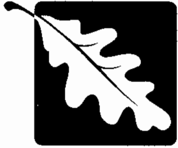
The following is from *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*, 9th ed., by Manuel Velasquez (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2005).



CHAPTER 2

Human Nature

Indeed it is of the essence of man . . . that he can lose himself in the jungle of his existence, within himself, and thanks to his sensation of being lost can react by setting energetically to work to find himself again.

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

Contents and Learning Objectives

2.1 Introduction: Why Study Human Nature? *Objectives: See how our views of human nature influence our relationships with other people, the universe, and our society.*

2.2 What Is Human Nature? *Objectives: Be able to describe the rationalist and Judeo-Christian views of human nature and explain how Darwinism, existentialism, and feminism have challenged these views.*

2.3 How Do Mind and Body Relate? *Objectives: Know why dualism is so influential a view of human nature, yet why it leads to the mind–body problem, and explain how materialism, behaviorism, functionalism, and the computer view of human nature each try to solve this problem.*

2.4 Is There an Enduring Self? *Objectives: Be able to explain why an "enduring self" is so important for us and how it leads to the problem of personal identity, and why it is difficult to deal with this problem by appealing to the body, the soul, the memory, or the no-self view.*

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2.1 Introduction: Why Study Human Nature?

The most basic question in philosophy is this: Who and what am I? Your answer to this question about **human nature**—what a human being is—will profoundly affect how you see yourself, how you see others, and how you live. To see how a view of human nature can affect us, let's look at what some psychologists and philosophers have said about human beings.

human nature what it essentially means to be a human being; what makes us different from anything else

Imagine walking down the streets of a city on a wintry day and seeing an old, unshaven man in ragged clothes sitting cross-legged on the sidewalk. In front of him is a sign that reads "I am blind and deaf. Please help me." Almost immediately you reach into your pocket for a couple of dollar bills, which you put into his cardboard box. Then, feeling good, you walk on.

Every man has a wild beast within him.

FREDERICK THE GREAT

Why did you help him? You might respond with the easy answer that you helped because you wanted to do something for this unfortunate person: you wanted to relieve his obvious need. Yet was this your real motive for helping? Might it not be possible that your actual motive was self-interest? That you wanted the good feeling you knew you would get from helping him? Are human beings, yourself included, moved ultimately by self-interested desires? Are all your actions, even those that seem to arise out of love for others, ultimately motivated by a desire for self-gratification? Is self-interest an inescapable part of being human? Or are we at least sometimes unselfish?

Psychologists have long pondered the question of whether human nature is essentially self-interested or whether unselfish considerations can also motivate human beings. Some psychologists have championed the view that humans are essentially cruel and selfish. As an illustration, consider the conclusion that the father of modern psychology, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), presented in his work *Civilization and Its Discontents:*

> Men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked, but . . . a powerful measure of desire for aggressiveness has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. The result is that their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness . . . to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.

Sigmund Freud: "Men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, but [possess] a powerful measure of desire for aggressiveness."
Bettmann/CORBIS

Anyone who calls to mind the atrocities of the early migrations, of the invasion of the Hun or the so-called Mongols under Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, of the sacks of Jerusalem by the pious crusaders, even indeed the horrors of the last world-war, will have to bow his head humbly before the truth of this view of man.[1]

Many philosophers have agreed with Freud that human beings are essen-.ally selfish and aggressive. Long before Freud, the British philosopher Thomas lobbes (1588–1679) argued for a similar view. Hobbes was a materialist who eld that everything in "the Universe, that is the whole mass of things that are, corporeal, that is to say body."[2] Humans, too, are material bodies, and we can xplain their activities much like those of a biological mechanism. The mecha-ism of desire moves human beings to act. Consequently, whenever human be-ıgs do something, they are seeking satisfaction of their own mechanistic de-res. In fact, Hobbes claimed, the antisocial desire for power over others is what .ainly motivates human beings. "In the first place," he wrote, "I put for a gen-al inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after ›wer, that ceaseth only in death."[3]

The European philosopher Moritz Schlick (1882–1936), also a material-:, suggested that we do not have to look at extreme instances of aggression to e self-interest at work. Schlick argued for the view called **psychological ego-m**. This theory says that human beings are made so that they can act only out

psychological egoism the belief that human beings are so constituted that they must always act out of self-interest

ıgmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Hogarth, 1930), 85–86.
homas Hobbes, *Hobbes's Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909; original work published 51), 524.
ıid., 86.

of self-interest. Self-interest is present in even the most apparently unselfish behaviors.[4] When people choose between any two options, they always choose the option that gives them the most pleasure. If we examine our own behavior and that of others, he held, we will see that this self-interested pursuit of pleasure is always present. We can explain even the apparent exceptions as the self-interested pursuit of pleasure. When a child "sacrifices" by giving up the larger slice of cake to a friend, Schlick claimed, it is because the child associates more pleasurable consequences with giving up the piece of cake. The pleasure of giving up the cake is greater than the pleasure of eating it. So the child gives away the larger slice of cake because doing so gives her the larger pleasure. Similarly, heroes risk their lives for others because they associate pleasurable emotions with the thought of being heroic and consequently choose the more pleasurable act. Even when no egoistic motive is obvious, self-interested motivations are always operating in human beings.

The views that we have just briefly described, then, say that human nature is selfish and material. Apart from their intrinsic interest, these views have profound and highly personal implications for each of us. For example, your views about these aspects of human nature will shape your relationships with other people. If a person thinks that human beings are basically unselfish, then won't that person instinctively relate to other people with trust and openness? Won't such a person accept the kind gestures of strangers as natural and not feel surprised that others help simply because they want to? But if a person believes that human beings are basically self-interested, then won't that person mistrust others? Won't she be suspicious of kindness and continually wonder what people are trying to get from her? Won't she feel that the only way to get help from others is by offering them something in return?

> ***Of all created creatures man is the most detestable. Of the entire brood he is the only one that possesses malice. Also he is the only creature that has a nasty mind.***
>
> MARK TWAIN

Your views about human nature also influence your relationship to the universe. If a person believes that human beings are spiritual as well as material, then won't that person be open to religious experience? Won't such a person see himself as having a spiritual aspect that makes him different from the purely material and biological universe? Won't such a person be willing to see his life in this material universe as a kind of preparation for a spiritual life in another world and universe? On the other hand, a person may feel that a human being is a purely physical creature. The person may feel that a human is a creature with a highly developed brain, to be sure, but not fundamentally different from other animals. For such a person, doesn't death have to be the end of existence? Won't such a person be convinced that this material universe is all there is and all that anyone can have?

Your perception of human nature will determine even how you think we should set up our society. Ask yourself this, for example: Should our society be based on capitalism or socialism? Well, suppose that humans are essentially self-interested. Then wouldn't the best way to get people to work be to allow every individual to keep whatever benefits he or she produces, and to not support those who don't work? Won't self-interest then lead every person to work hard

[4] See Moritz Schlick, *Problems of Ethics*, trans. David Rynin (New York: Dover, 1939).

should our society go in pursuing either one? Doesn't your answer depend on how you view human nature?

It is clear, then, that a lot hangs on how you answer the question "What is a human being?" In this chapter, you will begin your philosophical journey by looking at how several philosophers have tried to answer this question. By examining what they say in support of their views, you will be in a better position to form your own answer and to make up your own mind about the extent to which we are unselfish and spiritual beings, or self-interested and material beings. Our aim is not to convince you to accept any of the views of human nature presented here. Our aim is to help you decide for yourself what it means to be a human being.

QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of the fundamental properties that you think define a human being. Your list should enable you to distinguish humans from other kinds of creatures. How would you prove that these properties are essential to human beings?

PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

Is Selflessness Real?

Several contemporary biologists have argued that apparently selfless human behavior is actually a kind of selfish activity that our genes impel us to carry out. For example, Desmond Morris suggests that when a man rushes into a burning house to save his daughter — or if an old friend or even a complete stranger rescues the child—he is actually saving an organism that contains or, in the case of the friend or stranger, may contain his own genes. We have developed these protective behaviors so that our genes can survive and be passed on to future generations. Thus, helping behaviors are genetically selfish: they are mechanisms that our genes have evolved to ensure *their own* survival.

The man who risks death to save his small daughter from a fire is in reality saving his own genes in their new body-package. And in saving his genes, his act becomes biologically selfish, rather than altruistic.

But supposing the man leaping into the fire is trying to save, not his daughter, but an old friend? How can this be selfish? The answer here lies in the ancient history of mankind. For more than a million years, man was a simple tribal being. . . . [T]he chances were that every member of your own tribe was a relative of some kind. . . . [In saving your old friend] you would be helping copies of your own genes. . . . Again . . . genetic selfishness.

[Moreover, when man] was tribal, . . . any inborn urge to help his fellow men would have meant automatically that he was helping gene-sharing relatives. . . . But with the urban explosion, man rapidly found himself in huge communities, surrounded by strangers, and with no time for his genetic constitution to alter to fit the startlingly new circumstances. So his altruism inevitably spread to include [complete strangers].

QUESTIONS

1. What do theories of evolution such as that proposed by Desmond Morris imply about our human nature?

2. Could all human behavior be explained in terms of genes?

3. If Morris is right, does it make sense to say that humans are or are not selfish?

SOURCE: Desmond Morris, *Manwatching, A Field Guide to Human Behavior* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), 153–154.

2. Are there basic emotional and psychological differences between men and women? Are any such differences the result of their nature, or does society instill such differences through early training, education, and child-rearing practices?

3. Suppose that the emotional and psychological differences between men and women are the result of the way they were raised. What do you think this would imply about how we should arrange our society (e.g., our family life, our political life, our economic life)? Suppose that these differences are the result of the inherent natures of men and women. What would this imply about how we should arrange our society?

4. In your judgment, are humans basically selfless or selfish? If there were no social restraints—such as laws and police—would humans tend to take advantage of one another, or would they tend to help one another? In your judgment, do our social institutions tend to corrupt a fundamentally good human nature, or do they tame a fundamentally evil human nature? Explain your answers.

2.2 What Is Human Nature?

What happens when you die? Several years ago, a man who was revived after his heart stopped while he was in a hospital operating room described his experience as follows:

> I knew I was dying and that there was nothing I could do about it, because no one could hear me. . . . I was out of my body, there's no doubt about it, because I could see my own body there on the operating room table. My soul was out! All this made me feel very bad at first, but then, this really bright light came. It did seem that it was a little dim at first, but then it was this huge beam. It was just a tremendous amount of light, nothing like a big bright flashlight, it was just too much light. . . . It seemed that it covered everything, yet it didn't prevent me from seeing everything around me—the operating room, the doctors and nurses, everything. . . . The love which came from it is just unimaginable, indescribable.[5]

This startling account is one of many similar stories told by people who have suffered near-death experiences. Frequently, people whose hearts have stopped and then started again report that at the moment of their "death" they left their body, hovered over the scene of their death, and encountered an "unimaginable, indescribable" bright white light that came for them. Convinced that they have

[5]Raymond Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1979), 63–64.

experienced life after death, such people then lose all fear of death. They never again doubt that they have a soul that will survive. They are convinced that human life has a purpose: that humans have a destiny related to life after death.

Notice that all these accounts of life after death ask us to make some fundamental assumptions about human nature. First, and most obviously, they ask us to believe that all human beings have a **self:** the ego or "I" that exists in a physical body and that is conscious and rational. That is, this self can think, reason, and perceive. Tied to this is the idea that this thinking self can have a purpose: its life can have a destiny. Second, they ask us to believe that this self is different from, but related to, the body. The body is a physical or material entity, whereas the self is a spiritual or immaterial entity (sometimes called a soul) that can survive the death of its body. Third, they ask us to believe that this self has continuity: the self during life can continue to be the same self after death. Finally, they ask us to believe that the self is an independent individual: it exists separate from other things and people, with an independent identity.

self the individual person; the ego; the knower; that which persists through changes in a person

This view about human beings is prevalent among many of us today. It is also a view that many Western philosophers and thinkers have espoused. As we will see, it is a view with ancient roots. We will call this view the Traditional Western view of human nature because it has influenced Western thinkers since ancient times. The Traditional view holds, then, that all humans have an enduring spiritual self that is rational, has a purpose, and is a separate individual.

Not everyone accepts the Traditional view. As we will see, many thinkers have rejected the view that humans have a rational nature that has a purpose. Others deny that the self is separate from its body. Still others have rejected the assumption that humans have an enduring self. Still others quarrel with the idea that the self is an independent individual.

We begin our journey of self-exploration by considering two of the most influential versions of the Traditional view: the rationalist view of human nature and the religious view. We will look, also, at several challenges to the Traditional view. We next turn to examine the view that the self can exist separate from its body. Then we look at the view that the self endures through time. Finally, we discuss the assumption that the self can and should be an independent, self-sufficient individual. By examining these views of ourselves, we will understand how the doctrines they espouse affect how we see ourselves, how we interact with others, and how we live our lives.

THE TRADITIONAL RATIONALIST VIEW

The most influential version of the Traditional theory of human nature views the human primarily as a thinker capable of reasoning. This view is well illustrated in the thought and writings of a man considered by some to be the greatest philosopher—Plato. Although Plato did not think that reason is the sole constituent of human nature, he did hold that it was the highest part of human nature. Conversing in the *Republic*, Socrates and Glaucon present Plato's view by discussing a question: What is the self? Notice in the following passage the use of the word *soul*, a common translation of Plato's term *psyche*. Since Plato

Man is a rational animal who always loses his temper when he is called upon to act in accordance with the dictates of reason.

