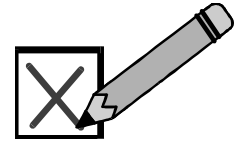


# Reality Check



August-September 2002

## SPECIAL ISSUE

This issue of *Reality Check* is dedicated entirely to one question: human nature. The idea came after an unusually long and intense discussion at the Knoxville Skeptic Book Club, when instead of the usual two hours we had a marathon 6+ hours of exchanging ideas on the subject, using Leslie Stevenson and David Haberman's *Ten Theories of Human Nature* as our starting point. In the following, you will find short and more in-depth opinions on human nature by several members of the Rationalists of East Tennessee. As you will see, there are varied viewpoints and contrasting conclusions, and we welcome feedback from our readers to be published in the next issues of *RC*. In this page, however, we start with a brief excerpt from the introduction to David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). Hume, the skeptic philosopher *par excellence*, starts out by decrying the state of philosophical debate in his own time, and makes the point that a good understanding of human nature is fundamental to any other philosophical or scientific investigation, because human nature determines what we can and cannot learn about the world. He then argues that empirical data have to be the ultimate foundation for any of our theories, and that therefore it will be difficult to reach conclusions in matters of moral philosophy, where experiments, unlike the case of natural philosophy (i.e., science) cannot be carried out.

Enjoy the readings!

-RC

Nothing is more usual and more natural for those, who pretend to discover anything new to the world in philosophy and the sciences, than to insinuate the praises of their own systems, by decrying all those, which have been advanced before them. And indeed were they content with lamenting that ignorance, which we still lie under in the most important questions, that can come before the tribunal of human reason, there are few, who have an acquaintance with the sciences, that would not readily agree with them. 'Tis easy for one of judgment and learning, to perceive the weak foundation even of those systems, which have obtained the greatest credit, and have carried their pre-

## On human nature

tensions highest to accurate and profound reasoning. Principles taken upon trust, consequences lamely deduced from them, want of coherence in the parts, and of evidence in the whole, these are every where to be met with in the systems of the most eminent philosophers, and seem to have drawn disgrace upon philosophy itself.

Nor is there requir'd such profound knowledge to discover the present imperfect condition of the sciences, but even the rabble without doors may, judge from the noise and clamour, which they hear, that all goes not well within. There is nothing which is not the subject of debate, and in which men of learning are not of contrary opinions. The most trivial question escapes not our controversy, and in the most momentous we are not able to give any certain decision. Disputes are multiplied, as if every thing was uncertain; and these disputes are managed with the greatest warmth, as if every thing was certain. Amidst all this bustle 'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proseytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours. The victory is not gained by the men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army.

From hence in my opinion arises that common prejudice against metaphysical reasonings of all kinds, even amongst those, who profess themselves scholars, and have a just value for every other part of literature. By metaphysical reasonings, they do not understand those on any particular branch of science, but every kind of argument, which is any way abstruse, and requires some attention to be comprehended. We have so often lost our labour in such researches, that we commonly reject them without hesitation, and resolve, if we must for ever be a prey to errors and delusions, that they shall at least be natural and entertaining. And indeed nothing but the most determined scepticism, along with a great degree of indolence, can justify this aversion to metaphysics. For if truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, 'tis certain it must lie very deep and abstruse: and to hope we shall arrive at it without pains, while the greatest geniuses have failed with the utmost pains, must certainly be esteemed

(Continued on page 7)

# A mix of selfishness and cooperation

By Phil King

I begin by asserting that human beings have a nature that is similar in many respects to that of other higher animals on Earth. They basically want to survive. Being selfish is natural. Also sharing and acting cooperatively with others in the human species is natural since humans have evolved a social scheme that helps to assure survival. I do *not* believe that humans are "sinful" or "wicked" and need to be "saved." I feel that a society will be most successful if it adopts principles that mirror basic human nature.

Evolution has also endowed us with the ability to think abstractly and to have compassion. We can produce mind pictures and models to explain how we got here and to envision such a concept as "purpose." We can put ourselves "in the shoes of others." While I have difficulty with the concept of absolute rights and wrongs, I generally opt for "what works" -- in social relationships, in philosophy, in life in general.

