RACISM - THE NEW INHERITORS

Martin Barker

PART I – THE NEW RACISM

"I think the nation can expect that, when they are announced, the Conservative proposals on immigration will be common-sense proposals."
(William Whitelaw, March 1978)

"Common-sense is the practical ideology of the ruling class." (Gramsci)

1 Introduction

The resurgence of organised racism, and the successful re-rooting of a fascist organisation in Britain, raises big questions for socialists. They are questions, answers to which have for some time now been partial, untested and inadequate. Not only have many people been taken by surprise at the quick successes of the National Front, but also the picture of racism which has been widely accepted, has been sorely undeveloped. I want to try to develop that picture.

I want to explore five arguments:
A - the customary picture of racism is hopelessly inadequate;
B - a new style of racism is emerging, for which a systematic theory is being groomed;
C - this racism is not only politically, but conceptually, connected with a possible fascist development;
D - the language of much "common-sense" discussion of race has conceded the ground to this emergent theory;
E - defences against racism - often starting from liberal stances - which are posed in this language, reveal inconsistencies and are, therefore, liable to very rapid demise in the face of a consistent racism.

I want, finally, to present a critique of the new systematic theory.

2 'Common-sense'

"By 'racism' is meant any claim of the natural superiority of one identifiable human population, group or race over another. By 'scientific racism' is meant the attempt to use the language and some of the techniques of science in support of theories or contentions that particular human groups or populations are innately inferior to others in terms of intelligence, 'civilisation', or other socially defined attitudes." (1)

"[Racialism is] the belief that intellectual, cultural, and moral qualities are genetically transmitted, and differ among the main racial groupings of mankind, that racial groups can be graded according to these qualities as inferior, with the racialists' own group at the apex." (2)

These two quotations are typical of a view that is deep in many people's understanding, of what constitutes racism. To be a racist is to think that Indians are inferior, or Jews morally corrupt, or blacks uncivilised who will go back to the jungle at the first beat of the tom-tom.

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Very few people will admit to being racist in these senses. If we read discussions of the far right in Britain since the war, (3) it is clear that until recently most movements were tainted with Hitlerism. They found it very difficult for that reason to gain public acceptability. The anti-immigration organisations that grew up in the 1950s went out of their way to avoid overt connections with the Hitlerists. It was for this reason that there was a return to metaphors. There was obsessive discussion, in semi-moral terms, of disease: leprosy, T.B., syphilis and other more exotic illnesses were predicted, discovered and agitated over. This emphasis on metaphors of pollution is to be found in Powell's early racist speeches (in 1968). A moral panic was in process of creation. In order to take hold effectively, it had to be cast in a language that did not recall the horrors of Nazi anti-semitism.

The frantic attempts of the National Front and National Party, as they began to achieve some success, to detach themselves from their Nazi past, are further evidence of their awareness that the old racism was unacceptable. The hatred of fascism still goes very deep.

My argument is that, after Powell's 1968 speeches, a new and equally dangerous version of racism emerged. It is curious to re-read these speeches, especially his infamous 'rivers of blood' oration. For there is a total absence of any theory of race. It is all and only rigged statistics, cries of pollution, and moral panics (4). The trouble with metaphors is that they can appear silly and rhetorical and (for the activists on the Right) you can't derive policies from them. Further, the exaggerated near-rantings of Powell's earlier utterances were all too reminiscent of a Nuremberg style. With a theory behind you, you can afford to seem calm and dispassionate.

"... having read very carefully Mr Powell's recent speech which is somehow held responsible for the recent deterioration in the racial atmosphere, I find it a remarkably cool one, basically analysing the facts, stating that the situation was not hopeless if it was dealt with now, but predicting trouble if it is not." (5)

Having had one's assumptions by and large built into 'common-sense', it is easy to be impassive. This evolution of racism can teach us much. When I was learning my politics in the 1960s, one thing I learned more than any other from my political mentor, Tony Cliff. Socialists swim

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2 A. Sherman: Why Britain can't be wished away, Daily Telegraph, 8 September 1976.
5 R. Bell: 'Enoch Powell: wrong man to be labelled scapegoat', The Times, 10 June 1976.
against the stream of ordinary thinking; that is why they need a clear, overall strategy, and must continually apply and reapply it in order to derive tactics that do a little to turn the tide. The Right, on the other hand, with its roots in everyday thinking, very often is only making better sense of what appears as common-sense truth, held in a disorganised way. This article demonstrates how much frightening truth there is in this notion; everyday language now embodies a racist 'common-sense', this has come from classic Tory assumptions about society, and a whole racist theory is waiting in the wings to give organised form to that 'common-sense'.

3 The Hidden Theory

If it were not for the presence of a theory behind the racist 'common-sense', the obvious lacunae and untested assumptions of its approach would not so easily escape scrutiny. The bare starting points of that 'common-sense' were given by a Labour Home Secretary in 1976. He was speaking in a much-heralded Parliamentary debate, that I shall refer to a lot because of its significance. It was the first debate for over three years, it came shortly after Powell's leaking the Hawley Report which claimed queues of illegal passport-holders in the Indian sub-continent. Unlike the cut and thrust of the debate we've recently grown to know and love on the radio, it was marked also by MPs on all sides congratulating each other on their 'good sense and moderation'. And yet in all this, a coherent racist programme was announced. Roy Jenkins, opening for Labour, stated his premises:

"Any policy towards immigration and race relations must start from where we are today... First, we have a community made up of a preponderant indigenous majority and a small, but nevertheless substantial minority of different ethnic origins with family ties in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. This part of our community is now developing into a second generation. Secondly, the British people occupy a largely urban, densely populated, industrialised island of limited size, possessed still of great natural and human resources but also with real economic and social problems and limitations. Our Imperial history, combined with the mal-distribution of wealth and prosperity in the world, has traditionally produced strong pressures to migrate to this country. These are the basic facts. They necessitate both a strict limit on the amount and rate of inward immigration for settlement and an acceptance of certain well-defined obligations to those we have already accepted here and who are settled." (6)

For a speech evidently written by his leading Civil Servants (the occasion would allow no other), the logic is devastatingly bad. These are not 'the basic facts' at all. There is not a community. The majority have not come from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. I.e. black; more immigrants were white, from Australia and the like. Nor do the blacks necessarily have foreign ties of any significance.

But even if the facts were facts, the conclusion would not be necessitated unless a theory linking them was at work. The theory is one he shares with others in the debate, even if Jenkins' commitment to it is far less. Opening for the Tories, William Whitelaw also discussed the British community, its history, and now its fears. In a stroke bold for its illogicality, he continued:

"... there are still far too many stories of illegal immigration and overstaying which are widely believed. I do not accept all of them, but the old saying 'No smoke without fire' is usually true, and so I conclude that there are some illegal immigrant rackets which need to be uncovered and smashed immediately." (7)

This is incredible, bad and offensive; but effective. He has linked up via a trampled syllogism with a great new Tory campaign: the 'genuine fears' department. Whitelaw has jumped on an assumption that if the majority community makes a claim, it must be justified. Margaret Thatcher repeated this theme in her January 1978 speech. The core of it was concern for the 'genuine fears of the British people'. A subtle play on words has been going on. First, there was genuineness in the sense that the people were not nut-cases:

"Many genuine people, entirely free from any racial prejudice, want reassurance." (8)

Secondly, genuineness meant they weren't pretending. They really did have fears. Labour was quick off the mark to concede this.

"I acknowledge the doubts and fears about future immigration which are felt by many of the majority community." (9)

But finally there was a slide into a claim of justifiability of fears. Not only were they real people, not only were they really worried, but they were right to be worried.

7 W. Whitelaw, ibid, pp966.
8 W. Whitelaw, ibid, pp971.
9 R. Jenkins, ibid, pp987.
"If we went on as we are, then by the end of the century, there would be 4 million people of the New Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture. And, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world, that if there is a fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in." (10)

Every racist can now glow with moral righteousness to know that he or she is on the side of the historical purveyors of democracy, and law, that our Imperial past was a mere Christian attempt to spread these. But it isn't just the nonsensical claims about Britain's past. It's also this slide through the meanings of 'genuine'.

A fear expressed by the majority community is ipso facto genuine. The nicer side of it was expressed by Whitelaw, who, like so many others, praises our tolerant past:

"Over the years Britain has been an absorbent society, welcoming all comers and in due course assimilating them into our way of life." (11)

This idea of a "way of life", expressed as a nice thing here, is however no different from the darker side of it which Robin Page picks up on:

'It is from a recognition of racial differences that a desire develops in most groups to be among their own kind; and this leads to distrust and hostility when newcomers come in." (12)

The connection is not difficult to demonstrate. I recognise racial differences not just by colour, but by way of life. That is why Page continues:

"... the whole question of race is not a matter of being inferior or superior, dirty or clean, but of being different." (13)

Therefore, there naturally comes a time when the society is replete, absorption stops, and the 'genuine fears' start growing. And because it is a matter of a way of life, it is easy to rebut any charge of racism; there has been no talk of superiority or inferiority.

