3. The Nature of Human Nature: Philosophical Perspectives on Human Development

Copyright © James S. Fleming, PhD

————————

No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience.
–John Locke[1]

Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains.
–Jean-Jacques Rousseau[2]

[Without a strong central authority there would be] No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

--Thomas Hobbes[3]

————————

Human Nature, Philosophy, and Psychology

What could possibly be meant by the term "human nature," and why is it important for psychology? This might seem a naïve question, because, after all, isn't psychology the study of behavior and mental processes? And if so, isn't that all about human nature, or even about what it means to be human? But ideas about human nature are as much in the realm of philosophy as in psychology, and probably, in fact, more a concern of the former than the latter.

A couple of centuries ago the two disciplines—philosophy and psychology—were not separated at all; it was not until the nineteen hundreds that the two began to be considered separate areas of inquiry. But if one looks closely at the different perspectives we find in psychology—psychoanalysis, behaviorism, cognitive psychology, humanistic psychology, and evolutionary psychology, for example— one begins to find underlying assumptions concerning human nature which are often unstated. These can be subtle and may be implicit rather than explicitly stated. So it can be enlightening to see which ideas or personal biases about the nature of human beings underlie each of the major perspectives. Are people basically good and moral,

Three Notable Philosophers on Human Nature

Name:	***Thomas Hobbes*** (English, 1588-1679)
Key work:	*Leviathan*
Key ideas:	A ***social contract*** must be established between people and their government in order to have an organized, civil society.
Philosophy of human nature:	Materialistic and deterministic; people are naturally selfish and destructive and must be kept in check by a strong central government ("leviathan," or great beast); without such controls life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."
Philosophy of Education:	Moral education is essential in order to maintain social order.
Who was influenced by?	Freud (power of the id and the unconscious mind) and the psychoanalysts.
Of note:	Hobbes was a noted historian who translated Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War.*
Name:	***John Locke*** (English, 1632-1734; Enlightenment Era)
Key works:	*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding; Some Thoughts Concerning Education*
Key ideas:	Locke was an empiricist who believed that the mind at birth is a *tablula rasa* (blank slate). Complex ideas

	(thoughts) are built upon simpler ones (associationism).
Philosophy of human nature:	People can be either good or evil, though Locke tended to think the best of them; it is experience that makes them so.
Philosophy of Education:	Children must be educated in schools, in the skills they need to succeed in society, including moral education (education is a civilizing force in a society). Children learn best by being rewarded rather than punished.
Who was influenced by?	B. F. Skinner and the learning theorists; framers of the U. S. Constitution; libertarians; many modern educators
Of note:	Locke was an early "self" psychologist who recognized that people have consciousness and are self-aware and self-reflective.
*Name***:**	***Jean-Jacques Rousseau*** (French, 1712-1778; Enlightenment Era)
Key works:	*The Social Contract; Emile*
Key ideas:	Society has a corrupting influence on the individual. "Natural" cultures are superior to the complexities of highly civilized ones. Rousseau was also the first developmental stage theorist.
Philosophy of human nature:	People are basically good; evil arises because society corrupts us. .
Philosophy of Education:	Children are natural learners; adult educators should guide but not control their learning.

Who was influenced by?	Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, and other cognitive developmentalists.
Of note:	Although Rousseau wrote extensively about child rearing he was himself a poor parent who neglected his many illegitimate children.

for example, or are they selfish and evil? Does what motivates one person differ from another—the drive to achieve, for instance, might be the prime motive for one person whereas perhaps the more simple seeking of the "good life" of pleasure and comfort might drive another. Or is there a single "master motive" which underlies all of or strivings which we can call "human nature"?

This section provides a brief introduction to some of the areas of philosophy needed to delve more deeply into such philosophical assumptions. It is an interesting exercise to then examine which of these ideas are most appealing to each reader from his or her own perspective. And as will be seen, the ideas presented in this chapter regarding human nature will resurface again and again throughout this book.

Three Areas of Philosophy which Bear on Psychological Perspectives

Some of the general areas of philosophy that are of most concern to the present course of study are:

- ***Epistemology*** (or theory of knowledge): How do we know what we know? How is knowledge acquired and how is this knowledge verified through experience – or is there some sort of inborn or innate knowledge?

