

compos mentis

Being Human

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to examine and explain the conception of being human from a philosophical perspective. I argue that our conception of being human is based on a standard of mind. After establishing that our conception of being human is based on a standard of mind, I describe the three aspects, or pillars, on which this standard of mind is based: The Organic Pillar, The Cognitive Pillar, and the Social Pillar. My goal in pursuing this topic is to provide a comprehensive framework in the face of advancing artificial intelligence technologies and research into non homo sapien consciousness. I draw influence from Confucianism, Taoism, Hindu philosophy, and Western Philosophy. The framework I provide is meant to take on a cross cultural perspective so that it may be applied broadly.

KEYWORDS

Being, Human, Personhood

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of being human is one that permeates all cultures. This notion has undergone many changes that have left open the question of what it is to be human. Often the notion of being human is equated to the notion of person. However, I am reluctant to use the term 'person' as it denotes a conception of 'is' and 'is not' which is passive. The conception of being human that I describe is active in that it is dependent upon one's striving for balance and focuses on the actions of an individual and the motivations behind said actions. For example, a non-artificially intelligent coffee maker is passive in that it can only do what it is made to do and does not have any goals or volitions which may result in its striving for improvement nor in its striving to maintain some standard. It is a coffee maker not because it tries to be but because it can be nothing else. In addition, prior conceptions of personhood have been based on arbitrary checklists of qualities which typically include some reference to intelligence or awareness of certain abstract ideas (Farah and Heberlein 2007). The conception of being human I describe is not necessarily based on any quotient of intelligence nor awareness of any abstract concepts. In this paper, I argue that to be human is not based on some innate feature of homo sapiens as a species but, rather, to be human is a standard which one must strive for in order to retain their humanity. This is similar to Charles Pasternak's *Curiosity and Quest* (Pasternak 2007, 114-132) in that it focuses on an active feature which does not necessarily exclude non homo sapien forms of life. However, my account differs in that rather than focusing on four innate features of homo sapiens which allow for more intense searching for knowledge, it focuses on the mind, the standard thereof, and one's ability to strive for balance among three range-based criteria¹. After establishing being human as a standard of mind, I will attempt to describe the nature of this standard. In recent times, there has been a movement away from a heavily Eurocentric point of view. Nevertheless, although it is important to give voice to other points of view, it is also important

1. A range-based criterion, as I define it, is any criterion which allows for degrees of its defining concept rather than a passive criterion which relies on an arbitrarily imposed checklist of qualities. For example, identifying number X as the lowest possible IQ for a full person is arbitrary. Why number X and not number Y or number Z? There is no obvious reason to choose number X over numbers Y or Z. In addition, if individual A were to have an IQ of X while individual B were to have an IQ of X-1, then A would retain full personhood while B is denied it despite the vast similarities between the two with regard to IQ. The range-based criteria I describe allows for a more fluid approach which avoids this problem.

that the more commonly heard perspectives are not silenced, especially when the topic pertains to a conception which permeates homo sapien culture broadly. The standard I describe is influenced by key principles of Confucian, Daoist, Indian, as well as Western thought and I will describe each where appropriate.

II. DEFINITIONS

In this paper, there are three terms of relevance which each have a distinctive definition and basis with regard to morality: human, person, and being human. Human, in the noun sense, is too often conflated with the biological human, or homo sapien. There is nothing applicable with respect to morality in biological determinations. An entity is determined to be biologically human or not in much the same way as a book is determined to be written in English or not. Although homo sapien DNA is a necessary trait for being classified as a biological human, it is not sufficient for the distinctions made with regard to morality or the rights ascribed to moral agents. This sense of the term 'human' is not to be confused with 'human' in the adjectival sense. Human, as used in the adjectival sense, refers to what is morally applicable, or what is able to be involved in moral determinations. Person, or personhood, refers to a set of traits or qualities which supposedly entitle an entity to certain rights or privileges. This notion does have a moral basis, although a one-sided one. The moral basis for personhood is only with regard to how one should be treated, not how one should treat others. There is no accountability necessarily contained in this notion. Not all persons behave morally with regard to the treatment of others. For example, abusive partners in domestic violence situations may beat, rape, threaten, and commit a plethora of other heinous acts against their victims and not face any consequences with regard to their being recognized as full persons. Being human, or the conception thereof, is based on a spectrum in which the behaviors of an individual oscillate about a central point which determines the degree to which one embodies a sense of humanness, or proximity to the center-most point of the Three Pillars. This conception has a two-way moral basis in that it focuses not only on how one should be treated but also how one should treat others. This moral basis is elaborated on later in this paper with respect to the social pillar.

