

POEM OF THE WEEK

2

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING HUMAN

The judge calls on the Prosecution to present its case

Your honours, what is a “human being”: are they the sum of their experience; are they measured in realising their potential, or a mixture of both? Can we, as human beings, aspire to greater heights when the society around us is riddled with contradiction, lies become “our truth”; violence is not only tolerated but applauded. There is an intrinsic contradiction in being the prosecuting counsel. As vigorously as we pursue our case, we highlight our own deficiencies. If one of us is found to be guilty, we are all guilty.

What is a human being?

Like many things that appear to be simple to define, it is more complex.

Human Beings Law and Legal Definition

There are various definitions of a human being. Biologically, they are classified as hominids of the species *Homo sapiens*, which is a primate species of mammal with a highly developed brain. Humans have the highest brain-to-body mass ratio of all large animals. They have a life expectancy approaching 80 years old in wealthy nations, walk on two feet and have opposable thumbs. Skin colour ranges from almost black to pale pinkish-white. Height and weight vary, depending on locality, historical factors, environmental, and cultural factors such as diet.

Human beings are characterised by the ability to speak. They have a high capacity for abstract thinking and are commonly thought to possess a spirit or soul which transcends the physical body. The spiritual aspect of human beings is often defined in terms of rituals and religion. Theories involving the definition of the beginning of human life, evolution, and creationism are hotly debated topics in the law.

An amazing species we are! Highly developed brain;
Susceptible to environmental influences
Have the ability to speak and a high capacity for abstract thinking;
We might or might not have a spirit or soul
That transcends the physical body

William Shakespeare expressed it more dramatically when he wrote

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god.

What can we learn from these quotes?
Human beings have the tools to live positively
Constructively and with purpose - a noble purpose
That grants all humans the opportunity to live

In peace, with sufficient supplies for the needs
To reciprocate kindness in return
They have the tools, the cognitive abilities
The consciousness, the awareness of being aware

Now, let us look back over human history
What do we see? Barbarism, from highly evolved
Societies to the most basic.
Where is this "capacity for abstract thinking"

This "in apprehension, how like a god"?
Granted, the behaviour of some gods leaves
A lot to be desired.

It seems to be clear that humanity has not internalised
The aspirations they were born into
Have not allowed principles of peace and forgiveness
Into their minds, and thus allowed such thoughts
to command actions and intents

What have they allowed into their minds? Survival!
Survival as a reason, as an end in itself
As a justification for unfriendly actions
All very neat! Why did you do that? Survival.

It begins with self-talk, the internal conversation
One doesn't know what to expect
What will happen? Will it be positive or negative?
What does one prepare for?

Expect the worst and prepare for it?
OR
Have optimism for a positive outcome?
I can imagine many of you responding
And considering me foolish

Survival is bare minimalism.
The brainy and noble
Have chosen brute minimalism!
They demand to be respected
As being "above" other animals.

They choose to be like them
(the 'other'). "They"? Who are "they"?

An essential and significant question

Multiple threads make up "human history"
Multiple stories, multiple beliefs and philosophies
Each with their language, their frame of reference
Their own desired outcome

Survivalist minimalism is but one of them

Optimism rates highly, focusing on growing and exercising
the skills that fuel growth and moving forward,
Creating a more caring and giving society
A Noble endeavour, all too often undone by the wilful misunderstanding

The malevolence of a small group of malcontents spreading misinformation
The human imagination can conjure up magnificent tales of heroism
It can equally crawl and grovel in the most abject of hells
Confusing "need" with "greed", without even passing through "want"

Social structures need to be examined.
They have taken different forms over the centuries
The rule of kings or queens, ecclesiastic authority
Communal living, democracy, socialism, communism

They have each had their supporters and those against
In civil conversation, their strengths and weaknesses can be discussed
In the political dog pit, there are words to be hurled at whoever is speaking
The ability to discuss reasonably and logically is one of the highest human skills

"BARBARISM"

Barbaric, barbarian, barbarity, barbarism.
Exists as a rebellion against, and contempt for, civilisation.
Book burnings, public book burnings, are an example.
The negation of another's beliefs; the imposition of your own.

In the roaring, technicoloured flames. Burn, baby, burn?
Not in my universe. "Why is power so scary?"
"Because power allows you to put into effect
The logic (or illogic) of your own beliefs."

Is Barbarism a worthy subject for analysis?
The definition can be applied to persons (or their actions):
"able or disposed to inflict pain or suffering".
Keywords: able and disposed.

Barely need the "reflecting lack of pity or compassion".
Let us examine this. Infliction of pain/suffering?
Lack of pity/compassion? These are human qualities.
Is barbarism implicitly a human phenomenon?
Is the human condition common to us all, a form of original sin?

It is? Choice is a human phenomenon also. What does this mean?
WE can choose honesty/truth/integrity or lies/deceit/disinformation.
Is it a political choice? The act of rejecting society or societal norms,
a set of rules and prohibitions?

In totalitarian states, the act of rebellion might be defined
as a personal or collective imperative.
The ruling body has its narrative,
In which to define its subjects.

I am more interested in the western liberal tradition,
defamed and maligned it be. In this rebellion, rejection
and resistance are not forbidden. They tend to take on
a sinister appearance.

Those who believe in conspiracies support their own belief
or point of view and spread that disinformation to propagate it.
(I would include under this ill-informed gossip to malign, to defame.)
It's Realpolitik. The nations' leaders are indeed naked;
(we all know that), clothed in high-sounding rhetoric
that fails to disguise their cynicism and hypocrisy,
their empty promises. Lies are a disease that has eaten
at the fabric of our society.?

Conservatism is not Civilisation. Civilisation is a process,
a continuing process. Doing its best to promote understanding,
communication and tolerance. Tolerance is the sticking point
with many, fearful they will lose their privilege.

So we come to barbarism. "A trifle dramatic, don't you think.
We're reasonable people." Do I hear you say?
Reasonable people? Begin with a "little" lie,
a deliberate mischaracterisation: Float it, stir it, give it a nudge.

You can always say, "Sorry, I was misinformed" if confronted.
Spread it through social media (social media loves controversy),
another nudge, it begins. The whisper campaigns.
The "alternative narrative" Then come the politicians,
then the state. The state becomes dominant.

Barbarity flourishes from small beginnings.
It begins with intent.
It ends in conflict.

Are humans inherently barbaric?
We, the prosecution, submit "Yes";
They can't help themselves.

It's their default position.

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