I feel others will treat you in much the same manner as you treat them, thus I like to treat others as I, myself, want to be treated -- with respect and dignity. However, I also feel that a competitive nature is part of being human. Therefore, individuals must assume an assertive (not aggressive) stance in life, to prevent others from usurping *their* rights. Other humans will accord you more respect if you do this. Sometimes society must act to restrain undesirable acts (that is, acts that would deny basic freedoms and rights of others) committed by individuals, by groups or by nations.

My views are perhaps best summarized by the way in which I wanted to raise my children. I felt that if young people are reared in an atmosphere of love and acceptance and are permitted to develop self-esteem, that they will make decisions that are good for them and also good for the society in which they find themselves. I didn't have many rules. I felt they would learn a lot from the consequences of their decisions. I felt they needed to learn to be competitive in our society in order to acquire the means to a secure financial future for their families. I wanted them to be outgoing and to have friends -- and to BE a friend to others. I wanted them not to take themselves too seriously. I wanted them to have fun -- in their approach to learning about the world and in life in general. I wanted them to be confident, yet compassionate and tolerant of those who did not agree with their own way of thinking. I wanted them to be balanced.

In summary, I don't really think anything is "wrong" with human beings. We are what we are. Therefore, I don't think there is any need for an all-pervasive prescription for "putting things right." Again, a social system that "works" is what is desirable - one that keeps things

in balance and makes it possible for each human being to seek happiness and fulfillment and for the human race to persist. I feel that, given the information, society will make the "right" decisions - just as I felt my children would.  
-RC

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***Immortal words: Every so often, we pass laws repealing human nature.***  
**(Howard Lindsay)**

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## Human nature, the philosopher's view

### A summary from *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

The explication of the notion of human nature is as difficult as it is important to philosophy. A major problem is that it is not obvious what kind of answer would satisfy. A number of key issues have dominated philosophical discussion of human nature: Is there some qualitative difference between humans and other animals, or is it all a question of quantities and balance? Is there one key thing that all humans have, or is there a range of qualities, irregularly dispensed? And, most crucially, is human nature inherently good, bad, or indifferent?

Plato thought that we are different from other beings in our rational ability and human nature is neither good nor bad, but with appropriate training this nature can be turned to good. Aquinas drew on Aristotelian roots in formulating his doctrine of natural law, concluding that any adequate account of human nature must not emphasize our spiritual side to the exclusion of the body. David Hume started to stress the continuity between human powers of reason and sentiment and those of animals, a challenge obviously continued by the rise of evolutionary biology.

Rousseau and other Romantics pushed the pendulum to the other extreme, suggesting that only the young and undeveloped is the truly good. On the other hand, John Stuart Mill and early evolutionists like Thomas Henry Huxley were convinced of the ape within and of the need to conquer our brute nature.

Extremely influential today is the view of 'constructivists' who deny that there is any essential human nature, arguing rather that all such conceptions are merely cultural artifacts. Again at the opposite extreme are sociobiologists, who see human nature as largely determined and thus not appropriately subject to moral evaluation. The quest, obviously, continues... -RC

*"I do not believe that humans are sinful, or wicked and need to be saved"*

## The visceral urge to live

### By Daryl Houston

Discussions of human nature tend to treat of the difference between good and evil, lumping humans into one or the other category striving toward the utmost good. But if good and evil are human constructs that describe objective, neutral phenomena (as I believe they are), then to talk about human nature from a moral perspective, as many theories of human nature do, is no more intelligible than to talk about ant nature or computer-logic nature within an ethical framework. In other words, it may make sense to consider human nature, but it makes little sense to do so from a moral perspective.

A discussion of human nature is a discussion, more generally, of the nature of living beings, whose fundamental goal I would argue is to continue living. My heart beats for no other purpose than to keep my own body alive. Likewise, the choices I make and the actions I engage in all lean toward the ultimate goal of keeping me alive and, to expand my scope a bit, keeping me happy and healthy (both of which arguably contribute to prolonging my life). I believe that aardvarks and ants and onions all are driven

*"It may make sense to consider human nature, but it makes little sense to do so from a moral perspective"*

by the same or similar urges, and to speak of human nature as a thing separate from aardvark nature, for example, is purely an intellectual exercise. What most people characterize as human nature is actually a series of effects the nature of living things has on human behavior.

