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# **NATURAL MAN**

**By Arthur B. Moss**

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## **NATURAL MAN**

Concerning the when and how of the origin of man nothing positive is known. Genesis states that "god made man," but as the greatest intellects of modern times doubt the existence of deity, a ready acceptance of the Mosaic account of the creation of the human species can only take place among those who are not well qualified to weigh evidence, balance probabilities, and appraise the evidence of rival theories.

The researches of men of science lead us to the belief that the authors of the first and second chapters of Genesis were mistaken. They formulated a theory and imagined it to be a fact.

Darwin, Haeckel, Huxley, and other eminent scientists, dispute altogether the theory that man was created perfect, and in their works have proved to demonstration that the beings called men have evolved from lower organisms; that they have the same anatomical structure as the Catarrhini apes; that there is a distinct blood-relationship between them, and that they have both had a common parentage.

To establish the truth of the evolution theory, it is enough to look fairly at the facts of nature; to observe man under various aspects; to consider him in barbaric times, or in countries where he is not yet civilised; to see him in a nude condition, with nothing to cover him but a mass of hair which nature provides; to watch him in his struggle for life with his enemies, the destructive lower animals and his fellow men, and to find in the course of years that a higher form of man has evolved out of this barbaric creature.

The evolution theory accounts for the facts as they are observed in life—facts which upon any other theory are quite inexplicable. And it must not be supposed that because the theory does not give a complete explanation to all the phenomena that it therefore is not reliable. Haeckel says ("Pedigree of Man," p. 36): "If we can only prove the general truth of the Darwinian theory, our idea of the origin of man from lower vertebrata follows of necessity, and we are not obliged to give a special proof as to this latter view if the general proposition is well established." That the general proposition is well established is now admitted by the most enlightened of the opponents of Darwinism. What is called the "evolution theory" is generally acknowledged to be removed from the region of hypothesis to that of fact.

But it is not my purpose further to pursue the subject of man's origin, which, while it is confessedly a most interesting question, is one upon which no man who is not a skilled scientist can write or speak with authority. I can only deal with probabilities. Nobody, so far as we know, was present to witness the first man spring into existence. Indeed, we do not know that there was a first man! And if there was a first, it does not follow that he was conscious of being made, or when he was completed that he had the pleasure of seeing his maker, who told him how it was done. Or, on the other hand, if he were evolved from some lower creature it does not follow that he was conscious of the evolution. But at least we can be sure that history speaks with no uncertain sound concerning man's progress in the world and the means by which it was achieved. As a civilised creature man is not many centuries old. Even now we find many savage races existing on the earth, and in type so low in the scale are they that they more nearly resemble the brute beasts, both in intellect and in physique, than the higher forms of men. Now if we would study the progress of the human race to any advantage, we must study it apart from all prejudice, and not allow religious or superstitious notions concerning the superiority of one class of people to warp our minds and prevent us from understanding the important part played by savage peoples in the battle of life. For it must always be remembered that man's history is one of fearful warfare, not only between men and men, but between man and the lower animals.

It is no flight of the imagination to say that there exist the clearest proofs that man many ages ago lived in "holes in the earth," and went in constant fear of animals who sought him as their prey. Sometimes he would have to scramble up trees to elude the vigilance of these sagacious beasts; sometimes the tree would form no place of safety, and he would have to run for dear life or become a living sacrifice to these savage beings.

In the course of time man learnt how to keep himself warm, while the beasts of the field perished from cold or parched with thirst and famished with hunger, sunk and died; he learnt how to huddle himself up close to a fire in his mud-hut, out of all danger from the enemy. In addition to this he learnt how to speak, to communicate his thoughts to his fellows. These were great steps in advance. Man was still in a nude condition. But now he began to form a theory as to the cause of the phænomena of the universe. He began to establish the reign of the gods. All his gods, naturally enough, at first were fetishes. Those animals which he considered superior to himself he elected as special objects of worship. As soon as he found that these were not superior, but inferior, to himself, he began to make gods after his own image.

