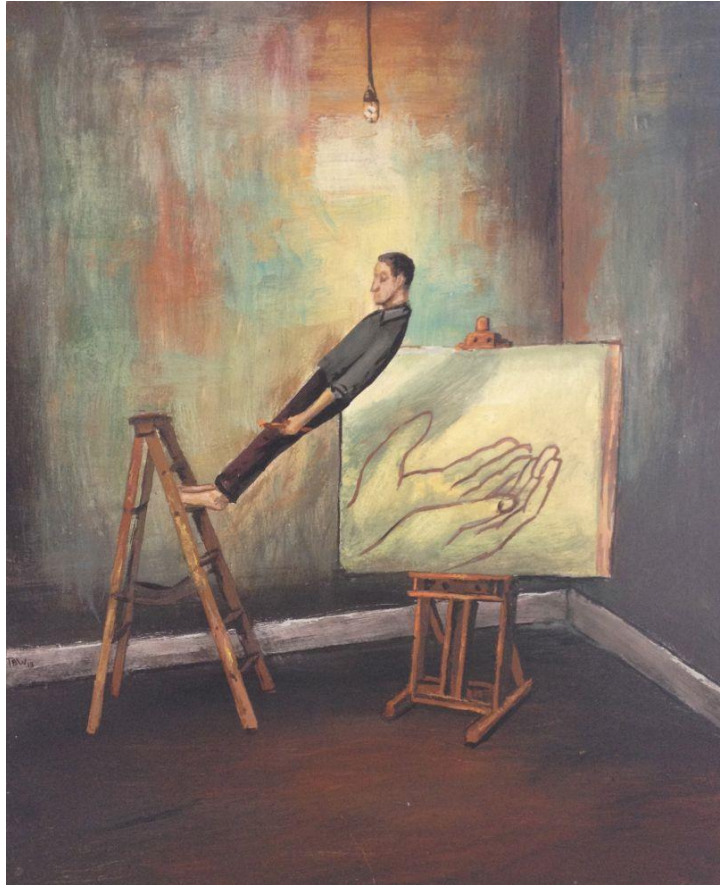


# How To Solve The Hyper-Fundamental Problem of Philosophy

*Robert Hanna*



“The Human Condition,” by Thomas Whitaker (Prison Arts Coalition, 2018)

In an essay entitled “The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy” (Hanna, 2024), I argued that there are *eleven fundamental philosophical problems*: (i) the nature of knowledge, (ii) the nature of appearance and reality, the different kinds of reality, and the possibility of subjective or objective idealism, (iii) the nature of the natural or physical universe, (iv) the nature of logic and semantic meaning, including the nature of truth and falsity, (v) the nature of philosophy, (vi) the nature of the mind, the mind-body relation, and mental or intentional causation, (vii) the nature and existence of free will in a natural or physical universe that our best contemporary natural science tells us is basically either deterministic or indeterministic, (viii) the nature of personhood and personal identity, (ix) the nature of human conduct and ethics or morality, social institutions, and politics, (x) the nature and existence or non-existence of God, and finally, (xi) the nature of human

nature and the meaning or purpose of human existence or life, which I also reformulated as *the problem of rational anthropology*: what is the nature, meaning or purpose, and value of individual and collective rational human existence in a thoroughly non-ideal natural and social world? In other words, the hyper-fundamental problem is *the problem of the rational human condition*. Then I argued that this problem is *hyper-fundamental*:

