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The Problem of Our Biological Heritage

In order to understand the implications of reality for us individually, that is as individual persons, we need to understand our nature, "where we come from" and the factors that condition our behavior and expectations.

OUR BIOLOGICAL HERITAGE

All biologically evolved life, that is all presently existing life, is various forms of competitors, combatants, fighters in a life and death, "no holds barred" struggle for survival. The battlefield is deep with the remains of the vanquished and the remorseless contest continues this very day and utterly without mercy.

This is not because of some heavenly, nor natural, mandate nor are the contestants, whether the vanquished or the victors, mean, evil or otherwise to be condemned for their behavior. They are merely natural. They are merely behaving naturally.

Change pervades nature; everything that exists constantly changes, and change constantly produces new variations, new types of natural beings with modified characteristics. In most cases the changes prove not to be advantageous and the individual having them fails to survive. But, sometimes a change appears that is a significant enough advantage that the individuals having that change are able to out-compete, to out-survive their fellows.

All life forms depend on a supply of certain sustaining conditions and materials from their environment: appropriate temperature, light, air, water, food or whatever, specific to the life form. If the supply of those necessities is abundant the life form increases in size or number until the supply becomes no longer sufficient to maintain that increased size or number. When the supply is not sufficient then those individuals most adept at securing enough

to meet their needs survive. The others tend to fail, to be eliminated, to die out.

Life forms tend to reproduce their characteristics in their offspring. The types that better survive the competition for individual survival because of their having more advantageous characteristics are more likely to populate the next generation than the types that cannot as successfully compete, that cannot obtain enough to maintain their own life let alone reproduce it. The next generation will, then, tend to have a greater proportion of individuals having those advantageous characteristics. Inevitably the process selects and improves the characteristics of those life forms that are most successful at acquiring from the environment that which they need and at reproducing in their offspring those same improved characteristics.

And we humans stand at the end of a very long chain of this process. We are refined and re-refined champion pursuers of our own self interest as we perceive it – personal welfare and survival. We reproduce those same characteristics in our offspring.

The more advanced life forms, the higher animals, can learn from experience to some extent, but it apparently requires a mental level only reached by we humans (at least in our planet's environment) to reason abstractly and to apply that process to learning. Thus we humans have learned to benefit from the longer term effects of adhering to short term constraints. This has led to a decreased tendency to murder, steal, and so forth, acts which might produce immediate instantaneous increase in short term personal survival and material welfare but which bode poorly for the long term because of the danger, and even likelihood, of being victim rather than perpetrator.

There are two different potential modes of application by humans of their relatively new characteristic of intelligence. These are illustrated in the table below.

Uses of Rising Intelligence and Knowledge

<u>Natural</u>	<u>Rational</u>
Increased competition for limited resources.	Cooperation increasing resources for everyone.
Less security due to preying on each other.	More security because of helping each other.
Exploitations: slavery, autocracy, oligarchy.	Freedom and control over one's own life.
Relatively slow progress in environmental control and the quality of life.	Enhanced development of environmental control and the quality of life.
Enslavement because of the stressed existence.	Freedom to be and to achieve one's potential.

Table 1

Because of our natural heritage we tend to take the left path above, that of greater competition. It is natural and instinctive to us. That path, largely with us to this day, can produce a high quality of life and survival for only a small group of the most successful competitors. It produces misery for the majority of society and it wastes resources and inhibits overall progress.

Yet, this is man, behaving according to his nature, his natural heritage. Why should we expect otherwise ?

Actually, many men throughout the ages of human existence have expected otherwise. Human history is replete with attempts to alter human nature, or at least to alter human behavior in spite of human nature.

Government is the greatest single instance. Long before the evolution of human intelligence our biological forebears learned the benefit of pack, herd, pride, tribal or whatever social organization to provide protection from predators and facilitate the gathering or

hunting of food. Any organization like those involves leaders and rules. In sophisticated societies those are called government.

While government still functions primarily in terms of improving the supply of the material necessities and protection of the social organization and its members, it also pursues, and achieves to some extent, the altering of the natural behavior of the members of society. Excessive intra-societal competition is restrained by law and developed custom, both backed up by punishment for violations.

Government does not move man from the competitive branch of progress to the cooperative one (of the above Table 1), nor does it seek to. In practice, the leaders in any society are the most successful competitors. They enjoy the high quality of life that their competitive success produces. They certainly do not want to change those "rules of the game". The modification of human behavior that government imposes is only to the extent and for the purpose of maintaining the government's structure and the position and quality of life of the leaders. That, quite naturally, is the leaders' primary interest.

