentializing anthropological definition of mankind without referring to or even subverting the specific discourse in which it was first formulated. *Straub* reconstructs the historically specific situation of human beings in the context of the living conditions in the age of Modernity and sys-

tematically characterizes the complex psychological make-up of human subjectivity corresponding to this situation. In this manner he analyzes a type of human behavior that is specific of our epoch and that has to become the object of all our remedial efforts in creating a sustainable humanism by way of providing a cultural orientation in the current of process of globalization. As opposed to traditional historicism and its different variations Straub explicitly emphasizes the high level of complexity of subjectivity in the modern world (without being oblivious of this cultural type's confinement to certain areas in an inter- as well as intracultural comparison). Especially the fragility, fragmentariness, openness, inner dynamic and the high degree of self-reflectiveness that the permanent awareness of a precarious relation with alterity involves render this type into a highly attractive option. Any attempt at rethinking humanism as a cultural compass for a new and viable orientation of human practices in the face of the modern challenges of globalization would be well advised to consider this approach.

The conclusion of this volume is formed by the essay of *Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer*. The intercultural perspective of this contribution is influenced by the topical problems of the situation in our world and therefore focuses on the difficulties of orientation attendant upon the process of globalization. At the same time reference to this presence is complemented and completed with numerous digressions into the past with its historical dimension. The first one of these revolves around the question of the historical preconditions. Schmidt-Glintzer explicitly inquires the opportunities and limitations of a new humanism (a question informing the concept of this entire volume). This humanism does not do away with the vital distinction between the self and the other. On the contrary, it rests upon the fundamental recognition of cultural difference and multifariousness. But this multitude of differences is circumscribed by the notion of a universal humanity that can assume different shapes. All endeavors to realize humanity must aim at unlocking this potential through a successful process of education. The forces running counter to such an education are addressed and differentiated by Schmidt-Glintzer so that his plea for a new humanism is counterbalanced by a realistic appraisal of mankind's potential for humanity, thus arming us against possible disappointments. This works all the more in favor of those arguments that positively assess the chances of working towards a new and viable intercultural humanism.