THE ARROGANCE OF HOMO SAPIENS

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IN a celebrated paragraph in one of the most celebrated of his essays the Dean of St. Paul's lays bare the iniquity of mankind's worship of itself. He writes thus:

> We have devastated the loveliness of the world. We have exterminated several species more beautiful and less vicious than ourselves. We have enslaved the rest of the animal creation, and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feathers so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form. If it is progress to turn the fields and woods of Essex into East and West Ham, we may be thankful that progress is a sporadic and transient phenomenon in history. It is a pity that our biologists......have not preached us sermons on the sin of racial self-idolatry......*L'anthropolatrie, voila l'ennemi.*

Man has abused his power, in fact, and mistaken himself for a god through his sedulous attention to his own petty concerns. The blasphemy of industrialism is the culminating horror. Essex (so one gathers) was not devasted by fields and churches, bridges and hedgerows. If these were sins, they were venial ones, but when ugly kilns belch their ugly poison, when children are rickety and pit-ponies blind for lack of sunlight, when the land is but the rubble of the factory, the wantonness and indecency of man's performance cries aloud to heaven. There is a measure in these things, and man has exceeded it beyond all computing. From this deadly sin biology itself should deliver us.

It may be doubted, however, whether biology preaches any such homily. Biologically speaking, every species is utterly self-seeking, and the law is competition and power. The race fights for its own ends, and its success is measured by the numbers that survive. Judged by this test, what cause has industrialism to feel ashamed? It maintains a population vastly more numerous than on any other system; and if it has paid a price for this achievement, it is nowhere near bankruptcy. Even the bacteria tremble at the doctors it supports, and for the moment the world's most urgent need

may be held to be the duty of permitting industrialism to be true to itself. Let it examine itself, and above all, let it remember that the world is its unit, not this people or that; that wars do not pay where the combatants are strong; that it is better to produce than to destroy. Prof. Leacock's "Wanted more profiteers" may not be an unexceptionable maxim, but even this may be what Prof. Leacock meant it to be, the exaggeration of a wholesome truth.

Dr. Inge's meaning, no doubt, was something different from this, but it may not have been more scientific. The biologist's sermon might refer to our humble origin, or might conjecture that we are destined either to surmount ourselves or to be surmounted by others. If so, the conclusion is not at all evident. We had ape-like ancestors, but we are not apes now. This circumstance may not justify self-idolatry, but it makes self-congratulation not unreasonable. And the rest is extremely speculative. Other reigning dynasties may have disappeared as utterly as the continent of Lemuria, but we have no evidence that any species ever controlled the earth's surface in the way that man controls it now. Man changes, like everything else beneath the moon, but he may have grown to his culminating stature, and there are no portents—as yet—of a super-man. The earth itself, indeed, may put an end to the dynasty as it gradually cools, and industrialism may exhaust its necessary supplies; but if any species is adaptable, that species is industrial humanity. If a glacial age is to come, we need not be caught and frozen like the mammoths; and we may reasonably conjecture that man will learn of these impending changes sooner than other creatures, and protect himself better than most. In short, the only biological lesson is that man must learn to adapt himself to his conditions, and this is just the lesson that he has taken most seriously to heart. The Dean's conclusion, therefore, must look for some other support.

The second count in his indictment is the claim and requirement of beauty. This also seems to call for reflection.

We have done something to beautify the earth, but on the whole we have enormously increased the sum of terrestrial ugliness. Irrigation, temples, afforestation, and palaces may sometimes be to our credit, and something may be said for the sheen of shipyards in the distance, or even for the mass of a viaduct. On the whole, however, there is no denying that the earth would have been a fairer place if man had let it alone. It is but sentiment to consider otherwise. When the Phoenicians undid their corded bales, they left a litter behind.

