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IDEA OF HUMANITY IN DAVID HUME'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

When thinking of tendencies in classical utilitarianism and of those that have been long since forgotten, the significant fact that hints of some of them were already present in the “pre-historical” period of classical utilitarianism cannot be ignored. David Hume, in particular, in his works devoted to moral issues, contributed significantly to the formation of individual aspects of utilitarian school of thought. Jeremy Bentham in his work *Article on Utilitarianism* clearly suggests Hume’s influence in him forming opinions and theory¹. It is, however, necessary to point out that Hume’s ethical theory, which included some fundamental features of utilitarianism, was substantially different in its formulation to Bentham’s².

¹ J. Bentham, *Deontology: Together with a Table of the Springs of Action and Article on Utilitarianism*, ed. A. Goldworth, New York 1983, s. 288-289.

² *A Treatise of Human Nature* (the 3rd book in particular is devoted to morality), published in 1739-1740, and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, published in 1751, are considered Hume’s most significant works focused on issues of ethics and morality. Opinions among the present-day professional public are profoundly different as to which of these works is a more significant contribution to the development of ethics. Such opinions as those of D.F. Norton (*Hume, Human Nature, and the Foundations of Morality*. W: *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. D.F. Norton, Cambridge 1993, s. 171) or J.C.A. Gaskin (*Hume on Religion*. W: tamże, s. 343) could be mentioned here who claim that *A Treatise of Human Nature*, i.e. Hume’s first work, was the most important work on ethics and morality. In his second work he only developed, or perfected, his previous opinions. On the opposing side are A. MacIntyre (*Introduction*. W: *Hume’s Ethical Writings: Selections from David Hume*, ed. A. MacIntyre, Notre Dame-London 1965, s. 14), H.D. Aiken (*Introduction*. W: *Hume’s Moral and Political Philosophy*, ed. H.D. Aiken, New York-London 1948, s. xxvii-xxviii) or S. Copley, A. Edgar (*Introduction*. W: D. Hume, *Selected Essays*, Oxford-New York 1993, s. xiii), who, to various extents, consider *Enquiry*, i.e. the other of

Hume based his ethical theory on feeling, which distinctly dominated and determined the deciding of what is right or wrong. It is, thus, quite natural that he considered benevolence, humanity, friendship, gratitude, natural affection and public spirit devoted to the common good as the most characteristic features³. All these values are, however, profoundly different from those that dominated especially thanks to Bentham's, but also in Mill's, theory. Utility was their unifying platform; this, nevertheless, suggests that Hume's ethical theory was formed and directed differently from Bentham's. This is also obvious in his understanding of justice, which he combines with utility, but, in some cases, only conditionally, as, with regard to justice, he considers humanity a highly significant value, which can possibly even dominate over justice. This is especially possible towards the weak, who are not independently able to ensure that justice be pursued. That Hume considered it important that all these values be beneficial to the interests of the whole society is a significant aspect of his ethical theory⁴. He, thus, considered, pursuing humanity a prominent factor in the efforts aimed at benefiting the whole society, not just an individual. Utility was a latent motif of all human striving. However, humanity, which supported the life of the whole society, was a specific and direct motif and criterion when assessing human actions. This did not merely concern the utility of an individual but of the whole society, which has now become a significant aspect of Hume's ethical theory. What is important is that rampant egoism, which especially dominated in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, acquired a fundamentally different dimension and was placed in context with striving for the utility of the whole society. Hume considered justice, together with humanity, significant aspects in protecting the life of human community and mutual human soli-

the above works, more significant. From the viewpoint of the studied area, I consider Hume's second work much more important. In it, he developed a great number of thoughts, to which, in the previous work, he either paid no attention whatsoever or they were merely on the periphery of his interest. In *Enquiry* he placed emphasis on the welfare of an individual with regard to the interests of society; he clearly formulated the role of humanity, justice and benefit within ethics and morality. My opinion on the importance of his paper *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* was also furthered by his own statement made in his biography where he wrote: "in my opinion [...], my *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* is incomparably the best among my historical, philosophical and literary works" (D. Hume, *My Own Life*. W: tenże, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, Indianapolis 1987, s. xxxvi).

