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Replies to Chris Brown's ' "Human Nature", science and international political theory' (JIRD 4/2013)

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The open-endedness and indeterminacy of Human Nature

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'Human Nature' is back — and not only in *JIRD*, which had a special Symposium on the topic several years ago (Freyberg-Inan 2006; Hall 2006; Mercer 2006; Sterling-Folker 2006). Two reasons seem particularly relevant for the discussion here and now. First, and for quite a while now, our normative discussions struggle with or indeed vacillate between a universalism with problematic foundations and a pluralism suspect of relativism. Second, our theories of action smuggle in assumptions about human nature upon which the impetus for a certain behaviour is to be understood, but which are often conveniently left out of the analysis. For instance, with the advent of constructivism in International Relations, the existence and explanatory status of 'rump materialism' is again up for discussion. More fundamentally, the classical dichotomies of 'mind/body' and of 'reason/emotion' have been found wanting. In this context, finding some kind of foundation in a potentially universal Human Nature would be a help welcomed by many.

Brown (2013) asks us to take this opening seriously. First of all, he proposes that contemporary evolutionary psychology offers a 'game-changing potential for our understanding of human nature' (438), a 'new *scientific* account of what it is to be human' (438, emphasis added). Aware of the usual pitfalls in such an undertaking, his intervention spends quite some time clearing underbrush. He argues that the past misuse of Human Nature arguments (such as in Social Darwinism) is not necessary to such research, and that a defence of universals can be done at the right level of abstraction with no necessary invitation to 'altruistic imperialism', to use Ruiz-Giménez Arrieta's (2005) quip on humanitarian interventions.

Yet, by doing so, Brown wants to have the cake and eat it too. His qualified defence of a Human Nature foundation rejects any version of determinism, which, however, his argument ends up relying upon. In one given example, he argues that calling something 'natural' (i.e., genetically predisposed) does not mean to endorse it, as, for example, male violence. Still, it has the significant implication for designing social and political order so that it would be 'unwise to design human institutions on the basis that such violence is learned behaviour, with the concomitant that, with the right kind of education and social environment, restraints on violent behaviour would be unnecessary' (445). However one calls it, this is only following if one assumes a certain determinism in which political institutions can be designed to adapt to a given, and hence determining, Human Nature: people are free to disregard these human constants, but only at their own peril.

Yet, when he defines the exact role of evolutionary psychology, he is at pain to downgrade any form of determinism and aims to show that Human Nature so understood does not rest on any kind of extreme essentialism. Instead, 'there are many, potentially thousands of psychological mechanisms that [...] are present in normal human brains' (446). And since only those 'multiple mechanisms […], taken together, and combined with the environment, produce actual human behaviour' (446), we do not know which of them will be triggered, which combination will be realized in each case and which mechanisms will cancel each other out. Consequently, when he eventually applies it to the social sciences, he concludes, with remarkable transparency, that 'moving beyond the kind of mechanisms that can be identified with a degree of reliability to making grand statements […] may actually never be possible' (448). By implication, to return to his example, the reasons for male violence are not reducible to mere genetic predisposition. Indeed, the very dichotomy of 'natural' and 'learned' is simply too crude. His argument opens up a regress to establish the reasons for actual violence which are multiple. Yet assuming the reasons of violence in some natural constant is not just wrong, it is an intervention into social reality, since it can become a classical self-fulfilling prophecy. Patronising young males as if they were simply living out their natural aggressiveness, instead of accommodating their quest for social esteem, honour or recognition, can provoke resentment and the very violence the political order was supposedly better prepared to anticipate

(for an argument rescuing the classical notion of honour and a multiplicity of motives, see Freyberg-Inan 2004; Lebow 2003, 2008).

Put differently, Brown may be right that at 'the right level of generality, human nature still does important work' (441). But even if universalism can be so grounded, for this very high level of generality, it can itself not find anything of the more specific normative or explanatory realm for which Brown wanted us to get a better look into the subject in the first place.

The story could end here. But according to us, Brown's predicament is not due to any faulty argumentation of his. To the contrary, his argument only exposes the inherent problems when using anthropological findings for arguing anything as grandiose as it is sometimes portrayed to do. We will support this claim by harnessing the wider literature on evolutionary psychology beyond the main authors cited by Brown and who, within the 'sciences', have insisted on the basic irreducibility and indeterminacy of Human Nature.

