

6 Morality and social dynamics

In this chapter it is the influence of our moral spheres upon broader social relationships that holds the stage. What impact do these spheres have on the social environment, and how does morality interact with other forces of importance for the development of society?

6.1 The effects of generosity

Let us begin with two propositions about how people should behave. Among the most common maxims is the "Golden Rule" <1> which we mentioned earlier: an exhortation to make sympathy the primary principle of action, and to treat people as one would want oneself to be treated. Another rule is the communist principle of distribution according to people's needs as distinct from their achievements. These may seem to be fairly good rules, partly due to their comfortable familiarity. We must, however, look beyond their status as slogans and consider the practical consequences of actions resulting from them.

If society, or many of its citizens, were to follow the Golden Rule's recommendations and satisfy, for example, the wishes of a rule-breaker, one can easily see what kind of actions would result. That a criminal has himself previously broken the Golden Rule becomes a separate issue, and a prior crime does not excuse a further crime. Every criminal wants, of course, to be pardoned rather than punished. He can hardly be expected to welcome punishment because he approves of certain principles of justice or supports crime prevention in general. As a return service for avoiding punishment, he may say a few words about self-reform and repentance. But to fulfill his desire for exoneration would undermine the rules which are essential in order to restrain excessive egoism.

On a practical level, this has to do with getting the citizens to stand up for society's norms. A merchant ought to report racketeers instead of paying them for protection - and despite the risk. A rape victim should help to win a conviction which will save other potential victims, even if staying away from the trial is simplest in the short run. Social morality and justice are upheld not by "turning the other cheek" in purported tolerance, but by holding on and hitting back. It is a task for the governed as much as for the governors. Thus the Golden Rule has directly negative social effects, in addition to the intellectual weaknesses which we have already noted.

The Marxist equation "From each according to his means, and to each according to his needs" <2> is no less unbalanced. We all have a long list of demands and a lower urge to make the required efforts. It is very difficult to match desired consumption with actual production. Hence, this vision inevitably takes shape in a central authority which

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uses its power to tell people how small their needs are and how large their means are. Slavery is another version of the same principle.

Sometimes a new social system is said to require only a bit of popular education, so that mouths and stomachs can be brought into voluntary harmony. Yet how its teachings could yield a "new man" any closer to its ideals is quite unclear. One would constantly observe the teachers shirking their own lessons, and the most blatant egoists filling their dishes with delights. It would be absurdly inconsistent if this organized encouragement of people's worst traits failed to have much greater effects than a moral campaign - however intensive - for diligence, thrift and consideration. What else could ensue but a social and moral collapse?

These two moral principles, then, lead to a weakening of the social system by not punishing crimes or rewarding good behavior. For all their pretensions of being morally advanced, they indicate the contrary. If our goal were to find a principle as antisocial as possible, the two in question would deserve renown for their impressively destructive creativity.

It is often claimed that other, more limited, altruistic attitudes are fundamental to social functions. Without altruism, the handicapped would starve, poor children would have no schooling, and pensioners would stay in the shadow of death. Such misery would indeed be tragic, but whether our rise from barbarism can be credited to altruism is highly doubtful. There may be different ideals between hell and heaven.

The concept of insurance

Insurance is a frequent solution, and scarcely an altruistic one. We do not buy accident insurance out of solidarity with the insurance company or its other clients. We do so because we prefer to pay a painless price today than to face a painful expense tomorrow. If no accident befalls us, we are glad and do not groan about the cost of premiums. Further kinds of insurance exist, but are more concerned with saving for old age than with the probability of accidents.

Instead of buying individual insurance through a private decision, we can take collective insurance through a political decision. To a large extent, the givers and recipients are the same people in politically determined social projects, so these are best understood in terms of insurance rather than of solidarity. The citizens favor systems which they regard as increasing their own security. Those who have, or intend to have, children are in favor of child support payments; those who have, or fear having, no work are interested in measures to stimulate employment. It is not pensioners who demand more child support, or city-dwellers who want more rural funding, as generosity to others. The idea behind insurance is farsighted judgement, an ability to see accidents as potential events that might affect one's own family. If accidents can be rendered less likely or harmful, so much the better. What matters is not that others

are to be pitied, but that disaster may strike oneself. This is the linchpin in the social system.

To call part of the welfare system "social insurance" is not inappropriate. Sentimental altruism serves as glossy wrapping-paper that makes it look nicer to many people.

6.2 Long term considerations

We often hear that egoism is shortsighted, while altruism is not. This seems to have some basis in fact, but one should think carefully before accepting it as an argument for altruism. Selfish actions that have negative consequences even for their perpetrators are frequently held to illustrate the ineptitude and shortsightedness of egoists. They display an egoistic ambition, yet the results are unintended. Although it does commonly happen, we attribute it to miscalculation, not to the nature of egoism. Since egoism means satisfaction of self-interest, shortsighted actions that violate the individual's ultimate interests are difficult to regard as good examples of egoism.

The main reason for the tendency to adopt a short perspective is simple: future rewards may well be so uncertain that it is wiser to have "a bird in hand than two in the bush". Much of the uncertainty is caused, not only by nature and fate, but by other people's eloquent talk and hollow promises. Everyone knows that future rises in salary do not pay present food-bills, and that a dollar today is worth more than a dollar tomorrow. Interest profit, and risk compensation, imply that a future promise must be greater than today's alternative in order to be attractive.

If nothing can be offered today, there has to be an offer of something still better tomorrow. Farsighted goals are perhaps not chiefly motivated by their high value as such, but by a lack of benefits close at hand. To justify actions that will bring suffering in the short run, one must gain support by depicting a large positive effect in the future - and necessity is the mother of invention. Thus, it may be that the causal relationship is normally the opposite of what is conventionally believed, and that the question of whether "ends justify means" is misguided. Drastic means that call for a glorious purpose could be most important: a great war requires a thousand-year peace so as to appear less repulsive. It follows that fundamental skepticism about vast future rewards is sensible.

Shortsightedness can admittedly be driven to extremes. When assessing a company, phenomenal attention may be devoted to the latest quarterly report. Seasoned observers will have heard so many assurances of an imminent turning-point that they dismiss it as noise. Unless the management makes a sober judgement of forthcoming prospects, others find it hard to take account of the future - as they should do according to economic theory, since share prices are supposed to reflect the company's long-run capacity to pay dividends. In practice, managers and investors act in numerous ways that are only interpretable as behavior with a very short perspective.

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A shortsighted approach does not, however, distinguish private business life in liberal states from other systems. A basic problem in underdeveloped countries is that they fail to achieve the degree of farsightedness that does exist in capitalist economies. Uncertainty in the institutional structure makes industry unprofitable, and rewards attempts to partake of government corruption over efforts to build up a business that will presumably be fleeced by the bureaucracy. In the communist states, it was obvious that future promises were illusions for fooling people. Socialist industrial development meant, in practice, racing factories into the ground and razing the environment for short-run economic survival while pretending to save it from capitalist exploitation.

An argument pursued by the philosopher Blaise Pascal was that, even if Paradise is an unlikely place, and even if living in a Christian manner is unlikely to improve one's chances of getting there, one ought to try. For in view of such infinite heavenly bliss, a small probability is enough to be worth the relatively small sacrifices entailed by a good Christian life. Yet Christians too, in their practical behavior, are pervasively prone to shortsightedness. The occurrence of sins cannot be explained solely by the weakness of the flesh. It also involves short-sighted priorities - small, but close at hand, benefits which are preferred to the divine delights of a distant destiny.

To conclude, shortsightedness is a fairly general affliction, not confined to adherents of an egoistic philosophy. Nor should this be moralized over, perhaps, until the causes are considered. Given the widespread use of false promises, "a bird in hand" might be a prudent principle. If farsightedness is to become more prominent, there is an alternative to further mass-marketing: raising the quality of farsighted policies. It may not be the advertisements that are faulty, but the products themselves. At present, one can understand people who react like the merchant who, having taken many a bad check, puts up a sign: "Cash Only". He loses a few customers and avoids being cheated.

Vision

When exploring the long perspective in political philosophy, we soon encounter the notion of vision. This has a specific variant which need not inspire mistrust. To build a cathedral, a plan of the entire edifice is essential from the outset, since it must function as a whole and the parts are interdependent. Such a vision seldom requires any defense, but is often used to defend dubious viewpoints.

Most political visions are surprisingly poor in ideas. Lacking any clear description of how society should function, they blend a wide range of attitudes and suggestions that frequently conflict with each other. Drawing a good plan is not easy: the structure's defects may become striking already at this stage, and the architect risks being fired. A clever way out is to declare that nobody can design the future in detail. Thus a threadbare sketch indicates humility, not

intellectual emptiness.

It is undeniably remarkable that we should be urged to strive for, say, a paradise or a classless society which we know virtually nothing about. But another reason for humble ineptitude is that there are advantages in being vague. Politics, like art, finds much truth in the adage that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder". An abstract painting allows the observer's imagination to complete it, and people with quite different interpretations can agree that it is superb. All sorts of paradises increase their popularity by appealing to different ideals. By contrast, an exact picture has difficulty in attracting either lovers of lust or seekers of the sublime.

The intellectual value of airy visions is, nonetheless, minimal. Sketches of this kind provide no real basis for debate, and recall the snapshots of pretty women which are exhibited to sell products. Their connection with the products is fictitious, but the image-maker hopes to establish a positive emotional association. With pretty women and paradise, it has proved possible to sell anything whatsoever.

Lotteries are of interest in this context. A thoughtful bettor knows that, the bigger the top prize is, the smaller his chances of winning it tend to be. Yet when placing his money, he seems to think less about probabilities, and the size of the prize becomes a very strong influence. If one is dreaming, one prefers sweet dreams - and not only when betting. The more we reflect on the farsightedness represented by altruism, the more skepticism arises. Once realism has been eliminated and concreteness dismissed, there are no bars to a lottery with ever bigger prizes.

Propagating for farsightedness, and at the same time issuing prognoses of low quality, has a predictable result: farsighted judgements lose significance for practical actions. Hence, a great deal would be gained for farsighted behavior by doing away with airy visions. The communist vision was purely illusory, and it will only be a boon if other chimeras meet a similar doom. Altruism, in spite of proclaiming good intentions, is a factor that obstructs serious and farsighted judgements.

Kin selection

Is there any more reliable alternative basis for farsightedness? Kin selection, as outlined earlier, is more than a modest candidate. Ordinary people, it is said, think only as far as the next holiday, and politicians as far as the next election, a longer view being reserved for prophets. However, we continually see people abstaining from immediate benefits so that their property will be inherited by their children and grandchildren. Such consideration does not stop at material things, since everyone is aware that a legacy will have little worth if environmental or nuclear catastrophes occur.

Altruism is thus unnecessary as a foundation for the long perspective. We already have a rooted interest in farsightedness, not as a global responsibility created by popular educators in the mass

media, but as a natural interest in our descendants. Rather than fostering commitment to new "higher" values, it is a matter of making prognoses and advancing alternatives for action with such highly constructive quality that they deserve respect and motivate real changes in our behavior.

6.3 Theories of human nature

An understanding of mankind has importance for moral values in many ways. Once again, we require an "is" in order to grasp what an "ought" should be, or even can be. Consequently, a brief survey will first be given of some different types of theories about man and their degrees of verisimilitude.

