

Type the number of the topic AND the name of the author of the quotation here

4. Tetsuro Watsuji

Start typing your essay here.

When we think about human nature and the understanding of human existence the first thought does not usually respect environment but rather belongs to what we call the most central notion of “I”. However, Watsuji is of the opinion that self-discovery as not only a discovery of personality but as discovery of a certain concept which I am going to refer to as *human nature* in the following is only possible by looking at human environment closely for it “objectifies” existence.

Stating this diverges from the idea of mankind as a being which is solely for its own purpose but leads to an understanding of human as a being that does affect its environment – how else would the latter be regarded as a scale for the nature of the former? Therefore we have to conclude that what Watsuji is saying can be either:

- 1) Human nature is the impact humans have on their environment as it mirrors human actions (“you are what you do”).
- 2) An objective look on the environment justifies human beings in their beliefs and notions of the world and their own existence.

In the following I will discuss both arguments starting with the first by arguing the question whether human nature really is reflected by what human does.

As in the saying “actions speak louder than words” one could assume that what somebody does or what humanrace does is sufficient to prove what the person or kind really is like. But think of the difference between the image a person has of themselves and the one another has of the same person. In many cases these images may differ widely. For instance you might think of yourself as an ambitious young worker but still the manager sees you as lazy and arrogant. Now both assumptions are quite obviously subjective. Here comes the point where the two definitions of the abstract “you” contradict. So what is “you”? By applying the “you are what you do” one could come to the conclusion that the solution of the problem lies in looking at your actual work. Looking at it there would be a clear measurement of whether you

are really working hard as you experience it or whether you are a lazy person relying on the work of others. But still, this conclusion would not be sufficient to give a definition of your nature as your standards of what good or much work is may be a different one to your boss's definition. Therefore only looking at your workload does not objectify your qualities. To ascertain your opinion you could start and compare the work you have done with the amount of work your co-workers do. You could also calculate the office's average and measure it thereby. And still it could be that all your colleagues are as unmotivated as you are and that their work is therefore no proper standard. In conclusion it is not possible to say who – your manager or yourself – is right in that matter for looking at the environment cannot possibly objectify your nature but only measure it with subjective standards.

Also it could be that you really are an ambitious worker but for some reason you cannot live up to your potential. This would lead to you not coping with as much work as you actually could and in the end even the look at your work would not mirror what you are really like.

Although this is quite an ordinary example the same does apply to human nature. Can we say that "homo homini lupus"* only because we grew up in a time where there is a lot of political turmoil and even worse a lot of war? Science also indicates that mankind is a social and peaceful species. Does that not contradict what is currently going on in the world? In addition it would be wrong to say that environment mirrors human nature as such for not only humans do have impact on the environment but the environment has equal amounts of impact on humans. Therefore it is rather onesided to say that human nature is reflected by the influence it has on its environment. Secondly, as we have seen in the example above, self-discovery through environment is dependent on who is looking at the environment which means that any perception of human nature deriving through analysis of environment (in the sense which I use in 1) cannot be objective and therefore does not lead to a sufficient understanding of what human nature is in a pure sense. Objectivication by environment does concludingly not work because environment is object to sensual perception and mental interpretation. It is accordingly not an applicable standard for objective knowledge or justified belief.

Another problem in finding human nature is that it is impossible to prove that the perception we hold after our process of reasoning really applies to all humans. Therefore we have an induction problem. However, it is not possible to analyse human nature as the behaviour of a whole race as I have argued above for there are always factors that influence human behaviour that we cannot divide from pure human nature because we have never seen a human being without environment that it is affected by.

To come to any perception of human nature we therefore need to rely on induction, assuming that every human being has self-perception and is conscious as I am in this moment (hopefully - otherwise this would be quite a strange dream). The question we now have to pose is: What is the most central unalienable part of us? What is the one thing we cannot get rid of however

hard we doubt the existence of anything else – even our own body and the whole environment? This is where Descartes found the *ego*. Because even if we dismiss subjective impressions such as feelings or sensual experiences we cannot deny that there is something that dismisses them. To every object there is a subject and to every *cogito* there need be an *ego*. And if we define *cogito* as the general concept of thinking we come to the conclusion that the most central and pure notion of humankind is none other than the *zoon echon**.

According to this line of argument human nature is to be found in solipsism not in environment. That is, because environment is nothing stable and therefore with every change of environment human nature was bound to change which would lead to a logical problem as human environment might change without any change in human behaviour. And yet one would need to assume that human nature was the cause for the change. Therefore human nature does only exist in isolation and cannot be proven by behaviour.

The reason for that is also partly kantian as in the end it is will that defines a human being and not the consequences of his deeds. Because through environmental influence even an action of someone who means to do good may end up in a catastrophe as Goethe discovered too. Only good will is absolutely good and so it is with human nature: only the inner world of the being does count for proper knowledge on humankind.

Let us make another thought experiment: Even if someone tried to prove the theorie “humans are moral beings” by deduction – to escape the induction problem – the person would first have to think of consequences of his assumption. One consequence could for example be “a human being would not do any harm to another without good reason”. As you will agree the person would not have to go far to find examples for the contrary. Still, would you not claim that it is part of human nature to be moral – as there is no other animal on the planet that possesses the abilities to act morally? Saying that humans are moral beings still, even after this experiment that apparently proved the reverse, is not wrong. The reason for this is that human nature cannot be regarded as an absolute truth but need be seen as an idea which has its essence in *thinking* but is made up of several different perceptions which can only be discovered by analysis of mind and will.