The underlying question is hence how extensively we can specify the multiple mechanisms of the mind and with what methods. Put differently, is the brain to be seen as a general-purpose problem solver 'which comes with a basic operating system on board' (446) (neuroplasticity potentially being one of the central adaptive mechanisms in this picture), or does it come 'pre-loaded with a great deal of software' (446) so that the human mind should be seen as consisting of hundreds or thousands of innate, functionally specialised and domain-specific psychological mechanisms?

To defend his claims, Brown must opt for the latter view. In doing so, he finds support in a kind of evolutionary psychological research that it is not only fraught with a number of methodological problems (for a good review of such problems, see Buller 2005), but is also based on some dubious assumptions, in particular concerning the understanding of brain development. His argument does not only rely on the weaker (and basically trivial) assumption that there are some psychological mechanisms at work in human beings. Rather, he assumes *a priori* that there is some universal, restricted set of very specific mechanisms that are 'innate' or 'hard-wired', in the sense of being relatively static through time and space, since pre-specified by our genetic-evolutionary developmental programme. Yet, all phenotypic traits — in this case, psychological mechanisms — are the product of a developmental process. And it is in the conceptualization of such a developmental process that the theory embraced by Brown shows itself lacking when viewed from the vantage point of recent empirical and conceptual advances in both developmental biology and developmental cognitive neuroscience.

First of all, Brown's argument relies on the idea that our psychological characteristics are encoded in some evolutionarily moulded genetic programme, which is then simply unfolded in individual development 'to make us who we are' — with an environment playing a mere triggering role in the sense of being able to activate certain evolutionarily hard-wired psychological mechanisms. But this

ignores how dynamic and complex the ontogenetic development, and by that the relationship between the genotype and the 'resulting' phenotype, actually is. Accordingly, instead of seeing it as a linear, pre-specified expression of information that has been stored in our genes by our evolutionary past, ontogenetic development should more correctly be seen as a complex, dynamic and contingent process, where phenotypic traits are the outcome of bidirectional interactions between genes and various levels of the environment (molecular, cellular, organismal, social/ecological etc.). Shortly put, phenotypic traits are emergent properties of *the whole developmental system* and not just an expression of a certain (even though crucial) element of it (Oyama 2000; Oyama *et al.* 2001: 2–5; Lickliter and Honeycutt 2003a: 820–21, 824–26; 2003b: 868–69; Johnson 2011: 2–4).

But especially in the case of brain development, the journey from genes to the mature brain is a long and bumpy one. For, even though some analogies can be drawn in the way the brain and other organs of the body develop, the qualitatively important difference here is the fact that the brain — or at least its cortical part, where the 'higher' cognitive functions of interest to evolutionary psychologists are processed — is subject to a highly *activity-dependent* process of development (Mareschal *et al.* 2007). In contrast to, for example, teeth or breasts, which are simply added to the organism during the process of maturation, cortical development is not a matter of genetically controlled processes of *adding* pre-defined modules to the developing brain (Buller 2005: 132). Rather, the transition from infant to adult brain is a matter of *subtracting* synapses and circuits, and by that moulding the brain into a functionally more complex and specialised form (Buller 2005: 132–34, Johnson 2011: 204). Yet, this process of selective subtraction is necessarily an *activity-based* process, where brain activity is not internally determined by genes, but rather is primarily guided by its interactions with the environment (Rakic 2000: 7–8; O'Leary 2002: 222–23, 226–28; Buller 2005: 133–35; Mareschal *et al.* 2007: 6–7; Johnson 2011: 205).

Such a developmental process of first providing a large mass of 'raw material' in form of numerous neurons and connections, and then sculpting it into a functionally more specialised form, can in fact lead to an emergence of relatively stable brain structures that may functionally specialise in some particular information-processing tasks, thus seemingly resembling psychological modules postulated by the kind of evolutionary psychology that Brown embraces. However, from the point of view of developmental cognitive neuroscience, such modularity is to be seen as an *emergent* feature, that is, as an activity- and context-dependent outcome of cortical development, and not as a result of some pre-defined developmental programme encoded in the genes (Buller 2005: 134–35; Wheeler and Clark 2008: 3569–70; Johnson 2011: 212). The opposition between 'natural' and 'learned' is hence misleading.