What are my reasons for holding the thesis of the hyper-fundamentality of the eleventh fundamental problem of philosophy? Let me rehearse them, one by one. The problem of the nature of knowledge is the problem of the nature of *our* rational human knowledge. The problem of the nature of appearance and reality, the different kinds of reality, and the possibility of subjective or objective idealism, is the problem about what appears *to us*, what is real *for us*, what different types of reality there are *for us*, and whether all the kinds of reality are ultimately ideal in that they reduce to or are in some other way dependent on *our* minds. The problem of the nature of the natural or physical universe is the problem of the nature of the natural or physical universe in which *we* live, and move, and have our being. The problem of the nature of logic and semantic meaning, including the nature of truth and falsity, all flow from the problem of the nature of *our* capacities for logical cognition and reasoning, and mental and linguistic representation. The problem of the nature of philosophy is the problem of the nature of a critical, synoptic inquiry and practice carried out by specifically *rational human* animals. The problem of the nature of the mind, the mind-body relation, and mental or intentional causation, is a problem about the nature of our minds, the causal relation between *our* minds and *our* bodies, or the causal relation between *our* minds and larger natural or physical universe surrounding *us*, and of how it is that *our* minds cause our bodies to move and/or bring about other effects in the larger natural or physical universe. The problem of the nature of the nature and existence of free will in a natural or physical universe that our best contemporary natural science tells us is either deterministic or indeterministic, is a metaphysical problem about *our* free will in a natural or physical world that *our* best contemporary natural science tells us is either deterministic or indeterministic. The problem of the nature of personhood and personal identity is a metaphysical problem about *our* personhood and personal identity. The problem of the nature of human conduct and ethics or morality, social institutions, and politics, are problems about what *I, you, or we ought* to choose and do. And the problem of the nature nature and existence or non-existence of God, is a metaphysical problem about what *we* can know or prove about God. Therefore, the first ten of the fundamental problems of philosophy all boil down to the eleventh fundamental problem. (Hanna, 2024: p. 4)

Perhaps that last sentence—

The first ten of the fundamental problems of philosophy all boil down to the eleventh fundamental problem. (Hanna, 2024: p. 4)

—is slightly misleading. My view is that the eleventh problem is hyper-fundamental, not in the sense that the other ten problems are explanatorily or ontologically *reducible* to that problem, but instead in the sense that the other ten problems are *grounded in* and *presuppose* the eleventh problem. In short, the eleventh problem rationally motivates the other ten fundamental problems. Therefore,

if we could produce an adequate, comprehensive solution to the fundamental problem of rational anthropology, then we'd *also* thereby have adequate solutions to the other ten fundamental problems. (Hanna, 2024a: p. 5)

Correspondingly, in what follows, I want to sketch an adequate, comprehensive solution to the eleventh problem.

In my opinion, the nature, meaning or purpose, and value of individual and collective rational human existence in a thoroughly non-ideal natural and social world, is essentially bound up with the irreducible, primitive fact that all rational human animals possess human *dignity*, namely, absolute, non-denumerably infinite, intrinsic, objective value or worth, beyond every merely hedonistic, self-interested, instrumental, economic, or utilitarian value, which entails that we always and everywhere ought to treat everyone as persons and never as mere means or mere things, and therefore always and everywhere with sufficient respect for their dignity, no matter what merely prudential reasons there are to do otherwise (Hanna, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2023a, 2023b). Therefore, the meaning or purpose of rational human existence is wholeheartedly to pursue an individual and collective life in which all our thoughts, caring (i.e., desires, emotions, and feelings), free choices, and intentional actions conform as closely as humanly possible to our universal obligation to treat everyone with sufficient respect for their human dignity. A life lived in this way is not only morally *principled* but also existentially *authentic*.

Rational human animals, real human persons, can freely choose and act, and they can and moral responsibility for their choices and acts. They can also take causal and moral take causal responsibility for things over which they had no control. In this way, they have not only autonomy in the robustly potential, dispositional sense of possessing an innate capacity for rational self-legislation, but also authenticity in the robustly potential, dispositional sense of possessing an online innate capacity for purity of heart, single-mindedness, or wholeheartedness. Together these innate capacities make really possible the fact of a free, self-legislating wholehearted adherence to one's moral principles, including some absolutely general moral principles, together with sometimes taking causal and moral responsibility for brute contingent facts, at least partially and to some salient degree or extent, that I call *principled authenticity*. Principled authenticity is

morally better than human happiness alone, although of course human happiness is extremely good too, and also an intrinsic proper part of a completely good rational human animal's life.

