

## § 10. Doctrine of Man

### Lecture 01

#### Different Approaches to Anthropology

Today we begin a new locus in our survey of Christian doctrine. For the past many months – it seems like well over a year now – we have been studying the doctrine of creation. When you think that the doctrine of creation includes within its scope *everything* in existence apart from God himself, then it is no surprise that it would be a subject that would merit such a lengthy and in-depth discussion. But having completed that locus now, we turn to a brand new section of the course devoted to the doctrine of man.

Psalm 8 raises the question, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” There are different approaches to answering this fundamental question about the nature of man. Let’s compare and contrast these approaches to anthropology.

First, *empirical anthropology*. Empirical anthropology can be defined as a collection for a whole series of sciences which respectively investigate different aspects of man through the observation of analyzable phenomena, through experimentation, and through the consequences of the data investigated. So, for example, empirical anthropology would include studies on the biological origins of man – where did the human species come from? It asks what, if anything, makes humans unique? What serves to differentiate humanity from the rest of the animal kingdom? It studies the relationship of the brain and states of consciousness – the famous mind-body problem. Psychoanalysis and psychology would be included in empirical anthropology as would be social studies. All of these provide partial answers, at least, to the question “What is man?”

*Philosophical anthropology*, by contrast, tries to answer the question “Who is man?” If the empirical anthropologist tries to answer the question “What is man?” the philosophical anthropologist explores the question “Who is man?” That is to say, philosophical anthropology seeks a self-understanding of man in light of the analysis of what it is to be a human being. This will usually be bound up with ethical considerations – what our moral obligations and prohibitions are – and the intrinsic worth of human beings and fundamental human rights.

As you might well imagine, there are various approaches to philosophical anthropology. For example, one of these would be materialism or physicalism or naturalism. This viewpoint has a very long pedigree. Particularly influential in the modern notion of materialism would be conceptions of man like that of Julien Offray de La Mettrie<sup>1</sup>. His

---

<sup>1</sup> Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709 - 1751) was a physician and philosopher. He published *L'Homme machine* (“Man a Machine”) in 1747 which was a materialistic, atheistic work in which he argued that consciousness is related to physical causes. Hence, he denied dualism (that is, he denied that man was comprised of a soul separate from the body).

dates are 1709 to 1751. This French thinker characterized man as *L'homme machine* – “man the machine.” This is very similar to the characterization of humanity by Richard Dawkins in our own day – that we are basically machines for propagating DNA.

*L'homme machine* is the notion of man as just a mechanistic device – a “moist robot” in the words of one contemporary naturalist. The German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach<sup>2</sup> whose dates are 1804 to 1872 had a very catchy way of expressing this materialistic view of man. Feuerbach’s aphorism was “*der mensch ist, was er isst*” – that is to say, “man is what he eats” – in German, at least, a very nice pun. On this view, man is just a purely material organism.

In contrast to this view of philosophical anthropology would be a quite different perspective known as idealism. This is represented in German philosophy by G. W. F. Hegel<sup>3</sup> whose dates are 1770 to 1831. For Hegel, it is the mind, or spirit, which is constitutive for man. What it means to be human is to be mind as opposed to the material.

Yet a third philosophical approach to anthropology would be existentialism. Existentialism emphasizes individual authentic existence achieved by a free choice through which a person realizes his uniqueness. So the emphasis in existentialism is on individual authenticity which is achieved through radical freedom. A good example of an existentialist would be the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre whose dates are 1905 to 1980. Sartre was an atheistic existentialist.<sup>4</sup> He held that man is condemned to be free because there is no essence of man which precedes his existence and defines who he is. Rather, man is condemned to freely define his own existence since he does not have an essence that is established by God in advance. Man determines his own meaning and value. So existentialism tends to lead to a sort of radical relativism about the meaning and value of human life.

Finally, one might mention Marxism or Marxism-Leninism. According to Marxism, society is constitutive for what it is to be a human being – not the individual but rather society. It postulates a kind of economic determinism and class struggle between oppressors and the oppressed. This view of man entails a view of human beings which implies the perfectibility of human existence. If the state can be made to respect and to work for the interests of the masses then the masses can achieve a sort of perfect society – a perfect humanity if you will – so that there is no innate, sinful, fallenness of man which would prevent having a perfect society in which human beings live.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (1804 - 1872) was a German materialist, atheist philosopher whose work later influenced Karl Marx.

<sup>3</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 - 1831) was a German philosopher with liberal, unorthodox Christian ideas.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 - 1980) was one of the main philosophical thinkers of 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialism.

All of these examples are various philosophical approaches to the subject of anthropology seeking to answer the question, “Who is man?”