- ***Metaphysics:*** Metaphysics concerns the basic nature of reality, including what is meant by "being." Metaphysics means, literally, "after physics," or things not explained by the study of physical reality. This is a difficult concept to define! Though not always

made explicit, metaphysical ideas "creep into" some of the perspectives considered here. Certain metaphysical ideas appear through this book, such as are encountered when considering "mind-body" distinctions.

- **Ethics** (or moral philosophy): Plato asked "What is the good life?" or in other words, how should one live? This has been a concern of philosophers ever since. What is the nature of good, of evil? These are deep questions that go beyond psychology and developmental science and this book does not attempt to answer them! It does, however, consider children's development of moral understanding; hence it is necessary to consider how different individuals and societies conceptualize morality.

Some Basic Ideas from the History of Philosophy

Epistemology. Philosophers hold different views about sources of human knowledge. Plato and Aristotle differed: Plato believed that knowledge could be derived from reasoning. The term *rationalism* refers to this basic concept. Aristotle, on the other hand, was an *empiricist*: He believed that nothing could be known except through direct sensory experience. Later philosophers would continue to disagree. René Descartes, for example, agreed with Plato, the British empiricists David Hume and John Locke with Aristotle.

The idea that some knowledge is innate or inborn is called *nativism*. This concept is important in the history of psychology. Some psychologists (e.g., Hermann von Helmholtz working in the nineteenth century) believed that perceptual abilities were inborn. Nativism also played a role in the perceptual psychology of the Gestaltists, who argued that not all behaviors are learned; rather, some appear to be "natural" or innate. Refer to Table 3.1 for a summary of these positions on epistemology.

Metaphysics and the Mind-Body Problem. Is the mind essentially different from the physical body? In his autobiography Bertrand Russell (1967) stated that he heard this clichéd refrain over and over from his family (until he became quite bored with it): "Mind? No matter. Matter? Never mind!" This idea, that mind and body are separate kinds of entities, each with its own laws, is called *dualism*.

Table 3.1
Epistemology or Theory of Knowledge: How do we "Know what we [think we] Know"

Concept	Explanation	Typical Advocates
Rationalism	Knowledge can be obtained through reason (but not necessarily by just anyone!) In other words, knowledge exists independently and prior to humankind. *Example (Plato):* We know that the Pythagorean theorem in geometry would be true even if no people existed to understand it. Also esthetics, such as truth and beauty, are ideas that exist independently of humanity.	Plato, René Descartes, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, Kant
Empiricism	Knowledge can only be obtained through direct sensory experience. Or, nothing can be known without a knower to discover it. *Example:* We know this book exists because we can feel its hardness and see its shape. (But would this be true of an idea?)	Aristotle, John Locke, John Stuart Mill
Nativism	1. Certain *ideas* are inborn (hence knowledge is as well); a form of rationalism. 2. Psychological nativism: Certain patterns are innate; or "hardwired" in the brain. *Example 1:* This cow exists because it conforms to the ideal form of a bovine. (But would this be true of a book?) *Example 2:* This horizon exists in our minds because evolution provides us with an inborn "horizontality pattern" to recognize it as such. (But again, would this be true of a book?)	1. Plato 2. Steven Pinker, Noam Chomsky
Postmodernism	Knowledge is constructed by social convention; absolute knowledge does not exist. *Example:* We only agree that this is a book because "book" is a traditional Western construct. It has no reality apart from our social consensus of what a book is. (But would this be true of a tree?)	Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, certain feminist scholars

Note: From these examples it can be seen that the knowledge of the existence of an idea differs from the knowledge of the existence of a "natural" object like a cow or tree; but that the latter also differs from the knowledge of a manufactured item, such as a book or automobile. The reasonableness of the concept (rationalism, empiricism, etc.), might thus depend on the object under consideration.

By contrast, *monism* is the idea that there is only one basic substance or reality. *Materialism* is the idea that all substance is

material or physical; hence materialists are necessarily monists, but the reverse is not necessarily true; Bishop Berkeley believed that all reality consists of ideas – a philosophy known as *idealism*. Democritus was a very early materialist who first proposed that matter was made of atoms, and that nothing else exists apart from these basic building blocks.

