Chapter One: Death is Natural But is Human Death?

One of the central tenets of the Death and Dying Movement is that death is - or ought to be - natural. This principle is not really argued. It is simply the premise of arguments about how to return dying to its proper place as a natural event. Even when there are strong disagreements about other points, writers agree on the desirability of death being natural. Sherwin Nuland, in *How We Die,* is implicitly critical of the direction that Kubler-Ross gave to the death and dying movement. Nuland attempts to provide a more realistic, sometimes stark, picture of the dying process as opposed to a romanticized view of dying that would make it peaceful and pleasant. However, Kubler-Ross and Nuland are agreed on one point, namely, the naturalness of dying.

The thesis of this chapter is that death is never simply natural for a human being; it is a personal act in which the natural is reshaped for better or for worse. A person has a human nature but is not reducible to that nature. A person shapes and reshapes his or her nature by means of the activities of life. Humans engage in art, religion and science in ways that other animals do not. Such activities are not opposed to nature (unnatural) but they also do not conform to a pre-established natural order.

People who say they want a natural death are usually fearful of being treated in inhuman ways. A violent attack on a person leads to death from Aunnatural causes.@ Intrusive technology can also do violence to the process of human dying. To be treated as a human being is to receive appropriate help (including medicines) that serve a person=s living and dying. To understand the current discussion of natural death it is necessary to lay out the meaning(s) of natural and the reason there is such confusion in using the term.

Kubler Ross=s *On Death and Dying* did not invent the language of natural death; it has been around for a long time. However, the naturalness of dying had not been emphasized in the first part of the twentieth century. Kubler-Ross=s book brought back to the fore a theme that had been prominent in the nineteenth century.

This time the idea took hold in the culture so that a natural death has become not only a popular but a legal concept. Since California passed a Natural Death Act in 1976, the phrase has shown up constantly in discussions of death. The desire for a natural death is usually in living wills that state a person=s wishes about what is to be done and what is not to be done if the person becomes incapable of expressing those wishes. A standard form for a living will in New

York State says that Aif life-sustaining procedures are serving only to prolong the dying process, then in that event, I direct that the procedures be withheld or withdrawn, and that I be permitted to die naturally.@

This usage of Anaturally@ in living wills indicates why there has been this sudden upsurge in the language of natural death. If someone were unaware of the technology in today=s hospitals, he or she might be puzzled by talk about natural death. Why should anyone have to say that he or she wants a natural death? Is anyone in favor of dying an unnatural death?

At one level the mantra of natural death seems almost too obvious for saying. But the phrase is actually very ambiguous in meaning. Individuals who say I want to die a natural death may not realize what they are asking for. Or what they intend to ask for may not be conveyed to the hearer by the term natural. For example, does a natural death exclude morphine if one is in excruciating pain? Can morphine be called either natural or unnatural?

This chapter is the backdrop for the five chapters that follow. Natural death, even when the phrase is not used, is now assumed in most discussions of the topics dealt with in the following chapters, namely, stages of dying, dying with dignity, euthanasia, suicide and mourning. The material in the present chapter may seem to be an overload for such a simple question as the meaning of Anatural.@ However, Raymond Williams in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, writes that Anature is perhaps the most complex word in the language...any full history of the uses of >nature= would be a history of a large part of human thought.@[i]

If Williams is correct, then the first question for this chapter is whether it is realistically possible to attempt an overall clarification of the term. A book by Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas in the 1930s listed sixty-six meanings of nature.[ii] How can one make generalizations about the meaning of Anature@? The task would seem hopeless.

People continue to use the term natural so that an effort must be made to avoid total equivocation, as well as some ambiguities that might be dangerous. At the least, examining the complexity of this term might be a warning to some people that the issue is not settled. There is a widespread assumption today that, while in recent centuries Anature@ (in its relation to Aman@) was misunderstood, the issue has now been put right, at least in theory. The one sure conclusion which will emerge in this chapter is that any simple statement of the relation between the human and the natural is deficient. Only with a paradoxical formulation does

one have a chance of comprehending this relation.

The relation between the human and the natural is of significance in almost every field of study and every aspect of existence. Sometimes, as in legal theory where Anatural law@ is discussed, the meaning of Anatural@ is obviously at stake. So also Anature@ and Anatural@ show up in anthropology, sociology and psychology. The term is not so prominent in politics, economics or engineering but it always hovers in the background.