Main themes

A classic instance is the "authoritarian" view of mankind, although used more often to disparage someone else's opinion than to express one's own. It stands for a variety of judgements such as: man is lazy and shortsighted, rather than industrious and prescient; security and material needs count more than freedom and idealistic needs. Petty egoism narrows man's horizons, but there is still hope, for he can be brought to transcend his natural condition with solid leadership and control. Actually he may thrive best under the firm hand of a good father - yet, ignorant of what is best for himself, an escapist lurks within him. Man is pretty low, if not evil.

The "rational" theory of human nature has expanded chiefly during the last few centuries. Descartes' thesis, "I think, therefore I am", sums up an overriding faith in reason. In the "economic" man of political economy and the "political man" of democracy, rational faculties take a central position; man is regarded as a gatherer of information and an analyst able to compare and judge alternatives. This view is descriptive, but contains a strong normative element.

Belief in mankind's rationality was much more common at the beginning of our century than it is today. World War I came as a great disappointment to it. Conservatives were amazed to see the established order committing suicide, liberals gaped at the fragility of social progress, socialists shook in their boots as the workers hearkened to militant nationalism and queued up to become cannon-fodder. The triumphs of Communism and National Socialism have warranted further skepticism toward a flattering self-portrait of the wise, good species *Homo sapiens*.

A fundamental feature to be inserted in this discussion is the influence of evolution. One possibility is to recognize a wider rationality than that of conscious thought. For example, a feeling like fear may guide our behavior in a way that is rational from the organism's standpoint. Animals have many modes of behavior which are not thought out, but agree with the other meaning of rationality -

purposiveness. With a broader definition, the rational view of man is more realistic. To buy a certain brand of jeans since our pals do so is not rational in relation to its price and quality; yet if the need for social acceptance is weighed in, the choice seems rational in that wider sense. During the course of evolution, different patterns of behavior have emerged because they harmonized with self-interest, and we can expect that, to a large extent, they still do.

People employ shortcuts to avoid thinking too much. An instance of this is the so-called "two-step flow hypothesis". Surveys often reveal that only a minority of voters or consumers absorb specialized information.<4> These, according to the hypothesis, are opinion-makers whose choices influence the decisions of others, and the information has a greater impact than it directly appears to have. Such behavior can also be effective for those who are relatively passive. It might be wise to rely on a person who, although possibly not an expert, knows more than oneself and shares one's interest.

A third type, the "emotional" theory of man, may be represented by David Hume's statement: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any office than to serve and obey them."<5> Marcel Proust was another advocate: "Life's realities do not reach the sphere in which our beliefs are nourished; they do not create these beliefs and are powerless to destroy them."<6> Rational arguments thus lend only retrospective support to decisions we have made on quite different grounds. Freud is a further illustration of thinkers who regard man as moulded by strong urges and dominant feelings.

In some respects this view is quite substantial. We have not adapted biologically to intellectual and social changes. Our adrenaline is more purposive when we fight about a water-hole, than when deciding to lay a water-pipe at the bureau of public works. Merely to be part of the evolutionary process does not satisfy us, so we seek more emotionally fulfilling answers: we would rather be images of God than the cousins of apes. Voltaire's aphorism is probably true: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him." God has been invented more than once.

Being partial to grandiose solutions for existential puzzles, we are often easily won over by revivalism, panaceas, ideology, astrology and the like. This does not mean, however, that most of our emotional urges are dangerous and destructive. Many are valuable and not hard to marry with a rational outlook on mankind, in the broad sense that they serve a useful purpose. As discussed previously, many feelings can also be regarded as ingredients in reciprocal behavior.

A fourth type is the "positive" view of man. Both generosity and energy are among our hallmarks; so is a striking capacity for reason and emotion. This interpretation finds clear support in the fact that it can function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. On a personal level, we often do best to treat other people with trust and reassurance, which increase the chances of their behaving as we want. Since we always have the option of retracting a positive attitude if disappointed, we are making a reciprocal offer that can be either returned or abused.

It is frequently wise to accept opportunities and trust: they come slowly and disappear rapidly.

Most people strive for power in general, and power over their own situations in particular. The capacity and desire for strength that lie in the positive view of man, therefore, do exist. What also exists in reality, yet does not belong to that view, is the tendency to gain power at others' expense - a sort of cowardly adaptation through the law of least resistance. In a sweeping form, the positive view often plays a dubious role. It is manifested on ceremonious occasions, such as company Christmas lunches, spreading gladness and sympathy but, in essence, flattering the audience. Its message is: I believe that you can do good, so believe the same of me.

A fifth type, the "flexible" theory of man, emphasizes our dependence upon external circumstances. An important aspect of it is the eternal question of heredity versus environment. Here, readers may be tempted to sigh that the rough answer is well-known: human nature is a product of both these factors. But their mixture has been estimated very diversely. If the conventional reply in the 1960s was "nine tenths environment", more or less the opposite proportions apply today, due to discoveries about the great influence of heredity.<7>

The environmental answer has gone into decline on the individual and cultural levels alike. Anthropologists once favored an almost total flexibility in which man is fashioned according to his culture. This was largely a result of myopia, and partly sheer fantasy. Just as a devotee of wines may taste a vast difference between a Bordeaux 82 and a Bordeaux 85, the anthropologist notices distinctions which he thinks significant, indeed fundamental. Eager to confirm their ideas, many anthropologists have also committed the "ideological fallacy" (see Chapter 4). Researchers such as Margaret Mead did not conduct objective investigations, but engaged in wishful thinking on the basis of presuppositions and prejudices.<8> A human culture might take any shape at all, so why not treat it creatively instead of descriptively? The doctrine of flexibility often becomes amoral in normative terms, since every action is judged by the morality of its own culture. Concern with flexibility leads to cultural relativism. Frequently an anthropologist concluded that the only culture he could criticize was Western civilization, for only there did he face no risk of being accused of cultural imperialism.

It is important to recognize that the flexible view of mankind is not a positive one. Emphasis is placed on cultural power, not human freedom. Anthropology deals with traditional cultures which have developed slowly and successively, but more modern and radical constructions are possible as well. These have greater relevance, as alternatives to our situation, than does a cannibal tribe in New Guinea.

The flexible outlook is frightening because it appears so realistic. Orwell's "1984" portrays the mechanics of a communist-fascist world. Propaganda, combined with promotion of the worst people, makes the system ever more awful and powerful. Brainwashing, and the build-up of repressive resources, strengthen the leaders' grip

and render hopes of positive change increasingly illusory. Happily, his fears have not been materialized.

By 1974, a military dictatorship had ruled Portugal for decades. Its power was puny and gave the impression that society was not quite under control. Worker strikes and student demonstrations would not have been surprising. In April, a military coup revealed that much of the officer corps had turned radically leftist. The core troops, or "bearers of culture", betrayed their culture - and this was entirely unexpected.

A similar shock accompanied the fall of Communism. While these events have been more gradual and thus more comprehensible, they were hardly anticipated. The Party lost its Stalinistic faith. When a coup was attempted in August 1991, the last remnants of the "avant garde" did not even display revolutionary brutality; it became a tired protest by tired men.

Evidently, culture is not as omnipotent as we are prone to believe - some of us hopefully, others with anxiety. In the trinity of biology, culture, and personality, there is reason to upgrade biology, but also personality. Systems have been undermined by wily, intelligent persons who claimed to share a culture's ideals and proceeded to dig its grave. Individuals such as Mikhail Gorbachev and F. W. de Klerk have shown the possibilities of challenging taboos which they were appointed to defend. This does not support a mechanical view of man which leaves little room for choice.

As regards the central role of biological heredity, we must consider the evaluation itself. The conventional opinion is that flexible people are fine because they can be influenced. In other words, a minimal impact of inheritance is welcomed. Spontaneously, it can be conceded that a greater ability to shape one's own personality is desirable. Everybody has bad habits that stubbornly defy efforts to reform them.

The flexible theory of man, however, favors not one's own, but a social engineer's, opportunities to adapt one to the society he chooses. Even if he has the best intentions and is backed by a democratic majority, those opportunities do not attract one much. Should we not, rather, be glad that our personality is relatively unchangeable? We possess a certain disposition and ought to live in a way which does it justice. The fact that people are different need not lead to either depression or megalomania. More suitable would be an orientation in certain directions, instead of wrestling with the thought: "Why didn't I try this instead?" While freedom of choice is good, a complete freedom of choice is a heavy burden.

Nor would an extreme flexibility in other people be an asset. We complain that others are inflexible about the ideas we advocate, but the dividend is a fairly high degree of stability and predictability. Social coexistence largely requires an ability to foresee others' behavior.

A variant of the flexible view is that man, though basically good, is quite vulnerable to the defects in society. Its followers enjoy describing it as a "positive" outlook. But this coveted label

cannot be earned simply by considering man basically good, which is as misleading as to say that a person is positive toward mankind because he believes that mankind was good before the Flood. A truly positive view of man should be one which gives great credit to human capacity in the world today. Whether such an appreciation is justified or not would be a subsequent issue.

If, on the other hand, we wish to stress an element of fundamental goodness in flexible mankind, the term "nice" is appropriate. It does not imply strength and fixed character, in agreement with its overall perspective. This view appeals to many people in modern democracies, and its consequences will now be exemplified.

The "nice" view of human nature

When the self-service method of doing business came into use, stealing was uncommon. Shopkeepers have had little to gain by demanding a peek into paper bags: why bother themselves or the customers? Anyhow, if a thief is discovered, it may be simpler to give away the goods than to call the police. People are widely thought to be so nice that only a few environmentally disturbed eccentrics engage in theft. But sadly, many of us can motivate stealing with some laborious logic if there is no risk involved.

To compromise, as with rules that let one steal up to a certain value of goods without being prosecuted, is to undermine a broadly approved moral. And the longer we wait before applying controls, the more people will have departed from the moral and must be restored to it. Hence, the "nice" view eventually results in tougher measures and sharper conflicts, when the line between right and wrong has to be drawn anew.

Unemployment is frequently dealt with by the policy that people who become redundant should, if possible, be kept at work. The advantage is not chiefly to save support money, but to prevent them from acquiring bad habits; whoever forgets how to work will have trouble learning again. This reasoning seems impeccable, although it is not consistently obeyed. A basic rule of society should be that behavior is easier to maintain than to recreate.

In Holland a quarter century ago, a law was established for benefits to those injured at work, offering a disability pension at 70% of salary. The law has been applied "generously" and now these pensions are held by about 900,000 Dutchmen, or 22.5% of the country's employable population. In such a situation one cannot clearly say even that the law has been abused, since abuse is the norm. Rather, the law is applied in a way which all, including the legislators, understand to have no connection with physical work injuries. Neither is there anything morally wrong on the whole with the Dutch pensioners - they have been urged and encouraged to take pensions by their employers, unions and authorities.

Throughout the Western world, welfare societies with very general benefits have been built up. That a general and "generous" application

is often adopted has several causes. First, if the recipients are numerous, they generate plenty of votes. Secondly, the bureaucracy wants a big clientele that requires many administrators. These also have a hard time supervising a system on the individual level, where uncomfortable personal confrontations can occur. It is easiest to hand over money and send the bill to the taxpayers, which is why the bureaucracy favors large-scale transfer flows. With a "generous" approach, the possibility of compensation soon becomes a right, allowing the applicant himself to decide whether he is entitled.

The problems of this general model are rooted in the "nice" view of human nature. Essentially it assumes that people have no fonder wish than to work with assiduity, if only their health permits. But the great majority are tempted to collect payment for lying on the sofa, indulging in their hobbies, or working "black". To avoid this predicament, incentives are needed which reinforce the behavior that is desired - not a pious hope that things will go well in the end.