This, however, is only a part of the problem. The beauties of landscape and of seascape are not the only beauties in the world;

and even if they were, there would still be a question concerning the worth of this beauty if no one were there to see it. I do not know whether anyone would seriously maintain that man should efface himself from the world in order that the lower animals and the angelic host should contemplate its natural loveliness. If anyone does, the plain conclusion is that he and his fellows should bury themselves as deep as they can. On any less drastic assumption, however, the problem is plainly different; and, equally plainly, it is much more intricate. Let us grant that Switzerland is disfigured by its hotels and its funiculars, and that every slag-heap, every chimney, every railroad is an act of vandalism. Even so, there is much to be said on the other side. Here are men and women who see and enjoy the beauties of nature, but have other elements also in their welfare. How, then, are they to react? Are a few needy herds and a few venturesome leisured enthusiasts to be the only persons who are privileged to behold this beauty? If not, we need the hotels and the funiculars; and we should try to build better ones, not fewer. Even industrialism may defend itself in this. Without the factories, no doubt, a certain number of human beings (quite a small number in the northern latitudes) might cultivate their souls, uncomfortably, in specially favoured quarters of the globe. With them, an immensely larger number of human beings can be supported with the "blessings" and affluence of civilization. They are making a sad mistake if they devastate all the beauties of the world; but if they cannot beautify their utilities, it would seem that they must pay for other goods in the coin of this ugliness.

Let us pass, then, to the third count in Dr. Inge's indictment—our treatment of the other animals.

Plainly, in this affair, our practice shows that we consider ourselves the only beings who matter. If any other species is obnoxious to us, we exterminate it; if it is useful, we enslave it. The rights of turkeys are determined by the needs of the season of good will to men. Hens may live during their optimum two seasons of egg-laying, but no longer. It may be argued, indeed, (quite disingenuously) that there are more hens, and happier ones under this dispensation than under any other, and that it does not matter to a goose whether the farmer eats it or the fox. If this be so, it is an accident, and the hens and the geese are not consulted in the matter. The farmer will not allow them to take their chances with the fox, and he does not expect them to covet the honourable sepulchre of the larder. Certainly we have rules against the grosser forms of torture. Most countries prohibit bear-baiting and bull-fighting, and England, for some obscure reason, decrees that dogs shall not be

harnessed. Certain humane persons even suffer from local twinges of conscience. They do not like to see wild things in a cage; they would rather eat mutton than lamb; they think that plumage should not be torn from a nesting bird to adorn a woman's hat. Certain odd persons, too, are vegetarians on humanitarian grounds, and others, still more heroic, profess to believe that it is better that many human beings should die than that a single guinea-pig should be inoculated with insulin. In a word, we have our troubles in this matter, but on the whole we trouble ourselves very little. I have seen a calf dangling from a rope in a French abattoir and plainly still alive.

The mere fact, however, that we admit that we have some duties, small though they be, towards these other creatures, proves that we attribute to them a certain inconsiderable but intrinsic value. They too may enjoy their living; they also frisk in the sun; if graceful movement is a good, it is a good for many of them; if courage, fidelity and affection are virtues, they in their own way are virtuous creatures. In the face of these facts, how can we justify our attitude towards them?

It is not to the point to argue that we are stronger than they are, and so that we may do with them as we will. This is a proof of might, not of right, and it is right that justifies. Again, we have no business to argue that our duties are bounded by the claims of our own species, and that we have no concern with any others. If it is wrong for us, truly and literally wrong, to inflict wanton pain on our distant cousins, and if it is in our power to inflict this injury or to refrain from inflicting it, then our duties *do* extend beyond ourselves and there can be no two opinions on the matter. The laws of our duty are determined by the goodness or badness we can bring about, not merely by the goodness or badness we can bring about *for ourselves*. Human beings can discern and can influence much more than themselves, and they are thoroughly well aware of the fact. To argue in this way, therefore, is to beg the whole question at issue, and to beg it without excuse. It may be true, indeed, as Dr. Ward sarcastically observes, that "society itself is always egoistic and never comes to recognize ends higher than its own." We are considering what it ought to recognize.

Since we cannot pretend, then, that we dominate other species for *their* good—governing in trust for them as Mr. Lloyd George says a great empire does with regard to its subject peoples—but at the best that we refrain from inflicting avoidable evils upon them, it is clear that the only serious plea we can urge is simply our own necessity. We cannot afford to allow rattlesnakes and bacteria to com-

pete freely with us, and we cannot afford to neglect the edible and other advantages which we can obtain from our distant cousins. We may consider, therefore, how far this argument from necessity justifies our conduct, and how far it carries us.

