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Gilgamesh, Political Power, and Human Nature

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The objective of the article is an analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from the perspective of political philosophy.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The main research problem undertaken in this article is the problem of human nature and its connection with political power in light of the Sumero-Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The article is based on an analysis of the source text (the *Epic of Gilgamesh*) in the English version by Andrew George, with the secondary literature also taken into consideration.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The point of departure is a justification of the subject undertaken here, with a reference to Leo Strauss' political philosophy. Next, three key aspects of the subject matter are analyzed: the humanization of Enkidu, the search for immortality, and the conception of political power.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The main result of the scientific analysis is the indication of themes concerning the significance and understanding of human nature and their relationship to the concept of political power that formed in Mesopotamia.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: In the conclusions, the author indicates the unmistakable presence of a notion of human nature in Sumero-Akkadian reflection, as well as the connection between

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this notion of human nature and a paradigm of political power. The author also points to a religious aspect crucial for understanding these concepts.

Keywords:
Gilgamesh, Enkidu, human nature, political power, political philosophy

1. INTRODUCTION

From a historical perspective, one of the most important issues in political philosophy is the problem of human nature considered within the context of communal life and political power. Today, however, the problem of human nature has been marginalized in philosophical reflection. It is often taken for granted that human nature simply does not exist. It has even been stated that the problem of human nature was formulated only within the framework of Greek reflection and no other model of ancient thought on communal life or political power referred to any conception of human nature. This misunderstanding may have its source in Leo Strauss' text *Progress or Return*. In it, Strauss asserts that "What distinguishes the Bible from Greek philosophy is the fact that Greek philosophy is based on this premise: that there is such a thing as nature, or natures – a notion which has no equivalent in biblical thought" (Strauss, 1981, p. 39), adding that

> Philosophy is the quest for principles, meaning … for the first things. This is, of course, something common to philosophy and the myth, and I would suggest for the time being that philosophy, as distinguished from myth, comes into being when the quest for the beginnings is understood in the light of the idea of nature (Strauss, 1981, p. 40).

Though Strauss explicitly formulates the above remarks within the context of the opposition between Greek philosophy and Jewish thought (with a marginal reference to Hinduism), the conclusions that stem from these remarks extend far beyond this context. The "authorship" of the notion of nature is ascribed to philosophy, and since philosophy in the full sense of the word first appeared (and only appeared) in ancient Greece, this means, *nolens volens*, that the idea of nature cannot be found anywhere in the ancient world outside of ancient Greek reflection.

In this article, I leave aside the general question of whether political philosophy can, or should, do without the notion of "human nature." I also do not undertake the subject of ancient Jewish thought. My goal is only to indicate one concrete example of ancient reflection outside of Greek philosophy that undertakes the issues of the sense of life, political power, communal life, and friendship precisely within the context of reflection on human nature (though understood in a rather peculiar way).

The Sumero-Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Sandars, 1960; George, 2000; Tigay, 2002; George, 2003; Gadotti, 2014) is considered the oldest extant literary text in the world. It is this text that, in my opinion, wonderfully illustrates the thesis that reflection on the species-nature of man was undertaken in the ancient world outside the framework of Greek philosophy.

The epos' titular character – Gilgamesh (Sumerian: *Bilgamesh*) – was most likely a historical figure. According to scholarly estimates, he ruled over the Sumerian city-state of Uruk as part of Uruk's First Dynasty sometime between 2800 and 2500 BC. Though no inscriptions from the period of his rule have survived to our time, other sources attest to his historicity (Kramer, 1963; Dalley, 2009; Anagnostou-Laoutides, 2017).

2. THE HUMANIZATION OF ENKIDU

The epos presents Gilgamesh as a powerful ruler who exceeds all other humans in terms of power and might. Gilgamesh is not a typical man, though, as he is "two thirds divine and one third mortal" (I, 48, George, 2000, p. 2). His father was Lugalbanda, ruler of Uruk (also possibly a historical figure), known by the epithet "The Shepherd," and his mother was the goddess Ninsun, whose name means "Lady of the Wild Cow." Despite the fact that he is mostly divine, Gilgamesh is mortal, like all human beings.[1]

1 Of course, we can find a similar motif e.g. in Greek mythology. Heroes were half-gods/half-men (the math is a little different here), but they were mortal, too. This theme of ascribing an element of divinity to the bravest, most powerful among men was probably used as a way to explain their

