

Of Inhuman Nature & Unnatural Rights

By Robin Fox

AS AN undergraduate student of anthropology and philosophy at London University in the 1950s I was faced with what seemed to be an irreconcilable conflict. The philosophers argued with compelling and urbane elegance that the naturalistic fallacy was just that: a fallacy. "*Ought*" we were told, could never be derived from "*is*." Ought, in fact, could never be derived from anything, it seemed. On the one hand the Logical Positivists were firm in their assertion that any "*ought*"-statements were emotive or prescriptive, and that was that. On the other, the Existentialists were telling us much the same thing under a different guise: that all was contingent, not to say absurd, and that one made more or less bloody-minded choices and stuck to them: this was "*commitment*."

That the one philosophy resulted in a kind of genteel north-Oxford inaction (as criticised by Ernest Gellner), and the other went off in all directions from *rive gauche* gloom to the tortuous Marxism of Sartre's *Critique* (and subsequent Communist involvement), left at least one student with a sinking feeling that, while they might not be actively corrupting youth, these philosophers were not giving it much guidance either.

This was particularly so since in anthropology and sociology we were faced with analysis, prescription, and judgment which, if the philosophers were to be believed, was neither methodologically sound nor ethically viable. In effect, it was metaphysical nonsense and emotive assertions riddled with bad faith.

To the philosophical arguments—all the heirs of David Hume—one could offer no answer, which was uncomfortable. It was as uncomfortable as one's failure to refute Berkeley's idealism: it was indeed irrefutable, but one *knew* it to be wrong. One also knew that even if prescriptions did not follow and could not follow from descriptions, they had to follow from *something*; and it was depressing to feel that they followed from nothing more than arbitrary likes, dislikes, or commitments.

PHILOSOPHY WAS equally scornful of "natural rights." There were "rules of the game" that were human inventions, but in no sense could these be construed as given by nature. That would be to derive "*ought*" from "*is*" again—which would be, as we know, impossible and even distasteful.

The prime example of the naturalistic fallacy always quoted was the sin of advancing the "*more evolved*" as the "*best*." One does not have to repeat all the elegant Oxfordian arguments here to the effect that if we equate "*more evolved*" with "*good*", then we rob the language of a word—a worse crime than robbing the Bank of England. Granted. But in anthropology we were at the same time learning how, in a very positive sense, some organisms were "*better adapted*" to specific environments than others; how some gene pools contained "*greater fitness*", all measurable; and how an organism like man was an all-round better adaptable risk than others because of its flexibility—and so on. Of course the concept of "*good*" and "*better*" here had to be defined differently from "*adapted*" or "*fitness*", or we did impoverish the language and end in tautology. At the same time, it was clear that we were, in the study of evolution, making rather profound judgments about relative merits that were not simply emotive noises or aesthetic preferences. It was "*better*" to be "*better adapted*" in the simple sense that otherwise the organism or species or population would in all likelihood vanish.

AGAIN, IN SOCIOLOGY, despite the rash of cultural relativism which would have had every culture and society as good as every other, we were constantly looking at patterns of social adaptedness, where it was clear that some cultures were less well able to survive than others. They "*functioned*" less well (in the jargon of the day). It did seem that, as long as one accepted *survival* as a criterion, one was saying something more here than just a "*hurrah*" or "*boo*."

BUT philosophy and ethics were implacable. One was simply stating preferences. There was nothing “in nature” that gave precedence. Cultures or species were simply “there.” To say that one was for whatever reason, “better” or “worse” was to express approval and dislike; that was all.

The Cultural Relativist wing of anthropology aided and abetted this attitude, and was, perhaps, a child of the same conditions that bred this particular philosophy. All cultures were indeed equal, and to rank them was simply to express prejudice. This was a counter to “ethnocentric” Western European cultures automatically ranking themselves top, on some self-appointed scale of progress, with the poor benighted savages relegated to bottom place. What the relativists never seemed to realise, however, was that their logic did not abolish ethnocentrism—it simply *extended* the privilege to *all* societies.

None of these attitudes, embroidered into schools and disciplines, left room for Absolutes, Categorical Imperatives, or Natural Rights—and none, certainly, with their heavy empirical bias in epistemology, would have had any room for “instincts” or “innate ideas.”