Thus different societies at different times have had different views of what constitutes human nature. Because it behooves individual members of a given society at a given time to band together with others, the society in question is defined in terms of community, and helping others is considered a moral action. Because some people find meditation to the point of temporary mind distortion beneficial, their understanding of human nature comes to be based on the idea that attaining the blissful state of mind distortion is the ultimate good.

Human nature is the visceral urge to live; religion, ethics, morality, and other systems commonly used to describe human nature are symptoms of the urge, ways of satisfying it or justifying the satisfaction of it in culturally manufactured environments.

-RC

## Cautious optimism

### By Florence Wilden

No student of human history can ignore the prevalence of aggression, that of nation against nation, of communal group against communal group. The "competitive impulse," one positive spin on aggressive behavior, fails to explain hundreds, even thousands of years during which massacres of small, unarmed minority groups by powerful, armed ones occurred. It hardly suffices to explain the genocidal furor of the strong-armed in face of the indisputably weak and disenfranchised. Uncontrolled aggression, far from serving a survival function, as it may have in the very early stages of human evolution, threatens our very survival as a species.

Konrad Lorenz suggests that personal acquaintance with individual members of alien groups would reduce intra-species aggression by reducing mutual mistrust. Put succinctly: one would learn that every stranger is not an enemy. Sadly, we know that recent experiments using this strategy have failed. Palestinians and Israeli youth groups willingly agreed to live communally, and, in that time, came to care for, even love one another. Yet, not long after returning to their respective communities,

*"The political genius of Tito kept murderous impulses in abeyance for decades. Alas, it did not extinguish them."*

they embraced anew their peoples' aggression against these now "familiar" enemies. Neither acquaintance nor contiguity bred tolerance among Yugoslavians. The political genius of Tito kept murderous impulses in abeyance for decades. Alas, it did not extinguish them. If we can understand the intolerance of these warring factions, what are we to make of the xenophobia that cripples efforts towards a federated (and largely Christian) Europe?

Will awareness of our conformity-driven, self-protective behaviors coupled with education about alien customs and cultures breed generations of "minds without borders?" Or give rise to worldwide, peaceful resolution of multi-national conflicts requiring that the privileged of this world divide their riches? Those parents, professionals, and all who function as concerned educators answer, "Yes," even as they dissemble their grave doubts of influencing the great motley.

-RC

# It's all in the (selfish) genes

By Mleeka Learn Houston

I think that humans tend to act in their own self-interest because of human nature and their ability to reason. Even if we are unaware of it, most of the things that we do are done to further our own goals. Since our most basic goal is the survival and propagation of our genes, most of us do whatever is necessary to ensure that our offspring survive and live a lifestyle that we think promotes their long-term survival.

There seem to be two categories of exceptions to the action for self-interest rule. The first is based on empathy. People do have the ability to empathize and to act on that empathy, sometimes against self-interest. However, I find that if doing something be-

*"Most of us do whatever is necessary to ensure that our offspring survive"*

cause of empathy has a high personal cost, most people have little trouble overlooking whatever guilt they may feel in order to do the selfish thing. Essentially, we're willing to be empathetic so long as doing so does not adversely affect us.

The second category of exceptions to the action for self-interest rule is due to a failure to act intelligently. For some reason, possibly because our society limits the degree to which natural selection culls the poor samples of our species from the group, some actions are not guided by self-interest. I find it amusing to think of these exceptions as "Jerry Springer moments." People know that going on that show is a bad idea, but for whatever reason—emotion, desire to be on television, stupidity—some segments of the population will agree to participate in counter-productive activities. This isn't to say that intelligent, reasonable people never make similar mistakes, but they do so less frequently.

-RC

# It's not in our genes

By Justin Green

To the best of my knowledge scientists have not yet (nor do I think they ever will) found a gene or group of genes which we humanity holds in common and can be thought of as responsible for what we call "human nature." Thus, however we describe "human nature," it is an outcome of nurture rather than nature.

Since anthropologists and others have found no universal behaviors among all the world's cultures, we can say that nothing that people learn is held in common by all people. I could offer plenty of examples of learned behaviors that many people believe are caused by nature and thus are held in common by all, but are really culturally determined.