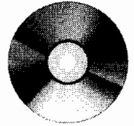
OSCAR WILDE

did not intend all the theological meanings that we give the word *soul*, it would be wiser to substitute *inner self* for *soul*.

> SOCRATES: Isn't it sometimes true that the thirsty person also, for some reason, may want not to drink?
>
> GLAUCON: Yes, often.
>
> SOCRATES: What can we say, then, if not that in his soul there is a part that desires drink and another part that restrains him? This latter part is distinct from desire and usually can control desire.
>
> GLAUCON: I agree.
>
> SOCRATES: And isn't it true in such cases that such control originates in reason, while the urge to drink originates in something else?
>
> GLAUCON: So it seems.
>
> SOCRATES: Then we can conclude that there are in us two distinct parts. One is what we call "reason," and the other we call the nonrational "appetites." The latter hungers, thirsts, desires sex, and is subject to other desires.
>
> GLAUCON: Yes, that is the logical conclusion.
>
> SOCRATES: But what about our emotional or spirited element: the part in us that feels anger and indignation? . . . Anger sometimes opposes our appetites as if it is something distinct from them. . . . Yet this emotional part of ourselves is [also] distinct from reason.[6]

CRITICAL THINKING

Plato assumes that the presence of two contrary desires in a person shows that there are at least two distinct parts in the person. Is this assumption correct?



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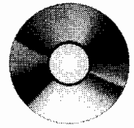
To understand Plato's view, consider this illustration. Suppose that you are very thirsty. Before you is a glass of poisoned water. One part of yourself, what Plato called appetite (located in the abdomen), invites you to drink. By *appetite*, he meant thirst and hunger, as well as sexual and other physical desires. Yet a second part of yourself, reason, forbids you to drink. By *reason*, Plato meant the uniquely human capacity for thinking reflectively and drawing conclusions—the ability to follow relationships from one thought to another in an orderly and correct way. This rational part of the self, said Plato, has its center in the brain. In this illustration a conflict arises between appetite and reason.

But Plato claimed that conflict could arise in another way, as when our aggressive emotions flare up. Suppose that someone cuts you off on the highway. You become enraged; you begin to blow your horn and shake your fist at the other driver. You are even tempted to tailgate for a few miles just to vent your spleen. Yet your head tells you that would do no good. Besides, it would be dangerous. Plato would say that the conflict here is not between reason and appetite. The conflict is between reason and what he variously calls anger, "spirit," or the "spirited element." The spirited element is what we would probably call our aggressiveness or self-assertiveness. According to Plato, it resides in the chest and is displayed in war and anger. Whereas reason seeks what is good and right, aggression seeks to overcome others and assert itself. Plato described these conflicts among reason, appetite, and aggression in a striking image in which he compares reason to a charioteer pulled by the horses of desire and aggression:

[6] Plato, *Republic*, from bk. 4. This edited translation copyright © 1987 by Manuel Velasquez.

> Let me speak briefly about the nature of the soul by using an image. Let the image have three parts: two winged horses and a charioteer. . . . One of the horses is of noble breed, the other ignoble. The charioteer controls them with great difficulty. . . . The vicious steed—when it has not been thoroughly trained—goes heavily, weighing down the charioteer to the earth. . . .
>
> Above them, in the heaven above the heaven, . . . there abides the true reality with which real knowledge is concerned: the Forms which are visible only to the mind and have no color, shape, or hardness. The souls that are most like gods are carried up there by their charioteer, although troubled by their steeds and only with great difficulty beholding true being. . . . Other souls rise only to fall again, barely glimpsing it and then altogether failing to see because their steeds are too unruly.[7]



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Notice Plato's use of the word *Forms*. For Plato, the forms are eternal and perfect ideals that exist in an unchanging perfect heaven. Things here on earth are but imperfect reflections of these ideals. The purpose or destiny of the soul is to be free of its body and ascend to heaven, where it will be united with these perfect forms. The soul can do this only if it controls its bodily desires and trains its aggressive impulses so that both obey reason.

Thus, in Plato's view, reason, aggression, and appetite are the three defining parts of human nature. Depending on which part dominates, we get three kinds of people, whose main desires are knowledge, power, and wealth, respectively. Yet Plato leaves no doubt about which element can and should dominate: reason. True, each element plays a part, but aggression and appetite have no knowledge with which to order themselves and must be brought under the control of reason. Through reason we can discover the truth about how we ought to live, and when aggression and appetite are subordinate to reason, we will live according to this truth. This truth, according to Plato, involves knowledge of ideals that exist in another dimension of reality that only reason can apprehend. After death, the person whose desires and aggressions are under the control of reason will be freed of his body and can ascend to this dimension. (For a fuller discussion of Plato's view of human nature, see the showcase on Plato at the end of this chapter.)

For Plato, then, humans can control their appetites and their aggressive impulses by the use of their reason. They are not ruled by self-interested desires, as Freud and Hobbes claim. However, Plato holds that reason's ability to control appetite and aggression depends on one's past choices. If a person continually gives in to his aggressive impulses and appetites, he will lose the ability to control his appetites and aggressions. Such people become slaves of their appetites and aggressive impulses. When something arouses their anger, they give in to this impulse. When something arouses their desires, they cannot control themselves. But if a person has learned to restrain and control his or her appetites and aggressive impulses, the person will gain the ability to do what reason says is best.

[7] Plato, *Phaedrus*, selections from 246a–247c. This translation by Manuel Velasquez.

For Plato's student Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), reason is also the human's highest power. Although in many ways Aristotle's views differed from Plato's, he also held that human reason can discover the truth about human nature and how we ought to live. Still, Plato held that the truth about human nature involved knowledge of another world of reality. Aristotle held that the truth about human nature required only knowledge of our own world. (For a fuller discussion of Aristotle's views, see the showcase on Aristotle at the end of this chapter.) However, Aristotle agreed that our ability to reason is the characteristic that sets the human self apart from all other creatures of nature.

Aristotle emphasized even more than Plato the idea that humans have a purpose. According to Aristotle, all living things have a purpose. For example, it is clear that the purpose of the eye is to see, and of the ears to hear. As he puts it,

> Surely, just as each part of man — the eye, the hand, the foot — has a purpose, so also man as a whole must have a purpose. What is this purpose? Our biological functions we share in common even with plants. So these cannot be the purpose of man, since we are looking for something specific to man. The activities of our senses we also plainly share with other things: horses, cattle, and other animals. So there remain only the activities that belong to the rational part of man. . . . The specific purpose or function of man must involve the activities of that part of his soul that belongs to reason.[8]

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Both Plato and Aristotle, then, stress reason as the most important feature of our human nature, certainly as more important than our desires and aggressiveness. Reason is what is unique in humans — what makes us unique and different from all other animals. In addition, both see the use of reason as the purpose of human nature. That is, the purpose of human beings is to be rational: to use their reason. To achieve this, reason must control its desires and aggressions.

Plato also emphasized the spiritual aspect of human nature. In one of his dialogues, *Phaedo*, Plato has Socrates argue that the self — the soul — is immaterial and so is immortal and survives our bodily death. Plato argues that our mental activities provide the clearest evidence of the immaterial nature of the soul. That is, our ability to think is evidence of our immaterial nature. When we think and reason, Plato held, we are engaged in activities that a physical body cannot carry on. In particular, the activity of thinking about ideals that do not exist in this material world provides evidence that we have an immaterial self — a soul. Notice in the following passage how Plato contrasts the changing physical objects around us with the unchanging nature of ideal concepts. He argues that the soul must be like these ideal immaterial concepts:

> **SOCRATES:** Consider perfect equality or perfect beauty or any other ideal. Does each of these always remain the same perfect form, unchanging and not varying from moment to moment?
>
> **CEBES:** They always have to be the same, Socrates.

CRITICAL THINKING

What is Plato assuming when he says that since the mind can think about immaterial objects, it must be immaterial? Is this assumption correct?

[8]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 1, ch. 7. This translation by Manuel Velasquez.

SOCRATES: And what about the many individual [material] objects around us—people or horses or dresses or what have you. . . . Do these always remain the same or are they changing constantly and becoming something else?

CEBES: They are continually changing, Socrates.

SOCRATES: These changing [material] objects can be seen and touched and perceived with the senses [of the body]. But the unchanging Ideals can be known only with the mind and are not visible to the [body's] senses. . . . So there are two kinds of existing things: those which are visible and those which are not. . . . The visible are changing and the invisible are unchanging.

CEBES: That seems to be the case. . . .

SOCRATES: Now which of these two kinds of things is our body like?

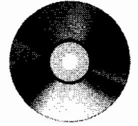
CEBES: Clearly it is like the visible things. . . .

SOCRATES: And what do we say of the soul? Is it visible or not?

CEBES: It is not visible.

SOCRATES: Then the soul is more like the invisible and the body like the visible?

CEBES: That is most certain, Socrates.



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PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

Is Human Nature Irrational?

Many social psychologists who have studied the choices and behaviors of people have concluded that humans do not behave rationally. For example, Max Bazerman, in his book *Judgment in Managerial Decision Making*, cites numerous studies which show that humans rely on irrational beliefs and rules of thumb when making important decisions. For instance, people rely on a nonexistent "law of averages" that they believe influences the risks they take. People believe they can control purely chance events. People regularly underestimate the risk of dying in familiar but highly risky activities such as driving, smoking, or eating fried foods, and overestimate the risks of unlikely but memorable events such as dying in a tornado or being attacked by a grizzly bear in a national park. Robert Cialdini notes in his book *Influence* that he found people's choices can be manipulated by appealing to six nonrational norms or rules that we generally follow:

Reciprocity. I should do this for you because you did something for me.

Commitment and Consistency. I should do this because it is consistent with something I already committed myself to doing.

Liking. I should do this because I know and like you.

Authority. I should do this because an authority says I should.

Scarcity. I should do this because there's only a few chances left and I won't get a chance later.

QUESTIONS

1. Suppose that the social psychologists are right in claiming that human beings behave irrationally. Does this show that human nature itself is not rational? Why or why not?

2. Can a psychological study of how people often—or even usually—behave disprove a philosophical theory of human nature? Why or why not?

3. Many advertisers, sellers, and promoters believe that Cialdini is right and that his theory provides the key for manipulating people into buying their products or doing what they want. Is there anything wrong with giving people the knowledge that will enable them to manipulate others?

> SOCRATES: . . . [W]hen the soul turns within and reflects upon what lies in herself [knowledge of Ideals], she finds there the perfect, eternal, immortal, and unchanging realm that is most like herself.[9]

In the rationalist view of human nature, then, we are creatures with rational minds that can control our appetites and aggressions. We can see ourselves as distinct from the matter of the world because our mind enables us to stand apart from our material environment. With our mind, we find meaning and sense in the events around us. We gain self-mastery through reason, by learning self-control, and by becoming conscious of the forces that have shaped us and the influences that make us what we are. Such self-mastery through reason is the purpose of human beings.

This view of human nature looks innocent and optimistic in the role it gives to reason. Yet is it? Consider one way that Aristotle used this theory. He claimed that if a group of people was less rational than the Greek people, they would be less human: they would be barbarians. Such "barbarians" could justifiably be enslaved by more rational, and therefore more human, people like the Greeks. As Aristotle wrote, "The lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master." But if slavery can be justified by a view of human nature that says that real humans are only those who live up to its standards, then can't any form of exploitation be justified by such a view? In fact, aren't all forms of racism ultimately justified by views that define what "human nature" really is? Doesn't racism always claim that other races are not quite as human or as highly developed humans as one's own race?

If the world consisted only of beings without reason, the existence of such a world would have no worth whatever, because there would exist in it no being with the least conception of what worth is.

IMMANUEL KANT

So the implications of the rationalist view for our own image of what we are loom large. In the rationalist view, we see ourselves as reasoning beings, imbued with an immaterial soul, with a purpose in life. Our reason can and should control our appetites and aggressive impulses. Indeed, it is the possession of reason itself that gives us the power to rise above our desires and self-interest, defining our purpose. This classical view is one of the most influential theories in Western civilization. Many people still accept parts of it, and it has deeply influenced a second important version of the Traditional view: the Judeo-Christian religious view of human nature.

TRADITIONAL WESTERN RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF HUMAN NATURE

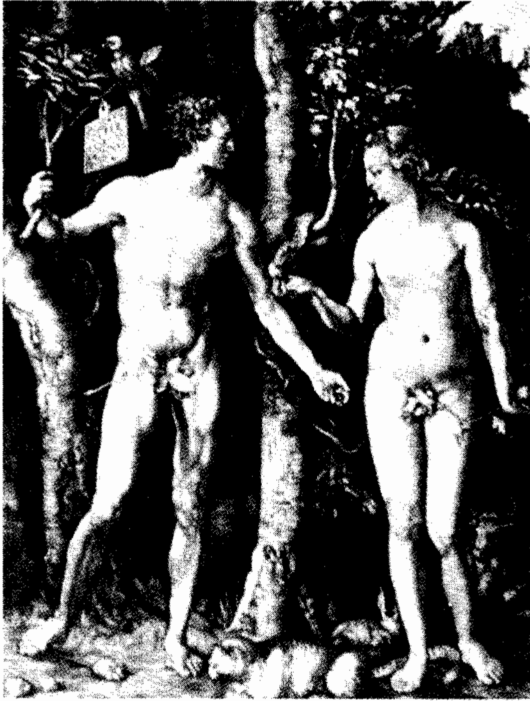
According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, humans are made in the image of God. They are like divine beings because they contain something of the ability to love and know that characterizes their Creator. For example, the Judeo-Christian scriptures portray God as saying "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Nature tells me I am the image of God.

