



WHOSE FAULT IS THE HUMAN CONDITION?

There is a famous story about an essay contest in England in 1910. The topic was, “What is wrong with the world?” The British writer G. K. Chesterton wrote the winning entry. It consisted of two words: “I am.”

In addressing the question, “Whose fault is the human condition?” I’m not going to focus on individuals, as Chesterton did. Instead I’d like to address larger human institutions or frames of thought. In particular, I want to consider science and religion: Which of these two institutions or frames of thought has had more of an impact on the sad, bloody human condition? The answer is religion. I refer herein to conventional, orthodox religion. Every reader of this magazine knows this, but I wish to present some reasons you may not have heard before.

From the conventional religious viewpoint, either God created human nature or else God allowed Satan to create human nature. Either way, our nature is God’s will. That’s what makes it human nature; we cannot change it. We can be “saved,” they say. But most of the people I know who claim the Holy Spirit lives inside them live in just as worldly a fashion as do those whom they vilify. At the very least, even “saved” people still have human nature.

Therefore, from a religious perspective, “is” and “ought” are the same in human nature. Consider this example: men are more violent than women. According to religion, this is the way things ought to be; God made us that way. As a matter of fact, it’s bad for men to suppress their violent nature. I vividly remember a radio broadcast in which James Dobson, a major voice of the religious right, condemned the *Berenstain Bears* cartoons because they depicted a father bear who was not sufficiently assertive and masculine. It is always men who start wars and who do most of the fighting—and this is the way God made it, religious people claim. Women are supposed to stay home, stay quiet, and stay pregnant with fetuses of future warriors.

Evolutionary science, on the other hand, separates “is” from “ought” in human nature. Darwin proposed sexual selection as the reason that male animals are more “pugnacious.” Males fight more because they evolved that way. Maybe it made sense in the Stone Age. But today it’s an evolutionary mismatch—what conferred fitness benefits back then is now maladaptive. Evolutionists don’t derive morals from Stone Age biological and cultural adaptations. Religious people, in contrast, have to obtain their morals from the way they think God made us. Was God correct in ordering the Israelites to kill all the Canaanites, even the kids? If God is unchanging, then either he is wrong or else all of the Old Testament killing was right. If God said it was right in the past, then it’s still right. But if an adaptation evolved in the past, it’s not necessarily adaptive today.

I believe I’m justified in attributing a great deal of modern human suffering to the idea, strongly held by most Christians, Jews, and Muslims, that God made men to be fighters and that’s the way it is supposed to be now and forever. For religious people, *Homo bellicosus* was intelligently designed. But to evolutionists, *Homo sapiens* is an ape struggling to subdue its old ape behavior with modern cultural evolution, of which humanism is an important component. ☐

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