Government does not really address man's nature, only his practical behavior. Religion, on the other hand, attempts to modify not only the behavior of man but also the nature of man. Religion attempts to overcome our inherited nature and overlay it with a "good" nature (to varying degrees in various religions). The tools that religion uses are generally the same as those of government: laws, education and punishment. In the case of religion the punishment (an unfavorable next life) is less tangible and less immediate than that of a government (unpleasant circumstances now, in this life). On the other hand, in religion the new feature of reward for good behavior (a favorable next life -- also not tangible or immediate) is used as an additional incentive.

For at least 6,000 years of human history the methods of government and of religion have been tried. One can observe that human behavior has probably improved a little as a result, but not

much. Certainly we humans still remain trapped in the self-defeating and society-retarding competition branch of the above table.

In addition to government and religion, a third approach has been attempted to some extent to resolve this problem of man. That third approach is socialism and its idealization, communism. This approach to modifying man's behavior from the natural competitive to the advantageous cooperative has had less trial time than the attempts of government and religion.

Quite small communities: the earliest Christians, various communities of monks, and a few experimental utopian societies and communes have attempted socialist or communist community life. In the sense being discussed here this kind of community life is one of cooperation and sharing without competition among the members of the community. In its ideal form each member contributes according to his ability and receives according to his needs (communism). In the more limited form each member contributes according to his abilities but is rewarded according to the quality and quantity of his contribution, although the society guarantees some minimum "floor" of quality of life under all of its members regardless of their condition or contribution (socialism).

Those various attempts failed in general because, even with a membership selected voluntarily for participation, human nature was too incompatible with the self-less sharing and cooperation required. Where the communities tended to survive was only in the cases of special controlled religious environments with a substantial element of coercion, that is, strong rule.

Another reason for the lack of success of socialist or communist experiments has been their inherent vulnerability to their competitive, survival-of-the-fittest, neighbors and environment. The most recent attempt to produce a successful socialist society was based on a new approach to dealing with that problem. The approach,

termed Leninism, introduced the concept of "the dictatorship of the proletariat".

The concept of Leninism was that a leadership, itself already philosophically and practically dedicated to socialism and (ultimately) communism, should autocratically impose a socialist society on man. Then, by educating and modifying the citizenry via its autocratic control, it was expected that gradually a socialist / communist society could be evolved. The concept, perhaps "good on paper", fails because of the difficulty of truly modifying human nature and behavior and because the autocratic leadership (also hobbled by being of human nature) becomes simply another exploiting group of "winners" in the age old competition. They give in to the temptation to operate the society for their own benefit.

The social ideal of communism in its ultimate form: from each member of society according to his ability and to each according to his needs, remains a valid ultimate objective. It is even a reasonable test of "how civilized" a society is. The concept is practiced in the nuclear family and has been so practiced for millennia. The concept of that family environment and social organization has never been criticized. Rather, even though the family is a case of essentially pure communism, it is held up and praised as the foundation of society.

Its practice in all of society, as a single big human and humane family, would be communist society.

MORE HUMAN NATURE -- THE PROBLEM OF OUR LAZINESS

By "laziness" is meant the natural inclination of we humans to do as little as possible to get or achieve what we want. We only put out significant effort if we believe that the benefits that we will receive will be in proportion to that effort or even better. If we are guaranteed minimum or adequate support and have little expectation of additional benefit resulting from any additional effort on our part then we are inclined to do as little as possible, just enough to "get by".

This, also, most likely is a natural characteristic evolved in us and in all life. The life competition for survival is always a struggle in the context of insufficient resources to meet the needs of all so that only the better competitors have their needs met sufficiently to enable them to populate the next generation. It takes energy to struggle, to compete; therefore energy is a valuable resource to be husbanded and preserved. The life form that can meet its needs with less energy expenditure is more likely to succeed. Energy conservation, "laziness", is bred in us.

That bodes ill for the success of communism ("from each according to his work -- to each according to his need"). It is a problem for socialism where, although reward is proportional to work, a guaranteed "floor" is provided for everyone. That is why communism can only be achieved when the problem of obtaining material abundance is first solved. With a society of material abundance there can be a reasonable level of laziness and full satisfaction of needs simultaneously.