³ Tenże, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. J.B. Schneewind, Hackett Indianapolis & Cambridge 1983, s. 18.

⁴ Tamże, s. 25-26.

darity⁵. Humanity, alongside utility, has, therefore, become another criterion when assessing what is right or wrong for the life of society, and, as a result, also for the life of an individual⁶. In Hume's ethical theory, humanity is not an attribute of utility, as it might seem at first, but vice versa. Utility is a component, and a highly significant one, of humanity. Humanity is, in his opinion, also necessary, as it is beneficial for the wellbeing of the whole society.

He considered applying the sense of humanity necessary in the relationship towards all mankind not only limited to a small group of close people. According to him, it would be unnatural for man to be careless about the wellbeing or suffering of his fellowmen and not considering good what benefits the welfare of others and bad what gives rise to suffering. He derived the value of social virtue, to a great extent, from the sense of humanity⁷. Humanity in Hume is, thus, the keystone of all social virtues, i.e. virtues which form a substantial base of the whole human morality. Without these social virtues, the existence of human society is impossible, and morality even less so. He realised that people are beings very different from each other; he was, in spite of that, convinced that every man has in him a certain sense of humanity. He claimed that every act of humanity is beneficial for the whole society, which cannot, however, be said about other human senses, such as affect⁸. He even considered humanity a decisive criterion for an individual when deciding about his actions⁹.

According to Hume, humanity "is the chief characteristic which distinguishes a civilized age from times of barbarity and ignorance"¹⁰. This is the very reason why he appreciated, for instance, Roman stoicism very highly. With regard to Roman stoicism, he compared the value of humanity in the life of a human community to the sun which disperses dark clouds and rain. Instead of them, it provides mankind with the most beautiful colours found in nature¹¹. It can, thus, be stated that humanity was also highly appreciated by Hume as an individual virtue. He ranked it among those virtues that only morally mature people could achieve, i.e. those who, in their lives, have maintained a moderate or medium position¹².

In Hume's ethical theory, humanity is the core of his idea of morality, as it stands for a feature common to all mankind. "And though this affec-

⁵ Tamže, s. 39-40.

⁶ Tamže, s. 46-48.

⁷ Tamže, s. 48-50.

⁸ Tamže, s. 75-76.

⁹ Tamže, s. 82-84.

¹⁰ Tenže, *Of Refinement in the Arts*. W: tenže, *Essays: Moral, Political...*, s. 274.

¹¹ Tenže, *The Stoics*. W: tenže, *Selected Essays...*, s. 89.

¹² Tenže, *Of the Middle Station of Life*. W: tenže, *Essays: Moral, Political...*, s. 546-547.

tion of humanity may not generally be esteemed so strong as vanity or ambition, yet, being common to all men, it can alone be the foundation of morals, or of any general system of blame or praise. One man's ambition is not another's; nor will the same event or object satisfy both: But the humanity of one man is the humanity of every one; and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures"¹³.

Bentham, in his ethical theory, assigned humanity hardly any place. All he did was mention it several times marginally. Considering Hume his predecessor, he reduced his understanding of humanity to a mere charitable aspect, i.e. decreasing significant suffering¹⁴. Bentham's reduced understanding of Hume's humanity can serve as an explanation why, in his ethical theory, humanity did not have a major position. His theory is based on the contradiction of pleasantness and pain, the emphasis is, however, unambiguously placed on pursuing and achieving a maximum amount of happiness. Charitable activities were only one of marginal areas of his interest in pursuing happiness for people. What was much more important was the political, social and legal reform of society, which, in his opinion, was the only thing that could ensure the achievement of the lofty goals, which he imposed on utilitarianism. High requirements for what the subject of ethics was also corresponded to the lofty goals that Bentham imposed on utilitarianism. "Ethics at large may be defined, the art directed men's actions to the productions of the greatest possible quantity of happiness..."¹⁵, or, possibly, as "...the branch of art and science which has for its object the learning and shewing for the information of each individual, by what means the net amount of his happiness may be made as large as possible"¹⁶. With regard to such an understanding of the role of ethics, there was hardly any space left for humanity and similar senses, which were not a means of achieving the maximisation of happiness or, at least, a necessary amount of happiness.