And it was not only the Viennese and Parisian biases that ruled out such considerations. Throughout the social sciences (and “behavioural sciences” generally) the “innate” was having a bad press. Darwin and evolution were definitely out of fashion. Evolutionary ethics was the last word in fallacious naturalism; and “evolutionism” was a term of abuse which was only rendered less severe by the overtones of gentle ridicule it had acquired.

The social philosophers seemed as much the heirs of John Stuart Mill as the philosophers of knowledge were the heirs of David Hume. They shared a thoroughgoing, robust empiricism with a scorn of innate ideas and an indulgent fondness for the *tabula rasa*. Like Mill they would advance the argument (and still do) that to flirt with the “innate” was to flirt with reaction, racism, and finally fascism.

THIS LED the sociological wing into some confusion. To be a thorough empiricist-individualist in the Utilitarian tradition was to deny the strength of Durkheimian collectivism—so necessary to the autonomy of the subject. It was also to deny such

collectivism as Marx derived from Hegel. So, while espousing a modified collectivism, they drew the line at idealism (“group minds” were out), and shunned nativism; they wanted to keep collectivism but throw out the solipsism.

The link they wished to both forge and sunder—and they did both with excruciating logical gymnastics—had bothered, for example, L. T. Hobhouse, in his critique of idealism and its dreadful consequences (*The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 1918). It was a constant tension in sociology, although perhaps not always recognised as such; and as with all such tensions it was likely to produce pathological reactions in the patient when faced with an unpleasant stimulus. That such reactions were not always reasonable follows from the ambivalence of the subject—a well-known clinical condition.

THE STIMULUS, of course, was any doctrine of the innate. Mill had declared such doctrines to be hopelessly reactionary by their very nature: for what was innate was not changeable, and it was all too easy to point to what is and regularly has been, declare it innate, and hence unalterable—a position obviously anathema to reforming radicals. That Mill was totally wrong is obvious, but we must leave the exploration of the “unnaturalistic fallacy” for a while and look further at the pathology.

ANYTHING, THEN, that might link a doctrine of the innate with an idealistic collectivism would obviously send shivers of horror down (or up) the collective spine of empiricist-relativist-reformist social thinkers; particularly those social thinkers who wished to espouse a lukewarm collectivism while shunning the innate. To tell them that society (or “the social”) was indeed a reality *sui generis* and more than the sum of its individuals, but that this was because “society was located in the gene pool of the species” was to produce panic bordering on terror. Yet this is what that remarkable group of neo-Darwinian naturalists, the Ethologists, had the intellectual impudence to do. Instead of floating lazily around in a haze of “collective representations” or even “class consciousness”, “society” had a definite, material and wholly explicable location in patterns of evolved adaptive social behaviour characteristic of a species.¹ Marx would probably have been delighted: he and Engels surely would have had no trouble with “sociobiology”: only their *lumpen*-intellectual followers have that problem today.

The response, when the Ethologists (and their few enthusiastic hangers-on from the social sciences) dared to suggest that this may be as true for man as for lesser beings, was a hectic attempt to

¹ This leads to some confusion in the case of the human species where sociologists and philosophers tend to see the collectivity as the individual culture or society. But there is no problem. The basic repertoire of human social behaviour, given that its major component is a propensity to act on the world as reconstructed through symbolic-meaning systems, will be refracted into many *versions*. These, then, will be special cases of the species-specific repertoire. The difference between this approach and the orthodox one lies in the starting point: for the Darwinist it is the species.

deny man's animality, the method's validity, and the compassion and integrity of the scientists involved. No insult has been too much, no distortion or innuendo too extreme. When one is defending truth and goodness, any form of excommunication is permitted and even honoured.

