

### 1.3.-Contents

#### 1. We are Heirs: Genes and Culture

##### Origins and Originalities

The human being is a “strange” reality, the result of the interaction of several realities. Firstly, we have a body, or maybe we should say that we are a body, and this body we are/have is the result of the biological evolution of our species, and also of our own evolution, and that is why it is very important to look after it. But we are not only biological beings. To a large extent, we are made of culture and of the society in which we live. We are also the result of cultural influences.

Each of us is heir to a biological trajectory and some cultural influences. The human being is the result of the interaction between genetics and culture, of both things at the same time. Our origins consist of genes and culture, the internal and external aspects. But we are not only the result of this interaction; we are not just “a product”; we also do things and create ourselves. Thus, in the same way that we say that we have an origin, we must also say that we have originalities.

Human being: each one of us	
ORIGINS	ORIGINALITIES
Nature (biology, genetics) + Culture (society)	- what we do, say  * the fruit of our: freedom and responsibility

##### A Great Debate: Nature or Culture?

Hundreds of erudite books and scientific magazines have dealt with the conflict between nature and culture. This debate is not far detached from our daily life and we must have heard of, or even discussed it, but perhaps in other ways. On the one hand, we have heard someone saying hundreds of times, “He is like his parents!”, “Genes always show up in the end!”, “The most important thing is biological nature”. On the other hand, we have also heard “That comes from experience”, “There is no such thing as nature, just history and culture”. This can also be debated using the example of twins: think of two genetically “equal” twins, with “the same” socio-cultural factors. Would they be “equal”? No, because each one is the way he is, with his own personality. And where does this personality come from? Genetics? Education?

### Activities:

1. Which of the following do you think is the most appropriate word to define what we are? (Look it up in the dictionary and give your reasons: "human being", "person", "individual", "man", "conscience", "citizen".
2. Choose one of these options: Are we the result of our inheritance (nature) or of our life circle (society, culture)? Or both? Or none of them? Give your reasons.
3. Think about a situation in which you turn to nature or culture to justify something you have done but do not want to admit to.

These are the terms of the debate. Present-day science usually gives a complex view. We are culture, but not just culture. We are also biology, but not just biology. We are bio-cultural beings.

REMEMBER: This debate, from either point of view, tends to clear the individual of any responsibility, because those saying that we are the result of genetics defend that there is nothing we can do, and so do those stating that we are the result of education. Both arguments conceal what we are:

complex beings, the result of biology and culture, but also people who decide and act, people who change their own and others' lives.

## 2. We Are Many Things: A Plural Identity

As we have seen, there are many terms that define human life, many dimensions, and when we threaten it, when we threaten a person's dignity, we reduce it to just one dimension and deny diversity.