The awareness of his mortality causes Gilgamesh great anxiety, even the "pain of existence"– he, the greatest, most powerful ruler in the world, born of a goddess, is a mere mortal, just like each of his subjects.[2] This mental angst creates in Gilgamesh an inclination to oppress his subjects – a form of displaced aggression, the difference being that what elicits it in the ruler of Uruk is not a rival with a higher position in the hierarchy, but the order of the world itself.[3]

Gilgamesh makes use of the *ius primae noctis* (Rubio, 2014) in relation to both women and men. His subjects implore the gods for help, for relief of their suffering. The gods do not remain indifferent. Anu (or An), the Celestial God, commands the goddess Aruru, who created mankind, and:

> [let her create the equal of Gilgamesh,] one mighty in strength,
> [and let] him vie [with him,] so Uruk may be rested!
> (MB Ni, George, 2000, p. 4)

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uniqueness, their deviation from the norm. Simultaneously however, an obvious and easily-observable fact is retained – that element of divinity, though allowing its carriers to do deeds exceeding the abilities of "typical" mortals, does not protect them from the final sentence – death.

2 In this case we can also draw a parallel with notions contained in Greek reflection. Of all animated beings, man finds himself in the most intolerable situation. He suffers the same hardships as other animals (disease, pain and physical suffering, death), which are immeasurably exacerbated by human reason – memory and the prediction of suffering, as well as by the thought of death that constantly accompanies man and makes him "the most agonized" of everything alive (e.g. Homer, *Iliad*, XVII, 443-447). It is worth noting that to a certain extent, the modern natural sciences support this perception of man. Stress, associated with memory and reason, elicits disease states in humans that are not seen in the vast majority of other animal species (e.g. Sapolsky, 2004, "For 99 percent of the beasts on this planet, stress is about three minutes of screaming terror as you sprint for your life on the savanna, after which it's either over with or you're over with. Problems begin because we cognitively sophisticated humans are capable of secreting glucocorticoids chronically for reasons of sustained psychological and social stress," Sapolsky, 2006, p. 101).

3 It is a matter of debate whether Gilgamesh's method of ruling during this time is the result of frustration connected with awareness of his mortality (*Introduction* [in:] George, 2000). This is the interpretation that I accept, considering the *Epic of Gilgamesh* above all as a story about "the revolt against death" (Jacobsen, 1977, p. 208). However, accepting that Gilgamesh's method of ruling from the beginning of the *Epic* is the result of other factors would not change the most important points of my analysis.

And Aruru created Enkidu in the wilderness. He was not yet human either in appearance or in behavior. His entire body was covered in hair, like the fur of an animal. He also lacked human manners and human speech. He lived with other animals, which were not afraid of him as they are of humans. Was Enkidu an animal, then? It is difficult to say. We can risk the hypothesis that he was an animal in his own eyes. At the same time, however, a hunter watching him perceives him as a wild man. The hunter also describes him this way to Gilgamesh, who sends the harlot Shamhat to visit Enkidu. It is safe to assume Gilgamesh would not do this if he did not consider Enkidu human. Enkidu is thus on the borderline between the world of animals and the world of human beings – he considers himself an animal, and other animals also consider him to be an animal. Humans, however, consider him to be a human being.

The meeting with the harlot Shamhat ultimately decides Enkidu's fate. She makes him fully human. This happens on the one hand through sexual intercourse – depending on the version of the epic (which I will address a bit later), Enkidu cohabits with Shamhat for either one week or two weeks. The second factor allowing for Enkidu's complete humanization is speech – he begins to understand and use human speech. Animals no longer viewed him as one of their own. They ran from him, as they run from other humans. Enkidu became aware that he had become a man.

While the significance of speech in the process of Enkidu's humanization is relatively uncontroversial, how are we to interpret the role of sexual intercourse in this context? My hypothesis is that sex plays the role of a domesticating factor, and it is generally in this light that I would perceive the significance of humanization. Human beings domesticated animals, but before doing so, they domesticated themselves.[4] A great illustration of this (self-)domestication is the version of Shamhat's meeting with Enkidu identified by Alexandra

4 In anthropology and ethology, the notion of self-domestication (or auto--domestication) refers both to cases where wild animals themselves initiate domestication that is then continued by humans (e.g. wolves) and to the process describing tendencies within a species to display more collaborative ("tamer") behavior. Many researchers are of the opinion that a modern species of monkey in which the process of self-domestication can be observed is the bonobo (*Pan paniscus*).

