

Who do you think you are?



By Roy Lawrence

Here am I, writing these words. There are you, reading them. We know we exist, or we could not do either of these things. But precisely who and what are we? And what about all the people we see around us? Who and what are they? Just what is involved in being the human entities which we are?

A chemist might answer: analysis shows that you are mostly made up of water, about ten gallons of it. There is a lot of carbon in you, too. In fact, enough to fill about 9,000 pencils. There is a quantity of fat that would make seven bars of soap, and if you are overweight, there could be much more. Another of your ingredients is phosphorus. It could put heads on more than 2,000 matches. And you contain enough lime to whitewash your garden shed. There is enough iron in your body to make a medium-sized nail, and some magnesium and sulphur, too.

All the chemical bits and pieces in us are worth less than a day's pay.

Yet, of course, there is much more to you and me than that. The fact that we can ask the question 'Who am I?' shows that along with the elements which make up our bodies, there is the mysterious factor of intellect. We are 'thinking beings'. Is that what shows us the essence of our humanity? Do we agree with the philosopher René Descartes, who wrote *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am)?

A chemical compendium? A thinking machine? We are both of these things, but we have not come anywhere near describing ourselves yet. What about our willpower? We would be nowhere without it. Without your willpower you might not have got out of bed this morning. We depend on willpower, if we are to see to life's necessary chores. In fact, without willpower there would be chaos.

But there's more. So far we have not mentioned the emotions and feelings which are so much a part of us. They colour our life at every level, and yet they are different from thought

and willpower. In addition there are individual aptitudes. For instance, from a very young age I found I could sit down and play the piano. It was an ability that was just in me. There are various things which I can do, but others cannot. To compensate there are all kinds of things which you can do and I cannot. And we have still only scraped the surface of our human nature.

And what about that indefinable quality which we sometimes call 'spirituality'? What about the capacity to have mystical experiences, which are probably much more common than we usually recognise?

The universe is a mysterious place and nothing in it is more mysterious than you and I. The more we think about ourselves, the more we should come to realise we are walking miracles. In the words of the biblical Psalm 139, we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'. Moreover, each one of us is different. We are not made on a production line. We are all amazing in an individual way. You

are uniquely amazing; I am uniquely amazing.

But wait a minute! Though each one of us is a miracle, we are flawed miracles. Even when our powers of thought and will and spirituality lead us to know exactly what we should do and what we should be, why is it that we often end up by doing and being something completely different? For instance, most of humankind agrees that peace is desirable and that war should be avoided; that differences should be resolved sensibly and reasonably; and that it is best if people and nations live together in a spirit of mutual concern and respect. Yet what actually happens? World Wars One and Two happened; the Korean War happened; Vietnam happened; the New York twin towers disaster happened; terrorism happens; human rights are abused; men, women, and children are subjected to all sorts of horror. We talk peace, but we make war. And we do it decade after decade, century after century. It is true that we become increasingly clever, but that often just means that our fallibility becomes increasingly dangerous, and our weaponry becomes increasingly terrifying.

At a personal and individual level we have good intentions, but even our best intentions and resolutions often amount to nothing. If we become aware of a fault or a weakness and resolve to have done with it, it often continues to dog our steps. 'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley', writes Robert Burns. 'The road to hell', says the proverb, 'is paved with good intentions'. If we are to be honest about our human nature, if we are to see it in the round, it is a very mixed bag indeed. The undoubted wonder of human nature is tarnished by faults and follies, by waywardness and sometimes by downright wickedness. So, bearing all this in mind, who do you think you are?

The psalmist David in the Bible asked this very question: 'When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?'¹

Later, a New Testament writer quoted this passage² and added

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.³

Jesus, very God in heaven, came down to earth to die for each and every human being, so that we could have salvation and be brought to glory.

Whoever you are, you were created with infinite care, and you are loved very dearly. God gave his son Jesus to you and for you, and God calls you to be with him for eternity.

This is the answer to the question with which we began. It is an answer which can make a difference to each one of us. If everyone on earth were to accept it and make it their own, it would transform the whole world.

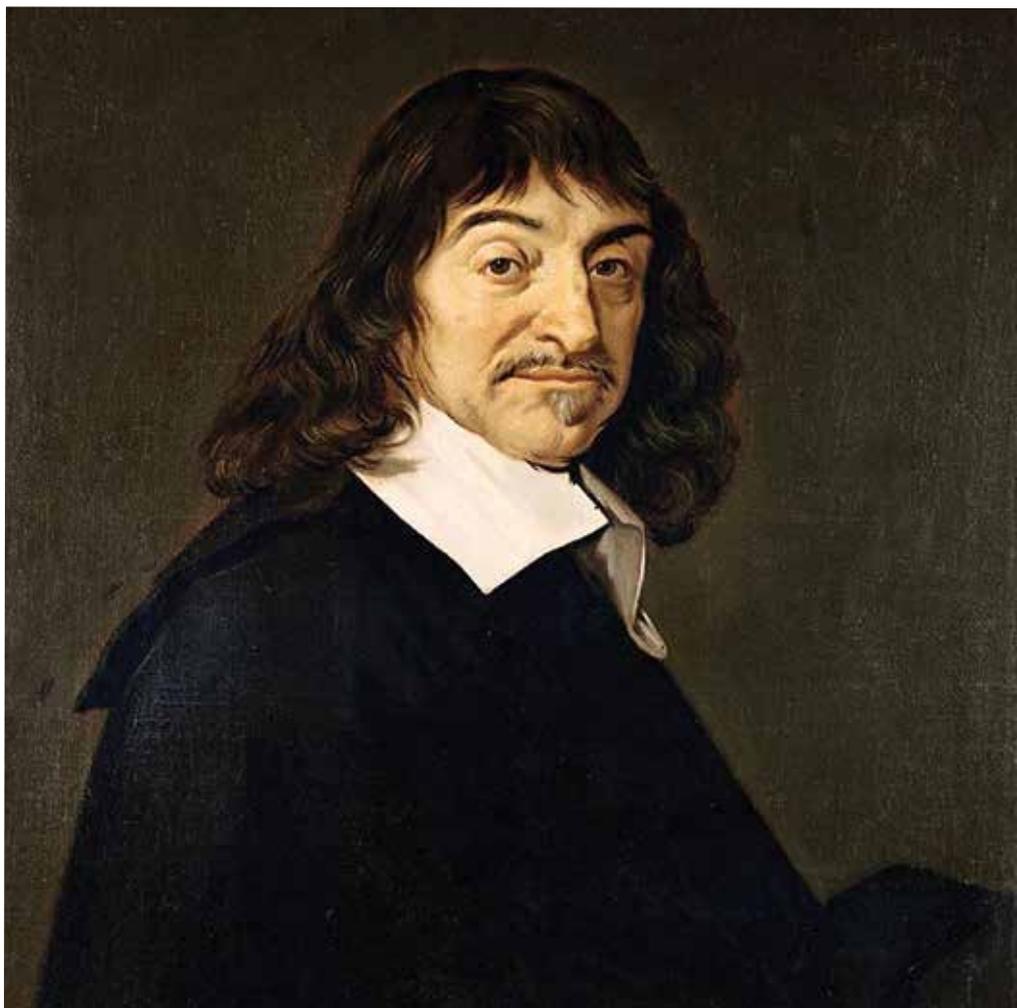
Notes

¹ Psalm 8:3-4

² Hebrews 2:5-6

³ Hebrews 2:9-10

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