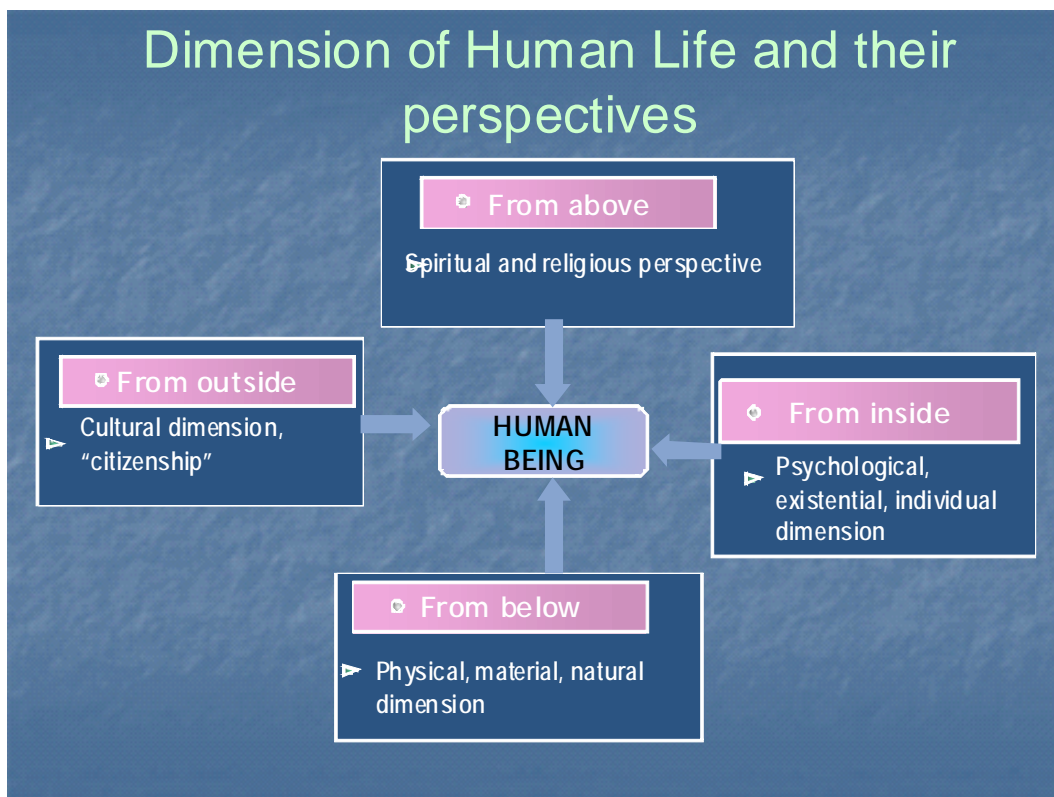
If the human being is plural and diverse, the way in which we approach him or her should also be different. Many times, we try to explain it from only one point of view, like when we try to define an object by just observing one of its sides.

Bearing in mind all of the previous ideas, and in order to simplify this difficult matter a little, we could say that there are four main dimensions to the human being and, consequently, four perspectives, four different ways of explaining what he is, what we are.

The human being can be seen from four perspectives: "from above", "from inside", "from outside" and "from below".

1) "From above": the spiritual, religious or transcendental part of the person; according to this perspective, the human being is willing to transcend;

2) "From outside": the socio-cultural dimension or "citizenship"; the human being is defined as a social being by his relationships and sense of belonging;



3) "From inside": this perspective concentrates on the deepest part of the person, the personality itself, and tries to ignore the external part: the human being is a psychological, emotional and internal being.

4) "From below": the physical or biological perspectives (genes); the human being is an element of nature, a biological species, another living creature.

These four dimensions are correct but separate. In a complicated way, we are all of them. Nowadays, many of the ideas on this matter reduce human richness to one unique dimension; this is a mistake.

**Activities:**

1. Human life occurs within these four dimensions. All human activity may be seen from the perspective of these four dimensions. According to this statement, how could we define *friendship* from each perspective?
2. Which do you think is the most important dimension? Why? Are "basic dimensions" and "important dimensions" synonyms?

### 3. Creating our Biography

#### Biology and Biography

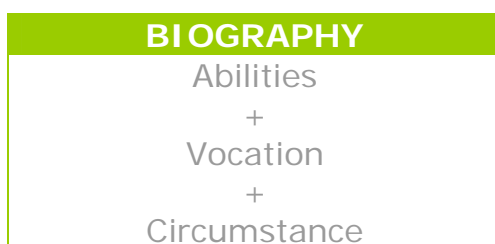
Human beings not only have a fundamental biology, but also a biography. We could say that biology is what we have, while biography is what we do with the resources we have, from biological to cultural factors. Human life, each life, is not made; each person has to build his life, hence the importance of thinking about these matters. Being a citizen means being a person, but we cannot be a person without an identity. Strangely enough, one needs the other, in other words, we also need other people to achieve a personal identity. This is why this matter is so important and transcendental.

To "write" our biography we need three major elements:

- what we are, our qualities, our aptitudes and abilities
- what we aim to be, our life project, our vocation
- our circumstances

We all have some resources and possibilities, and this is why we - helped by education - have to discover our abilities; they might be related to sport, they might be artistic abilities, or a capacity for scientific investigation, among others. Thus, it is important to know ourselves and value what we have. But it is also important to know what we want to be, in other words how we are going to use our abilities: to know our vocation, what attracts my attention, what my calling is. It is also important to be aware of one's physical and social circumstances.