Bentham refused Hume's theory of moral sense. Bentham, moreover, did not only refuse this theory but any considerable role of feeling in the moral life of man and, above all, society. He claimed Hume his predecessor who laid the primary foundations of utilitarian ethics; he, however, extracted the notion of utility from Hume's ethical theory. He also taxed Hume's understanding of utility with being vague, as Hume's utility was

¹³ Tenže, *An Enquiry Concerning...*, s. 75.

¹⁴ J. Bentham, *Deontology...*, s. 345-363.

¹⁵ Tenže, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Vancouver 2008, s. 310.

¹⁶ Tenže, *Deontology...*, s. 124.

interconnected with many other notions which, as a result, denominated it and lead to elimination in practical application¹⁷. It can, therefore, be stated that Bentham refused many positive aspects of Hume's ethical theory mostly related to Hume paying significant attention to human senses and, as a part of it, the sense of morality. By refusing them, Bentham made his theory into a cold, rational and unattractive theory, without much hope for broader application in the solving of common moral problems of an individual and it could, thus, not serve as a guide for the moral life of man.

Hume's ethical theory was also based on the morality of feeling. It is, thus, quite natural that he also dealt with many issues directly or indirectly connected to it. He paid significant attention to the matters of love and marriage, in spite of having lived his life outside one. He understood marriage as, primarily, a joining of equal human beings where domination of either partner should not be present, as that always procreates revolt and new despotism¹⁸. From this, duties for men resulted. According to him, they should also take part in the care of children and their upbringing in the spirit of humanity¹⁹. In other types of marriage, such as polygamy, he pointed out that this violates the equality of women as human beings since they are in an unequal position towards men and their status can be likened to that of animals²⁰.

This does not, however, change the fact that Hume, by his theory, laid the foundations of what seemed to promise development into the form of a more harmonic whole than it actually did, especially thanks to Bentham's theory of quantitative utilitarianism. J.S. Mill, later on, returned, at least indirectly, to some suggestions included in Hume. This mainly concerned an indirect inclusion of some aspects of human senses and, as a part of it, actual moral senses into his theory of qualitative utilitarianism.

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I think that it is possible to follow Hume's ideas of humanity and develop them into new understanding within the present ethical theories. In context with Hume, we usually ascribe humanity on the intuitive level or the level of common sense morality as human capacity to feel compassion with the suffering of others. I think especially about the capacity to feel

¹⁷ Tamže, s. 289.

¹⁸ Tenže, *Of Love and Marriage*. W: tenže, *Essays: Moral, Political...*, s. 560.

¹⁹ Tenže, *Of Polygamy and Divorces*. W: tamže, s. 181.

²⁰ Tamže, s. 184.

compassion with strangers. This capacity to feel compassion with the suffering of others is probably the impulse that leads to giving assistance to people affected by disaster. The capacity to feel compassion with the suffering of strangers and the help provided to the people struck by misfortune or suffering are the uniquely human manifestations, on the basis of which we can speak about humanity as a moral value that is a result of our cultural evolution, our moral development. The capacity to forgive can be put on the same level with the capacity to feel compassion. The capacity to forgive others, for example, friends and acquaintances, or even passers-by with whom we have a misunderstanding, or in an extreme case to forgive one's enemies is a uniquely human matter. It certainly can be seen as a manifestation of humanity as a moral value, a result of our moral development.

We can proceed in this line of our thinking in a similar way and ask as to what extent a protection against unprovoked aggression from other person is a manifestation of humanity since we protect human life, whether it is ours or the life of a close person or a stranger. I have already drawn a conclusion that if we respect the life of our child, or any other close person, we do something that also widely exists in the animal realm. In the animal realm the life of offspring and members of the family is also automatically protected. Biologists explain that it is done to protect our genes or genetic investment into our offspring²¹. It is then a natural and not moral capacity, not to speak about the protection or defence of one's own life because every living creature usually fights for its life and tries to protect and defend it. Man is no exception in this case. A different situation occurs when it is the protection of a stranger. People can stand in defence of man in danger, if his life is threatened (or his property, his physical or mental integrity) by some aggressor. Undoubtedly, this is a uniquely human manifestation of behaviour, which certainly is an attribute of humanity as a moral value and which should be seen as a result of our cultural evolution, i.e. of the development of morality.

