

Editorial

KNOW THYSELF AND MEANING OF LIFE

Gnōthi sauton – ‘Know Thyself’ – is written on the wall of Apollo’s temple at Delphi, and those who seek Apollo’s guidance should first know themselves before they could seek guidance to their actual situations. For Socrates, and for most philosophers after him, ‘the unexamined life is not worth the living’ and the most important knowledge to be pursued was self-knowledge. Paradoxically enough, Plato engaged in Dialogues for self-knowledge showing that self-knowledge is gained through others; it is a fundamentally a social form of knowledge. So, for instance, according to Plato, by gazing into the eyes of your lover, you gaze into a window of the self. Rather than the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am – the classical tradition advocated *sumus ergo sum* – we are therefore I am. It is in conversation and collaboration that one would know thy self. The Indian classical tradition identified *atmavidya* (self knowledge) with *brhamavidya* (knowledge of the Absolute), because Reality is one without a second. For St Augustine, ‘God alone knows who he truly is’ and his prayer was ‘Let me know myself and know thee.’ More importantly *atmavidya* is seen as *atmasakshatkara* (self-realisation) showing that the question is ontological rather than epistemological; know thyself is actually an invitation to become thyself.

Human persons are embodied subjects with active and passive bodily and spiritual (rational, emotional, volitional, etc.) powers and are substantially and creatively present in the world. We live, move and have our being in the world, both in the natural and the social world. Care is to be taken, however, not to reduce a person into either nature or society. One pattern in the weave is interwoven with many others and one has to see them in the context of the weave of our life. The conceptual clarification throws light on who we are and how we live in conversation and collaboration with fellow human beings. As natural beings ‘the world is my world;’ as social beings, however, ‘the world is our world.’ By living in the world, we transform the world and make it a human world. Nature and community are related to each other not just empirically but logically. ‘The motto here’, following Wittgenstein, ‘is always: Take a wider look round.’¹ The current issue of the *Journal of Dharma* on “Being Human: Explorations” presents a wide spectrum of perspectives regarding human subjectivity.

¹Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 127.

“The Dignity of The Human Person and Co-Responsibility for the Common Good” by Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil contributes towards a right understanding of the human person learning both from the wisdom of the scriptures and sages and contemporary thought on life in the market driven environment. It is a call to work together in the service of humanity, especially in defending the dignity of the human person, in affirming fundamental ethical values, in promoting justice and peace, and in responding to the suffering. Dignity of the human person, according to Archbishop Menamparampil, is the foundation of all human rights and obligations (civic rights, and ethical, social and environmental obligations). We are living in the midst of a situation that tolerate the widening gap between the rich and the poor, caste discrimination, corruption in an outrageously conspicuous fashion, political protests, and bomb blasts. Efficiency and GDP without human concern for each other and for the more fragile communities, commercial exchange without proportionate advantage to the weaker partner, hidden dishonesty and violence without a sense of guilt, flexibility of principles that amounts to relativization of truths and values. Justice must ultimately place itself at the service of the community, which means at the service of love. Both rights and duties need to combine in the right manner to promote the common welfare of the human person. According to the author, there is an urgent need for collaborating across Cultures, Traditions and Religions as inter-religious and inter-cultural conversations have assisted mutual understanding, helped to resolve problems and generated a desire for the development of an interfaith ethic. He also refers to some of the themes in which the Catholic and Hindu perspectives specially agree: spiritual search, religious depth, renunciation, austerity, monasticism, purity, simplicity, and silence.

Shankar B. Chandekar, in his article, “Principles of Management and the Bhagavad Gita” presents an outstanding contribution of the Gita to the Modern Management Science, with the principles of managing oneself and managing human resources rather than managing the raw materials, finances, infrastructure and other external factors. The *Gita* develops and presents a profound theory of *Purushottama Yoga* in which the harmony between the individual and the universe (*samatvam yoga uchyate*) is emphasised. Performing *Svakarma* (selfless action) in unison with this *Atma Yoga* is excellence in action. This wisdom and vision when properly understood, digested and transformed into action can really help us to provide effective and efficient management, creative and innovative managers and enlightened leadership, which is the need of the day.

Dr. Rekha M. Chennattu presents the Christian understanding of the dignity of women based on the biblical presentation of women and their rightful place in society as human persons. The Paper, “Dignity of Women: Christian Perspectives” begins with a reflection on the creation stories in the Bible (Genesis 1-2) and women’s role in Salvation History as God’s partners in the Old Testament. It is followed by an analysis of the New Testament women in the stories of Jesus as well as the attitude of Saint Paul towards women. These biblical episodes uphold the dignity of women as created in God’s image and likeness. After examining the teaching of the Church Dr. Rekha concludes the paper with the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church, a document issued by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI). In the present context of ever increasing alienation and brokenness in the world, a more dynamic partnership between men and women and an inclusive leadership can be a transforming grace in the life and mission of the Church.

Ubuntu/Hunhu is an African vision of life that privileges humanness and interconnectedness of persons based on people’s lived experiences. Irene Muzvidziwa and Victor N. Muzvidziwa in their paper, “*Hunhu (Ubuntu)* and School Discipline in Africa,” argue that there is a strong link between *hunhu* and school leadership, school culture and academic achievement and school effectiveness. Hence the focus on teaching, learning and professional development needs to be grounded on *ubuntu/hunhu*. The paper also shows that *hunhu* is linked to positive and/or negative school discipline. The absence of *hunhu* leads to human factor decay. The paper argues strongly for the need to understand the link between school leadership and *hunhu*.

Transgenderism is perceived as natural and therefore divinely ordained, according to Islamic tradition in Malayasia, though it is a complex phenomenon that needs explanations considering biological, environmental, and social factors. A group of scholars from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia critically analyzed the acceptance level of the transgender persons in the society and most importantly, comparing the perception from Islamic views *vis-a-vis* the transgender and society members. The data was gathered via interviews with the transgenders, Islamic religious authorities and fellow University students. Though the transgender persons feel that their nature is innate, the Malaysian government and public at large judge them as responsible for their behaviour and charge them with ‘indecent behaviour.’ With Islam being the official religion of the country, most of the transgenders’ lives

are also challenged by the enforcement of the religious edicts by the police and the Islamic authority. The article contends that though the prevailing religious beliefs and social ethos reject transgenderism, construing it as an abominable act to God and public humiliation in general, transgender individuals are human beings like any other citizens and they deserve the basic human rights to live in the society.

The explorations on human subjectivity conclude with a Wittgensteinian interpretation of human subjectivity: “The Person: Project of Nature, Nurture and Grace.” The author presents human beings as rooted in nature, formed by nurture and sustained by God; positively they act upon the world, build up the community and move towards God. The methodology is Wittgensteinian, that of assembling reminders, criss-crossing the terrain, and providing an *Übersicht* of the person from a religious perspective. It is neither claimed that this is a general thesis that philosophy can establish nor a point of view that Wittgenstein himself held; rather this is how Wittgenstein’s philosophical investigations stimulated the author to thoughts of his own. This is, to use a Wittgensteinian expression, a form of life: how we live, move and have our being.

Being Human: Explorations, thus, presents an album of sketches on human beings and their life perspectives. Though the authors persuasively argue for their respective positions, none of the sketches are expected to be exclusive and independent; they have family resemblances showing different ways of being human and finding meaning in life. Ultimately the imperative Know Thyself is intimately related with the question on the meaning of life.

Jose Nandhikkara, *Chief Editor*