Thomas Hobbes, a materialist, believed that the mind was merely an *epiphenomenon*, or something that arose as a kind of byproduct of the underlying physical reality. Baruch Spinoza's *dual-aspect theory* was not the same as dualism; Spinoza believed that both mind and body were, as the term implies, two aspects of the same underlying reality, which was divine in origin.

Parallelism refers to the belief that the mind and body are separate (dual) systems, but that they do not interact. In contrast, Descartes was not just a dualist, but also an *interactionist* who agreed that mind and body were separate but interacting entities. Descartes believed that the pineal gland was the organ at which the two forces met, so to speak, to interact (perhaps because there was no other known function at the time for this gland).

Today many *evolutionary psychologists, behavior geneticists,* and *cognitive neuroscientists*, tend to be materialistic monists. A mind, a self – or a soul, for that matter – that is something in addition to or beyond the physical brain itself, they consider a "ghost in the machine" (Pinker, 2002). This doesn't invalidate the concept of a "mind" or of a "self," so long as such terms do not imply any surplus meaning. If the mind is indeed be an epiphenomenon then it is a very important one, designed by nature through the process of evolution to ensure survival of the individual and of the species.

Metaphysics and the Question of Free Will versus Determinism. By *determinism* is usually meant the notion that all events are physical in nature and have physical causes that are law-like. Deterministic principles are thought to apply equally to the dynamics of a physical system or to human behavior. Alternatively, some philosophers believed instead that all events are divinely determined, but for present purposes the former conceptualization of determinism is assumed.

Free will is the common sense idea that people can freely make choices. This idea is not only interesting to philosophers, but also to theologians, many of whom assume that people are free to choose a life of good versus evil. Many people see free will and determinism are opposing ideas, but this depends in large part on one's definition of the two terms. For example, Rudolf Carnap stated that "When a person makes a choice, his choice is only one of the world's causal chains. If no compulsion is involved, which means that the choice is based on his own preference, arising out of his own character, there is no reason for not calling it a free choice. It is true that his character caused him to choose as he did, and, this in turn, is conditioned by previous causes. But there is no reason for saying that his character *compelled* him to choose as he did because the word "compel" is defined in terms of outside causal factors" (1966, p. 221, emphasis in original). In other words, a person is compelled if, say, someone holds a gun to her head and orders her to commit an act, but most people's actions are not compelled in such a way. This perspective is known as **compatibilism**.

Some philosophers and psychologists espouse a particularly **mechanistic determinism** in which the behavior of people (and animals) is seen to operate in not only a deterministic mode, but moreover in a machine-like fashion, and in accordance with laws of physics. Carnap was definitely not of this view, but in psychology such a viewpoint was taken by some classic behaviorists, particularly B. F. Skinner, who saw the external environment as the cause of all behavior. In contrast to Skinner, the social-cognitive learning theorist Albert Bandura believes that human behavior can only be fully understood when people are viewed as active agents in their own lives.

The metaphysical positions discussed here are summarized in Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

Ethics: Some Ideas concerning Morality and "The Good Life." A comprehensive survey of philosophical ideas about morality and ethics is not possible here; only a few classical ideas are presented. Some of these ideas will resurface in the psychology of morality, in which developmental scientists present people with hypothetical

Table 3.2
Metaphysics and the Mind-Body Problem

Concept	Explanation	Typical Advocates
Dualism	The mind and body are separate entities; the nature of each is different.	Descartes
Monism	1. *Materialistic monism:* All is matter. (Mind is an *epiphenomenon*.) 2. *Idealistic monism:* All reality consists of ideas (ideas exist independently of our minds)	1. Aristotle, John Locke 2. Plato, Bishop Berkeley
Interactionism	Mind and body are separate but interacting systems. Interactionism is one form of dualism due to Descartes, who believed that the pineal gland was the "meeting place" of the two.	Descartes
Parallelism	The mind and body are separate systems that do not interact (another form of dualism). Rather, they are harmonized by/in God.	Leibniz
Dual Aspect Theory	Mind and body are two aspects of the same (divine) underlying reality.	Baruch Spinoza

Note: The last three — interactionism, parallelism, and dual aspect theory — are all variations of dualism.