THOMAS BROWNE

The abilities to love and know—will and intellect—are the distinguishing characteristics of human beings in the Judeo-Christian view. So unique, and wonderful, are these abilities that the Judeo-Christian tradition holds that these make human beings "like" God.

[9]Plato, *Phaedo*. This edited translation copyright © 1987 by Manuel Velasquez.



Adam and Eve. **In his idealized figures of the first man and woman being tempted by Satan, the fifteenth-century Christian artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) attempted to portray humans as rational, loving beings made in the image of God but capable of great good and evil.**

The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Rosenwald Collection.

The Greeks believed that only those who can exercise their reason can realize the purpose of living. But the Judeo-Christian view contends that the two purposes of life—loving God and serving God—are open to all, whatever their level of intelligence. As Saint Paul writes, "If I understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Since God gives this love, it is divine, and so allows humans to share in divinity.

However, the Judeo-Christian view is hardly a denial of the rationalist view. On the contrary, Plato strongly influenced Christian thought through philosophers such as the Roman Plotinus (205?–270?) and the early Christian Saint Augustine (354–430). Augustine, in particular, adapted many of Plato's doctrines to Christianity. For example, from Plato, Augustine took the doctrine that the human self is a rational self: an immaterial soul that is conscious and that can think. The self, Augustine held, can with the help of God control its desires and has the power to allow reason to rule over passion.

Augustine also borrowed Plato's view that humans have an immaterial and immortal soul. Augustine used this idea to justify the Christian notion of an afterlife. Plato had said that after death the souls of those who love "perfect, eternal" ideals would rise to heaven. Augustine modified this, arguing that the souls of those who love the perfect, eternal God will rise to heaven.

For the Christian, the way to union with God is by emulating the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In the life of Jesus, we find an expression of the highest virtue: love. We love when we perform selfless acts as Jesus did, developing a keen sense

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action hou like an angel! in apprehensio how like a god! The beauty o the world, the paragon of ani mals! And yet, to me, what i this quintessence of dust?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

of social-mindedness and realizing that people are creatures of God and are thereby worthwhile. Thus, Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you."

For the Jew, we serve and love God primarily through expressions of justice and righteousness. We also develop a sense of honor that we derive from a commitment to the ideals of truth, humility, fidelity, and kindness. This commitment also produces a sharp sense of responsibility to family and community.

The religious view fosters the idea of a moral self: each of us is capable of great good, but also of great evil. Refusing to serve and love God is the greatest evil. This refusal is expressed in various ways: injustice, vanity, pride, and dishonesty. Whenever we commit these offenses against God, we lose touch with ourselves by retreating from our alliance with God. In contrast to the Greek belief that we must develop our rational powers to perceive the moral order of the

PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

Evidence of the Soul

For several years the American Society for Psychical Research has been carefully conducting the research called for in the will of an obscure seventy-year-old Arizona miner named James Kidd, who died in 1946. The old miner left a will that read:

> *Phoenix Arizona*
> *Jan 2nd 1946*
> *this is my first and only will and is dated the second day in January 1946. I have no heir's, have not been married in my life, an after all my funeral expenses have been paid and $100. one hundred dollars to some preacher of the gospital to say farewell at my grave sell all my property which is all in cash and stocks with E. F. Hutton Co. Phoenix some in safety box, and have this balance money to go in a research or some scientific proof of a soul of the human body which leaves at death I think in time their can be a Photograph of soul leaving the human at death,*
> *James Kidd*

The E. F. Hutton stocks were worth more than $200,000. Several groups came forward to claim the money, asserting that they would carry out the research stipulated in Kidd's will. Superior Court Judge Robert Myers, before whom the will was read, was faced with the task of trying to determine which group should get the money. After ten years of deliberations, the estate was awarded to the American Society for Psychical Research. A few years later the ASPR announced early results of its search for the soul:

> *Six out-of-body (OBE) projects have been conducted. An OBE "fly-in" and an attempt to correlate OBE's and apparitions both supported the OBE hypothesis, but other interpretations (e.g. ESP) are possible. Perceptual experiments with OBEs and psychophysiological studies of subjects gave similar results: evidence in harmony with OBE hypothesis but other explanations possible. Instrumental recordings (i.e. photos) and a test of mediums gave negative results.*
>
> *Deathbed studies of apparitions, visions, hallucinations, etc. (reported by attending doctors and nurses) supported the conclusion that "some of the dying patients indeed appeared to be already experiencing glimpses of ecsomatic existence." But again, other interpretations can't be ruled out; so these results "should not be taken as a final balance of evidence for or against survival." Masses of data are still being processed.*

QUESTIONS

1. What kind of evidence could *disprove* the existence of a nonmaterial soul? What kind could *prove* the existence of a soul?

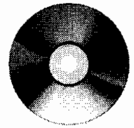
2. How would you have decided who was to receive the money if you were in the position of Judge Robert Myers?

SOURCE: *ASPR Newsletter*, July 1976.

universe, the Judeo-Christian view holds that high intelligence is no prerequisite for a moral sense. We do good when we make God the center of our lives; we do wrong when we retreat from this commitment.

Besides reason, then, Augustine emphasized the notion of a will. The will, Augustine held, is our ability to choose between good and evil, and this ability is the seat of the most significant Christian virtue: love. For the Christian, as for the Jew, the fundamental religious duty is that of freely choosing to love and serve God. The human will, the power of choice over desire, allows human beings to make this choice. Still, the will is a two-edged sword. Whereas it enables us to choose the good, it also enables us to choose evil. We humans, Augustine held, are constantly attracted to evil and away from God. He describes an event in his boyhood that illustrates this:

> Near our vineyard there was a pear tree, loaded with fruit. . . . I and some other wretched youths conceived the idea of shaking the pears off this tree and carrying them away. We set out late at night . . . and stole all the fruit we could carry. And this was not to feed ourselves. We may have tasted a few, but then we threw the rest to the pigs. Our real pleasure was simply in doing something that was forbidden. . . . I did evil for nothing, with no reason for the wrongdoing except the wrongdoing itself. . . . I loved the sin, not the thing for which I had committed the sin, but the sin itself.[10]

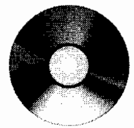


The Philosophy Source CD-ROM

Here, Augustine is echoing Plato. Like Plato, Augustine held that humans have within them powerful desires that, like an unruly "steed," constantly "weigh" us down to the earth and away from "heaven above." Nevertheless, Augustine held, with God's help, we humans can overcome "lust" and allow reason to rule over our lower desires. The human being, then, has both reason and will: the ability to know the truth about God and the ability to choose and love that God. Thus, the Judeo-Christian view agrees with the rationalist view, that human nature is not basically self-interested. In this respect, both differ from the views of Hobbes and Freud that we saw above. Humans are, instead, capable of rising above their self-interested desires and turning to God.

The Judeo-Christian tradition modified another key part of the rationalist tradition. Aristotle argues that like all living things, human beings have a purpose. The purpose of humans is to achieve happiness by using their reason. The Christian thinker Thomas Aquinas agreed that humans and everything in nature have a purpose. However, he said, the purpose of humans is to achieve happiness by using their reason to *know* God:

> The heavenly bodies cause the generation of all things here below. So the purpose of their motion is the generation of things below. Now [here below] . . . the simplest elements exist for the sake of compound minerals; these latter exist for the sake of living bodies, among which plants exist for animals, and animals for humans. So humans are the purpose of the whole order of generation. . . . Now humans naturally desire, as their ultimate purpose, to know the first cause of things. But the first cause of all things is God. So the ultimate purpose of humans is to know God.[11]



The Philosophy Source CD-ROM

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[10] Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1963), 45.

[11] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk. III, ch. 22, para. 5, 7, 8; ch. 25, para. 11. Translated by Manuel Velasquez.

In many ways, the rationalist and Judeo-Christian view of human nature is appealing. It seems to describe something that we all experience: the conflict between what our reason wants and what our desires pull us toward. It seems to provide an uplifting picture of human beings. Reason and will set us off from all other creatures, making us "like" God and capable of choosing between good and evil, between a course that will bring us closer to or take us further from our Creator. The rationalist and Judeo-Christian view argues for a self that is spiritual and so can survive the death of its body.

> ***Man is absolutely not the crown of creation: every creature stands beside him at the same stage of perfection.***
>
> FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

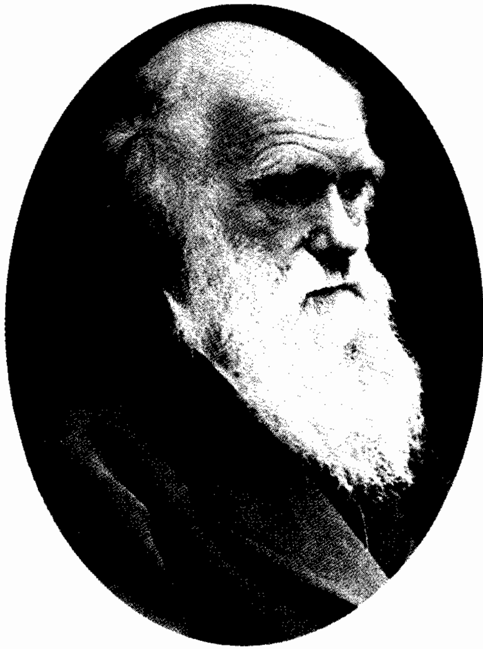
All these are familiar ideas about ourselves: the idea that it is possible for us to survive bodily death or that the self might leave its body, the idea that we humans are special and different from other animals, the idea that it is reason that makes us different and that reason should rule over our passions, the idea that human beings have a purpose and that this purpose may be related to the spiritual dimension of the universe.

Yet are these optimistic views of the Judeo-Christian tradition tenable? Is the assumption of a spiritual dimension supported by what modern science teaches us? If, as materialists claim, there is no immaterial element in human nature, then must we abandon the Judeo-Christian view? Are humans really able to choose between good and evil as the Judeo-Christian view suggests? Or are our choices ultimately determined by our upbringing, our society, our home, and our history? These are important questions that we must explore further in the chapters to come.

Perhaps more disturbing are the implications of cultural superiority that may lurk beneath this view. For if the Judeo-Christian view of human nature is the true one, then wouldn't we be justified in dismantling cultures that are inconsistent with this view? Has the Judeo-Christian view of human nature been in any way responsible for the destruction of cultures that has taken place when Christian societies have explored and colonized other lands?

As noted, the views of the human as a rational and loving being have been the most influential in Western civilization. In them we find the intellectual emphasis of the Greeks and the religious emphasis of the Jews and Christians. From them we inherit the view that all human beings share a nature that is rational and that has a purpose. Many of us today continue to look at ourselves in this manner. Yet some philosophers have challenged these ideas. Perhaps the most serious challenge to these ideas has come from science. Of the many ways in which science has challenged our understanding of ourselves, the most important challenge has been the challenge posed by the theory of evolution. As we will see, the theory of evolution challenges key aspects of the traditional Western concept of who and what we are.

We will look closely at this challenge by looking at the ideas of Charles Darwin. Darwin, more than anyone else, forced us to take the theory of evolution seriously. He is also the man who saw more clearly than anyone else that the theory of evolution is a threat to our traditional Western ideas of who and what we are.



Charles Darwin: "Natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good, silently and insensibly working at the improvement of each organic being."
Bettmann/CORBIS

THE DARWINIAN CHALLENGE

Darwin proposed two key ideas. The first is the idea that animals and plants are sometimes born with features that are different from those of their parents but that they can pass on to their own offspring. Darwin called these differences "variations." For example, a giraffe may be born with a longer neck than its parents. The giraffe can then pass on this "variation" to its own offspring. Variations like these, Darwin argued, happen randomly. That is, each happens completely by chance.

The second key idea Darwin advanced is that because animals produce more offspring than can survive, they are continuously caught in a great "struggle for existence"—that is, they must continuously compete with one another to stay alive:

> A struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase. Every being, which during its natural lifetime produces several eggs or seeds, must suffer destruction during some period of its life, and during some season or occasional year, otherwise, on the principle of geometrical increase, its numbers would quickly become so inordinately great that no country could support the product. Hence, as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life.[12]

[12]Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859), ch. 4.

A newborn cat, for example, starts life having to compete with its many brothers and sisters as they all struggle to suck from their mother's few nipples. Later, the cat has to compete with other cats for mates and food. Throughout its life, it struggles to keep away from wolves and other predators. Always it must struggle against heat and cold, sun and snow, droughts and storms. This is a life-or-death struggle for every animal, and most fall by the wayside and die.

