In the previous chapter I described an attempt to restore an extinct species, the quagga, by selective breeding from its near relative, Burchell’s zebra. The attempt has been successful in that there are now animals which look more or less as quaggas used to look. But, I asked, are they real quaggas? Does the fact that they are not directly descended from quaggas make any difference? And how can we be sure that they behave as real quaggas used to behave? There is no way of knowing with any certainty how much of that behaviour was directly dependent on genetic inheritance, and how much was learnt. We know that quaggas went about in herds, and must presumably have learnt some of their habits from each other. But even if these were to a large extent genetically programmed, we cannot be certain that in selecting the right genes to make them look like quaggas, we would necessarily also be selecting the right genes to make them behave as such. Stunning reproductions of life among the dinosaurs can disguise the true depth of our ignorance about what extinct animals really did. Experts can make intelligent guesses on the basis of anatomy, habitat, and the distribution of fossils, but actual knowledge of real dinosaur behaviour is, and probably always will be, inaccessible.

The word ‘real’ in this context begs a question. It presupposes a certain fixity in the nature of things. But is there? It is the extent to which we can rely on any such fixity, discern a basis for it, and use it as a guide to life, that is the subject of this chapter.

In Aristotle’s biology to know the real nature of a dog, or a tree, or a human being, was to have grasped the organising principle which makes each of them distinct, and dictates what kind of life they pursue. This was the original meaning of the word ‘nature’, and it underlies the subdivision of the living world into species, each with its own nature, where ‘nature’ means not just anatomical form but the whole range of capacities and purposes which make a thing what it is. It is ironic that it should be just this primary concept of distinct and identifiable natures which now looks increasingly doubtful, in the light of the biological revolution brought about by The Origin of Species. Darwin himself was notoriously confused about how species are actually to be distinguished. When does a variation become a separate species? Is it just a matter of convenient labelling? Or are species distinguishable by tracing their separate evolutionary lineages? Or is the crucial difference the ability or not to interbreed? If the latter, what are we to make of horses, donkeys, and mules, and numerous other more recent examples of inter-species fluidity? Despite its foundation text, the theory of evolution nowadays implicitly dispenses with the idea of a fixed number of species, each with its own nature, and presents us rather with a continuum of life, within which boundaries are formed only slowly, and sometimes incompletely.

The discovery that physical life is a continuum invites the obvious question, do behaviour patterns form a continuum as well? In particular, how far does human behaviour, despite strong cultural conditioning, rest ultimately on our genetic inheritance?

A BIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR BEHAVIOUR

The new discipline of evolutionary psychology, a successor to sociobiology, explores the hypothesis that human behaviour must have its origins and roots in evolutionary competition, and hence be encoded in our genes. It looks for correspondences between sophisticated human activities, and what are claimed to be their more instinctive precursors in less complex organisms. The widespread human concern about property, for instance, might be
traced back to the kind of innate territorial instinct familiar to us in many animals, most notably in birds. Our so-called aggressive instincts, and the facial expressions which accompany them, have obvious parallels in animal behaviour. Indeed it has been suggested that our high valuation of justice may have arisen out of the need to dissipate anger in response to the facial signals of those who have been unfairly treated.2

One of the latest examples of this kind of explanation, in a book called *A Natural History of Rape*,3 caused something of a furore by its suggestion that rape is not so much a crime of violence, as a natural and widespread sexual strategy for passing on genes, in which the violence is incidental. The thesis originated in a study of scorpion flies, which alerted the researchers to the prevalence of rape in the animal world, and hence to the need for an evolutionary explanation. The depth of confusion possible on this subject was revealed in a review of the book in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, in which the reviewer wrote:

The popular perspective on rape, the social science theory, posits that rape is caused primarily or only by ‘culture’ or social learning, which is presented as a quasi-metaphysical force that determines human behaviour. But, in fact, culture is totally biological – learning from members of one’s own species, like all learning, occurs within the living brains of living beings and is guided by learning adaptations.4

I find this an astonishingly naive comment. To say that culture is ‘totally biological’ simply on the grounds that it entails brain activity is like saying that written words are no more than ink on paper. It is to confuse different levels of understanding, to confute two widely separate layers of the explanatory sandwich,5 in the interests of an all-embracing reductionism.

To claim that there need to be different levels of explanation, however, does not preclude the search for connections. In particular if evolutionary accounts of human behaviour are to have any plausibility, they must deal credibly with those types of behaviour which most clearly distinguish us from our animal ancestors. It is one thing to identify an animal-type aggressiveness; it is another to understand how a sense of moral obligation might have developed from what have been rather misleadingly characterised as ‘selfish genes’. At first sight altruism seems the unlikely product of an essentially competitive evolutionary process. However an ostensible advance in understanding came in what is now known as the kin selection theory of altruism, which demonstrated a possible means by which a biological basis for unselfish behaviour could have evolved. Given that genes belong to families and not just to individuals, there may be indirect genetic advantages when an individual sacrifices its own life for the sake of those related to it, with the result that some at least of their common gene pool survives. Altruism, in other words, can be of evolutionary benefit to one’s own kin, and among social animals may benefit a wider circle as well. On this level of understanding worker ants and bees live lives of supreme self-sacrifice.

But can altruism, in this rather restricted sense, really be a basis for those aspects of human ethical behaviour in which the good done to others is especially valued when done for its own sake, rather than for some supposed advantage? A bird warning other birds about the approach of a predator may be altruistically risking its own life; but it is not behaving ethically because its actions are instinctive, and it is highly unlikely to have considered any alternatives. Nevertheless it is possible to see how in animals with stronger social bonds a more deliberate, and hence more ethical, form of altruism might have developed out of what are essentially non-ethical biological impulses, through the necessities of social interaction; and how with the growth of self-awareness, the social demands on behaviour might come to predominate over the biological. As Michael Ruse has put it:

Laid on top of our selfishness is our (genuine) altruism, put in place to make us efficient biological ‘altruists’: a very necessary adaptation, given that we humans have so firmly gone the route of sociality. We are loving and kind and
generous – really loving and kind and generous – because
this is just as much a part of our nature as is our selfishness.\footnote{6}

In short, while biology may provide some of the groundbase
for ethical behaviour, human culture and the choices made within
it are the indispensable context for its development. It is only
within human cultures that actions can be designated as good or
evil, right or wrong.

