

PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF HUMANITY AS CAPAX DEI, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF HUMANITY

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Abstract: Man has ascribed to himself the position of God on Earth amidst other entities in the world by virtue of epistemic priority. How valid is the truth of this epistemic claim founded on human rationality? There are different forms of knowing: instinctive knowledge, sensual knowledge, rational knowledge, intuitive knowledge and infused knowledge. Each entity in the world by virtue of ontological hierarchy has access to one form of knowing or the other. How do we justify that rational knowledge is the highest form of knowing by virtue of which man can claim transcendence over and above every other entity in the world? Some philosophical traditions like materialism hold that humanity is like every other entity in the world, it is not transcendent and therefore is not capax dei (openness to God). Other philosophical traditions like rationalism or idealism maintain that humanity is ontological, prior to other entities in the world. This is transcendent and therefore, capax dei.

Keywords: philosophical traditions, humanity, ontological capax dei.

1. INTRODUCTION

The task of Philosophy is not to justify every claim of humanity both true claims and false ones. Philosophy is first and foremost a servant of truth. The truth emerges into the open when radical questions are raised. The second task of philosophy is then formulation of science of questioning. Scientific questioning unveils that which is hidden, calling truth forth into light and un-concealing its anti-thesis, turning the darkness around anti-thesis of truth into light so that anti-thesis of truth is thrown into dilemma of choice to metamorphose and transform or to remain stagnant. The task of philosophizing on the possibility or non-possibility of human beings possessing the capacity for God is one which has come to the center of thought in this post-modern epoch. Phenomenology, the science of experience, will help in addressing this question. Laying bare the myriad of experiences is not philosophy. In applying Phenomenology, the tyranny of subjectivity is encouraged. To forestall this monstrous situation from coming to the fore, Phenomenology will be part of our method of enquiry but not all. On the main, hermeneutics of phenomenology will be the scientific method of inquiry for this excursus. Accordingly, the question of human being's capacity for God hinges around:

- i. The acceptance of an ontological hierarchy of being.
- ii. The acceptance of the primacy of human beings in that ontological hierarchy.
- iii. The acceptance of the truth of God's existence which has been rationally and non-rationally demonstrated though not without criticisms.
- iv. The acceptance of the possibility of human transcendence and openness to God. The negation of any of these assumptions will definitely mean placing the theme of discussion on a pendulum.

Experience has shown from existent history of humanity and the world that human propensity for evil is excessive. The human capacity for war and for destruction of the other are indicators that humanity cannot possibly be capax dei. The evil of the holocaust, the psychological warfare going among nations in the world, the cold shoulder to concept of

alterity, suicide bombings, kidnapping, human trafficking and numerous evils of post-modern humanity are negative indicators that humanity may not be capax dei. This position would imply that ontological ethic is serving as measure of judgment for this excursus. The crux of the discussion is the epistemic priority of rationality over other forms of knowing, on the grounds of which humanity claims to be transcendent and therefore capax dei.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Human capacity for God is the epistemic problem. The problems center on the possibility of human knowledge, the nature of this knowledge and sources of human knowledge. Others are the nature of the soul, God and immortality. Elaborating on this problem, a whole lot of other epistemic problems relating to the theme of discussion emerge. Do human beings know in the true sense of the word? Can there be certain knowledge that is beyond doubt? Is there a connection between knowledge and belief? This problem was introduced by Plato when he defined knowledge as justified true belief. (Blackburn 118). The connection between knowledge and belief would imply a connection between skepticism and atheism. Thus, skepticism becomes justified true atheism. This is the point of this discussion. When the possibility of human knowledge is negated then the whole edifice of argument supporting human capacity for God is erased. The problem of human capacity for God is not Atheism but skepticism. Skepticism is the cause while atheism is the effect.