Out of small tribes in course of ages grew great nations. Men could now manufacture weapons of destruction with which they could procure food and destroy their enemies; thus little by little were built up the nations of the earth. All advance, all progress towards civilisation made by primitive man was made by opposing with all his strength and skill the destructive forces of nature, and by strenuous attempts at improving upon human nature itself. Was man then inherently depraved and prone to evil continually? Not so. The germs of evil and good were alike sown in his nature; and if either of these was developed by favorable circumstances an evil or a good result followed of necessity. That man was not depraved by nature is seen by the fact that in the general evolution of things, instead of growing worse he has continued to improve—from the low, brutal and immoral creature of the past, to the purer, loftier, nobler being—the highest that can be found to-day.

In his natural state, it is true, man was a wicked being. He had no intuitive knowledge of right and wrong. He had to perform an act, and he was never sure until he felt the results whether it was good or bad. In his natural state he was dirty, untruthful, unjust. No god came to tell him that "cleanliness was next to godliness;" nor admonish him to be truthful and just in all his dealings. He was left alone to use his own unaided intelligence as best he might.

To test the truth of these assertions one has only to turn to savage races existing to-day. It will be found on investigation that not only are they unclean in their habits and destitute of any idea of justice, but for the most part they are unblushing liars and ingenious thieves.

All the characteristics in human nature that are called virtues are purely of artificial growth, and result from man's cultivation of his better self; or, in other words, from his improvement upon nature's spontaneous course of action.

In support of this view I may here quote J. S. Mill, who says ("Essay on Nature," p. 48): "Children and the lower classes of most countries seem to be actually fond of dirt: the vast majority of the human race are indifferent to it: whole nations of otherwise civilised and cultivated human beings tolerate it in some of its worst forms, and only a very small minority are consistently offended by it. Indeed, the universal law of the subject appears to be that uncleanliness offends only those to whom it is unfamiliar, so that those who have lived in so artificial a state as to be unused to it in any form, are the sole persons whom it disgusts in all forms. Of all virtues this is the most evidently not instinctive, but a triumph over instinct. Assuredly neither cleanliness nor the love of cleanliness is natural to man, but only the capacity of acquiring a love of cleanliness." On page 57 the same writer declares that "Savages are always liars. They have not the faintest notion of truth as a virtue."

Having then all these bad qualities of nature, how is it that man has been able to put them into subjection and advance along the road to civilisation even at the pace that we have seen? Such advance has been wholly dependent upon the energy and skill with which he has opposed the destructive forces of nature, using one law to counteract another, and upon the determination with which he has striven to improve upon human nature itself.

For centuries man groped about in the dark. Nature was deaf to his appeals and blind to his sufferings, and

her daily performances frightened and bewildered him. And yet he did his best to ascertain the causes of the phenomena of the universe. But his best guesses were wide of the mark. Outside of nature he sought for explanation. He thought he had scaled nature's heights and fathomed her depths when he had merely gazed a few miles into the vast expanse of space above; and when the most learned among them declared that god was the author of the universe, a great theological enterprise commenced. Every nation started a god on its own account, and if one proved to be insufficient, a few more were easily drafted in, with a devil to keep them company.

These gods and devils, which were material or spiritual, according as occasion required, were hereafter put forward as explanations of nature's workings. And the people believed in them. How could they do otherwise? Their credulity was perfectly natural. They could not investigate; all their faculties were untrained. Even the most learned among them were superlatively ignorant; incapable by virtue of an untrained mind of accurately perceiving, recording, remembering, or judging of nature's manifold manifestations.

And so the theologian had a good time of it. He believed thoroughly in his own pretensions; believed that he possessed the key which opened the door of all mysteries; that he was a god-appointed teacher of men; and in all the countries of the world he was looked upon as second only in importance to the gods themselves.

But all this time the people were anxious to know not only what sort of deity it was they worshipped, but what kind of action would be likely to win his favor. They were told that god was a jealous being, and that their first duty was obedience to his will. They believed it.