Thus cultural and genetic accounts of behaviour need not be
regarded as mutually exclusive. There may be value in becoming
more aware of those vestigial elements in our human make-up,
no doubt encoded in our genes, which bear comparison with
what we can observe in other species. It is likely that our animal
inheritance provides the raw material for many of the feelings
and inclinations, such as sexual attraction or sociability, on which
our moral choices may depend, and knowledge of this inheritance
may make us wiser in handling them. But given the huge diversity
of behaviour both among different species and within different
human cultures, the attempt to trace genetic connections
between human and animal behaviour can easily fall into the
trap of arbitrary selection. It is not hard to find correspondences,
but that is a long way from proving that these are genetically
based. It is still further from proving that, even if such connections
exist, they ought to have any direct bearing on how we
should behave today.

Pascal wrote three and a half centuries ago that ‘Man must
not think that he is on the level either with the brutes or with
the angels, nor must he be ignorant of both sides of his nature;
but he must know both.’\footnote{7} He was not, of course, anticipating
Darwin’s discovery that the brute is in us by direct descent, nor
was he the first to realise that human beings can behave like
brutes. He was simply recognising a radical ambivalence in
human nature, which has long been known, but which we are
now better able to understand. We do indeed bear the marks of
our physical ancestry, though they are hard to distinguish from
the massive layers of cultural inheritance without which we
would not be human at all.

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FOLLOWING NATURE

NATURE AND CULTURE

To be human is to be part of a culture, and in that sense culture
itself, as my quotation from Ruse indicated, is natural to us. The
point becomes even more obvious when we consider how the
most distinctive aspects of what it is to be human – language,
art, reason, and religion – belong to human beings as such,
whatever their particular culture. They take very different forms,
and they depend for their particular expression on growing up
within a tradition which is communicated from one generation
to the next, but the characteristic types of human cultural activity
are universal. This is not to imply, however, that outside the
human world there are not more rudimentary types of culture
appropriate to less self-conscious forms of social life. The ability
to learn from one another is not an exclusively human capacity,
and I have already suggested that even quagga might have picked
up from each other some of their behavioural characteristics.
Primates certainly do, and so do many other social animals. The
close study of animal groups in the wild has revealed the dividing
line between nature and culture as increasingly fuzzy.

The difficulty of disentangling one from the other is especially
obvious in the study of human individuals. Identical twins have
been the primary resource for research in this area, but some of
the findings have been strangely anomalous.\footnote{8} There are stories,
for instance, of identical twins separated at birth and brought
up in totally different environments who, when they meet for
the first time in adult life, discover remarkable similarities in
quite trivial matters, such as the kind of clothes they wear or the
food they prefer, matters which on any ordinary understanding
would be regarded as purely cultural. There are other identical
twins who from the start are quite distinctive individuals and who,
even as babies, have radically different temperaments. There are also examples of genetically identical twins who do
not even look the same. Whatever the explanation of such anom-
alles, it seems clear that there is no simple equation between
identical genetic inheritance and actual human persons. Human
nature is irreducibly complex. It is the outcome of a process
which, however we strike the balance, depends on a combination of genes, general environmental influences, culture, experiences both in the womb and outside it and, in later stages of development, individual choices. This is perhaps why there appears to be no limit to human variety.

All of which leads to the question implicit in the title of this chapter, about what could be meant by ‘following nature’ when our human nature is so complex in its origins, and so varied in its expression. The phrase also further exemplifies the ambiguities in the concept of nature itself.

‘Following nature’ could mean paying attention to scientific evidence of the kind mentioned in the previous section, ‘A biological basis for behaviour’. The 2001 Reith Lectures on Ageing, for instance, were packed with biological information which might be used in shaping social policies, giving medical advice, and possibly for reversing the processes of ageing themselves. ‘Nature’ in this sense is everything capable of being studied by scientists, as discussed in Chapter 2 above.

The phrase could also mean ‘following natural impulses’, whatever their basis, whether genetic or cultural. ‘Natural’ in this sense is much more closely tied to the emotions, to what feels right. Nature religions with a strong immanent bias, the modern heirs of Baalism as described in Chapter 3, have come back into favour in our increasingly machine-dominated age. They can include everything from herbalism to witchcraft and woodland frolics in the nude. Their attraction lies in their closeness to nature, conceived as a living force which in some measure indwells the believer. The lifestyles of some modern pop stars follow the same pattern, albeit in a very different context. So did D. H. Lawrence who sacralised sex without civilising it.

For the Stoic philosophers ‘following nature’ meant exactly the opposite. The stars above and the moral law within were the true face of nature as perceived by reason. Calm detachment from the brutalities and misfortunes of a world which was falling apart, was to be achieved through the contemplation of what was eternal and transcendent. In effect, therefore, to follow nature was to obey the dictates of reason, the highest manifest-

tation of human nature, and to eschew emotion. Centuries later, nature-loving Romantics like Wordsworth likewise found inspiration in the more sublime aspects of the natural world, but inspiration strongly suffused by emotion too. Bertrand Russell in his early years dealt with intolerable emotions of isolation and unreality by immersion in the philosophy of mathematics.

A fourth, and within Christian tradition the most dominant, meaning of the phrase ‘following nature’ was derived from Aristotle, and managed in some measure to combine all these emphases - a close study of the natural world, human aspirations towards natural fulfilment, and the central importance of reason. It achieved its fullest articulation in mediaeval theology, provided the basis for much of the moral teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and in more modern forms is still an important ethical resource under the title ‘natural law’. It should not to be confused with natural law as understood in the natural sciences.

NATURAL LAW

Natural law is based on the ancient and widespread belief that there are moral obligations, inherent in our humanity itself, which need to be obeyed if we are to be true to our essential nature. In the Western tradition there is an early example in Antigone who, in jeopardising her own life for the sake of burying her dead brother, believed she was obeying a more fundamental law than the law of the land which forbade her action. Aristotle’s principle that everything has its purpose, which it strives to fulfil in order to realise its true nature, lent itself to a systematisation of such fundamental laws. Human beings have many seemingly contradictory purposes, he said, some of which we share with all life, even with vegetables, such as the impulse to live and grow; others we share with animals, such as the ability to enjoy sensations. But the distinctive element in human nature is reason. It is practical reason, therefore, based on sound knowledge, and refined by life within the polis (the political community), which must judge between other natural desires and impulses in the pursuit of goodness.
These are the bare bones of a theory which in the Mediaeval Church and for centuries afterwards undergirded what claimed to be a universal ethic. Its claim on universal acceptance, however, was somewhat compromised by the fact that it had been extensively Christianised. It drew, for instance, on the concept of divine order as the true basis of sound knowledge. It also provided a Christian equivalent to Aristotle’s *polis* in the Church, as the context in which human life could alone find its fulfilment. To obey natural law was to discern the order of one’s being, as ordained by God, and to espouse its moral significance in the light of reason, which also owed its being to God. Natural law also found its title deeds in Scripture, most notably in St Paul’s comments on those who did not know the law of Moses.