The "nice" view, and our duty to help defenseless victims, have led to other cautionary examples. Damages awarded by American law courts are often derived from various sorts of misdirected sympathy. It is assumed that misery ought not to happen and that somebody owes the nice victim full compensation for pain and suffering. A lawyer may make him look especially deserving in the courtroom, and next we see a huge rise in insurance premiums. Despite this, insurance is not difficult to sell, for what most people really cannot afford is to lose a court case and have no insurance. It becomes a self-propelling process where the damage payments continually set higher records. At the bottom is a strange notion of both human nature and human life.

Fines or damages paid by criminals, and certain aid to their victims from the state, are by no means wrong - quite the contrary. Yet to believe that we can be protected from the world's misery is unrealistic. If the doctor had done the operation in a different way, the old woman might have survived. If the landlady had not employed the doorman, he would not have had the chance to rape the girl. If the municipality had not built a playground in the park, the child would not have hurt itself. We may feel sorry for those widowed, raped or injured, but compensation will not turn back their clocks; it can, and should, be only a bandage for their wounds. When the bandage becomes a winning lottery ticket, something has gone wrong.

This view of mankind affects the administration of justice in further respects. Due to its "niceness", ambitions for change are lower than they would be with a reciprocal philosophy of punishment. The criminal himself is a victim who needs treatment. As can easily be observed, however, imprisonment consists of storage and not treatment. Correctional care is bewildered by the fact that it does not live up to the term "care", and is virtually obliged to give the criminal an apology because he does not get the care he was sentenced to get.

A danger of the "nice" view is that it conjures up a picture of society as totally responsible for each citizen's welfare. He is a poor victim in his own right, and others have a duty to help him. If there is no God, there do exist people and their institutions. The

citizens are clients and, when too numerous, they become a clientele. In addition, the "nice" view is a danger to itself, since it creates an unstable system that cannot survive according to its own morals, and leads to increasing aberrations. A more realistic view is needed which appeals to the goodness in mankind without inviting abuse.

From a survey of man's diverse aspects, one may plausibly infer that he is, in the main, a rational being - while not in the sense of being dominated by reasoning. Many strong feelings, stereotyped ideas, and prejudices are part of him. Still, these can largely be seen as rules of thumb for purposive behavior. This is naturally founded upon an egoistic perspective, and the first question of "Homo sapiens" is seldom how he can serve the system, but how it can serve him. We have to stop regarding the question as embarrassing and indecorous.

An experiment

If people are asked how they respond to a moral dilemma, the answers are liable to reflect how they think - or how they believe the questioner thinks - that one ought to respond to it. A comprehensive investigation which avoided this and many other pitfalls was conducted by Stanley Milgram. In its several variants, this experiment has been made repeatedly and the results are of great interest when assessing a view of human nature.<10>

The experiment performs a test within a test. Officially, it is a test of learning by means of penalties. The official test person, or "student", is attached to an electric chair, while the unwitting real test person, or "teacher", stands at a control panel. The test leader reads a series of word-pairs for the student to memorize and then repeat. At every wrong answer, the leader tells the teacher to give the student a little electric shock, raising it by 15 volts each time. The teacher thinks that he is doing a learning experiment on the student, and that the voltage is raised in order to show how it affects the capacity to learn. He himself is given a shock of 45 volts in advance, so as to enhance its realism. But the student receives no shock, and knows what is actually being tested: how strong a shock will the teacher consent to deliver?

At 75 volts, the student reacts with a groan. At 120 volts, he begins to complain loudly. At 150 volts, he shouts that he does not want to proceed. At 285 volts, he screams. At 300 volts, he refuses to answer, but the penalty continues. At 330 volts, nothing more is heard from him. At 450 volts, the scale ends; after three shocks, so does the experiment. On the panel with the voltage control, there are also labels from "light shock" and "extreme, intense shock" to "danger, powerful shock" and finally "x x x" at the two highest levels.

This experiment is relevant, for example, to participation in torture. It involves no compulsion in the experimental setup, no threatening assistants, locked doors and so on. The test leader is a person unknown to the teacher, and the payment is low with no promise of future assignments. The pressure on the teacher to obey is minimal.

Before the experiment, Milgram requested a prognosis from both his students and an expert group of 39 psychiatrists. The students expected that 1-2 percent of the teachers would go all the way and deliver a shock of 450 volts. The experts judged that very few, just 0.1 percent of the teachers, would do so.

Most experiments yield only refinements of results that support accepted opinions, and are seldom surprising. Such was not the case in this experiment, whose outcome may be termed sensational. As many as 60-65 percent of the teachers followed the scale to the end at 450 volts. Closer contact with the students moderated the teachers' behavior, but not much. If the two were in the same room, the proportion of 450-volt teachers decreased to 40 percent. It went down to 30 percent in a setup where the teacher had to press the student's hand onto the current source.

Thus psychiatrists, as well as the rest of us, have fresh cause to wonder over our view of human nature. The experiment may be taken to provide firm evidence against relatively optimistic views. These teachers' behavior does not correspond to our expectations and hopes about how people behave. Is, then, civilization merely a thin varnish on a brutal human wilderness? Is culture saved by a morality which we impose with heavy authority? The variants of this experiment point to quite another explanation for its worrisome data.

In Variant 1, the test leader said that the shocks should be stopped, while the student insisted that the experiment should proceed - and none of the teachers continued. In Variant 2, the test leader sat in the chair and the student read the word-pairs; when the leader said to stop, the student wanted to proceed, but none of the teachers continued to give shocks. In Variant 3, a second test leader was introduced, and the two took up different positions. With this unclear arrangement, none of the teachers chose to continue the shock treatment.

The conclusion is unambiguous. Teachers did not exploit these opportunities to satisfy any sadistic urges. What motivated them were a deep belief in authority and the notion that somebody else bore the responsibility: they were simply obeying orders. Does this sound like a familiar argument? And none of the usual instruments of authority were present here; the test leader's authority was only a scientific appearance, with a white coat and definitive commands. Moreover, the experiment has often been conducted with diverse types of teachers. Social factors such as education, gender, class, country of origin, and age have proved to be of marginal influence. The test subjects behave as we would behave.

The reason for this dangerous behavior is not that we are badly brought up, but that we are too well brought up and believe the authorities know what is right. Our sole duty is to deal with our specific tasks, and we execute it with zeal. The frightening thing is not human egoism, which has so stubbornly been depicted by altruistic agitation as the big problem. The problem, as in many other contexts, is the obedience that makes people indulge in actions which can be catastrophic for their fellows.

Authority has two fundamental elements - the praiseworthy ideal and its interpreter (in the above case, research and the test leader, respectively). Our confidence in them leads us to detach our personal responsibility. If we wish to change the harmful behavior that comes of excessive faith in authority, this example shows clearly that it cannot be done by further emphasizing the good objectives and the insightful interpreter. Popes, party secretaries and professors make their choices, yet we must learn to make our own independently.

6.4 Survival of the fittest

The phrase in this heading has been the primary source of antipathy and protest against the Darwinian model of man. It was coined not by Darwin but by the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who gave its meaning an additional charge by drawing parallels between evolution and human society. Spencer saw the same laws behind man's development as in the radical improvement of man's conditions by industrialism. Such an efficient principle ought not to be resisted with counterproductive, though well-meaning, measures. The "social Darwinists" concluded that politics should do nothing to limit competition or its effects.

Before commenting on the results of social Darwinism, two basic questions must be explored. How does natural selection take place, and to what extent is it paralleled in human cultures?

Nature's severity is sometimes quite conspicuous. Old, sick animals come to rest in the stomachs of other creatures - a rule with negligible exceptions. The young are exposed to frequent perils and have a higher mortality than adults. These great differences between age groups as regards chances of survival, however, are not the core of the evolutionary process, which involves a change in the genetic composition of a species. Since evolution is cumulative, the smallest differences are enough to produce enormous effects in the long run.

As a concrete instance, a hare born with slightly larger lungs can better endure pursuit by a fox. But his lungs do not always help, and in many situations he will be caught while a "standard" hare gets away. Still, a tiny advantage in survival suffices to make the trait ever more common, and after numerous generations it dominates the whole species. In real hunting, a standard hare may have an 80 percent chance of escaping the predator, and a better hare 81 percent. Thus we cannot be sure that a dead hare is standard whereas a nearby survivor is better - it could be the other way around.

This, of course, is a very serious objection for those who view social Darwinism as a fair explanation in particular contexts. Such fairness does not exist in nature. If one descends to the individual level, it is inadequate to say that "the fittest survive": one must add "with greater probability". The law of evolution is statistical, not absolute.

Now for the other question: "In what degree does biological evolution occur in human society?" As far as reproduction and survival are concerned, natural selection has been strongly influenced. A

substantial and essential change is caused by the fact that evolution has not "reckoned with" planned parenthood, but relies on sexuality as the motor in reproduction. Widespread cultural efforts to alter sexuality have had little success, and the motor's huge power remains intact. Nonetheless, preventive technology has given us a gearbox that enables sexuality to be disengaged from reproduction. Few people with material possibilities choose any longer to beget as many children as they can support. This is the most important transformation relative to normal behavior in our evolutionary past.

King Solomon, with his 700 wives and 300 concubines, evidently promoted his own reproduction - not unlike an elephant seal, if the comparison is permissible. The Incas carefully integrated polygamy with their power structure: three wives could be owned by the lowest chiefs, 20 by provincial chiefs, 30 by vassals and 50 by the highest grandees. Between the lowest and the provincial chiefs were five further categories allowed 5, 7, 8, 12 and 15 wives.

For the king himself, the quantity was not specified, but it exceeded a thousand. Wives were kept in special women's houses all over the country, often being recruited before the age of eight to ensure their virginity.<12> In our time, while a socially successful man seldom has several wives, "serial monogamy" is usual.<13 > He tends to follow up his first family by marrying a younger woman and acquiring a second family. This pattern can be seen as a cultural modification of biological behavior, although maximization of children is no longer a dominant aim. Frequently it is the less successful who have most children, as is clearest on a global scale. The paradoxical rule today is that, the poorer the country, the larger its population increase.

Hasty conclusions are easily drawn from the fact that the principle of maximum reproductive success has ceased to apply. But we do not leave biology behind us with that. Our aggressiveness, curiosity, lust for power, thirst for knowledge, and much else originate in selection for traits that promoted our survival and reproduction in another environment.<14>

Almost no genetic changes are occurring which adapt mankind to its new environment. A creative problem-solver generally has greater social success than a crude ruffian, but hardly greater reproductive success. There is no support in a Darwinistic model for the idea that we are developing as a species to become, for example, more intelligent or peaceful.

Having briefly answered these two questions, we are ready for the main one: can the development of human society be considered a parallel to evolution? A connection between our nature and culture sounds so credible that it is difficult to understand the indignant protests. After all, the same species has passed from the primeval forest into the drawing-room.

Revising social Darwinism

The hypothesis that a revised "survival of the fittest" could be

as valid in society as in evolution is not exactly a hair-raising absurdity. A kind of social Darwinism built on this principle should not be viewed as a historical label from the nineteenth century, but has to spring from the parallel with evolution. It is then presumably to be regarded as a statistical, not absolute, rule by adding "with greater probability". In this sense, social Darwinism is not social perfectionism.

Obviously social perfectionism does not exist in human society. We all know some people who have been selected for activities they are relatively incapable of. Half of all marriages end in divorce, suggesting erroneous choices. Neither Strindberg nor Tolstoy received Nobel Prizes in literature; and so forth. In politics, economics and science, a struggle goes on between individuals, opinions and interests, where the best man does not always win. A revised social Darwinistic hypothesis predicts positive selection, but only on the average. Members of government are on average more capable than members of Parliament, managing directors than deputy directors, and professors than lecturers. Once perfectionism is removed from social Darwinism, the latter seems quite a reasonable parallel to evolution.

