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Der Anfang des menschlichen Daseins. Biologisch-medizinische Beiträge zu einer philosophisch-theologischen Anthropologie der Prä-, Peri- und unmittelbaren Postnatalzeit

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Abstract (English)

The investigation concerns the existence of the whole of the beginning of human existence and includes both the life-world (German "Lebenswelt") based on the into-the-world-coming, its origins in the being-with-one-another of its parents, thus the preceeding living environment as conditions for biological procreation of human beings, as well as the life-time (German "Lebenszeit"), what has begun to be and throughout life to its completion, the end of life, remains in effect. In the chapter "Preceeding life-world" the terms the beginning, the start and natality are defined and key aspects of modern assisted reproduction are outlined. The advances of modern reproductive medicine in the second half of 20th century lead to the development of in-vitro fertilization to the almost complete manipulation of human reproduction. The essential feature of modern, medically assisted reproduction is the quintessential comprehensive choice of selecting in every way: starting with the selection of the partners based on genetic aspects up to all those persons and germ cells involved in the process of reproduction. The "eugenic" scale of selection includes the donor of the oocyt and sperm, the selected sperm to be injected into the oocyt, the pre-implantation diagnosis (PID) and selection of the embryo prior to insertion into the uterus and pre-natal diagnosis (PND) with ensuing decisions, are all procedures in which people decide on the beginning of another individual's human existence. In chapter life-time (German "Lebenszeit"), the Psalm 139, which states, that man is already formed in its internal structure in the womb, discloses my research question and hypothesis: that the human being in a first life-time, which comprises the pre-, peri- and postnatal period up to infancy, experiences a fundamental formation (German "Grundlegung"), which is determinative of its entire life-time and which can be distinguished - based on recent biomedical and anthropological findings - from a second subsequent life-time of unfolding. Three basic biological processes, the energy expenditure, the installation of order, represented as the entropy-export (neg-entropy) and as growth in information, and the construction of the complex neural circuitry of the brain, the synaptic networks, are represented in its course from the time of conception, to delivery and to the end of life. Energy expenditure, the neg-entropic installment of structural order and the complexity of the brain, the prerequisite of thinking, reach their maximum value around birth and the first years of life. At that very time a fourth constituent, the psychological development in infancy reaches a first determined status, defining character traits which persevere through the whole life. This so-characterized maximum, better called a peak threshold, separates the time of fundamental formation (German "Grundlegung") of essential structures from the time of incipient decomposition and coincides with the transition from the phase of authentically being a child to a phase of no-longer-being-a-child. This time of fundamental formation is the base for the whole life and determines the prevalence of diseases later in life, especially in adulthood. As we demonstrate, pre- and perinatal processes and influences from the maternal environment, the so called "first universe", are responsible for man's epigenetic programming and imprinting of health or disease and for man's personal being as an individual. The "extra-uterine year", a concept coined by Adolf Portmann, and the maternal influences on the postpartum growth and development of the child maintain their significance for the whole life time. Consequently, the time of fundamental formation, the "Grundlegung", must be regarded as the decisive, significant time in the life of man. The process of individuation, with the result of the identity of man

is characterized by continuity, which is given by the characteristics of an autopoietic system. It manifests itself in the pre- and postnatal continuity of neurological functions and in a continuity in terms of the similarity of physiological, medical and social characteristics and behaviors between the prenatal, postnatal and childhood existence and the adult. A detailed description of the prenatal, personal dialogue between child and mother supports the view that the child from the very beginning is accepted into the human community. In the chapter "The Beginning of the Human Soul" we emphasize that the whole man has to be considered as an indivisible unit with an irreducible plurality and the lived body is a body molded and pervaded by the soul. The sensations of the lived body are real components of consciousness, consequently of a psychic life, and as such inherent to an ego. Concepts of neuroscience, neurological and neuroanatomical findings already point to a non-linguistic consciousness in the first few weeks after conception. Psychological-psychiatric methods of Otto Rank, Sigmund Freud and especially of Gustav H. Graber elucidated prenatal experiences, which were linked to a prenatal consciousness. One chapter is dedicated to the relationship of birth to prenatal existence from the perspective of two groups of philosophers: One group (J.J. Rousseau, S. Freud, G.W.F. Hegel and K. Jaspers) views birth as the beginning of the actual human being, the other group (O. Rank, L. deMause, GH Graber and AK-Wucherer Huldenfeld) considers birth only as a transition of an existing human being from intra-uterine to an extra-uterine environment. From the perspective of modern, medically assisted procreation a woman as a mother has gained a new important role as the sole, irreplaceable person for the transmission of human life and for carrying a child to term and giving birth to a new human being. The mother is a crucial mediator of programmed epigenetic environmental influences and in her womb's "listening room" shapes the development of language and brain of the child to be born. In our statements on theological anthropology we depicted the image of man which results when basic theological disclosures, valid for the abstract imaginary adult person, are applied to the human embryo, fetus, intra-uterine, prenatal child and to the not-yet-reflective toddler. If the fundamental relationship of God to the human being is grounded in his absolute love and devotion to his creature, in the unconditional, absolute freedom of man, in man being his creature, then this also applies to the initial, prenatal human being. Being an image of God is constitutive of human existence, regardless of its stage of development and therefore it makes no sense then to ask when, at what time this provision takes effect. The man in his life-time of fundamental formation (German "Grundlegung") is already the image of God and therefore has the essential and even captive determination to have communion with God. The theological answer to the question where the single new person has its origin, is answered to the effect that parents indeed set the initiative to create the prerequisite and condition that a new person can arise. However, strictly speaking they cause only the conditions of the radically new, but not this in itself. We show that parents are completely dispossessed of the setting of the beginning and the realization of this new human being, which is compatible with the church doctrine that the individual souls are created directly by God. One theological consequence of man's foundation (German "Grundlegung") is that all that man is and will be, he does unassailably not owe to himself but was given to him during the foundation period and prior to the beginning of a conscious adult life in freedom. As conscious persons we are called again and again to relate to what has been given to us in a reflexive manner and to either accept or reject our life in gratitude to God. The life succeeding the period of foundation is a chance and meant to be used for the unfolding of man's free, conscious choices in following Jesus and becoming similar to God. Though our contribution in its current, modern bio-medical illustration states that the human being in its beginning experiences a final foundation (Grundlegung), at the same time it contradicts the concept of perpetuum mobile, the paradigm of determinism. If we accept an image of God, where God meets man in his unconditional freedom and wants him to be, neither a theological nor a scientific determinism (the former a variation where God, the later a variation where the laws of

nature determine everything) is justified. Rather man experiences God in his creative freedom and thus fulfills his mission to contribute to God's creation.