If there is one place that all the conflicting meanings of natural converge, it would likely be in thanatology. Like much else in human life, the relation of the human person to nature becomes a pressing issue when a person confronts dying. The good news is that a focus on dying can simplify things on the far side of life=s complexity. If one wishes to know what is natural about human life, it may be better to start rather than finish with death.

Is it possible to propose one meaning for the term natural, and if so, how does one proceed? If reaching a single meaning is unrealistic, how does one move from sixty-six, or some other unwieldy number of meanings, to a manageable and practical range of meanings? Peter Coates lists five main meanings that the term nature has had in western history.[iii] I would suggest that the main meanings can be reduced to three: nature as an inner principle of things; nature as what is not Aman@; nature as the name for everything. I will argue that the first and third meanings are compatible; the second is an historical aberration that is still with us but should be retired.

For any old and important term, two criteria are required to determine how best to use the term: First, the proposed meaning must somehow include the etymology and all the major shifts in the term=s history? Second, the proposed meaning must provide a consistent and comprehensive usage for today=s problems?

The first criterion cannot be met without digging into the twists and turns of history. The most that this chapter can offer is snapshots of dramatic shifts in the term=s history. Fortunately, for 2500 years there has been a continuous history with a relatively clear translation from one language to another. I will select a few people, such as Aristotle and Rousseau, and a few schools of thoughts, such as Stoicism and feminism, to illustrate the historical shifts of meaning.

The History of ANature@

Why does the term nature exist at all? Sometimes one can give a precise answer to who first used a word and why the word was invented. In the case of old words, rich in meaning, the origin is usually too deeply embedded in history or pre-history to provide clear answers. With the term nature, however, we have some helpful historical sources that touch on the origin of the idea.

The Greek word for nature, *physis,* seems to have emerged with the origins of philosophy itself. Reflecting on the diversity and movement in the world, the early Greek philosophers sought to bring things into a unity and to explain change. What most struck them were living things that are born, grow, decline and die. The term nature seemingly was coined to identify the source of change in living things. A living being has Aself-movement,@that is, a source of change which itself does not change but instead gives stability to plants and animals over time.[iv]

The first place to take a snapshot of nature=s history is Aristotle. The term has a history of many centuries before Aristotle but he is the first person we know of who tried to sort out and to synthesize the disparate meanings of Anature.@[v] Aristotle thus becomes the conduit for much of what we know of Anature@before him. And Aristotle is a model for how to go about deciding on a word=s meaning. Aristotle lists six meanings that the word had acquired by his time. From that summary he then attempts to give Athe primary and chief sense@of the term.[vi]

Aristotle=s first meaning of natural is birth or origin; he attempts an etymological link between nature and birth. Although his etymology may have been inaccurate, nature and birth were associated before Aristotle and after him.[vii] The connection was solidified by Cicero=s choice of *natura* (from *natus*) as the word to translate *physis*. The English word took its lead from Latin and retained the connection to birth.

Aristotle=s other meanings also survive to the present. Nature refers to what is inherent, to what is a source of motion, to what things are made of, to the primary being (or essence) of living things and by extension to the essence of every thing. From these six meanings Aristotle concludes that Anature is the primary being of those things that have in them the source of their own movement.@[viii]

What Aristotle seems to be missing is the collective meaning of Anature@that became prominent later and is sometimes thought to be the primary meaning. That is, nature as the aggregate of things, a name for the whole world is in some eras the main meaning of Anature.@ While there is nothing necessarily wrong with this evolution of the word, it is helpful to remember that the collective meaning was the secondary not the primary meaning. It may still be helpful to start by

thinking of nature as the inner principle of living things more so than as a general name for everything.

Even at the individual level Anature@ is an abstraction. It is not a perceptible reality but a philosophical concept invented as an explanation. The Hebrew Bible, for example, has nothing to say about Anature@; it lacks the word.[ix] The Bible of the Jews (the Christian Old Testament) has plenty to say about plants and animals, as well as the human relation to the world of living things. But in contrast to Greek philosophy, the Hebrew Bible speaks in concrete terms of flesh and blood and breath. Jews, Christians and others have to be careful about reading the concept of Anature@ back into the Hebrew Bible. High blown generalizations about the Jewish or Christian attitude to nature are almost bound to be inaccurate.

A main question throughout the centuries has been the relation between the humans and nature. The era of Plato and Aristotle, the fourth century B.C.E., represents one of the first great shifts in the meaning of Anature.@ The developed speculative systems of Plato and Aristotle gave a new prominence to individual human life and to rational concepts for speculating on the human relation to the cosmos. It was now possible to think of the human being as in some sense an outsider to the natural world of other living beings. Earlier religions may have implied this outsider status but philosophical concepts, such as being, nature, essence, form, matter and soul forced some explicit choices.