There is a theory behind this. It is a theory that groups form bonds on the basis of a recognisable shared way of life. They then erect boundaries around that. This has biological or pseudo-biological (14) roots, but it expresses itself through people's consciousness.

Do Jenkins and Whitelaw accept all this? I doubt it. But, once having chosen to operate with the sort of language they use, they are always vulnerable to those on their right who take that language seriously.

I shall try to show in more detail how, once you adopt this implicit way of thinking, the liberal lines of defence become Maginot Lines - impregnable until the first attack. The inconsistencies show up as soon as the way of thinking faces a test.

10 M. Thatcher, front page Daily Mail, 31 Jan 1978. The Daily Mail gives its entire front page to this.
12 R. Page. 'To nature, race is not a dirty word', Daily Telegraph, 3 Feb 1977.
13 R. Page, loc. cit.
14 The use of 'pseudo-biological' will no doubt be questioned. But, in the light of what I shall say later, I think it fully justified. Tiger and Shepher, in their study of women in Israeli Kibbutzim, tried to demonstrate the working out of genetic pressures. These were seen to be undermining ideological moves to sexual equality. Among the things they cite was the apparent refusal of children brought up as though they were brothers and sisters to be sexually interested in each other. Tiger and Shepher conclude that this is evidence of an incest taboo at work, even though the children are not genetically related. A Horizon programme on their work called it 'fooling the genes'. It seems to me quite reasonable to call this 'pseudo-biological'.

The question is one of consistency. Organised racism produces a nasty, but relatively coherent, view of the world. It is wrong, but it is tenable. A racist theory, consistently applied, makes many of its predictions come true. It is held back from full consistency and from full application by the resistance offered to it as a body of ideas and as a political force. But the ease with which a coherent doctrine can drag half-hearted liberalism in its direction is something we must recognise. And one of the processes allowing this is the presence in the 'ordinary language' of race, of a racist worldview.

4 The Politics of the 'Natural Community'

After Thatcher's January tirade, the Daily Mail began a series of articles entitled 'Immigration - The Great Debate'. As part of it, on 9 February an article appeared, supposedly about a Harlesden (London) man returning to his childhood street, only to find it overrun with immigrants. "Roger Coultas" the hero of the story called "They've taken over my home town..." had been there when the first immigrants had arrived, and had welcomed them. Subsequently, he had emigrated to Australia. Returning, homesick, he found a 'massive' 24% black population, and his street 'taken over'. The article ended:

"He slumped against an old Victorian statue and said: 'We used to have a community sing-song round here on New Year's Day, whole families of 'people. We'd end up with a chorus of Auld Lang Syne.' He shook his head, said he had been robbed of his birthright, his roots."

"I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of Britons have been cheated in just the same way. And more to the point, HOW MANY MILLIONS ARE GOING TO SUFFER THE SAME FATE IN THE FUTURE?" (15)

This idea of rootedness is more than picturesque talk; it is held to be part of 'human nature'. Ivor Stanbrook MP expressed this aspect of it clearly:

"Let there be no beating about the bush. The average coloured immigrant has a different culture, a different religion and a different language. That is what creates the problem. It is not just because of race. The people in our cities feel strongly about immigrants. I believe that a preference for one's own race is as natural as a preference for one's own family. Therefore, it is not racism, if by that one means, as I do, an active hostility to another race. It is simply human nature." (16)

15 'They've taken over my home town...', Daily Mail, 9 Feb 1978. The last sentence was set in very large type.
16 I. Stanbrook. Hansard, p1409.
This is a peculiar notion of human nature. It is a human nature to which culture, a way of life, are not merely the present historical configuration of human actions, a summary of the past and a continuation of it. Culture is essentially national, and a population has no specific character without it. What this means can be seen further from a speech by Powell. He had attacked the danger of having a permanent minority in our midst who would, he predicted, play endlessly on our guilt feelings. To avoid this, heroic measures were called for: "They would indeed be heroic measures, measures which radically altered the prospective pattern of our future population, but they would be measures based on and operating with human nature as it is, not measures which purport to manipulate and alter human nature by laws, bureaucracy and propaganda." (17)

The change in population so elliptically referred to would of course come from repatriation. But why should this be in accord with human nature? Because there is a special sense of unity, and of individuality, without which society will founder: "The destruction of the homogeneous we, which forms the essential basis of parliamentary democracy and therefore of our liberties, is now approaching the point at which the political mechanisms of a 'divided community' take charge and begin to operate autonomously." (18) Occasionally a suggestion is allowed to creep in that only the British are capable of this special unity. But this is unnecessary in a way, and clouds the issue. Let the milder version do the work; Edward Gardner MP:

"The strength of any nation, of any people, lies in its unity, and unless a Government is prepared to deal with the problems of numbers, unless they are prepared to make finite and known what is present infinite and unknown, I believe that the hopes of all of us of creating a homogeneous nation composed of both the immigrant and indigenous parts of our nation will and must inevitably begin to go." (19)

For all the milder tone, Gardner's statement somehow tells more than the hard-liners. For in what does this unity lie? Clearly, Britain has not had a continuous indigenous population. Waves of immigration have produced a rare old mixture since the Romans brought their candles. In what sense does unity give strength? It is something in the notion of nationhood.

"Britain is not a geographical expression or a New-world territory open to all comers with one foot in their old home and one in their new. It is the national home and birthright of its indigenous peoples." (20)

It is a tradition, inherited along with the land. 'Culture', 'way of life', 'tradition', all express the same fundamental idea.

What is tradition? That requires some rewriting of history:

"Of course the dominant culture in this country is going to be the culture that has been developed here over a thousand years." (21)

17 E. Powell, Speech to Streatham Young Conservatives, full text in Daily Telegraph, 23 Jan 1977. It must be noted that there is a clear continuity here with traditional Tory thinking. Classic conservatism stresses the separation of our natural 'institutes', and politics with its dangers of bureaucratic planning 'contrary to human nature', and excessive use of 'reason'.

18 E. Powell, Speech to Hampshire Monday Club, quoted in The Times, 10 April 1976. Powell has forgotten both his history of Parliament, and his history of political thought. Far from being derived from a 'homogeneous we', Parliament arose from the need to reconcile competing interest - groups and individuals.


20 A. Sherman, loc. cit.

21 N.S. John-Stevas, BBC 1, 2 March 1978

This idea of a 1,000-year continuous development is either a sheer fiction, or it is so all-embracing that there is no reason why it shouldn't continue developing happily even if blacks became 75% of the population overnight. But it has its place, and has a logic, if put in touch with this special idea of nationhood:

"National consciousness is the sheet anchor for the unconditional loyalties and acceptance of duties and responsibilities, based on personal identification with the national community, which underly civic duty and patriotism." (22)

But then a big step, the big step, is taken even supposing we had accepted the idea of national consciousness:

"Parliament can no more turn a Chinese into an Englishman than it can turn a man into a woman." (23)

Why not? Because our 'genuine fears' have been aroused. We have felt our cultural barriers go up. But also because that Chinaman, or whatever he or she is, must also have a thousand years of cultural development behind him. Suppose the Chinaman turned himself into an Englishman, by adopting this 'way of life'. That just couldn't work, because a person is so interwoven with his or her natural environment, that existence outside it is just not on.

Robert Taylor put it with due, honest nastiness in discussing a woman deserted by her husband while living in this country:

"The Home Secretary agreed with me that the most sensible action would be to return the family to their natural environment in Sierra Leone." (24)

The commonplace piece of sociology that human beings don't have natural environments - they create human, cultural environments - is overturned. Now the phrase 'natural environment' carries an enormous theoretical load. If a group has long been separated, ties of real strength make it sensible and necessary to put them back together again - even if they don't want to go.

Racial separation now has two theoretical grounds. They should return to their natural environment; and our race feels threatened, 'genuinely'. If we don't act on this, disaster awaits us:

"Here is a criminal phenomenon which is associated with social disintegration. My prognosis is extremely grave. It is the consequence of a divided society." (25)

This was Powell on the causes of 'mugging'. We should examine this view, for it reveals that the reclassification of a variety of offences (from..."
grabbing a handbag, to certain varieties of pick-pocking, to robbery with violence) as 'mugging' was not just a shift in nomenclature. It marked a shift in theory. Statistics alone, although very important as a weapon in arguments, will not defeat the theory.