The anthropologists, who at least pay lip-service to the importance of man's physicality and his evolution, might have been expected to cock a friendly ear in this direction. But they mostly reacted with even more incoherent indignation. For what was breached here was the distinction Claude Lévi-Strauss had taught was basic and sacred: that between Nature and Culture. Not only "savage minds", it seems, are overwhelmed when, as in the case of incest, this distinction is threatened; the even more savage mentalities of post-Tylorian anthropologists are afflicted with grisly horror. For—heirs as they were to Huxley's disastrous distinction between "cosmic" and "ethical" evolution; to Spencer's and Kroeber's between "organic" and "superorganic"; and to their own between "genetic" and "cultural"—they, like the savage, could only resort to incantation when the distinction is, however gently, declared irrelevant.

The *bête noire* here is "racism" and its sister-in-crime, "aggression." In the same way that all cultures are "the same" to proponents of this happy *Weltanschauung*, so are all races; and no one is aggressive but evil circumstances make him so. Mill would have been proud of them; but even he might have been hard put to explain how the evil circumstances came about in the first place. For which is worse?—to have creatures who are inevitably aggressive, or to have creatures who inevitably produce circumstances that inevitably produce aggression? No matter. To suggest the location of any profound behaviours in the biology of the creatures (and, particularly, their more unsavoury tendencies) was to offend against equality, against progress and human perfectibility, and so to be the potentially reactionary villain that Mill denounced in the unlikely person of Sir William Hamilton.

IT IS FOR the sociologist of knowledge to explore the paradox of "liberalism" which, at least in the United States and Western Europe, has become coterminous with "environmentalism" and so the exact counterpart of Soviet doctrinaire Pavlovianism. In each case—reaching lunatic heights with Lysenko in Russia and even B. H. Skinner in the USA—the "innate" is denied significance and the "environment" made prime mover. Behaviourism in psychology, philosophy, and the social sciences dominates both East and West; and, in the name of both "liberal democracy" and "the dictatorship of the

proletariat", the completely manipulable man is made the model of explanation and practice.

That liberal-radical democrats in capitalist America should march ideologically hand-in-hand with communist-totalitarians in the Soviet Union might appear on the surface odd. But these people have more in common with each other than with beleaguered pessimists like myself, or even with the naturally conservative majority of mankind who are less likely to be intoxicated with their own rhetoric than those whose business it is to trade outrageous ideas for dubious action in that half-world between intellect and politics glorified by the name of "theory." For the "radicals" are all dedicated to serious and cumulative change; change not only in social institutions, but (and they have at least the wit to see this) in the *very nature* of the people who support the institutions. For people must be motivated to practise the bright new institutions that either capitalist individualists or socialist collectivists wish upon them. Therefore, purveyors of either progressive-liberal or revolutionary-socialist solutions have to adhere to a doctrine of human perfectibility as a matter of principle. There is no "old Adam" in this philosophy, no original sin. There is only an infinitely perfectible human machine and a totally unoriginal virtue that will be implanted by the benign, self-appointed mentors.

One understands their antipathy to doctrines of the "innate." It is easy to follow the reasoning: the innate is what it is and is ineradicable. It is not subject to wilful change; it is not at the mercy of ideologues, and is therefore suspect. If it exists, its existence is best denied. For an extension of the argument says that even if it *does* exist, then it is dangerous to admit of its existence, since this will *encourage* reactionaries!

Why this environmentalist doctrine should be so deeply entrenched in both communist and capitalist ideologies is, therefore, easy to see. Both are equally abandoning the feudal universe and the fixed order of nature; both are concerned to remould man in accordance with the dictates of a new environment, be it a happy socialist Utopia or an affluent capitalist production line. Both wish to erect an "unnatural" order; that is, an order made according to rational decision, not an order evolved from the needs of "human nature." To this extent, then, "human nature" must be denied, at least in so far as it appears to stand in the way of rational reformist action. It is not so much that human nature is repudiated (Mill reckoned that men were incurably greedy and lazy), but that only those attributes that suit the reformist are allowed to exist in it.

One must also note here a curiosity: that this hostility to the "innate" started as a hostility to the reactionary possibilities of innate *ideas*. Thus John Locke attacked the doctrine for

“the power it gives one man or another—to make a man swallow that for an innate principle which may serve to his purpose who teacheth them.”