At his trial, Socrates spoke of a soul that would survive his death, a belief that seems to entail that the real human being is an outsider to earth=s cycle of birth, growth, decline, death and rebirth. Other Platonic dialogues also suggest an eternal, immutable form as more real than the perceived world.

Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, was a biologist, keenly attentive to the material world around him. Despite hints that intellect is separable from matter, Aristotle treated humans as living beings who have a nature. Human nature acts through powers that can be trained by habits of intellectual and moral excellence. One might say that Aristotle=s first interest is neither the noun Anature@ nor the adjective Anatural@ but the adverb Anaturally.@ Living beings act naturally when their acts flow from what they are and action is directed toward its proper good.

For Aristotle, humans have a superior position of power and self-reflection but they are still governed by the laws that govern living things. Aristotle was aware of the paradox: that the human is neither Aa part@ of nature nor Aapart@ from nature. Aristotle=s nature remained concretely realized in each living being,

including human individuals.

A second snapshot of nature=s history is from several centuries after Aristotle, at about the time of the Christian era. A group of writers known to history as the Stoics made a permanent impression on Anature.@ Christianity absorbed considerable amounts of Stoicism into its ethics. And even today, or especially today, a kind of Stoicism is evident in discussions of the environment.

The Stoics were one of the groups to move Anature@ in the direction of becoming co-extensive with the cosmos. At the same time, philosophical thinking had become more conscious that the humans= possession of reason gave them a perspective different from others. The world was made for gods and men - those who possessed reason - according to the Stoic Chrsippus (280-207 B.C.E.). But clearly the men are in a position of subordination.[x] Nature is all enveloping; if men claim to be independent they will only increase their suffering and eventually death will prove who is stronger.

The Stoics began recognition of what became the faculty of free will, but they advocated acceptance of nature as the only wise course to follow. AFollowing nature@ might be thought today to mean following natural impulses. For the Stoics, it meant just the opposite. A wonderful allegory, attributed to either Zeno or Chrsippus, captures the relation of humans and nature. AIf a dog is tied, as it were, to a wagon, then if the dog wishes to follow, it will both be pulled and follow, acting by its own choice together with necessity; but if it does not wish to follow, it will in any case be compelled. The same applies to human beings....@[xi]

The best known Stoic is Marcus Aurelius, whose Meditations are very much on death: AIf only it be steadily contemplated, and the fancies we associate with it be mentally dissected, it will soon come to be thought of as no more than a process of nature (and only children are scared by a natural process) - or rather, something more than a mere process, a positive contribution to nature=s well-being.@[xii] His qualifying last phrase suggests a recognition that human death is not entirely captured by a Aprocess of nature.@ The same is true when he writes Aas a part, you inhere in the Whole. You will vanish into which gave you birth; or rather, you will be transmuted once more into the creative Reason of the universe.@[xiii]

Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor for whom Stoicism was a consolation. This philosophy was just as comforting to Epictetus, a Greek speaking Roman slave. He advises human acceptance of whatever nature demands, including death. AIf you kiss your child or wife, say that you are kissing a human being; for when it dies you will not be upset....What upsets people is not things themselves

> but their judgments about things. For example, death is nothing dreadful (or else it would have appeared dreadful to Socrates) but instead the judgment about death that it is dreadful - *that* is dreadful....Just as a target is not set up to be missed, in the same way nothing bad by nature happens in the world.[xiv]

The language of Aman and nature@ appears with Stoicism but the earlier language of living natures, including human nature, does not disappear. Not until the seventeenth century does the language of @man and nature@ become standard fare.

AMan and nature@ did not become the language of Christianity because Stoicism=s metaphysical picture was unacceptable. Christianity starts from the idea of a creator of living beings and, at the center of those beings is the human being as the priest of all creation. To early Christianity, Plato seemed to be the perfect match. A school known as neoplatonism shaped much of the theology of the West.

Neoplatonic thought, like early Greek philosophy, saw an organic unity to the world. Humans are not apart from the other natures. All natures participate in a world soul, even though human reason is recognized as a superior power. Human reason is a participant in reason which itself participates in a much greater reality. What especially distinguishes neoplatonism is a push beyond being to the ultimate source called the One.