To learn how our visions of human nature as kind and

*"Scientists have not found a gene which is responsible for what we call human nature"*

gentle is overly optimistic, I recommend Turnbull's *The Mountain People*, a study of a culture under severe stress. Turnbull shows us that the only behavior we all have in common is the drive for individual survival: the pursuit of food, water and dealing with others who threaten our survival. To quote Hobbes, without society we all "return to the jungle where life is nasty, brutish and short."

Our nature is thus whatever any given culture makes of it, and there are no human universals.

-RC

# Nature and nurture

By Aleta Ledendecker

In considering just what is human nature, it would be necessary to look at cultural variations in order to distill those aspects of human behavior that are evident throughout human societies. Not having access to those kinds of studies, I will have to be content to ruminate on human nature from a more personal perspective.

Since my background is in education, I am particularly

experienced in child development. Humans are born with the capacity to acquire skills such as language, numeration, socialization and movement. In order for these skills to develop normally, certain conditions must be present in the environment. If the conditions are not present at the particular period of sensitivity for acquiring those skills, it may be much more difficult, if not impossi-

ble, to acquire them later. Cross-cultural observations of developing children have identified many of these sensitive periods for development, most of which occur during the early years of life.

In fact, studies of institutionalized orphan infants have provided us with clues as to how important early human physical contact is to intellectual development. Furthermore, children demonstrate a window for language acquisition that remains open through the first six years of life and then gradually closes. Lack of vocal interaction during this time severely impairs later development. Early movement such as crawling and pulling up is tied to later reading ability due to the particular patterning of the brain connected with these physical movements.

Serious socialization begins after an approximate age of twenty-four months. Children who are not given opportunities to extend their range of social contact out-

side the family by about the age of fifty-four months, often have difficulties acquiring what are considered normal social skills such as empathy and compassion.

Looking at human nature from this developmental perspective seems to make it clear that much of what we consider human nature, may indeed be human nurture. Other facets of "human nature" that are more innate, such as the drive to reproduce, find shelter and feed ourselves, are better understood under the general rubric of animal behavior.

Children can be taught to be kind and caring or violent. They can be taught to have good manners or be social misfits. They can be taught to be tolerant of others or suspicious. Through exposure to certain environmental conditions their ability to develop into normally

functioning adults can be helped or hindered. Is this human nature or human nurture?

*"Is this human nature  
or human nurture?"*

-RC

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***Immortal words: It is human nature to think wisely and act foolishly. (Anatole France)***

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## Naturally, human nature

By Carl Ledendecker

Human nature is usually defined as being the fundamental dispositions and traits or sum of qualities of humans. That definitional approach has some shortcomings, especially with respect to the second part of the term, nature.

The concept of human nature is often approached by pointing out how humans are different than animals. But then, humans are animals. Humans are related to a specific line of animals, mammals or more specifically very closely related to the great apes. Because of this close relationship, definitions or descriptions focusing on the differences with our close relatives are at best incomplete. An integral part of human nature is our connection to (the rest of) the natural world itself. It is imperative to always include our roots when we discuss our uniqueness.

Related to the "differences" line of thought is the notion that human activity creates unnatural artifacts and/or events. This concept of unnatural activity would place all of the early oxygen-producing organisms in the category "unnatural" as well, since they filled the atmosphere with the "unnatural" toxin oxygen. Even though this "unnatural act" is one that eventually resulted in the emergence of most other life forms on this planet. Living organisms (from the smallest and simplest on) have literally created an environment that is vastly different from the one that existed before they came into existence through natural processes.

Derivatively, any human action cannot be truly "unnatural." The only way that human acts can be "unnatural" is for there to be some sort of supernatural intervention through us. As pointed out above, all organisms have modified the environment and created change through natural processes (although probably much more slowly than humanity) and we are clearly part of the evolutionary processes of our planet. There is no good reason or evidence to conclude that we are capable of, or are the instruments of, supernatural intervention.

So we must begin with the notion of humans as a natural phenomenon. To do otherwise would merely be an exercise in describing an indescribable (beyond our comprehension) or arbitrary (the Lord moves in strange ways) set of dispositions and traits. If we are not part of a natural process then we can be anything the supernatural powers desire at the moment. All-powerful entities could change our "nature" every day and create the illusion in us all that this is the way it has always been. We must assume, at the very least, that there is a relatively stable reality that works through a process of non-contradictory events. In short, we must not employ supernatural explanations or interventions if we are to have a meaningful description of "human nature."