Thus men's *natures* could well be seen as having fixed features (Mill's greed and laziness) but this did not matter as long as their *ideas* could be changed. It was with the waning of the Enlightenment's overvaluation of ideas and reason—the rise even of Darwinism—that the hostility was extended beyond the limits of Platonic innateness (i.e. of *ideas*) to feelings, sentiments, predispositions—in short, to “instincts” broadly conceived.

This led to endless ideological confusion, and one is alternately appalled by the aggressiveness of the proponents of human peacefulness, or saddened by the intellectual confusion that afflicts the basically humane people like René Dubos who feel, with Mill, that to admit *content* to “human nature” might be to admit a Pandora's box of aggressive and malign intentions.

That emotions like altruism and aggression, for example, are not incompatible—and indeed might be necessary to each other and that they are both, in their ultimate expression, a combination of innate propensities and environmental input—is obvious to students of the evolution of behaviour, and virtually uncontroversial. It is only when these facts hit the heady realms of liberal ideology that otherwise intelligent men go haywire in their contradictory defences of the Manipulable Man who both has no nature at all and is Naturally Good at the same time.

For the record, I would rather hope that man has *some* nature, that it is indeed *innate*, and that it is aggressively concerned with the assertion of compassion, altruism, sharing, and other basic human virtues. I would rather hope for this than be stuck with a human *tabula rasa* on which any tyrants or do-gooders can write their (always conspicuously benign) messages at will. And I think man *has* such a nature, that it is intensely social, and that it gives the lie to all sanctimonious manipulators from Mill through Stalin. Given the dilemmas of our technological hubris, I think it is also our only hope—certainly more hopeful than the pious platitudes of the perfectionist liberals or the asserive prescriptions of socialism.

BUT LET ME RETURN for a moment to the calm waters of ethical theory where good and evil are elements in equations rather than problems of real life. Throughout the youthful academic period in London I was describing, an almost lone voice protested against the amorality of the philosophers and the relativism of the anthropologists: that of Morris Ginsberg. He protested that moral argu-

ment was not largely emotive but factual; that men agreed on moral ends but argued about means; that there were indeed moral universals but there was no universal agreement about the range of their application. On the basis, then, of these moral universals—universals which must surely reflect something in human nature—it was possible to erect a truly *rational* ethical discourse: essentially a discussion of means and applications. Thus, all societies agree that murder is wrong, and generosity good; they disagree about what constitutes murder, and to whom one should be generous. We do not need to look further, he suggests, than the universal ends revealed by the comparative study of morals in history, to locate a basis for a rational ethic.

Now in such a position there seemed to be hope and promise although at the time I felt it did not go far enough, and I think so still. But it did suggest some basis in fact—the revelations of the “comparative sociology of morals”—for a rational code of ethics. The problem with it was, for me, that the prescriptions woven into moral codes were not necessarily representative of the *whole* range of human activities on which a social philosophy should be based. They were primarily *negative*, and concerned with what man feared in his own nature rather than what he exalted. A true attempt to base a rational ethic on human nature, or to formulate a natural basis for a system of natural rights, had to go further.

AT THE TIME, HOWEVER, I could not see how to take it further. Clearly, in a theoretical sense, there must be a set of behaviours and their consequent social institutions that were more “natural” to man than others—and one sincerely hoped that these would be congruent with one's democratic or humanist prejudices. But how to ascertain these? Aristotle could assert that slavery was “natural”; and Verwoerd could do the same with *apartheid*, Spencer with *laissez-faire* capitalism, and Rousseau with human equality. How did we decide? And having decided, on what basis did we assert that the “natural” was better?

One thing was certain: “natural” and “instinctive” were not one and the same thing, at least not with *Homo sapiens*. Even then we could see that the old “instinctivism” would not do. It took the ethologists with their “neo-instinctivism” to teach us this, much as they are caricatured to the contrary. What we are equipped with is innate *propensities* that require environmental input for their realisation. Thus, what we need to look for is a *combination* of the innate predispositions and the range of environments compatible with them. Any prescriptions would take the form: “We are programmed to do *X* and this requires environment *Y*; if we wish to see the maturity of *X* we must

provide Y." Thus, for example, we know that there is no simple "maternal instinct" or even "mating instinct", but that an organism's capacity for a full display of maternal or sexual behaviour depends on the organism itself having had a secure maternal relationship. Thus, the organism has, as it were, an "output" of energy in the early stages that demands the "environment" of "maternal security." We know this as a result of the classical ethological "deprivation experiment"—take away the environment and the maturation of the "innate" potential is thwarted. Instinct is the organism's demand for necessary environmental input.