Table 3.3
Metaphysics: Free-Will versus Determinism

Concept	Explanation	Typical Advocates
Free Will	People can freely make choices and take responsibility for their actions.	William James, Rollo May, Judeo-Christian-Islamic theologians, Libertarians, existentialists
Determinism	People's actions are determined by forces beyond their control. For example, all behavior is determined by one's genetic endowment, by external (environmental pr cultural) forces, or by a combination of the two. Karl Marx advocated a form of *historical* determinism; B. F. Skinner's was a *mechanistic* determinism (i.e., people respond to their environment in a machine-like fashion).	The Epicureans, Spinoza, Karl Marx, B. F. Skinner
Compatibilism	Compatabilists believe that free will and determinism are not contradictory concepts. One form of compatibilism argues for *soft determinism*, or the belief that, although all actions are determined (caused) in a physical sense, one is relatively free in choice if not forced or coerced into an action.	David Hume, Rudolf Carnap
Indeterminism	In principle, the course of people's actions cannot be completely determined. (Extrapolated from Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in quantum physics.)	(This is an interesting, though not well-accepted, concept.)

morally ambiguous situations or dilemmas, and then see how these people will resolve them.

- Plato believed that goodness was an absolute; it was given and is independent of and prior to humanity. But it can be learned through reasoning (idealism again). However, only the elite, highly trained philosopher was capable of discerning this good.

- For Aristotle happiness was the primary goal of life. But happiness was achievable through the practice of the **golden mean**, or moderation in all things. For example, courage is a desirable characteristic that lies between the extremes of cowardice and rashness. Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not view virtue in absolute terms; rather, the happy or fulfilled life means one thing to one person, another thing to the next. Aristotle was thus a **moral relativist**.

- Aristotle did not claim that happiness always implied pleasure, but pleasure was the central idea in the philosophy of Epicurus, who espoused the philosophy of **hedonism**. But **Epicureans**, like Aristotle, believed in moderation: one may have too much of a good thing. Overeating or excessive wine consumption were not good because they did not result in pleasure over the long run.

- If the Epicurean ideas seemed linked to Aristotle, the **Stoics** were more closely aligned with Plato. Stoicism implies a belief in absolute good. The Stoics believed in living a simple and frugal life of asceticism to escape from the evils of the world at large. (Note also the similarity here to **early Christianity**.)

- One of the most notably philosophers of ethics was Baruch (or Benedictus) Spinoza, who wrote in the seventeenth century. But Spinoza's moral philosophy is difficult to describe, especially in a few short sentences. He was a determinist, and somewhat of a stoic himself; yet also a relativist. He did not see good and evil as absolutes. Human acts must be judged on their merit; killing or stealing might be justified in specific instances, for example. He thought that, since events were determined in a fatalistic way, an

Table 3.4

Ethics and the "Nature of Human Nature"

Concept	Explanation	Typical Advocates
Goodness is not natural but can be attained through reason	People are capable of leading moral lives through their rationality, but only certain people (philosophers). The rest must be socially controlled or educated.	Plato, Aristotle
Natural goodness is preempted by society	People are basically good, but negative social experiences make them evil.	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Carl Rogers
Moral neutrality—environmental bias	People are neither good nor evil; morality is learned (environmental emphasis).	B. F. Skinner, Rollo May
Moral neutrality—genetic/evolutionary bias	People are neither good nor evil, but are capable of both; and moral predilections are genetically determined via evolutionary processes.	Steven Pinker, David Buss, Robin Wright
People are basically evil and destructive (or at minimum selfish and egotistical)	People are inherently sinful or evil, or self-centered. *Example 1 (Christianity):* They can be redeemed by exercising free will through God's grace. *Example 2 (Hobbes):* They must be controlled by a powerful central authority (the "leviathan"); otherwise life is "nasty, brutish, and short."	Christianity (some forms), Thomas Hobbes

Table 3.5
Ethics and the "Good Life"

Concept	Explanation	Typical Advocates
Duty	The good life is one of morality and responsible living. For Kant, the *categorical imperative* meant determining one's own moral principles and always adhering to them.	the Stoics, Emmanuel Kant, Christians and Muslims
Happiness (eudaimonia)	The goal of life is individual happiness. Being happy requires moderation in all things, but happiness is always relative to the individual's needs. Aristotle believed that happiness required avoidance of unnecessary harm to others – in other words, virtuousness is a prerequisite for true happiness.	Aristotle
Pleasure (hedonism)	The goal of life is one of pleasure. *Example 1 (Epicureans):* Although pleasure is the goal, moderation and morality are required. *Example 2 (Freud):* All of us seek to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.	the Epicureans, Freud
Love	Christianity stresses love (as well as duty).	Christ
Power	Power over others is stressed.	Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Nicholó Machiavelli
Meaning	Pleasure and happiness are not enough. The good life is one in which people can find or create a meaningful existence.	Jean-Paul Sartre, Viktor Frankl
Contemplation	The way to peace of mind is through contemplation and meditation.	Buddha

Note: It should be clear that the various conceptions of the good life are not mutually exclusive.