But this view of 'national consciousness', 'national individuality' is not just a description, prediction or a causal account. It is also a recommendation. This point must be stressed. Bryan McGee, in one of the 'Men of Ideas' programmes, actually cited the case of racist beliefs in a defence of the fact/value distinction. His case was that, even if we proved that some races are superior to others, no policy-recommendations could be logically derived from this knowledge. This ignores two main points. First, facts about racial differences (whether put in terms of superiority, or not) come tied up with theories of the nature of human motivation. In other words, theories of race talk about how men will act. Therefore, at the very least, policy-limitations can be logically derived from those facts.

Secondly, his case completely ignores the point that even if we were logically improper to derive policy-recommendations, any racist having such 'facts' at his fingertips is going to use them for policy. Why? Because a racist is not merely in agreement with the facts, he is politically and emotionally committed to them. No amount of R M Hares will dissuade them.

'What white Englishman will be prepared to integrate with an Asian Muslim? Very few. He may work with him and treat him with due regard and respect, abiding by the letter of the race relations legislation; but that is not my definition of integration. We can never pretend that an Asian Muslim is exactly the same as an Anglo-Saxon."

But who wanted to say they were exactly the same? Come to that, I'm not identical with my workmate, next-door-neighbours, wife or children. The theory Winterton is espousing makes integration sound like sexual intercourse! In fact, the theory does run in this direction, for it is a 'pack-mentality' view of nationalism:

"National consciousness, like any other major human drive - all of which are bound up with the instinct for self-preservation (27) - is a major constructive force provided legitimate channels; thwarted and frustrated, it becomes explosive." (28)

There are clear policy implications here. We have been told that it is natural to love our nation. Any politician believing this has his orders: defend the nation to protect itself is that the minority who have not are not necessarily connected with racism for all its objectionable character is not necessarily connected with fascism. True, in Germany Nazism made a meld of the two. But the connection is not a necessary one (31). I want to suggest the opposite. Not only is there in general a political connection, but also there is a conceptual connection between the new racism and its theory, and the idea of a strong state and a nation founded on organic blood-relationships.

Put more simply, when we examine the theoretical underpinnings of the new racism, it takes much of its credibility from a theory and a language which have implications for all spheres of political and social life.

Listen to Sherman:

"The imposition of mass immigration from backward alien cultures is just one symptom of this self-destructive urge reflected in the assault on patriotism, the family - both as a conjugal and economic unit - the Christian religion in public life and schools, traditional morality, in matters of sex, honesty, public display, and respect for the law, on educational values, thrift, hard work, and other values denigrated as 'middle class', in short, all that is English and wholesome." (32) There is a bitter logic in this. If the theory of national consciousness is taken seriously, it has to be asked how it is that we, or our leaders, have been 'persuaded' to allow all this damage to be done by mass immigration. There are only two viable explanations: either governments are especially blind: or there is a self-destructive, perhaps evil intent in their actions. Whilst blindness might be an explanation for a period when the fears and resentments of the indigenous population were not fully raised, it won't account for refusal to act in defence of the nation once people express their 'genuine fears'.

But the logical outcome of this failure of the nation to protect itself is that the minority who press for these self-destructive actions must be purged. If they do not see the error of their ways, they put the pack at risk. How exactly they are to be dealt with is of course open to doubt. But the theory, with its semi-biological orientation, would make easy space for the idea that those who support immigration, those who attack the family, and so on, are biological failures.

The reason I suggest a possible fascist development from this is that the theory sees immigration as only comprehensible within an all-embracing theory of race. That global theory sees an all-out legitimacy of the English people's instincts. They would be wise to do so now, in a civilised manner while there is still time." (30)

5 Racism Entails Fascism

I have heard it argued on occasion (by anti-racists) that racism for all its objectionable character is not necessarily connected with fascism. True, in Germany Nazism made a meld of the two. But the connection is not a necessary one (31). I want to suggest the opposite. Not only is there in general a political connection, but also there is a conceptual connection between the new racism and its theory, and the idea of a strong state and a nation founded on organic blood-relationships.

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26 N. Winterton, Hansard p1076.
27 Or: as Powell put it: 'An instinct to preserve an identity and defend a territory is one of the deepest and strongest implanted in mankind. It happens to happen at least as good in its beneficial effects are not exhausted.' E. Powell, BBRC, 9 June 1969.
30 As an example of this: I quote a leaflet from Workers' Socialist League, distributed at the Anti-Nazi League's carnival on 1 April 1978: "Fascism is the product of capitalist society in a state of crisis and decay. Though vermin like the National Front begin as fringe lunatics their hope for growth lies through the support of big business. The capitalists must drive down wages, create mass unemployment, speed up production, slash social services and plunge the great mass of people into misery to do it. If other means fail, fascism will be used as it was in Nazi Germany."
31 Racism Entails Fascism

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war emerging between 'the nation', and its enemies, both internal and external. The fight for the survival of the nation is one of the chief characteristics of fascism.

It must be pointed out that this far Right view of national traditions has odd implications, once held at all consistently. On this view, Christianity gains its importance, for example, not from any truth it might embody, but solely from its involvement in 'our national identity'. For, provided you are convinced that the lies you tell are crucial to national survival - and that is the source of all values - you can afford to be as cynical as you like about the truth of the ideas (33).

Let me reiterate that I am not performing a reductio ad absurdum, and proving that all Tories are fascists because, if you press their ideas, they can be shown to have links with a proto-fascist theory. Rather, I am arguing that it will be all too easy for a real fascist movement such as the National Front to ride on the coat-tails of the 'trendies' (who have characteristics remarkably like those who embody Sherman's self-destructive urge) for undermining our national capacities, he argued:

33 I wonder if Peter Winch has ever realised these possible consequences of his relativistic views in social science? His theory of social knowledge revolves around the existence of independent 'ways of life', or unified cultures. David Lamb, in fact, has performed a useful job recently in exploring the potential sources and ramifications of his doctrine. See D. Lamb: 'Preserving a Primitive Society', Sociological Review, 1977. The consequences of this sort of relativism can be seen in Ivor Stanbrook's contribution to the pollution of the Commons:

'The theory of biological culturalism; a community gains its individuality from its continuity, and from its relations to a special environment. Hostility to out-groups is endemic and natural, but need not become a problem as long as they stay largely separate. If something isn't done soon, if the state does not act to preserve national identity now, the situation will inevitably and naturally become explosive. People recognise outgroups by their living out of order within a way of life. In other words, what is outside a way of life is against human nature, and is beyond rational support. For human nature, as expressed in ways of life, is the sole source of rationality."


'We are still a nation of natural competitors. That same spirit that stoked out the Industrial Revolution and Empire can be seen daily everywhere, even at flower shows! I make no apology for the seeming absurdity of the analogy. You look at Britain taking part in the flower show and you can see the competitive spirit at its very best.

You find the natural law of competition prevailing there ... only the best is on display; there's no sentimentality about rejecting but not destroying those that don't come up to the mark, no matter how pretty they might seem.' (34) (my emphasis)

That qualification has frightening implications.

If a natural law of competition goes against any sentimentality towards failures, why should we stop short of destruction? No doubt Boyson would have reasons, and one can surmise what they might be. But why retain the qualification when the going gets hard? Presumably, when the greenhouse gets overcrowded - and think of the number of references to overcrowding in debates on race - we rub out the weaklings, the less-than-perfect. Boyson's argument for 'not destroying those that don't come up to the mark' is the same as Tom Lehrer once put in song: "Be nice to someone who/is inferior to you/You can do it if you try." But there is no reason to the contrary why I should do so.

'This is the theory, then. Any individual quotation I have given could have been seen as picturesque, metaphorical. But the sheer continual weight of it makes it clear that a world-view is emerging. That is why I have used so many quotations. It is a theory of biological culturalism; a community gains its individuality from its continuity, and from its relation to a special environment. Hostility to out-groups is endemic and natural, but need not become a problem as long as they stay largely separate.

If something isn't done soon, if the state does not act to preserve national identity now, the situation will inevitably and naturally become explosive. People recognise outgroups by their living out of a different biologically-based culture.

There are names for this theory: they are, variously, human ethology and sociobiology. These theories provide systematic versions of the new racism. What is significant, as far as I am concerned, is not only that they do the job, but that they are beginning to be recognised as doing it.
PART II – THE NEW PHILOSOPHY OF RACISM

1 Introduction

Ethology is a serious branch of natural science, studying the patterns of behaviour of animals in their natural environment; human ethology, as understood by a particular group of writers, now appearing in a new form as sociobiology, is an unwarranted excursion into human politics. That description would not be accepted by the growing number of converts to this way of considering human beings. I shall try to justify the description. The human ethologists and sociobiologists make no attempt to hide the politics of their 'science'. All their writings, without exception, spell out consequences for human social life, and without exception they are pessimistic.