When Gentiles who do not know the law carry out its precepts by the light of nature, then, although they have no law, they are their own law; they show that what the law requires is inscribed on their hearts, and to this their conscience gives supporting witness, since their own thoughts argue the case, sometimes against them, sometimes even for them.  

How far God was necessarily involved in this enlightenment of Gentile consciences has been hotly disputed, and is a key issue in the relationship between nature and grace, a topic to which I shall be returning in Chapter 6. For the moment it is enough to note that rational thinking about morality, however much it might have been buttressed within its Christian context, was nevertheless deemed to be possible within the natural law tradition without explicit reference to revelation. Hence the significance of Aquinas’s appeal to Aristotle, in spelling out the order of natural inclinations:

First, there is an inclination in man towards the good corresponding to what he has in common with all individual beings, the desire to continue in existence in accordance with their nature. In accordance with this inclination those matters which conserve man’s life, or are contrary to it, are

governed by natural law. Secondly . . . those matters are said to be of natural law ‘which nature has taught all animals’, such as the union of male and female, the bringing up of children, and the like. Thirdly, there is in man an inclination to good according to the nature of reason which is peculiar to him. He has a natural inclination to know the truth about God and to live in society. 

Aristotle, preceded by Plato, was also the source for the four cardinal (or non-theological) virtues which, like the moral principles derived from human nature, depended heavily on reason. Thus prudence discerns the limits of what is reasonably practical. Justice is about the rational direction of the will towards right conduct. Temperance restrains passions contrary to reason, while courage holds them fast to what reason requires. All this is set by the Christian natural law tradition within the context of a rational, but fallen, world which needs the grace of God (manifested in the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and love) if it is to reach its ultimate fulfilment. Nevertheless, it was claimed, despite human frailty and falleness, reason remains a reliable guide, and the natural law based on it can thus have universal significance.

Others have not been so sure. Any such attempt to derive ethics from a rational study of human nature poses obvious problems for those Christians who believe that human nature and reason have been so corrupted by sin, that nothing about God’s purposes for human life can be discerned except through revelation. As with the relationship between nature and grace, this is a further point to which I shall be returning in Chapter 6, where I shall be suggesting that it represents an over-pessimistic assessment of our rational powers. The strong identification of the natural law tradition with Christianity, though, remains a barrier to universalising it. In modern Roman Catholicism there is a prime example of this problem in its teaching on contraception. Theoretically this is prohibited on the basis of arguments from natural law, whereas in practice these are so inconclusive
that the prohibition has to be asserted as binding by appeal to ecclesiastical authority.

But these are not the only problems. What I have said earlier about the way human nature is formed, and the strong influence of culture, indicates difficulties of another kind. How is it possible to distinguish between what is essential to human nature, and what are the mere contingencies of evolutionary and historical development? If the propensity to rape, for instance, really were encoded in our genes, should this be regarded as a God-given capacity requiring fulfilment? Add to this mixed bag of genetic propensities the sheer variety of human types and customs, a variety which becomes more evident as the scope for self-expression increases, and the idea of a universal natural law appears even more doubtful.

There is also the objection, constantly reiterated by Isaiah Berlin, who questioned whether reason is capable of adjudicating between certain aims and values which, as he saw it, are fundamentally irreconcilable. It is worth noting, however, that similar objections have been met in earlier times. Despite his eighteenth-century conditioning, Bishop Butler, one of the greatest of English moralists, knew as much as any man about the complexities of human nature and the inconstancies of human emotions, yet remained firmly committed to belief in an over-riding internal authority, reason or conscience, which could adjudicate between them. It has been said of him:

Nothing is too small or too trivial to be ignored, nothing too slight to merit the attention of a proper estimation. Butler’s faith in God is revealed by the intense reverence for human nature that pervades his ethical writings, by his preoccupation with the problem, which he never finally resolves, of a proper and valid conception of experience as at once revealing to us the unsuspected richness and complexity of our existence, and yet compelling us to acknowledge frontiers which we must not pass... We must reckon with human nature as a whole; and yet there is a sense in which the fundamental laws of our being are immediately and certainly known to the honest and unsophisticated.

Diversity and complexity, in other words, are not necessarily counter-arguments to the idea of natural law, at least in so far as its fundamental principles are concerned. It is these, rather than their applications in widely different contexts, which comprise the heart of the matter as human beings reflect rationally on what they are, and what their lives should be.

The philosophical objection that a natural law theory of ethics appears to derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’, can be quickly dismissed. The theory is not proposing that the possession of certain natural inclinations common to most human beings entails a moral obligation to satisfy them. Its claim is that rational reflection on what we are and what our inclinations tell us about ourselves, reveals our human nature as inherently placing obligations upon us. The fact that we have strong feelings about social cohesion and fairness, for instance, obliges us to think rationally about justice. It does not mean that what we feel is fair must necessarily be so. Hume, who in effect was the first to draw the ‘is/ought’ distinction, acknowledged that morality must have its roots in human nature. He saw many obligations as arising quite naturally:

Mankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may properly be said to be as natural as anything that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflection. Though the rules of justice be artificial, they are not arbitrary. Nor is the expression improper to call them Laws of Nature, if by natural we understand what is common to any species, or even if we confine it to mean what is inseparable from the species.

Despite the range of possible objections, therefore, the idea that there is such a thing as human nature, and that it has moral significance, remains impressively persistent. If morality is not to be arbitrary, a mere matter of cultural conditioning, nor to be...
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based solely on disputable religious premises, and if law is to have a rational foundation and an authority beyond the particular dictates of lawmakers, there is a need to identify some truths about what makes for human flourishing, rooted in something more durable than human convention and historical accident.

As we have seen in Hume, the belief that this must be so resurfaced, outside Christian commitment, as one of the key elements of the Enlightenment. In some of its manifestations it had dire results. Isaiah Berlin memorably described progressive French thinkers as believing:

...that a logically connected structure of laws and generalisations susceptible of demonstration and verification could be constructed and replace the chaotic amalgam of ignorance, mental laziness, guesswork, superstition, prejudice, dogma, fantasy, and, above all, the 'interested error' maintained by the rulers of mankind and largely responsible for the blunders, vices and misfortunes of humanity.

Unfortunately the French thinkers left out of their calculations the subtleties of earlier traditions, as well as the seductions of relativism on the one hand, and sin on the other. They also forgot that what reason can propose, reason can refute. Their certainties proved to be as fragile as the systems they sought to destroy.