When, therefore, they were instructed to slaughter their neighbors who worshipped a different deity, they went to the task with all the ardor of their nature, imagining in their ignorance that the more brutally they executed the deity's will, the more pleasantly would he smile upon them. The Jews killed the Midianites, the Amalakites, the Baalites, and all other peoples they were capable of mastering who despised their god. Later, the Mahomedans with equal mercilessness followed the example of their Jewish brethren. Later still, the Christians persecuted and murdered many who stubbornly refused to acknowledge that Jesus was the Christ; and each nation could not only refer the deed back to the priest from whom the wicked instructions came, but the priest in his turn could point to the passage in his sacred book distinctly commanding or sanctioning such barbarities. The Bible contained instructions for the Jews not only to kill unbelieving people of other nations, but minute details were given as to how believers of their own kith and kin should be put to death (Leviticus xxiv., 16).

The Koran was equally explicit in its directions to murder the infidels (chapter on the "Cow," p. 23); and the New Testament, which the Christians accepted as a guide, not only bade the believer have "no fellowship with unbelievers," but into whatever city they went, and the people were indisposed to give heed to their preachings, they were to "shake off the dust of their feet," and god would make it warmer for such people in the next world than for ordinary sinners. Nay more: the Christian could point to the strong declaration of Jesus: "But those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay before me" (Luke xix., 27).

The people were told that angels existed. They believed it.

They were told that witches were displeasing to the sight of God; that he had given instructions that they were not to be "suffered" to live. They believed it; and did their best to remove the witches from the face of the earth.

They were told that their God liked nothing so much as roast lamb. They believed it. And when they couldn't spare a lamb, they thought it would be pleasant at least for their deity to smell the flavor of it.

They were told that God was the father of all men; that he was just and good; but that he liked some nations better than others; and considered some men fit only to be the slaves of others. They believed it.

They were told that God made man. They believed it.

They were told that he made all other animals for man's pleasure and assistance. They believed it.

They were told that he made the sun and the stars to give light to the earth. They believed it.

They were told that he made the earth. They believed it. That it was flat, and they were flats enough to believe that also.

But they were not told who made God; what intelligent mind designed him before he was made; who made the intelligent mind that designed the God that made the world out of nothing. These matters were allowed to remain impenetrable mysteries.

In course of time morality improved. The would-be murderer found that there were men in the nation who could defend themselves against all assaults of the enemy; and that the only way to be secure from attack was to promise not to be the aggressive party.

And the thief found that if he stole others would steal from him; that only by being honest could he hope to have his own property protected.

Though very early in the progress of man laws had been made against murder and theft, it was not until men saw that their own life and property were at stake, and that unless they were peaceful and honest themselves they ran a risk of losing all they had, that anything approaching harmony existed among the people of the nations that were on the high road to civilisation.

Among savage races, murder, theft and other crimes are almost as rife as ever; and it is only when barbarous races come in contact with races higher up the scale of life that their morality manifests rapid improvement.

Scepticism is the sign of a healthy mind. Doubt and unbelief invariably arise as the result of earnest inquiry and vigorous thought. Except among the philosophical Greeks and cultured Romans, doubts concerning the truth of theology were not openly expressed, even by the few, until many centuries after the Christian era began.

Of course, among the early Christians there were many who doubted; some who denied the divinity of Jesus; many who questioned the truth of the resurrection; among the Brahmins and Buddhists, many who

were sceptical on dogmatic points of their faith. But it was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that we find men questioning the pretensions of theologians, and exposing with admirable fearlessness and candor the errors of theology.

Martin Luther early in the sixteenth century boldly questioned the dogmas of the Romish Church. He was ably supported by Philip Melancthon, but these reformers, although fighting bravely for the right of Freethought, were fearful lest others in the exercise of this freedom should go further than they did. Bruno, Telesio, Campanella and Vanini are among the first mentioned in history who courageously declared their disbelief in the prevailing theology.