Some of the ethologists have always been 'popular'. Desmond Morris in particular, has never found difficulty in persuading newspapers to purvey his ideas. The Daily Mail, for instance, ran a week-long pull-out serialisation of his book Intimate Behaviour. But recently, there has been a flurry of attention to these gentlemen and their new friends, the sociobiologists. There have been two long-since-completed series devoted to their work, several radio interviews, a full-page advertisement 'in the Daily Mail' and articles in women's magazines. These are only the ones I have come across.

Sociobiology has already put down roots within sociology. The American Sociologist devoted the whole of a 1977 edition to a speculative projection of the 'Decline and Fall of Sociology'. This cannot be put down simply to sociobiology, as though it were a new discovery. Even before it appeared, the influence of such views was spreading. Not untypical was an article by Pierre van de Berghe: "For all the plasticity and diversity of behaviour on which we pride ourselves, our behavioural repertoire, though probably greater than that of any animal known to us, is far from infinite. There is such a thing as human nature, just as there is a chimp nature, or an elephant nature." (35)

What must be stressed is the extent to which the human ethologists agree in their fundamental conceptualisation. They also carry little placards for each other, to the point of silliness. (The hardcover edition of Dawkins' book has on its dust-cover a dreadful painting by Desmond Morris.) This common doctrine (with differences that I shall try to explore) must be the source of their popularity.

2 The New Instinctivism

What then is this theory? Its take-off point is a rejection of a 'nature-nurture' division. They believe that traditional treatments of instincts and environment miss the point: 'We wish to avoid being hung up on the classical dichotomy of 'heredity versus environment' or 'nature versus nurture'. When in such a frame of mind, it is all too easy to look for a single deterministic factor or cause which determines behaviour. We do not think of the biological factor simply in this way.' (36)

Alternative terms are found for the word 'instinct', for example 'behavioural repertoire' or 'biological imperative'. What is important in the change of title is the indication that inherited patterns must be seen as occasioning behaviour via reference to the environment. The environment triggers the inherited tendency. Behaviour is stimulated; and once it begins, it is in a process of continual interaction with elements within the environment. These give it shape, force and direction.

Nor do they accept an opposition between heredity and learning. Learning improves the chances of survival, because it makes a species more flexible in its responses. At a simple level, learning completes already present processes; the chaffinch's song is partially present in a young bird; it is completed by copying the full adult song.

But for all the emphasis on interaction between heredity and learning, one key point carries forward from the older conception of instincts. Robert Ardrey expresses it with typical Churchillian heaviness: 'The territorial imperative is as blind as a cavefish, as consuming as a furnace, and it commands beyond logic, opposes all reason, suborns all moralities, strives for no goal more sublime than survival." (37)

Instincts, whatever we may call them, are pre-conscious. They function despite any knowledge a species might have. An analogy with dams expresses it well: let some through, or the dam will burst, or at least flood over.

Because instincts are blind, they too often escaped our attention. They want to put this right: 'The ignorance of ourselves which needs to be stressed today is ignorance about our behaviour - lack of understanding of the causes and effects of the functions of our brains. A scientific understanding of our behaviour, leading to its control, may well be the most urgent task that faces mankind today.' (38)

The core is Darwinian, the key term is survival. Wilson puts it graphically at the beginning of his book: 'Samuel Butler's famous aphorism, that the chicken is only an egg's way of making another egg, has been modernised: the organism is only DNA's way of making more DNA." (39)

It must be said that here is the strong point in the instinctivists' case (I shall use the term 'instinctivism' to apply to those doctrines shared by ethology and sociobiology). They aim to treat humans as compatible with animal evolution. A successful organism is one which is adapted and organised such that it will survive in particular environments, and be able to replicate its kind. Note that all species are adapted to particular environments. Every species has a best environment in which its ability to reproduce will be most advantaged. A 'way of life' is an adaptation to environmental conditions, or a particular life within an environment. Whatever the environment, the goal is survival. Not of the individual, but the genes. (The two schools within instinctivism differ here: the ethologists stress survival of the gene-pool, or the group; the sociobiologists stress, rather, survival of the individual gene-pattern. Later,...
I shall discuss the difference. It does not matter for the moment. Survival is, by definition, selfish.

The necessity of selfishness gives the two schools their fundamental concerns:

"A selfish gene is the opposite of an altruistic gene, and an altruistic gene is defined as one which has the effect of increasing the chances of survival of a rival gene, at the expense of its own survival. By definition an altruistic gene propagates fewer copies of itself than its selfish rival. Therefore, automatically, the genes whose effects we see manifested in living bodies are selfish genes." (40)

The logic of this is faultless, provided two assumptions are made. First, that genes aim at nothing better than survival; second, that 'gene machines' aim at nothing better than survival. This second one will prove very problematic. If the two assumptions could be proved correct, all genes are necessarily selfish and those that are around us are there because of their selfishness.

Sociobiology gets its theoretical concern set by this:

"... the central theoretical problem of sociobiology is: how can altruism, which by definition reduces personal fitness, possibly evolve by natural selection?" (41)

This central problem is given directly from the definition of the subject-area. The same applies to human ethology even though its issue is apparently very different:

"Man is the only species that is a mass murderer, the only misfit in his own society. Why should this be so?" (42)

This is ethology's dominant question, because it views survival in terms of species-survival. In that context, intra-specific killing is surely self-defeating. That does not mean that all aggression is evolutionarily unnatural, far from it. What I am pointing to is the way the central problem for ethologists derives from their definition of the subject. Aggression is natural to species-survival; human aggression appears unnatural - how can this be accounted for?

Instinctivism, as I have called it, is the 'science of species in their natural environment'. All species exist in natural environments, and attain their chances of survival by being adapted in complex ways to those environments. We must not operate with a crude nature/nurture division.

We are dealing with a single complex, summed up thus by Wilson:

"The principal goal of a general theory of sociobiology should be an ability to predict features of social organisation from knowledge of the population parameters combined with information on the behavioural constraints imposed by the genetic constitution of the species." (43)

Instinctivism is a theory of the whole relation of a species to its environments. From that, the forms and limits of internal species-life will be derivable. In this complex, social organisation appears as the end-term to which analysis moves after learning the nature of the specific gene-patterns, the consequent behavioural repertoire, and the nature of the interaction of these in population dynamics with the natural environment of the species. We end by being able to understand the society; it is the consequence of all the others.

The correspondence with the claims of the new racism must be apparent. Culture was, we saw, a biologically limited and determined mode of behaviour and thinking, existing in relation to a natural environment. From this was derived a belief in the necessary separateness of other 'populations'.

3 Induction and Analogy

We know why they want to apply a hard Darwinism to humans. The question is: how do they justify it? They have a number of strategies. The first, I want to call 'naive inductivism'.

Their basic problem is that they need to show the presence in men and women of significant biological drives. A number of them at various points in their writings adopt an inductivist strategy to prove their case. Listen to Professor Eysenck:

"Consider, for instance, what Steven Goldberg, in a most interesting book has called 'The Inevitability of Patriarchy'... He concludes that male dominance is a universal fact, and that its logical reason for male dominance. That is bad science and bad logic, quite apart from the powerful biological cause of its universality."

This is inductive reasoning of a quite fallacious sort. It runs: all known societies have male dominance; therefore all conceivable societies have male dominance; therefore there is a biological reason for male dominance. That is bad science and bad logic, quite apart from the questionable nature of the initial premise.

Ironically, lurking behind this fallacious step is an assumption which, if true, would make sense of this 'leap into faith'. This assumption derives from a lurking environmental determinism:

"It is true that we shared a common ancestor..."
with baboons, way back in our evolutionary history, but that is not the point. The point is that baboons, like our early human forbears, have moved out of the lush forest environment into the tougher world of the open country, where higher group control is necessary. Forest-living monkeys and apes have a much looser social system; their leaders are under much less pressure. The dominant baboon has a more significant role to play and I selected him for this reason." (45)

There is only one possible sense to this. Moving into a new environment required a specific genetic change. This implies than an environment, even one as general as 'the open country', only allows one sort of social organisation among primates. That is a staggering claim, and amounts to a new form of environmental determinism.

In that quotation from Morris, in fact, contained the second strategy of the instinctivists: the human/animal analogy. It is primarily the ethologists who use such analogies; but they use them liberally. Often, of course, we are not invited directly to say: animal, therefore man. Rather, we are given a description of a group of animals, and then a description of a human characteristic in much the same terms; or, we are told about a problem in grasping human behaviour genetically, and then a non-human species is indicated by means of which an explanation might be possible. The list of such analogies is large: baboons (Morris), lepilemurs (Ardrey), ants (Wilson), rats (Lorenz), phalaropes (Dawkins).