Human knowledge of the world and all the entities in it can be understood within the levels of experience and rational knowledge. How does human being come to the knowledge of metaphysical realities as God, the soul and immortality? These metaphysical realities are bound up. God is, “the nous” to use the platonic term, or “the wholly other” in the words of Rudolf Otto, or “elder brother” in the words of Bertrand Russell, who is believed to be the creator of heaven and earth, immortal and benevolent and has promised immortality to those who believe. The soul is the human rational faculty for the knowledge of God. The purpose of knowledge of God is for human realization of immortality. How does the rational soul come to know God? God is not a concrete object of experience and therefore can only be known through abstraction. Can God be known through faith? Augustine wrote “without faith it is impossible for the powers of unaided reason to know God”. Faith definitely is not a continuation of reason.; Other entities in the world that lack reason can have faith in God for their own liberation. Faith is not a faculty of knowledge. It is an act, an accent of belief. At the level of faith, rationality is suspended, a leap that is better termed transcendence is required to believe in God. Faith is not a way of knowing God. Faith is an act of belief in God. This position nullifies Paul Tillich’s position in his book “Dynamics of Faith” that “faith is an act of ultimate concern”. (Tillich, 36)

Having come this far, it is then clear that the hub of this paper is on skepticism, atheism and theism as philosophical imperatives for any discussion on human capax dei.

3. PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Pre-Socratic era testified to unified knowledge of human being, the world and gods. The Egyptians of 4000 B.C believed that Osiris, their goddess was behind the success of their civilization and the Babylonians believed that Marduk, their god was responsible for issuing their law and for their empire coming into power.(Russell, 3) In this pre-Christian era, human being was open to the world and to the gods and goddesses as the case may be. And it was inconceivable for a people to survive without their gods. The Pre-Socratic philosophers though pagans had far-reaching insights about human beings, “God” and the Universe. Thales (c.625-545 B.C) by raising the rational question: “what is the source of everything that exists?”; showed that human beings have the irresistible quest to know. He posited water as the ultimate substance. In spite of his answer, he remained open to reality. When he saw the metals are attracted by magnet, he shouted: “Everything is full of gods.” Philosophically, this statement is regarded as pantheism, but it points to openness of mind and a pointer to the fact that Thales recognized that humanity is not God unto itself. Anaximander (610-545B.C) a student of Thales studied nature and saw the variety in nature: the land, seas, sky, plants and animals. He reasoned that all these varieties cannot come from a finite substance, for that he posited that the source of everything that exists must be infinite, indeterminate, and boundless. The Greek word is “apeiron”. In Anaximander, human reason showed that it can reach the knowledge of God though the name God was not mentioned, but the idea depicts a clear understanding of what God stands for. Anaximenes (580-475 B.C) posited air as the ultimate substance because air permeated everything and everywhere. It can transform into many things that exist. The answers of these philosophers show the extent of the powers of human reason. Pythagoras (570-495 B.C) posited number as the source of everything that exists. He also postulated the theory of “metempsychosis, a theory which holds that the soul is immortal and transmigrate from one substance to

another. Heraclitus (580-480 B.C) posited that ultimate substance is fire, but that reality is one and many. The underlying principle is change. Parmenides took the opposite position by positing that reality is permanent. These pre-Socratics set the stage for philosophical trends that will emerge in the future. The sophists entered the stage and subverted philosophy to mean ability to falsify the truth for gain. It must be noted that the activity of the sophists created room for skepticism. It was Socrates who recalled philosophy back to the study of man as its subject matter.

Plato regarded God as "Nous" and recognized the ideal world of forms different from this sensible world. In Plato, human reason can reach the knowledge of the ideal forms unaided by sensation, experience or faith. In the allegory of the cave, Plato symbolically stated that some people can contemplate reality while others prefer to remain under the clutches of ignorance. The metaphor of the divided line shows that there are different levels of knowledge, but knowledge of the ideal forms is the highest level of knowledge. (Shouler, 30) These insights indicate that human reason has natural capacity to search and know the ideal forms. Let us note here that since there is sensible object here which corresponds to God, in all probability there is no form for God in ideal world of forms. On the main, human reason can contemplate the ideal forms.