III. PART 1

Before describing the standard by which our conception of being human is based, I must first provide some proof of its existence and that it is something that is clear and consistent so as to be recognizable. If there is not a clear and consistent conception of being human, then there is nothing to separate being human from not being human. This type of distinction is logically sound in that it is not possible to sort entities into two separate groups without knowing what qualities are attributed to each group or at least what qualities are attributed to one group. For example, if Alice wishes to sort a collection of books based on some distinguishing feature of the books, then she could only sort the collection into two groups if all the books are not identical in their ISBN identifications. With regard to distinctions made of conceptual natures, this notion remains true. In the Advaita Vedanta there is discussion of the two notions of Brahman: Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman. Saguna Brahman is defined as Brahman with qualities whereas Nirguna Brahman is Brahman without qualities. Having qualities merely means that one is able to make assertions about what descriptions can be made with regard to the entity whereas not having qualities is the lack of this ability. It is pointed out that Saguna Brahman is a contradiction by nature due to the fact that whenever one ascribes one quality to Brahman, one must also ascribe its opposite given that Brahman is an entity which is all encompassing by nature (Deutsch 1969, 14). If an entity is both X and not X, then the entity is also neither X nor not X. This results in Nirguna Brahman, or Brahman without qualities, being the conception of Brahman that is most consistent with the core definition of Brahman as an entity which is all-encompassing. This explanation of Brahman serves to highlight the fact that in order for there to be one thing and not another, there must be some distinction to separate the two notions, just as there is between the two notions of Brahman.²

The first objection that one may be tempted to assert is that the distinction between being human and not being human is merely a semantic distinction rather than a pragmatic one. I concede that the objection is correct to say that the distinction is heavily rooted in semantics. However, it is best not applied here since the implications of this distinction are pragmatic. For instance, if entity A were merely considered less than human, then entity A would be treated as such

2. If one needs another example of this notion, then one might refer to Benedict Spinoza's argument for substance monism.

with no thought about ethics. This was the case for the indigenous populations of the Americas as well as for African peoples brought into the country as slaves. One may object that such practices are a thing of the past and assert that the distinction between being human and not being human currently plays no part in the world today. Nevertheless, such an assertion would be mistaken for two reasons. The first reason is such an assumption seems to assert that an expanded view on what is human is the same as an abolishment of the distinction altogether. This is simply not the case at all. For example, expanding one's circle of friends does not entail that one is friends with everyone or considers objects to be friends. It merely means that more entities are held in the category of 'friend'. Second, to this day, non-human specimens are fundamentally treated differently as can be seen in cases involving laboratory animals and other cases which will be discussed later. It remains to be seen to what degree morality is rooted in this idea of being human. But, it is undeniable that it plays some key role in the distinctions that we make.

Given the evidence that the distinction between being human and not being human is a distinction that has some effect in the world we live in and the ways in which we conduct ourselves, it follows that there must be a clear and consistent conception of being human. This conception, however, must have some basis, some essential feature, that would constitute the essence of what it is to be human that would distinguish it from what it is to not be human. The conception of being human can only be based on one of three things: homo sapien DNA, homo sapien form, or what I will call human mind³. I will address each of these in the following paragraphs.

3. The reason I say homo sapien DNA and homo sapien form rather than simply DNA and form is due to the fact that simply having DNA or a definite form or both, of any type or combination, has never been a criterion for personhood. The fact that an animal bled or screamed did not stop ancient peoples from hunting or sacrificing it despite having a definite form and clear biological similarities. Any solid object has a definite form and yet no one of a sane mind greets and converses with a basic (i.e. non artificially intelligent) refrigerator despite having routine interactions with it. Publications on the discovery of DNA did not stop scientists from continuing animal experimentation, which continues to this day, nor did it result in all organic life being attributed with personhood.