2-13

objective and non-emotional view of them was best. Like other philosophers, Spinoza saw human happiness as a worthy goal. But Spinoza is important here because some of his writings fit well with modern evolutionary psychologists, behavior geneticists, and cognitive neuropsychologists in their study of the adaptive nature of emotions: ". . . the very first foundation of virtue is the endeavor (conatus) to preserve the individual self, and happiness consists in the human capacity to preserve itself" (from *The Ethics*; quoted in Damasio, 2003, p. 170). Further quoting Damasio on virtue and self-interest at length, he states:

> At first glance the words sound like a prescription for the selfish culture of our times but nothing could be further from their real meaning. As I interpret it, the proposition is a cornerstone for a generous ethical system. It is an affirmation that at the base of whatever rules of behavior we may ask humanity to follow, there is something inalienable: A living organism, known to its owner because the owner's mind has constructed a self, has a natural tendency to preserve its own life; and that same organism's state of optimal functioning, subsumed by the concept of joy, results from the successful endeavor to endure and prevail. *Paraphrased in deeply American terms I would rewrite Spinoza's proposition as follows: I hold these truths to be self-evident, that all humans are created such that they tend to preserve their life and seek well-being, that their happiness comes from the successful endeavor to do so, and that the foundations of virtue rests on these facts* (pp. 170-171, emphasis added).

and:

> Here is the procedure: The *biological reality of self-preservation leads to virtue* because in our inalienable need to maintain ourselves *we must of necessity, help preserve other selves.* If we fail to do so we perish and are thus violating the foundational principle, and relinquishing of virtue that lies in self-preservation (p. 171, emphasis added).

and finally:

> So here is the beauty behind the cherished quote, seen from today's perspective: It contains the foundation of a system of ethical behaviors and that foundation is *neurobiological*. The foundation is the result of a discovery based on the observation of human nature rather than the revelation of a prophet (p. 171, emphasis added).

These reflections are also consistent with many other modern writers on bioethics; for example, Richard Dawkins (1976/1986) or Robin Wright (1994), who see an evolutionary basis for morality. All agree that man is a social animal, and that a morality based on cooperation underlies much of human activity; or put differently, that individual survival depends on the success of the group, tribe, or society.

- The utilitarian philosophers, notably Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, believed that morality resulted from the ***consequences*** of human acts, rather than the motives of the perpetrators; "If an action produces an excess of beneficial effects over harmful ones, then it is right; otherwise it is not" (Popkin & Stroll, p. 32). The weakness of this position is easy to spot; all of the long-term consequences of a given act cannot be known be anticipated in advance, so it becomes difficult to apply this philosophy in practice. But utilitarianism is still a useful point of view in both economics and in politics (think of the long-term effects of price controls or declaration of war, including the unintended consequences – such as so-called "collateral damage" in the case of war).

- Immanuel Kant propounded an interesting concept that he called the ***categorical imperative***: that one should act consistently in terms of right moral precepts without any reservations or qualifications. Kant did not believe that "the end justified the means." Thus one should *never* lie, cheat, steal, and so forth. But taking such absolutist measures is bound to strike most people as unreasonable (see, for example, the moral dilemma of "Heinz Steals a Drug" in Chapter 7). On the one hand, Kant's imperative seems consistent with Judeo-Christian ethics (i.e., the Ten Commandments), and is also consistent with the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." But the rigidity of his proscriptions can lead to dire consequences; think, for instance, of the necessity of lying to the Gestapo when hiding someone in order to protect her, as in the well-known autobiographical diary of Anne Frank (1947/1989).