THE POSSIBILITY was dimly emerging, then, of a scheme whereby the innate demands and the necessary environmental stimuli could be catalogued so that we could eventually sketch the parameters within which human social arrangements had to operate *in order to be human*. Outside this, any demands on the organism—any environments created for it—would be, literally, inhuman.

If we take an animal example, it is simpler and more obvious. A rooster crows, displays, struts, pecks, copulates, fights, etc. We do not feel we have to *justify* the rooster's crowing; we need no theory of the rooster's *right* to crow; we recognise that if we prevent this we are taking away something intrinsic to being a rooster. We could say that all these things are a rooster's *needs*: things it has to do to realise fully its roosterhood. The rooster, of course, lacking consciousness and imagination, cannot, like ourselves, have *wants* in addition to its needs. (We could almost define man as the animal that wants things) The rooster cannot *want* things it does not need; humans can.

And here they get into real trouble—but that is almost another story. We have touched on it in looking at the claims of those who *want* man to be perfectible. (I only want him to be human and, God knows, that is difficult enough.) Our problem is that because of the dominance of wants—wishes, desires, aspirations, and utopias—we have lost touch with our needs: lost touch to the extent that we constantly sacrifice needs to wants like the animals in fables who have delusions of grandeur and end in disaster. This is, surely, in one sense a philosophy of caution; but (contrary to Mill's expectations) it can turn out to be functionally quite radical. For in order to restore our humanity—in order to jettison outrageous wants and return to the satisfaction of basic needs—we may have to cut through a Gordian knot of "civilised" behaviour and industrial institutions that have outstripped our capacity to handle them. To restore the basic con-

servatism of the species may require the most radical action of all.

AND HERE WE MUST NOTE another curiosity in the history of ideas. We have seen how the doctrine of "innate ideas" was hitched to "reaction" and why. But at least for the great 18th-century conservatives it was the proponents of "innateness"—of "human nature"—who were the dangerous revolutionary fellows, not the Lockians and the Humeans and other empiricists.

Take Edmund Burke's argument: we have to support the institutions of society as they stand, as we have *learned* them—since these are all we have. They are our rational bulwark against irrational (innate) passions. Burke quite consistently opposed the "Rousseauian" French revolutionaries because they chose to upset established institutions (the authentic social contract for Burke) with their claims for "human rights" based on "human nature"—hence "natural rights." Thus it was those who held the doctrines of "the innate" who were seen as the dangerous revolutionaries—as indeed we are!² Also (as Hofstadter and Burrows, among others, have pointed out) these "conservative" and "radical" labels slip about a lot in the 19th century and may or may not correlate with anyone's position on the "innate." The 19th-century "radicals" were likely to be progressive, *laissez-faire*, Darwinian individualists; while their socialist counterparts were often agrarian "conservatives", opposing change and "progress" (as conceived by the radical capitalists) as strenuously as Edmund Burke. In short, there is no *logical* connection between any doctrines of innateness (or their opposite) and any political stance: the connection is always forced.

BUT TO RETURN to the rooster. We can see that by depriving it of certain behaviours we would prevent it from being a rooster, since these behaviours define it as much as its anatomy defines it. At some point, sufficient deprivation could mean that it ceased to function as a rooster at all, which could mean its genetic death. If we did this to all roosters, the species would become rapidly extinct. Once one is up against this sheer fact of species survival, then the nature of basic needs is obvious; and assuming that survival is accepted as a goal, the question of what to do about it is not difficult.

With man, we have not—at least not during the period since the Neolithic revolution—been faced with any such problem: *as a species*. This-or-that population may have been faced with the problem of its survival; but the species as a whole has progressively expanded, filled the earth, changed the environment, and radically transformed its own mode of existence. All this has happened, in

² Or at least *could* be. No political doctrine *follows* from either position, in fact; it is what you choose to make it.

evolutionary terms, virtually overnight. But during this 10,000-year period of unprecedented good weather and population expansion, *wants* have dominated *needs* to the extent that many behaviours and institutions, which in the pre-Neolithic were simply *needs* that the community met, are now *rights* that can be extended or withheld but, above all, have to be justified.