Darwin pointed out that the random variations an animal is born with can sometimes give it an advantage in this great struggle for existence. A giraffe with a longer neck can reach leaves that other giraffes can't. When an animal has a variation that gives it an advantage over other animals of the same kind (the same species), it will have a better chance of surviving and of eventually mating. It is then more likely to pass the variation on to its own offspring. A giraffe with a longer neck can feed itself better and so live longer, mate more often, and leave more offspring with long necks than other giraffes. The great struggle for existence, then, "selects" those animals with advantageous variations and lets them survive and multiply. At the same time, the struggle for existence weeds out animals and plants that have less advantageous variations and lets them die. After many generations, all the surviving members of the species have the new variation:

> [C]an we doubt (remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive) that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and of procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. This preservation of favorable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest. . . .
>
> Let us take the case of a wolf, which preys on various animals, securing some by craft, some by strength, and some by fleetness; and let us suppose that the fleetest prey, a deer for instance, had from any change in the country increased in numbers, or that other prey had decreased in numbers, during that season of the year when the wolf was hardest pressed for food. Under such circumstances the swiftest and slimmest wolves would have the best chance of surviving and so be preserved or selected.[13]

Over many thousands of years, the inexorable "weeding" process of natural selection can make a species (a kind of animal) change into wholly new species. A species of fish over millions of years may evolve into a species of frog-like amphibians, the amphibians may evolve into dinosaurs, and the dinosaurs may evolve into birds:

> It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the hand of time has marked the lapse of ages, and then so imperfect

[13] Ibid.

> is our view into long-past geological ages, that we see only that the forms of life are now different from what they formerly were.[14]

We are so used to the idea of evolution that it is hard for us to understand how incredible Darwin's theory was to people of his time. The idea that after many generations one kind of animal might have descendants that had become an entirely new species, and that the new species might eventually give rise to yet another even more different species, was a disturbing new thought for many people. It meant that the world around us is not fixed, but is caught up in a dizzying and unsettling continual change.

Most of the more complex emotions are common to the higher animals and ourselves.
CHARLES DARWIN

Yet as disturbing as Darwin's ideas about animal species were, his ideas were even more disturbing when applied to human beings. For humans are animals, and if Darwin's theory applied to animals, it also applied to humans. Humans also must have evolved! Darwin himself made the point in *The Descent of Man*, a book that aroused a flurry of angry controversy:

> Thus we can understand how it has come to pass that man and all other vertebrate animals have been constructed on the same general model, why they pass through the same early stages of development, and why they retain certain rudiments in common. Consequently we ought frankly to admit their community of descent: to take any other view, is to admit that our own structure, and that of all the animals around us, is a mere snare laid to entrap our judgment. . . . It is only our natural prejudice, and that arrogance which made our forefathers declare that they were descended from demigods, which leads us to demur to this conclusion.[15]

The main argument which convinces us that animals have no reason is that no animal can make use of a true language so as to indicate to us by signs anything that could be referred to thought alone, rather than a movement of mere nature.
RENÉ DESCARTES

Think of the implications of Darwin's theory for the Traditional view of human nature. Take, first, what the Traditional view says about the differences between humans and animals. The Traditional view says that although humans are animals, they have a characteristic that makes them unique. This is the ability to reason. Humans are rational animals, and our ability to reason and think goes beyond anything animals can do. Reason is not just a more developed and more powerful version of the same kinds of abilities that animals have. Instead, the Traditional view says that our ability to reason is a completely different kind of ability than any of the abilities that animals have.

Darwin denied this. If humans evolved from lower animals, then all human abilities evolved from the abilities that their earlier nonhuman predecessors had. If so, Darwin believed, then all human abilities are merely more developed variations of the same kinds of abilities that nonhuman animals have. According to Darwin, "[T]here is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties."[16] The Traditional view held that the human power to reason is so unique, so different in kind from the powers of animals, that it could only have come from God. It is, in fact, what makes us like God. Yet in Darwin's view the human power to reason is not qualitatively unique but is merely a more developed version of the cognitive powers of nonhuman primates. The human power to reason is no more "God-like" than any other de-

[14] Ibid.
[15] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, ch. 1.
[16] Ibid., ch. 3.

veloped animal ability. Humans are made not in the image of God, but in the image of the apes that preceded them.

Second, and even more important, the Traditional view holds that like all living things, human beings are obviously designed and so must have a purpose. Aristotle had noted that human organs, such as "the eye, the hand, and the foot," are like intricate instruments or tools that have been put together to achieve a specific purpose: the eye is designed to see, the hand to grasp, and the foot to walk. Since each of our parts obviously is fashioned for a purpose, Aristotle argued, a human being as a whole must likewise have a purpose, and that purpose must be whatever humans can do that nothing else can do. Aristotle concluded that the purpose of humans is to exercise their reason. Christian philosophers such as Augustine and Aquinas added to this that the purpose of humans is to exercise their reason in order to love God and neighbor.

Our reverence for the nobility of manhood will not be lessened by the knowledge that man is, in substance and in structure, one with the animals.

T. H. HUXLEY

Darwin's theory of evolution undermined the idea that living things and their parts are designed for a purpose. Animal organs, such as the eye, the heart, and the foot, Darwin held, were not made to serve a specific purpose but developed bit by bit through the accumulation of countless tiny random variations and the blind process of natural selection. It is true, as Aristotle and others had noted, that the eye and all our other organs seem to be specially designed to serve a specific purpose. But this apparent design and purpose are illusory: the eye is simply the accumulated outcome of numerous chance variations that had survived because each happened to confer a slight advantage to an animal: chance, not purposeful design, had resulted in the eye and each of its intricate parts. Nor did humans as a whole have a purpose. The evolution of a species, like the evolution of each of their organs, Darwin argued, is the result of chance, not of purposeful design. Humans and other animals are the products not of a purposeful plan, Darwin and his modern followers have argued, but of chance "variations" and the blind mechanical forces of natural selection. In Darwin's view, humans and their parts provided evidence of evolution, not of purpose.

Still, does this mean that the Traditional view of human nature is dead? Hardly. Many thinkers have attempted to respond to Darwin, some by pointing to problems with his theory, others by arguing that Darwin was wrong in his belief that his theory disproved the idea that human nature has a purpose, and still others by claiming that human reason is uniquely human.

First, and most controversially, many have argued that Darwin's theory still lacks definitive proof. Some critics of Darwin have argued that while there is adequate evidence of what is called "microevolution" (change or evolution of organisms within a species), the evidence for "macroevolution" (the evolution of one species into a new species) is not as complete. The main evidence for evolution is fossils. Fossils are preserved skeletons (or other remains) of ancient animals found in layers of rocks under the earth. If these fossils are placed in rows, with the oldest ones first, and the most recent ones last, there is a progression among them: the oldest animals seem, step by step, to become more like the animals that are still living today. Darwin argued that this fossil progression shows that the animals living today evolved gradually from ancient animals. He claimed that only his theory of random variations and natural selection can explain how this evolution took place.

In many respects man is the most ruthlessly ferocious of beasts.

WILLIAM JAMES

Nevertheless, some scientists have argued that fossils do not support Darwin's view that species gradually evolve into other species. When we examine the fossils buried in rocks, they claim, we find that most new species seem to appear suddenly, without earlier, continuously different forms leading up to them. It is as if there were sudden jumps from one complete species to another. Missing, in most cases, are the gradual changes and many intermediate steps that should be there if new species evolve by gradual steps through natural selection. As the contemporary biologist Stephen Jay Gould writes,

> The history of most fossil species includes two features inconsistent with [Darwinian] gradualism: 1. Stasis. Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth. They appear in the fossil record looking much the same as when they disappear. . . . 2. Sudden Appearance. In any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the steady transformation of its ancestors; it appears all at once and "fully formed."[17]

However, Gould does not think that the large gaps in the fossil record disprove evolution. Gould suggests that the gaps show only that evolution generally occurs by "jumps" or "saltations" that take place in such short time periods that they leave few if any fossils. However, others insist that the gaps "prove" that Darwin was wrong.

Does this debate mean that Darwin was wrong and that we should reject his theory? Not necessarily. Perhaps the "gaps" are simply the result of the fact that we have not yet found all the fossils or that we have not yet discovered exactly how evolution works. Gould himself has argued that there are some fossils that provide excellent examples of the unbroken chain of changes required to show that one species can evolve into another. The debate merely shows, then, that we must not be dogmatic about Darwin's theory of evolution. It provides some powerful and profound ideas for understanding ourselves: how we are related to the rest of the animal kingdom and how chance and randomness may have created us. Nevertheless, the theory might be wrong, at least in its details, if not in major ways. We should remain open to this possibility.

> ***What a chimera, then, is man! What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy!***
>
> BLAISE PASCAL

Second, even if Darwin's theory is correct, some opponents have argued, it is a mistake to think that evolution proves that human nature is not designed for a purpose. For example, the contemporary philosopher George Mavrodes suggests that there are two ways of understanding evolution. A "naturalistic" understanding of evolution holds that evolution is "explicable entirely in terms of natural law without reference to a divine intention or intervention." But a "theistic" understanding of evolution holds that "there was a devine teleology in this process, a divine direction at each crucial stage in accordance with divine plan or intention."[18] In other words, a theistic understanding of evolution holds that although evolution occurred, God still directed evolution. Evolution is merely the tool of God's design. Evolution, and even the great struggle for existence that "selects" some animals to survive and others to die, is the instrument with

[17]Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb* (New York: Norton, 1980), 182.
[18]George Mavrodes, "Creation Science and Evolution," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 7, 1987, 43.

which God designs human beings and other animals. On this view, Darwinian evolution is consistent with a belief that God, through evolution, produced human beings for a purpose. Other philosophers, such as Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), have also argued that the process of evolution is not blind and random, but directed and purposeful. More recently, Michael J. Behe, a biochemist who wrote *The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (1996), and William A. Dembski, a mathematician who authored *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (1999), have argued that the complexity of living organisms, including human beings, cannot be explained by random processes but requires the admission of "intelligent design" or purpose.

But not all evolutionists agree that the theory of evolution is compatible with the idea that humans are designed for a purpose. As Stephen Jay Gould writes,

> Humans are not the end result of predictable evolutionary progress, but rather a fortuitous cosmic afterthought, a tiny little twig on the enormously arborescent bush of life, which, if replanted from seed, would almost surely not grow this twig again, or perhaps any twig with any property that we would care to call consciousness. . . . The course of evolution is only the summation of fortuitous contingencies, not a pathway with predictable directions.[19]

A third criticism that opponents of Darwin make is an attack on his claim that there is no fundamental or qualitative difference between the cognitive abilities of many nonhuman animals and the reasoning ability of humans. Because the human ability to reason evolved from the mental abilities of our nonhuman ancestors, Darwin claimed, the difference between them is ultimately a difference of degree, not a fundamental difference in kind. The ability to reason, Darwin thought, was an ability that almost all animals exhibit to some degree, including, he argued, the lowly worm!

Yet critics of Darwin have argued that the human capacity to reason is unique in all of nature. The most telling difference between human mental capacities and the mental capacities of all other animals, critics have claimed, is our ability to use complex rule-governed languages in our reasoning processes. In fact, before Darwin was even born, Descartes had declared in the fifth part of his *Discourse on Method* that what distinguished humans from the "brutes" was the fact that humans can "arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they make known their thoughts; while, on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect and fortunately circumscribed it may be, which can do the same." Although many animals can communicate by using simple signs and symbols, only humans seem to have the ability to communicate and think in languages that use complex syntactical rules capable of producing a potentially infinite number of new sentences expressing ideas that have never before been expressed. The human languages that we use to develop, express, and manipulate our complicated ideas, theories, technologies, cultural conceptions, religious beliefs, and imaginative artistry seem to be unique to human

[19]Stephen Jay Gould, *Dinosaur in a Haystack* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1995), 329, 332.

beings. Although numerous scientists have tried to show that nonhumans—including chimpanzees and gorillas—can be taught to "speak" and understand human languages, these attempts have proven frustratingly inconclusive. If human reason consists of the ability to think linguistically and of the ability to create, understand, and engage in complex chains of reasoning about such linguistically embodied thoughts, then human reason may indeed be unique and qualitatively different from anything found in other animals.

However, Darwinists, like Darwin himself, have continued to insist that even if language is a uniquely human characteristic, still it must have developed from capacities that evolved from earlier mental abilities that we share with nonhuman animals. While the ability to think linguistically and to engage in linguistic reasoning may be uniquely human, the underlying brain structures on which this ability depends evolved from nonhuman brains and are to that extent not unique. Even though humans are a distinct species, Darwinists insist, they developed from a nonhuman species only by a gradual and continuous series of changes that makes human abilities nothing but more developed versions of the kinds of capacities that our nonhuman ancestors had. However, critics of Darwin are similarly insistent that humans, precisely because they are a distinct species, have mental capacities that are fundamentally different in kind from those of any other animal and by virtue of which humans, and only humans, can be said to be "created in the image of God."

So is Darwin's theory true at least in its major claims? Does his theory of evolution disprove the Traditional Western view of human nature? Is evolution compatible with the idea that humans were designed for a purpose? Is it compatible with the uniqueness of the human species? You must decide the answers to these great questions yourself. However they are answered, it is clear that a great deal hangs on them. Your view of yourself and of the kind of creature you are ultimately depends on your answer.

THE EXISTENTIALIST CHALLENGE

In the middle of the twentieth century, another, very different view of human beings arose to challenge the Traditional Western view of human nature. This view, called **existentialism,** holds that humans are whatever they make themselves. Existentialism denies any essential human nature in the traditional sense, insisting that individuals create their own nature through free, responsible choices and actions. We cannot say that humans have a fixed rational nature and a fixed purpose.