A Contrast in Philosophies: John Locke Versus Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In his book *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Steven Pinker (2002) begins by addressing three ideas that he considers to be fallacious: The ghost in the machine (already discussed), the blank slate, and the noble savage, which will be discussed shortly in terms of the philosophies of John Lock and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, respectively. But Pinker's basic thesis is, as his subtitle suggests, that the idea that there is indeed such a thing as "human nature," even though this notion has been denied by many modern academics. In support of this, he cites what John Tooby and Leda Cosmides (1992) term the ***standard social sciences model (SSSM)***, so named because it represents ideas that are thoroughly engrained in the progressive ideology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They claim that this is the philosophy, adopted wholesale by social scientists, that human cultural progress is not only possible through better science and technology; it is demanded. This philosophy of social engineering was also the driving force behind behaviorism in psychology (Mills, 1998). But the seeds of these ideas were planted earlier, by Locke in the seventeenth century – ideas that also led to the American ideals of democracy as well.

Locke's Empiricism. John Locke was a philosopher of the enlightenment era. Like others of this era, Locke rejected many traditional ideas, such as Platonic idealism, the authority of the church, and hereditary privilege, such as the divine right of kings. He was a strong empiricist and environmentalist, who believed that a person's destiny was shaped by experience and education, not by birth. The mind of a child, he argued, is a ***tabula rasa*** (Latin; usually translated as a ***blank slate***). In Lockian terms, then, the function of education is to "write upon" this slate that knowledge and those values, including citizenship, that were recognized as worthy by an enlightened society. Contrary to conventional beliefs, however, Locke did believe that there *some* individual differences present at birth; thus he was not always entirely consistent (Crain, 2010).

In terms of his psychology Locke was an ***associationist***: He believed that complex ideas developed through a series simple mental associations. Simple associations were thus the building blocks of

more complex ones. As an example of very simple associations, recall from basic psychology (or see later in Chapter 10) how Pavlov's dogs associated the sound of a bell with food, and thus were conditioned to salivate at this sound. Locke therefore believed that, in teaching children, one must begin first with simpler concepts, and then build upon them in incremental steps. Like it or not, for students, repetition is therefore the key to much of what is learned. Yet insofar as possible, Locke believed that education should be made interesting and enjoyable.

Locke also believed that rewards motivated learning and were central to the learning process. He departed from the prevailing philosophy in European schools that stressed punishment for failure to learn one's lessons quickly or thoroughly. Punishments, he believe, would not motivate the child to learn; rather, punishment would only be effective in the short-term, and the administrator of the punishment would risk breaking the child. He admitted that punishment was sometimes necessary, but believed that it should take the form of mild reproof. Rewards in terms of praise or approval were best – with other kinds of rewards, such as money, gifts, or other "goodies," the child learns only for the sake of such external contingencies – but lacks the long-term interest in learning for its own sake. (Notice how modern some of Locke's ideas are about fostering ***intrinsic motivation*** (a love of learning for its own sake; cf. Deci & Ryan, 1975; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994).

Rousseau's Romantic Nativism. Rousseau, another philosopher of the enlightenment era, disagreed with Locke's notion of the blank slate. His position was nativistic because he believed that children come "pre-programmed" to learn in a natural way, and that they will do so with a minimum of adult instruction (or perhaps *interference* would be a better term). Rousseau believed that children learn naturally, by trial and error in experimenting with their natural surroundings. Of critical importance, Rousseau believed that biological maturation dictated what and when the child was capable of learning. He also specified four discrete stages of development[7] (infancy, early and then later childhood, and adolescence) that corresponded to differing levels of maturation, and what he believed children learned naturally during these states (thus anticipating the

stage theories of Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, and other cognitive developmentalists).

There are many things in life that children must and can learn only through self-discovery; indeed, Rousseau believed that children can only truly grasp many concepts only through such a process of self-discovery and explanations, and that the child is also the best judge her or his own successes. The goal of education, especially in the early years, is not to teach facts or "correct answers," but rather to allow the child to learn through experiencing and doing. Education should be child-centered, not teacher-centered, in Rousseau's worldview!

The romanticism associated with Rousseau came from his belief that most of society and social conventions thwarted the individual's tendencies to grow and develop according to nature's plan; hence the term ***noble savage***. He believed that simpler (some would say "primitive") social structures – or minimalist societies – were more natural and therefore better. Unlike other philosophers of the enlightenment (e.g., Diderot, Condorcet, Voltaire), he did not see the possibility of social progress in complex cultures. Rousseau's own experiences with social organizations, and his witnessing of greed and power among them members within them, contributed to his cynicism.