An alternative perspective is social pessimism. Its outlook and tone can be summarized as follows: "The crooks invariably end on top, and the good people get tramped on." Social pessimism is not only a dubious description of reality; it is destructive for those who believe in it.

Yet the commonest critique of social Darwinism is that from a perspective of social perfectionism. The evolutionary process is not good enough. Where have high ideals gone? Usually this critique focuses on the word "fit" as being covertly normative - since it can mean "good" - and thus as incurring the "naturalistic fallacy" (see Chapter 4). Some positive traits are fine, such as intelligence and creativity, but others are rarely praised by moral philosophers. Toughness and the ability to manipulate people are also often important traits, and their usefulness leads many a philosopher to dislike the implicit evaluation that suitable traits are good.

In spite of this, the word "fit" does appear appropriate. It emphasizes the key role of well-adapted traits which are purposive for the task. We might say that "the right man in the right place" is both a normative and a practical rule. Nor is there any circular logic in proving one's "fitness" by being selected, because the word plainly implies much more than that. It is not a matter of choosing a perfect angel to help Saint Peter, but of choosing the least imperfect people for worldly positions; not all the traits favored by selection are praised in Sunday school. To be "fit" is definitely a more relevant evaluation than a metaphysical notion of what is Good.

Sometimes an extension is made from functional fitness to goodness in a wider sense. During the Cultural Revolution in China, a slogan was launched: "Better Red than expert!" This movement did not get far, and soon another principle was revived: "Who cares what color a cat has, as long as it can catch mice?" Here a clear step has been taken, figuratively as well as literally, in the direction of social

Darwinism. Again, one reason for the problems of England is doubtless a broader interpretation of fitness than the narrow utilitarian perspective. Giving priority to social factors like school-tie designs and skill at cricket does not seem to be successful.

Further, the assessment "probably more fit" makes a selection easier to accept for people who are not selected. The judgement is not based on divine justice. Nobody need put a bullet in his head, or rush out self-righteously to put one in somebody else's head. Determination to try again becomes preferable. The best man does not win always or usually - only more often. It may also be worth asking whether the judgement was actually correct. Even a correct verdict, though, is not a total assessment of somebody as a worse person in any metaphysical sense, but simply a finding that he is less suitable for a particular task than another candidate.

Markets and democracy

Certain social decisions occasionally claim to be perfect, yet in terms of different arguments. These concern markets and democracy, where we think that the claims are refutable.

Proponents of market perfectionism question the value of discussing whether a market is right or wrong, since the market invariably proves itself right anyway. To begin with, however, the market and its decision-makers often prove wrong. An example was IBM's lack of interest in a patent on the copying machine, on the ground that the world demand for such machines amounted to four of them(!). Music experts at the producers Decca, Columbia, and His Master's Voice called the Beatles' music unsellable and turned it down. The book "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" set what may be a record: it was refused by over 120 publishers before it became a global bestseller. Against this one can only object that the mistakes are not made by the market, but by its servants, those who judge it.

If the market is allowed to judge itself, it shows itself to be right in the sense that a bestseller is popular. But the market can be judged by economic criteria at different times, and a market is not a higher organism - it consists of a great number of actors. A serious problem arises from strongly collective behavior, even when intellectually hard to defend, since the actors become prisoners of the prevailing judgement. A nonexpansive bank director during the 1980s was soon transferred, when adherence to the official and traditionally conservative policy of banks proved too passive in comparison with the expansive optimism of competitors. Everybody had to follow along. People with freedom of choice also followed along, and the analysts' warnings came mainly after the market had begun to swing. Hence, the market made at least one misjudgement; the bottom was a result of exaggerated pessimism, or else the top was due to erroneous optimism. No structural changes, technological developments, or other rational factors can adequately explain the large market variations in property values, exchange rates and so on.

The market, then, is a further area to be liberated from the claims of perfection. To be right on average is entirely sufficient. A bad product with good promotion may knock out a good product with bad promotion, but it is still advantageous to have a good product. This suffices on average, while not in each single case.

Democracy's perfection is something that nobody believes in so deeply as a winning party-leader on election night. The judgement of democracy is indeed like divine justice. Again, this claim needs to be toned down. Lincoln perceptively described the strength of democracy: "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time." Like other selection processes, that of democracy may make mistakes - just as a popular majority is capable of misjudging the effects of specific political proposals. For democracy too, however, it is reasonable to believe in positive selection. Things go better on the average for politicians and policies that are "good" from the viewpoint of the majority's interests.

Revised social Darwinism emerges as an instructive, inspiring analogy between the market economy or democracy, on the one hand, and the evolutionary process on the other. The customer or voter is driven by his self-interest. He may at times be wrong about what he wants to achieve, and about how ends are related to means. Yet he more often chooses rightly than wrongly. Choices based on his self-interest provide the force for selecting other individuals as well as parties and companies. His own environment is also pervaded with competition involving his and other people's choices and interests. A frequently suggested aim is to save mankind from Darwinism, but a more cogent alternative would be to strengthen it and see that parties, authorities and businesses operate under similar laws.

Evolution, market economy and democracy can be criticized insofar as they are not theoretically optimum solutions. God the Creator, a perfectly planned economy, and an enlightened despot all have some abstract chance of greater success. Lack of perfection may also, of course, be regarded as an injustice; and many people feel the urge to point out defects in market-made or democratic decisions. To some extent, this is positive and productive, partly since the social system has an innate capacity for correction.

Besides a reformist critique, there is a fundamental critique: the tyranny of competition ought to be eliminated. Life in Paradise is naturally more comfortable and happy with its absence of blood, toil, sweat and tears. The weakness of this alternative is that Paradise is very hard to reconstruct, and that not even God could make it stable enough to withstand human desire. Experiments in which the crass utility of democracy and markets has been replaced by organized effort toward "higher" ends have, in practice, yielded more suffering and less justice.

Classic social Darwinism

Every argument from a sociobiological perspective risks provoking accusations of social Darwinism. Two issues are therefore rewarding to confront. Why should classic social Darwinism be so despicable? And how does it differ from sociobiology, or neo-Darwinism? The answers are probably in sharp disagreement with general opinion.

A good way of elucidating Herbert Spencer's model of mankind is to compare it with Marx's views, as these are more well-known. These two philosophers were mutual opponents, but their systems were similar in several important respects. Both had a sociological perspective and thought of society as guided by strong forces toward a goal, which they saw clearly and others misunderstood. They regarded themselves as discoverers, not inventors, of inevitable trends in development. Marx described true political control as a midwife, while Spencer compared it to a lubricant that facilitated the process without changing the actual course of events. Both can rightly be called determinists.

In addition, each made an interesting prognosis about a crucial stage in development. Marx portrayed the transition from capitalism to socialism, Spencer that from military to economic competition. They may be judged wrong, but they advanced hypotheses with scientific intent on the basis of theories and observations. Their ideas of class conflict and competition as social forces also led to a controversial prescription: higher doses, instead of mitigative medicine. Apart from this crucial transformation, each model has another one. For Marx, socialism turns into idyllic communism; for Spencer, economic competition gives way to general altruism as the culmination of progress. These final steps, though, were poorly supported hypotheses, which even contradicted their primary arguments. We are reminded of a film whose director strives for a realistic plot, but cannot resist throwing in a happy Hollywood dénouement. The outcome is Paradise in two new secular versions.

Whether the two thinkers were optimists or pessimists must, in consequence, have a twofold answer. In the short run, they were pessimists - class conflict or crushing competition is unavoidable. But ultimately they were optimists, if their final visions held any significance. As we know, Marx advocated revolutionary violence; yet Spencer's model was not so grim that he found it incompatible with pacifism. Still, for strange reasons, Spencer is regarded as the more pessimistic and heartless.

An essential contrast between Spencer and neo-Darwinism is that Spencer subscribed to the evolutionary notions of Lamarck. These can be illustrated for a giraffe's long neck: by stretching itself to eat leaves, the creature makes its neck a bit longer. This acquired trait is inherited and the neck becomes longer in each generation. The facts are otherwise, but such a hypothesis explains much of Spencer's view of society. If there is a need for long necks, nature fulfills it efficiently. To pull mechanically on necks would be a painful and presumably fruitless experiment. Serving food on the ground to lazy or short-necked giraffes, so that they need not stretch themselves, would delay the development of a good solution.

Spencer identified war as the historical means of competition

which has fueled societies' growth: they must be greater or go under. "By force alone were small nomadic hordes welded into large tribes; by force alone large tribes were welded into small nations; by force alone have small nations been welded into large nations." <16> In modern society, such advantages no longer exist, and wars yield social losses. Even individual selection is negative in contemporary warfare. A stronger warrior does not tend to cut down a weaker one; the brave are mowed down, while the cowardly flee and survive. Evolution's rationality and war's irrationality have turned development away from military, and toward economic, competition. Thus a situation of progressive selection arises once again. Spencer also often thought about what was best for the species, like most Darwinists at that time. As we have seen, this is a view which neo-Darwinism has come to terms with. If selection acts for the species' best, it is easy to imagine a parallel with development for society's best.

Social Darwinism is further criticized for being just one of several possible moral interpretations of evolution. As an alternative, Peter Kropotkin is frequently cited, since he stressed cooperation in nature. <17> The usual inference from a contrast between Spencer's competition and Kropotkin's cooperation is that no moral can be drawn at all. <18> However, the approach taken in the present book resolves their opposition. What Kropotkin largely advocates is reciprocity - cooperation pays off. From nature he drew both moral and political conclusions. Cooperation is good, and its natural basis means that it need not be imposed by a strong state apparatus contrary to people's innate inclinations. This suited Kropotkin's political anarchism very well.

The social Darwinists were not unaware that cooperation occurs, but they emphasized a different aspect: group egoism. It is the disciplined soldier, not the hotspur, who holds the fort in social struggles. Walter Bagehot decreed that "the tamest are the strongest". <19> And it commonly happens that solidarity increases when confronting an external threat. This might be as limited as the takeover of a park by another gang. Rivalry for girls within the gang, rank-ordering and old injuries are written off or postponed; even novices become full members, for all must stand united. Or it might be the blockade of an entire country, requiring a coalition government and a delay in labor conflicts. As Benjamin Franklin said when the Americans faced a threat from England: "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." <20>

Spencer wanted a weak state power for the same reason as did Kropotkin: nature steers in the proper direction. Their political conclusions are not so far apart, though one is branded a right-wing extremist and the other a left-wing extremist. A state that works with nature does not need great power - but a strong state power can work against nature and do enormous damage.

Since Lamarckism and group selection were cornerstones in Spencer's argument, the accusation that sociobiology delivers the same idea in a new form is false. It derives from ignorance of the argument's content. As regards the central question for this book,

altruism, we take a diametrically opposite view of Spencer. He believed that development would, and should, cause a growth of altruism.