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Although existentialism is also popular among religious thinkers, we'll confine our remarks to atheistic existentialism. The chief exponent of atheistic existentialism was Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), who saw humans as "condemned to be free." We are free because we can rely neither on a God (who doesn't exist) nor on society to justify our actions or to tell us what we essentially are. We are condemned because without a fixed purpose or a guideline we must suffer the agony of our own decision making and the anguish of its consequences.

Sartre believed that there are no true, universal statements about what humans ought to be, but he did make at least one general statement about

the human condition: we are free. This freedom consists chiefly of our ability to envision additional possibilities for our condition, to conceive of what is not the case, to suspend judgment, and to alter our condition. Therefore, we should make individual choices, fully aware that we are doing so. We must take full responsibility not only for our actions but also for our beliefs, feelings, and attitudes.

To illustrate, many people believe that we have little control over our emotions. If we feel depressed, we feel depressed, and there's little we can do about it. Sartre argued that if we're depressed, we've often chosen to be. Emotions, he said, are not moods that come over us but are often ways in which we freely choose to perceive the world, to participate in it.

It is the consciousness of this freedom and its accompanying responsibilities that causes our anguish. The most anguishing thought of all is that we are responsible for ourselves. Sometimes we escape this anguish by pretending we are not free. For example, we pretend that our genes or our environment is the cause of what we are, or that we are spectators rather than participants, passive rather than active. When we so pretend, said Sartre, we act in "bad faith."

Self-deception or bad faith is the attempt to avoid anguish by pretending to ourselves that we are not free. We have many ways to do this. We try to convince ourselves that outside influences have shaped our nature. Or that forces beyond our control or unconscious mental states have shaped us. One graphic example of self-deception provided by Sartre involves a young woman sitting with a man who, she knows, is bent on seduction. He takes her hand. To avoid the painful necessity of making a decision to accept or reject the man, the woman pretends not to notice, leaving her hand in his. Isn't there bad faith in the woman's pretending to be a passive object, a being-in-itself, rather than what she really is, conscious and, therefore, a free being? Here's Sartre's account of the incident, as he develops it in *Being and Nothingness:*

> Take the example of a woman who has consented to go out with a particular man for the first time. She knows very well the intentions which the man who is speaking to her cherishes regarding her. She knows also that it will be necessary sooner or later for her to make a decision. But she does not want to realize the urgency; she concerns herself only with what is respectful and discreet in the attitude of her companion. She does not apprehend this conduct as an attempt to achieve what we call "the first approach"; that is, she does not want to see possibilities of temporal development which his conduct presents. She restricts this behavior to what is in the present; she does not wish to read in the phrases which he addresses to her anything other than their explicit meaning. If he says to her, "I find you so attractive!" she disarms this phrase of its sexual background; she attaches to the conversation and to the behavior of the speaker, the immediate meanings, which she imagines as objective qualities. The man who is speaking to her appears to her sincere and respectful as the table is round or square, as the wall coloring is blue or gray. The qualities thus attached to the person she is listening to are in this way fixed in a permanence like that of things, which is no other than the projection of the strict present of the qualities into the temporal flux. This is because she does not quite know what she wants. She is profoundly aware of the desire which she inspires, but the desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her. Yet she would find no charm in a respect which would be only respect. In order to satisfy her, there must be a feeling which is addressed wholly

Man is but a reed, the mo[st] feeble thing in nature; bu[t] is a thinking reed.

BLAISE PASCAL

Man is a biodegradable bu[t] nonrecyclable animal bless[ed] with opposable thumbs capable of grasping at straws

BERNARD ROSENBERG

CRITICAL THINKING

Does Sartre assume that we can discover the trut[h] about our inner motivations by examining our own consciousness? Would this assumption b[e] correct? Is self-deceptio[n] possible for Sartre?

> to her personality—i.e., to her full freedom—and which would be a recognition of her freedom. But at the same time this feeling must be wholly desire; that is, it must address itself to her body as object. This time then she refuses to apprehend the desire for what it is; she does not even give it a name; she recognizes it only to the extent that it transcends itself toward admiration, esteem, respect and that it is wholly absorbed in the more refined forms which it produces, to the extent of no longer figuring anymore as a sort of warmth and density. But then suppose he takes her hand. This act of her companion risks changing the situation by calling for an immediate decision. To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to engage herself. To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm. The aim is to postpone the moment of decision as long as possible. We know what happens next; the young woman leaves her hand there, but she does not notice that she is leaving it. She does not notice because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect. She draws her companion up to the most lofty regions of sentimental speculation; she speaks of Life, of her life, she shows herself in her essential aspect—a personality, a consciousness. And during this time the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished; the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion—neither consenting nor resisting—a thing.
>
> We shall say that this woman is in bad faith, but we see immediately that she uses various procedures in order to maintain herself in this bad faith. She has disarmed the actions of her companion by reducing them to being only what they are.[20]

Existentialism obviously emphasizes the free and conscious individual. However, the self in this view is not necessarily rational, or mechanical, or a creature of God. It is instead a project that possesses a subjective life; it is the sum, not of everything that happens to it, but of everything it ever does. In the end, we are what our choices make us; to be human means to create oneself.

Man will do nothing u[...] he has first understood he must count on no o[...] himself; that he is alo[...] abandoned on earth in [...] midst of his infinite res[...]bilities; without help, [...] other aim than the one [...] himself, with no other [...] than the one he forges himself on this earth.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Yet can we have the kind of self-knowledge and control over ourselves that Sartre assumes people always have in situations like those facing the woman in the passage above? Doesn't our unconscious mind—the unconscious motivations and desires that psychologists say operate without our knowledge—control much of what we do? For example, doesn't that unconscious mind heavily influence how a woman reacts to the touch of a man or how a man responds to that of a woman? Doesn't the kind of conditioning we have received in the past shape our external behavior in the present moment?

In *Existentialism and Humanism*, Sartre vigorously expresses the existential view of human nature. Notice in the selection that follows the primacy that Sartre gives to existence. Existence is prior to essence, he believes; humans exist first, and then they make something of themselves. In this fact lies the human condition:

> Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares . . . that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man. . . . What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to

[20] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 55–56. Copyright © 1956 by Philosophical Library. Reprinted by permission.

> begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills.[21]

Clearly, existentialism provides a profound challenge to the Traditional view of human nature. If existentialism is correct, then there is no such thing as a universal human nature shared by all people. Instead, we each create our own nature. If Sartre is right, we also cannot say that humans are defined by their rationality. Ahead of time, we cannot say what will define a person: only his or her future choices can determine this. Moreover, if Sartre is right, we cannot say that humans have a purpose. Humans are not made for anything. We simply exist, and each of us must decide for ourselves what purpose our existence will serve. There is no way to say ahead of time that one purpose is right for everyone or that there is some purpose that is meant for everyone.

We are, therefore, ultimately responsible for our own nature and purposes. This radical responsibility—our inability to blame anyone else for what we are—is the basis for our feelings of despair, fear, guilt, and isolation. It is also the basis for our uncertainties and anxieties about death. There we confront the meaninglessness that is at the core of existence and thus discover a truth that enables us to live fully conscious of what being human means.

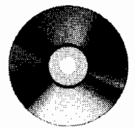
Yet do we have the kind of absolute freedom to create our nature that Sartre attributes to us? Are we fully responsible for the nature we have? Are you wholly to blame for who and what you are today? If you deny that you are free and responsible, are you in fact using this very denial as an excuse to escape your responsibility? Is the denial of freedom always a form of bad faith?

THE FEMINIST CHALLENGE

The most disturbing challenge to the Traditional picture of human nature is the criticism that it is fundamentally sexist—that is, it discriminates against women. This feminist objection strikes at the very center of the Traditional picture, and to examine it, we must go back to Plato and Aristotle.

To understand the feminist criticism, recall that in the Traditional view of human nature, humans are rational beings whose reason should rule over the body and its desires and emotions. In the part of his dialogue *Phaedo* that follows the portion excerpted earlier in this chapter, Plato, putting his own views into the mouth of Socrates, described the rationalist view like this:

> **SOCRATES:** Yet once more consider the matter in another light: When the soul and the body are united, then nature orders the soul to rule and govern, and the body to obey and serve. Now, which of these two functions is akin to the divine and which to the mortal? Does not the divine appear to you to be that which naturally orders and rules, and the mortal to be that which is subject and servant?
>
> **CEBES:** True.
>
> **SOCRATES:** And which does the soul resemble?



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[21] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1949), 85.

CEBES: The soul resembles the divine, and the body the mortal—there can be no doubt of that, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then reflect, Cebes: of all which has been said is not this the conclusion?—that the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and that the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintellectual, and multiform, and dissoluble, and changeable. Can this, my dear Cebes, be denied?

CEBES: It cannot.

SOCRATES: But if it be true, then is not the body liable to speedy dissolution and is not the soul almost or altogether indissoluble?

CEBES: Certainly. . . .

SOCRATES: That soul, I say, itself invisible, departs [at death] to the invisible world—to the divine and immortal and rational: thither arriving, the soul is secure of bliss and is released from the error and folly of men, their fears and wild passions and all other human ills, and forever dwells, as they say of the initiated, in company with the gods. Is not this true, Cebes?

CEBES: Yes, beyond a doubt.

SOCRATES: But the soul which has been polluted, and is impure at the time of death, and is the companion and servant of the body always, and is in love with and fascinated by the body and by the desires and pleasures of the body, until it is led to believe that the truth only exists in a bodily form, which a man may touch and see and taste, and use for the purposes of his lusts,—the soul, I mean, which is accustomed to hate and fear and avoid the intellectual principle, which to the bodily eye is dark and invisible, and can be attained only by philosophy;—do you suppose that such a soul will depart pure and unalloyed?

CEBES: Impossible.

SOCRATES: Such a soul is held fast by the corporeal, which the continual association and constant care of the body have wrought into its nature.

CEBES: Very true.

SOCRATES: And this corporeal element, my friend, is heavy and weighty and earthy, and is that element of sight by which a soul is depressed and dragged down again into the visible world, because it is afraid of the invisible and of the world below—prowling about tombs and sepulchres . . . and these must be the souls, not of the good, but of the evil, which are compelled to wander about such places in payment of the penalty of their former evil way of life.[22]

Plato associates the soul with reason and opposes these two to the body and its earthy desires. The "pure" soul is supposed to rule over the "impure" body and to turn away from the "desires and pleasures of the body." If the soul dominates the body and turns away from its desires and "wild passions" or emotions, it will be "good." At death, such a pure soul will rise to join the gods. But if the soul becomes the "companion and servant" of its body and bodily desires and pleasures, it will become "polluted" and "evil" and will be punished by being dragged down to wander among "tombs and sepulchres."

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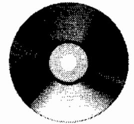
[22]Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett and ed. Justin D. Kaplan (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950), 103–106.

Feminists have argued that here Plato inserted a critical assumption into the rationalist view of human nature: the soul and reason are superior and should rule, whereas the body and its desires and emotions are inferior and should obey. Aristotle, Plato's student, next made a move that would forever give this rationalist view of human nature a sexist bias. Aristotle associated men with reason and claimed that women do not share fully in reason. Consequently, men should rule over women:

> There are three elements of household rule, the first being the rule of the master over slaves, . . . the second that of the father over his children, and the third that of the husband over his wife. . . . His rule over his wife is like that of a magistrate in a free state, while his rule over his children is like that of a king. For the male is naturally more qualified to lead than the female, unless something unnatural happens, and the older and more complete adult is more qualified to rule than the younger and incomplete child. . . . For in the soul there is by nature an element that rules and also an element that is ruled; and in these elements we recognize different virtues, the virtue, to wit, of that which possesses reason, and the virtue of that which lacks reason [but which should obey reason]. It is clear, then that the same rule holds good in other cases also, so that most things in the world by nature are rulers or are ruled. But it is in different ways that the free man rules the slave, the male rules the female, and the adult rules the child. Although in each of these there is present an appropriate share of soul, it is present in each in a different manner. For the slave, speaking generally, does not have a reasoning faculty; the woman has it but without the power to be effective; and the child has it, but in an incomplete degree.[23]



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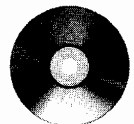
Aristotle is claiming that the reason that characterizes the essential nature of humans is fully operational only in males. Women, like children, do not have a full share of reason, so, like our bodily appetites and emotions, they should obey the full reason of males.

From the very beginning of Western philosophy, feminists have argued, the rationalist view of human nature has associated males with the superior traits that are supposed to set humans apart from all other beings. The rationalist view associates men with rationality and mind. It associates women with the bodily appetites and emotions that must be controlled. Reason is male and must rule, whereas feelings are female and must be ruled.

Centuries later, feminists charge, the religious version of the rationalist view of human nature adopted this association of reason with men and of appetites and emotions with women. For example, in the *Confessions*, the Christian philosopher Saint Augustine wrote the following in a prayer to God:

> Then You took man's mind, which is subject to none but you and needs to imitate no human authority, and renewed it in Your own image and likeness. You made rational action subject to the rule of the intellect, as woman is subject to man.[24]



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[23] Aristotle, *Politics*, quoted in *Philosophy of Woman: Classical to Current Concepts*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 68.

[24] Augustine, *Confessions*, quoted in Genevieve Lloyd, "The Man of Reason," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 111–128.