Immediately following the passage I have quoted, Morris continues:

"The value of the baboon/human comparison lies in the way it reveals the very basic nature of human dominance patterns. The striking parallels that exist enable us to view the human power game with a fresh eye, and see it for what it is: a fundamental piece of animal behaviour." (46) [my emphasis, MB]

This is only acceptable if the analogy has worked. What is an analogy? It is a comparison between two separate items or processes; they are found to be similar in one significant respect. When a consequential quality is found in one of them, analogical reasoning suggests the other might have it. But it depends wholly on the assumption that the two were significantly similar in the first place. Morris does not show this. He assumes that there is a significant parallel. He then uses the parallel to account for where analogical reasoning breaks down.

In pursuing the analogy between baboons and humans, he asserts:

'It is always the dominant male baboon that is in the forefront of the defence against an attack from an external enemy. He plays the major role as protector of the group.' (47)

By the logic of analogy, the same ought to be true in human societies. But it isn't. Morris, quite unabashed, does not declare 'here the analogy ends' - for that would require an account of why it had broken down. Instead, he turns it into a method of condemnation:

"If only today's leaders were forced to serve in the front lines, how much more cautious and 'humane' they would be when making their initial decisions." (48)

What has become of the baboon/human analogy? Dominant male baboons lead in a fight. Human leaders don't. Therefore, they ought to. Morris' judgement flatly contradicts his facts. His analogy turns out to be more of a moral fable, more like Lafontaine, than a piece of scientific argument.

What enables this slide from apparent description to evaluation? It is the environmental determinism. Morris' argument runs: moving into open country required genetic changes towards group territoriality. This put humans in a position analogous to baboons. What disrupted this close relationship was a separate ability in man to develop tools, and culture. This has led to a wrecking of the close relationship to a natural environment, and left us with (dangerous) residual drives.

The shift to evaluation is now accounted for on general 'a priori' grounds; because of a general commitment to genetic explanation, a specific case is investigated in these terms. No definitive piece of evidence of genetic drives has been uncovered.

All these slides, glides and conceptual illegalities indicate something, much the same as in Part I: under the jumps is an 'a priori' theory that justifies what are otherwise appalling moves. If so, the theory had better pass some pretty stringent tests for consistency and internal coherence. If facts are to be dismissed, if problems are dodged, there must be good reasons. What we need to know, therefore, is the pattern of concepts central to instinctivist theory, and their structure.

4 Altruism and the Group

Many writers, commenting on instinctivism, have noted a tendency to group human activities into arbitrary units. We are told, for example, that human behaviour exhibits 'aggression' or 'territoriality'. What makes my shouting at my children the same as a street brawl; how can a suicide be traced to the same root-cause as a torturer's sadistic impulse? In what significant way is war similar to two dogs barking at each other? Something of the weakness of these grouped-activity concepts is given away by Ardrey:

"Man considers it his inherent right to own property, either as an individual or as a member of a group, or both." (49)

The slippage indicated between individual and group makes a nonsense of the claim. First, how could two such diverse systems of organisation as communes and private property be given the same
explanation? And second, if this is conceivable, it is hard to see why the 'group' should not be infinitely large: in which case, the concept 'property' would cease to have meaning. Being everybody's, it would be nobody's.

However, Fromm, Lewis and others are wrong to suggest that these groupings are purely arbitrary. In terms of surface evidence, they certainly appear so. But there is a pregiven conceptual requirement to group isolable activities within a given theory.

Lorenz, to explore one typical case, roots all behaviour in 'the big four' - feeding, reproduction, defence, and flight. Of course, in actual behaviour all sorts of combinations are revealed, but there are important senses in which we can still talk of them as separate. Julian Huxley, introducing Lorenz's famous study, notes that he is operating with a notion of 'behaviour-units':

Lorenz: 'Are these little martial drives completely independent of each other? Do they form a mosaic which owes its functional completeness only to the construction of evolution? ... In the early days of comparative research it was thought that one drive at a time exclusively governed the whole animal. ... In reality, all imaginable interactions can take place between two impulses which are variable independently of each other.' (50) [my emphasis, MB]

Lorenz himself analysed a most famous interaction. His study of greylag geese led him to postulate that their pair-bonding is the evolutionary correlate of displaced aggression; their mating rituals could be seen as deflected attacks. They turned potential aggression towards each other into both a bonded union and aggression towards outsiders. In Lorenz's analysis, it is unthinkable that the bonding should last if the external aggression were done away with somehow. One can draw pretty obvious conclusions, if the claim is that humans pair-bond like geese. It is the logic, in fact, underlying the peculiar end-game of Wilson:

'With our present inadequate understanding of the human brain, we do not know how many of the most valued qualities are linked to more obsolete, destructive ones. Co-operativeness towards group-mates might be coupled with aggressivity towards strangers, creativeness with a desire to own and dominate, athletic zeal with a tendency to violent response, and so on. ... If the planned society - the creation of which seems inevitable in the coming century - were to deliberately steer its members past the stresses and conflicts that once gave the destructive phenotypes their Darwinian edge, the other phenotypes might dwindle with them. In this, the ultimate genetic sense, social control would rob a man of his humanity.' (51)

What we may call 'higher' responses remain constructs of the lower drives. They do not gain independence from them; they merely, by interaction, alter their direction. But their fundamental orientation, which is selfish survival, remains unalterable.

It is this necessary commitment to breaking behaviour up into units, genetically determined, that marks instinctivism more than anything else. This is what leads to conceptualisations of 'aggression', 'territorialism', 'pair-bonding' and so on:

"Our basic question is: why is man so aggressive compared with other animals, and especially with other primate species? My work, derived in large part from the work of zoologists, palaeontologists and ethnologists ... runs as follows: the root cause of aggression is competition for resources. There are two basic ways of regulating that competition: territoriality which establishes monopoly rights over resources within a portion of usable space, and hierarchy which creates an order of precedence in access to, and distribution of, resources." (52)

Supposing we were prepared to accept these separable behaviour units, it does, of course, leave the instinctivists in a difficult position. Not only do they need adequate grounds for determining what units there are (so that combinations can be understood), but they must be able to measure for their presence. Polly Toynbee quite rightly emphasises the difficulties of the latter in her critical piece on Eysenck. She points out that variables that Eysenck claims to isolate such as 'empathy' and 'leadership' are just not measurable attributes. (53)

Nevertheless, the instinctivist project depends upon isolating such units. Earlier, I showed how the fundamental problem and project of the ethologist and the sociobiologist, respectively, was reached by deduction from a 'Darwinian' premise. Let us reconsider those examples. Dawkins and Wilson, for the sociobiologists, have argued that selfishness characterises the main process of evolution. But Dawkins is quick to point out that selfishness has a behavioural, not a subjective, definition. This is why it is self-defeating. To be altruistic would be to behave "in such a way as to increase another entity's welfare at the expense of its own" (54). A gene for such a characteristic would prevent itself surviving; that is why altruism presents such a problem for their doctrine. If there is altruism, it must be what we can call a 'second-order construct'. It is particularly a problem for the sociobiologists, given their opposition to the ethologists' assertion that evolution favours group-survival. This construct must make altruism compatible with individual gene-selfishness:

"Do selfish genes necessarily make selfish bodies? Often they do, but not always.... Consider a gene which makes its bodies behave altruistically towards only close relatives, say, by sharing food with a brother, or saving him 51 E. Wilson, op.cit. p.755. Once again we find evidence that instinctivism, like the new racism, is not at all incompatible with old conservatism. The theory of planning, of social control, is notorious. That dislike has always been based on a distrust of rationality with its 'abstractions'. In favour of men's natural tendencies or 'instincts'. On so other grounds dislike of planning as a generality makes any sense. (And it is just as unexplained how planning in this way is possible, let alone such a threat. If our 'natural instincts' are so strong and deeply-rooted.) 52 P. van de Berghe, op.cit. p.77. 53 P. Toynbee, Guardian, 27 Feb.1978. 54 R. Dawkins, The Selfish Gene. Oxford University Press 1976. p.4.
from danger. Since there is a good chance that an identical copy of the very same gene is sitting in the body of the relative saved, there is a good chance that the gene for kin-altruism is saving itself." (55)

Of course, this prescribes close limits to the possibility of altruism - except where the genes can be 'fooled'. Altruism must always be second-hand or disguised selfishness; for this version of genetic determination conceives that all behaviour retains its direct connection with the process of survival, and onward transmission, of genes.