After I have argued the pro and con of the hypothesis that “you are what you do” I will now critically engage with the second interpretation of the given quote. It says that only an objective look on the environment justifies human beliefs and therefore also self-perception.

First of all, humans without an objective knowledge of environment would equal a *tabula rasa**. So basically there would not be anything to discover in the being except maybe from drives, feelings and rushing impressions but nothing steady. Even after *reflection* has taken place there is no objective knowledge but merely subjective impressions. The *ideas* that shall

actually be subject to perception are not yet inside the beings mind but only exist independently from it. Therefore the general common sense understanding of the world and of the human being itself is subjective and has a high chance of being wrong simply because it is not corroborated by evidence other than sensual experience. At this point objectification by environment seems to become necessary as it is a proper standard to measure knowledge of the same. Although objective reality and theory of cognition surely is an interesting topic, it would be too far-reaching to discuss it here properly. This is why I will restrain myself to stick with the relevance of objectification by environment in terms of self-discovery and perception of human nature.

Objectification by environment could happen in scientific terms. For example you could objectify humankind scientifically as a biological species that mostly consists of H₂O and N₂ and lives on an insignificant green-blue planet in some galaxy proud to have overcome the hairy existence of its ancestors. As you see scientific objectification would only lead into depression as you may discover that there is no sense in your existence at all and still you are somehow sitting in a computing room with about fifty others who will like yourself eventually turn into a heap of biological waste. But after all this is not really helpful for finding the essence of human nature as it is scarcely imaginable that “no nature at all due to lack of objective sense” would be a satisfactory conclusion to anyone reading this essay and expecting some kind of a constructive approach to the problem.

But the problem here is that human nature is no scientific subject and therefore trying to define it with scientific methods will not work. Therefore I think the problem of self-discovery cannot take place with regards to the environment. While the discovery of environmental truths may be found in scientific methods and in deduction, perception of human nature follows a different logic. This leads the following problem: You cannot objectify human nature by environment because perception of the environment functions differently than perception of the self. This is also referred to as the *Qualia Problem*. While you may examine what you think is human nature in the environment or by scientific research of the brain and similar excrescences you may come across objective truth but there will not derive any universal perception of essence for this is solely to be found in the non-measurable part of the human being. That is, its mind. (At this point it has to be mentioned that this does not indicate a kind of dualism. It rather claims that social sciences are there for a reason. The former argument merely shows the problem that not everything can be examined by natural sciences because human nature is no scientific term as it is a social construction which does not naturally and objectively exist.)

A proper strategy to approach the human mind can hence never be the natural sciences. To really understand human nature it does not apply to use deduction as in testing hypotheses in other human beings. But this is not only because you cannot observe will as such. This is also the case because the epistemologic system behind self-discovery is a different one to the

discovery of others as other human beings are part of the environment and can therefore not be dealt with as an “I”. And “I” is what we are looking for because induction in this case does work as I argued above. For perception of the environment we use our senses and to objectify we use natural sciences. For perception of others we use our emotions and to objectify we use social sciences. But for perception of our emotions we cannot use anything other to objectify than reason. And here we have already reached the end of the row for there is nothing that could objectify reason. Pure reason therefore is the superior instance of objectification. It must not be influenced by environment nor by emotions. Only in this pure state it is the source of all objective knowledge. Yet, although reason is the source of all objective knowledge, it may be applied differently. In the case of finding truth in environment reason works with deduction and leads to justified beliefs and reliable assumptions. While in this case reason applies to something external in the case of finding truth in self-perception reason has to refer to itself. What I am describing is commonly known as self-reflection. This process is the only way of finding human nature and why it does not work in a deductive way will be explained in the following: Imagine holding the idea that you are an ambitious person, what would the consequences be with which you could verify or falsify your belief? As you are not allowed to use external consequences such as “I did a lot of work today”, for their verification would be - as reasoned earlier – subjective, you will not find any internal consequences other than of the type of for example “if I was ambitious, I would reasonably believe of myself to be so”. With this consequence you cannot do a lot of falsification – your reason would have to test itself to come to a conclusion of whether the attribute it describes itself with is true or not. Rather odd, I think. This would be like stating:

Assumption: My arm belongs to my body

Logic proof:

1. I believe that my arm belongs to my body
2. If my arm did not belong to my body I would not think it does
→ My arm belongs to my body

This argument of course is insufficient as is the argument concerning ambition above because there is no objective evidence for both assumptions. In the end the argument simply states: if I think this or that, this or that is necessarily true. As you might have noticed yourself one time or another this is naturally not true.

This is the reason why deduction does not work in terms of self-discovery. Hence reasoning about reason itself must not be concerned with consequences of applied reason but with reflection on what you cannot separate from the “I” (the reasoning itself). Anything additional is always subjective perception – which does not necessarily mean it is wrong, it is only not absolute and therefore relative knowledge.

In conclusion I would like to disagree with the quotation and claim that quite the opposite is the case. Environment does not only fail to objectify human existence but does equally not help to find the essence of the latter because self-discovery only takes place in the self (internally) and not externally.

*Hobbes

*Hannah Arendt

*John Locke