Edmund Burke, the scourge of this kind of arrogant rationalism, himself appealed to human nature, but he meant by it something much more like the status quo. Nature is what has come to be. It is what has grown, rooted in history. 'The nature of man is intricate,' he wrote, 'the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity; and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature, or to the quality of his affairs.' In Burke's eyes, to appeal to 'nature' as the French revolutionaries conceived of it, was to set the 'feeble contrivances of reason' against the wisdom of the ages. He was appealing to what I was describing earlier as the cultural and historical dimension of human nature. Outside a particular cultural context we are nothing. Aristotle had the

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**polis.** Aquinas could rely on centuries of Christian culture. Even rationalism had its cultural presuppositions. But when these were gone, what was left was one of the more damaging long-term consequences of Enlightenment rationalism, against which Burke's critique was of no avail - the rise of individualism. Individuals without any stable or meaningful commitment to a particular social order, and (as in many modern cultures) faced with apparently limitless choice, have to ask themselves what reasons they have for choosing one way of life rather than another. Where, if anywhere, are boundaries to be drawn? And what social order can there be without some agreement on the kind of constraints that are necessary and desirable? In a profound sense human culture rests on the ability and willingness to say no.

NATURAL LAW UPDATED

It is time to look afresh at the possibility that there might be a wisdom of the ages, an inextricable mixture of genetic inheritance and historical conditioning, which finds reasonably consistent expression in all human cultures. If there is such a wisdom, it would be foolish to neglect it, given that it must have become an essential part of what human beings are. There are some simple forms of behaviour in which the genetic basis is obvious. Babies learn to crawl instinctively, not as a result of observing their parents. They incessantly explore the world around them because that is what they are programmed to do, not because anybody has told them to do it. The relationship between mothers and babies is the same the world over, and not all that different when the mothers and babies are chimpanzees. A somewhat more complex example is the empathy possible between people of all cultures, a fellow-feeling which can usually manifest itself spontaneously, unless feelings have been deliberately suppressed through some process of dehumanisation or cultural isolation. There seems to be an innate ability to recognise each other's subjectivity, despite huge barriers of linguistic incomprehension. In the light of such examples, and notwithstanding
all that I have been saying about the pervasiveness of cultural influences, there really do seem to be feelings, desires, predispositions, and patterns of behaviour which are simply human, given as part of our human nature, and therefore relevant in decisions about what we should do or be.

But there are dangers in trying to be too precise about the contents of this common human inheritance, particularly those aspects of it thought to be located in our genes. The familiar complaint that modern people still have the genetic predispositions of hunter-gatherers, while trying to live in a world totally alien to this way of life, has a grain of truth in it, but not when it is used as a catch-all explanation for the discontents of civilisation, nor when it is applied simplistically to entirely modern phenomena, such as predatory take-over bids. Indeed from what is known about the few remaining hunter-gatherers in our own day, it would appear that even they are not as dependent on predatory genetic predispositions as some evolutionary enthusiasts have suggested city financiers might be. The dividing line between nature and culture is just as difficult to draw in them as it is in us. Much of their lifestyle seems to result from a strong tendency to think of the world as imbued with human qualities. But this is not unique to them. Modern children who personify their dolls and toys do the same, as one of the normal stages in the development of thinking. Nor is hunting and gathering simply about food. It is just as much about constructing social relationships, as is any modern dinner party in which food and sociability are inseparable. An anthropologist living among the Beaver Indians in British Columbia has described a society which is mostly inarticulate, dependent on stories and dreams, but extraordinarily skilful and far-sighted in its ways of maintaining and pursuing its traditional way of life. It was despised, as such cultures frequently are, by an officialdom which wanted to use its hunting grounds for other purposes, but when the two sides talked with one another it was clear that this was a clash of cultures and interests, not between two levels of intelligence or two types of being. The main differences lay in the conceptual tools which the two sides had at their disposal. The

Beaver Indians had a strong moral code appropriate to their circumstances, but which tragically tended to collapse when their time-honoured way of life was destroyed.

Mary Midgley in her splendid book Beast and Man has given a convincing defence of the idea of what she calls ‘the roots of human nature’. In moving from consideration of our animal inheritance to suggesting the basis for a kind of natural law, she claims that it is possible to discern a ‘structure of deep, lasting preferences’, which may well differ as between species, and be adapted to the needs of each particular kind of existence. These preferences may be hard to reconcile with one another as, for example, in the conflict between parental care and self-preservation. If your baby is carried off by a lion, for instance, do you chase the lion at the risk of your own life? or do you write off the loss? Our characteristically human way of dealing with such conflicts, especially when they are internal to us, is to weigh them up in our minds, and it is out of this process of thinking and choosing that the integrated personality emerges. Other species may have preferences very similar to our own. Elephants and wolves, like us, really care about their young, and may have to face similar dilemmas concerning them. But to a greater extent than ourselves, says Midgley, they have what she calls ‘a structure of motives that shapes their lives around a certain preferred kind of solution’. Their intelligence is of a less reflective kind, and hence lacks the moral significance of the choices which fall on us. Our peculiar privilege and burden is to know, after being faced with such a choice, that we might have done something else.

Moral choice, then, can be both rational and appropriate to our nature, but it depends on identifying the human ‘structure of deep and lasting preferences’, and the needs which underlie them. The word ‘structure’ is significant because Midgley is referring to something which belongs to us simply as human beings, without differentiating between our genetic and cultural inheritances. The point is that it is common to us, and displays a kind of givenness. If the preferences were simply a matter of individual choice, then any behaviour might be justified simply on the
grounds that that is the kind of person we want to be. The possibilities for disastrous self-deception would be endless. But if our structure of deep lasting preferences is somehow given, it can carry a degree of authority. If only by demonstrating that the neglect or violation of what is fundamental to our human nature carries its own penalties.

How then can we discern this human structure of preferences? Animal analogies may mislead, because we can only know which analogies are relevant, if we do in fact distinguish between propensities which are primarily genetic, and those which are primarily cultural. And this is precisely the difficulty. A more hopeful approach might be to bypass this problem, and look below the surface of different cultures, to tease out what is implied or required by the very fact of living together, and to see whether there are common values or preferences being expressed. The fact that it has been possible to reach very wide agreement on basic human rights is a hopeful sign that there are indeed commonalities to be found. This approach to natural law has the further advantage that it starts, not from supposedly natural endowments, but from actual shared human preferences, usually expressed in recognisably similar social habits and conventions, the most fundamental of which have now been institutionally enshrined in international agreements. It also avoids the naturalistic fallacy of mysteriously deriving an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. The ‘ought’ is already there.