6.5 Power, sexuality, and reproduction

Here are three words in a chain that has deep biological importance. In most cases, the chain traces a sequence in time. A man becomes successful, he gets a pretty lady, and she gets pregnant. In a larger perspective, the order is reversed - reproduction takes the lead. Reproduction in nature is the gold standard by which all other currencies are eventually valued. Sexuality is secondary in terms of evolution, being a mechanism to bring about reproduction.<21> Power and wealth are often said to be sexually attractive,<22> and this is clearly rational if compared with the world of animals. A male which has acquired a high-quality territory may exert more attraction on females, as he offers a better possibility of raising offspring. For some animals, it involves less a choice by females than a decisive fight between males, and the winner obtains the most sexual opportunities.<23>

Hence, if the chain is considered in an evolutionary perspective, reproduction is the highest and ultimate goal. Sexuality, and power or resources, are means - proximate goals - to the higher objective.<24> These goals have been part of us since before we were born. Sometimes people moralize over a woman who prefers one gentleman's power and resources to another's charming personality. The present intention is not to moralize about this, or about moralizing itself, but to place the quest for power in a reproductive context. Certainly there are further reasons for acquiring power; yet on closer review, they may not be ultimate reasons.

Many different links in this chain belong to our genetic programming. The pattern exists in the animal world, and we can be sure that, rather than being exceptions, we are profoundly affected by it. Nor is the pattern fixed in detail like a precise, predetermined act; it amounts to an aspiration. How it looks, and how it can be influenced, are obviously of major relevance to our behavior.

Nature works with practical improvisations, not theoretically optimum solutions. The important point is that things work here and now. This is why selection strikes hard against solutions which are worse than other practical alternatives. The winning solution becomes dominant, although it may not be the best conceivable one even for its own environment, and may be still less so in a changed environment. Every good trait has a dark side, and the solution is a compromise between goals that pull in different directions.<25> An animal with lower weight finds it easier to run fast, while a heavier animal has more energy reserves in case of famine. There is seldom any room for reserve traits, which are not needed now but may be worth having if the environment changes in future - these are selected against. Such a lack of flexibility is the main reason why over 99 percent of all the

species that have existed on earth are extinct.<26>

No chain is stronger than its weakest link, and the same applies to the evolutionary chain. An unexpected change occurred when sexuality could be separated from reproduction. Evolution had not developed a reserve system for the possibility that sexuality proved deficient as a mechanism for generating maximum reproduction. The disengagement of sexuality is usually seen as a revolution, but few people have understood the magnitude of this possibility.

If human beings really wanted to have as many children as they could support, their situation would be bleak to say the least. With a strong urge to maximize reproduction, they would bear out the theory of Malthus: the population always tends to grow faster than the economy, so mankind will constantly be pushed to the limit of starvation.<27> The liberal society would be a brief interlude before returning to the struggle for sheer survival. Some people would argue for civilized behavior during this period of grace, but many others would opt for totalitarian solutions, since democracy is doomed anyhow. The conclusion is an ecological collapse, so why wait instead of acting now? Democracy would be in a very sticky intellectual and moral position.

Our modest good fortune is that population growth does not seem unavoidable. In societies that have developed toward democracy and capitalism, the same pattern is visible everywhere - lower birth rates. This is the result of higher living standards, better-educated women, and preventive techniques. It crosses cultural boundaries and appears in quite different countries like Italy, Japan and China.<28>

Less successful have been efforts to attack sexuality as such. Total abstinence is known from monasteries in many societies, as is general advice against sexual activity. Ascetic morals have tried to take command of natural inclinations, but this confrontation shows how hard it is to oppose an instinct with a cultural value. Carnal lust has unobtrusively, yet effectively, resisted tenacious attempts at re-training for more spiritual interests. However, the possibility of voluntarily avoiding reproductive maximization without repressing sexuality offers new alternatives. Its chief consequence is nothing less than the opportunity for universal well-being.

Population: a pyramid or a tower

It does not take long to visualize the outcome of a continued, rapid, global growth in population. Ecological breakdown and human tragedy are not exaggerated terms here. The only sensible normative inference is that population growth must be stopped. Symbolically, this means moving from a pyramid to a tower of population, with equally many - instead of ever more - individuals in each generation.

Large groups of people have begun to reject the pyramid, but their leaders have not reconsidered. Dictators in the Third World reply with accusations of racism when their high birth rates are questioned. The Catholic Church still repeats Scripture: "Be fruitful,

and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." <29> This end is not reached until famine has become the rule rather than the exception. Child benefits and similar family assistance are designed progressively so that they encourage further births. <30> In several countries, a very prolific mother can earn a medal for her contribution to the family's continuation.

Many, too, cast worried glances at new population towers and become nostalgic about the old pyramids. A political economist, Julian Simon, argues that if the United States had kept its population pyramid, the budget deficit would have vanished and more middle-aged people would be able to pay for the elderly. <31> Such claims are often based on silly calculations; certainly the tower's taxpayers have a greater proportion of old people to support, but it also has a lower proportion of children. The great mistake, though, is a failure to see that the tower must be striven toward, since this is the only viable long-term solution. The economy must, and should, adapt to it in the end, without breathing fresh life into the pyramid which we now have a chance to get rid of.

Remarkably enough, the tower is regarded as a problem in the developed countries, to be solved with additional children and more immigration, a policy which can be justified as both human and humane. The tower is an alternative that few imagined a century ago, but today it is a widespread reality, not just a hypothetical possibility. At the same time, conventional morality insists on dragging us in the wrong direction. Fundamental rethinking is essential in these respects.

The population pyramid is defended by erroneous economic analyses and traditional arguments. For example, the design of pension systems is to determine population growth, like a tail wagging a dog. Or the global problem is viewed in an even narrower perspective of personal humanism. A quotation from John Donne might stand for this attitude: "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind." <32> Since today around 300,000 deaths occur daily, such a posture must be painful. One has to hope that the 600,000 daily births compensate it with a feeling of euphoria.

In poor countries, the effects of the pyramid morality are devastating. Little or nothing is done to head for the tower. Regimes are too weak, and have too much trouble staying in power, to tackle so thorny an issue. Paltry funds are donated for this purpose by rich nations; their public image is polished better by financing vaccination campaigns that help population growth. The United States, for moral reasons, has boycotted all agencies promoting population control, because abortions may occur.

The only ambitious effort is the one-child policy of China. It has faced two kinds of objections: to the goal and to the methods. As for the goal, advocacy of a one-child policy in underdeveloped countries is thought inconsistent with a many-child policy in developed ones. But that is not true in terms of our genetic model discussed earlier. By counting siblings and cousins as well as children, the one-child policy becomes genetically fair in comparison to developed countries. While this may seem to be an artificial and

alien way of reasoning, we should beware of ethnocentric influence from the Western notion of family boundaries. The family concept in underdeveloped countries is closer to that in genetics. And most importantly, only a one-child policy can have an adequate impact on the growth potential of a population with a very low average age.

When it comes to methods, the unambiguous and surprising experience is that free and prosperous people choose to have fewer children. With the current birth rates in underdeveloped countries, however, prosperity is extremely difficult to attain: they are stuck in a vicious circle where economic growth is eaten up by population growth. Measures and rules must be shaped into a consistent one-child policy. Different forms of support should be provided for reproductive equality - that is, be given per family instead of per child. Access to contraceptives, and instruction primarily of women, are key requirements; yet material incentives and social pressures are needed as well.

This sounds like an intrusion into private life, and a call for drastic procedures. Indeed it is: the situation demands a firm change in course. The altruistic theme, to help as many people as possible, does sound nicer - but a huge problem has to be solved, and the altruistic model is simply not up to it. Policies until now have succeeded mainly in contributing to a larger population, worse living conditions, and a fixed journey toward ecological disaster.

In sum, the chain from power to sexuality to reproduction contains a weakness, which offers a great and hitherto neglected - in fact, counteracted - opportunity. But there is one more point in the chain with a faulty causal connection. How is power related to sexual success?

Power in the chain of reproduction

In our society, many struggles for power concern neither survival, in the biological sense, nor reproduction. Yet these two goals may be the ultimate explanation behind the quest for power, status and affluence. The latter are sought because they were once efficient evolutionary methods for survival and reproduction. A travelling salesman who flirts in a bar has absolutely no intention of begetting another child, but sexual desire did have this original function. The evolutionary hypothesis is that power, in the same way, is a means of reproduction.

Among male baboons, each strives to become the "alpha" in his group, with the most prestige and the most mating. When a male has achieved that aim, he tries to hold out against challengers. In modern human contexts, though, success within a small group is not a final objective but a step toward new goals. Human society enables a man to become an "alpha-alpha". The attractions of this ambition are not as clear as the advantage to a baboon of being an "alpha". Rather than enjoying his pleasant position in the group, a man often changes to another group. While the new group has greater resources, it reduces him to one of many equals - for the rest are also "alphas", a little

bigger and stronger than their previous competitors. It is even harder to become best in this group; and if he succeeds, still more demanding groups await him.

The status of being "the man with the BMW" in a terrace-house area is slightly lowered, in an exclusive suburb, to "the man with the little BMW". An upward step entails, in certain respects, a step down. It is understandable, although lamentable according to some values, that a material standard should be so hotly desired in both relative and absolute terms. But the third goal, to be an "alpha-alpha", is a real merry-go-round, and not as easy to comprehend. Even a person who advances in the hierarchy is driven further. He quickly adapts to a new level; with new associates and higher ambitions, he faces a test as difficult as those he passed on the way up. In the presence of rising expectations, he may actually be worse off.

Such behavior long possessed a biological rationale. Genetically, it is rational for a man to take a 50 percent chance of becoming a chief - and a 50 percent risk of being killed - if he then would acquire three times as many wives and children. The "alpha-alpha" status was not genetically inconsistent in a polygynous society.

Another explanation has to do with the need for barriers against excess. We never drink too much water. The opportunity often arises, and a mechanism is essential to ensure that we only drink sufficiently. Lacking barriers, we would frequently make errors and suffer the consequences. Primitive man had a far smaller possibility of regularly eating more than what his body consumed; as a result, our barrier against gluttony is less developed than that against drinking too much water. Our body is not suited to modern sit-down existence, and many of us suffer by eating too much. Since male apes had no chance of becoming empire-builders, an excess of power and resources was not our ancestors' problem. They were satisfied with a simple prescription: more power!

Today, growing resources are not used to increase reproduction, but the quest for power goes on. It is a problem for the seeker himself, because it involves greater risks; ambitious people commonly suffer accidents. It is also a social problem when "alpha-alpha" individuals undertake hazardous ventures, not for sordid profit or more sexual conquest, but for power and more power - a place in the history books and a monument to themselves.

A financier's behavior seems baffling when he gambles all his billions in order to double them, with classic egoism. He risks losing much more than he can gain, in private material standards. It is reasonable to expect that successful people will be satisfied with their situation and primarily concerned in safeguarding what they have, instead of jeopardizing everything to acquire more. Innumerable examples show the opposite: a strong urge for power which conflicts with normal egoistic caution. Neither Christians nor Marxists regard power as a means of reproduction that has been disengaged to serve as an end in itself. To them, power is a tool for obtaining resources (which are only further means in an evolutionary perspective). The criticism of power then becomes just an aspect of ordinary moralizing

about materialistic egoism. A conventional attitude influences both the analysis and the conclusions.

If we turn from private individuals to people in power, the link between egoism and materialism disappears. One may be tempted to represent unpopular figures as petty crooks who would sell their mothers for a few coins - but the motor at the top of society is power, not money or personal favors. An ego-trip can conjure up a palace, but the goal it maximizes is power. The world teems with people who fight for power although their Swiss bank accounts are already full.

The solution does not lie in a general decline of egoism, which would merely give leaders more opportunity to inspire others with their self-aggrandizement. Rather, the solution is a reinforced civil egoism, meeting grandiose schemes with an irrepressible query: "What's in this for me?"