Somewhat earlier, the Jewish philosopher Philo also accepted the rationalist view of human nature and brought it into Judaic thinking:

> The male is more complete, more dominant than the female, closer akin to causal activity, for the female is incomplete and in subjection and belongs to the category of the passive rather than the active. So too with the two ingredients which constitute our life-principle, the rational and the irrational; the rational which belongs to mind and reason is of the masculine gender, the irrational, the province of sense, is of the feminine. Mind belongs to a genus wholly superior to sense as man is to woman.[25]

This brief look at the historical development of the rationalist view of human nature clarifies the fundamental issue: the rationalist view, and the Judeo-Christian religious view based on it, are sexist — they are biased against women. The rationalist view holds that reason is the essential characteristic that sets humans off from the rest of creation. Yet, as feminists point out, the rationalist view attributes full reason only to adult males: reason and rationality are "male" whereas desire and feeling are "female." As a result, the rationalist view allows only men to be fully human because only men are fully rational, and women are incomplete and driven by their emotions.

Moreover, feminists argue, the rationalist view defines male rationality as superior to the bodily appetites and emotions, which it associates with women. This view asserts that reason must rule. Consequently, the rationalist view and the religious views that accept it imply that men should rule over women. The rationalist view thus justifies the oppression of women.

And finally, feminists argue, the rationalist view implies that rationality—the supposedly male quality—is good and should be cultivated. Our bodily desires and emotions—the supposedly female qualities—are bad and should be restrained. Male rationality is the key to attaining truth, knowledge, and even eternal salvation. But our bodily appetites and emotions "pollute" us and prevent us from thinking clearly and from attaining truth, knowledge, and eternal salvation. The result is a profound lack of respect for basic aspects of human nature: the body, the appetites, and the emotions.

The feminist objection to the rationalist and Judeo-Christian views of human nature is that they are fundamentally sexist. Yet is this objection correct? Are sexist views that assume the inferiority of women to men essential to the Traditional view of human nature? Can we talk about reason and emotion, body and spirit, truth and desire without covertly assuming sexist views? Although many people continue to think of rationality as a "male" trait and emotion as a "female" trait, can't we start to think differently? Granted, many people still feel that emotion is an obstacle to the attainment of the truth and knowledge that reason seeks. But can't we create new ways of thinking about truth, science, and knowledge? Granted, many people still believe that if we are to be moral and righteous, we should restrain our bodily appetites. But can't we start to think differently about the value of our body and its appetites? Finally, many religious

[25] Philo, *Special Laws*, in *Philo*, vol. 1, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1929), 125.

people still feel that our bodily desires "pollute" us and prevent us from attaining eternal salvation. But can't we create new forms of religion and spirituality that look at our bodily desires from a different perspective? Is the rationalist picture of human nature such a deep part of our everyday way of thinking about ourselves that we can't change?

Consider a more radical proposal. Why don't we simply throw out the rationalist view of human nature if it is sexist? Genevieve Lloyd, herself a feminist philosopher, argues that this is not as easy to do as it may first appear:

> It is a natural response to the discovery of unfair discrimination to affirm the positive value of what has been downgraded. But with the kind of bias we are confronting here the situation is complicated by the fact that femininity, as we have it, has been partly formed by relation to, and differentiation from, a male norm. We may, for example, want to insist against past philosophers that the sexes are equal in possession of Reason; and that women must now be admitted to full participation in its cultural manifestations. But . . . this approach is fraught with difficulty. . . . For it seems implicitly to accept the downgrading of the excluded character traits traditionally associated with femininity, and to endorse the assumption that the only human excellences and virtues which deserve to be taken seriously are those exemplified in the range of activities and concerns that have been associated with maleness.
>
> However, alternative responses are no less beset by conceptual complexities. For example, it may seem easy to affirm the value and strengths of distinctively "feminine" traits. . . . Thus, it is an understandable reaction . . . to stress . . . the warmth of feeling as against the chillingly abstract character of Reason. But . . . subtle accommodations have been incorporated into the social organization of sexual division which allow "feminine" traits and activities to be both preserved and downgraded. There has been no lack of male affirmation of the importance and attractiveness of "feminine" traits—in women—or of gallant acknowledgement of the impoverishment of male Reason. Making good the lacks in male consciousness, providing it with a necessary complementation by the "feminine," is a large part of what the suppression . . . of "womankind" has been all about.[26]

Lloyd may be saying that one way of rejecting the rationalist view is to simply insist that women have as much reason as men. Yet, as she points out, why would we insist on this unless we agree that reason—the "male" trait—is really as superior as the rationalist view says it is? A second way of rejecting the rationalist view, she suggests, is to insist that the "female" traits of feeling and emotion are as valuable as the "male" trait of reason. But males have always "gallantly" said that these "female" traits are valuable, Lloyd says. This implies that women should be content with their place in society: to serve as the companions of males who unfortunately are stuck with cold (but ruling!) reason.

Are the very notions used by the rationalist view—reason and desire, body and mind, rationality and emotion—such an integral part of a centuries-old way of thinking that we can no longer rid ourselves of them? Do the very meanings of these words assume that women are inferior to men? When we use these notions, are we forced into seeing women as inferior to men? Is it possible for

[26]Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 104.

us to stop using the notions of reason and desire, body and mind, and rationality and emotion? In fact, is it possible for us to reject the rationalist view of human nature, which seems to be built into our very notions of what men and women are?

QUESTIONS

1. Some people argue that because nonhuman animals can think, humans are not unique at all. What is the difference between thinking and reasoning? What mental states indicate a thinking process? Would you say that reasoning presumes thinking but that thinking does not presume reasoning?
2. What historical evidence indicates that we are rational animals? What evidence indicates that we are not?
3. How do the rationalist and religious views foster a concept of the human as being at odds with nature? Does history indicate that Westerners have lived up to this concept? Does contemporary experience confirm or challenge the wisdom of this concept?
4. Suppose that the concept of evolution is valid. What implications would evolution have for how our societies should be arranged? What implications would evolution have for religion?
5. Sartre's existentialism leaves us with no moral rules or behavioral guidelines, yet it ultimately holds us responsible for all our choices. Do you find such a view appealing? Contradictory? Unsettling? Liberating?
6. To what degree and in what ways, if any, do you experience your life as free, as Sartre describes freedom?
7. In your view, are there ways of looking at women that ordinarily are not seen as sexist but that when examined more closely turn out to be sexist? What are the consequences of sexist ways of looking at women and men?

2.3 How Do Mind and Body Relate?

To most of us, it's obvious that we have minds and bodies. We spend much of our time fretting and fussing over our bodies. We exercise to keep our body healthy, diet to keep its weight down, comb its hair and paint its face to make it more alluring, lift weights to inflate its muscles, jog to keep its stamina up, adorn it with clothes and jewelry to make it aesthetically pleasing, hire doctors to cure its illnesses. We know our body has weight and mass and is spread out in space. It has color, size, shape. It can be seen and touched and measured. It is, in short, a material entity.

Your mind, too, gets its share of attention. We study and learn to increase its knowledge, we travel to expand its experiences, we read to keep it entertained, we spend many hours daydreaming to while its time away, we hire psychiatrists to cure it of its illnesses, and we sleep to keep it rested. The mind is the source of our creativity and deepest feelings. It is with the mind that we experience the ordinary and the unusual, feel desires and emotions, believe or doubt. It is with our mind that we feel hope, fear, love, hate, disgust, shame, pride, amusement. Unlike the body, the mind seems to have no observable color, size, or shape. Its most characteristic feature is its consciousness. What is consciousness? Suppose you are sleeping, or sleepwalking, or anesthetized, or knocked out. Then you are unconscious and have no consciousness. As you wake up in the morning, and as you gradually become aware of yourself and the world around you, as you become aware that you see your bedroom, become aware that you feel the wrinkled sheets beneath you, become aware that you smell the musty odors of your closed room, and become aware of the dry, stale taste in your mouth, you are becoming conscious. Consciousness is this awareness you have of yourself and your sensing when you are awake. Consciousness is subjective: I am directly in touch with and am directly aware of my own consciousness, and you with yours. But you are not directly aware of my consciousness, nor can I be directly in touch with yours. Strangely, consciousness seems not to be physical. It seems to have no weight, color, taste, mass, or physical dimensions. The conscious mind seems to be an immaterial substance.

To most of us, then, that we have both a mind and a body seems obvious. Human beings—human nature—seem to be both mental and physical, seem to consist of both mind and body. Moreover, to most of us, it is also obvious that our immaterial mind interacts with its material body. The thoughts and desires in the mind have an effect on how the body behaves. When I decide to go for a walk, it is a simple matter for me to move my body's legs. When I injure my body, my mind is aware of the pain. Thus, the mind seems to be able to control the body, and the body is able to affect the mind.

But although this all seems obvious and commonsensical, the view of human nature as consisting of both mind and body has given rise to profound problems. Philosophers, like each of us, have long pondered our nature. And the feature of human nature that has most troubled them is this apparent dual identity of human beings. Some have simply accepted the commonsense view and have agreed that humans consist of two kinds of things: bodies and minds. Others, influenced by science, have recoiled from accepting this duality. We have only bodies, they have argued, and somehow the mind must be understood as a part of or a property of the body and its brain.

THE DUALIST VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

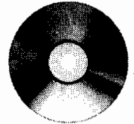
The view that human beings are immaterial minds within material bodies is an ancient one. It is a view that many adherents of the Traditional view of human nature have adopted, including Plato and St. Augustine. Still, the view was most clearly expressed in the seventeenth century by the first philosophical figure of the modern European age, René Descartes (1596–1650). Notice that

Descartes leaves no question that the human being is an immaterial mind. The essential nature of the mind is its conscious ability to think. This mind is very different from the body it inhabits:

> And then, examining attentively that which I was, I saw that I could conceive that I had no body, and that there was no world nor place where I might be; but yet that I could not for all that conceive that I was not. On the contrary, I saw from the very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it very evidently and certainly followed that I was. On the other hand, if I had only ceased from thinking, even if all the rest of what I had ever imagined had really existed, I should have no reason for thinking that I had existed. From that I knew that I was a substance [a thing] the whole essence or nature of which is to think and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this "me," that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is.[27]

CRITICAL THINKING

Descartes assumes that i[f] it is possible to conceive of one thing without the other, then those two things are not identical. [Is] this assumption correct?



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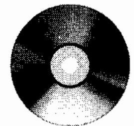
Descartes is pointing out here that we can conceive of ourselves as existing without a body. He then makes a crucial assumption: if we can conceive of one thing without the other, then those two things are different. Because we can conceive of the self as not having a body, he claims, the self is not a body—that is, it is not a physical thing. On the other hand, I cannot think of myself without thinking. So thinking is necessary for the self; it is part of the **essence** (the defining characteristic that makes something what it is) of my self. All humans, then, are selves that are immaterial, that are essentially conscious, and that can exist without the body, which is material and essentially unconscious. But what is the body? Descartes describes the body thus:

essence that which makes [an] entity what it is; that defini[ng] characteristic in whose abse[nce] a thing would not be itself

> By the body I understand all that which can be defined by a specific shape: something which can be confined in a certain place, and which can fill a given space in such a way that every other body will be excluded from it; which can be perceived either by touch, or by sight, or by hearing, or by taste, or by smell: which can be moved in many ways not, in truth, by itself, but by something different, by which it is touched.[28]



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The Traditional view of human nature, as Descartes explains it, says that a human is composed of two kinds of things: a material body and an immaterial mind, or "soul." Philosophers call this view *dualism* because it claims that humans are made up of dual (meaning "two") substances. To many people, traditional dualism seems obvious. Don't our bodies have physical characteristics (like color, size, and shape) that our minds do not have? When people's bodies weaken, can't their minds remain strong? And can't the mind deteriorate even as the body remains vigorous? Don't these differences imply that the mind and the body are distinct entities? Isn't the separation of the mind from the body important for religions that say that after the body dies the mind or soul can survive and live on in an afterlife?

Humans are the boundary line of spiritual and corpor[eal] nature, and intermediate b[e]tween the two, sharing in both corporeal and spiritu[al] perfections.

THOMAS AQUINAS

[27] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 101.
[28] René Descartes, *Meditations*, meditation ii, ibid., 151.

Nevertheless, this dualist view—that the mind and body are two entities each made of a different kind of stuff—raises a hard problem. How can an immaterial mind move a physical body, and how can a body that consists of heavy, dense, spatial matter affect an immaterial mind? If the mind is immaterial, it is not part of the physical world. How can something like the mind reach into the physical world and affect it? If it did so, then the mind would somehow have to introduce new energy and force into the physical world. But scientists tell us that this is impossible, that it would violate the principle of the conservation of matter and energy.

PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

Lana, Seeker of Truth

Sara of USC, Washoe and Lucy of Oklahoma, Nim of Columbia, Lana of Yerkes—all are names well-known to those who study human language. They're all chimpanzees.

Separately and together, these chimps have demonstrated the ability to converse with humans, to combine acquired words in order to describe new objects or situations, to distinguish difference and sameness, to understand "if-then" concepts, to describe their moods, to lie, to choose and use words in syntactical order, to express desires, to anticipate future events, to seek signed communications with others of their species, and, at least in one instance, to extract the truth from a lying human. This last remarkable occurrence is recorded by Duane Rumbaugh of the Yerkes Primate Center in Atlanta in *Language Learning by a Chimpanzee: The Lana Project*.

Human Tim, Rumbaugh recalls, had entered chimp Lana's room with a bowl of monkey chow, which Lana had requested be loaded into her food machine. But instead of honoring her request, Tim loaded the machine with cabbage, then told Lana that chow was in the machine. Rather than asking the machine for her chow, as was her custom, Lana asked Tim, "You put chow in machine?" Tim lied that he had.