Their definitions of selfishness and altruism only work if they are defined in relation to survival. If we alter the definition of altruism, for example, to remove the reference to damaging the chances of survival, there would be no difficulty in altruism being recreated in a new generation. Equally, if the altruistic behaviour was not directly rooted in a genetic characteristic, but represented a development to be located in the 'machine' rather than the 'genes', there need be no problem of survival.

These are not empirical discoveries; they are 'a priori' expectations. The somatisation with which the derivation is performed, the subtlety of these second-order constructs, varies between writers. But the logic of their production is the same in all cases. And therefore the consistency tests are generally amicable.

5 Levels of Reductionism

The first main inconsistency appears when we examine the hard reductionism implicit in all their theorising. The ethologists argue that the basic unit with which we must be concerned is the group, or the 'gene pool'. The gene pool is the total set of genetic characteristics within a population of a species that enable the reproduction of that species.

A population is a finite group, with limits. This is not an arbitrary point, for it makes part of the definition of a gene pool clearer. For a population will have limits which it will maintain by having mechanisms that exclude outsiders, and encourage breeding in specifiable patterns. This entails that a gene pool cannot be defined without reference to its behavioural characteristics. It is this that leads to one of Morris' conclusions. All men are basically the same, but their sameness consists, among other things, in their group-competitiveness.

Dawkins, on behalf of the sociobiologists, agrees on some particulars with the ethologists, but thinks they have missed the central point:

"They got it wrong because they misunderstood how evolution works. They made the enormous assumption that the important thing in evolution is the good of the species (or the group) rather than the good of the individual (or the gene)." (56)

I don't want to enter the debate about reductionism as such; enough has been said, and more by others (57). But what might make one assumption preferable to the other? While Dawkins might claim that his version of Darwinism will account for more facts, that is not the source of the reinterpretation. It is a general theory, and Dawkins prefers it on more general theoretical grounds.

But for my purposes, the two halves of instinctivism agree on one fundamental point, and it is this I find inconsistent, and want to challenge: for they share what I can only call a 'base/superstructure' picture of the gene-body relationship.

I shall concentrate on Dawkins because, at least he often sees where problems lie. He calls the body a 'gene machine'.

"I prefer to think of the body as a colony of genes, and of the cell as a convenient working unit for the chemical industries of the genes." (58)

Dawkins recognises that the relationship between gene and machine is not always a simple one. As he says, the genes may dictate that the body learn from its environment. But the logic of survival remains; the aim and the rationale of all behaviour is always the onward transmission of genes. In this sense, the genes always determine 'in the last analysis' the possibilities of behaviour; that is why I call it a base/superstructure model. Any autonomy the body possesses, is autonomy for the benefit of gene-survival.

This is an impossible account. Dawkins notes that at an early evolutionary stage genes with a capacity to co-operate had a greater capacity for survival. This is to say, when a group of genes could associ-
ate together, producing complex reactions, the chances of survival were increased. This would increase still more when those genes evolved a body, capable of behaviour. What Dawkins, with his reductionist spectacles, has failed to understand is that even at this stage something qualitatively new has emerged. By co-operating to form 'gene machines' the genes have taken the bold step of making an environment for themselves (59). They constitute an environment for each other, and co-operate to make it as favourable as possible.

Of course, for a relatively inert 'gene machine' (into which category come most plants, etc.) it is only an internal environment that is regulated. The external context is not controlled. But to the extent that a species evolves learning, and develops a capacity to act on the results of learning, it gains a capacity to manipulate elements of its external environment.

How does this present a problem to Dawkins? It is not the genes that do the manipulating, though the conditions of its possibility are laid down genetically. Nor do the genes do the learning; it is the body that does both, with its motile implements and its organs of awareness. By what mechanisms does a body determine its process of learning and its pattern of responses? Dawkins recognises that the body receives, at most, a general programming. From that beginning, it has to learn, and incorporate the results of its learning into later decisions. The wider the spectrum of learning, the more aspects of a species' behaviour it involves, the less sense can be made of a notion of direct genetic determination.

It is, therefore, the 'gene machine', not the gene, that learns; Dawkins grants all this. But he does not see that it fundamentally subverts his whole reductionist programme. Among the many aspects of learning are the following: recognition of relevance; development of a capacity for judgement; awareness of consequences. I have picked on these almost at random; but they illustrate a general point. It is possible for a species to have innate recognition of relevance, but it is not at all flexible. A young gull recognises its parent's beck by an orange snort; there is a judgement of relevance to food-getting, and an amorronic piece of behaviour. The young bird necks at the spot, and the adult regurgitates food for it. The gull cannot advance its learning one iota on this point.

But flexibility requires that an organism can learn what is relevant. To do this, it has to have a certain autonomy.

A species can have innate awareness of consequences. Species that share an environment with rattlesnakes often display an innate reaction to the sound of the snake's tail. That is a form of awareness of consequence, with appropriate behaviour. But such species cannot thereby learn about a new possible danger, or its attendant consequences. To be flexible, a species must be able to exercise judgement, and learn new things about its environment. To do that, it has to have a certain autonomy.

What is this autonomy? Since its learning, its responses cannot, by definition, be pre-programmed, genetic determination has to take the form of the programming of desires: desire to learn, desire to develop appropriate responses. The significance of this is overwhelming: where flexible learning is at all present, to that extent patterns of species behaviour are mediated by a rationale which is other than, more than, survival.

This does not at all imply incompatibility with survival. The species is naturally concerned now with more. These new mediations have to be explored for their own logic, the structure of their expression. On Dawkins' own premises, such mediations cannot be simply regarded as an evanescent expression of the genes' selfishness. If they were, they could not fulfil their evolutionary functions of flexibility.

What does Dawkins have to say about all this? He gets in a great tangle. He admits the significance, as do all the others, of what he calls 'culture'. I quote at length from the conclusion of his discussion of 'parental investment' and its genetic justifiaption:

'I have not explicitly talked about man but inevitably, when we think about evolutionary arguments such as those in this chapter, we cannot help reflecting about our own species and our own experiences. Notions of females withholding copulation until a male shows some evidence of long-term fidelity may strike a familiar chord.... Most human societies are indeed monogamous. In our own society, parental investment by both parents is large and not obviously unbalanced.... On the other hand, some human societies are promiscuous, and some are harems-based. What this astonishing variety suggests is that man's way of life is largely determined by culture rather than by genes. However, it is still possible that human males in general have a tendency towards promiscuity, and females a tendency towards monogamy, as we would predict on evolutionary grounds. Which of these two tendencies wins in particular societies depends on details of cultural circumstance, just as in different animal species, it depends on ecological details.' (60)

This won't do. It offends some basic ground-rules, of a sort that Durkheim outlined in his classic essay on dualisms. Discussing quite different dualisms, Durkheim wrote:

"To say that we are double because there are two contrary forces in us is to repeat the problem in different terms; it does not resolve it. It is still necessary to explain their opposition.... We understand even less how these two worlds which are wholly oposite, and which, consequently, should repulse and exclude each other tend, nevertheless, to unite and interpenetrate in such a way as to produce the mixed and contradictory being that is man...." (61)

Durkheim's lesson is a good one for us: an unresolved dualism between genes and culture is no better than one between good and evil, body and soul. If human males still may have a tendency towards promiscuity, how is it restrained by something as evidently different as 'culture'? The answer had better be a good one.

It isn't; he gives a very curious answer. Implicitly recognising the need for an account of culture that is compatible with gene determination, he writes that a new form of evolution has taken over:

"The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a name which conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation." (62)

This form of evolution has taken over from simple

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59 I owe my understanding of the significance of this to Steven Rose, op.cit.


By analogy with the life-generating "primeval soup" which biologists and chemists believe constituted the seas some 3-4 thousand million years ago (Kuhn, p16).
genetic relnication:

'Whenever conditions arise in which a new kind of relnicator can make copies of itself, the new relnicators will tend to take over, and start a new kind of evolution of their own. Once this new evolution begins, it will be in no necessary sense subservient to the old.' (63) In no necessary sense would it be subservient; but equally, in no necessary sense would it take over. Unless and until an account is given of the actual characteristics of this new form of evolution, it will be quite impossible to say whether it is even compatible with the old.