Thus, instead of viewing the brain as necessarily consisting of numerous separate, genetically specified brain circuits designed to solve each distinct adaptive problem that our ancestors may have encountered in our evolutionary past, it makes better

sense to take evolution more seriously for having produced a different 'solution': a highly plastic brain that is capable of *adapting* to particular environmental demands (Buller 2005: 139–42). In this perspective, a recourse to Human Nature basically shows not constancy but evolutionary plasticity, that is, an ability of the brain to (re)organise itself in response to changing conditions in the organism's environment, a mechanism especially active during early stages of development, but to a certain degree retained throughout the whole lifetime of the organism (Buller 2005: 137–38, Johnson 2011: 208). It is this very plasticity that is our key evolutionary adaptation, our distinctive universal human nature. 'Insofar as there is something worth calling a universal human nature on this alternative view', it would rather consist of 'biologically determined openness' to developmentally mediated cognitive change (Wheeler and Clark 2008: 3572). Our evolutionarily 'fixed' nature would in this case be a kind of 'meta-nature': a certain self-transforming open-endedness of the Human Nature, which, as a result, makes it a constantly moving target (Wheeler and Clark 2008: 3572).

In this context, and perfectly agreeing with Brown's call to theorise the social world with a consistent view of Human Nature, Human Nature cannot provide the justifications required by Brown's claims. For normative theorizing, the open-endedness of Human Nature is exactly one reason why attempts to 'naturally' ground, for instance, a neo-Hobbesian view of political order cannot work in general. Or, put differently, although a neo-Hobbesian depiction of social contracts can be empirically justified in some historical and social contexts, such contexts cannot be reified as universal theory. For this reason, Brown's argument that uses a particular version of evolutionary biology/psychology as allegedly secure and scientific foundation is no less biased than his chosen targets. Moving to explanatory theorizing, the lessons hardly change: multiple psychological mechanisms may cancel each other out and, in any case, no understanding or explanation of social action or political order can ever be reduced to them.[1] For its open-endedness, the recourse to an evolutionary psychology of Human Nature stays indeterminate; we still need to do our job as social and normative theorists with other means.[2]

Notes

1 For a similar argument with regard to the recent resurgence of geopolitical thought in Europe (and its necessary yet denied reliance on environmental determinism), see Guzzini (2012: Chapter 2).

2 For a similar critique of the use of sociobiology in philosophy, see Taylor (1989: Part I).

(How) does the human make the world hang together?

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Chris Brown's essay presents an interesting paradox: the individual has become a core reference in the practice and study of world politics. Yet, at the same time, we lack a coherent account of what constitutes an individual. This seems strange, particularly as contemporary theoretical reflections on world politics have witnessed an unprecedented string of contestations over once undisputed core concepts. However, as the case of the individual proves, one core topic has yet to be subject to a systematic debate: the human.[1] Consequently, Brown claims that '[t]he rise in the importance of the individual cries out for a coherent account of human nature' in order to 'provide us with a firmer basis for thinking about humanity' (2013: 437, 450). In keeping with Brown's interest in stimulating debate (451), the following addresses the broader implications of his proposition: how theories of the human have an impact on 'the game of "International Relations"' (438), that is, the description of world political order.

The human as a solution

World politics and its reflection theories are enduring a process of 'double debordering' (Albert 2003). The term captures the experience of the contingency and complexity of an increasingly differentiated world order as well as the concurrent difficulty of said theories to maintain a vocabulary that further enables productive observations of the political. Brown's engagement with the individual can be read as a response to this problem.

While his essay cannot be expected to fully outline and substantiate its far-reaching implications, one can still assess the direction and thus productiveness of Brown's proposition. Here, one option is to not focus on the more striking question, the 'nature of the individual', but on one that seems to have been answered already: Can the individual serve as the basic unit for theorizing world politics? Hence, to reveal how much mileage Brown's account has left in it, one may ask what mileage the individual already has on it.