Saul Smilansky offers us further inspiration for the development of our thinking about this problem²². He argues that in the world full of intolerant, uncaring, unjust and maleficent people, we have to appreciate the value and virtue of non-maleficence and be grateful to the non-

²¹ A. Oldenquist, *The Origins of Morality: An Essay in Philosophical Anthropology*, „Social Philosophy & Policy” 1991, nr 8(1), s. 121-140; B.N. Waller, *What Rationality Adds to Animal Morality*, „Biology and Philosophy” 1997, vol. 12, s. 345; R. Wright, *The Moral Animal: Why We Are, the Way We Are. The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*, New York 1994.

²² S. Smilansky, *Should I Be Grateful to You for Not Harming Me?*, „Philosophy and Phenomenological Research” 1997, vol. 57(3), s. 585-597.

maleficent people who are, in fact, our benefactors²³. Can we then in the context of our discussion state that if someone does not harm others, he behaves humanely? First of all, we should find out whether a similar kind of behaviour is also present in the animal realm. It certainly is because the existence of animals is not only the matter of the fight for survival, but there also exist such situations in which animals accept each other, maybe because they have enough food or maybe because the potential enemy is equally strong or stronger, etc. There can be a lot of reasons for such acceptance. The non-maleficence (for various reasons) then exists also in nature and that is why it is not a moral but natural-biological quality. However, in relation to man we can think about the reasons why people do not behave towards each other in a harmful way; that they do not cause suffering or bring disaster to each other. One reason can be that these people do not know about the each other's existence. What is absent is this basic condition for causing harms to each other – they do not know that the other person exists. Should they be grateful to each other that they are not harmful to each other? We could hardly say that the fact that someone at the other end of the world, who does not even know that we exist, does not harm us is a manifestation of his humanity. On the other hand, a reason for not being maleficent can be the fact that although certain people know each other, their life interests and goals are completely different. Although they know about their mutual existence, they are almost in no social or moral contact (they are strangers to each other); in the extreme case we can call it mutual indifference. In this case we can hardly call this indifference a manifestation of humanity because it is not related to the protection or maintenance or development of the life of other man, his needs and interests. Other situation appears when they know each other better than in the previous case, but their values, interests and goals are compatible so there are no conflicts of interests and they tolerate each other. However, their mutual tolerance cannot be perceived as the kind of non-maleficence that is a manifestation of humanity.

However, a different situation occurs if there exists a conflict of their legitimate interests and goals, but they still do not harm each other although they could. It is not because one of them is stronger, smarter, has a higher position, but because they do not think it is right to harm other person in the realization of his legitimate goals and intentions by their 'non-standard' behaviour or conduct. In that case we certainly can speak about humanity of such behaviour and conduct. Of course, I do not think that a thief's decision not to steal or a rowdy's decision not to fight other man should be per-

²³ Tamže, s. 597.

ceived as a manifestation of the humanity of their behaviour and conduct. The goals and intentions of the thief or the rowdy that led them to their acts were certainly not rightful, but quite the contrary. Let us rather think about the situation of the two people who want to acquire the same leading position at work. One of them knows that the other committed a moral misdemeanour in the past, which had no tragic consequences and the person regretted it. However, no one in his job knows about it. If the one who knows it would make it known to others, the chances of his rival to get the leading position would significantly decrease. However, he does not use this information because he does not think it right to acquire the leading position by the disadvantaging of the other. He believes that everybody makes mistakes, including moral mistakes, which should be tolerated unless they bring tragic or extremely unfortunate consequences, or if they are not repeated too often. Then, in certain circumstances not to act in a maleficent way means acting humanely. In this case we can say that this form of behaviour and conduct is uniquely human and a result of our cultural evolution and moral development. In this context we can agree with Smilansky's opinion that we should be grateful to people that do us no harm, but we cannot accept it as a universal rule.