Let us suppose, then, that our practice with regard to the other animals is absolutely necessary, at least for the security and prosperity of our own existence. On this assumption it is usual to argue that our worth is so immeasurably superior to theirs that nothing remains to be said. This is a mistake, I think, although it is not a mistake for the reason that is sometimes given. It is objected that we are not unbiassed judges, and consequently that we should not trust our decision on the point. What would the bullock and the salmon think about it? This is specious, but unsatisfactory. We may not be unbiassed judges; but if we have any discernment at all in these matters, we have excellent reasons for believing that humanity is in fact capable of excellences which are intrinsically superior to the excellences of any of the brutes. We know nothing at all about these matters if our knowledge does not extend beyond ourselves, and would have no right whatsoever to call any savages degraded or any deity righteous. I must assume, then, that we do know that we are superior to dogs or gnats, but surely it is quite another thing to urge that we are entitled to slaughter or enslave other animals, just because we are better than they. A dissatisfied philosopher is better than a satisfied pig, but it is an odd conclusion that he is therefore entitled to make breakfast bacon of the pig. If this were true, every saint would have the right to become a cannibal if he chose.

To prove its conclusion, therefore, this argument must choose a slightly different strategy, and it might possibly succeed on some such line as the following. The dynasty of the human species, it may be argued, is enormously superior, both in fact and in promise, to any other conceivable dynasty. For the good of the world, therefore, and not merely for its own private advantage, it must take whatever steps are necessary for its own dominance; and these steps include the factories and the slaughter-houses.

This reasoning may be just—at any rate I can think of no other strategy that is even remotely adequate—and if it is just, its consequences are of the first importance. So far from permitting the untrammelled egoism of society, it expressly limits and conditions this arrogant selfishness. To devastate beauty, to destroy and confine our fellow creatures—these things in themselves are ugly and vile, and we have no business to do them *unless* they are necessary. We may do them, therefore, *only* if they are necessary and in so far

as they are necessary. To exceed in these matters is as wicked as any other excess. And this leads to a further point. If the argument is sound, we have the right to do these things not simply and directly for our own advantage, but in the service of the good, and although the argument assumes that our good outweighs any other terrestrial good in its excellence, it is by no means the only good that concerns us in the world. If we are forced to create ugliness, this cannot be helped; but a necessary evil is an evil all the same, and we have to prove that the evil must be committed in order that greater good may arise. The argument warns us, in a word, that we do these things at our peril. So far from justifying arrogance, it inculcates humility and caution.

To expand the point, let us consider some further developments of this logic. The argument in itself does not seem to have any direct or obvious application to so large a unit as the human race. It would justify any aristocracy, or any dominant race, in precisely the same fashion as this which is alleged to justify humanity; and we are all familiar with such reasonings. Art for art's sake is the greatest thing in the world; therefore everyone should serve the artists, exempt them from ordinary duties, and make them the masters of their leisure. A military aristocracy has the right to impress all the retainers it can arm; a plutocratic aristocracy has the right to inherit the earth, and to treat the labour of human beings as a mere market commodity grunting and sweating through a forty-eight hours week. These consequences, in our own days, are more usually implied than expressed, but they are expressed with great confidence when the aristocracy of a nation or of "civilization" is in question. No single strong nation, perhaps, can afford to flaunt its *Realpolitik* in the face of other strong nations; but the exploitation of undeveloped territories with the most perfunctory concern for the wishes of the inhabitants is quite another thing, and is very little affected by accepting the duty of a "mandate" in place of the frank, unqualified booty of annexation. Certainly our conscience is pricking us now. The spoils are divided, and we are trying to justify our retention of them—not wholly without success. The world must march in the way we have taught it to march. We must therefore convert it into an industrial training school, and hold it in "trust", taking care not to mend our ways too rapidly. For all progress (except our own) is slow, and should not be hurried; indeed, it may always be retarded in the case of the others. Our intelligence-testers have proved to their own satisfaction that uncivilized humanity is incurably deficient as compared with civilized. The gin-trader may seem a peculiar aristocrat,

but the race he belongs to is intrinsically superior to the race of his victims. Leading strings, therefore, may always be needed, and an adequate place in the sun may always be denied to the peoples who receive most, by nature, from that luminary.