Neoplatonism=s distinction between beings and the One provided the framework for Thomas Aquinas=s distinction between the essence or nature of a thing and its act of to be. Human nature exists by participation in Ato be.@ Nature or natures are given a positive place but their act of being is received.

The human being has a human nature which determines what it is, but *who* the person is goes beyond *what* a person is. Each person is unique not from its nature but because of its act of being. Human life is not subordinated to a law of nature. Ethical questions have to respect the limits of nature while going beyond the fixed forms of nature.

Neoplatonic thought was the framework within which the rediscovery of Aristotle occurred in the middle ages. Aristotle=s physics and biology kept neoplatonism from losing touch with the empirical world. Thomas Aquinas managed to unite the two traditions but the end of the Renaissance brought out a conflict between a desiccated Aristotelianism on one side and a neoplatonic philosophy allied with magic on the other side.

The Roots of Modern Nature

Modern scholarship traces the beginnings of modern science to the twelfth century when Christian thinkers developed a distinction between the natural and the supernatural.[xv] The significance of this language was that it asserted the intelligibility of natural things and the human ability to exercise control by the use of rational methods.

Contemporary critics of Christianity often have little understanding of the distinction between natural and supernatural. The meaning of Anature@is therefore lost if one assumes that it is being opposed to man or history or culture. For Thomas Aquinas, the nature does not exist on its own; nature is the intelligible form of living beings, including the human. The natural within a supernatural world indicated human limitation. When Thomas Aquinas speculates on the natural (in contrast to the supernatural) he refers to what nature has taught all animals and what conserves the natural world.[xvi]

The seventeenth century brought about the greatest shift since Aristotle in the meaning of nature. There was a continuity with the science and the Apractical arts@of the middle ages, but also a discontinuity hidden under the term Anature.@ The common belief that science and religion were at war in the seventeenth century is inaccurate. AThe new physicist wanted nothing so much as a philosophy of nature that harmonized with mainstream Christianity, the better to combat the socio-religious threat of magic.@[xvii] The theologians were only too happy to join with the scientists. Both groups were fighting a magic, partly derived from neoplatonism, in which nature was a force within living things. The mathematical sciences and Christian theology combined to reduce Anature@to objective data.

Scientists took over the phrase Anatural revelation@that had emerged in the middle ages as the younger sister of Asupernatural revelation.@ Gradually, this underling edged out the supernatural. Even among the theologians, except those who moved in the direction of biblical literalism, the main and practical source of knowledge was the natural revelation.

Natural revelation turned out to be a bad bargain for theology when the only natural revelation became the unveiling of nature itself. Nature acquired most of the attributes that had been assigned to God (self-sufficiency, prime mover, eternal). In the seventeenth century, motion was thought to be supplied from outside matter; the need for a mover was the premise from which the existence of God was proved. But when the eighteenth century decided that nature contains

motion within itself, it became possible to speak of God or Nature interchangeably (*Deus sive Natura*) which led to the choice of either God or Nature (*Deus aut Natura*). By that time Nature held the stronger hand.

The supreme place of nature or Nature in eighteenth century thought had overtones of Stoicism. Nature was to be revered as mother of us all, an attitude that is evident in the nature mysticism of modern romantic movements. However, the main current of modern science stood against a reverence for nature as the great mother.

In the Stoic parable a small dog is tied to a large cart and has only the choice of trotting along with the cart or being dragged by the cart. By the seventeenth century, the dog (AMan@) had grown up and thought it could now drag the cart. Whereas first-century Stoics advised acceptance of nature=s ways, the seventeenth century invented the language of Aman conquering nature.@ The person who most clearly brings together the two strands of modern thought, reverence for nature and power over nature, is Francis Bacon (1561-1626).

Bacon was as influential as any one individual for shaping the meaning of nature during the seventeenth to twentieth centuries. Abstract man was set in contrast to abstract nature. The verbs that Bacon used to describe the relation were Acommand@ and Aconquer.@[xviii]

Far from thinking that conquest is arrogant, Bacon describes the needed attitude as one of humility. His governing metaphor was Aa bridal chamber@ or Aa nuptial couch for the mind and the universe.@[xix] Many contemporary feminists are appalled by this metaphor but, for Bacon, the scientist is a gallant suitor who must use chastity, respect and restraint. Bacon condemns those who value knowledge in itself; Athis is to use as a mistress for pleasure what ought to be a spouse for fruit.@[xx]