Consequently, we can try to conclude the so far presented thinking about humanity and on this basis define the active and passive forms of the realization of humanity. The active form means the direct involvement of moral agent through his participation in the activity developed for the benefit of the strangers in need of help. The passive form of the realization of humanity means that our behaviour expresses our compassion with the strangers affected by disaster. Especially in the case of the latter form an important role is played by moral feelings. Usually this passive form of humanity forms the basis, or is the condition for the realization of the active form of humanity, i.e. for the providing of assistance to those people who need it. Compassion with the suffering often (though not always) leads to the acting for the benefit of these people. Of course, the active help is always more valuable than mere compassion, but we should not minimize the value or potential of the humanity comprising compassion. Our capacity to forgive comprises a similar potential of being humane. Forgiveness, just like compassion, can be the initial point for our further acting, the active realization of humanity in the form of assistance to others. The passive humanity can also be reflected in not acting, i.e. not causing harm to other person despite the fact that the moral agent could do it while realizing his rightful intentions and goals. This passive form of humanity can be seen as a certain minimal level of humanity related to

the fact that if the moral agent cannot help other man, he at least expresses his compassion, or at least does not act in the way that could harm the other in the realization of his rightful intentions and aims. The active form of the realization of humanity can be divided into positive and negative. The positive form means a direct assistance to a stranger who needs it in the realization of his positive intentions and goals. The negative formulation means to prevent other person from the realization of harmful aims, intentions that could affect some stranger.

My thinking, developed so far, has brought me to the conclusion that it is possible to respect humanity from the metaphysical or ontological perspective, i.e. to perceive someone as a human being on the basis of his morphological and functional signs belonging to human beings. This, however, does not say anything about the moral aspect of humanity. We can only latently create conditions for the formulation of a definition of the moral value of humanity. From the ethical or moral perspective, humanity has to be realized and not only respected because it implies acting to the benefit of the strangers in need. It is latently present also in the passive form of humanity, i.e. in the feeling of compassion with the suffering or misfortune of strangers or in the case of forgiving someone. The moral value of humanity can be realized only through our behaviour and conduct in relation to strangers.

Similarly, we can ask to what extent we can speak about humanity or inhumanity of people's opinions. Can we relate humanity only to human behaviour and conduct or can we also find it in the opinions expressed in a certain form of communication. With respect to the partial conclusions of my thinking it is necessary to state at first that the humanity of someone's opinion is not dependent on his understanding of the essence, or origin of man, but on his attitudes taken in his dealing with the problems and needs of people struck by disaster or suffering. One's opinion can be a means of expression of his compassion with the suffering or misfortune of strangers, so it can be included in the passive forms of humanity, of course, if it fulfils the criteria that have been formulated above.

I suggest that we speak about humanity in all the cases in which human life is protected and maintained since it brings positive consequences for human life; with the specification that if it is the protection and maintenance of one's own life, the lives of our close ones, friends or acquaintances, it is the humanity based on a biological-natural foundation that, however, has also its moral dimension and effect. On the contrary, the manifestations of the protection and maintenance of life in relation to strangers represent the real moral value of humanity, i.e. they are the re-

sults of our cultural evolution, our moral development. In this way we accept all the positive manifestations of our behaviour in relation to other people. Especially, we emphasize the value of helping, the protection and maintenance of the handicapped forms of human life and the strangers who need it because such behaviour transcends our biological-natural dimension, or the basis that we have in common with many other representatives of the animal realm²⁴.

Conclusion

The presented analysis of some, at present practically non-traditional, aspects of Hume's utilitarian thinking of the 18th century has confirmed that utilitarianism of the given period exceeded present-day utilitarianism in many respects. It embodied many topics and approaches which had a chance to enrich not only the morality of society but also the moral life of an individual. They created space for the acceptance of other values than just those strictly utilitarian that were based on calculating pain and pleasure. They enriched the moral life of an individual by the acceptance of human senses, which were considered a significant component of the moral striving of an individual for achieving happiness and self-perfection. Moral senses were considered compatible with the efforts for achieving benefits of human actions.