Recognition

Interesting light on the role of power in human goals is shed by the idea of recognition. Plato mentioned it, as "thymos", together with reason and lust as the three basic human motives. Hegel sharpened the focus on recognition and made it central to human endeavor. In the Hegelian world-view, it was by meaningless and dangerous actions to earn recognition that man demonstrated his greatness.<34> Murder and martyrdom became an ego-trip. Hegel's chief arguments are misleading, but the importance of recognition as a goal is worth further development. If it is placed in a reproductive context, there might even be a way of putting Hegel's idealism on the right track.

Power and material resources are good in themselves, but cannot have a substantial effect by benefiting only their owner. To yield valuable social contacts and reproductive success as well, they must be accompanied by clear signals that can easily be observed by others. Recognition and status become the communicative link between them and reproduction. To a great extent, this link in the chain has also been disengaged. Some public status is strongly attractive in spite of standing for neither power nor material prosperity: the artist, bartender, and tour guide enjoy their share of glamor.

The Nobel Prize and the Rockefeller Foundation illustrate, perhaps, not mainly altruistic effort, but a wish of philanthropists to gain widespread recognition. Conspicuous in our age are people with power and/or money who seek recognition of the most trivial kinds. Recognition only within a qualified circle has sometimes been an ideal of financial aristocracies and further powerful groups<35>, although replaced by an approach of more public appeal. Magnates, monarchs, scientists and many others yearn for public attention. This is occasionally used as a path to power and prosperity, yet often the opposite is true - power and money are means for becoming famous. The reason is not, as Hegel thought, that recognition is a higher aim which distinguishes us from lowly nature. It is that, originally and

fundamentally, status is an important factor in sexual selection.

6.6 The nuclear family

Human cohabitation was probably not organized at first on a nuclear family basis. Different cultures today exhibit a definite pattern. Modern societies are essentially monogamous, while traditional cultures are usually polygynous - one man is entitled to take several wives. Even these cultures are modern in a longer perspective, so additional evidence is needed in order to reveal their initial conditions.

Polygynous families

In the animal world, there is an interesting connection between body size and family structure. Among many mammals, the male is bigger than the female, and this has to be accounted for. Size is one of the numerous traits whose magnitude has both advantages and drawbacks, so a certain size is optimal under given conditions of life. A difference in size between the genders must be due to differing circumstances, which often involve sexual selection. In physical competition for females, a big male generally wins over a smaller male, resulting in selection for bigger males. The sex ratio of a species is expected to be around 50/50 independently of the mating system, such as whether the species is monogamous or polygamous. Hence, the more polygynous a species, the more intense is the competition for females.<36> Comparative studies between species show that, the more different the genders are in size, the larger the harems of successful males are. Hence, the more polygynous a species, the more intense is the competition for females.<37>

Ends and means are mutually related. The more genetic advantage a male can get from being big, the more clearly males develop toward being bigger, even if this has other disadvantages. Spontaneously, we do not consider size a disadvantage, but the possibility is obvious if we look at animals whose sexual selection has taken a different turn. The Irish giant deer, which had horns 3.5 metres wide and weighed 45 kilograms,<38> or the peacock with its long feathers, indicate that physical drawbacks can be accepted if they yield reproductive success. They are not so good in terms of individual survival, yet a big male compensates for them by acquiring more females. A female mammal's survival and reproductive success are closely connected, as she can bring up more offspring if she lives longer. Thus, the female's size is near the optimum for her individual survival. By contrast, the male's reproductive success lies not in maximum survival, but in "ruling the roost". From the perspective of individual survival, then, it is the male who is too big, not the female who is too small.

In monogamous species, the genders are generally of equal size. Since, on average, a man is 8 percent taller and 20 percent heavier than a woman,<39> it is likely that monogamy was not originally the family system of human beings, and that certain men got more women

while other men got none. Polygyny has several consequences. Those least favored may be not the women, but poor men without partners. In today's environment, men may not suffer from "oversize", whereas many other effects of sexual selection are striking.<40> Testosterone, besides its vital functions, has a well-documented negative impact on longevity - an ox lives longer than a bull. Aggressive and very risky behavior are ultimately caused by sexual selection, one effect being that over 90 percent of violent criminals are men. In all younger age groups, more males die for both behavioral and medical reasons, bringing the overall difference in average lifetime between the sexes to about six years. Plainly, biological evolution has an enduring legacy in our world.

However, many cultures have seen a development from polygyny to monogamy. Why? To begin with, it is quite probable that man long ago became his own worst enemy, and that competition between groups proved decisive for survival. If groups are small, family ties serve admirably; men who are brothers and cousins stay together more readily and strengthen their group. But the group's size is important, not only its fighting spirit. When the possibility of creating large groups emerged, the competitive pressure on smaller groups increased.

Every culture has heroic sagas where a few strong men inflict defeat on a quantitatively superior adversary. Such tales are morally edifying, yet it does hold true that quantity is even more significant in reality than in sagas, and is the chief factor in most conflicts. One consequence was the importance of group size for our ancestors. Habits that could keep a large group together were favored over the systems of smaller groups. The opposition of placid farmers to warlike nomads may reflect, not reality, but the fact that history has been written by farming peoples. Military superiority through greater numbers was a key agent in the development and diffusion of agrarian cultures.

A modification of the family system was the clan. This emphasizes lineage on either the male or female side - a patrilineal or matrilineal system. Often linguistic usage is adapted to it; for example, first and second cousins on the clan side become "brothers" and "sisters". As a revised picture of the family, it agrees less well with genetics, yet has social advantages. It can unite far more people with simpler rules: the clan comes before the non-clan, enabling even distant relatives to combine their efforts without conflicting loyalties. Many clan societies also explicitly recommend marriage with cousins outside the clan. Thus contacts are not lost, but strengthened, with the other half of the family tree. The clan system is a social elaboration of kin selection.<41>

In still larger groups, though, clans and polygyny were a limitation. The leader could generate a great power base by having many children, cousins and so on - but plenty of people were left outside it. Why should they stand up for a society centered on clan interests in which they did not participate? The growing society faces the same problems as a big company that tries to reserve its top jobs for family members. Talented employees often move to its rivals, not

every child lives up to the old patriarch's hopes, and the firm has trouble in coping with aggressive competition.

Monogamy

Blood ties were both restrictive and rewarding. Some groups created a new situation with more monogamous rules. The king now lacked enough sons to fill every post, and was forced to rely on other connections such as reciprocity and group egoism. It was not a question of equality in the modern sense, but monogamy does amount to the greatest egalitarian reform in history, a fundamental step toward comparative equality in reproduction. Long before the slogan "one man, one vote, one gun" there was an outcry: "one man, one woman, one sword".

Monogamy as an institution rests on the need to find principles of cooperation that work for larger groups than those in which people originally lived. The clan was replaced by reciprocal ties between individuals, and by group-egoistic alliances: different classes. Society also became more stable internally, since large groups of men without women are potentially revolutionary. More individuals at the top acquired a stronger interest in the system, when their recruitment was shifted from blood toward competence and friendship.<42 >

Nepotism, and polygynous ambitions in men, have by no means disappeared, yet are less significant. Surviving examples throw light on the clan system's essential limitation. The royal house of Saudi Arabia, comprising a couple of thousand family members, rules its nation in a way that displays many contrasts between new and old. This clan would doubtless never have managed any modernization but for the unusual boon of being able to support the country on virtually labor-free income. Present-day industrial oil needs are crucial to the state's existence. So paradoxical a situation was expressed by the regime's slogan at an anniversary: "Sixty years of progress without change."

Transformations of the family

While the advance of monogamy is a radical change, we now witness further novelties of family life in liberal societies. During this century, the nuclear family has been separated from a wider concept of the family, and no longer includes three generations. At the same time, we see steps toward additional fragmentation. In many countries, the divorce rate is around 50 percent and a great proportion of children grow up without both parents in their households. These and other signs of disharmony are surprising and call for reflection.

The increasing professional activity of women was supposed to provide an economic and social platform, so that men and women could meet on a more equal basis. Opportunities for balanced, harmonious life together were to grow. Liberation from the older generation would also eliminate some conflicts of interest. State pensions should free

the elderly from direct dependence on their working children, while the latter avoided the claims of power which old people, with varying success, continued to exert. Yet in this relationship, too, it has been difficult to substitute a viable voluntary togetherness for the old compulsory community.

An unbiological outlook must bear some of the blame. Children have become a project for parents, not for the older generation, which has "done its part". In an evolutionary perspective, such a phenomenon as menopause has drawn attention.^{<43>} Why does this cessation of reproductive ability occur? The prevailing explanation is that it is a method of orienting the woman's interest toward her grandchildren. In biological terms, at a certain age, she promotes her genetic interest better by investing energy and care in grandchildren than in a new child, which has a much smaller chance of surviving since she herself has fewer years left to live as she grows older. This hypothesis, of course, involves the usual kin-selection explanation for helping one's grandchildren. Thus, an active role for the elderly is not a social invention, but primarily a biological institution. From this perspective, we can see a biological function, connected with both work and society, being diluted in our culture.

Some subcultures in the affluent world have weakened the family's structure by another step. Children imply no responsibility for the father, who is socially disengaged and becomes little more than a sperm donator.^{<44>} Female responsibility is also lessened, when the child appears to be an unplanned consequence of sexuality or a way for the mother to support herself on social security payments.

These problems, and the direction of development, indicate that we have underestimated the difficulties of getting cohabitation to function well. A marriage is sometimes a wrong decision that can be corrected, resulting in two new families which function better. But often the change does not improve matters: it causes permanent problems for both children and parents, as outlined in Chapter 2. There is a widespread inability to resolve personal family conflicts.

Just as a genetic bond exists between parents and children, a man and woman are united by the bond through the child, which is their shared reproductive project. If responsibility for it is taken over by others, the man's interest is weakened in the first place. When the state assumes some responsibility for the child, the family is not strengthened by being unburdened, as many well-meaning reforms have expected. On the contrary, the family's function is undermined.

Nor do these problems have easy solutions. One approach may be to reinforce, rather than opposing, the kin-selection basis; another could be to encourage ordinary reciprocal cooperation. The latter is feasible with a different general outlook, a change in social morality. Once again, altruism is a fly in the ointment, with its view of victimization: "My wife doesn't understand me" or "I've helped him for years, but now it has to stop". After turning the other cheek like Jesus, we cannot go on. The individual's plight is not really personal, but belongs to somebody else - perhaps society. This view appeals, more or less honestly, to benefactors instead of supporting

efforts to solve problems in an adult manner.

6.7 Progress or mere change?

The question of whether development entails an improvement, or only an alteration, in living conditions is a central one for both evolution and human society. Until recent centuries, history has predominantly been interpreted as cyclical change with no upward trend. The ancient Greeks believed in stages such as the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages - usually a sequence of gradual decline, interrupted by a brighter Heroic Age. This meant change, but no uniform betterment, nothing new under the sun.

It was during the eighteenth century that the idea of progress took wing, to soar ever higher in the nineteenth through, among other theories, Darwinism and Marxism. The idea was applied to biology as well as social life, and made mankind the crown of evolution if not of Creation.<45> Development passed from simple organisms, like amoebae, to increasingly complex organisms and growing diversity.

The picture of development as a tree with ever more branches is, however, dubious. Evolution has periodically been halted by mass death, exterminating most species.<46> Following this, new species have arisen until another mass death, and so on. According to the number of species, therefore, development pursues a cyclical rather than expansive course.

Not only increasing diversity, but also higher quality, is a questionable tendency. The reasons for thinking a man better than a cockroach are not entirely obvious. Being a more modern construction is not the sole criterion. Finding an adaptive strategy is one solution, yet a long-run solution that can cope with many external changes is another. Future survival is an important criterion, and it has been plausibly predicted that cockroaches, which are 400 million years old, will exist long after our species has disappeared. Great intelligence is the criterion we prefer - perhaps because it puts mankind at the top - but there are good grounds for supposing that, to an independent observer, the term "change" may be more justified than "progress" as a description of life on earth.