For Bacon, man=s religious duty is to read the Book of Nature and restore human control over nature. As in so many authors since the twelfth century, Bacon posits three stages to history.[xxi] In the first stage, nature was free and develops herself in her ordinary course. In the second stage, nature is affected by the insubordination of matter; man and nature are at odds with each other. In the third stage, nature will be molded by art and human ministry.[xxii]

Far from thinking that Christianity had brought about dominion over nature, Bacon was critical of the failure in the past to exercise that power. Like Rousseau, Kant, Schiller and other later writers, Bacon foresaw a third age in

which nature and art come together in harmony. The title page of *The Great Instauration* has the prayer Amay he graciously grant to us to write an apocalypse or true vision of the footsteps of the Creator imprinted on his creatures.@[xxiii] For today=s reader, the term apocalypse may suggest violence, but apocalypse simply meant revelation. This apocalyptic vision is intended to support Bacon=s marriage metaphor: the search for a harmonious union of man and nature as the fulfillment of history.

The writer who perhaps offers the best litmus test for today=s difficulty in grasping the meaning of nature is Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Living more than a century after Bacon=s abstract nature and in the midst of the eighteenth-century=s glorification of nature, Rousseau carries an earlier view of nature into the modern world.

For Rousseau, the opposite of nature is Asociety,@a word whose meaning he helped to shape. His educational treatise, *Emile*, which opens with a well known description of the clash of Aman and nature,@is easy to misread. Rousseau is not referring to the relation of human and nonhuman; he is not praising nature in contrast to the ways of humans. Nature refers to the inner life of the individual man (and woman). This human nature=s destiny is as a reasoning being whose life is governed by ethical and religious convictions.

Rousseau published *Emile* in the same year as his better known work *Social Contract* (1762). But the usual interpretation of *Emile,* as a hands-off attitude for the development of an autonomous individual, makes it an apolitical book rather than an education for political transformation.[xxiv] Summaries of *Emile* usually indicate that the reader did not get beyond the first two pages or at most the first two of five books. With that to go on, the reader is almost certain to misread what Anature@means for Rousseau and what kind of education he is recommending. Human nature requires instruction. After age twelve, which Rousseau calls the age of reason, the boy is subjected to regular lessons on politics, ethics, sex and religion, preparing him to be husband and father in the family that is to be a microcosm of political revolution.

Some of Rousseau=s catchy phrases and images contribute to the misunderstanding of his complex meaning of nature. He is famous for referring to a Astate of nature@a phrase that leads to the assumption that he is educating Emile to live in a state outside civilized life.[xxv] However, Rousseau writes that Athe man who speaks of the >state of nature=speaks of a state which no longer exists, which may never have existed, and which probably never will exist.@[xxvi] Rousseau staunchly opposed the Christian doctrine of original sin but he was

faced with explaining how a pure human nature gets entangled in the messes it does. Rousseau keeps the idea of an Edenic state of nature before a psychological fall into society=s corruption.

The root of this moral failure, in which a person tries to live according to society=s expectations, lies in the flight from death. Unless humans control their fear of dying they love a false version of their selves and so make themselves miserable. At the end of book three, Emile is to have learned that death is a necessity of nature. ATo live free and to depend little on human beings is the best way of learning how to die.@[xxvii]

This attitude of accepting death is possible because in book four we read AI no longer sense that I am anything but the work and instrument of the great Being who wants what is good, who does it and who will do what is good for me....@[xxviii] His attitude to death is that AI aspire to the moment when freed from the shackles of the body, I shall be *me* without contradiction or division.@[xxix] Rousseau could not solve his problem of (human) nature without recourse to religious beliefs. He found those beliefs in Atrue Christianity.@This true Christianity or Anatural religion@ turns out to be eighteenth-century Deism.[xxx]

Contemporary Geography of Meaning

Besides the history of the term, one has to attend to its contemporary uses, what I have referred to as the geography of its meaning. The history and the geography of meaning meet in the present. It can be somewhat arbitrary where to draw a line between (past) history and present use. The present meaning of a term refers to a time that is more than this month or this year or this decade. In the case of Anature,@we seem to be undergoing a drastic change that started four or five decades ago.

The best way to identify the meaning of a term in its present use is to ask what the meaning excludes, that is, nature as opposed to what. There are dozens of candidates for this position but I will comment on three of the most common: artificiality, culture, nurture.