These aims following from Hume's idea of humanity can be achieved through the moral principles and particular moral norms that define some ways of pursuing humanity in the individual and social life of moral communities. I do not think that humanity as a moral quality is unachievable and abstract moral ideal that is too far from moral practice of the moral agents. I mean that humanity as a moral additional value is the expression of actual requirements and interests of the individuals and humankind in general. Human beings hope for their rational existence and

²⁴ Bruce N. Waller in this respect speaks about the morality of care and the morality of duty. In his opinion, human rationalistic morality is an improved animal morality of care. Ethics of care is in its essence valid because affection, care, trust and generosity form a moral basis. The attitude based on rational principles is an important means of the widening, improving and supporting of moral behaviour when affection reaches its limits. The moral basis of the morality of duty resides in care and affection. The affection is rooted in biology, supported by direct and indirect reciprocity and exists prior to rationality. The rational morality of duty is an adaptive complement of the morality based on affection and care (B.N. Waller, *What Rationality...*, s. 353-354).

survival through the application of humanity, its principles and respect for human dignity. Human existence also depends on the solution of environmental issues which represents an external condition for the preservation of human life in general. However, what is important is the fact that the moral agent should try to perform humanity in his life (also in contexts with Hume's understanding humanity).

Humanity is one of the most significant moral principles on which the human society is based as a society of the co-operating individuals. We can see that the future of humankind is possible only if we accept and apply the principle of humanity as one of the fundamental principles. There are not only the basic duties of mankind towards the preservation of the future existence of humankind, but there is also a danger of the environmental disaster. It is so urgent that it is necessary to overcome narrow anthropological views on the future of the world and its life.

The idea of the preservation of human existence must be associated with the respect for and the application of humanity as moral quality and it is only possible response to the future of humankind. The international co-operation of states and nations is the means of fulfilling humanity in life of the individual and whole human society. The co-operation brings a perspective of preservation of human life. One of the most significant conclusions of this reasoning is an idea that the meaningful existence of the moral agents, communities and whole humankind is possible only through acceptance and application of humanity. I do not think that it is an abstract and unachievable goal for most people during their lives. To respect and apply humanity in our lives, we do not need necessarily be the saints. Being human is enough. That is why I think we can justify the attribute human and moral being by our action regardless the unfavourable character of contemporary period which perhaps tend to stimulate opposite position. Despite this, I think no other alternative than the acceptance and application of humanity in the world is possible.

I conclude with Thomas Garique Masaryk's quotation: "[H]umanistic ideal, [authentic] humaneness, is the foundation of all strivings of our time-particularly those that prevail at present in our national life. It is this which Kollár means when he says: »When you cry, Slav, may it always mean Man«"²⁵.

²⁵ T.G. Masaryk, *Humanistic Ideals*, Lewisburg 1971, s. 61.

Idea of humanity in David Hume's moral philosophy

According to Hume, pursuing humanity is a prominent factor in the efforts aimed at benefiting the whole society. He considered justice, together with humanity, significant aspects in protecting the life of human community and mutual human solidarity. Humanity in Hume's opinion is the keystone of all social virtues, i.e. virtues which form a substantial base of the whole human morality. Jeremy Bentham, however, reduced understanding of Hume's humanity to a mere charitable aspect, i.e. decreasing significant suffering. Despite Bentham's view, it is possible to follow Hume's ideas of humanity and develop them into new understanding within the present ethical theories. It concerns especially the capacity to feel compassion with strangers, capacity to forgive others, etc. We can follow Hume's thinking on humanity and on this basis define the active and passive forms of the realization of humanity. The active form means the direct involvement of moral agent through his participation in the activity developed for the benefit of the strangers in need of help. The passive form of the realization of humanity means that our behaviour expresses our compassion with the strangers affected, for example by disaster. Following Hume's ideas, I suggest that we speak about humanity in all the cases in which human life is protected and maintained since it brings positive consequences for human life. Humanity is one of the most significant moral principles on which the human society is based as a society of the co-operating individuals.