That rational human animals, real human persons, really do have lives in which there is both a Highest or Supreme Good (principled authenticity) and also a Complete Good (happiness guided by principled authenticity), and furthermore an at least partial achievement or realization, to some salient degree or extent, of these highest goods in their lives, even if they never can fully attain these highest goods, is the same as to say *that their lives have meaning*. Only creatures whose lives really *do* have meaning would be capable of intense suffering because they can, falsely and tragically, come to believe and feel in their hearts that their lives are meaningless. In this way, as rational human animals, real human persons, capable of principled authenticity, we are *the animals with meaningful lives*. We are always and inherently governed by reasons, and we are always and inherently looking for reasons. We crave grounding and validation, both contextual and ultimate.

This is not to say, however, that we ever actually manage to live up adequately to our own nature or to our own principles. We can feel, choose, and act as if we were nothing but complex machines or tricked-up puppets, and not living animals, not free, and not real persons, and therefore as if our lives were utterly without meaning. That is where the inauthenticity part comes in. Moreover, we can screw things up, and very frequently we do screw things up, both colossally and trivially. That is where the evil and suffering part comes in. We can do horrendous, terrible things to one another, and/or to ourselves. Also, it can happen that either we are not what we want ourselves to be, or other people are not what we want them to be, or the world is not the way we want it to be. Any of these facts, or all of these facts together, can make us feel sick unto death. So we are, also, *the animals capable of evil and suffering*. That is the tragic side of us. Nevertheless, as the necessary flip side of our innate capacities for inauthenticity, evil, and suffering, we are also essentially the animals innately capable of principled authenticity and happiness.

Therefore, the solution to the hyper-fundamental problem of philosophy is successfully to pursue principled authenticity, both individually and collectively; and adequate, comprehensive solutions to the other ten fundamental problems will naturally flow from this and the conditions under which it's really possible (see, e.g., Hanna, 2006a, 2006b, 2011, 2015, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2023a, 2023b; Hanna and Maiese, 2009; Hanna and Paans, 2020, 2021, 2022; Maiese and Hanna, 2019).

## REFERENCES

(Hanna, 2006a). Hanna, R. *Rationality and Logic*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/21202624/Rationality\\_and\\_Logic](https://www.academia.edu/21202624/Rationality_and_Logic)>.

(Hanna, 2006b). Hanna, R. "Rationality and the Ethics of Logic." *Journal of Philosophy* 103: 67-100, also available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/7940609/Rationality\\_and\\_the\\_Ethics\\_of\\_Logic](https://www.academia.edu/7940609/Rationality_and_the_Ethics_of_Logic)>.

(Hanna, 2011). Hanna, R. "Minding the Body." *Philosophical Topics* 39: 15-40. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/4458670/Minding\\_the\\_Body](https://www.academia.edu/4458670/Minding_the_Body)>.

(Hanna, 2015). Hanna, R. *Cognition, Content, and the A Priori: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind and Knowledge*. THE RATIONAL HUMAN CONDITION, Vol. 5. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/35801833/The\\_Rational\\_Human\\_Condition\\_5\\_Cognition\\_Content\\_and\\_the\\_A\\_Priori\\_A\\_Study\\_in\\_the\\_Philosophy\\_of\\_Mind\\_and\\_Knowledge\\_OUP\\_2015](https://www.academia.edu/35801833/The_Rational_Human_Condition_5_Cognition_Content_and_the_A_Priori_A_Study_in_the_Philosophy_of_Mind_and_Knowledge_OUP_2015)>.

(Hanna, 2018a). Hanna, R. *Deep Freedom and Real Persons: A Study in Metaphysics*. THE RATIONAL HUMAN CONDITION, Vol. 2. New York: Nova Science. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/35801857/The\\_Rational\\_Human\\_Condition\\_2\\_Deep\\_Freedom\\_and\\_Real\\_Persons\\_A\\_Study\\_in\\_Metaphysics\\_Nova\\_Science\\_2018](https://www.academia.edu/35801857/The_Rational_Human_Condition_2_Deep_Freedom_and_Real_Persons_A_Study_in_Metaphysics_Nova_Science_2018)>.