The 'naturalness' of Brown's premise becomes evident at the level of disciplinary debate. Here it most clearly resonates with a (yet mostly unspoken) consensus inherited in many theories of world politics. Regarding the problem of 'what makes world politics hang together', they present a clear-cut solution: the human. Their argument appears to be bulletproof: We *do* live in a world of humans. Humans and/or their relations *make up* political order. World politics *is* a human enterprise. The

theoretical 'marching orders' are thus equally clear: to understand political order, one must study the human.

The elegance and problem-solving capacity of such a 'human semantics', as evident in Brown, appears all the more stimulating *vis-à-vis* the high level of closure it implies.[2] In the face of the global challenge of heterogeneity, it allows for the description of world political order as one coherent unity. It does so by accounting for how world politics as a whole equals humanity, which, in turn, consists of human beings as its individual parts who, via their individuality, at the same time capture diversity. One can then either induce how the parts strive towards a whole or deduce how this whole unfolds into its parts. In any case, an identitary description of world political order can be retained — or can it not?

Here, scrutinising the distinction of wholes/parts that structures the theoretical argument is revealing. If one theorizes order starting from the whole, it is already unclear how this whole of an *identical* humanity is to be represented at the level of its parts, the *different* individuals. Vice versa, it is uncertain how those *different* individuals form an *identical* whole. It is not logically addressed how the human can actually be identical/different or universal/particular at the same time and thus guarantee the very unity of political order. For an approach relying on the human individual, the latter then not only presents a solution but also a problem.

The human as a problem

Yet, the individual now adopts a problem different from the original task to ferret out its 'nature'. While both problems are joined at the hip, this new challenge reveals an even more fundamental paradox in its theoretical use than the one mentioned at the outset. It is to Brown's credit that he makes the underlying problematic the starting point of his account: said relation of identity/difference (438). His solution, however, is also the prospective breaking point of his account. What does this mean — particularly for the individual?

Since the human guarantees the unity of political order, Brown resolves the tension of identity/difference through his account of the 'nature' of the individual. The latter 'is always going to be found in the relationship between those things about us that are genuinely universal […] and those things about us that are shaped by our culture' (450). Yet, upon closer inspection, is this not simply a repetition of the above said structure of wholes/parts? Only this time it is delegated to the inside of the individual — its 'genuinely universal' aspects (regarding *all* humans) and its 'cultural particulars' (regarding *individual* humans). Unaware of the primary distinction of wholes/parts structuring his account and holding on to the idea of describing order as a unity, Brown does not productively engage said paradoxical distinction but only further unfolds it. His solution perpetuates an infinite regression of wholes/parts that simply postpones the promise of their unity via surrogate distinctions.[3]

It would be short-sighted to attribute this mistake to a lack of rigour on Brown's part. After all, his caution *vis-à-vis* concepts of 'human nature' and turn to evolutionary psychology indicate that he does notice the prevailing tension. It is only in taking one further step back and assuming that social structure and semantics do correlate that it becomes clear that Brown's problem is not only one of logic, but is itself embedded in a broader intellectual history.

Old solutions, new problems

Brown is right — the individual is not only a recent addition to theories of world politics. In fact, the evolution of its present-day meaning began in the 18th century (see Borsche 1976). It paralleled the erosion of secular order, dissolving its natural God-given unity, leaving only a *plurality* of *individual* human beings behind, detached from nature and facing the uncertainty of a yet unforeseeable order. While the term 'individual' had been around since the classics, denoting 'the indivisible', the above period witnessed its restriction to solely mean humans through the idea of individuality. Around the same time, the Cartesian subject emerged. As yet another term with historical mileage, the *hypokeimenon*, it originally stood for the self-sufficient entity that founded its own being, and in turn everything else. Yet, the idea of the *cogitans* marked the delegation of the foundations of certainty from an objective outside to the subjective inside. Subsequently, the individual and the subject merged to form an accepted fact at the beginning of the 19th century: individuals by their individuality were now humans, humans were subjects, subjectivity rested on human consciousness. Hence, humans were no longer simply 'things' in a world of other things but became the foundation of the world.