LANA: Chow in machine?

TIM: [still lying] Yes.

LANA: No chow in machine [which was true].

TIM: What in machine [repeated once]?

LANA: Cabbage in machine [which was true].

TIM: Yes, cabbage in machine.

LANA: You move cabbage out of machine.

TIM: Yes [whereupon he removed the cabbage and put in the monkey chow].

LANA: Please machine give piece of chow [repeatedly until all was obtained].

In 1637 René Descartes wrote: "There are no men so dull and stupid that they cannot put words together in a manner to convey their thoughts. And this proves not merely that animals have less reason than man, but they have none at all, for we see that very little is needed to talk." Experiences with chimps like Lana and gorillas like Koko at Stanford, who has exhibited a learned vocabulary of 300 words and an IQ of around 85, would strongly call such an easy distinction between human and beast into question.

QUESTIONS

1. If chimps and apes have access to language, can they be expected to reason?

2. Primatologists currently suspect that there's no significant distinction between the ape's capacity for language and our own. Would this in any way affect our concept of human nature? Our responsibilities to animals?

3. Might Descartes counter that what matters is not so much whether chimps can use language, but whether they mean what they say, know what they mean, and have self-awareness—as indicated by language?

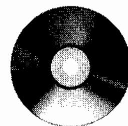
Descartes recognized the problems created by saying that we have an immaterial mind that somehow interacts with a material body. Nevertheless, he held that the mind and body obviously interact, so there must be some point of contact between the two. He suggested that perhaps the mind interacts with the body through the pineal gland, a tiny gland near the brain. Descartes apparently felt that this gland is so tiny and so sensitive that even the immaterial mind could move it. Yet Descartes's own contemporaries ridiculed the idea that the immaterial mind and the material body interact at the pineal gland. The philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) suggested that the mind and body don't really interact at all, but just seem to. Suppose, Leibniz said, that the mind and body run in parallel order, like two clocks that are synchronized so that they seem to be connected yet operate independently. Then, whenever something happens to the body, it also seems to affect the mind, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the two never really interact. Other philosophers said that this was as ridiculous as Descartes's pineal gland theory. For example, the philosopher Nicolas Malebranche (1683–1715) agreed that the immaterial mind could not interact with a material body. Still, he refused to believe that by some incredible coincidence the mind and body were perfectly synchronized. What happens instead, he said, is that God steps in to synchronize the body and the mind. When something affects the body, God obligingly comes forward to cause a corresponding feeling in the mind. When the mind commands the body to move, God again obligingly steps forward to move the body for the mind.

Yet don't the contorted explanations of Descartes, Leibniz, and Malebranche show that dualism has gone wrong somewhere? Wouldn't it make more sense to reject dualism? This was the approach the philosopher Thomas Hobbes took.

THE MATERIALIST VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

The problem with Descartes's dualism, Hobbes said, is that it says there are two things in human nature. Instead, let us say there is only one: the material body that we observe with our senses. Let us agree that the activities we attribute to the mind are really activities of the material body. Thomas Hobbes was a *materialist* who felt that we can explain human activities as working much like those of a machine:

> For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within; why may we not say, that all *automata* (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as does a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the *heart,* but a *spring;* and the *nerves,* but so many *strings;* and the *joints,* but so many *wheels,* giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer?[29]



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This kind of view — that processes like thought and life are really nothing more than physical and chemical processes — is often called **reductionism.** Reductionism is the idea that we can completely understand one kind of reality in terms of another kind. Reductionists take what seems to be one thing and argue

reductionism the idea that one kind of thing is, or can defined as, another kind of thing

[29]Thomas Hobbes, *Hobbes's Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909; original work published 1651), 23.

that it is really something else. Hobbes, in particular, claimed that although the mind seems to be an immaterial entity, it is really nothing more than a physical, material thing. He was, in short, a materialist.

What led Hobbes to embrace materialism and reject the traditional idea that the mind is an immaterial entity? In part, Hobbes was led to reject the immaterial mind because he could not see how an immaterial mind could affect a material body. But Hobbes was also motivated by the many advances that science was making at his time. Through careful observations and measurements of nature, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and others had made gigantic strides in understanding the universe. Their scientific advances seemed to be based on what they could observe with their senses and measure quantitatively. Hobbes decided that a scientific view of the universe required accepting as real only what we can observe and measure. Since we can observe and measure only material or physical bodies, Hobbes came to his famous conclusion: "The Universe, that is the whole mass of things that are, is corporeal, that is to say body; and has the dimensions of magnitude, namely length, breadth, and depth . . . and that which is not body is no part of the Universe." Since only material bodies exist, the mind must also be a material body.

CRITICAL THINKING

Suppose that by restricting ourselves to studying only physical entities we were able to make great scientific strides. Would this show that only physical entities exist? Would it show that only the study of physical entities is worthwhile?

One of the gross deficiencies of science is that it has not yet defined what sets man apart from other animals.

RENÉ DUBOS

Science has played an ever-increasing role in our lives since the fifteenth century. The success of the natural sciences has continued to encourage us to view human beings in the way that the natural sciences view the physical world. For example, one view of science claims that the methods and theories the natural sciences use to study physical phenomena can also study and explain everything about human beings. True, people are more complex than some other entities, but we can completely explain them in terms of observable physical and chemical phenomena. Like Hobbes, this view holds that science reaches no further than observable facts, and these observable facts can explain human nature, including the mind. We can reduce human nature to the observable world of matter and its physical, chemical, and biological processes. In particular, we can reduce consciousness, the most characteristic feature of the mind, to observable bodily facts.

If materialists' views are to be acceptable, then they must somehow reduce our supposedly unique human qualities, such as consciousness, to the material. One kind of contemporary materialist view is what we now call "the identity theory" of the mind. The identity theory claims that states of consciousness are identical with states of the brain, which is a physical or material organ. When we have a mental experience such as a thought, this experience is nothing more than the material brain working. The same is true of any other conscious experience, such as dreaming, hoping, and feeling. Philosophers who accept the identity theory don't think that their theory is just a matter of definitions. In other words, they do not hold that words for mental states *mean the same* as words for brain states. Instead, they say, science will someday *discover* which mental states are identical with which brain states. The identity of mental states and brain states is thus a "contingent" relationship. For example, we now know that water and H_2O are identical. But science had to discover this. In the same way, we will someday know what brain states are identical with the mental states of desiring, seeing, feeling pain, being happy, being sad, etc. But science must

discover this. We cannot know, just by thinking about the meanings of the words, what brain states are identical with "desiring," "seeing," "feeling pain," "being happy," and "being sad."

Yet won't the attempt to identify conscious experiences with brain states quickly run into problems? Consider, for example, that whereas brain states are publicly observable, our conscious experiences are not. If a surgeon exposes the brain, she can observe its brain states, such as the reaction of a ganglion; she could pinpoint the brain state's precise location, describe its color and shape, and truthfully say that anyone can literally *see* it. On the other hand, because only you can have your conscious experiences, no one else can literally see your experiences. Moreover, an experience such as thinking has no precise location, no color, and no shape. So doesn't it seem that a brain state and a conscious experience are two different things, with very different qualities? How can the strict materialist account for this fact? Does the distinct nature of consciousness suggest the presence of a nonmaterial reality? Is there something at the core of our mind that we cannot measure, pinpoint, or see?

A prime proponent of identity theory, the Australian philosopher J. J. C. Smart (1920–), thinks not. Smart contends that future scientific discovery will show that all conscious experiences are identical with processes taking place in the brain. He justifies his claim by arguing that a nonphysical property couldn't possibly develop during animal evolution:

> But what about consciousness? Can we interpret the having of an after-image or of a painful sensation as something material, namely, a brain state or brain process? We seem to be immediately aware of pains and after-images, and we seem to be immediately aware of them as something different from a neurophysiological state or process. For example, the after-image may be green speckled with red, whereas the neurophysiologist looking into our brains would be unlikely to see something green speckled with red. However, if we object to materialism in this way we are victims of a confusion which U. T. Place has called "the phenomenological fallacy." To say that an image or sense datum is green is not to say that the conscious experience of having the image or sense datum is green. It is to say that it is the sort of experience we have when in normal conditions we look at a green apple, for example. Apples and unripe bananas can be green, but not the experiences of seeing them. An image or a sense datum can be green in a derivative sense, but this need not cause any worry, because, on the view I am defending, images and sense data are not constituents of the world, though the processes of having an image or a sense datum are actual processes in the world. The experience of having a green sense datum is not itself green; it is a process occurring in grey matter. The world contains plumbers, but does not contain the average plumber: it also contains the having of a sense datum, but does not contain the sense datum. . . .
>
> It may be asked why I should demand of a tenable philosophy of mind that it should be compatible with materialism, in the sense in which I have defined it. One reason is as follows. How could a nonphysical property or entity suddenly arise in the course of animal evolution? A change in a gene is a change in a complex molecule which causes a change in the biochemistry of the cell. This may lead to changes in the shape or organization of the developing embryo. But what sort of chemical process could lead to the springing into existence of something nonphysical? No enzyme can catalyze the production of a spook! Perhaps it will be said that the nonphysical

> comes into existence as a by-product: that whenever there is a certain complex physical structure, then, by an irreducible extraphysical law, there is also a nonphysical entity. Such laws would be quite outside normal scientific conceptions and quite inexplicable: they would be, in Herbert Feigl's phrase, "nomological danglers." To say the very least, we can vastly simplify our cosmological outlook if we can defend a materialistic philosophy of mind.[30]

In essence, Smart is defending the position that states of consciousness are identical with states of the brain. Smart asserts that science will discover which particular brain states will turn out to be identical with a particular mental state like feeling a pain. As Smart puts it, the identity between mental states and brain states is "contingent" and not "necessary." If the identity were "necessary," we could deduce it from the meanings of the words. But since science will discover it, it is "contingent."

Do all philosophers agree with Smart's analysis? Consider what the American philosopher Norman Malcolm (1911–), for one, says:

> I wish to go into Smart's theory that there is a contingent identity between mental phenomena and brain phenomena. If such an identity exists, then brain phenomena must have all the properties that mental phenomena have. . . . I shall argue that this condition cannot be fulfilled.
>
> a. First, it is not meaningful to assign spatial locations to some kinds of mental phenomena, e.g., thoughts. Brain phenomena have spatial location. Thus, brain phenomena have a property that thoughts do not have. Therefore, thoughts are not identical with any brain phenomena.
>
> b. Second, any thought requires a background of circumstances ("surroundings"), e.g., practices, agreements, assumptions. If a brain event were identical with a thought, it would require the same. The circumstances necessary for a thought cannot be described in terms of the entities and laws of physics. According to Smart's scientific materialism, everything in the world is "explicable in terms of physics." But if the identity theory were true, not even those brain events which are identical with thoughts would be "explicable in terms of physics." Therefore, the identity theory and scientific materialism are incompatible. . . .[31]

However, objections like these have not led materialists to abandon materialism. Many remain firmly convinced that dualism has to be wrong. Objections to one form of materialism have therefore spurred greater efforts to find other, more plausible kinds of materialism.

THE BEHAVIORIST VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

One alternative kind of materialist view of human nature is behaviorism. **Behaviorism** began as a school of psychology that restricted the study of humans to what can be observed—namely, human behavior. Psychological behaviorists argued that they could not observe states of consciousness, so psychology should

behaviorism a school of psychology that restricts the study of human nature to what can be observed rather than to states of consciousness

[30] J. J. C. Smart, "Materialism," *Journal of Philosophy* (October 24, 1963). Reprinted by permission.
[31] Norman Malcolm, "Scientific Materialism and the Identity Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* (October 24, 1963): 662–663. Reprinted by permission.

not be concerned with them. Some philosophers have agreed with this view. They have argued that when explaining human nature, we should restrict ourselves to what is publicly observable: the outward physical behavior of human beings. How, then, do we explain interior mental processes that are not physically observable, such as thinking, feeling, knowing, loving, hating, desiring, and imagining?

Behaviorist philosophers have argued that we can easily explain mental activities in terms of people's behaviors. For example, the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle claimed that we can explain mental activities and mental states in terms of the externally observable behaviors with which they are associated.[32] Ryle would argue, for example, that "John knows what chairs are" should be taken as meaning something like "When a chair is present, and given certain other conditions, John will engage in certain specific behaviors with the chair." In other words, to say that a person knows what a chair is, is to say that the person does certain things when a chair is near (sits on it, for example). Similarly, to say that a person loves someone is to say that she is disposed to behave in certain ways toward that person. For the behaviorist, then, the mind is just bodily behavior and dispositions to bodily behavior.

Still, are all interior thoughts reducible to exterior observable behavior? Can't you keep a certain very personal idea in your mind without ever betraying it in your exterior behavior? The contemporary philosopher Hilary Putnam has argued that it is very easy to come up with examples that show behaviorism is wrong. Imagine a "superactor" who is giving a perfect imitation of the behavior of someone in pain. Behaviorism says such a "superactor" is feeling pain, even if in fact the superactor is conscious of no pain whatsoever. Or imagine a "superspartan" who can endure pain without giving any external sign in his behavior of the pain he feels. Behaviorism says such a "superspartan" feels no pain even if the superspartan is conscious of excruciating pain.