(Hanna, 2018b). Hanna, R. *Kantian Ethics and Human Existence: A Study in Moral Philosophy*. THE RATIONAL HUMAN CONDITION, Vol. 3. New York: Nova Science. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/36359647/The\\_Rational\\_Human\\_Condition\\_3\\_Kantian\\_Ethics\\_and\\_Human\\_Existence\\_A\\_Study\\_in\\_Moral\\_Philosophy\\_Nova\\_Science\\_2018](https://www.academia.edu/36359647/The_Rational_Human_Condition_3_Kantian_Ethics_and_Human_Existence_A_Study_in_Moral_Philosophy_Nova_Science_2018)>.

(Hanna, 2018c). Hanna, R., *Kant, Agnosticism, and Anarchism: A Theological-Political Treatise*. THE RATIONAL HUMAN CONDITION, Vol. 4. New York: Nova Science. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/36359665/The\\_Rational\\_Human\\_Condition\\_4\\_Kant\\_Agnosticism\\_and\\_Anarchism\\_A\\_Theological\\_Political\\_Treatise\\_Nova\\_Science\\_2018](https://www.academia.edu/36359665/The_Rational_Human_Condition_4_Kant_Agnosticism_and_Anarchism_A_Theological_Political_Treatise_Nova_Science_2018)>.

(Hanna, 2023a). Hanna, R. "In Defence of Dignity." *Borderless Philosophy* 6: 77-98. Available online at URL = <<https://www.cckp.space/single-post/bp6-2023-robert-hanna-in-defence-of-dignity-77-98>>.

(Hanna, 2023b). "Dignitarian Post-Capitalism." *Borderless Philosophy* 6: 99-129. Available online at URL = <<https://www.cckp.space/single-post/bp6-2023-robert-hanna-dignitarian-post-capitalism-99-129>>.

(Hanna, 2024). Hanna, R. "The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy." Unpublished MS. Available online at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/118501731/The\\_Fundamental\\_Problems\\_of\\_Philosophy\\_May\\_2024\\_version](https://www.academia.edu/118501731/The_Fundamental_Problems_of_Philosophy_May_2024_version)>.

(Hanna and Maiese, 2009). Hanna, R. and Maiese, M., *Embodied Minds in Action*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/21620839/Embodied\\_Minds\\_in\\_Action](https://www.academia.edu/21620839/Embodied_Minds_in_Action)>.

(Hanna and Paans, 2020). Hanna, R. and Paans, O. "This is the Way the World Ends: A Philosophy of Civilization Since 1900, and A Philosophy of the Future." *Cosmos & History* 16, 2: 1-53. Available online at URL = <<http://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/viewFile/865/1510>>.

(Hanna and Paans, 2021). Hanna, R. and Paans, O. "Thought-Shapers." *Cosmos & History* 17, 1: 1-72. Available online at URL = <<http://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/923>>.

(Hanna and Paans, 2022). Hanna, R. and Paans, O. "Creative Piety and Neo-Utopianism: Cultivating Our Global Garden." *Cosmos and History* 18, 1: 1-82. Available online at URL = <<https://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/1017>>.

(Maiese and Hanna, 2019). Maiese, M. and Hanna, R. *The Mind-Body Politic*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Available online in preview at URL = <[https://www.academia.edu/38764188/The\\_Mind-Body\\_Politic\\_Preview\\_Co-authored\\_with\\_Michelle\\_Maiese\\_forthcoming\\_from\\_Palgrave\\_Macmillan\\_in\\_July\\_2019](https://www.academia.edu/38764188/The_Mind-Body_Politic_Preview_Co-authored_with_Michelle_Maiese_forthcoming_from_Palgrave_Macmillan_in_July_2019)>.

(Prison Arts Coalition, 2018). Dreux, P. "Art Behind Bars: The Talents of Incarcerated Artists." *Art Zealous*. Available online at URL = <<https://artzealous.com/art-behind-bars-the-talents-of-incarcerated-artists/>>.