What are we to make of artificiality these days? When today=s advertisers claim that the bread, the beer or the ice cream is Aall natural,@the claim entails a denial of anything Aartificial@in the ingredients of the food. This assumption that natural is good and artificial is bad represents a dramatic shift over the last half century. But during the same time, practices such as the genetic engineering of foods has continued to expand, which suggests some inconsistency in the value

of the natural, as opposed to the artificial. Is the irradiation of food natural while the addition of chemicals is not natural? Raymond Williams notes that Anature is what man has not made, though if he made it long enough ago - a hedgerow or a desert - it will usually be included as >natural.=@[xxxi] The simple clear contrast of natural and artificial thus has many shady edges. All artificiality is not opposed to nature; artifice is what human beings do. David Hume, who is often invoked in the denial that the natural and the moral are related, writes Athough the rules of justice be artificial, they are not arbitrary.@[xxxii] But some artificiality does violence to human or nonhuman natures; that kind of artificiality is unnatural.

A second and more ambiguous contrast these days is one that is made between nature and culture. Peter Coates begins his history of nature by referring to Aan elemental juxtaposition of nature and culture.@[xxxiii] He goes so far as to say that Awithout a concept of culture as the works of humankind, there can be no concept of nature.@[xxxiv] The problem here is that this meaning of culture is quite recent and remains highly ambiguous. Although in past centuries Acultural@ would have been in some tension with Anatural,@ it was by no means its simple opposite. ACultural@ began as an agricultural metaphor and even in some uses today it reflects an intimate relation to the natural. The meaning of Anatural@ depends not only on the word to which it is set in opposition, but also to the era and the social context when such a contrast is made.

A third opposite to Anature@ is Anurture,@ a pairing that goes back about a century and a half but shows no sign of disappearing. Dispassionate commentators on this pair of words regularly say that it is not an either/or choice. Is it not obvious that both nature and nurture are important in human life?. While everyone might agree with that proposition it does not stop passionate advocacy on one side or the other

The reason why this debate never seems to go anywhere except in circles is the extraordinary ambiguity in what are assumed to be the names of two sides. The Anature@ in the debate is human nature but the common meaning of nature as forces opposed to the human keeps creeping in. On the other side, Anurture@ can quite logically be thought to be intrinsic to human nature (though not to all natures). However, Anurture@ sometimes includes the human employment of environment (one of the meanings of Anature@). That is, just about anything can show up on either side of this confused debate.[xxxv]

There has been some serious struggle with the meaning of Anature@ in two prominent movements in the latter half of the twentieth century: feminism and environmentalism. The movements have sometimes run parallel, at other times

they converge or overlap. A feminist complaint about Aman and nature@was obviously to be expected after the general linguistic change in the use of Aman.@ With only the two categories of man and nature, women had most often been implicitly on the side of nature, that is, part of the world that needed taming. But one should note it is the relation itself, Aman and nature,@ that needs changing, which is not accomplished simply by replacing Aman@with Ahuman.@

When one moves away from abstract man and abstract nature, then there is no simple way to state the relation between the natural and the human. The natures of both men and women are thrown into question, as well as the natures of each living thing and the cycle of life. Thus, the issue of women being oppressed or excluded from philosophical and political thinking is inseparable from the environmental or ecological question.

Many authors today continue to speak of man and nature, especially when the topic is a grand historical, scientific or philosophical generality. No one should rewrite past literature to eliminate Aman@or assume that the use of Aman@ was always oppressive. Nevertheless, the language of man and nature deserves to be completely retired; it is incapable of addressing today=s problems. The language of Ahumans and nature@may be an improvement, but if it is assumed to be a solution, it can further obscure the deeper problems.

A different tack is taken by some writers in ecology who think that Aman@ should be absorbed into nature.[xxxvi] That would be a comprehensive solution but one that cannot be consistently stated. If nature is all, then any human project, other than rapid elimination, is in the wrong direction. There may be a few Stoics today who believe in submission to Nature but university professors hardly fit the profile. If in the past, man was said to be Aoutside@nature, the picture cannot be righted by a simple reversal that would put man Ainside@nature. Nature embracing man may seem to be an irenic picture but it is one that raises more problems than it solves.

Jane Jacobs, in the forward to a book on urban design, writes: AThe basic premise is that human beings exist wholly within nature as part of natural order in every respect....Readers unwilling or unable to breach a barrier they imagine separates human kind and its works from the rest of nature will be unable to hear what this book is saying.@[xxxvii] Jacobs should not assume that readers who disagree with her cannot breach a barrier they imagine separates humankind and nature.. Someone might argue that while humankind is not *separate* from the rest of nature, Jacobs=s own work on urban design shows that neither are humans Awholly within nature as part of natural order in every respect.@ In some

respects humans exist in a natural order, in other respects humans change that order.