Still, we are not independent observers as a species. We are actors in the drama of evolution, with a quite sensible degree of egocentrism about our species. Each of us sees his own birth as a cardinal event, and cannot impartially tell which time is best - the present, the Permian or the Cretaceous period. But the main issue is to understand evolution's machinery, not to give marks for our age or our species.

The judgement that human social development has gone forward is equally disputable. In this regard, the last century's affirmative shout has given way to a skeptical murmur from influential circles, including many liberals, existentialists and anthropologists. It is commonly held that contemporary society is ripe for various changes which would bring real improvements and are thus very desirable. But

in a wider perspective, those who say so are uncertain whether our present way of life is any better than more primitive cultures. Such a judgement of historical change contrasts sharply with the assessment of current changes, which are comparatively marginal and indeed negligible - a slightly higher salary, fancier car, longer vacation and the like. Standards a few decades old seem awful, whereas those of a thousand years ago are only different. Huge emphasis is placed on marginal changes, while large ones arouse confusion.

Several explanations can be found for the critical view of modern society. To a great extent, it is a pose. When it does not involve a practical choice at hand, the judgement is made chiefly for the sake of our images. A bit of skepticism about our own age does appear open-minded and farsighted; besides, we have all dreamt of life's excitements in another age. On a mundane level, we feel that a hamburger from a primitive garden barbecue is as good as one from an electric stove, at least on sunny summer Sunday afternoons.

If we were faced with a real choice of becoming ordinary people in different societies, extremely few of us would opt for an earlier society. When judging human effort, it is always wise to be somewhat skeptical about statements of personal goals. Actual behavior is a better index. Many poses, such as antimaterialism, are socially acceptable and can be embraced with glee. Criticism of what materialism means for happiness, compared with a simpler natural state of affairs, leads to surprisingly little action. The vast majority of communists with freedom of choice have preferred to go on living under capitalist oppression, instead of moving to the societies they recommend. Nor do anthropologists usually stay in the cultures they study. Most primitive peoples absorb as much as possible of civilization's practical solutions, and only an occasional cultural symbol survives the confrontation with civilization. Few have argued that a coat and tie are better than an embroidered shirt, but on basic issues it is clear that modern answers are thought to be superior. A gesture of hesitation before drawing the general conclusion is, to be sure, considered appropriate.

As for nature, there are certain difficulties in finding self-evident criteria for whether change constitutes progress. The draining of swamps is a step forward for man, but a change that brings deterioration for the malaria mosquito. When making comparisons between human life in different cultures, we think the criteria are obvious and cannot easily justify a return to cyclical or neutral mentality. Only a whining old crone can argue against the facetious motto: "Better healthy and rich than sick and poor."

Our material advances should not need documentation, but some sporadic examples may be mentioned to illustrate the pattern. A hundred years ago, four out of ten children in Stockholm died before the age of three. Infant mortality was 130 per thousand, compared with 8 today. The average man's lifetime has grown from 48 to 75 years, and the woman's from 51 to 81 years.<47>

Another objection is that progress occurs, yet at a high price. As Rousseau put it: "Iron and wheat have civilized man - and ruined

him." <48 > Early industrialism is especially condemned, and blamed for environmental damage and child work as its main characteristics. However, the children were not thrown out of green meadows and into the misery of factory floors by greedy industrialists and unloving parents. They did not go from play to work, but from hunger to work. The big change for children was the decline of child mortality. In the mid-eighteenth century, 74.5 percent of London's children died before age 5, whereas the figure was down to 31.8 percent in the beginning of the nineteenth.<49> The industrialized countries had rapid population growth because more children survived than in the preindustrial idyll. When industrialization raised its productivity, an additional improvement resulted for children - the parents became able to provide for them.

Those who insist on asserting that misery is constant must hark back to relative poverty. After centuries of progress, the average human being still has an average standard of living, and so it will remain in the future. This complaint, though, is more than a retreat: it is a necessarily camouflaged capitulation.

Civilizations undergo cyclical processes, but the curve does not return to the same level as earlier. Not least the two great wars in this century show that conditions have changed radically; nonetheless, after setbacks, new and higher levels have been attained. A policy of stagnation is defensible only as a blow against inflated notions of progress - ideas and theses such as that human knowledge doubles every ten years, a new perfume transforms one's life, a party will abolish injustices if it wins the election. The fact that progress is not so fast and that small advances are not fundamental, however, does not mean that no development takes place.

This ought to be a case among many where the popular "biased" attitude is superior to the usual intellectual introspection. Human development has progressed in important ways, and the skepticism fostered in our century sounds largely like grumbling from spoiled brats. Life has unfortunately never been a bed of roses, and never will be; yet there do exist differences between states of existence. These are not observable when one holds a magnifying glass up to wounds from the thorns of life, or when life is seen in the widest perspective - death has not been eliminated. In the time leading from the futile to the grandiose, quite a lot has happened, which deserves to be called progress.

If we do not approve of the idealistic Berlin Wall between body and soul, we can attribute a deeper effect to material progress. People are better off and development has gone forward.

A terminus?

The next question is whether this development will come to an end. Christians await Judgement Day, and many other schools of thought - notably the Hegelian - also believe that there is a terminal station for history as we know it.

According to Hegel, history entered its final stage in 1806 as a result of the Battle of Jena. Napoleon's victory convinced Prussia that it had to modernize its society on the French model in order to withstand him. The French Revolution and its own ideas had triumphed by permeating France's enemies as well. Marx built upon Hegel in adding two stations after the liberal society: socialism and communism.

With today's experience, one can agree with modern Hegelians such as Francis Fukuyama that Hegel was more right than Marx. But this is not enough; the very idea of a terminus is quite weak, and directly conflicts with an evolutionary perspective which envisions an endless, ongoing process. On the long view, a nuclear war resembles the mass extinctions of the Permian and Cretaceous periods. Nothing indicates a sudden stop in cosmic, evolutionary, or cultural development.

A necessity?

A third element in this problem complex is the inevitability of development. Has it rolled inexorably in a specific direction? As regards evolution, many people probably believe that the origin of life is a mystery, but has been followed by a plan-like development all the way from amoebae to man. This view is not shared by most biologists, who see the emergence of mankind as simply one in a host of possibilities. Often the steps were logical and unavoidable, but led to a point with several realistic alternatives, where chance intervened. Despite adherence to laws, the number of feasible options is huge in a long-term perspective.

Human history, too, is a blend of lawlike and random factors. History is not wholly orderless, but it has reached many crossroads and been guided there by neither divine prescience nor despotic principle. The existence of causality tempts us to seek direct connections: event Y necessarily happened because of factor X. Yet determinism is primarily a philosophy of the semi-ignorant. As soon as one knows a little more about both large and small events, a range of realistic alternatives for action becomes apparent. To say "must" and "necessarily" is to defend an action rather than to explain it soundly as having been the only way out.

As an illustration, we may reflect upon the great events of our century. Many historians maintain that, without World War I, there would never have been Communism in Russia, Nazism in Germany or Fascism in Italy. The steps toward war are well-charted, but no one has plausibly shown that they were necessary and the war inevitable. Turning to World War II, it is easier to make connections with the decisions of familiar historical figures. That the war's outcome has been of fundamental importance for presently living generations is generally accepted. Let us consider three key decisions in its development.

England's prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, had appeased Hitler in order to create "peace in our time". When the Germans

invaded Poland, he declared war on them; but by that point they had occupied Czechoslovakia and formed a pact with the Soviet Union. Thus, the Allies lacked enough military power to save Poland, and the declaration of war was not only a lame gesture but a dangerous one. As a result, it stabilized Hitler's temporary pact with the Soviets and led to attacks in the west. The democracies of continental Europe were occupied and England tottered on the verge of defeat. Chamberlain, who wanted peace, chose to take arms at the worst possible moment.

Stalin welcomed the alliance with Hitler and did his best to preserve it. Right up to the German attack on him, for example, oil was delivered to the Wehrmacht. Reports and warnings reached Moscow - from Churchill among others - that such an attack was imminent and millions of men were being sent across Europe to the Russian border. Stalin took no precautionary measures, and expressed only sanguine hopes, until the German bombs began to fall. Due to his wishful thinking, this astonishing invasion eliminated the vast Russian material advantage. The Red Army was largely wrecked during the first days and had to beat a protracted retreat, which cost millions of lives and nearly ended in total subjection.

Hitler's only ally with considerable military strength was Japan, and the two countries had held a pact since 1936. He was no stranger to gangster agreements by which two aggressive states share booty, like the Soviet treaty that divided Poland. Germany would greatly benefit by getting Japan to join an attack either on the British Empire in 1940, or on Russia in 1941 - and in each case, an invasion in the east could have been fatal. Yet despite the expansive plans of the Japanese warlords, no known attempt was made to bring them into the German effort. Instead they attacked the United States and forced it to go to war, although Hitler's scheme for world domination meant to save the United States for the last campaign. A clever conspirator, Hitler had overcome initial obstacles and managed to cooperate with Mussolini and Stalin, but he did not even seriously try to do so with his natural partner.

Numerous other events and choices during the war can be cited which had a potentially decisive impact. These three are highlighted since they seem less, not more, probable than alternative actions. They exhibit behavior that flouts the actors' main political policies and personalities. Chamberlain was a peacemaker who declared war when it was impractical. Stalin was a paranoid who trusted one single character, Hitler. <50> Hitler negotiated unscrupulously with everybody, while ignoring his principal ally.

When individuals stray out of line with themselves to such great effect, it is reasonable to expect a still larger aftermath of systematic behavior that combines with personality and ideology. This is not to deny the definite advantages for industrial capacity and economic strength. However, within the material framework, there is room for both chance and freedom of action, which tip the scales in many situations. So much for historical inevitability.

Moral consequences

It is now time to examine the moral implications of progress, its termination, and necessity. If the idea of progress is embraced, a moral approval of the forces that make things better is close at hand. Capitalism ought to receive praise for its performance in improving people's living conditions, instead of stubborn criticism for its crimes against altruistic norms. Real results should not be missing from the discussion and replaced by idealistic opinions.

This idea hardly has negative implications. The fact that life has improved does not compel us to commit hubris, or to adopt a missionary attitude toward traditional societies since we have no primary interest in modernizing them. Trade with raw materials and new markets is of interest, but there are many alternative trading partners. In any case, most traditional societies have a clear desire to partake of the development which it is thought smart to be skeptical about. The choice is theirs, so no problem arises unless we assume a patriarchal role of showing them the right path or protecting them from our "mistakes".

What does attract general consent as a strong moral claim is the combination of necessity and a future end to progress. In both Christianity and Marxism, the ultimate state is a moral objective. Even more secularized movements include a "future-morality" with pretensions: those who speak for tomorrow's solutions possess special rights.

In nearly all movements, future-morality is coupled with its apparent antithesis, reactionary passion. Besides victory in future, there has been a better past. Labor unions, businessmen, opposition parties, and many others try to prove that their own group has suffered an absolute decline. This agitation shrinks the perspective and easily creates a feeling that development peaked a few years ago, has since gone downhill, and now calls for a struggle to reconquer the good old past. Like surfers advancing beneath the crest of a wave, both Left and Right are eager to believe in such a lost Arcadia - the Golden Age before environmental ruin and turnover taxes, when the flag was respected and workers belonged to the union.

