

WARFARE BETWEEN HUMAN NATURE FICTIONS

COLEMAN R. GRIFFITH

University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois

It is obvious beyond all question that this war is being fought between armies, navies, flying forts, and radios which are owned by, and serve the interests of, the several nations. These nations, or the people who lead them, hate each other and are bent on the destruction of their enemies. It is not quite so obvious, but nonetheless true, that a struggle is being waged between patterns of belief, forms of government, systems of finance, claims to priority in access to raw materials, means of control over ocean lanes of traffic, and rights to sell goods in preferred markets. As an integral part of these factors, there are the roots of evil intentions which are said to lie in balances of power, race hatreds, old debts to be paid, and the desire to remedy ancient wrongs. Still less obvious are the brutal qualities that are commonly attributed to man's original nature,—his lusts, instincts, and other echoes of the fact that he stems from the beasts of the field. This might be called, then, a war of machines, a financial war, a political war, a war of ideologies, a war of empires, and a struggle for survival, but in none of these manners of speech has the final and irreducible nature of the conflict been indicated. In the last analysis, it is a psychological war. Stripped of all the trimmings of men and machines, or of policies and practices, this is a war of man against himself. It is civil war in the body psychologic. It is a war between fictions about the nature of human nature, that is, a war between partial views of the traits of men and of what they need in order to live.

Since all of us are men who normally pursue a double path toward self-knowledge, that is, a path among the immediacies of self-inspection, and a path among inter-behavioral contacts with our own kind, any appeal to the notion that we are the witnesses at a civil war among human nature fictions stands

forth, at first sight, almost as a peculiar kind of nonsense. If there is anything in the whole universe that should be known with precision, and in the fullness of its being, it is man's own nature. Moreover, it is said to be one of the most patent facts of history that human nature is the same the whole world over; and yet, instead of a view of himself in the wholeness of his character, one must still insist that death is the price being paid for a wild array of partial views and of absurd abstractions which are battling one another to the bitter end. Some of them have stood out to the exclusion of all of the others, and some of them have been united with others so as to form curious caricatures of the truth.¹ There have been biological, rational, spiritual, economic, political, liberal, nomadic, western, oriental, romantic, pragmatic, mystical, humane and military or power men, to say nothing of the man of the golden mean. These terms have not been used to name the several facets of the whole of the psychological creature. They have been taken as real names for views that have been held of man's essential constitution as displayed in what he has done, what he wants, what he will strive for, and for which he will give up his life. Some of them are names for the kinds of men who are now grasping each other's throats or blasting out each other's brains from the skies.

There is, then, at the very center of man's universe a strange paradox. He ought, since he is always his own subject and object, fully to know himself in the completeness of his nature, and yet the actual record shows scarcely an instance when he has scored a notable success in synoptic comprehension. So grave a failure must be explained and, fortunately, the answer is not far away, for man has at last become a problem to himself, and this is the beginning of wisdom. It is first to be observed that me

¹ Each of them, of course, will hold that it reveals the truth, all the others being defections from the obvious and the essential. See, for example, Maritain, J. *Christian humanism* *Fortune*, 1942, 25, 106 ff.

must, if the immense variety of partial views which crowd the record are to make any sense at all, be extremely versatile in their resources for adjustment to life situations. The plain fact is that they do have capacities for meeting their environments which can be channeled into action in an amazing variety of ways. In the second place, it is wholly clear that life situations vary over an immense area from deserts to lavish riches, from battle, mating and feeding to dialogue, friendship and aesthetic pleasure, from being ruled to the role of ruler, from working and producing to selling and saving, and from manual labor to deep concern about angles, sizes, words, verbal propositions and final principles. When pieced together, these two kinds of facts point to a single conclusion. At a time and a place within a given culture, and for a given purpose, men are able to mobilize their rich resources for adjustment in precisely those patterns which appear to be adequate to the conditions which prevail.

This conclusion, however, marks only the first step in the creation of human nature fictions. When a particular set of life situations is intensely demanding, the whole scope of human nature will appear to be expressed in exactly those habits, skills, attitudes, and thoughts that have been designed to meet the demands. But it is at this point that the next step in the creation of a fiction is normally taken. In proportion as the designs for action meet with success, they will be used to prescribe the rules or response to all kinds of situations, in all kinds of cultures, even though the initial conditions which gave rise to them have already passed away. But success alone is not enough. The traits aroused by one life situation in its own climate of opinion, when utterly demanded by that situation, are often abstracted from their functional dependency on time and place and converted into the intrinsic rights, duties, essences, or powers of the adjusting individual. In short, they appear to express the laws of the inner nature of man, and they are made pre-emptive, therefore, not only for the time but for all other kinds of situations. They become definitions of what it means to be a human being. Moreover,—and

this is the final step in the creation of fictions,—the adjustive habits required by local conditions of time and place are quickly transformed into rules, codes of law, customs, institutions and political or other social arrangements which appear to be right because they manifestly embody the wants, the best thoughts, and the hereditary qualities of the men who have created them.