Bruno was a Pantheist. He denied that God was a person, and declared that he was an essence. He affirmed that matter was indestructible; that nature produced "all phænomena as the fruit of her own womb." He believed in the plurality of worlds, and denied the teachings of Aristotle. Telesio and Campanella held much the same belief.

Vanini was an Atheist. For their heresies Telesio and Oampanella were imprisoned; Bruno and Vanini both died at the stake. No doubt there were many others who entertained doubts similar to those expressed by these noble philosophers; but when they found that their scepticism would be burnt out of them if they expressed it, they doubtlessly came to the conclusion that they had better keep it to themselves until men were more prepared for the reception of it. And probably the time would never have come had it not been for the heroism of a Bruno, the defiance of a Vanini, and the persistent teaching of other less known Freethought worthies.

Galileo the astronomer must also be numbered among the sceptics. He denied that the earth was the centre of the universe, and in opposition to such teaching declared that it moved round the sun. For making known this now well-established fact the great astronomer was imprisoned, and a short interval allowed for him to recant or die the death of an infidel. He was an old man, and life was sweet. He elected to live. He had sown the seeds of doubt concerning the Church's teaching of astronomy—he left it to blossom in its own good time.

In Europe periodical efforts had been made to improve the social and domestic life of the people. Feudalism having developed to its highest point, decayed, and upon its ruins were established strong monarchies, which vied with each other in voluptuousness and wickedness. But if the nation showed any signs of going forward in the march of progress, there was always one chain at least to drag them hopelessly back again. This was the Romish Church with, its slavish theology and horrible corruption.

"For centuries the popes at intervals had embroiled Italy. Sometimes several popes ruled at once, and sometimes the Catholic Church had no pope at all. To unite and maintain, the temporal and spiritual power in their own persons was ever the ruling passion of the Catholic potentates; and for this they have spilt rivers of human blood. Under their absolute power the Church and its vices has grown up for centuries. Rooted into the heart of society the people had learnt to revere the ancient institution. Their imaginations were captivated by its showy services; its priesthood had the keeping of their consciences; was their only means of access to heaven; gave consolation in sickness; married, buried, and sent them to paradise. Its superstitions and centuries of cruelty had as yet only increased its power. Europe was filled with its images of saints and martyrs, real or counterfeit, and the people were instructed to fall down and worship them. Dead saints were made the medium of access to the deity; the services of religion were muttered in dead languages; priests were decked in dazzling garments; wax candles burnt in the churches at noonday; vessels of gold and silver stood on the altars; preaching had become rare, and had degenerated into frivolous talking; monks who lived a life of ease or idleness, and often of vice, were scattered in multitudes throughout every nation of Christendom; and in order to prevent inquiry and crush opposition, the Inquisition was established and the fire of persecution lit. Pope Alexander VI., a man of unusual depravity, burnt Savonarola for preaching reform in the Church. In short, a frightful spiritual despotism, such as Europe had never seen before, held the human mind in abject bondage" (Dr. Bollock's "History of Modern Europe," p. 23).

After the Reformation the disputes between Christians, regarding the doctrines of the Protestant as well as the Catholic Church, were numerous and exceedingly bitter. But the masses of the people having to work hard for a small pittance and little leisure, took comparatively small notice of these theological disputes, and applied themselves with commendable zeal to more useful labor than watching the wretched encounters of fanatical religionists.

The printing-press having now got into working order, began to disturb the peace of mind of the clergy and others in authority. Every shot from the armory of intelligence shook to their foundation the dogmas of the Church. The people continued to work. Scientific men, too, continued their labors quietly.

Columbus discovered America, and frightened credulous believers in the flatness of the earth out of all the wits they ever had.

Descartes in France, Spinoza in Holland, formulated a philosophy that knocked the anthropomorphic deity of the Christians quite off his pedestal; it was done, however, in such a learned manner that the common people heard scarcely anything about it.