Dawkins seems to realise this. He therefore develops his line of investigation to make the picture of culture compatible with evolution. So, since behaviour had to be reduced to units, associable with drives, culture has to be also broken into units. This is a very odd idea, as even Dawkins realises. What will count as a 'meme-unit'? A statement? A whole argument? What about a whole play of Shakespeare - how many units does it contain? Dawkins' proposal to avoid these ludicrous outcomes reveals how far he will go in making culture compatible with genetic reductionism:

'The 'gene' was defined, not in a rigid all-or-nothing way, but as a unit of convenience, a length of chromosome with just sufficient copying-fidelity to serve as a viable unit of natural selection. If a single phrase of Beethoven's ninth symphony is sufficiently distinctive and memorable to be abstracted from the context of the whole symphony ... then to that extent it deserves to be called one meme.' (64)

Out of sheer exasperation, let him pursue his case. If a meme is so much like a gene that it can be said to have 'copying-fidelity', presumably it also competes for survival? Yes, but how? It competes for our attention. Take an example - belief in hellfire and damnation. A highly effective belief, notes Dawkins, one could almost believe it had been designed by a trained ornanagist:

'However, I doubt if the priests were that clever. Much more probably, unconscious memes have ensured their own survival by virtue of those same qualities of pseudo-ruthlessness which successful genes display. The idea of hellfire is, quite simply, self-perpetuating; because of its own deep psychological impact.' (65)

Thus we have idea-units transmitted by imitation. Even scientific knowledge, he claims, will be transmitted by students 'imitation' of a teacher. Idea-units compete for our attention; they survive simply because they are successful:

'What we have not previously considered is that a cultural trait may have evolved in the way it has, simply because it is advantageous to itself.' (66)

His example is blind faith, which he claims has survival value because it eliminates the possibility of its own refutation, by refusing rational enquiry. This view of culture is, frankly, peculiar. But it is the only one that is conceivable for this sort of reductionist. If learning, or culture, is to be anything more than a simple adjunct of the genes in their effort after survival, it must be of a compatible nature. Dawkins' account, for all its oddity, at least matches his reductionism.

But the cost of consistency is an absurd doctrine; it therefore acts as a good check on the coherence of the original 'story'. For this view of learning as imitation of units won't do the job it was originally designed to do. In what way can a view which outs copying at the centre of its paradigm of learning, explain how animals learn significant facts about their environment and then modify their behaviour in order to take account of what has been learnt? But odder still than this is the complete disappearance of a concept of truth. When discussing the new racist defence of 'traditional values' as embodied in, say, Christianity, we noted the effective loss of any claim to the truth of such doctrines. They were needed, and any truth was wholly accidental. Dawkins has, quite consistently, taken the matter still further. Success in a theory (even a scientific one) depends on its internal capacity to survive; and that turns on its capacity to have a powerful impact on our minds, almost certainly unconsciously.

And yet the whole function of learning-adaptation was to make animals more responsive to their environments. Animals need objective information in order to live. Genes for learning and 'imitation', on this view, would surely die out, no doubt racy indulging their private learned fantasies, but quite unable to transmit their capacity for fantasising to a new generation.

I have spent this long on Dawkins because he, at least, has the intelligence to realise that he has a problem. Other instinctivists just don't seem able to see what all the fuss is about. Nowhere is this better seen than in Morris:

"The snag is that when the tribes became super-tribes, someone took away our biological safety-net. It is up to us to make sure that we do not crash to our deaths. We have taken over evolution and have no one to blame but ourselves. The strength of our animal properties is still carried securely within us, but so are our animal weaknesses. The better we understand them and the enormous challenges they are facing in the unnatural world of the human zoo, the better our chances of success." (67)

I leave the spotting of all contradictions in that one, as an exercise for an idle half-day.

What are the problems the instinctivists have to overcome? They have to explain not only the nature and the structure of learning, how it functions in relation to genetic survival, but also how it is transmitted, how it grows. They have to reconceptualise human reasoning and logic so that they can be talked of in terms of survival and evolutionary success. And when they have done all these, they have to explain how it is possible that culture is the villain of the piece, disrupting stable patterns of territoriality and limited aggression.

What are we offered overall? Culture constitutes a new form of evolution, where ideas replace genes as means to survival and as survival machines in themselves. Predictably, the ethnologists - who are never so open on their view of culture - have a variant: they represent a whole culture as the unit that must survive.

This opposition concerning the unit of transmission represents a tension, an opposition concerning the degree of reduction, that is not accidental. It is implicit within a general orientation to the world that is closely related to instinctivism: conservativism. For in that tradition, there has always been a tension, unresolved, between characteristics inherent in the individual, competitive, striving; and
a mode of social resolution of all these individuals' strivings, a 'hidden hand'? It is my belief that the
disagreement about the extent of the reduction to be
performed owes as much to this source as it does to
a scientific disagreement. (68)

6 Instinctivism as Para-behaviorism

A useful way of exploring the implications of the
instinctivists' view is to consider what they see
themselves as opposing. And it is here that we run
against a very peculiar fact. The only real alter-
native they can conceive to instinctivism is
behaviourism:

"Genetically, we have not evolved very strikingly
since Cro-Magnon man, but culturally we have
changed beyond recognition, and are changing at
an ever-increasing rate. ... But I am not alone
in believing that this behavioural adjustability,
like all types of modifiability, has its limits.
These limits are imposed on us by our hereditary
constitution, a constitution which can only change
with the far slower speed of genetic evolution.
There are good grounds for the conclusion that
man's limited behavioural adjustability has been
outpaced by the culturally determined changes in
this social environment, and that this is why man
is now a misfit in his own society."

(69)

Tinbergen is setting up as his opponent a notion of
infinite malleability. No one but the behaviourists
ever held such a view. Tinbergen is in fact repro-
ducing a classic opposition of 'nature' and 'nurture'.
This is not surprising in itself, even if it is galling
to find it imputed that instinctivism and behavio-

rism constitute the sole alternatives.

What is surprising is that in their view of culture,
of human learning, they reproduce wholesale the
behaviourist view. Again we must go to Dawkins
for clear exposition, but much of it is implicit in
other instinctivists. Learning, says Dawkins, is
an adaptive mechanism allowing greater flexibility,
more movement. Behaviour comes to be at one
remove from genetic determination:

"The genes ... control the behaviour of their
survival machines, not directly with their fingers
on puppet strings, but indirectly like the computer
programmer. All they can do is to set it up before-
hand; then the survival machine is on its own, and
the genes can only sit passively inside." (70)

Imitation provides the main method of trans-
mission of culture. To this extent, it is already pure
behaviourism: Dawkins can conceive to instinctivism is
simply a matter of what he can do, how far he can go.
Dawkins says, the idea of the survival programme is
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We must see how Dawkins understands simulation:

"One way for genes to solve the problem of
making predictions in rather unpredictable
environments is to build in the capacity for
learning. Here the programme may take the
form of the following instructions to the survival
machine. 'Here is a list of things defined as
rewarding: sweet taste in the mouth, orgasm,
mild temperature, smiling child. And here is
a list of nasty things: various sorts of pain,
nausea, empty stomach, screaming child. If
you should chance to do something which is
followed by one of the nasty things, don't do it
again, but on the other hand repeat anything
which is followed by one of the nice things.'" (73)

What is this but a behaviourism based on genes?
Whereas Skinnerian behaviourists have traditionally
noted their stress on the way particular events in the
environment reinforce behaviour in variable ways,
here is an instinctivist merely focusing attention
on what makes reinforcement possible at all. The
pain/pleasure syndrome - with its roots right back
into English empiricism - is now simply rooted in

genetics. Dawkins appears to recognize the
weakness of this:

"The evolution of the capacity to simulate seems
to have culminated in subjective consciousness.
Why this should have happened is, to me, the
most profound mystery facing modern biology. ... Perhaps consciousness arises when the brain's
simulation of the world becomes so complete that it must include a model of itself. Obviously the
learning and the survival programme is seen as
constitute an important part of its simulated world;
previously, for the same kind of reason the simul-
ation itself could be regarded as part of the world
to be simulated. Another word for this might
indeed be 'self-awareness', but I don't find this
a fully satisfying explanation of the evolution of
consciousness, and this is only partly because it
involves an infinite regress - if there is a model
of the model, why not a model of the model of
the model, ...?" (74)

There is something very wrong here. Firstly, no
explanation can be given apparently for subjective
consciousness; Secondly, this account of simulation
and self-awareness leads quite logically to a para-
dox; that ought to lead to abandonment of the theory.
Dawkins, instead, stands on one paradox in order to
pronounce another. He now claims that subjective
consciousness - so inexplicable, so paradoxical -
gives us the power to 'rebolt against the dictates of the
genes'. It does not signal the end of genetic
determination, only a capacity to override. Once
again, this offends brutally against Durkheim's
criteria for a satisfactory dualism; for it posits
learning and consciousness as capacities designed
to serve survival, but then gives them, without
explanation, powers of rebellion against a survival
principle.