A single example will suffice. With the advent of the machine at the outset of the Industrial Revolution, the ways of men with respect to machines, to raw materials, to goods produced, to sales, and to bank accounts passed through the mighty transformation that marked the end of feudalism. Moreover, their manners of dealing with one another in the market place and in the forum took on a flavor which set them off from the customs that had prevailed in feudal times. Men who owned land gave way to men who owned goods or banks, and in proportion as almost any one could share in the new kinds of ownership, men became individualists endowed with the kinds of rights that individuals ought to possess.² From an earlier period, these new kinds of men drew upon the fiction of rational men as it had been perfected by those who had learned how they ought to behave if they were to deal adequately with geometry, mathematics, or with the meanings of words when they are used to compose a syllogism. The result was, first, an economic sort of man ruled by reason in behalf of enlightened self-interest, and, second, a whole array of political, commercial, international and military arrangements, intended to bring in a constant flow of raw materials and send out a constant flow of goods to be sold for a profit. This economic man was a liberal, an individualist, or a capitalist whose habits, emotions, and points of view, instead of being relative to the kind of world in which living had to be accomplished, appeared to stem from his genes and be expressive of his inalienable rights. His government, his treaties, his wars, his peace pacts, his schemes for a balance of power, and his attitudes toward natives in the far corners of the earth, accordingly, were merely public and institutional expressions of what he conceived to be the

² Cf. Laski, H. *The Rise of European Liberalism*. London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1936.

intrinsic human nature granted to him by his Creator.³

This is, of course, an extremely sketchy view of a complex process. This is not the place, however, to fill in the details, whether for economic or any other kind of man, and neither is it the place to find out how various types of men fare when they go to war in order to protect what they manifestly feel to be the inner essence of their own natures. We must not even attempt to trace the way in which economic, religious, democratic, totalitarian, communistic and emotional men, with all their associated practices and arrangements, are caught in the present tangle of world-wide conflict.⁴ The existence of human nature fictions, however, raises one question which is pertinent to this program. Given the conditions which produce a varied assortment of human nature fictions and which place them in bitter conflict, what is it that preserves them and sheds an aura of finality over them? The answer is: Education. Education is one of the very first of the arrangements set up by groups of men in order to develop youth in accordance with the fundamental nature of human nature. In short, educational systems also go to war. In fact, they are employed long before the advent of overt conflict in order to prepare men more heroically to defend or to die for the values and natures ascribed to them by the fictions they have created. Moreover, it is education upon which is placed the burden of instruction regarding civilized habits, customs, institutions, practices and loyalties which, because they appear to be grounded in human nature, constitute exactly the substance of the various nations which spring at one another's throats. Stated in another way, if wars are fought between human nature fictions at the level of the political, social and economic arrangements which embody these fictions, then education is the primary agent by which the truth and the authority, both of the fictions and of the arrangements, can be nurtured to the point of complete conviction and utter devotion.

If, however, education can go to war in this fashion, it ought also to be subject to mobilization in the interests of peace. What is needed is not an educa-

tion which will change human nature or a mode of training which will eliminate brutal instincts, but an education which will strive toward, because it is based on, the whole of the psychological person in the full array of his adaptive talents. For some situations, and when to the manner trained, men should be rational, but they might also be romantically and economically as well as religiously and politically democratic, and scientific in method as well as emotional and worshipful in their rights and duties. In short, then, these several words could not be used as the names of kinds of men in a culture whose education was expressly designed to develop the whole of the psychological person. Moreover, they could not be the names of the human nature forces, whether they are called instincts, innate ideas, or the first principles of being, which guarantee finality to political, economic and social arrangements. By contrast, they would name degrees of excellence, now in this facet and now in that facet, of races of men in accordance with the duties they must perform and the relations they must establish with respect to others of their own kind in the common business of removing occasions for civil war in the body psychologic.

It should be obvious that the road away from revolution lies in this direction, for men who intend fully to realize the whole of their natures will not tolerate institutions, standards and practices which are a violation of what they need and must secure if they are to avoid ceaseless conflict. They will, instead, create institutions which are compatible with the kinds of human nature their educative process has directed them to achieve. If, for example, it is affirmed that a form of government, or a system of banking, is finally and absolutely true because it is based on human nature, then school ought to teach that form of government and its financial arrangements. On the other hand, however, if the human nature which is said to underlie a form of government can be shown to be a fiction produced by the chances of time and place, and wholly relative to a given culture, then education, instead of becoming a form of propaganda in order to pro-

³ Cf. Browne, L. *Something Went Wrong*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1942.
⁴ Cf. Drucker, P. F. *The End of Economic Man*. New York: John Day Co., 1939.
⁵ Cf. Tolman, E. C. *Psychological man*. *J. Soc. Psychol.*, 1941, 13, 205-218.

serve the fiction, ought to stand forth as an agent for the training of men who will gradually and thoughtfully amend their government and all other institutions so as to make them fully expressive of the whole of their psychological beings.

The crucial test of this assertion is said to lie in the relations that obtain between human nature and democracy. Democracy, of course, has been defined in a great many ways, but none of them emphasizes so many facts as the argument that plans for self-government name a direction of becoming rather than a state of being. Likewise, human nature can be defined in a great many different ways, but none strikes quite so close to the spread of man's abilities as the statement that the scientific method, that is, the operating intellect which uses goals as means to further ends, demands more of the whole person than any other possible statement about him. Human nature and democracy, then, became twin-like terms, for adjusting men who exemplify the scientific method are the

premise of, and the necessary condition for, the coming-to-be of democracy. The alternative is to use the processes of education in the interests of conformity, that is, in the interests of maintaining an existing fiction about human nature and about all the social arrangements contingent thereon. In this case, education becomes an extremely powerful agent for the promotion of wars without end, for its natural product is a multiple personality whose members are always in conflict, either directly or by way of social structures. On the contrary, however, education can be used for a peculiarly human and democratic purpose, namely, to direct growth toward the actualization of all the powers of adjustment of the whole of the psychological person. In this case, educated men become, first, the necessary correctives of the formal agencies by which their lives will be regulated, and second, the natural mode of approach to a time when wars need no longer be waged because men no longer fashion themselves into their own worst enemies.