

INTRODUCTION

The Symposium published in the present issue is the supplement to the former one that appeared in the Volume 13, No 2, December 2003 under the title “The Nature of Human Nature?” While that issue focused on the most general questions, such as whether there is such a thing as human nature at all, this one presents specific contributions related to epistemological, ethical and psychological problems.

Human nature remains a very general and contested concept, according to some theorists even not a very useful one. Nonetheless, it may provide the framework within which further investigations are not only possible, but necessary. We need to go deeper into the intricacies of what makes us the kind of creatures we have become; we need to inquire into all aspects and strands of our human constitution in order to understand what we are able to do to each other.

One such intriguing question is that of the determinants influencing our personal constitution from the start: from the very conception of the human embryo. This is followed, upon the very birth of the human being, by the enormously powerful impact of education. Thus it is a truism that to explain the developmental process of the human individual both categories of factors, biological as well as social, have to be taken into account. However, there is no comprehensive theory so far which would provide us with the satisfactory explanation of the “interplay” between these. It does not make much sense to pose the obsolete question as to which factors are more powerful—those of nature or nurture—since both are powerful, even if not equally in all respects. Biological determinism seems to be true in some respects while social determinism in others, so rather than being tempted to make a choice between them, theorists might want to try to find ways of combining them. Exactly, what is biologically determined in humans and what is socially determined cannot be considered in isolation from each other if we want to develop a comprehensive theory of human nature. For instance, our ethical behaviour cannot but be influenced in a way by our biological makeup as well. But in what way?

We are complex beings and to delineate this complexity seems to be the task ahead of us. The contributors to this Symposium pay their attention to aspects of this complexity from different perspectives.

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