C. S. Lewis mounted a vigorous defence of natural law so conceived in his frequently quoted lectures on The Abolition of Man. He argued that belief in a given set of values was an educational necessity, and listed a wide variety of quotations from different cultures and religions to demonstrate that there is indeed what he called ‘a universal Tao’, a common morality embracing many different traditions. The method has its drawbacks, however, as he himself recognised, in that it appears to be something of a hodgepodge, dependent on the comprehensiveness of the cultural trawl on which it is based.

John Finnis in his book Natural Law and Natural Rights has pursued a similar aim, but by a rather more promising method.

He claims to have identified seven basic values which are self-evident, essential, and which are actually found, albeit expressed in many different ways, in all known human societies. It is the self-evidence of the values, rather than their ubiquity, which gives them their authority. The fact that they are found everywhere confirms this authority, but does not, as in C. S. Lewis, provide the basis for it. By a self-evident value Finnis means one which is valued for its own sake as an essential aspect of human well-being, without needing to be derived from anything more fundamental. The seven he identifies are life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability, practical reasonableness, and religion. Note that these are values, not ethical obligations. Obligations arise from them through a process of rational reflection. Justice, for instance, can be seen as the demand made by practical reasonableness in response to the value of sociability.

Why are these seven values to be regarded as self-evident? The value of life hardly needs justification. It clearly corresponds to one of Midgley’s ‘deep, lasting preferences’, and there is an important sense in which the drive for self-preservation, though not absolute, is fundamental to the existence of all other values. Its practical expression also includes a huge raft of subsidiary values and conventions on matters ranging from health, and the procreation and nurturing of children, to food production and self-defence. To list the actual ways in which the value of life has guided human conduct would be to write a history of human evolution and civilisation. Even those human societies which have seemed careless of life, as for example in the practice of human sacrifice, have implicitly asserted its value as the supreme offering required to safeguard the lives of others.

The value of knowledge is equally self-evident, rooted in the characteristic human desire to question and to explore. As already mentioned, human babies, like most other young animals, have a natural impulse to explore their environment. But to a unique extent they also learn by being part of a culture in which knowledge and skills are passed from one generation to another. Knowledge, in other words, is just as fundamental to all other human values as life itself. It is true that not everybody...
wants knowledge as such, and there is some knowledge most people might prefer not to have, such as the knowledge of how to make nuclear weapons. There are also those who for a variety of reasons might wish to suppress some forms of knowledge, like the much-quoted Christian group who are said to have prayed, ‘O God don’t let this evolution be true. But if it is, don’t let it be generally known.’ Despite such aberrations, to deny that knowledge is a self-evident value would be self-refuting. The sceptic can only do so by claiming to possess superior knowledge about what is to be preferred instead of it.

Of the other values on Finnis’s list, play is perhaps the most surprising. Like others, it clearly has biological roots, and in some animals, particularly predators, may be an important element in the honing of their skills. There is recent evidence that in children too it may have an essential role at a vital stage in brain development. But human beings, including adults and even some animals, also play for its own sake. We misunderstand it as a value, and are in danger of distorting its character, if we try to defend it simply on the grounds of its biological usefulness. Its self-evident value seems to lie precisely in the fact that it is not useful. Play, particularly in older children and adults, is a highly significant first step in escaping from necessity. Rowan Williams links it with an illuminating discussion of fraternity, around the idea ‘that there are goods to be worked for that are completely different in kind from material goods, goods that exist only in the game, within the agreed structures of unproductive action’. Play, in other words, can enable fraternity by creating opportunities for stepping outside customary social roles, under rules which can be accepted because they are arbitrary, and thus in a larger sense do not really matter. Within this complex of ideas lie the roots of freedom. But this subtle relationship can easily be destroyed, which is why the designation of play as a self-evident value can at first sight seem idiosyncratic. Montaigne said of chess:

I hate and avoid it, because it is not enough of a game. It is too serious for an amusement, and I am ashamed to give it

an attention that might be employed on some good action... See how our minds magnify and exaggerate this absurd pastime...

What would he have said, I wonder, about contemporary spectator sports, in which precisely those qualities which give play its value, are apt to be submerged in overblown rivalries and the irresistible pressures of commercialism? At the highest levels of international sport these days the contests are not so much between competitors as between competing technologies. It is a question of who can afford the most advanced equipment, or deploy the best team of, physiologists, nutritionists, psychologists and so forth, or buy the best players. Fortunately we are not dependent on such public exhibitions in order to value play. More modest forms of it have greater moral significance, even such simple examples as a conversational game over the garden fence, in which the human worth of those engaged in it can be affirmed without the constraints of over-seriousness.

As with play, there is a significant place in all human societies for art in one form or another, most commonly perhaps in music. Aesthetically valuable artefacts have been produced for at least 10,000 years. Whatever their precise significance, prehistoric cave paintings and numerous carvings of humans and animals, are evidence of considerable artistic skills at around the time when human society in a recognisable form was beginning to take shape. One of the more recent cave paintings in East Africa even depicts figures playing musical instruments. Clearly what we now recognise as art was important in the ancient world, and it has undoubtedly made a major contribution to human self-understanding in every known civilisation. Is this enough to prove its self-evident value? I suspect aesthetic value is as difficult to pin down precisely as the meaning of the word ‘game’, but it seems to share with play the value of stepping outside necessity, expressing a freedom to transcend the sheery given, and providing a perspective from which life can be seen differently. Like play it can be justified as an end in itself. ‘High culture,’ as someone has put it recently, ‘provides a time and place that is
not simply here and now.' Prehistoric cave painters may have been trying to manipulate nature, but they did so by a free act of creation. Maybe aesthetic value ultimately resides in just such an expression of imaginative freedom, and in our human response to it. And there may even be an echo of such a possibility in the phrase 'God created human beings in his own image'.34 It is perhaps significant that this statement is made when all that the author of Genesis has so far told us about God is that on him the whole of created existence depends.