The ecological question is not whether humans should Atamper with nature.@ All human activity has an effect on human nature and other natures. The question is what kinds of human actions might be doing damage to important ecological systems. Because human knowledge is always limited, what is thought to be progress in one part of the world may be causing horrendous problems in another geographical or temporal part of the world. Jules Baggini has great fun in ridiculing people who want to rely on what is natural and, for example, are concerned about genetically modified food. With food and other necessary human resources it is a legitimate question to ask what is compatible with human nature: the health of humans both short term and long term, as well as what is compatible with natures in the human environment.[xxxviii]

Summary

It is apparent from both the historical survey and from the full range of today=s problems that the relation of human(s) and nature(s) cannot be stated as a simple choice of inside or outside. Neither is the language of part and whole adequate. In some sense, humans can be said to be Awithin@nature, if nature is taken to be the sum total of things. But from the time of pre-socratic philosophy to the present, Anature@is in some sense Awithin@the human. Certainly human nature is within humans and so is the very idea of nature.

An abstract meaning of nature needs to be regularly grounded in particular beings, human and nonhuman. What needs examining today is not Aman and nature@or Ahumans and nature@but the relations of men and men, women and women, men and women, adults and children, humans and nonhuman animals, humans and other living beings, and the ecological systems of living beings (including men and women) in a physical environment.

Then when we try to generalize about the human relation to nature we will look for alternatives to in/out, conquer/conform to, above/below. We might, for example, say that human activity should respect the natural order while not necessarily conforming to it; that human actions should work with the rhythms and contours of nature, both human and nonhuman.

The etymological root of Anature,@what is given by birth, is still present in the word=s use today. The natural world is one in which organisms are born, grow, decline and die. Humans cannot avoid Ainterfering@in the processes of birth,

development and death. That interference is true of their own cycle of birth and death, as well as the cycles of birth and death all around them. This intrusion ought to assume that human knowledge is always scanty (even about humans) and that harm is likely if the intrusion is violent.

Short of all humans becoming Jain monks, humans will remain the great killers; they cannot breathe, wash, eat or walk across the grass without killing. The world of natural things involves killing but that is not a licence for humans to kill whatever they wish and to kill in any manner. The first principle of ethics should be Ado violence to no one.@ It is an ideal that humans should strive for but realize they can never fulfill, a fact that makes apology and forgiveness integral to ethics.

The phrase Anatural law@ goes back as far as the Romans. For the Stoics it may have been an accurate description of their ethics. The law of nature determined that AMan@ was called to submit to ANature.@ In the Christian middle ages the natural was related to the supernatural, both within the human and in the whole of creation. Grace (or the supernatural) was said to build on nature; human actions were in this supernaturally ordered world. While the natural, as the substrate of the supernatural, should not be violated or dismissed, the life of persons in community is not dictated by the natural order of things.

In the last three centuries, natural law advocates have generally fought a losing battle against a variety of positions that have emphasized human freedom and creativity. Discussion of natural law received a boost at the time of the Nuremberg trials. Surely there is something wrong with executing millions of people even if a nation=s laws do not forbid it. International and environmental events since that time have continued to raise the question of natural law but without persuading many people of its validity.

What is needed is a conversation between peoples of East and West, North and South, a conversation that might learn from earlier philosophy and religion as well as today=s science. There might be achievable agreements on what not to do to nature(s) even if there is no agreement on one law or a set of laws called natural.

It would be helpful if the word Aunnatural@ were saved for those actions that directly violate a thing=s nature or an ecological system. Attaching electrodes to someone=s gums or genitals is an unnatural act; it does violence to a human=s nature. Some of the ways in which the life of an individual are being extended in today=s hospitals may be unnatural, a violent intrusion into the process of dying

when there is no realistic hope of the person returning to life in a human community. One can also say that acts such as polluting a river, which once seemed harmless, may rank as unnatural acts.

In contrast, some things once thought to be unnatural can now be seen as a variation in human nature. That especially applies to sexual activity. Humans, like other animals, naturally reproduce through sexual union. But human nature has always allowed a playful side to sexual activity. Humans have been imaginative and creative in using sexual organs, much to the shock of neighbors who have not encountered that action. Throughout Western history the term unnatural was attached to same-sex practices. Today the practice of homosexuality is generally accepted as a variation in human activity that does not violate (human) nature.