Now, where do we go after dismissing two of humanity's cherished illusions in a few hundred words? Well, one key human trait is empathy. There is likely some-

thing like (if not actual) empathy in other complex social mammal species so it is not an entirely unique trait. Nonetheless, empathy is very important and more developed in humans. It is a key part of the human social framework.

There are other traits of course. As it happens with our close cousins, we have tendencies to have or be "alpha chimps." We tend to defend territories and we have fears and passions that come literally from the ancestral past via the brain stem. We also feel attachment (affection) for offspring and closely associated others (friends). We (in a very complex way) do what all organisms do, that is, attempt to respond to the environment in a way that is advantageous to us (individually and in the long term collectively).

This "need" to respond to the environment has lead to the highly complex mental structures found in many organisms. Essentially, our ability to reason is an extremely complex adaptation of relatively simple responses such as moving towards certain shapes to get food or hiding when a shadow passes overhead. These abilities found in simple organisms are elementary skills in modeling and responding to the external environment. We do the same thing to a much more sophisticated degree and include internal (mental) modeling also. We are very good at modeling reality in ways that involve great amount of input, past knowledge and the feedback processes that are the key to what is called "consciousness." There are serious shortcomings (such as supernaturalism), which have resulted from the combination of the limits of our brains and the evolving nature of human culture. Nonetheless, we have been able to overcome many of these limitations (in a relatively short time compared to most other life forms) and actually manage to model reality very accurately in specific areas. This modeling has become so accurate that we have been able to leave the planet, manipulate matter and energy (which other organisms do but without awareness and diversity) and even change course after predicting that certain activities would counter productive (subservience) or dangerous (pollution).

Which leads to another important trait, adaptability. Roaches and bacteria are better at it than we are, but the rapid spread of our species demonstrates a significant level of adaptability, especially for a large mammal.

To pull some of this together, human nature is characterized by great complexity, resulting from layers of evolutionary history. This complexity is able to generate sophisticated and useful models of reality, provide adaptability (flexibility) and create culture.

With culture lies an extremely important aspect of hu-

*"Human nature is characterized by great complexity, resulting from layers of evolutionary history"*

manity. It is the idea that the "whole is greater than the sum of the parts." Human nature is actually not just an individual thing. It is a group thing. One human cannot define human nature even though the individual is the base unit. The individual is so intertwined into society and the culture generated that it is meaningless to consider human nature and culture separately, just as it is misleading to just describe one ant independently of its colony. The great impact of ants on the environment and the amazing organization of ant colonies would be entirely missed by describing only one individual and not the integrated whole.

The emergent property of culture and cultural transmission (itself intertwined with language) is a fundamental and necessary aspect of human nature. Through it the sophisticated modeling, adaptability and evolving nature of culture itself are able to exist on such a grand scale. Here empathy can exist in a meaningful way. Here the modeling of reality can be corrected and refined. Here cooperation is vital.

Evolution has been described as "red in tooth and claw " or the "survival of fittest." This ruthlessness view of evolution is reflective of the culture of the Victorians who developed the theory. Recently there has been an increasing awareness of the function of cooperation in the evolutionary process. Cooperation in the broad sense applies to much of life. Our own bodies are a collection of individual cells working in a "cooperative" fashion to maintain a very complex organism as well as the individual cells themselves. (Not to mention all of the bacteria, fungi, etc. that are an important and sometimes essential part of the well being of the human body.)

This historically changing view of evolution reflects in different views of human nature. The past notions of

*"One could not begin to leave the house without a very cooperative, morally structured complex of humanity"*

humans as inherently evil (original sin, etc.) were based on an incomplete picture of humans and a less sophisticated cultural framework. In actuality, the modern world (or the ancient world to a lesser extent) could not begin to exist if it were not for the underlying cooperative / empathetic nature of humans and the cultures that developed and supported (to various degrees) these qualities. One could not begin to leave the house (or even have a

house) without a very cooperative, highly organized, morally structured complex of humanity, that is, the phenomena of sophisticated culture.

Human nature is complexly integrated into the natural world with all of its struggle and cooperation. Probably the most significant difference in the individual human is a very developed brain-centered process involving feedback loops often referred to as consciousness. This "consciousness" is deeply involved with the empathetic traits found in social animals and results in what is re-

ferred to as a "conscience." Out of the combination of these two key elements (as well as other related factors such as emotion and language) emerge the unique features of humanity. These features can be considered unique, but not unnatural, that is, they are intimately related to all other life. Humans are part of the natural

world and if we all accept and embrace this basic fact we might just do an even better job of being human.