We never feel we have to *justify* the cock's right to crow. We can scarcely even conceive of it as a right: it is simply what a cock does to be a cock. But we have elaborately to justify the "right to work" or the "right to vote" or the "right to education." The philosophers, as we have seen, will warn us of the "naturalistic fallacy"—the fallacy of concluding that because men *need* to contribute to a group of which they are a part, *need* to be involved in its power structure (however indirectly), and *need* to be informed of and initiated into its knowledge and mysteries—because they *need* all these things this does not mean they *ought* to have them. "*Ought*" is a value judgment. We are saying only "hurrah" to work or "boo" to slavery.

But if (as in our deprivation experiment with the rooster) we progressively take away the satisfaction of these needs from the majority of men, then, whether we "*ought*" to or not, we will be faced with the consequence of extinction, or at least such considerable malfunction that we might prefer extinction. "Natural needs" may not, in this abstract scheme, imply "natural rights": but then what does? Only a creature with wants would get so confused; only a creature capable of making value judgments would exercise them so badly.

IN THE NATURAL, small, hunting communities in which we evolved, there were no ethical theorists. If there had been, we would probably not have survived. It would have been as if the roosters had spawned philosophers to tell them they had no right to crow, fight and breed as of nature, but had to justify these things. Our ancestors were too busy surviving to care much about wants or rights. They understood their needs (which included aesthetic and spiritual necessities), and they met these with their communal and individual resources. They did not "justify" hunting: they hunted to live and to survive, and it was its own justification. It was what men did. They had not much choice, any more than the rooster. With the agricultural revolution and the enormous population spurt, with the creation of a surplus and a leisure class, *wants* came to dominate *needs*, theories came to confuse practice, and any sense of the immediacy of human needs was lost. For even the peasant, on whom this fantasy structure that we call civilisation rested, was himself stripped of major aspects of his humanity as was the cultivated élite which his tedious labours supported. Even "freedom" had to be justified in

this context, which is a little like justifying the rooster's crowing. The paleolithic hunter would not have understood.

WHAT I AM AIMING AT should by now be clear: to understand the parameters which define our humanity, we must explore our evolutionary history to ask: what are our inbuilt potentials? and what is the necessary environmental input for the realisation of that humanity? Our ethic, then, would be avowedly "naturalistic." It would state that all human action, that all social policy, should operate within *human* parameters and hence avoid the *inhuman*. To do less is to risk the survival of the species. To deprive human beings of their humanity beyond a certain point is to destroy the species or, at least, seriously to distort it. To deny human beings the satisfaction of human needs is, by definition, to cut at the roots of being human.

Of course these are, stated thus, no more than the usual pious platitudes of good men everywhere. But with a difference. I want to define "human" not in terms of *wants*, not in terms of Utopian expectations or Utilitarian formulas, of theoretical possibilities or theological vistas, but in terms of what we know to be the repertoire of evolved behaviour of the species *Homo sapiens*. I am not asking that we have a world in which all men will be good, perfect, communitarian, angelic or democratic, but that we have a world in which they are *human*. This need not be a totally attractive or pleasant world. It will likely contain, as well as the angelic qualities, its share of greed, jealousy, conflict, hate, killing, and exploitation. But—and this, I recognise, is indeed a statement of faith—we can work out a human scale for all these things. Exploitation among friends is one thing; among nations or classes, it is a disaster that could end everything.

All this assumes that we can in point of fact track down the essentials of human social nature; and having done so, can act on this knowledge to produce an environment congruent with our needs. I am more sanguine on the first point than the second. The work of animal behaviourists and evolutionary geneticists—as well as structural linguists, developmental psychologists, palaeontologists, anthropologists, neurophysiologists, endocrinologists, and comparative ethnographers—promises, if treated in an evolutionary or "biosocial" framework, to yield the material we need. We can put together the information on our evolutionary past and physiological present, together with our knowledge of the range of socio-cultural experiments in which we have indulged, to establish "the parameters of humanity." Many of us are, despite the abuse of the good folk, working to this end with growing

success. But whether, having established the repertoire of human needs and possible environments, we can cut through either the morass of wants that have turned into needs (jet travel, and the like), or through the theories based on the assumption that whatever man wants to be he can be perfected into being (or through the appalling consequences of the population-technology explosion that has overtaken this rather conservative, several-million-year-old species), I do not know.