These conscientious scruples may become still more exasperating as the numbers of the civilized peoples swell. Swarming animals are very inconsiderate, and the migrations of the peoples are not yet at an end.

It is precisely these scruples that form the most interesting part of our present topic. If we really believe our professions, why should we be so scrupulous (at times) concerning mankind, and so callous towards other living creatures? If the superior race should be judge and disposer, and if, *propter excellentiam suam*, it has the right to make others give way to it, why trouble ourselves over the matter? Certainly if we hold that every human being, irrespective of his capacity, has a soul to be saved, and that no other creature has any soul at all, we have a sufficient reason for discriminating between them; and this, with some of us, is a firm belief, with others a lingering echo. In practice, however, this natural equality of souls is precisely opposed to our customary conceptions, and it proves far too much for our convenience. *Homo homini deus*, or the maxim that humanity is to be treated always as an end and never as a means, was not written of the old Tasmanians.

The fact is rather that we know when our ground is slippery. Aristocratic castes tend to become pallid ghosts, not because there is no such thing as aristocracy, but because it is so difficult for an aristocrat to prove that he is one. Give him his chance, and he will show that he is not so very different from other people. If the point is doubtful, his sons and his friends will show it for him; and even if he is really better, he need not therefore have greater possessions. We do not see the necessity. In the case of dominant races, it is true, we profess with great confidence that our ground is firmer; but sometimes we wonder. According to our own standards we are demonstrably superior. We have a more flexible language, a more skilful art, much better knowledge, enormously more adequate machinery. Yet some of these advantages, we know, are deceitful, and others irrelevant. As a domestic arrangement, therefore, we insist that Jack shall have the same vote as his master despite his economic inferiority, and in the last resort our code is frankly a compromise. In a general way we own allegiance to the teeming democracy of humanity. Further than this generality we do no want to go.

We may even be "indifferent honest". The business is much too

intricate for dogma. But we have very little occasion for spiritual pride. It is cant to say that we effectually recognize the brotherhood of man, or that we have elaborated the consequences of this creed. The best we can say is that we have been thinking about these affairs. This is much, but it is not enough, and we ought to be ashamed that we have thought so little and to such feeble purpose. We should think a little more, and congratulate ourselves a little less. The longer views are the wiser, and neither a white skin nor an erect stature sets bounds to them.

It is not a biological lesson that we need, but a straightforward scrutiny of fundamental principles, and the reason for our need is something much deeper than Darwin, or democracy, or humanitarianism, or vexatious debates on the minor issues of school divinity. It is a question of the whole trend of our convictions and reflections, not of some special current or eddy. We have fallen into a new way of thinking about ourselves, and we do not know what it implies.

We have outstripped the ancients in many things, but most of all, as we think, in our better acquaintance with man's place in the universe. For the Greeks and for the schoolmen this earth was the centre of things; and now we can all correct their ignorance. The earth, we know, is a highly insignificant unit in the infinite dance of the suns and their attendants. It behoves us to consider it accordingly. We may indeed, like Fontenelle, dream of worthier denizens of other planets; and some of us intend to go to school with the Martians by wireless telegraphy. For the most part, however, we have learned quite a different lesson. Our better acquaintance with the immensities has taught us our littleness in a physical sense, but it has not humbled our spirit at all. Compelled to admit that we are tiny wanderers, we have come, by compensation, to envisage no duties outside our species. The geocentric world-view never contemplated the sufficiency or the supremacy of man. For it, he was a fallen god, an ephemeral participant in perennial divinity. He aspired towards the circumambient godhead, looking at the governing deities above him from his misty cavern on the earth. Thus the Greeks, and thus too the monkish mind. The cosmos, for the mediaevals, was not man's but God's, and the earth was God's footstool. Man was neither the measure nor the end of the things of the spirit. Man's soul, which came from above, longed to return to its heavenly mansions. The wanderer was God's wanderer, and the *civitas terrena* was a tinselled show.