IV. PART 2

If our conception of what it is to be human were based on whether or not one has homo sapien DNA, then any substance which contained even the slightest trace of this type of DNA would be considered fully human. However, this is not the case, and it would be absurd if it were since traces of homo sapien DNA can be found in fluids and secretions of the body many of which are thought of as nothing more than waste to be flushed down a drain. One may object that cellular waste products are not living entities with homo sapien DNA and cannot be considered as such since they lack living processes. However, one need not look further than the history of cancer research to find a case of living cells with homo sapien DNA that were treated as nothing more than disposable lab specimens. These cells are what are known as HeLa cells. The cells have survived for decades and have contributed greatly to cancer research. Nevertheless, they receive no accolades, no honors, no merits for their sacrifices, and they shouldn't simply because the cells themselves are not fully human despite having full strands of homo sapien DNA. So, if having homo sapien DNA is not enough to be considered fully human, then it follows that homo sapien DNA is not the essential feature on which we base our conception of being human.

Although having homo sapien DNA is not enough to be considered human, one may argue that having the form of a homo sapien is the essential feature of being human. However, this is also not the case since statues and mannequins are not considered to be fully human, if at all. This can be seen in cases in which such figures are damaged. Let's say that Jerome works in a beauty parlor with several mannequins strewn across the room. One day, Jerome is on a tall ladder near one of the mannequins and loses her balance, falling on and breaking the mannequin so severely that it must be replaced. Jerome is not going to be charged with manslaughter for breaking the mannequin since the mannequin is not considered to be human. One may argue that the mannequin, though it has the form of a homo sapien, does not have homo sapien DNA and, thus, is not considered to be human on the grounds that it needs both the DNA and form of a homo sapien in order to be considered human. However, this is also not enough to be considered human since corpses are not considered to be human. If an individual were in a situation in which one had to choose between a living being and a dead one to save from falling into a deep chasm never to be recovered, the individual would always choose the living one given that the individual making this decision is a

sensible one. In addition, if having both homo sapien form and DNA were enough to consider one as fully human, then there would be no difference with regard to the treatment of a living being as opposed to a dead one. This is plainly false considering the fact that these entities are fundamentally treated differently. A corpse is burned, buried, left to rot, or made to undergo some other ritual with the end goal of its disposal whereas a living being is its own agent to do onto others and react to things done onto it. Rights of living are ascribed to living beings whereas funeral rights are ascribed to dead ones. If homo sapien DNA and form were enough to be human, then it would not make sense to treat homo sapien corpses as things to be disposed of and living homo sapiens as agents of themselves. A family would be completely sensible, if not required out of respect, to leave a deceased relative in the exact same location as the one in which the relative died, especially if that location is in the family's home. However, that is not considered sensible, in any case. So, neither homo sapien form nor homo sapien form with homo sapien DNA is the essential feature that distinguishes what it is to be human.

If what it is to be human is not distinguishable via homo sapien DNA, homo sapien form, or some combination of both, then our conception of being human must be based on human mind. However, one runs into the problem of discerning what is the essential characteristic of a human mind as opposed to a non-human mind. Afterall, if there is something to separate being human from not being human and our conception of being human is based on mind, then it stands to reason that there must be a distinction between merely having a mind and having a human mind.

V. PART 3

Although in the past many have assumed that only homo sapiens have the capacity for thought characteristic of having a mind, this notion is mistaken. It is clear that some thought must occur in order to solve problems and create structures such as those which are commonly observed in nature. To assert that other animals are mindless machines while at the same time describing them as running on some program is contradictory since the mind is a kind of program which dictates action and thought-based planning. Although the nature of this program is something that has been debated extensively for years, that much is clear. If it were true that only homo sapiens had the capacity for mind in the

sense that one is capable of higher thinking, then there would not be cases of non-human persons, natural or artificial. However, there are and have been cases of non-human persons in the world, such as Sofia the robot and Koko the gorilla, and many more cases of non-biologically human characters in media being perceived as nothing less than human, as in the adjectival sense described earlier. Nevertheless, there are also cases in media of non-human minds, particularly in the horror genre. For example, it is not uncommon to observe monsters and demonic possessions in film. The viewer typically never feels remorse at the demise of these antagonistic entities. For example, in the film, *The Possession of Hannah Grace*, a young woman is possessed by a demon which kills in order to gain power and heal itself. During the exorcism, the woman dies, ending the continuity of her mind. Nevertheless, the demon remains in her body and continues to control it. If there were no distinction between the non-human mind of the demon and the human mind of Hannah Grace in the sense of its humanity, then the film would lose much of its overall plot as a horror film and become a scientific fantasy about either a supernatural being occupying a natural being's body or a regular being undergoing a profound shift in appetite and gaining some powers to be used in a morally questionable manner. Given the fact that it is considered a horror film, the distinction with regard to humanity is clear. But, how is that distinction made?