Kleinerman and Alhena Gadotti in the museum archive of Cornell University in 2015. This version sheds new light on the process of Enkidu's humanization. Below, I will indicate the most important elements from the perspective of my argument.[5]

After a week of cohabiting with Enkidu, Shamhat convinces him to visit Uruk, describing to him the greatness of Gilgamesh:

> Where Gilgameš is perfect in strength,
> And like a wild bull lords it over the menfolk.
> (SB I 211–212 // 218–219, George, 2018, p. 19)

In response to Shamhat's prompting and description of Gilgamesh, Enkidu wishes to go to Uruk to challenge the king to a fight. As George asserts, this is analogous to battles for dominance among animals, in which Gilgamesh symbolizes the alpha-male, while Enkidu represents the challenger for the alpha-male's position. Enkidu, though he already understands human speech, still displays animalistic behavior, despite animals no longer considering him one of their own.

The situation changes after his second week spent with Shamhat. The latter again pushes him to visit Uruk, though in different words:

> Where (men) are engaged in labours of skill,
> You, too, like a man, can make a place for yourself
> (OB II 61-63, George, 2018, p. 19)

This marks Enkidu's final transformation. He loses the last of his animal nature and becomes a human being. Enkidu's transformation culminates in his meeting with Gilgamesh. Despite the fact that they do engage in a battle that results in a draw, Enkidu, whose motive for

5 Details concerning the newly-identified "Cornell fragment" can be found in a wonderful article by Andrew R. George (George, 2018), which also contains a reconstruction of the cuneiform, its transliteration, an English version of the text, and an interpretation. I must emphasize that both descriptions of Shamhat and Enkidu's cohabitation were known prior to the discovery of this fragment; however, they were treated as separate versions of the story (Oppenheim, 1948; Bailey, 1970; Abusch, 2015). The Cornell fragment gives cause for revising this stance and treating the two-week-long cohabitation as the original and intended course of events, as it divides the domestication of Enkidu into two significant stages (George, 2018).

visiting Uruk was no longer the desire to dethrone Gilgamesh but to become part of the city-state's communal life, recognizes Gilgamesh's superiority on the basis of the latter's divine legitimization (George, 2018, p. 20). I will return to this point in the fourth part of this article.

The story of Enkidu's humanization sets the boundaries of human nature on the animal side. Man is viewed as an animal, subjecting himself to the process of self-domestication, whose essence boils down to the acceptance of social order – a process which offers each individual the possibility to find his or her place in the community.

However, humanization is only one aspect of human nature. The boundary between animal and human has been crossed – self-domestication marks the beginning of a new epoch in humankind's history, a new stage in our journey. However, in coming out of the animal world, are humans embarking on an endless journey or is there something that determines its end? What role do the gods play in this journey? What is divinity and is it attainable for human beings?

3. THE SEARCH FOR IMMORTALITY

Above, I mentioned the frustration that awareness of his own mortality caused Gilgamesh. Achieving immortality becomes an obsession for Gilgamesh, while the event that causes him to concentrate all his energy on reaching this goal is the death of Enkidu – Gilgamesh's best friend since the moment they met, as close to him as a brother.

Before his death, Enkidu has two prophetic dreams in which he sees his own death and is led to the Netherworld. After the first dream in which he saw his death, Enkidu curses the hunter and Shamhat, blaming them for his fate. It was the hunter who noticed him in the wilderness, which prevented him from attaining the full measure of his greatness:

> [as for] the hunter, the trapper-man,
> Who let me be not as great as my friend
> (VII 94–95, George, 2000, p. 57)

Shamhat, on the other hand, weakened him and made him a human being:

> Because [you made] me [weak, who was undefiled!]
> Yes, in the wild [you weakened] me, who was undefiled!
> (VII, 130–131, George, 2000, p. 58).

Both of these passages point to the difficulty that the necessity of coming to terms with human nature and its inherent mortality causes Enkidu. But why does he blame the hunter and Shamhat? Would he have been beyond the reach of death had it not been for them?

Of course, Enkidu would not have avoided death, but its context would have been entirely different. Not being part of a community, not knowing speaking a human language, he probably would not have had such an understanding of death. Not thinking about immortality, not even being familiar with this idea, he would not so painfully feel its absence in his own life. Secondly, conforming to social order took away his freedom and deprived him of the special role he played among the wild animals. He was forced to accept a secondary role in Uruk.

