

Unpopular Essays

by ASSEY EKPO BASSEY



TODAY, this column is given to a guest writer. Again, we invite you to take part in the quest for correct answers by contributing to this column. We shall also print logical exceptions to our views.

"THOSE at the upper echelon of society see only the inverted image of reality, and hence the process of their reflection is necessarily inverted. Those who are paid to reflect — the so-called intellectuals — are so alienated from nature and society that in their understandable confusion, they frequently take flight into irrationality and mysticism"

We reject any idea of the pre-social man, since in his pre-social existence, man cannot be regarded as man. We conceive man as a part of nature which has established a specific identity for himself as a social animal.

duces even when he is not in need. He produces, so to say, universally.

Furthermore whereas animals only try to adapt themselves to their surroundings and alter these surroundings only unconsciously, man consciously alters his surroundings and forces these surroundings to serve him.

The facts that man is a social animal and a species being do not answer the question of human nature. These facts only lay the basis for the answer. What is human nature?

Human nature is

IT is a paradox that one of the fundamental problems of human existence—the question of the nature of man—is a problem towards which we react most unconsciously in our practical activities.

In our daily activities, we seldom have the inclination or the opportunity to reflect on such questions as the essence of man, the real relationship between man and the rest of society, what determines human activities and what human activities determine.

Most of the members of society are so crushed by the problems of livelihood that there is just no time and no strength left for them to reflect. Those at the upper echelon of society see only the inverted image of reality, and hence the process of their reflections is necessarily inverted.

Those who are paid to reflect — the so-called intellectuals — are so alienated from nature and society that in their understandable confusion, they frequently take flight into irrationality and mysticism. Even when these alienated beings stumble on reality, they do not recognise it to be so.

This essay does not aim at offering finished solutions to questions of the essence of man — for such finished solutions do not exist among those of us humble enough to be limited to our material experience. Rather, the essay intends to pose the question of the essence and nature of man from certain premises and, at best, indicate certain directions towards solutions. These premises amount

WHAT IS HUMAN NATURE?

to demands on methodology.

First, we demand that all explanations of what happens in the material world must be sought in the material world itself, where such explanations can be subjected to investigation. We regard as fraudulent, and therefore inadmissible, all appeals to the supernatural as a witness. It is necessary to observe this rule because as soon as we allow an appeal to the supernatural, all further discussions are closed, since the supernatural is supposed to be the proof and justification of everything, including that of its own existence.

Secondly, we demand that we approach the question of the essence of man — historically — which is just a demand for the scientific method. We make this second demand since man, the object of our investigation, would vanish if we tear him away from history.

Thirdly, the investigator himself should always be conscious of the fact that he is part and parcel of his investigation. In a chemical laboratory, an investigator can detach himself from, and be external to, the chemical reactions; but a social investigator is partly investigating himself, whether he is conscious of this or not.

Space limitation will not allow us to go in detail into this third

demand — which is nevertheless a self-evident truth. But we may remark that this demand is tied up with the question of PARTISANSHIP IN PHILOSOPHY, which we may take up in subsequent articles. However, we demand that we remain conscious of the crucial fact that the investigator is also part of the object of his investigation.

Finally, let us remind ourselves that there is a mighty difference between "unknown" and "unknowable". If we declare that the solution to a problem is unknown, we are merely leaving future investigations to find out this solution. But if we declare the solution to be unknowable, then we are foreclosing further investigations, thereby pronouncing the limit of knowledge.

We demand that we adhere to the only scientific principle that nothing is unknowable. The world of reality consists of only the known and the yet-to-be known, called the unknown.

Having made these demands, we can now pose the question: What is Man? What are the special characteristics of man? How do we differentiate man from the rest of nature? Is there anything as the human nature? If so, is this human nature a static attribute or a dynamic one? If it is dynamic, what is the cause of this motion and what

are its laws? Finally, is there an ultimate destiny for this motion?

As indicated earlier, there are no finished solutions to social questions. We can only

In addition to being a social animal, man is also a species being. By this we simply mean that man is a member of the human race and that this human race is distinct from the rest

simply the totality of the relationships between man and nature and between man and his society. In his daily activities, man interacts with nature and his society. He alters nature through his productive labour and also alters the society through his socio-economic, political and cultural activities.

By altering nature and society, man also alters his relations with nature and society. Since human nature is the totality of these relationships, the alteration of these relationships means the alteration of human nature. Man therefore alters his own nature by his activities.

We can conclude from the above that human nature is not static but dynamic. The laws of motion form this dynamic attribute of man and his society. Space limitation will not allow us to go into the enunciation of these laws. We shall however state that these laws are objective; that is, they operate regardless of our individual wishes or prejudices.

Finally, we dismiss as mystical, any speculation about the "ultimate" nature of man, for this is like speculating about the end of history. All we can say is that the movement of human nature is towards the realisation of human freedom — freedom to fully develop his powers as a social animal and a species being through fettered productive activities.

by
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(Guest Writer)

give answers which correspond to the present state of our knowledge of the phenomenon in question, while leaving future investigations, social practice and reflection to deve-

of the animal kingdom by its essential characteristics.

This distinction consists of the fact that man is the only animal who engages in purposive production.

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lop and deepen these answers.

Man is a specific part of nature, by this we mean that although man is a product of nature, he occupies the specific position as the only part of nature which constantly alters nature. Furthermore, man is the only social animal. By this we mean that not only is man the only animal who lives in society, but he is also the only animal who can fully develop his potentialities only in society.

It may be argued that animals also produce. To this argument, we answer that the crucial word in our definition is purposive. Animals only produce instinctively and accidentally; but man produces with clearly defined intentions.

Man has the ability to set up a project in his mind before he constructs it in practice. Animals only produce for the satisfaction of immediate needs, but man pro-