The self-evident value of sociability and friendship is clear from our essential nature as social animals. Our identity as persons is grounded in our relationship with others. What is not so clear, however, is where the boundaries of sociability are to be drawn. How does one pass from family or tribal loyalties to a more general conception of the common good? In biblical times the lessons were learnt only slowly and incompletely, despite the implications of universality in the Hebrew doctrine of God as Lord of all. Even in our own time, with a universal declaration of human rights, increasing globalisation, and far more cross-cultural communication than has ever been possible before, the idea that the good of individuals is inseparably linked with that of the international community, is hard to sell. But perhaps there is a glimmer of hope in what I described earlier as the universal instinctive recognition of each other's subjectivity, no matter what national, social or cultural barriers intervene. Sociability, though fundamental to human nature and culture, may, like goodness itself, have to begin 'in Minute Particulars'.35

The importance of practical reasonableness as the central pillar of the classical natural law tradition has already been sufficiently discussed. Here it is only necessary to distinguish it from abstract reason. Its value lies, not in the possession of great intellectual power as such, but in the need to make sensible choices coherent enough to create a sustainable culture, to balance one's commitments, and to devise practical means of putting them into effect. In short, it is the conductor of the orchestra of values. Freudian inspired denigration of reason, and sociologically inspired rela-

The concept of nature...
SEXPATY - A CASE STUDY

I venture here into the disputed realm of sex and sexuality not because, as we are frequently told, the churches are obsessed by it, nor because, as we are also frequently and rather contradictorily told, the churches are afraid of it, but because it is so fundamental to what human beings are, and nowadays gives rise to some of the most contentious moral issues. It can therefore serve as a useful test case for any viable theory of natural law, and in particular for the practical application of Finnis's seven values.

It has been suggested with some plausibility that the need for social control in general, and for its internalisation as moral self-restraint, began with the need to control sexual behaviour. Indeed so central is sexuality to most higher forms of animal life that standard behaviour patterns, whether instinctive or learned, associated with sexual intercourse, combined with different concerns and modes of conduct as between the sexes, are found not only in primates but to some extent in all social animals. Midgley's 'structures of deep and lasting preferences' may take a bewildering number of forms, but the evidence for some pre-human structuring of the sexual drive and of sexual roles seems clear enough.

In so-called 'primitive societies' the pattern is equally bewildering, but a striking feature in many, if not most, of them is the high importance given to sexual rituals, especially the initiation of boys at puberty into their adult male sexual role. It is as if sexual maturity does not just happen, but has to be conferred, even imposed, ceremoniously by the tribe. Thus the first experience of sexual powers, instead of being individual and furtive, as so often in our present culture, is inherently social and heavily dependent on custom. The tribe is, as it were, insuring itself against slipping back into a state of pre-human nature, where whatever social constraints there may be on sexual activity are latent under an appearance of unrestrained competition. I am no anthropologist, but the description of a distinctively human way of life as emerging pari passu with the socialisation of sexuality, seems to me convincing, and it is hard to think of any but the most transient human societies in which sexual activity is not regulated in some form or other. It is no coincidence that the first moral story in the Bible, the story of the Fall, has strong sexual overtones, as does the account of what is purported to be one of the earliest rites - that of circumcision.

The significance of control was the central feature of Foucault's groundbreaking work on the history of sexuality. His thesis was that 'disciplinary power' has so shaped all expressions of sexuality into socially approved forms that it is no longer possible to identify what is 'natural'. In particular he made much of the idea that the escape in the latter half of the twentieth century from so-called repressive attitudes towards sex, has simply replaced one form of disciplinary power with another. The medicalisation of sex, for instance, has been just as powerful in prescribing norms as was the confessional in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Victorian values in the nineteenth.

The belief that all heirs of Western civilisation are ineluctably trapped under different forms of domination is a seductive one, especially to those who feel themselves in some way oppressed. If this is really the case, though, it is not clear what liberation could possibly mean. In fact if, as Foucault seems to be claiming, there is nothing simply 'given' in the realm of sexuality, any supposed liberation must turn out to be subjection to just another arbitrary form of dominance. To understand how our desires and expectations have been shaped for us by others may be enlightening, but the most urgent question is one which Foucault, from his Nietzschean perspective, cannot answer or even seriously ask, namely whether beyond such external influences it is possible to identify any abiding truths about our sexual nature, and hence about its fulfilment.

It is with this question in mind, therefore, that it may be useful to look again at Finnis's list of self-evident values, and their bearing on sexual control. Remember that it is a list of values, not of rules. The most it can help us do is to set some goals, to describe a framework for sexual fulfilment, on the basis of which practical reasoning can attempt to match policies to
circumstances. But even this modest aim is not immune to Foucault’s criticism that values may only appear self-evident because they are so deeply entrenched in dominant social assumptions. Or was it he himself who was trapped in his own bottomless relativism, with no vantage point for building any permanent insights or values on what might be claimed as the real ground of our human nature?

Sexual activity has obvious relevance to the value of life, in that without it life could not continue. Not everybody values children, but communities which value their own continuance must do so, and must make arrangements for protecting and nurturing the future generation. This in itself may initiate some sort of social control, but the need for such arrangements does not necessarily imply a positive desire to dominate; it is just a fact of life, because children cannot look after themselves. Nor can they educate themselves, which is why a respect for the value of knowledge is another essential aspect of the generative process.

Knowledge also has more direct sexual connotations, as for instance in the interesting use of the biblical word ‘know’ to mean ‘sexual intercourse’. Though the phrase ‘carnal knowledge’ is now archaic, it can still be a useful pointer to the intrinsic moral relationship between sex and intimacy, as can the word ‘intercourse’ itself. Intercourse implies a personal relationship; it is a form of communication, an exchange of more than body fluids. To enjoy sexual intercourse without ‘knowing’ the other is not only a contradiction in terms, but is to slip back into a pre-human mode. Intimacy also means allowing oneself to be known, and hence to become vulnerable, and is thus an essential element in one of the unexpected gifts of sexual love – the exposure and release of the self. In fact there is a whole cluster of values around the concept of sexual knowledge which, sadly, is all too often treated as if it referred only to a set of techniques.

Just as failure to value knowledge of the other person can tend to dehumanise sexual relationships, so can loss of the dimension of play. Sex is not a wholly solemn business, in fact there is much which borders on the ludicrous. But play, as I have stressed earlier, is not merely about having fun. It is about the trans-}

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cendence of the mere practicalities of life, which then makes possible the building of relationships not dependent on mutual profit or productivity. In this light it is difficult to see how a natural law ethic which places a high value on play, could be used to prohibit contraception. On the contrary a recognition of its value could provide grounds for disapproval of sexual relationships intended only to serve practical biological needs, or further dehumanised by being turned into a kind of transaction.

The aesthetic values capable of being expressed within the realm of sexuality speak for themselves. Sex has been one of the main inspirations for art. The curious use of the word ‘sexy’ to describe anything attractive, interesting, exciting, or beautiful, says a good deal about our contemporary culture. But perhaps we need a reminder that sexual relations themselves should have aesthetic value. There is beautiful, life-enhancing, relationship-creating sex, and there is ugly sex which disgusts, destroys, and abuses.