All distinctions are made via some standard. As was discussed previously, it is not possible to separate one group into multiple smaller groups without having something to determine which smaller group each of the members of the one group belong. Given the distinctions between being human and not being human and the argument that these distinctions are based on mind, it follows that there must be some standard on which we base our conception of mind. If it is true that our conception of being human is based on a standard of mind, then the question remains regarding the nature of this standard.

VI. THE THREE PILLARS

There are three pillars on which the conception of being human rests: The Organic Pillar, the Cognitive Pillar, and the Social Pillar. Each pillar relies upon the others for the maintenance of one's proximity to the center. In other words, it is not possible to have one or several but not all the pillars and maintain the full scope of one's humanness. I will take time to describe each and refer to previous and new examples to point out the shortcomings of one of these essential pillars

that reduce the humanity for the entity in question. I say reduce simply since, cinema and media aside, there are few if any cases in real life in which one is able to separate oneself entirely from any one of or all of the pillars of humanity.

The simplest of the three pillars is the Organic Pillar which relates to one's ability to respond to the conditions and events of the surrounding world. This is not to say that an individual is less human when asleep than awake since the potential to respond remains and the individual is still able to respond reflexively. Nevertheless, it does explain the fundamental difference between a living human and a dead one. A corpse can never respond to the world but simply be an object within it. One must note that this trait is not unique to homo sapiens and that it is a fundamental trait of living things. In other words, as far as the Organic Pillar represents humanness, other animals and anything which responds to the conditions and events of the world may be considered just as human as homo sapiens are. Nevertheless, that does not necessarily entail thoughts or emotions regarding those conditions or events.

The Cognitive Pillar is concerned with one's awareness of the world, emotions, and abilities to reason and analyze information thereof. This pillar has often been the focus in the past⁴, being set out as the defining feature of human beings, or homo sapiens, that sets them apart from other species. However, the notion that homo sapiens are the only species that exhibit some connection to this pillar is vastly mistaken due to the fact that other species have exhibited the problem-solving capabilities and emotional awareness that is characteristic of this pillar. I would like to clarify the fundamental difference between what I am describing and past notions of reasoning so as to not be misconstrued. When I refer to one's capacity for reason, I am not referring to the notion of wisdom described by Plato in *The Republic*. Reason, as I intend to describe it, is one's capacity to think about the information one is presented with and make decisions based on that information. This is not an ability unique to homo sapiens since other species exhibit this capacity in their interactions with the world. For example, a predator, such as a leopard, must make decisions while hunting that may increase or decrease its likelihood of catching its prey in addition to making the decision to pursue its current prey or redirect its focus to an easier target. Of course, it

4. The Cognitive Pillar contains within it part of what may be referred to as consciousness. However, it must be noted that it does not necessarily contain the full scope of consciousness. Due to the uncertainty and widespread disagreement with regard to what consciousness is and where it occurs, it is best not dwelled upon here.