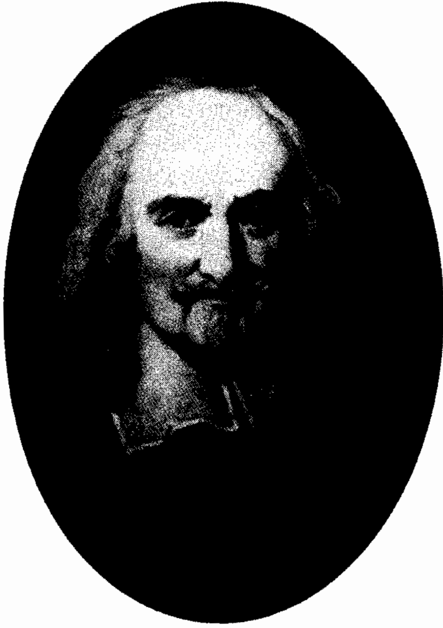
O man, strange composite
Heaven and earth!

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

In behaviorism, our consciousness seems to have disappeared. But there is something odd here. We seem to be directly aware of what is in our consciousness. We seem to know directly, in a way that others cannot observe, what we are thinking, feeling, sensing. I know if something feels good to me in a way that you cannot know. Yet behaviorism says that all feelings are external behaviors that others can observe. So others who observe our behavior know just like I do—perhaps before I do—when something feels good to me. This seems wrong. In fact, behaviorism inspired a famous joke. Two behaviorist philosophers have just finished making love. So the first behaviorist says to the second: "It was great for you. How was it for me?"

The problem, then, is that behaviorism restricts itself to outer behaviors. In doing this, it seems to leave out the interior conscious states that cause behavior.

[32] See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949).



Thomas Hobbes: "For seeing Life is but a motion of limbs, why may we not say that all automata (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as does a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the heart, but a spring, and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body?"
Bettmann/CORBIS

THE FUNCTIONALIST VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

A recent view, which does not try to reduce all mental activities to external behavior but which research in computers has inspired, is called *functionalism*. Functionalism claims that humans should be thought of as complicated computers. During the middle part of the twentieth century, scientists made great strides in devising powerful machines that could calculate and manipulate bits of information at an amazing rate. When we give a computer certain "inputs," such as a mathematical problem, the computer will calculate and provide an "output," such as the answer to the problem. Many philosophers began to think that perhaps the computer provided a model of how the mind works.

Proposed by several philosophers, such as D. M. Armstrong,[33] functionalism holds that we should explain mental activities and mental states in terms of inputs and outputs. The inputs of the human mind are the stimulations that affect the nervous system—what we see, hear, taste, and feel. The outputs are the behaviors that result: running, walking, sitting, standing. We can think of a mental concept such as *belief* as a connection the body makes between certain inputs and certain outputs. For example, suppose that when a certain man sees a dog (the input), he runs off (the output), and we explain this behavior by saying that he ran "because he believes that dogs bite people." Then we can say that the man's *belief that dogs bite people* is just something in the body's brain that links his sensory input (seeing a dog) to his behavior (running away). Functionalists claim that all conscious mental states and activities are shorthand terms for the

[33]See D. M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968).

complex connections that the body's brain makes between sense inputs and behavioral outputs.

Unlike earlier forms of behaviorism, functionalism allows that mental states can explain other mental states; thus, it gives a greater role to mental states than did earlier forms of behaviorism. For example, functionalists might agree that a person's intention (a mental state) can be explained in terms of the person's desires and beliefs (other mental states). For instance, when we see a man running to a bus stop after he sees a bus coming, we might say that he is doing so because he intends to catch the bus. We might then say that his intention to catch the bus is simply something that plays the role of linking his sensory stimulation (seeing the bus) to his desire to catch the bus and to his belief that by running he will catch the bus (mental states), and these to his behavior (running to the bus stop). Thus, some mental states (like intentions) are to be explained in terms of other mental states (desires and beliefs). Yet, according to the functionalist, all mental states ultimately are to be explained in terms of the roles they play (sometimes through other mental states) in linking our sensory stimulation to our external behavior.

But functionalism, too, seems to leave something out. Opponents argue that functionalism leaves out the inner conscious states we are directly aware of. They argue as follows: imagine two people who experience colors differently. When one sees a red object, he has the kind of visual experience that the other person has when the other person sees a green object. The color red has the appearance to him that green has to the other person. And the color green has the appearance to him that red has to the other person. Otherwise, the two people are exactly the same. In fact, they don't even know that colors appear differently to them. How could they, since each can't get into the other's mind to see how colors appear? Now, suppose we ask them to look at some colored objects (the "input") and sort them into different piles (the "output"). Each person will sort colors exactly like the other: green objects will go into one pile, red ones into another. Now, functionalism says that if two people have exactly the same inputs and give exactly the same outputs, those two people have exactly the same inner mental state. So functionalism says that the inner conscious states of the two people must be exactly the same. But clearly this is wrong. Inside, what one person consciously experiences is different from what the other person consciously experiences. So functionalism is mistaken. The problem is that functionalism wants to reduce mental states to inputs and outputs. But this seems to leave out what is most characteristic of our minds: our inner consciousness.

However, other philosophers still remain loyal to materialism. Some have adopted a view called "eliminative materialism." They grant that one of the biggest objections to materialism is the existence of consciousness. Somewhat strangely, they have concluded that we must therefore eliminate our belief in the existence of consciousness. People *think* they feel pains, desires, emotions, beliefs, longings, etc. But this belief is deceptive. It is based on "folk psychology." It is like people's earlier belief that the sun rises and goes around the earth. The advances of science showed that in fact what seemed to be there—the rising and setting sun—was merely an appearance. In reality, the sun does not rise and set on the earth; instead, the earth spins on its axis and spins around the sun. In

the same way, the advances of science will show us that we do not have consciousness. We use the word because we don't know any better. But eventually science will show us that we do not feel, believe, desire. We have no consciousness at all.

Eliminative materialism seems a bit extreme. It denies what is there for all to experience. Moreover, it seems to misinterpret how science works. Science does not work by saying that people don't have the experiences they have. Instead, science works by giving new explanations for what people experience. For example, science did not show that we do not see the sun rising and setting. Instead, it explained why we see the sun rising and setting. Science offered a new explanation of our experience; it did not eliminate the experience. In the same way, scientific advances may someday give us new explanations of consciousness—perhaps materialistic explanations. But such new explanations will not eliminate the consciousness they explain.

THE COMPUTER VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

In spite of the difficulties of functionalism, it led some philosophers to the view that the human brain is a kind of computer that processes inputs (our sense observations) and generates outputs (our behaviors). Some functionalists, in fact, believe that very soon computers will be able to imitate the input–output processing of the human brain. Some have argued that when computers can process inputs and outputs like the human brain does, they will have minds and be able to think. For example, Alan Turing suggested what we now call the "Turing Test."[34] Imagine that you are in a room where there are two computer keyboards and two printers. One keyboard and a printer are connected to a computer somewhere outside the room. The other keyboard and printer are connected to a human being who is also somewhere outside the room. You do not know which keyboard and printer are connected to the computer and which to the human being. You can type questions on the keyboards, which the computer or human on the other end will respond to by printing out the answer on the printer. Your job is to figure out which answers are coming from the computer and which are coming from the human being. According to Turing, when a computer is so powerful that we cannot tell the difference between its answers and the answers of a human being, that computer has a mind. That is, if the outputs a computer generates in response to the inputs it receives are the same as the outputs a human mind would generate in response to the same inputs, the computer is the equivalent of the human mind.

Many computer experts, including Turing himself, predict that it is only a matter of time before computers will match the abilities of the human mind and pass the Turing Test. Then we can say that the computers think and have minds. We will then know that materialism is right. For if a machine, which is completely material, can have a mind, then the mind is not something immaterial. It is a chunk of physical machinery.

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[34]A. M. Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," *Mind* (1950), vol. LIX, no. 236.

Alan Turing. According to Turing, if we cannot distinguish between the answers a computer gives to questions and the answers a human being gives, then the computer has a mind.

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Several philosophers hotly contest this computer theory of the human mind. One of the most vociferous opponents of the theory is the American philosopher John Searle. Searle has pointed out that a computer is nothing more than a machine that follows the instructions in its program. But the instructions that a computer follows can also be followed by a human being. So if following a program can produce mental states in a machine, then when a human being follows the same software program, the same mental states should be produced in the human being. However, says Searle, when a person follows a program that is supposed to let a computer have certain mental states, the person will not have those states.

Searle gives a simple example of what he means. Suppose a computer had a program that let it pass the Turing Test in Chinese. Then, supposedly, the computer could think in Chinese. Now suppose that a human being, such as yourself, followed the same program. Then you should be able to think in Chinese. But, says Searle, following a program will not put Chinese thoughts into your head:

> Suppose that we write a computer program to simulate the understanding of Chinese so that, for example, if the computer is asked questions in Chinese the program enables it to give answers in Chinese; if asked to summarize stories in Chinese it can give such summaries; if asked questions about the stories it has been given it will answer such questions.
>
> Now suppose that I, who understand no Chinese at all and can't even distinguish Chinese symbols from some other kinds of symbols, am locked in a room with a number of cardboard boxes full of Chinese symbols. Suppose that I am given a book of

> rules in English that instruct me how to match these Chinese symbols with each other. The rules say such things as that the "squiggle-squiggle" sign is to be followed by the "squoggle-squoggle" sign. Suppose that people outside the room pass in more Chinese symbols and that following the instructions in the book I pass Chinese symbols back to them. Suppose that unknown to me the people who pass me the symbols call them "questions" and the book of instructions that I work from they call "the program." The symbols I give back to them they call "answers to the questions" and me they call "the computer." Suppose that after a while the programmers get so good at writing the programs and I get so good at manipulating the symbols that my answers are indistinguishable from those of native Chinese speakers. I can pass the Turing test for understanding Chinese. But all the same I still don't understand a word of Chinese. And neither does any other digital computer because all the computer has is what I have: a formal program that attaches no meaning, interpretation, or content to any of the symbols.[35]

Searle claims that this argument shows there is something that human minds have that a computer following a program does not have. What does the computer lack? Consciousness. Consciousness, argues Searle, is essential to the human mind, and a computer following a program does not have consciousness.

Nevertheless, Searle is not a dualist. Searle claims that humans are purely physical creatures in whom physical, chemical, and biological processes take place. These processes, he claims, cause or produce all our mental states or activities. These mental states or activities are not reducible to physical things, but a physical thing produces them—namely, our brain. Someday, Searle argues, science will succeed in explaining how the brain produces consciousness. However, consciousness is a unique kind of human quality, one that is not reducible to something else. Someday we will be able to explain consciousness, but we will not do this by reducing it to some other kind of familiar physical quality.

The failures of materialist views of human nature have prompted some philosophers to return to dualism. For example, the American philosopher David J. Chalmers is a kind of dualist. In his 1996 book *The Conscious Mind*, he writes the following:

> [M]aterialism is false: there are features of the world over and above the physical features. . . . The character of our world is not exhausted by the character supplied by the physical facts; there is an extra character due to the presence of consciousness. This failure of materialism leads to a kind of dualism. . . . The arguments do not lead us to a dualism such as that of Descartes, with a separate realm of mental substance that exerts its own influence on physical processes. . . . The dualism implied here is instead a kind of property dualism: conscious experience involves properties of an individual that are not entailed by the physical properties of that individual, although they may depend lawfully on those properties.[36]

Chalmers argues that there could be a world that is physically identical to ours except that it has no conscious beings in it. Such a world could contain "zombies" that look and act exactly like human beings except that these zom-

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[35]John Searle, "The Myth of the Computer," *The New York Review of Books*, 1982.
[36]David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 123, 124, 125.

bies would not be conscious. Chalmers concludes that consciousness is not a physical feature of the world. Instead, consciousness is a nonmaterial property of the world.

In a way, we have come full circle. Most philosophers are not willing to return to Descartes's idea that the mind is a special kind of thing that is different from the physical body. Yet the various materialist views of human nature all seem to leave out what is so familiar to all of us: our consciousness. This has now led philosophers like Chalmers to believe that mental states are special kinds of features that are different from physical features.

So is the mind reducible to any other kind of physical thing? Clearly, this question has tremendous implications for us. If the mind is a physical thing, or a physical feature of the world, then it is not immaterial. We are not unique. There is no spiritual realm. We do not have souls. We die with our bodies. Are these consequences acceptable?

Yet if we humans are both immaterial minds and material bodies, then how do the two relate? How can my ineffable, intangible, unobservable consciousness affect my heavy, solid, physical body?

QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of "reductionism" that you think are true? What are some examples that you think are mistaken? What is the difference between them?

2. Behaviorists claim that the human can be measured experimentally. Are there any human characteristics that contradict this claim? What human qualities cannot be measured?

3. Behaviorists also argue that techniques and engineering practices can be used to shape behavior so that people will function harmoniously for everyone's benefit. What questions would you raise about such a proposal?

4. How would you determine whether a robot had a conscious mind? What tests would you use?

5. Read over Darwin's theory again. Suppose that consciousness is real. From an evolutionary viewpoint, do you think consciousness would give humans an advantage in the struggle for existence? Suppose that humans could think and act, like sleepwalkers do, but they were not aware of their thinking and acting. Would this lack of consciousness put them at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence? What good is consciousness? What survival benefits does it have?

6. Do you think it is possible for you to continue to exist after your body dies? Why or why not?