A natural being, in contrast to an artificial being, is one that dies. A human individual, shaped by a human nature, is a natural being that is born, grows, declines and dies. But humans are not merely natural. Who they are is distinctly personal, which is in tension with the natural order both within and outside their bodies. Human death is personal and communal. Human death can be treated as a biological event but it is not wholly describable in biological terms. Politics, art, science and religion are a refusal to accept the biological limits of a personal life.

Kubler-Ross=s insistence that death is natural assumes a very limited choice. The alternatives, she assumes, are either to accept death as biologically necessary or else to be hooked up to a machine that will not allow death its place. The choice in this case is between the biological and the technological. But if human nature includes both the biological and the capacity for the technological, then the choice is not submission to either biology or to technology. The alternative is a creative and humane use of technology - what until the nineteenth century was called Athe practical arts.@ An ethical use of technology is one that is proportionate to personal situations.. There are other ways to resist the dehumanizing of death than by saying that death should be natural. Kubler-Ross=s assumption of what the choice is, as well as the rest of her assumptions, deserve to be looked at carefully.

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i. Raymond Williams, *Keyword* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 184, 186.

ii. Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas, 447-56.

iii. Peter Coates, *Nature: Western Attitudes Since Ancient Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Coates=s five are: physical place more or less unmodified by people; collective phenomena of the world or universe; essence of things; inspiration and guide for people; conceptual opposite of culture

iv. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

v. I do not attempt here a history of Anature@ in Eastern philosophies; I note only at the end of the chapter the need for a dialogue of East and West. Certainly, Taoism and Buddhism have much to offer for filling out the meanings of nature and human nature. But the context and connotations of the term translated as Anature@ would make this chapter much more complicated than it already is.

vi. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1014b.

vii. According to David Ross, Aristotle=s mistakes the origin of the word

viii. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1015a.

ix. The word first appears in medieval Hebrew

x. For quotation from Chrsippus, see Peter Coates, *Nature*, 27.

xi. R.W. Sharples, *Stoics: Epictetus and Sceptics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 77; Hippolytus, Philosophy 21.

xii. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), ii:12.

xiii. Ibid., iv: 14.

xiv. Epictetus, *The Handbook* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983), #13, #5, #27.

xv. M.D.Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

xvi. For a summary, see John Habgood, *The Concept of Nature* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), 87-88.

xvii. Margaret Wertheim, *Pythagoras= Trousers: The Ascent of Mathematical Man* (New York: Random House, 1995), 83.

xviii. Francis Bacon, *The New Organon and Related Writings* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 118-19.

xix. Francis Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, in Ibid., 14.

xx.Advance, Book 1, p 35 in Everyman ed

xxi. Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore* (New York: Harper Torch, 1977).

xxii. Francis Bacon, *The New Organon,* 273.

xxiii. Francis Bacon, *The Great Instauration,*- 29.

xxiv. Jane Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) is one of few commentators who emphasizes the political implications of *Emile*

xxv. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), , expressly denies this is his intent

xxvi. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (New York: Washington Square, 1967), Preface, 169; also Nietzsche in Ansell-Pearson, 50

xxvii. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, 208.

xxviii. Ibid., 292.

xxix.Ibid., 293.

xxx. Ibid., 294.

xxxi. Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, 188.

xxxii. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739 ed. (London: Oxford,) 484.

xxxiii. Peter Coates, *Nature*, 1.

xxxiv. Peter Coates, *Nature, 6*

xxxv. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, 2001, wades into this debate with the supreme confidence that he has the scientific information to settle the debate. Unfortunately, he never asks whether the terms of the debate make sense, starting with the title and the subtitle of the book which are in conflict. A Ablank slate,@far from being a denial of human nature is a very clear idea of human nature. The slate may be empty but the more important fact is that it is a slate.

xxxvi. For example, Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

xxxvii. Jane Jacobs, *Nature of Economies* (New York: Modern Library, 2000) , Preface.

xxxviii.Jules Baggini, *Making Sense*(New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 182: AWhen communities rely on >natural=sources, they expose themselves to disease. At the very least, they need unnatural apparatus, such as pumps, to access clean water supplies. Anyone who suggests we would do better to go back to nature for our water supply is frankly nuts.@ At the end of the chapter, he notes that the argument over genetically modified foods includes the question of human health but that is a scientific question not a philosophical one (194). I would suggest that whether scientific or philosophical, that is the main question being raised about Aunnatural@ foods.