Today Rousseau's ideal of the noble savage is considered not only naïve but, according to Pinker (2002), sadly mistaken. So-called primitive peoples have their own social structure and rules, and life is seldom easy or ideal. But his ideas of stages of development and their importance in teaching and learning remain viable, and his beliefs that children learn much through on their own according to their state of readiness is considered basic by many if not most theorists.

In comparing Locke's ideas with Rousseau's in terms of classroom applicatiion, educational practice is limited to one or the other, but in a practical sense is a product of both. But traditional schools are probably more "Lockian" whereas certain non-traditional schools – such as those utilizing the Montessori Method – are much more "Rousseauian."

The "Blank Slate" and "Noble Savage" Today. Locke's associationism was refined by John Stuart Mill, and both influenced

John B. Watson, B. F. Skinner, and other behaviorists. Locke's environmentalism and belief in mind as a blank slate were also major influences. Coupled with these ideas was the progressive philosophy led by Watson, Skinner, and others to believe in the fundamental malleability of behavior and in the hope psychologists (and other scientists) could engineer a better society through technology. An assumption underlying this philosophy was the rejection of the notion that people have any sort of inborn nature – no propensity to learn certain kinds of tasks at certain periods of development, for example; no differential susceptibility to psychological disorders such as schizophrenia; no inborn aggressive tendencies; and indeed, no basic difference from one infant to another. With the proper training and technology, all could be taught (or conditioned) to behave in a manner that would benefit themselves and society as a whole. In other words, a strongly environmentalist position predominated.

The disagreements about human nature led to some real "culture wars" between those who supported the SSSM and those who opposed it. According to Pinker, "To acknowledge human nature, many think, is to endorse racism, sexism, war, greed, genocide, nihilism, reactionary politics, and neglect of children and the disadvantaged. Any claim that the mind has an innate organization strikes people not as a hypothesis that might be incorrect but as *a thought that it is immoral to think*" (2002, p. viii, emphasis added). Indeed, it is almost as if people who reject the almost sacrosanct SSSM must be considered fascists. But does it really follow that believing in some version of human nature – the idea that people come into the world equipped to act in certain ways under certain circumstances – implies that these believers are anti-liberal or anti-progressive? This is not the case according to Pinker, who argues that social progress does indeed depend on accepting these newer ideas from evolutionary psychology, behavior genetics, and cognitive neuroscience. How is it that "No current theory of personality can explain why both members of a pair of identical twins reared apart liked to keep rubber bands around their wrists and pretend to sneeze in crowded elevators" (2002, p. 73), Pinker asked?

In a measured and balanced account, Lerner (2002; 2006) cautioned of the potential consequences when sociobiologists, evolutionary psychologists, and behavior geneticists lean too strongly

toward the "nature" side of the nature/nurture antimony. Specifically, Lerner (2006) believes that such "genetic reductionism" can amount to "biologizing errors of the past, such as eugenics and racial hygiene" (p. 7), if not among scientists then for the "Person in the Street" who too often seeks simplistic explanations for complex behavioral phenomena. Such explanations are all too readily available from popular and sensationalist sources lacking in any scientific basis.

Concluding Remarks: So, What's All the Fuss About?

What difference does it make if human behavior is seen as being somewhat more rooted in biology than was once thought, and why the strong reaction to these ideas by those who favor the SSSM? Lerner's fears are firmly grounded in historical precedents that would seem quite alarming, in which ideas of genetic determination have been misused by social scientists and politicians alike. Sir Francis Galton founded the Eugenics Society in England in the late nineteenth century. Galton believed that those who were superior specimens of humanity should be encouraged to have children; those who were lower down in the social scale (and presumably intelligence) should not. It probably goes without saying that Galton placed himself in the high upper end of this continuum!