It was Aristotle who called attention of philosophy back to the concrete existing world. He emphasized the importance of knowledge by stating that "all men by nature desire to know". Aristotle, however, denies that human reason has power to have knowledge of forms, experience is central to knowledge. The problem of experience as a source of knowledge is that it is varied, discreet, and not unified. It does not take form and differs in different individuals and so cannot give certain knowledge. With experience, knowledge of God, of the soul, of immortality and of the world can never be certain. Aristotle criticized Plato's theory of forms with his hylemorphic theory according to which matter and form must co-exist in a substance. There can be no form without matter so the Platonic ideal form is baseless. This points to the fact that human knowledge of God, soul and immortality is not possible unless the forms of these substances are mattered. In Aristotle, therefore, human capacity for God in terms of epistemic openness is non-sequitur. Aristotle further undertook the study of substances. He identified the soul as a substance. He dismissed the previous notions of soul before him, rejected the theory of transmigration of the soul, of immanentism of the soul, and of outside travel of the soul. In book two, chapter one of "De Anima", Aristotle set out to define the soul as substance of natural body, since substance as form of a natural body is actuality while the body or matter is potentiality. Aristotle inferred that the soul's actuality of natural body. And by actuality, he meant that the soul has power to possess knowledge and to exercise knowledge. He insisted that the soul must exist in a natural body and not outside it. (The basic works of Aristotle, 555). In book 3, chapter 4 of De Anima, Aristotle grants the soul epistemic powers within the sensible realm and supra-sensible realm. He wrote that the soul has power to think on objects without matter. He added that when the soul thinks on objects without matter what is thought and what is thought of become identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical. (Aristotle, 591). Thus, it is clear that Aristotle philosophy is positive on the possibility of human epistemic knowledge of God on the powers of the soul. What still remains questionable is the certainty of knowledge derived from thought thinking thought.

The Post- Aristotelian philosophers like the stoics were concerned with the practical life issues. The stoics saw man as partly fire and partly clay. Man in the exercise of his freedom acts as God. The universe is a single being with soul. This soul they called reason or God. This being is free and applies the laws of nature in such a way as to get best results. (Russell, 267). From the fore going it is clear that stoic philosophy has a conceptualization of human being as capable of God. On the other hand, in the face of life problems, the stoics recommended suicide as a way out of life problems. This position casts a shadow of doubt on human capacity for God; if human beings have capacity to know God and to believe in Him then suicide cannot be accepted as an option in the face of life's problems.

In the Medieval period, St. Augustine took up the problem of skepticism which is one of the main issues in any discussion on human capacity for God. Bertrand Russell conceded that St. Augustine was one of the great philosophers of all times. (Russell, 355). Augustine proposed the theory of illumination. According to this theory, human soul is illuminated as light from the sun to know eternal and necessary truth. This light of illumination comes from God. (Shouler, 71) Augustine in "The Confessions" not only affirmed that the human soul can know God but that the human soul is restless until it rests in God. This insight is again a beckon in the understanding of human capacity for God. In the city of God, Augustine took up argument against the Pelagians. He had earlier on dealt with the skepticism of the academicians of new platonic school. He regarded skepticism as a despicable thing before God. There was no justification for skepticism since the human mind has capacity to know. Augustine is known of his philosophical dictum against skepticism "credo ut intellegiam" "I believe in order that I might understand". In this, Augustine displayed the power of a great mind. He saw the relationship between skepticism, believe and knowledge. The problem of skepticism is not so much of knowledge but much more of belief. The skeptics know. Without prior knowledge one will not know what to doubt.