The value of sociability as the moral context for sexual relationships is equally obvious. It includes, of course, the values of friendship, companionship, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. But it is significant that the social bonding of partners, as one of the aims of sexual intercourse, and inherent both in the concept of knowing and of play, only achieved its present high valuation with the arrival of easily accessible and reliable contraception. This has entailed a major shift in the perception of what sex is for, and hence of the social controls appropriate to it. It has also, contrariwise, demonstrated how sexual sociability by itself, when unhampered by other values, can quickly revert to pre-human forms. The prophet Jeremiah was sensitive to the point in his description of how ‘each neighs after another man’s wife, like a well-fed and lusty stallion’.

Practical reasonableness may not be very evident in much that goes on in the name of sexuality, but it is the essential quality needed to relate different values to each other in the interests of personal integrity, and to translate them into action.

As for religious value, the complex relationship between sexuality and religion almost certainly extends back to the earliest
attempts to regulate sexual activity. I described in Chapter 3 how Israelite religion had to distinguish itself from the fertility cults which surrounded it, but also took something from them. This is only a tiny fraction of a long and complex story, which it would be out of place to try to tell here. The main point is that there have been different histories of the relationship in different religions, but that all have been concerned about it, and that within the Christian faith this history has sometimes been glorious and sometimes tragic.

My purpose in this rapid review has been to suggest that all seven of the values identified by Finnis can throw a distinctive light on the moral issues surrounding sexuality. Between them they provide a broad moral landscape within which sexual conduct, as well as all other types of behaviour, can take their bearings. To that extent they can be validated in practice. While not claiming that the list is exhaustive, the implication is that there really is such a thing as our sexual nature, to which natural law is relevant, but that its ethical significance is multi-dimensional and cannot be adequately discussed under a single aspect, or in a single cultural context. It is not as if procreation, or pleasure, or social stability, or creative excitement, or personal fidelity were all that is at stake. If the seven values really are self-evident, and thus fundamental to our human nature, an ethic based on natural law needs to take them all into account and to find a reasonable balance between them in the light of particular circumstances. They are a reminder that sexuality is pertinent to the whole of what we are, and to all the values by which we seek to live. Much that seems wrong today in both the public and personal treatment of sexual matters can be traced to a failure to give all seven values their due weight. Though Finnis himself says little about sexuality, I find it encouraging that his analysis is so clearly applicable. Of course, it may be that other values beside those he has identified will, on further analysis, prove equally important and even self-evident. No scheme of this kind should be set in concrete. What matters is his demonstration that appeals to what is inherent in human nature cannot all be dismissed on the grounds that they are arbitrary.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Within the general picture set out above, homosexuality is a special case. It calls for separate treatment, not least because of the frequent condemnation of homosexual activities on the grounds that they are 'unnatural'. In terms of Finnis's analysis, this charge of 'unnaturalness' would seem to be focused on three of his values: life, aesthetic value and, in some of its forms, religion. Life appears to be devalued by the inherent lack of procreative possibility. Aesthetic taste is said to be outraged by a use of the body in ways which are widely regarded as inappropriate or disgusting. Religious disapproval of homosexuality is by and large confined to the Semitic religions, and seems to have had its origin in Jewish rules about purity rather than in the moral law as such. Among modern biblical scholars, interpretation of the relevant biblical passages has proved to be highly controversial, thus making them unpromising material for an appeal to unequivocal religious tradition.

In answer to the first two objections it can be said that the lack of procreative possibility is certainly a misfortune, but is not unique to homosexuals. The strict view that all sexual intercourse must be open to the possibility of procreation is, as we have seen, defended by those who hold it on the basis of natural law; but it is widely acknowledged that the defence is no longer convincing, not least in the light of the other values already discussed.

Aesthetic distaste at what is regarded as biological misuse raises more difficult problems, but is commonly met by the counter-claim that what seems unnatural to one person may seem natural to another. This, however, is a superficial use of the word, which confuses different senses, thereby obscuring the key question of whether it refers to more than personal likes and dislikes.

If the claim that there is a genetic predisposition to homosexual orientation were to be substantiated, this would strengthen the argument for it as one of a variety of given elements in human nature. At present no direct genetic link has yet been proved nor,
as I have repeatedly stressed, are genes the only basis for what counts as natural in human beings. The abundant evidence of same-sex relationships in the non-human world has also been cited in favour of naturalness. However this, like all other direct arguments from animal to human behaviour, is double-edged. Its moral significance depends on whether or not human sexual encounters are to be regarded as distinctive in expressing values besides the satisfaction of immediate biological desires, as well as in restraining desires which run counter to these values. The large remaining areas of ignorance about the causes of homosexuality provide further reasons for being cautious in deciding what is or is not 'natural' in this context. It seems best therefore not to pre-empt judgements about naturalness, but to tackle the aesthetic objection on its own terms.

The perceived distastefulness of some homosexual practices is at first sight no more conclusive than arguments about unnaturalness. Tastes undoubtedly differ, and may be hard to reconcile. But does it follow from such differences that there are no criteria by which anything more than highly personal aesthetic judgements can be made? One possible criterion in this context might distinguish between different intentions. To do something disgusting, knowing that it is disgusting and delighting in it for that reason, is generally regarded, not only as an expression of bad taste, but as demonstrating some kind of moral deficiency. There are, of course, artists who see it as their role to shock and disgust in pushing out the boundaries of awareness, and they justify themselves on the grounds of wanting to awaken people to reality. Even if their argument is accepted, I am not sure that indulgence in what is recognised to be disgusting can muster the same defence, when it is simply a matter of individual pleasure. In the latter case some important judgements about what is valuable in life seem to be missing, and there would seem to be something seriously wrong with a natural law ethic which advocated disgustingness for its own sake. This objection fails, however, when disgustingness is not intended, and when morally responsible people see aesthetic value where others do not. It is one thing to defend aesthetic value in general, but quite another to absolutise a particular aesthetic judgement about practices one does not share. Apart from this vexed question of what people intend when doing something which appears disgusting to others, it thus seems to me that aesthetic value, like Finnis's other self-evident values, cannot be used to draw a decisive and convincing moral distinction between homosexual and heterosexual practices.