In contrast to both empirical and philosophical anthropology, *theological anthropology* approaches these questions with respect to man’s relationship to God. Like philosophical anthropology, it also seeks to answer the question, “Who is man?” What is the meaning and nature of human existence? But in contrast to empirical and philosophical anthropology, it sees the answer to the psalmist’s question to be found fundamentally in our relationship with God. This usually involves two aspects: man as created in God’s image and then man as a fallen human being – a sinner – before God.

So theological anthropology – or the doctrine of man – typically includes within it two subsections. First would be man as created in the image of God. What is man by nature? Then secondly would be man as sinner – man in his fallen state of alienation from God.

A third state, namely man justified in Christ and restored to his relationship with God, will typically come in the doctrine of salvation or soteriology, which we will look at later. So there tend to be two subsections in the doctrine of man – man in the image of God and then man as sinner. Man insofar as he is redeemed and restored to relationship with God (though it could be included here) is generally classed under the doctrine of salvation.

So man is created by nature to be in God’s image though he now stands in rebellion to God. There is a sort of paradox in Christian anthropology, if you will; namely, the so-called “natural man” is not really the natural man! That is to say, man as he was created to be, by nature, is in the image of God; he is innocent and not fallen – that is the way that Adam is presented in Genesis prior to the Fall. But what Paul calls the “natural man” is fallen humanity. So Paul’s natural man is not really the natural man. Sin doesn’t belong to man by nature; it is rather a perversion of human nature. Human nature in its uncorrupted form as it was created to be is in the image of God.

What is the inter-relationship between these different approaches to the doctrine of man? Well, some persons think that theological anthropology has no role to play whatsoever and should be excluded. Obviously, if you are a materialist or a naturalist then there simply is no room for answering these questions with respect to our relationship to God. For many people on the modern scene who are influenced by secular philosophical approaches, theological anthropology is simply out of the question.

Among those who do take a theological approach, it will be very frequently said that there is no relationship between theological anthropology and empirical anthropology. These thinkers try to separate empirical studies of man from theological approaches to this question in order that there might not be any conflict between the two. If these are utterly non-intersecting domains of study then there can be no conflict arising for theological anthropology from the various empirical anthropological disciplines.

This, however, seems to me to be an abdication of responsibility on the part of theologians. It involves a retreat of theology into unverifiable and hence irrelevant sanctuaries. It achieves security and safety from the studies of empirical anthropology only at the expense of becoming irrelevant to the real world in which we live. It seems to me that theological anthropology does have empirical consequences. For example, consequences about the origin of humanity – was there an original human pair from whom we are all descended? Or, consequences about materialism and the mind-body relationship – are we simply chemical machines or is there an immaterial part of our nature? Or, consequences concerning freedom versus determinism – is everything that we think and do determined by the input of our five senses and our genetic makeup, or do we have genuine freedom of the will? In all of these ways, I think, empirical anthropology and theological anthropology have the potential of coming into conflict with each other and to either verification or falsification of theological positions.

Moreover, I think it is obvious that theological anthropology can come into conflict with philosophical anthropology. The philosopher seeks to answer the same question as the theologian, namely “Who is man?” – but he does so totally from the human side without taking any account of what God has to say about the matter or what difference God would make to the question “Who is man?” Whereas the theologian seeks God’s viewpoint on human nature and on who we are. So obviously conflict can arise between theological and philosophical approaches to anthropology.

So it seems to me that what we want to find is an integrative approach to these questions – a synoptic approach – which will take into account all of the insights of empirical, philosophical, and theological anthropology. The Christian worldview is properly a synoptic worldview that integrates all of our various sources of knowledge that we have in order to answer life’s deepest questions.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* In the last two categories of the theological, the fallen man – I think that would more closely align with the first part of Psalm 8, *what is humanity that thou are mindful of him*. The second part, *what is the son of Adam that thou visited him*, would be the redeemed part. As far as integrating them, it seems like Hegel would be more closely studying what is humanity prior to the Christian because it's talking about a spiritual nature of humanity before coming here. The integrative approach – what Sartre says is that we are given total libertarian stuff and we are affected but his thing about the spirit is all wrong. But what we do, we reap in our spirit, too. I think that an integrative approach is the only way to approach it.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, good.

*Student:* I just wanted clarification about the difference between Hegel and Sartre – idealism and existentialism. I know that existentialism is complicated and diverse.