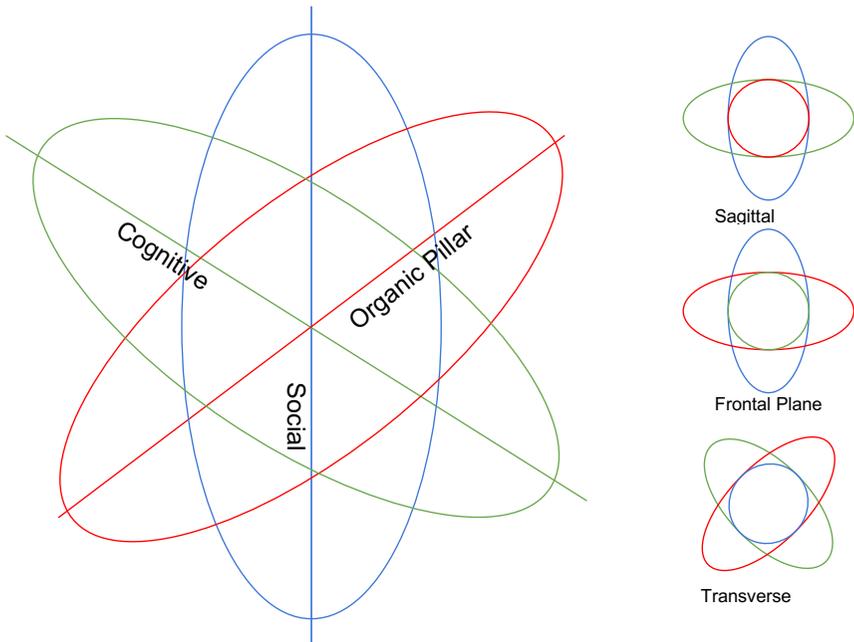
cannot be overlooked that there are discrepancies between species due to the scope of information that may contribute to one's decision. Abstract concepts such as value, virtue, emotion, and meaning may also play a role in one's decision. There is not much that can be said with regard to the abstract concepts that other species may have given that, as Thomas Nagel pointed out in his bat argument (Alter and Howell 2012, 15-23), we as humans do not have an applicable concept of the lives and experiences of other species, only our imaginative guesses thereof. Nevertheless, such concepts differ from culture to culture and even from one individual to the next. So, it is important to clarify that it is not the particulars about these concepts and notions of value that determine the connection one has to the Cognitive Pillar, but that one is able to apply information while making decisions. The difference between decision making and reflexive responses lies in the differences in complexity and the variation in the results between individuals. For example, regardless of the background, beliefs, or other mental phenomenon of an individual, when the individual touches something hot and experiences pain, that individual will pull away as a reflexive action. However, when making a decision, an individual may consult with one's background knowledge, beliefs, or other mental phenomenon in order to construct some course of action. In other words, there is usually some thought accompanying decisions which reflexes seem to lack.

The Social Pillar concerns itself with the connections and potential to connect that one has with others and the world. At the individual level, this relates to one's ability to interact with others by forming social connections and living by some moral code. It is important to note that these connections are bidirectional. In other words, the connections that individual A has with individual B can affect the humanness of both. For example, if Nora holds Ashram, whose humanness is in question due to events that Ashram did not contribute to directly, to be nothing less than human, then Ashram is more human than otherwise. This is typically only applicable to the unborn⁵ but can also be applied to those in comatose or degenerative states. On the opposing side of the spectrum, if Carja treats Arcee as if Arcee were less human than in actuality, then Carja has the potential

5. I would like to clarify that a woman's choice to have an abortion is permissible under this view. She is not necessarily more or less human for having undergone such a procedure due to the fact that there are too many reasons for getting an abortion to pin the act itself with some inherent moral value. In addition, as will be discussed later, having compassion for the unborn entity is not a justification for lacking compassion for the would-be mother.

of reducing his own humanity given that he takes cruelty too far and drifts too far in one direction of the pillar. Of all the pillars, the Social Pillar is the one which focuses the most on our conception of being human as socially embedded. It does not necessitate a particular view on the morality of one's actions, but it does necessitate a degree of compassion and understanding thereof. As Confucius supposedly said, "To impose the death penalty without first understanding words is to be cruel... [a man] has no way of judging men unless he understands words" (Confucius [500 B.C.] 1979). Although one may argue that anything done in excess, even something seemingly virtuous, quickly becomes a vice when there is a lack of moderation, it must be noted that true compassion and understanding are found at the point of balance. The fact that an individual has compassion for and understands why another did some act which brought harm to another does not excuse the act. To dismiss the harmful act is to lack compassion for those who are harmed by the act. On the other hand, having so much compassion for those who are harmed that one inflicts too great of a punishment on the perpetrator is also to have a lack of compassion, especially given recent neuroscience findings which imply less free will than previously thought (Caruso & Flanagan 2018).

The Three Pillars



VII. BALANCE

The goal of each of the pillars is balance. If one were to imagine a three-dimensional figure to represent the Three Pillars on which our conception of being human is based, then one may use the three-dimensional plane commonly found in mathematics as a framework for this model. Each axis is a pillar which has a common intersection with all the other pillars. One may reside on either side of this central point with regard to one's humanness. However, although each of the pillars has a positive and negative side, there is no value ascribed to either side with regard to which is the superior side due to the fact that the center is the point of balance which we strive for and any push toward one side indefinitely results in an extreme which reduces this balance. One may relate this to certain Daoist principles. Imagine a wheel with thirty spokes all joined to one hub. The further the hub is from the center of the wheel, the more unstable the wheel is and the rougher the ride. The Tao Te Ching emphasizes this notion of balance throughout but especially in the lines "There is no crime greater than having too many desires; there is no disaster greater than not being content; there is no misfortune greater than being covetous. Hence in being content, one will always have enough" (Lao Tzu [600 B.C.] 1963). One may object that one source emphasizing balance is not a strong enough defense. However, this notion, that balance results in a superior outcome than otherwise, is not unique to Daoism. Aristotle also toted this notion in his description of the excellences. For Aristotle, each excellence was found at the point of balance between two vices (Aristotle [340 B.C.] 1987).