Galton's ideas were extended to race and ethnicity, and in fact adopted by Hitler in his beliefs in a master (Germanic) race, and to a certain extent by other racist groups. In psychology, intelligence testing was misapplied to immigrants coming to the United States in the early twentieth century as well. But this gets ahead of a story that is told more fully in Chapter 6, on intelligence. The fears of some individuals are obviously not without basis; however it does not *necessarily* follow that a belief in biological influences on behavior will lead to further negative implications for human rights and values. But such beliefs must be tempered by the recognition – *and this is worth repeating* – that the nature/nurture antimony is a false dichotomy: development is *always* a matter of the interplay between the two; as once again, following Aristotle's wisdom, the path of the golden mean applies. Biology is *not* destiny; what happens to people in the course of their lives is as important for their development as is their genetic endowment. And any contemporary conception of "human nature" must recognize that this is so.

Fortunately, utilizing genetic differences in the service of racism or racist policies is no longer as dangerous what it once was (though there may still be a few that push this cause; see Lerner, 2002). Psychologists now view race as more a socially constructed concept, less than one that is rooted in biology.[4]

*****

For Thought and Discussion

1. Which philosophers discussed in the "Philosophical Positions" section are moral relativists and which are moral absolutists?
2. Do you have a position on the free-will versus determinism divide? What is it?
3. What to you is "the good life" or the best way to live, taking into consideration your views of morality?
4. In your experience, are parochial schools more influenced by the philosophy of Locke or by Rousseau? How about Montessori types of schools? What was your own experience as a child in school?
5. If you are a parent, or have extensive experience with families and children, how similar or different can two small children from the same family seem? What might your observations tell you about the influence of nature and nurture on development?

*****

Notes

1. From Locke's (1690/2006) treatise, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.*
2. From Rousseau's (1762/1998) *The Social Contract.*
3. From Hobbes's (1651/1987) *Leviathan.*
4. See the January, 2005, issue of the *American Psychologist*; also the further discussion in Chapter 6.

*****

References

Allen, E., Beckwith, B., Beckwith, J., Chorover, S., Culver, D., Duncan, M., Gould, S. J., Hubbard, R., Inouye, H., Leeds, A., Lewontin, R., Madansky, C., Miller, L., Pyeritz, R., Rosenthal, M., & Schreier, H. Against "sociobiology." *New York Review of Books*, *22*, 43-44.

Burroughs, E. R. (2008). *Tarzan of the apes*. New York: Signet Classics. (Original version published in 1912.)

Carnap. R. (1966). *Philosophical foundations of physics: An introduction to the philosophy of science*. New York: Basic Books. (Edited by Martin Gardner.)

Crain, W. (2010). *Theories of human development: Concepts and applications.* (6th Ed.). Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Damasio, A. (2003). *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, sorrow, and the feeling brain*. Orlando, Fl: Harcourt.

Dawkins, R. (1989). *The selfish gene (new editions).* New York: Norton. (Originally published 1976.)

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1975). *Intrinsic motivation*. New York: Plenum.

Frank, A. (1989). *The diary of Anne Frank (critical edition).* New York: Doubleday. (Originally published in 1947).

Golding, W. (1954). *Lord of the flies.* New York: Perigree.

Gould, S. J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man* (Rev./expanded Ed.). New York: W. W. Norton.

Gottfried, A. E., Fleming, J. S., & Gottfried, A. W. (1994). Role of parental motivational practices in children's academic intrinsic motivation and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *86*, 104-113.

Lerner, R. M. (2002). *Concepts and theories of human development*. (3rd. Ed.). Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Lerner, R. M. (2006). Developmental science, developmental systems, and contemporary theories of human development. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Series Eds.), & R. M. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1, Theoretical models of human development* (6th Ed., pp 1-17). Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

Locke, J. (2006). *An essay concerning human understanding.* New York: Penguin. (Originally published in 1690.)

Mills, J. A. (1988). *Control: A history of behavioral psychology*. New York: New York University Press.

Pinker, S. (2002). *The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature*. New York: Penguin.

Popkin, R. H., & Stroll, A. (1993). *Philosophy made simple*. (2nd. Ed.). New York: Doubleday.

Rousseau, J. J. (1998) *The social contract*. New York: Penguin. (Originally published in 1762.)

Russell, B. (1967). *The autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1872-1914*. Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown.

Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (1992). Psychological foundations of culture. In J. Barklow, L. Cosmides, and J.Tooby (Eds.), *The adapted mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Wilson, E. O. (1975). *Sociobiology: The new synthesis.* Harvard: Cambridge University Press.

Wright, R. (1994). *The moral animal.* New York: Vintage.