These continued the useful labors of the world. They tilled the soil; they bred cattle; they erected magnificent houses for the rich and small hovels for the poor; they made gaudy raiment wherewith to bedeck the persons of kings and priests, and plain dresses as a covering for the common people. Periodically, their progress was thwarted by being called upon to fight religious wars for the priests, and wars for the glorification or vanity of kings. Running rapidly over the pages of history one important fact stands prominently out. It is this, that as soon as the nations were at peace, for however short a while, the sceptics appeared again, and with the growing intelligence of the people, spoke in language of unmistakeable plainness about religion.

Thomas Paine directed his powerful intellect against the upas tree; Voltaire's wit went like a javelin to its core; while Mirabaud and D'Holbach tore off the mask and left theology's errors exposed in all their glaring hideousness. And now the dawn of a new era for Freethought began to appear.

The clergy maligned great sceptics, but scepticism increased notwithstanding. Heretical works were condemned and the authors imprisoned; but the seeds of doubt having been widely sown, nothing short of the

wholesale destruction of persons suspected of entertaining these doubts was likely to prove effectual in the extirpation of them.

From this point rapid progress towards the higher civilisation was made in all countries in Europe where the people were bold enough to free themselves from the dogmatism of the priests, read the works of scientific men, take advantage of every new discovery, interest themselves in the political and social movements of the country. In short, man advanced in proportion as he devoted himself to the work of the world, and left the next world and all opinions in regard to it to take care of themselves.

So far we have seen the progress of man has been won by a vigorous struggling against the harmful forces of nature. In truth, nature has been a very useful servant to those who understand her, but a harsh and brutal master to those who were ignorant of her ways. She is not, nor ever has been, worthy of worship. She destroys every being that lives once, and sometimes by the most painful process it is possible to conceive. How many thousands she has starved with hunger, frozen with cold, poisoned, drowned, or swept away by earthquakes or other frightful calamities, mankind will never know. All we can know is that thousands have been thus sacrificed, and that in proportion as man used one force of nature to counteract the effect of another he has advanced.

When the sceptical man had a chance of life, his advance towards civilisation was rapid. The sceptical mind investigated; new discoveries were made; the printing press increased in usefulness and power; new forms of industry were started, and a higher happiness made possible for the masses of the people. The art of agriculture steadily improved; and the shipping of merchandise from one nation to another was greatly facilitated by improved skill in navigation.

Great, however, as were the strides towards civilisation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were all eclipsed in the early part of the nineteenth century by the utilisation of steam-power, electricity, and other great natural forces, which had the effect of greatly increasing the wealth-producing power of those nations that adopted them. Nor was this all; for immediately following, machinery, which saved an enormous amount of labor, was introduced. Food and clothing became cheaper. The people multiplied rapidly, and with this increase of population grew a proportionate demand for food and labor.

In a short time the struggle for existence was manifestly keener than it had ever been before; the rich became richer and richer, while among the poor the tendency was to get poorer and more poor. Uncomplainingly the people devoted themselves to the labor of each day. Theology they set aside for six days of the week, and concerned themselves about the gods on Sunday. Though they did not often say so, the majority of men thought it was far better for them to be diligent workmen, performing all the secular duties of daily life—building houses, making clothes, machinery, writing books; acting the part of good husbands, fathers, or citizens—than to have the most orthodox belief it was possible for a being to entertain. And this sentiment grew stronger and stronger, and proved of immense importance to mankind.

For hundreds of years theologians had talked about the importance of saving men's souls; and those who possessed the smallest seemed to make the most fuss about them. But now the aspect of things was changed. Men began to talk about looking after their bodies; and some ventured to suggest that if they had souls in their bodies it would, perhaps, be no disadvantage to them if their bodies were well fed, well clothed, and their whole being well trained.

Necessity forced all but a small minority into the labor market. And after years of labor the earth was converted from a howling wilderness into a home fit for habitation. Here let me distinctly affirm that all that is admirable in civilised life—the comfort of home, the pleasure of education, the fascination of the drama, the beauty of painting or sculpture, the usefulness of scientific acquirements—owe their value to the secular labor of mankind.