ONE THING IS CERTAIN: our evolved repertoire was *not* intended for this environment. We may well be evolved to fight, for example; but not at a distance with weapons of ultimate destruction. We are certainly evolved to be gregarious; but not in nations of 600 million, or in cities of 15 million. We are probably evolved to travel; but not around the world in eighty minutes. We are an animal which has lost forever the intimate scale of its natural evolution and lost its head in the process.

But we can at least approach the unprecedented and truly appalling conditions that we have created for ourselves with a full knowledge of what it is we are doing and are equipped to do. If we know firmly what range of social contexts is required for each and every human to realise his humanity, then we can strain in that direction—as opposed to assuming that we can create whatever kind of humans we wish in whatever image our god-like pretensions dictate. We are tampering with an old animal whose behaviour goes back to primate roots more than 70 million years old, and to mammalian and even reptilian roots that are much older still. We are unique animals, but we were formed slowly over several million years, and at least 99% of our existence—when our uniqueness was probably being moulded on the African savanna—was the existence of a small-scale hunter. This is what established our parameters. The agricultural, sedentary world is a mere 10,000 years old; and the industrial world with its even more alarming transformation is only 200 years old. Only yesterday. We are an old animal coping with a startling new world of its own creation that has got out of hand.

STILL, WE (NO MORE THAN the rooster) cannot afford the luxury of an ethical theory that denies natural rights or rational ethics. Nor can we afford a political philosophy or even a working ideology that denies content to human nature. It is too late for that; it may be too late for anything. Yet, con-

trary to what Mill and his latter-day followers maintain, to look hard at and to accept the limitations of human nature as a basis for political action, may turn out to be the least reactionary and most strenuously radical act of the 20th century.

But it will, in the non-pejorative sense of the word, be also a truly conservative act. So often we are told that man, because of his wonderful capacity for culture, is able to say “no” to his own nature (seen, one supposes, as brutish and nasty). But nature usually has the last laugh in these matters, and as an anthropologist who is constantly shaken by the evidence of man’s capacity to create truly hideous and revolting cultures, I would feel happier to think that something in human nature was always going to be able to say “no” to ignoble experiments in human culture in the name of “common humanity.” I draw some slight comfort from the evidence that that is so; that man cannot be indefinitely brainwashed by tyrants of Left or Right, and indeed even by high-minded progressives or liberals (and there are no worse tyrants than thwarted idealists), but that some of the “old Adam” resists the manipulation of the culture-mongers, even violently. In this distastefully aggressive assertion of his natural rights, lies perhaps his last best hope.

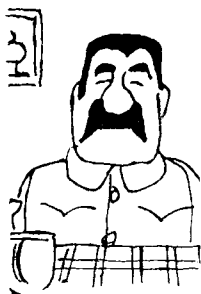
But I doubt that the philosophers, relativists, behaviourists, radicals, liberals, socialists and all the other products of human *wanting* will agree. If Jefferson said, “Always trust the people”, perhaps I am saying, “Always trust our essential human nature.” It is, after all, all we have in the end, if we will let it alone to do its natural business. It got by quite well without the theories until very very recently; and only since the theories has it gone astray.

We are now like roosters in some bizarre Aesopian tale, discussing whether crowing and pecking are in order; or, even worse, trying to find out if we really are an animal that crows and pecks, and if so, what we should do about it. Paradoxically, we might be forced to conclude that it is in our nature to create such quandaries for ourselves, so the situation is perfectly natural as it is. This smacks of the Cretan liar and his notoriously unsolvable paradox. But while it might be, in a sense, natural for us to create tragic dilemmas for ourselves, it is surely in some sense also unnatural—or at least literally inhumane—to create quandaries that negate our own nature. To be unnatural is not so bad: it is being inhumane that is the problem. “Being bad” is not so bad either; and “being good” is nowhere near as important as ethical theory would have it be. The problem is to be human.