As I noted in the statement of Problems, the discussion on human capacity for God must presuppose the existence of God. If there is no God there is no point for humans to have any disposition for Him. In the Scholastic period 11th-13th century, the problem of existence of God dominated philosophical discussions. St. Anselm proposed his ontological argument of God's existence. He postulated that God is "A being than which nothing greater can be thought". Although he has been criticized on the grounds that anyone who has not experienced this being must doubt his existence; but Anselm's ontological argument reveals the level at which human mind can go in its openness to God.

Averroes, an Islamic philosopher, proposed that the Koran supported the fact of God's existence since it maintained that the universe was created by God. It recognized God as the cause. At this point it becomes clear that man's disposition for God is seen not just rationally and ontologically but through the confession of religions. Thus, man's religious affiliation is reciprocation and an eloquent expression of his openness to God. Moses Maimonides, a Jewish philosopher, expressed deep thoughts using Aristotle's logic to demonstrate the existence of God. Thomas Aquinas in the midst of medieval skeptical tendency towards the truth of religion and God's existence, proposed five arguments for God's existence. These philosophical efforts indicate that foundation for a discussion on human capax dei is founded on a solid foundation. It is true that these arguments have loopholes for criticism, but they are strong rational and ontological quest to resolve the problem at hand.

In the modern period, Rene Descartes, the father of modern philosophy turned the hand of time in philosophical enterprise by his methodic doubt. The only indisputable truth which he could not doubt is "cogito ergo sum" "I think therefore I am". In this way, Descartes divided reality into res cogitans and res extensa, the world of thought and the world of existence or reality. This subject-object dichotomy makes knowledge of God elusive. The knowing subject now knows everything outside as object of Knowledge. The basis of knowledge depends then on the subject and not on the object. The object is at the mercy of the subject for its manipulation. What is to be known depends on how the thinking subject processes the knowledge of such object. Thus God is first an object of Knowledge. The knowledge of God is subjective knowledge. Thus if we follow Descartes logically, human capacity for God becomes a subjective matter. The inevitable consequence is proposal of atheism.

Immanuel Kant's philosophy is laid out in his two great works: Critique of pure reason and Critique of practical reason. Kant divides reality into the phenomenon and noumena. He introduced categorical imperatives of judgement- a priori judgment, a posteriori judgement and synthetic judgement. With this logical tools Kant philosophized that the judgements can apply to phenomena truths. Thus metaphysical realities like the soul, immortality and God belong to the noumena and cannot be known by human reason. He dismissed metaphysics. In Kant, there is no hope for man to know God and to be open to God. In his proposal on deontological ethics, Kant based ethics and morality on law. This means that even the practice of morality is for its own sake and not for any reward here or hereafter.

The contemporary philosophers as exemplified in Nietzsche and Hegel took up the position of absolute impossibility of humanity being open to God. Nietzsche defiantly portrayed the picture of modern secularism and the consequences in the Madman. Modern humanity has lost every sense of religion, of morals and cultural values. The necessary conclusion which follows from Modern secularism is that God is dead. It is the event of God's death that can create the enabling condition for humanity to go on living in total neglect of any value. Nietzsche's position is that it is impossible for humanity to be capable of openness to God given the state of affairs. Hegel took up the same position. In the case of Hegel, the death of God is epistemological reality. It is a death through which God will resurrect anew to reverse the order in the world. For the time being, man is match of God through the land. In Hegel, there seems to be some glimpse of hope. This shows that if even God is dead, humanity will be moved to open up to God by virtue of this "death of deaths". How will this come about remains a question needing answer. The Post-modernity witnessed a change in philosophical perspectives. This is the advent of existentialism. The father of existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard sought to redirect attention to human transcendence and possibility of openness to God through his onto-theology. In fact, he laid bare the reality of human condition in the world by analyzing some passages of the bible. Sartre took up the existentialist position from the aspect of human freedom. At the end, human freedom will constitute a blockade to human openness to God. Heidegger celebrated atheism in grand style in his onto-theology. Heidegger's analysis of facticity of human existence impoverished the human person so much that humanity appeared to be thrown into the world and without any relationship with God. In spite of this position, Heidegger maintains a position that appears to be in favor of core human values. What is evident in his thoughts clearly qualify him as atheistic humanist. Thus, the human being should be open to his or her humanness but not open to a being called God.