-RC

*(Hume on Human Nature—Continued from page 1)*

sufficiently vain and presumptuous. I pretend to no such advantage in the philosophy I am going to unfold, and would esteem it a strong presumption against it, were it so very easy and obvious.

'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature: and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties. 'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and could explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings. And these improvements are the more to be hoped for in natural religion, as it is not content with instructing us in the nature of superior powers, but carries its views farther, to their disposition towards us, and our duties towards them; and consequently we ourselves are not only the beings, that reason, but also one of the objects, concerning which we reason.

If therefore the sciences of Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, have such a dependence on the knowledge of man, what may be expected in the other sciences, whose connexion with human nature is more close and intimate? The sole end of logic is to explain the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas: morals and criticism regard our tastes and sentiments: and politics consider men as united in society, and dependent on each other. In these four sciences of Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics, is comprehended almost everything, which it can any way import us to be acquainted with, or which can tend either to the improvement or ornament of the human mind.

Here then is the only expedient, from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches, to leave the tedious lingering method, which we have hitherto followed, and instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, to march up directly to the capital or center of these sciences, to human nature itself; which being once masters of, we may every where else hope for an easy victory. From this station we may extend our conquests over all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life, and may afterwards proceed at leisure to discover more fully those, which are the objects of pure curiosity. There is no

question of importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending, therefore, to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.

And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation. 'Tis no astonishing reflection to consider, that the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects should come after that to natural at the distance of above a whole century; since we find in fact, that there was about the same interval betwixt the origins of these sciences; and that reckoning from THALES to SOCRATES, the space of time is nearly equal to that betwixt, my Lord Bacon and some late philosophers in England, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public. So true it is, that however other nations may rival us in poetry, and excel us in some other agreeable arts, the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and of liberty.

Nor ought we to think, that this latter improvement in the science of man will do less honour to our native country than the former in natural philosophy, but ought rather to esteem it a greater glory, upon account of the greater importance of that science, as well as the necessity it lay under of such a reformation. For to me it seems evident, that the essence of the mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations. And tho' we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical.

I do not think a philosopher, who would apply himself so earnestly to the explaining of the ultimate principles of the soul, would show himself a great master in that very science of human nature, which he pretends to explain, or very knowing 'm what is naturally satisfactory

*(Hume on Human Nature—Continued from page 7)*

to the mind of man. For nothing is more certain, than that despair has almost the same effect upon us with enjoyment, and that we are no sooner acquainted with the impossibility of satisfying any desire, than the desire itself vanishes. When we see, that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented, tho' we be perfectly satisfied in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, beside our experience of their reality; which is the reason of the mere vulgar, and what it required no study at first to have discovered for the most particular and most extraordinary phaenomenon. And as this impossibility of making any farther progress is enough to satisfy the reader, so the writer may derive a more delicate satisfaction from the free confession of his ignorance, and from his prudence in avoiding that error, into which so many have fallen, of imposing their conjectures and hypotheses on the world for the most certain principles. When this mutual contentment and satisfaction can be obtained betwixt the master and scholar, I know not what more we can require of our philosophy.

But if this impossibility of explaining ultimate principles should be esteemed a defect in the science of man, I will venture to affirm, that 'tis a defect common to it with all the sciences, and all the arts, in which we can employ ourselves, whether they be such as are culti-

vated in the schools of the philosophers, or practised in the shops of the meanest artizans. None of them can go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority. Moral philosophy has, indeed, this peculiar disadvantage, which is not found in natural, that in collecting its experiments, it cannot make them purposely, with premeditation, and after such a manner as to satisfy itself concerning every particular difficulty which may be. When I am at a loss to know the effects of one body upon another in any situation, I need only put them in that situation, and observe what results from it. But should I endeavour to clear up after the same manner any doubt in moral philosophy, by placing myself in the same case with that which I consider, 'tis evident this reflection and premeditation would so disturb the operation of my natural principles, as must render it impossible to form any just conclusion from the phenomenon. We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension.

—David Hume

-RC

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