NOTES & TOPICS

Getting Out of Yalta?

By Raymond Aron



PARIS
MANY JOURNALISTS (and even historians) have been questioning recently the myth of “the division of the world at Yalta”, recalling the Soviet promises of free elections which (according to Franklin D. Roosevelt) were supposed to be “as much above suspicion as Caesar’s wife.” Are we, then, to stop blaming Yalta, and instead to blame the violation by the Soviets of the agreements concluded at that historic place?

This new or revised version certainly comes close to a truth of the matter. In February 1945 the US President and the British Prime Minister redoubled their efforts to wring concessions out of Stalin regarding the provisional Polish government in Lublin, which was recognised by Moscow but not by London and Washington. In the end it was decided that the Lublin Committee should become the nucleus of the future Polish government, but that it was to be augmented by members of the provisional government centred in London. Winston Churchill had few illusions about the political fate in store for the East European liberated nations from the armies that came from the cold. Roosevelt was more gullible; and the Sovietisation of Poland was one of the causes of the “cold war” breach between Moscow and Washington.

It was not diplomacy but the movement of armies that determined the division of Europe. Why do we French in particular persist in laying the blame on Yalta rather than on Stalin? Stalin, the Marshal and the ideologue, had made no bones about telling Milovan Djilas: “Every army brings its ideas along with it. . . .” Since France was not represented at Yalta, it did not carry the slightest responsibility for these consequences of the War. But it is often forgotten that although in the autumn of 1944, after the liberation of France, General de Gaulle refused during his visit to Moscow to recognise the Lublin Committee, he took a step in that direction by sending a diplomatic representative (Christian Fouchet) to the Committee, while Great

Britain and the United States were still ignoring it.

In 1944–45, the words, the good intentions, and the flights of invective were stopped by the same barrier that stops them today: the Soviet armies. Those armies were already on the spot, and neither the British nor the Americans felt capable of matching strength with an ally flushed with its victory over Hitler and The Nazi Reich. Thirty-five years later, the peoples of Eastern Europe are still not resigned to the despotic and disastrously inefficient rule imposed by their old liberators. The Polish army, and still more the Polish militia are doing the dirty work, but they are only jumping to the Kremlin’s orders. Without the military strength of the USSR, the imperial, so-called socialist zone would completely collapse.

It seems to me that François Mitterrand’s slogan about *Sortir de Yalta*, “getting out of Yalta”, does a double mischief. It revives the flagging myth of Yalta, and it implies a similarity between the two parts of Europe. So France would remain “completely free” to get out of the Atlantic alliance, just as it got out of the unified command of NATO. But then one hard question persists: will the Soviets some historic day allow the Poles, the Czechs, and the Hungarians to govern themselves in their own way, and not in the Kremlin’s?

If it were simply a question of giving Moscow guarantees of security, the happy solution would be only a hand’s reach away; but for Moscow that guarantee is identified with the total power of the Party and the full backing of the Army. So the idea that Moscow wants nothing more than security convinces no one but blind men and fools. The presence of a powerful army in the middle of Europe is not there to defend the borders of the USSR; but its presence does intimidate and threaten the democracies—hence the necessity for the strict supervision of Poland, which carries the lines of communication between the bases on Soviet territory and the divisions stationed in the East German Communist Republic.

General de Gaulle preached *détente* in the hope of loosening the entrenched positions of the two blocs. But his policy produced an outcome quite contrary to what he wanted. When the need arises, tanks can repress dissidence and rebellion in the East—but it is the unity of the West that has faltered.

The French went scouting for a certain privileged status in Moscow, and the Germans embarked on their *Ostpolitik*, a copy or complement of the policy of France. Ten years later, neither diplomatic *rapprochement* nor increased trade have tamed (“Gulliverisation” used to be the high-flown phrase) the Russian giant. We are facing the same old Soviets, except that meanwhile they have built up their armaments (on sea as well as land), while Western nations have lowered their guard and feel themselves to be half-prisoners of