One may attempt to argue that, with regard to the model I presented earlier, it is always better to be on the positive side of each pillar. However, this is plainly false since when Kant's universalized maxim is applied, the result is either stagnation or chaos. Imagine a society in which the positive side of the Social Pillar were enacted universally; let's call this society the Land of Gentlemen. In the Land of Gentleman, everyone strives to act altruistically to always benefit the other person more than or rather than oneself. However, such a society fundamentally could not function since everything would stagnate. For instance, if Cayo, an average but stubborn citizen from the Land of Gentlemen, were to seek to trade some amount of cabbages for an amount of bananas at the local shop run by Caiyu, another average but stubborn citizen, then an altercation over the value of each supply would result in nothing being bought since each person would assert that the other deserved more for what was being offered. In addition, if

one were to expand upon this mindset, it is probable that in this type of society some individuals would eventually starve themselves to death as a result of this altruistic extreme due to the fact that in our world, one in which complete altruism is not the norm nor the standard way of life, there are individuals who become vegetarian or vegan for moral reasons that pertain to the suffering and death of the creatures they would otherwise consume. One may argue that a society such as the Land of Gentleman is not so bad and that the scenario described is merely an example of an excess in stubbornness. However, I respond that although such a society functions in theory, it is not probable that it could function in practice since in our world people differ in degrees with regard to altruism and adherence to social norms. Further, such an extreme of altruism disregards the values and attachments of individuals. One may be accused of selfishness for not wanting to give up something arbitrary which that individual holds meaning in. If two individuals are biologically compatible and likely to produce offspring which would benefit society greatly, then according to this altruistic society's norms, these two individuals are morally required to produce a child regardless of the feelings of each individual involved. To hold an individual to the standard of sacrificing one's own morals, thoughts, and emotions for the sake of the wants and desires of others is unreasonable. For example, if there is a group of individuals who want to engage in sexual activity with one individual simultaneously, then the individual does not necessarily have a reason to say no in an altruistic society. Sexual activity itself is not a harm and provides many benefits. However, if an individual does not desire to engage in sexual activity but is pressured into it, then it is rape, which is always a harm. The opposite side of the Social Pillar is no better.

Imagine a society in which selfishness was considered a virtue that everyone strived for. Let's call this society the Land of Narcissists. In this society, if you could call it that, everyone strives to get the most for oneself through any means necessary. There is no social contract among people since it is in no one's best interest to sustain such a contract. One might be reminded of the Prisoner's Dilemma in which two individuals each must choose whether or not to betray the other person. If the one talks and the other doesn't, then the one receives the greatest benefit to the greatest detriment of the other. However, since both have the incentive to betray the other, both talk and receive less than if they collaborated in silence. The fundamental condition of any contract lies in trust. However, in a society in which everyone seeks to benefit oneself without any of

the constraints that trusting or relying on others would bring, such a society would be nothing more than a free-for-all of back-stabbing and throat cutting in both the literal and metaphorical sense. It would be chaos.

VIII. THE CENTER

The extremes of each side have shown to be unstable and unsustainable. Complete and universal altruism leads to starvation, stagnation, or a standard of disregarding the individual in favor of the group whereas complete and universal selfishness leads to universal mistrust, murder, and a standard of disregarding the group in favor of the individual. However, the question remains with regard to how one might achieve the central point of the Three Pillars of Being Human. Frankly, achieving the centermost point of the Pillars is not achievable, but the fact does not entail that it is not worth striving for. Before defending the value of striving for the center, I must first explain why the centermost point is not achievable. There are several reasons.