*Dr. Craig:* Obviously we're making very broad strokes here. But the point I wanted to emphasize about Hegel was the commitment to idealism in contrast to the materialistic point of view of La Mettrie and Feuerbach. For Hegel, what is constitutive human existence is spirit or mind, and I think that's an element that is one with which we would resonate from a theological point of view in contrast to pure materialism. Now, we have to be careful, however, not to lapse into Gnosticism where we think it's all about spirit because clearly a Jewish view of humanity includes the worthwhileness of the physical body. It's not just spirit. But that would be the emphasis that I'm trying to point out here. In contrast to materialism is the importance of mind or spirit. What I see different about existentialism that I wanted to focus on was its emphasis on the individual, that it's very, very individualistic. And that this emphasis is very much connected with, in Sartre's view, the fact that we have no defined essence from God. What we are is what we freely make of ourselves. We choose our own meaning, value, and destiny through this radical freedom that we have, and we're not defined as to what we are by God because there is no God on this view. So it's that emphasis that you don't have in Hegel – this emphasis upon the lack of an essence prior to your existence and therefore, as he says, being condemned to define your own existence in light of your radical freedom.

*Student:* Given Sartre's view, it seems like that's a very popular concept today and actually mushrooming because the focus in so much of what I see in theater and entertainment and whatnot is letting yourself be free, discover who you are, it's okay. You don't have to be judged by any sort of authority or culture. You're certainly free to express yourself as you see fit. It's a sense of reaching your self-awareness. I just see that is a very popular theme that's being promoted so much today because there is no God so you don't have to worry about boundaries of moralism and whatnot. It's within yourself. Am I correct in that understanding?

*Dr. Craig:* I hadn't made that connection but I can see why you would say that. I would suggest that probably all of these views have currents within contemporary culture. These philosophical viewpoints just don't disappear without a trace. They leave currents in popular culture. I mentioned, for example, Dawkins' approach which I find to be still very influential culturally – this idea of “man the machine.” But the other existentialist viewpoint I wouldn't be at all surprised if you're not right about that.

*Student:* I would agree sort of, especially since I spent the last six months in a secular university. I've got this different perspective. Yes and no individuals determine their meaning for humanity. Yes, in the sense that we have choice, but no in the sense that our only choice is making sure that we agree with everybody else, too. Because the

celebration of the individual stops when you're not celebrating all of the others around. So the Christian worldview, because it is very narrow (because we do go through the narrow gate) is not something that is accepted in the culture at large. In the culture at large very much is this idea that we can create a perfect society.

*Dr. Craig:* Thank you. I think what you just highlighted is that Marxism is also still very much alive in the West. Not in the old bourgeois versus the proletariat, but in the social justice movement. The same sort of stratification of society between the oppressed and the oppressors in terms of gender, race, sexuality, and so forth, all of these kind of themes are current in the contemporary university in a kind of neo-Marxist emphasis that is, as you say, not at all individualistic. It's communal.

*Student:* Paulo Freire is super-popular right now – the Brazilian philosopher and teacher who talked about if the oppressed are going to break free from their oppression the oppressors have to join them. So it's very much a “we're all the same, and it's wonderful.” But you can't lift people out of oppression unless you become one of them. It's a very strange philosophy but it is definitely – there are the oppressors and then there are the oppressed and the only way to break free from that and create that perfect society is to get down in the mud and bring everybody up because a rising tide raises all boats.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, thank you. These are very interesting comments.

*Student:* This trying to get an integrative view – aren't some of these mutually exclusive? How do you get an integrative view with mutually exclusive ideas?

*Dr. Craig:* When I say a synoptic point of view, I don't mean you make a kind of kaleidoscopic collage or something because obviously things like existentialism as Sartre expressed it is incompatible with Christianity because we believe that there is a God who does define for us what humanity is and our moral worth and obligations. But what I meant by that was that we will approach an issue not in sort of pristine isolation from these other schools of thought but we will interact with them and take account of what they say and to refute them where necessary or show where their critiques fail. But we won't have a kind of naive isolationism where we just retreat into our own circles and don't interact with these wider points of view. We want to be interacting with these kinds of things that someone just described at the university and so forth.

*Student:* I read about Rousseau but I heard Rousseau was a Christian existentialist. I don't know anything about that. You're saying that it was incompatible but I've heard that there are Christian existentialists.

*Dr. Craig:* Rousseau, if I can dig into my memory files, was a deist. He was a French deist. That is to say he did believe in God, that's right, and therefore thought that we have a moral duty to God to approximate. But he wasn't a Christian. He would not be an

atheist like Sartre was. He lived a couple of centuries earlier during the heyday of French and German deism. So he has the idea of a Creator to whom we are morally responsible, but he would not have adopted a Christian point of view. He is called, as those of you who study philosophy of education know, the father of modern education and had a tremendous influence on philosophy of education subsequently and how children are to be raised.<sup>5</sup>