The big philosophical idea ruling the world today is humanism. Humanism has found expression in democracy as its political wheel to subtly drive its agenda. In humanism, the human being is transcendent. This transcendence, however, excludes God. It is transcendence towards self-actualization through maximum exploration of human potentialities. In post-humanism, we arrive at a point in history of humanity when the existence or non-existence of God makes no difference. There is divine “sede vacante” (vacant seat). Every human value is relative. There is no sense of sin, though evil hold sway, but guilt must not be tolerated. Religion is the enemy of human progress and should be eradicated. This is the position of Bertrand Russell. In the era of technological humanism that follow, believes divide humanity. There is need for a universal belief, a kind of religion modeled after democracy. This has taken the forms of socialist religion as seen in soccer, football and sport events. This is further in casinos. These are emerging world religions where “deus pecunia” (god of money) is worshiped. It is believed that this socio- democratic religion will unify humanity and take away terrorism and strife from human society. After technological-humanism comes the turning point to use Heidegger’s language. The turning point will usher in anarchy and anarchy will force humanity to total openness to God.

4. SKEPTICISM

Skepticism is to be discussed via the thesis on human as capax dei. Skepticism is philosophical epistemology perspective that proposes: The impossibility of human knowledge, the impossibility of certainty of human knowledge, the impossibility of justification of knowledge as belief. The position on these attitudes to nature of knowledge determines and differentiates a pyrrhonian and academic skeptic. Ordinarily, skeptics are classified into mild and rigorous or absolute. In the statement human is capax dei, it is of the nature of logical statement $A=B$. This statement gives insight into the nature of A and B. It preempts a first proposition and goes on to draw inference from a second position. The skeptic of Pyrrhonian type withholds consent on the truth of the above statement. It must be noted that in withholding consent, the pyrrhonian skeptic has not proved why the above statement should not merit our consent. The academic skeptic attempts to negate one or two premises of our thesis. Let us state it fully. Knowledge of God is apriori. Man is capable of apriori knowledge; therefore, man is capable of knowledge of God. The argument can be stated as such: $A = B$, $C = B$, then $C = A + B$. The academic skeptic tries to negate the argument by stating that $-A = B$, $-C = B$ then $-C = A + B$. On the main, the statement: human is capax dei is a logical argument which can be logically justified. If human beings have both sense and reason, it follows that human beings are capable of both sense knowledge and rational knowledge. If sense knowledge and rational knowledge are aposteriori and apriori knowledge respectively, and knowledge of the soul, God and immortality are apriori knowledge then human beings are capable of knowledge of God and can be open to Him. This argument is both hypothetical and disjunctive. This is because it is expressed in logical terms. The skeptics only deny knowledge by withholding consent or falsifying a proposition. This attitude of mind is not proper knowledge. Instead, it leaves knowledge stagnant. At worst, it prepares grounds for atheism.

5. ATHEISM

Atheism is a philosophical position which follows from skepticism. It is the denial of knowledge of metaphysical realities as the human soul, God and immortality. Atheism denies the existence of God and that human beings have immortal soul. In some forms, it manifests as a negation of God’s omnipotence. If there is God, He is absentee landlord (deus abscondus). This brand of atheism is mild form. It is ready to consent to God’s existence but denies that God cares for human beings. This is a form of atheistic humanism. There are no rational grounds on which to justify atheism. As atheist denies knowledge of metaphysical realities, how did they come to know that God does not exist? It is much easy to know that p than to know that $\neg p$. If their thesis is accepted then there is no grounds on which to posit that human beings are capable of God. It can be posited that human beings are capable of transcendence, but that is only to the exclusion of God. Absolute atheism is unfounded. This is because such atheist at least believes in himself. And as long as such atheist is not self-created or self-generated or self-regenerated, then there are possible grounds to assert that such atheist believes in God even implicitly. Atheists are therefore capable of God at least tacitly.