If some of these factors fail, feelings of frustration and unhappiness arise.



#### **Activities:**

1. Of the three factors that make up biography, which do you think is the most important? Why?
2. Look for the biography of an important person like Velázquez.. How are these three factors expressed through his life?
3. If you had to write your biography or CV, what would you say? How would you organise it? What are your abilities, vocation and circumstances?

#### Like a Novel

Human life, our biography, could be compared to a novel. Novels have a plot and suspense, just like our own lives. We create

the plot from our experiences and from the characters we come across. Our life makes sense when we tell it, when we narrate our experiences. We like telling people about our life and listening to others talk about theirs. We like stories, tales, adventure films; we like to identify ourselves with their characters and heroes. We also have to create a character in our life, so we must think a lot and choose the character we want to play, the story we want to tell about ourselves. Therefore, we must pay attention to our life, our wishes, our motivations, and to others.

#### 4. Motivation, Autonomy and Health

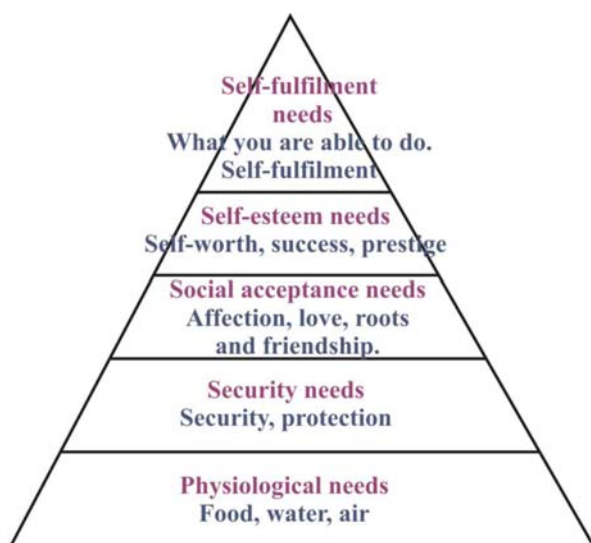
##### Being Autonomous

Writing our biography is a way of being autonomous. An autonomous person is someone who decides for himself, who makes his own rules. Meanwhile a heteronomous person is someone who lives through others and not through himself. Of course, being autonomous does not mean living without counting on others; an autonomous person counts on others, listens, takes advice and knowledge from others. Autonomy is not the same as independence; it's about making your own decisions, but not in opposition to others.

To be an autonomous person we need to organise our wishes, our motivations or, as was said before, our vocation. What do we want in life? What do we value? What do we want to achieve?

##### Human Motivation

The psychologist A. Maslow designed a pyramid of human motivation that became famous. This pyramid organises human wishes, from the most basic to the most important. It is also an organization of human needs. Let's look at this pyramid.



##### Activities:

1. Look up in the dictionary the following terms: "self-fulfilment", "self-esteem", "social acceptance".
2. Everything we do, or almost everything, can be found within this pyramid. Try to think of an example of each step from your own experience.
3. How would you explain that a person remains on one of the first steps and doesn't aim higher?
4. What relationship could be established between this image and the dimensions of human life?
5. Who do you think is a happy person? What does happiness mean?

## Biography and Health

Building our life means taking care of all that we are. This involves looking after our biography (the importance of reflection, criticism, etc...), but also our biology. As human beings, we need to help each other and comply with some rules. This does not mean an end to our freedom, rather it is the path to total freedom, to be able to develop our biography and climb the steps of the pyramid. We can help others by taking care of ourselves, because, in a very basic way, this is part of mixing with other



people. This can be reflected in terms of personal hygiene or respect for others; when a colleague is speaking, for instance, we wait our turn to speak. Good personal hygiene is also essential when mixing with others.