But look again at that infinite regress. It bears a
striking similarity to that which is implicit in
Gilbert Ryle's The Concept of Mind, and explicit in
David Armstrong's A Materialist Theory of the Mind
(75). The problem that dogs all three is self-
awareness. In Dawkins, it occurs as a problem
because simulation is seen as an experimental dry-
run, as 'vicarious trial and error'. A simulated
model has to include all those factors in an environ-
ment that might be relevant to the intended action.
As Dawkins says, the body enters as a factor in the
model early on, because an animal must reckon with
its own physical capacities. But clearly, in self-
awareness, the mechanism of simulation itself
must be part of the model. But that creates a 'hall
of mirrors' effect, each reflection has to include
itself. So for self-awareness to be possible, an
infinite regress has to be overcome.
Ryle thinks he can avoid the problem. Discussing "the systematic elusiveness of the I", he argues that the tendency to paradox can be avoided by understanding that all apparent self-awareness is actually awareness of something just seen, done, thought, or felt. Self-knowledge always points to the past. But as Dawkins is honest enough to realise, simulation concerns the future. It concerns the intentions, the plans, of an organism. It refers to what I might do. Either Ryle is going to say that there is no sense in which I can meaningfully consider the future or he has not saved himself from the same problem.

Armstrong defines self-consciousness as "a self-scanning mechanism in the central nervous system" (76). He also realises that this creates the paradox of an infinite regress. If self-awareness is a mode of perception, as he claims, then strictly to have self-perception, the scanning-mechanism itself needs to be scanned; as does that one; and so on. He in fact resolves it pragmatically by saying that at some point we do just stop. But that leaves him with a problem. He himself has noted that perception requires judgement. Each of these scanning operations requires a corresponding judgement of the form "And that's me I'm looking at". How could that be achieved? For there is a sense in which it isn't 'me' - it is a different mechanism. And because the brain, and behaviour, are, predictably, regarded as separable into units, one scanning operation is not identical with another. Self-awareness vanishes.

What do these three models have in common? They share two connected claims. First, they all view self-awareness as, in some sense, a species of perception. Second, they all regard the process, thought, model or whatever is the object of awareness as a given, an 'object' with settled characteristics. In Dawkins, it is the model, the simulacrum; in Ryle, it is the thought, feeling, action just gone - and therefore fixed; in Armstrong, it is the brain-process going on independently of the scanning operation. It is precisely these two characteristics of their notion of self-awareness that pushes all of them headlong into the 'hall of mirrors', the infinite regress.

Who are the three? Dawkins is a genetic reductionist; Armstrong is a mechanical materialist; Ryle is a behaviourist. All three share a fundamental picture of mind.

Their paradox is only resolvable by making a shift in the notion of self-awareness. It has to be seen, not as a monitoring process, seeing a mental (or dispositional) process already underway, determined from other sources by other causes. It is the givenness of what is observed that generates the paradox. If self-awareness is understood, literally, as a 'making up of one's mind', there is no independent entity or process to begin the 'hall of mirrors' paradox. But this requires ending the key assumption underlying Dawkins', Ryle's, Armstrong's reductionism: that behaviour is determined by processes and causes outside consciousness. Whether it be instincts, brain-processes or environmental stimuli, all relegate consciousness to a reflective role.

In reality, the choice between these three approaches is pretty academic. Gene-determination establishes brain-processes which are triggered by environmental stimuli: this simple merger of the three positions suggests that the apparent opposition between instinctivism, mechanical materialism, and behaviouralism is much less than one might have supposed. If I am right, it suggests that the debate on which I was reared, the 'nature-nurture' debate, was a pretty bogus affair. And the instability of the environmental-behaviourist view will have been one of the factors leading to its easy collapse when its optimistic predictions of improvement were not borne out. (77)

What I have tried to show is that instinctivists in general have not bothered to attempt to make sense of culture. Dawkins, the exception produces a doctrine of culture that can be summed up in three propositions. It has the virtue of being broadly compatible with his genetic reductionist theory; it has the unfortunate character of making no sense; and it has the oddly revealing character of being so largely behaviourist.


77 For a subtle and brilliant analysis of one such collapse, see Finn, Grant and Johnson: 'Education, Social Democracy and the Crisis', Cultural Studies 10, 1977. Certainly much of the 1960s educational sociology had behavioural leanings, as did many community studies.
What would be a brilliant design? How would it were it not for our having these characteristics.

Human behaviour is naturally selfish and territorial; this naturalness is rooted in our genetic make-up. We would not have survived until now were it not for our having these characteristics. The drive is for survival, even in human beings. Without suggesting superiority, or inferiority, we can say that different groups have different cultures. A culture is a system of learned responses, limited and shaped by genetic requirements, dedicated to survival. Naturally and instinctually, a group will seek to defend its culture. A group that did not have a genetic predisposition to defend its culture would not have survived until now. Culture is not a body of truths, it is a mode of surviving in relation to a specific natural environment. It is the inherited cunning of a species, that has made it fit for its life in its habitat. Ideas appeal, in large measure, to non-rational, unconscious elements in us.

What implications can be drawn from these beliefs? Of course, the instinctivists, like the 'new racists', are rarely consistent. Their theory is marked as much by what cannot be supported as by any positive implications. And the recipes are always very pessimistic.

At one extreme is the outright ideological use: 'Science, now seems to have caught up with Adam Smith. To summate an economic lameduck is not merely bad economics, indifferent politics, but apparently is also against our deep-seated nature.' (78)

For the most part, however, it is their sheer imprecision that strikes one. Norris, talking of what we ought to do to avoid some of the consequences of our biological nature, writes: 'We may, if we are lucky, remain at peace and continue to operate efficiently and constructively within our group. The internal cohesive force, even without the assistance of an out-group threat, may be sufficiently strong to hold us together.... Only a brilliantly designed super-trivial structure can avoid both (external war and internal strife) at the same time.' (79)

What would be a brilliant design? How would it reconcile apparently irreconcilable? We are never told. It is left wide open for rhetorical expositions, or aggrandist deductions and justifications.

All these are premised on a need to try to stop the aggression. But why should we? It is natural, selfishness and aggression are in our genes, why try to stop their expression? As Wilson has argued, preventing them will as likely as not damage our capacity for love. Internal cohesion will disappear. It is on this point of recommendations and policy suggestions that the instinctivists are very like the new racists. Having stated their version of human nature, they are scarred of the consequences.

Listen to Dawkins:

'Tam not advocating how we humans morally ought to behave. I stress this, because I know I am in danger of being misunderstood by those people, all too numerous, who cannot distinguish a statement of belief in what is the case from an advocacy of what ought to be the case.

Be warned that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals co-operate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish.' (80)

It must be clear by now that I think this absurd. First, if our nature really is like that, we would have no interest in fighting it. Second, a good orator could make ham paste of a logic that suggests we should, or can, ignore fundamental biological warnings. Third, he has given us no coherent account of how we are to go about this transformation. Having opened his book thus with an assertion of faith, he ends by suddenly introducing 'conscious foresight'. On the basis of this 'deus ex machina', he says we might be able to "turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of our selfish replicators". (81)

Even if our conscious foresight could be explained, why should it want to do this? Any true racist would have no difficulty 'consciously envisaging a future' in which we would 'live true to our natures'.

Far more consistent with the theory is the open nastiness of Robert Ardrey. He takes biological culturism seriously. Different societies have different cultures; these reflect stored-up genetic propensities. Thus: the Jews are a true race, as evidenced by their capacity to reform after the Diaspora; the Arabs are not a true race. The Italians are a noyau. Special praise is reserved for the South Africans:

"Today there is not a black African state which for all the world's good will and economic aid does not stagger along on one side or the other of the narrow line between order and chaos, solvency and bankruptcy, peace and blood. Whereas the pariah state South Africa is attaining peaks of affluence, order, security, and internal solidarity rivalled by few long established nations. A degree of tyranny has contributed to the change, but that degree is far smaller than world feeling is yet willing to grant. What since 1960 has transmuted a divided, unstable, near-bankrupt state on the verge of racial explosion into a stable, united, incredibly prospering nation in which the threat of racial explosion is almost non-existent has been natural alchemy.... Every law of the territorial principle has been set in motion; the oromniator's insale defence enhancement of the energy, co-operation and acceptance of leadership..." (82)

His views gain the credence of their contents. Where people lack means of access to data, they conceptualise events. What ethology and sociobiology offer is a conceptualisation of things that go beyond any individual's experience. Because of that, opposition to the new racism, and to its systematic version 'instinctivism', has to shatter the concepts. We are facing the emergence of a new world-view. It is vicious, and racist in its implications. But it could work. It is our job to defeat it in fact and in theory, on the streets and in argument, before the common-sense of the new racism becomes the systematic fascism of a lived instinctivism.


One wonders how these damned totalitarian socialists managed to suppress their deep-seated natures so well. Perhaps they're not really human....

D. Morris. op. cit. p115-16

R. Dawkins. op. cit. p3.

R. Dawkins. op. cit. p215.

R. Ardrey. op. cit. p316.