

Review of: "Menschenbild: An Important Factor for our Identity"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

It is indicative of the fundamentality of the concept of human nature Kant's assertion that all the great questions of philosophy, and even of religion, have a connection to the query of human nature

"The field of philosophy in this cosmopolitan sense can be brought down to the following questions:

1. *What can I know?*
2. *What ought I to do?*
3. *What may I hope?*
4. *What is man?*

Metaphysics answers the first question, *morals* the second, *religion* the third, and *anthropology* the fourth. Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one." (Log, AA 09: 25).

In this vein, a large number of authors have their thoughts based on a certain conception of human nature, including religions. Just think of Hobbes, Rousseau, Freud, Marx or Darwin.

In *Menschenbild: An Important Factor for our Identity*, Zichy deals with these questions in seven steps: first, he develops a definition of *Menschenbild*; second, he gives an overview of some contents of *Menschenbilder*; third, he differentiates between individual, group-specific, and societal *Menschenbilder*; fourth, he explains how *Menschenbilder* are embedded in life-world; fifth, he gives a description of the most important functions *Menschenbilder* fulfill in life-world; sixth, he explains how *Menschenbilder* are embedded in a society's cultural system; seventh, he explores the enormous impact *Menschenbilder* have on human identity. He develops these aspects based on Nietzschean philosophy.

Zichy defends a really interesting and creative perspective. According to him, *Menschenbild* should not simply be translated by a mental image of human beings, but as something precisely responsive to moral, societal and political determinations, i.e. "a bundle of deep convictions about the human being in general. [...] a typification of what humans are, how they typically behave, what inclinations to act they have, what goals they have or should have, etc." This formulation is something very general and all-encompassing.

Nevertheless, Zichy punctuates a specific conception of *Menschenbild*, namely, something that is "embedded in ordinary

everyday life, i.e. the life-world." This formulation grants a kind of operationality to the concept of Menschenbild that moves it from the narrow realm of philosophy to something operative in society itself. It is on this basis that he can then present his most important contribution in the text, namely, that of presenting the concept of Menschenbild as a kind of filter, of lens, "through which we look at human beings."

Finally, and even more importantly, Zichy thinks of the concept of Menschenbild as a "kind of selffulfilling prophecy." Surely, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as human nature, in the same way that the nature of a tree exists. This is because the human being has a malleable, gelatinous, adaptable nature, even more if the predicate of freedom is attributed to the human being, because with such a predicate he becomes a perfectible being, something whose determination is not given in the same way as the determinations that a tree is given. To put it clearly, the alleged determinations of human nature is something that is realized through human praxis itself, hence human nature is precisely a kind of a "selffulfilling prophecy." Therein lies Vcky's great contribution. Human nature is something that is realized in the terms of the freely chosen actions of human beings themselves, such that if they think of themselves in a certain way, that determination will eventually be realized as the result of such an image that they project collectively onto themselves in their life-world. Thus, their own actions end up realizing what they think about themselves.