Returning to Brown's proposition, this brief excursion is insightful on two counts: For one, theoretically, it is probably not by accident that his basic unit, the human being, is an individual that provides the foundation of order. Likewise, it seems equally fitting that he finds his solution to how humans make the world hang together as a unity in the human brain 'as general-purpose, problem-solving computer' (446) — arguably a contemporary update of consciousness.[4] Two, historically, not unlike the past semantic transformations, Brown's account can then indeed be read as a reaction to the 'double debordering' of global order. In both cases, it seems, said 'human semantics' fulfil the function of bridging the gap between a dissolving and a yet uncertain new order by folding the human and order into one. Yet, again, what does this mean for the description of world politics and the human?

Classical semantics were about the rise of the human as an individual subject from the ashes of an 'objective' natural order. The contemporary challenge, however, is not about regaining unity but acknowledging the heterogeneity 'caused' by the unavoidability of the other subject(s). Hence, if differentiation implies sociality, it is impossible to account for the social quality and hence complexity of world politics from the vantage point of the classical subject.

For how can heterogeneity be reconstructed if the subject/brain is the foundation of itself *and* the world? Who founds whom, if everything founds itself? Such a monadology only relegates the social to something in between 'pity and police, a political-ideological program' (Luhmann 1997: 1030). As much as Brown seems to evoke sociality with his notion of interaction (446), said dangers *are* granted possible entry points, for example, in his suggestion that we might be able to arrive at 'a set of parameters within which a substantive account of human flourishing will have to be constructed' (445). Yet, this equally obscures sociality, this time by relying not on 'human nature' but on the assumed authority of science.

Such an approach dooms the human to appear only as a stopgap for an overcome semantics and its faulty logic. It remains a theoretical band aid, tasked with holding together what are basically two angles on the same phenomenon. Instead of providing a description of the differentiation of order, wholes/parts only facilitate a double-description of one order — once as a whole and once as the sum of its parts. Wedged in between these, the human is disposed to only do what, historically, its 'nature' or, today, its brain 'wills' it to do. For an approach that essentially strives for human flourishing, this seems to be no small self-limitation.

Beyond the human, before the world?

What, then, does IR need in order to enable more intricate descriptions of the complexity of present-day world politics? Here, Brown's conclusion offers sage advice: 'new metaphors' (450)! This rings true because, after all, we can indeed only start making sense of change by reverting to an already available vocabulary — one that reflects back on past rather than novel events. It is thus notoriously unfit to distinctly capture new phenomena. For one, scholars of world politics are thus tasked with reflecting on the obstacles inherent in these vocabularies and how they may make us (re)describe phenomena and (re)solve 'problems' that may be long gone. Likewise, we must generate a new vocabulary and logic, able to capture the contemporary contingencies and complexities of world politics without unwittingly reducing them to the already familiar.

And the human? It seems untenable to claim that the phenomena we study as world politics would occur — and, for that matter, be studied — without what is referred to as 'the human'. Similarly, wo/man's stomach keeps grumbling away, even as s/he goes about the business of world-building (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 201). Hence, if human 'qualities' cannot be ignored, yet cannot be incorporated at the most basic theoretical level, how are we to continue?

To begin with, even if we strive for a 'human politics', we must ask if we are doing the human a favour by making it the analytical vantage point. If we want to enquire into how political order, for example, may allow for more freedom, why don't we stop asking *what* the human is and start looking at *how* we come to understand it and with which consequences. This could tell us *why* we sometimes cannot see it otherwise and in turn, expose the (trans)formation of those observational boundaries.

Notes

1 See, however, Jacobi and Freyberg-Inan (2012).
2 For more, see Luhmann (1995: 5–8, 1997: 912–31, 1016–36).
3 That is, for example, until one posits a final state for the regression, which, however, will most likely only be able to guarantee the unity, that is, obscure the underlying distinction, for as long as its plausibility lasts.
4 Correspondingly, the brain serves as a logical stopgap for infinite regression – as the 'place' where unity is found. Yet, the quoted 'mechanisms', as disaggregated as they may be, are obviously always the same (*identical wholes*), yet produce various outcomes (*different parts/elements*).

The cosmopolitan aspiration

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The cosmopolitan aspiration to know our common humanity is being re-engaged in with increasing prominence in international law, in global governance, in claims of human rights and in calls for global justice. This, in turn, has produced novel discourses of the human subject that can be the subject of international law and governance and the bearer of human rights. Chris Brown's interesting and thoughtful article proposes a way of knowing our common humanity that draws on recent developments in evolutionary psychology.