Enkidu begs Shamash (the God of the Sun) to execute his curses. The god, however, instructs him that his curses are unjust (though Shamash only explicitly addresses the curse against Shamhat). He convinces Enkidu that the life he received thanks to Shamhat is one of the best possible lives, the best of the lives that he could have lived. Shamash also point out that the death that awaits him need not fill him with sadness, quite to the contrary – the death that awaits him is one of glory and splendor. He will be honored with a glorious period of mourning both by his friend and by all the residents of Uruk. Enkidu, convinced by Shamash, recants his curse against Shamhat and instead blesses her.

We can view Enkidu's dreams as epitomizing an archetypal understanding of human nature from the perspective of the choice between life in society and life in the "wild." The latter is defined by freedom and limited self-awareness, which in consequence frees one from reflection on death. On the other hand, the greatest advantage of life in society is order, connected with a stable power structure, which leads to security and to the possibility of choosing one's own place and role within the structure of the city-state (with the exception of the ruler's position, of course). Societal life also brings with it more opportunities to satisfy one's needs. The price of self-domestication is the awareness of death and a limitation on freedom.

Enkidu's death shook Gilgamesh and rekindled within him the desire for immortality. He decides to go on a quest, the goal of which is to find Utnapishti (Uta-napishti), a man who survived the great Deluge and to whom the gods granted immortality.

Gilgamesh meets Ur-shanabi, the boatman of Uta-napishti, and asks Ur-shanabi to take him to Uta-napishti. When they reach their destination, Gilgamesh tells Uta-napishti his and Enkidu's story, emphasizing the source of his suffering:

> How can I keep silent? How can I stay quiet?
> My friend, whom I loved, has turned to clay,
> My friend Enkidu, [whom I loved, has turned to clay.]
> [Shall] I not be like him and also lie down,
> Never to rise again, through all [eternity?]
> (X, 244–248, George, 2000, p. 85)

In response, Uta-napishti instructs Gilgamesh about human nature, a necessary and inevitable aspect of which is death. It was the great Anunnaki god and goddess Mammitum who enjoined life and death to the fate of man. They did not, however, reveal to humans the date death will come. No man knows the time of his death, but just as certainly, no man can avoid it.

Gilgamesh is not entirely convinced by Uta-napishti's speech, however. Gilgamesh points out to him that though both of them have the same nature, Gilgamesh is doomed to die, while Uta-napishti has attained eternal life:

> I look at you, Uta-napishti:
> your form is no different, you are just like me,
> you are not any different, you are just like me. …
> How was it you stood with the gods in assembly?
> How did you find the life eternal
> (XI 2-4, 7-8, George, 2000, p. 88)

In response, Uta-napishti tells the story of the Deluge, about how Ea (Enki) helped him survive, and finally about Enlil's decision to grant him and his wife immortality:

> In the past Uta-napishti was a mortal man,
> But now he and his wife shall become like us gods!
> (XI, 203-204, George, 2000, p. 95)

Immortality is limited to the gods. Only they, in exceptional cases, can give mortal men this gift. However, Uta-napishti tells Gilgamesh about two more possible ways of attaining immortality, two tests. The first requires enduring without sleep for six days and seven nights. Gilgamesh fails to complete this task. The second concerns a flower that grows at the bottom of the ocean and possesses powers of rejuvenation. Gilgamesh acquires this flower (the Plant of Heartbeat), but on the journey back to Uruk, during a moment of inattention while he is swimming, it is stolen by a snake. Ultimately, Gilgamesh comes to understand that immortality is unattainable for him.

What significance should be ascribed to these two tests? Sleep is likely understood here as a state related to death (such an understanding is present e.g. in Greek mythology), as a "weak version" of death. Since Gilgamesh is unable to overcome sleep, how could he overcome death?

The Plant of Heartbeat, in turn, likely symbolizes eternal youth.[6] Though death can come at any time during human being's life, it is an event more typically and naturally associated with old age. Retaining youth may not protect one against a violent death, but it would give one the chance to hold off the natural aging process that culminates in "death from old age." However, Gilgamesh is unable to hold onto the gift of youth that is the Plant of Heartbeat. From the perspective of human nature, eternal youth is an unattainable state of affairs.[7]

Gilgamesh must come to terms with his mortality. What distinguishes human beings from the gods is precisely the fact that only gods are not subject to death's reign. Humans can achieve immortality only as the result of a decision of the gods; immortality does not belong to human nature. Moreover, it only characterizes the purest form of divine nature, as even Gilgamesh, being two thirds divine, is deprived of it:

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6 "Its name shall be 'Old Man Grown Young'" (XI, 299, George, 2000, p. 99).