First, for one to achieve the centermost point, one must know what the centermost point entails. One would need to know an absolute truth, an unchanging, stagnate truth in all its dimensions and details. Since living things are limited by their own perceptions and do not have direct access to the perceptions of other living things as to form a network, this is not possible. One could imagine looking at a three-dimensional figure. Although one may clearly and distinctly perceive one side of the figure, one cannot see the other hidden sides without moving to reveal them. Even when all sides are revealed, the details may remain unseen, such is the case with living tissues. To the naked eye, the tissue of the brain appears to be uniform and solid. However, if one were to use a light microscope, one may observe the neurons that make up the tissue. Nevertheless, there remains more to be seen. If one were to use an electron microscope, then one may reveal the Golgi cells that assist in the maintenance of the neurons, the organelles within the neuron, and the compositions of the synaptic cleft between neurons. Yet, the individual elemental compounds that make up the neurotransmitters, compounds, and atomic structure of each remains hidden and can only be represented by probable theories. Probable truth is not actual truth.

Second, to achieve the center, it is necessary for one to remain fixed in that position. To remain fixed in a given position, one must have equal forces acting on it. The only way in which one moves along any of the pillars is by acting in the

world. This includes all actions and non-actions. Given that a single entity cannot enact opposing actions, such as inhaling and exhaling simultaneously, it is not possible for one to stagnate at a fixed point on one of the pillars. So, it is not possible to achieve the center.

Now that it has been explained why the center is not achievable, it is important that I explain why striving for it is nevertheless valuable. If one were to release oneself from striving for the center, then one would inevitably fall to one of the extremes. As shown previously with regard to the Social Pillar, this is unsustainable and results in universal death. One might object that this notion assumes that life is inherently valuable. However, I disagree since I have not made any claim with regard to the value of life nor the value of death. The only argument I have made about value is the argument for balance. Since balance requires both life and death, one cannot hold one as more valuable than the other. In addition, for the present argument to be applicable, there must be entities which make distinctions. It is not possible to make any distinction, or act for that matter, without having an existence which makes it possible for one to do so. Therefore, the objection regarding value assumptions on life or death does not apply to this argument.

IX. BORDERLINE CASES

An objection that one might attempt is that there are some homo sapiens who lack the faculties to comprehend the world around them, such as those with anencephaly, and ask whether or not that results in their being less human and, thus, less worthy of rights. What rights are being referred to exactly? The only rights necessitated by this paper are dependent upon the social pillar which only entails the right to be treated with compassion and understanding. However, treating one with anencephaly with compassion and understanding is neither more or less important than treating with compassion and understanding those without the condition who may accept or reject the task of caring for such a being. As for being less human, although individuals with anencephaly, or any neurodegenerative condition, lose or lack much of their ability to make decisions and respond to the world, they still have connections to the world and to others; they still respond, albeit reflexively. The only pillar that may be affected is the Cognitive Pillar. Given that one does not have that direct access that would allow one to know exactly what another is aware of, it is not possible to ascribe an absolute negation of the Cognitive Pillar to those with anencephaly, especially

since such individuals may survive for several years in the care of willing family members who develop attachments to them. In other words, the neurological condition that one is born with or later develops cannot affect one's humanness, especially if there are others willing to vouch for one's humanness.

The only feature that can affect one's humanness is one's connection to the center. It is this connection which upholds one's humanness. Although some may reject striving for this center and in turn reject their humanity, they still retain some connection to this center and some aspect of their humanity since they retain the capacity for change. As the saying goes, every saint has a past and every sinner has a future. Even an individual who tries in earnest to be a bookshelf is limited in this endeavor by biological restraints, such as matter consumption or excretion and muscle fatigue or atrophy. In addition, such an individual retains the capacity to change, to become something other than or more than a bookshelf. Although this individual strives to be an object, the ability to strive is characteristic of all subjects and our conception of being human. Thus, even the most adamant rejection of one's humanity is not enough to sever ties with it.

X. CONCLUSION

One may wonder at the implications of this argument. In short, our conception of being human is not a matter of the arrangement of one's physical material but a matter of being connected to a state of balance among three range-based criteria. This connection to the center is maintained in the actions of the individual. Much like a piece of silver, one's humanness is something which must be repeatedly attended to in order to prevent it from dulling and tarnishing. However, whereas silver is merely polished periodically for its maintenance, humanness must be continually attended to for its maintenance because every action, or non-action, affects one's relation to the center. The conception of being human is as much about being as it is about humanness. One must be human in order to be human.

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