Brown raises a set of issues that are important for international political theory. First, the effort to bring the new developments in the sciences of the mind and body into international political theory is important. Second, the article addresses an issue that has interested political theorists for many years: that political theories rest on concepts of the human that they under-specify and fail to understand (and, I would add, in some cases also obscure and disavow). So, as I understand it, the author is asking international relations scholars to do two things: to theorise the implications of physical human sciences for international theory, and to become more self-conscious of the underlying philosophical assumptions about human beings and human life on which their theories rest. Both of these seem important to me.

I want to make two general points. First, I am sceptical about how Brown thinks this can be done. In fact, he seems torn between appeals to a weaker ontological position — in which assumptions about the nature of the body and mind are linked to human behaviour but remain provisional and contestable — and a stronger ontology in which certain fixed, universal attributes, capacities and proclivities of human

psychology determine, if not behaviour *per se*, at least the parameters of 'normal' human behaviour. Furthermore, why does the way of knowing our common humanity have to be a story of 'human nature'? In short, Brown seems to regard 'human nature' as a foundational principle of human behaviour rather than one historically constituted way of knowing a common humanity, with particular social and political implications.

Why must a knowledge of our common humanity, that might help us formulate rules and negotiate differences in a post-Westphalian world, be rooted in a foundational discourse of the human subject, that stable, universal and trans-historical subject able to ground common meanings and mental processes? Why reduce knowing our common humanity to such a subject (Brown seems to insist that while we don't know its makeup now, we might in the future as the evolutionary science of psychology matures)? Does the promotion of universal ethical and legal standards, which, of course, are not the same thing, require a foundation in 'human nature'? How thick must this be? Does the project confuse the relation of universals and particulars by viewing universals as epistemically and ontologically prior to particulars? If universals are prior to the particular actions and thoughts that manifest them (setting fixed parameters), what role is there for the subjective action of differently situated historical actors in setting the basic goals of 'human flourishing' — the goal the author postulates as the (universal) goal of the political good that seems to have come to the fore with appeals to a common humanity?

At one point, the article appeals to an age-old positivist ideal that sometime in the future science will provide a secure, foundational basis of knowledge of nature, including human nature. Without the article explicitly saying so, it appeals to the ideal of a unified science of human life that will eventually emerge, and in which what counts as 'normal' behaviour will count as fact, derived from some objective account of how the individual brain/body works that has in the last instance some important and meaningful effect on individual behaviour.

Second, how might an understanding of the new physical human sciences (in the author's case evolutionary psychology) illuminate the problematic of legitimation that the author points to at the beginning of the article (i.e., the problem that current practices that govern individuals directly rather than mediated by states rely on assumptions about the individual that they cannot defend)? The author seems to presume that a valid theory of 'human nature' can somehow clarify, improve or ground (I am not sure which the author thinks it is) developing legal, organisational and political practices in the emerging global order. My question is: Exactly how does it do *this* work on this particular set of issues? And would this be as politically neutral as the author supposes?

I think there is a 'how' implied here (I return to this point below), which Brown seems to disavow in his defence of the political neutrality of the discourse of evolutionary psychology. He rejects viewing evolutionary psychology as merely a

heuristic device in favour of some harder scientific discourse. Brown seems to think that eventually the science of evolutionary psychology can provide this foundation and thereby ground policies to limit violence, promote human rights and promote justice, even if the science does not explicitly endorse specific policies.

Again, I think Brown is correct to point to the problem that current developments in international law, relations and organisation increasingly rest on assumptions of a foundation they do not and cannot fully understand and justify. He very usefully points to this dilemma. As he says, the nation-state is no longer able to provide an adequate mediation of the juridical and normative practices that are increasingly involved in international/global relations. I also think he is correct that some concept of 'humanity' is increasingly replacing the sovereign nation-state and being used as the ground that justifies taking the 'individual' as the subject of international action and the object of global regulation, and that this idea of 'humanity' is left unexamined.