The nub of the moral and political arguments about homosexuality lies elsewhere. It concerns homosexual practice in its aspect as a cultural phenomenon with its own codes of conduct, its own patterns of interpersonal relationships, and its own interests in practical matters such as the education and upbringing of children. In Classical Greece, where pederasty was normal, the explanation for its prevalence is usually sought in social structures, in the separation between the sexes, for example, or the relationship between tutors and their adolescent pupils, within which sexual initiation was an expected part. But nobody suggests that most Greek men were homosexuals, incapable of being anything else. In fact effeminate homosexuals were despised. In predominantly Christian cultures, where historically homosexual practice has for the most part been driven underground, its very existence has often been denied. This has been especially true in Africa, and I recall immense difficulties in the 1980s in trying to persuade African church leaders even to discuss homosexuality as the dangers of AIDS began to become apparent. The strength of feeling which still exists on the subject of homosexuality in many parts of Christian Africa found vigorous expression at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, and opened up a serious division within the Anglican Communion on questions of biblical interpretation. But I suspect that cultural and historical motivations were at least as important as the ostensible theological differences.

In a generally tolerant culture it is difficult to know for certain what underlies an individual's sexual orientation, how far it is genetically driven, how far external pressures contribute to it, and whether there is a real element of personal choice. The massive 1994 report on Sexual Behaviour in Britain provided
striking evidence of the fluidity of sexual orientation, and concluded that although homosexual experience is quite widespread, 'exclusively homosexual behaviour is rare'. Uncertainty about one's sexual orientation may be a normal part of growing up, but there can be cultural inducements, too, when a particular marginalised lifestyle turns militant, and thus becomes a useful means of signalling sexual independence. Alternatively being part of a homosexual culture may be seen as an emotionally safe form of behaviour at an age when the other sex appears dangerously different. The pressures on young people to experiment are very strong, and frequently strengthened still further by the notion that in order to make sensible choices they need to be taught about all possible permutations and combinations of sexual activity. It is small wonder that the public discussion of homosexuality in recent years has frequently been confused and inconclusive, and that public debate should have centred on pieces of legislation which are largely symbolic. The transition to a state of affairs in which sexual orientation is no longer seen as the defining characteristic of a distinct cultural group, but as part of normal variation within a single culture, would ease many of the tensions, and reduce the need for the stridency which at present aggravates them.

Let me stress that I have been considering the matter from the perspective of natural law, which has a greater role in public debate and legislation than does Christian revelation. Many Christians would doubtless want to say more, but I have already hinted at the difficulties in interpreting the comparatively small number of biblical passages which refer to homosexuality. Not only is it hard to know precisely what was originally meant, but there are problems too in judging how far this was conditioned by the special circumstances of a particular culture, very different from our own, and how far much more recent circumstances have further conditioned modern attitudes. The only certainty is that we know a great deal more about homosexuality than any previous generation, though that cuts little or no ice with those who believe that religious and moral truths are revealed once for all. It seems to me that within the churches arguments about homosexuality are set to continue, and that the answer probably lies in greater concentration on those other obligations under natural law, such as intimacy, fraternity, fidelity, knowledge of and sympathy for one another, and spiritual values, which do not figure so widely in the public debates.

Natural law gives clearer guidance in relation to sexual abuse. It is of the essence of abuse that it is destructive of relationships, and that it is degrading rather than life-enhancing. Though it may sometimes masquerade as play, it does not contain the priceless element of free and equal participation characteristic of play at its best. It is also necessarily secretive, and thus internally damaging to both the abused and the abuser. A type of experience which depends on secrecy and has to be hidden away, either through fear, or shame, or disgust, cannot be integrated into life. So it merely fester, and eventually destroys. It is perhaps significant that even in ancient Greece the treatment of boys as sexual partners seems to have been a cause of anxiety, judging by the amount the philosophers talked about it. It must have been hard for thoughtful teachers who had exercised their power over a boy destined to become a free citizen, and used him as an object for their pleasure, to reconcile this domination with a proper respect for his dignity.

Yet even here a kind of natural law seems to have been at work. There is a line to be drawn between freedom and its abuse. There really do seem to be values which belong to human nature as such. And there is a price to be paid for not respecting what we fundamentally are, what our evolution, and our history have made us, and for neglecting to give due weight to our extraordinary human capacity for transcending our biological origins.
Chapter 4: Following Nature
1. There is a useful summary of different concepts of ‘species’ in Ernst Mayr, One Long Argument (Penguin, 1991) Chapter 3.
5. See Chapter 2, p. 18ff.
7. Blaise Pascal, Pensées (Everyman Edn) 418.
8. I have explored these themes more fully in John Habgood, Being a Person (Hodder and Stoughton, 1998).
15. The point is made repeatedly in Michael Ignatieff’s Isaiah Berlin, A Life (Chatto and Windus, 1998) e.g. on p. 89. Berlin went further in his more disputable claim that, whereas cultures may share similar prohibitions, they may differ fundamentally in those they uphold as virtues, p.285.
24. Ibid. p. 280. Midgley’s The Ethical Primate. Humans, freedom and morality (Routledge, 1994) is also highly relevant to this theme.
28. Rowan Williams, Lost Icons. Reflections on Cultural Bereavement (T & T Clark, 2000) p. 57. Williams also has a useful description of ‘fraternity’ as ‘a sense of integration, of belonging with an entire social body extending far beyond one’s choice or one’s affiliations of interest and “natural” loyalty’, p. 54.
29. Michel de Montaigne, Essays, 1580. Book 1 no. 50.
30. The relation between play and sport is complex and subtle, and by no means all as negative as my comment on commercial sport implies. There is a story about an Oxford student who, when asked for an essay on the difference between them, wrote the single sentence, ‘to play with Amaryllis in the shade would be unkind’. It was a brilliant answer, echoing of course Milton’s lines in ‘Lycidas’:
Were it not better done, as others use, To sport with Amaryllis in the shade, Or with the tangles of Neaera’s hair? The true character of play would seem to lie somewhere between the over-seriousness condemned by Montaigne, and the lack of seriousness identified by the student.
33. Most of us can recognise a game when we see one, yet as Wittgenstein famously pointed out (Philosophical Investigations, 66–71) there is nothing common to all games – only family resemblances. The same might be said of art.
34. Genesis 1:27.
35. ‘He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars’ from Blake’s ‘Jerusalem’.
36. Pascal Boyer’s Religion Explained. The human instincts that fashion gods, spirits and ancestors (William Heinemann, 2001) may be less than convincing as a total ‘explanation’, but makes a good case for holding that the mental systems and predispositions underlying religious experience are indeed universal.
37. I owe these suggestions to a former colleague, Leslie Paul. His books Nature into History (Faber and Faber, 1957) and Coming to Terms with Sex (Collins, 1969) are both relevant to the theme, but never had the attention which I think they deserved. A
38. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I, 1976, which deals at length with the hypothesis of domination and repression.
43. Countryman, op. cit., has much useful material on this point. The literature on homosexuality is, of course, immense, but it has not been my purpose to go further into the subject, than to point out the ambiguities inherent in any appeal to ‘nature’.