Having gathered energy from nostalgic indignation, they look toward the future. Their adversaries form an impotent parenthesis between bygone glory and coming victory. For members of the democratic Left, this parenthesis was the decade of the 1980s; for the Right, it is the welfare state; for romantics, it is industrialism; and for Christians, it is the epoch from the Fall until the Last Judgement.

Faithful future-morality has several weaknesses. A concern with the forces of development in our time is not wrong, being the very kind of analysis that is needed to reveal the real alternatives. The danger lies in depending on automatic development. This has never existed: history is created day by day. Future-morality also destroys our moral responsibility, for nothing can demand obedience with greater authority than History. Moral responsibility requires liberation from that authority.

6.8 The Prisoner's Dilemma

Many arguments revolve around a famous logical problem. Two prisoners are suspected of a crime, but the evidence is poor. If they both remain silent, each will get 1 year in prison. If either one speaks against the other, he will go free while the other gets 10 years. If both speak against each other, they are rewarded for cooperating and each gets 5 years. The accompanying "payoff matrix" shows the four possible outcomes, with the punishment for Prisoner 1 followed by that for Prisoner 2.

If the prisoners coordinate their responses, the best solution for them both is to remain silent, getting 1 year each (outcome A). But if one remains silent, the other can do even better by speaking against him, which lowers the punishment to 0 years (outcome C). Likewise, if one chooses to speak, the other can benefit by speaking, which lowers it from 10 to 5 years (outcome B to D). Thus, regardless of whether one speaks or not, rationality demands that the other speak. Both prisoners have good grounds for speaking, so the outcome is D, much worse than if they had both kept quiet. This kind of dilemma gives rise to various observations.

First, the importance of communication is often inferred. If the prisoners have any opportunity for discussion, each will naturally try to persuade the other to remain silent, and represent himself as certain to do so. Yet such a dialogue cannot be expected to have any reliable effect. Realistic threats may influence the other's behavior, but a joint analysis and a gentleman's agreement would scarcely ensure outcome A. Are the prisoners actually gentlemen? Communicative methods seldom solve the problem.

Secondly, it can be stressed that norms are important. When each actor thinks only about himself, outcome D is the result. If they both were to focus on the total effect, they would aim for outcome A. (The wholehearted altruist, of course, would confess to the crime and let the other go free, but not even altruistic enthusiasts tend to bring in this fifth alternative. Some regard for reality prevents altruism from accepting its consequences.) Here, then, the moral of solidarity is better than that of egoism. Broadly interpreted, the example shows that Christianity or socialism may be better than egoism or capitalism respectively. Altruism becomes an alternative, and the fact that it does so in a case of crime might have a further implication.

A debate over more or less confused admiration for criminal solidarity, however, leads nowhere - except to speculation about whether, for instance, it is the criminals who are right. Our understanding that society's interest resides in outcome D does not remove the theoretical interest in possibilities of achieving outcome A. The criminal solution to this problem should be especially noteworthy.

Criminals behave partly on the normative level, and their ethics condemn cooperation with the police. But criminality does not stop at moralizing; it extends to a level of influencing the effects. A pillar in the Mafia's system is *omertà*, the law of silence. Even if a man has been executed in an internal settlement and his widow has seen the murderer, she does not bear witness. Whoever talks will die. Returning to our matrix and adding this unofficial consequence of speaking, we find that the situation has changed. It is now egoistically rational for one criminal to remain silent, and he can be fairly certain that the other will keep quiet too. The prisoners have solved their dilemma.

Society's countermove on the level of effects is to offer some sort of witness protection - bodyguards, a new identity - and make it once again rational for a Mafioso to talk. One reason why organized crime is hard to cope with has been its successful influence on the rationality in the matrix. An instructive contrast is the widespread informing which occurs in economic crime: many swindlers, once caught, disclose others in order to get a softer sentence. They have not been threatened by *omertà* for betraying criminal solidarity.

The discussion pursued on the normative level is not irrelevant, but neither is it clearly crucial. While norms are significant in the short run, the effects seem to be decisive for behavior in a longer perspective. A social convention with weak effects can live long if well-established. Many families marry and baptize in church although they have not worshiped there for generations. Still, when the consequences are palpable, these overshadow the principles involved. Moral indignation against the Mafia has not dealt any decisive blows. It is more important to break the backbone of *omertà* and the bonds of criminals who are faced with the prisoner's Dilemma. If the prisoner's self-interest can be made to coincide with society's interest (outcome D), a great step forward has been taken.

This argumentation may be assumed to hold for crime in general. The central level is not that of normative moralizing. Christianity's Seventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal", is a valuable rule, but it cannot play a large role in a society - Christian or secular - where it fails to harmonize with a more essential requirement: "Crime shall not pay."

Factors such as "bad company, insecure home life, and private financial difficulties" have an impact. Both social problems and inadequate norms determine who leaves the straight and narrow path. Nevertheless, a successful crime remains the simplest way to get something one wants. To set up norms without reinforcement against self-interest is to challenge an ultimately stronger adversary. A wiser course is to encourage agreement between effects and self-interest. It must be in the individual's self-interest to follow society's, not the Mafia's, rules. Given this basic correlation, morals have a good chance of utilizing the power of habit and personal pride to make people refrain from breaking the law when isolated opportunities arise. In comparison with "Crime shall not pay", all other rules and opinions are but the noise of moral old maids and social

assistants clattering their coffee cups.

6 Summary

Which view of human nature is most congruent with reality? We arrive at a rational view in the sense that man tends to act in his own broad self-interest, but that rationality need not mean conscious planning. An emotional view can be consistent with rationality in this sense. As we see it, a "nice" view of fundamentally good but vulnerable mankind promotes unstable systems. Too much tolerance and generosity - that is, altruism - will be exploited precisely because people are rational, and such systems eventually undermine themselves. On these grounds, the Golden Rule and the Communist "From each...to each..." are both asocial principles. Against the background of the prisoner's Dilemma, our argument is that morals alone cannot guide human behavior, and must be backed up by actual consequences. Thus, if a rule like "Thou shalt not steal" is to work, it requires support by realities showing that "Crime does not pay".

The claim is often made that a civilized society needs altruistic "solidarity", since otherwise people would revive customs such as pushing the elderly over cliffs. We think that the idea of insurance is a valid alternative, and a better description of the processes in a "welfare system". Altruism and solidarity are frequently a false description.

It is also widely believed that, since people at least in the world's rich nations no longer attempt to maximize their numbers of children, as should be expected from a Darwinistic perspective, mankind has ceased to obey the rules of evolution. But this is an illusion, and traits that have been developed during millions of years, promoting our reproduction in the meantime, exist within all of us. Apparently, for example, the quest for power is ubiquitous and is characterized by the fact that evolution has given man no barriers against excess. Today the driving force which was once sufficient for reproduction, namely sexuality, has been disengaged through the use of contraceptives. The lack of a conscious will to maximize offspring must be recognized as a blessing, for the only viable long-term objective is a population tower, not a population pyramid. Altruistic principles such as maximizing the number of people on earth are obstacles to that goal, and foster an approach to Malthus' global catastrophe.

We compare the evolutionary process, natural selection, with the processes of a market economy and of democracy. They have something in common: more suitable properties, products, or politicians enjoy a higher probability of doing well. None of these processes lead to the perfectionism of theoretically optimum solutions. There are few signs of evolutionary changes in basic human behavior during historic times; the creature in the Cadillac is the same as the one in the cave.

Notes chapter 6. Morality and social dynamics

1. Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31.
2. The thesis was actually coined by Louis Blanc, but popularized by Marx to such an extent that it has been attributed to him. Most of the caustic slogans ascribed to Marx were borrowed from other socialists. See Johnson, *Intellectuals* .
3. Pascal, *Pensées: Notes on Religion and Other Subjects*.
4. The basic structure of the two-step flow hypothesis was developed by Lazarsfeld et al. in 1948.
5. Hume quoted from Schmandt, *A History of Political Philosophy*, p. 283.
- 6 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*.
- 7 See for example Bouchard et al. (1990).
- 8 Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*.
- 9 *Newsweek* May 11, 1992.
- 10 Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.
- 11 Spencer, *The Man Versus the State* and *The Principles of Ethics*.
- 12 Betzig, *Despotism and Differential Reproduction: A Darwinian View of History*, p. 76.
- 13 See for example Betzig, Borgerhoff Mulder & Turke (eds.), *Human Reproductive Behaviour*
- 14 e.g. Wilson, *Sociobiology*; Alexander (1989), Nesse & Lloyd (1992).
15. From a speech made in Clinton, September 8 1858.
16. quoted from van der Dennen (1990), p. 153.
- 17 Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*.
18. See for instance Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, p. 201.
- 19 Bagehot, quoted from van der Dennen (1990), p. 153.
- 20 van der Dennen (1990), p. 184.
21. It is, however, important to note that the amount of sexual activity per fertilization varies between species. Our own group, primates, ranges from species in which the female mates only during ovulation, to those where mating can occur throughout the ovulation cycle. The latter type is by no means exclusive to humans. Among the factors that influence the amount of sex within a species are sperm competition and the evolution of female strategies to decrease negative effects of male competition (e.g. infanticide). See especially Hrdy, *The Woman that Never Evolved*.
- 22 Ellis (1992).
- 23 Since Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex.*, sexual selection is normally divided into two kinds: (1) the struggle between individuals within a gender (usually males) for access to the other gender, and (2) individuals of one gender (often females) choosing between individuals of the other. The terms "intra-" and "intersexual selection" have frequently been used for these two kinds, but are questioned by Cronin, *The Ant and the Peacock*, p. 234.

24. See for example Chagnon (1979) and other articles in Chagnon & Irons(eds.), *Evolutionary Biology and Human Social Behavior*; Betzig, Borgerhoff Mulder & Turke (eds.), *Human Reproductive Behaviour*; Daly & Wilson, *Homicide*.
25. About trade-offs, see for example Stearns, *The Evolution of Life Histories*.
26. Futuyma, *Evolutionary Biology*.
27. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*.
28. Landers & Reynolds, *Fertility and Resources*.
29. Genesis 1:28.
30. An illustration is the day-care centre fee for 1993 in the Stockholm municipality. For a second child, 29% of the fee for the first child is paid; for a third, 7% is paid; and for a fifth, only 1%.
31. Conference of the Mont Pèlerin Society, Vancouver 1992.
32. John Donne quoted from Hemingway in *For whom the Bell Tolls*, the preface.
"Any man's death deminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."
33. Landers & Reynolds, *Fertility and Resources*.
34. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*.
35. For example, the motto of the Swedish financial magnate Marcus Wallenberg was "to act but not being seen".
36. See for example Trivers, *Social Evolution*.
37. Alexander et al. (1979).
38. Gould, *Ever since Darwin*, p. 79 and p. 88.
39. e.g. Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*.
40. See Trivers, *Social Evolution*, chapter 12.
41. Van den Berghe, *Human Family Systems: An Evolutionary View*.
42. Van den Berghe, *Human Family Systems: An Evolutionary View*.
43. Alexander (1974).
44. Newsweek, August 30 1993 describes the rapid weakening of the black family in America.
45. See O'Hara (1992). This was Haeckel's thesis.
46. Raup & Sepkoski (1984); Futuyma, *Evolutionary Biology*.
47. Anniversary volume, "Sabbatsberg Hospital, 111 Years" (1989; in Swedish).
48. Rousseau cited from Novack, *Humanism and Socialism*, p. 71.
49. Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, p. 110.
50. Solsjenitsyn, *The First Circle*, (Swedish edition p. 114.)