But Brown seems to view this gap between the collective (the state) and the individual as a problem that can be solved by a proper science of human nature. But what if this is more an *aporia*, a permanent and ineliminable part of politics, than a contradiction that can be resolved? In other words, what if theories and international/global practices (international law, regimes of human rights etc.) do rest on some concept of universal principles and common features of human life, including human thinking, cognition, desiring and affectivity, that the theories can never defend absolutely and scientifically and that will always be in part historically constituted and therefore always in part contestable? This does not mean either that appeals to human universals are a contradiction (i.e., purely relative) or that they are not relevant to international relations. But it does imply that they can never be fully grounded in indisputable 'facts' and therefore must be parts of more extensive arguments and accounts of both how particular ensembles of power (such as the individualist turn itself in international relations) arose and what might be their implications (empirical and normative).

Two further issues arise for me here. One is the seeming reduction of human nature to psychological determinants of behaviour as understood by evolutionary psychology as presented here. The reductionism I have in mind is reflected in the appeal to the IT model. Why privilege behaviour and the coding of genes over other aspects of human thinking and judgement? (Would the IT model of the brain be accepted by all brain scientists?) While it may give some insight into behavioural patterns, the model seems to go against what I understand as models of thinking and judgement that arise from some brain research. As I understand the latter, and I admit my knowledge is quite limited, the brain operates more flexibly, a complex set of relays and networks in which 'core' activities are rooted and changed in the process of thinking, feeling, desiring, remembering and so on. Rather than the security of the genetic code that changes over long periods of time, brain research suggests that human nature might

involve a very different temporality in which the complexity of brain functions produces much quicker and indeterminate changes in the neural and somatic networks that influence thinking and judgement, and that could be said to constitute 'human nature'. These would seem less susceptible to the kinds of stable principles of behaviour that the IT model seems to imply. Indeed, the IT model assumes that what is most natural about human beings is encoded in their genes and that DNA trumps all else in determining or influencing behaviour.

In other words, the author seems to endorse a concept of human nature, rather than just describe an objective one, given that other human physical sciences would seem to imply a quite different concept of 'human nature'. The author is perhaps correct that the theory does not endorse the specific behaviour patterns as desirable, but this does not make the theory objective and without political implications.

My second concern has to do with the political implications of the particular idea of human nature. This is the 'how' — how the concept of human nature articulated here might work to limit violence and promote justice. While I appreciate the desire for a more nuanced and plastic understanding of human beings that allows for greater appreciation of cultural differences, I wonder, however, if the politics that follows from the model of 'the individual' as a generic category does not limit this appreciation substantially, and actually prescribes a particular kind of politics. It would seem to endorse a system of governance that takes 'the individual' as a generic category (but not 'individuals') as an object of regulation.

For example, the article on page 445 says:

> The message here is not that, simply because it is natural, male violence is somehow inevitable but rather that it would be unwise to design human institutions on the basis that such violence is learned behaviour, with the concomitant that with the right kind of education and social environment, restraints on violent behaviour would be unnecessary. […] Scientific knowledge of the human animal will not tell us what sort of society we ought to promote, or what kind of rights we ought to assign to individuals, or, indeed, what kind of human capabilities we ought to allow to develop. But, on the other hand, it may eventually provide us with a set of parameters within which a substantive account of human flourishing will have to be constructed, and a set of problems (like male violence) with which this account will have to cope.

First, as Foucault and others have shown, setting parameters that regulate 'the individual', taken as a generic category whose behaviour is indeterminate, is a form of politics and power. This is the way he describes the biopolitics of neoliberalism. In short, the 'objective' science of evolutionary biology, while it may not prescribe a specific good, does privilege a particular political form that is likely to give significant power to experts in the scientific discourse of human psychology who can best secure the proper 'parameters' of 'normal' behaviour in whatever ideology of human flourishing happens to gain power.

I am, again, not disputing either the possibility nor even the need for appeals to universal principles or even something we might call human nature that is grounded, provisionally, in contemporary biological and physical human sciences. I am more concerned that viewing this human nature as foundational in the way evolutionary science does — as beyond normative contestation and as necessarily fixed over a long period of time — privileges a process of political decision making and resolution of disputes that limits contestation and pluralism.

Finally, I think the payoff of the cosmopolitan aspiration to know our common humanity is that doing so might enable us to prevent the worst instincts of the human animal from turning difference into hatred, to replace recourse to violence with agonistic relations that allow for peaceful negotiation of differences. I am not sure, however, how Chris Brown's interesting, though I think problematic, effort can aid in this quest.

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