7 The question remains of why Gilgamesh lost the Plant of Heartbeat. Is the description allegorical? Is it merely intended to indicate that eternal youth is incompatible with human nature? My view is that it may be intended to suggest that the life man desires "by nature" (of course in line with the paradigm presented in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*) contains elements that that "deplete" this life. Retaining youth would require the rejection of everything life is made of. It would be a "life devoid of life" – one without death, admittedly, but it would be a life that no one would want to life.

> [Only the gods] have dwelled for [ever in the sunlight.]
> As for mankind, [its days] are [numbered,]
> (MS y_1 1′, George, 2003, p. 357)[8]

4. POLITICAL POWER

The relationship between human nature and political power is an important aspect of the *Epic*. Gilgamesh is admired and respected by his subjects, but the way in which he uses his power in making use of the *ius primae noctis* elicits obvious fear and dissatisfaction. It is Gilgamesh's way of compensating for the pain and suffering he feels due to his awareness of death. In doing so, however, he beings to lose sight of his responsibilities as ruler of Uruk.

What are the responsibilities of a ruler? They are outlined synthetically and antithetically in the pleas Gilgamesh's subjects raise to the gods:

> 'A savage wild bull you have bred in Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
> he has no equal when his weapons are brandished.
> 'His companions are kept on their feet by his *contests*,
> [the young men of Uruk] he harries without warrant.
> Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father,
> by day and by [night his tyranny grows] harsher.
> 'Yet he is the shepherd of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
> Gilgamesh, [*the guide of the*] *teeming* [*people.*]
> Though he is their shepherd and *their* [*protector,*]
> powerful, pre-eminent, expert [and *mighty,*]
> Gilgamesh lets no girl go free to her *bride*[*groom.*]'
> (I, 181–191, George, 2000, p. 4)

The king should be a shepherd (George, 2000, p. lxvi).[9] His rule should be centered on leading his subjects, caring for their well-being, acting to maintain order, as well as special care of the weakest

8 "You cannot find the life that you seek:/when the gods created mankind/ for mankind they established death,/ life they kept for themselves." (OB VA + BM iii 2-5, George, 2003, p. 507).

9 Recognizing the king as a partially divine being, that is a being of a different nature than that of his subjects, strengthened the internal consistency of the king-shepherd conception.

(Dalley, 2009, p. 49). He should be just and aspire to establish freedom (Anagnostou-Laoutides, 2017, 37).[10] All of these qualities are clearly antithetical to the way in which Gilgamesh exercises his power in Uruk. His subjects do not rebel, however, since Gilgamesh is of a partially divine origin. The only hope for the inhabitants of Uruk lies in the gods hearing out their pleas.

The way in which Gilgamesh exercises his power changes under the influence of Enkidu, and ultimately as a result of understanding his own nature and consequently coming to terms with his own fate as a mortal, which takes place within the context of his visit with Uta-napishti (George, 2000, p. xlvii–xlviii) and loss of the "Plant of Heartbeat."

It is worth noting that in the system of kingship present in the Early Dynastic period, the ruler seems not to have possessed absolute power. He needed to consult his decisions with a council of elders, possibly also with a council of warriors or with a general assembly of the residents/citizens (Jacobsen, 1943; Jacobsen, 1957; Crawford, 1991, p. 35). We see this in the *Epic*, where Gilgamesh consults his intention of journeying to the Cedar Forest with the elders. Thus, though kings are more than mere humans, though their rule is approved by the gods, their rule is nevertheless subject to a certain degree of control from their subjects, at least to the extent that the latter have can express their opinions.

Each of these topics, both those indicated in this part of the article and those mentioned earlier, create a basis for interesting reflection on human nature and political power.

Human beings are animals that have subjected themselves to and successfully achieved self-domestication. In this way they have created a community in which one can find a place and function for oneself, simultaneously freeing oneself from the permanent rivalry and strict hierarchy of animal groups or herds.