We call this "other-worldliness" to-day, and we have very little patience with it. The contemplative life, we think, is foolishness—an indolent, selfish refusal to be up and doing. In a measure, our

reproach may be just. There is selfishness in the best of these renunciations, and in certain ways this modern standpoint may be saner on the whole. If man is a fallen deity, it is better, perhaps, to assume that he fell for a purpose, and that the purpose is at his feet and not in the skies. Man should try to improve his lot, not pine for escape from it. Even industry may be as good as prayer, and God may prefer such a *meditatio vitae* to any *meditatio mortis*. If this be so, it is well, but it cannot be denied that our prevalent contempt for other-worldliness has usually a different motive. If our lives are an incident in an eternal purpose, it is legitimate at least to argue that our eyes should be set on eternity. The engineer may be more practically saintly than the anchorite in his cavern; but the question is at least an open one, and for the most part we despise other-worldliness simply because we do not take any other world seriously. We consider ourselves more, not less, on account of our abandonment of the geocentric way of ideas. Having found ourselves so little in the eyes of astronomy, we have turned with a will to the cultivation of our gardens and the turning of our lathes. We have made ourselves everything, terrestrially speaking, whatever our celestial stature may be, and we have come to consider no values save our own. Too small for deity, we are sufficient for ourselves.

Religion itself has followed the fashion. It is concerned, not with God, but with (man's) "religious experience", and sometimes it is scarcely distinguishable from audacious sentimentalism, a permissible escape (within reason) for those who are weary of buying and tax-paying, fighting and domesticity. The rest of our religion, at the best, is the religion of humanity; and this is no religion at all. Humanity is too small a thing for the human spirit, too tarnished a thing to dazzle anyone's eyes. Despite our arrogance we dare not worship ourselves as we are. We have too little imagination to worship what we might conceivably become; and we know too much of our history to worship ourselves as we were.

It seems most unlikely, indeed, that these latter-day methods of bringing heaven up to date can possibly succeed in their enterprise; and although part of the reason for this is that harp and crown are incurably antiquated ideals, the rest of the reason is very much less flattering to our modern intelligence. The sham theology of "religious experience" is apt to be but a human affair. It is rooted in man, not in man's quest for a good which formerly was supposed to be his only in the sense that he was privileged to be a participant in the quest for it. And therefore it feeds the sickness which it might have helped to cure. "Ourselves alone" is not suited to a

worshipping or to a moral creature, and it should not satisfy a thinking one. Other-worldliness apart, we should not be so engrossed with ourselves. Certainly we were right to conclude that it does not matter, in the court of conscience, whether we are at the centre of the universe or not, or whether we are large or small. Lilliput and Brobdignag do not differ in this particular. We rightly inferred, also, that theology and astronomy are entirely different studies, and we very properly refused to complicate our respect for the moral law beneath with any superstitious reverence for the starry heavens above. It was right in us, moreover, to employ our knowledge and our skill, and to go on employing them not only in husbandry but in any legitimate enterprise. There is no arrogance in this, although there may be proper pride. If the pride is sooty, let us cleanse it.

This pride, however, is conditional. Not even skill can justify unless its purpose is justified, and so we have to consider whither this supremacy and this efficiency are tending. From this point of view even humanity takes the guise of a useful ideal, and "democracy" itself is something more than a catchword. For these ideals limit mere efficiency. They involve some thoughts of the weaker, some reflection at least on posterity. They bid us reflect upon others, and upon the purpose of our vaunted efficiency. Such reflections, however, cannot be bounded by mere humanity, and it is better that they should not be. Humanity is too small an object for the human mind, and the human mind is healthier and saner when it appreciates the fact. Reigning in this little planet we should preserve the dignity, consideration, and humility of responsible governors. We need not strut and lord it like vulgar, bullying children. And there is more than mere dignity at stake.