Theology deserves no credit in respect to these things. Theology did not help man to supersede the sailing vessel by the steamship, the old coach by the railroad, the reaping machine by the scythe (vice versa, DW), nor the fastest locomotion by the telegraph wires. The theologian did not discover the telephone, nor did he learn how to light—with a brilliancy previously unknown to man—our streets and great public buildings by means of electricity.

One Stephenson is worth a thousand theologians; one Edison of more value to the world than all the gods that men's imagination have ever pictured.

But see what additional wonders the secular laborer has accomplished. He has removed forests of trees and converted them into houses, the hides of cattle he turned into boots and shoes, the wool of sheep he has transformed into robes of beauty and utility. He has bedecked our walls with paintings, put books upon our shelves, and with sweet music gladdened our hearts. To accomplish all this he has had to rely solely upon his reason. Yet theologians call this splendid attribute *carnal reason*, and declare that it is no safe guide to man. It has been man's only guide; and when he has trusted it he has been more often in the right than otherwise. Even his errors have assisted him in future labors. Faith he has had, but it has always been secular faith. Experience has been his guide, science a lamp unto his feet. Even when he has walked down the wrong path he has done so with his eyes open.

Theological faith is sightless. It allures you to the brink of a precipice and precipitates you to the earth beneath. It is a ship without a rudder; the tempestuous waves toss it about recklessly, the wind drives it savagely against the rocks, and to-day this ship called "Theological Faith" is a dreary wreck.

But reason grows stronger and clearer as the ages roll on. Man has discovered that he can trust it; that he can use it; that he can assist himself and others by the employment of it. In other words, he can do his own thinking, reason out his own principles, act his own life. He can be a man. And it is better for an individual to be a bad original than a good copy of somebody else. Man is civilised to-day. He has fought a good fight, he has conquered a foe; but better than all, he has converted an enemy into a friend.

What is man's future policy? Is there not still plenty of labor for him to perform? Is there not an ocean of enigmas yet to be fathomed, a gold-mine of knowledge yet to be explored? Is there not poverty to be remedied, pain to be alleviated, ignorance to be removed? The reformer has yet something to inspire his fervid soul; the philanthropist plenty to touch his generous heart. Why even now the wealthy rogue struts

pompously upon the stage of life in grand attire, and fares sumptuously every day; while honest poverty in rags lies hungry and fainting at his door. Even now the rich own all the land, and many poor have not where to lay their head. Even now all men are not equal in the sight of the law; and one man gets pensioned for work for which another is incarcerated in gaol. Even now our sisters are outraged and turned adrift upon the world to be the playthings of vicious men for evermore. Even now our workhouses are filled with men and women who are able to work for an honest living—if they could get it—but cannot because labor is cheap, and there are too many waiting to perform it. Even now our gaols are filled with society-made criminals, that education and better circumstances might have rescued from a life of misery and crime. Even now youth is stunted and starved, and men and women pine away, racked with some terrible disease which thoughtless and careless parents have transmitted to them.

Reformers abate not your enthusiasm, but work bravely on. Through the world diffuse the glorious light of knowledge, let men learn that all crime is a mistake, that effects always follow causes, and that a good effect never follows from a bad cause in a nation that is governed on the principles of truth and justice.

Remove poverty by sound advice to the poor and by strenuous efforts to improve men's surroundings. Stay the drunkard in his downward course, and assist unceasingly all social and political progress. Popularity you may never attain; even praise for your unselfish labor may be denied you while you live. But good work must leave its influence in the world; and your children's children will assuredly profit by it. For as Carlyle truly says: "Beautiful it is to see and understand that no worth, or known or unknown, can die even on this earth. The work an unknown good man has done is like a hidden vein of water flowing underground, secretly making the ground green. It flows and flows; it joins itself with other veins and veinlets, and one day it will start forth as a visible perennial well."

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