The problem becomes sustaining this state of affairs, maintaining the structure and functionality of the community. In addition,

10 "The precedence of Šamaš over justice became a stable feature of the ancient southern Mesopotamian tradition(s) of kingship at least since the early second millennium and remained popular in the first millennium, during which the piety of the ruler was stressed anew" (Anagnostou-Laoutides, 2017, p. 37).

human nature requires political rule. This becomes especially clear in a version of human history slightly different from the one presented in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. As Andrew George emphasizes, in the tradition connected with the city of Lagash at the beginning of the second millennium BC, shortly after the Deluge, the gods deprived mankind of kingly rule for a certain period of time. This resulted in a serious civilizational crisis. People lost the ability to organize and irrigate their crops – the only water they used was rain water. Consequently, there was no harvest, the sheep began to die, there was a famine, and people became successively smaller in size. It was only the restoration of kingly rule that brought back order, enabling humans to regain their lost civilization. It was Gilgamesh who was to play a key role in this process (George, 2000, p. xlix–l, BM 23 103 *The Rulers of Lagash*).

It is impossible to take a clear stance on the issue of human nature and political power. On the one hand, humans aspire to self-domestication, perceiving it as creating more beneficial conditions from the ones in which other animals live. This awareness is illustrated most emphatically by Enkidu, who chooses the civilized life over wild freedom and limited self-awareness. On the other hand, however, these same people, when deprived of the rule of kings of a divine origin and left to their own devices, lose all ability to maintain life on a civilized level. It seems as though human nature desires civilized life, but without the political rule granted by gods, it would not be able to achieve this life. People are rational sheep whose reason is nevertheless too weak for complete self-control and who need a partially-divine shepherd to organize and sustain community life for them.

5. CONCLUSIONS. HUMAN NATURE: BETWEEN ANIMALS AND GODS

The thesis that in antiquity, the problem of human nature was first (and only) formulated within Greek philosophy, does not correspond with the facts. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is to a large extent dedicated to this very problem of human nature. In the *Epic*, man is situated between animals and gods, which is characteristic of many ancient anthropologies. The species-traits of humans that set them apart

from other animals (it is important to emphasize the word "others," as Enkidu is initially even more of an animal than a man) are self-domestication and an awareness of death. On the other hand, what differentiates humans from gods is mortality and a lack of omnipotence. This second aspect is somewhat controversial: were the Mesopotamian gods truly considered omnipotent? Is omnipotence not an anachronistic description of the Mesopotamian pantheon? Whatever the case may be, there can be no doubt that the causative capabilities of the gods greatly exceeded those of humans.

Human nature as we find it in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* requires a guiding factor, which will take upon itself the responsibility of upholding the community formed as a result of self-domestication. Devoid of this guiding factor, mankind shows a tendency to gradually "freeze" in its inertia, to neglect to fulfill the obligations necessary for its survival, to slowly degenerate. This factor is, of course, kingly rule. And since human nature shows an inclination to actions (or the lack thereof) leading to the disintegration of the community, the nature of kings must be supplemented with a divine element.

The nature of kings thus constitutes a peculiar divine-human admixture and it is precisely this quality that allows kings to properly fulfill their pastoral function vis-à-vis their subjects – for a shepherd cannot be of the same nature as the sheep in his care. Despite have a more perfect nature than their subjects, kings are not infallible. They also have human nature within themselves, which determines their mortality (among other things). Kings are predestined to learn and understand the principles that govern the world. They can understand the proper place of humankind in the world, the role of kings, and the essence of the power they exercise.[11]

Since kings are the shepherds of their subjects and have a different nature from these subjects (though they share the key quality of mortality), the question appears: for whom are they shepherding their "sheep"-subjects? They answer is obvious – for the gods. The gods created the world for human beings, a world in which everything

11 One may discern here the problem of nature vs nurture, which, in the light of Gilgamesh's history, takes the form not of an opposition, but of interdependence, as it is expressed by Matt Ridley in relation to contemporary biological knowledge: "no longer is it nature vs nurture but nature via nurture" (Ridley, 2003, p. 3-4).

necessary for them to function can be found. In exchange, the gods demand that the rules they have imposed on man be followed and that he upholds their cult.[12] And it is Gilgamesh who restores this divine order. Gilgamesh who, though initially against the divine order (opposing Ishtar/Innana and the killing of the bull, the journey to the Cedar Forest, and the killing of Humbaba/Huwawa – actions likely caused by his unwillingness to come to terms with his own mortality), ultimately understands and comes to terms with the divine order and becomes both its restorer and defender (George, 2000, p. xlvii-l).

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12 Divine narcissism can also be found in Greek mythology, e.g. in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, 310-313 or in Euripides, *Alcestis*, 38-55. The gods only take interest in human destinies for the sake of their own glory. A similar motif is discernible in Roman Catholic theology, where the world is created by God for His own glory.

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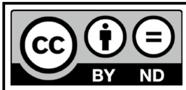

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