6. THEISM

Theism is a philosophical perspective that holds that God exists and can be known by man through the powers of reason aided by faith. The knowledge of God can be through rational means or non-rational means. Theism calls for believe in God and worship of God. In theism, the thesis of human being as capax dei can be justified, when the obstacles on the

path of thought have been removed. There are enormous problems to theistic acceptance that human beings are capable of God. The problem of technological humanism poses a danger. Humanity believes in God but this God is God of technology or technological God. This God is one to be manipulated and not to be worshipped. Thus across Europe, America, parts of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and parts of middle East worship of God has declined so much. This development cast doubt on thesis of humanity openness and capability for God. The traces of neo-paganism and Satanism lay credence to the fact that human capacity for God is still disputable. The return of mystery cults of old mixed with immorality and idolatry practices call attention to a re-evaluation of the thesis on human capacity for God.

7. HUMAN AS CAPAX DEI AND FUTURE OF HUMANITY

In what ways can technological humanistic humanity be capax dei? There are many varied ways in which human capacity for God can be expressed as not just a possibility but as a reality

Sherman has demonstrated through the thoughts of Giles Deleuze that humanity can be open to God through “dis-embodiment and de-materialization”. At the heart of Giles Deleuze’s theophanic philosophy are the concepts of creativity, virtuality and actuality. It is the creative act that turns into a virtual event whereby making this event an actuality. This means that humanity should regain a mystical union with creation by virtually actualizing the events of becoming and coming into being of being. It is as if the argument commands humanity to contemplate creation in order to achieve openness and union with the divine.

The view of Thomas Aquinas on this subject demands to be given a pride of place. The Angelic Doctor stated that man has natural desire to see God. The question arises; is this natural desire the end of human nature or is it the motive of transcendence? The reply of the Angelic Doctor is that “the natural desire to behold God’s essence is a supernatural desire divinely elicited from potentia obedientialis of human nature”. Feingold Lawrence tried to give an interpretation and meaning of “potential obedientia” within Thomistic corpus and found out that nine out of nineteen occurrences of the expression was used to refer to miracles. (Feingold, 238). Worthy of note is that the action of divine grace, whether as miracle or infused virtue into the heart of most hardened sinners, for human economy of salvation or human openness to see God depends on God as cause. Thomas did not dismiss human nature as evil or not able to contribute anything in the actualization of this natural desire. Human nature has the potency of obedience which can be acted upon by the power of God. Thus, it is in the submission of this human nature in obedience to God that human capacity for God lies. It is through divine actuation of human potentia obedientialis that human nature can become capax dei. Put in other words, human capax dei is a work of divine grace and human nature. In the case that human “potentia obedientialis” is not brought under divine action of grace, can the action of grace still proceed to act on human nature despite the lack of disposition or obduracy in evil? Here, I hold that the concept of divine grace also includes mercy. God through the action of divine grace expressed through His mercy, will go ahead to make human nature receptive to his saving action. This shows that even human moral evil and natural evil that force human being to attempt to deny God cannot separate human being from its natural destiny.

8. CONCLUSION

Philosophy is like an edifice of thought. It involves a deconstruction and a reconstruction. In reflecting on human capax dei, philosophical path has shown that some philosophers’ thoughts are most profound in the positive sense to accent to the fact that human beings have the capacity even in potency to be open to God. The preparatory stage was set by Plato then Aristotle in his immovable mover, Augustine in his theory of illumination, and Thomas Aquinas in his theory of natural desire for God. There is hope for humanity. God cannot allow His image in Human beings to be lost.

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