Ethics and Human Behavioral Modernity

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Abstract

Humans were once purely animal, the same as all the other animal species, implying that the practice of ethics must have been nonexistent until quite recently in human history. It has been during the species' turn towards behavioral modernity that ethical precepts and systems have been formed, eventually becoming an integral part of modern human existence. This essay will explore the cause for this transition, emphasizing the idea that there are now two different sources of modern human behavior. On the one hand, modern humans are still animal, and they must still engage in biologically driven behaviors. At the same time, modern humans have become increasingly influenced and guided by the many artificial constructions that have been accruing over time and are now saturating the human landscape, with the response to these artificial constructions producing a wide range of behaviors heretofore unwitnessed on the planet Earth. These two aspects of modern humanity—the *animal* aspect and the *constructed* aspect—they find themselves often in conflict, each striving to gain ascendency over each individual and over the species as a whole. It is the tension at the heart of this inherent conflict that has engendered ethics and morality.

Keywords

Human behavioral modernity; Ethics; Morality; Animality; Artificiality

1. Introduction

It was Friedrich Nietzsche who highlighted that morality itself needs to be submitted to a critical scrutiny—his call for a revaluation of all values (Nietzsche, 2013). For such an endeavor, the fundamental question that must be addressed first is this: how did it come to be that there *is* such a thing as values? Why do human ethics exist at all?

It is not a theoretical question. In Nietzsche's day, the early biological history of humankind was still mostly unknown, and so to begin a genealogy of morals on the basis of ancient Greek and Hebrew culture, as Nietzsche did, must have seemed perfectly reasonable. But today, anthropologists possess a much fuller, and much longer, picture of the hominin timeline, and humans can trace their cultural and ethical sources to much earlier than classical civilizations (Quiros, 2012). Indeed, humans can trace their beginnings all the way back to when humans were not human in the modern sense of the word, when the species was still in fact purely animal (Klein, 2009). And since it is not generally considered a legitimate practice to apply ethical standards to wild animals, there must have been a time in human history when such standards could not have been applied to humans themselves, when there were no values to be valued—or to be revalued. Thus, the question needs to be asked again, non-theoretically: why do human ethics exist at all? What is it about the human transformation that has given birth to the practice of morality?

In attempting to explain the human turn towards behavioral modernity, scientists frequently resort to the notion of evolution—for instance, through such proposals as language genes and neural alterations (Klein, 2002; Pinker, 1994; Zwir et al., 2022). But these evolutionary explanations face serious challenges (Schlinger, 1996), including a lack of specificity and a need to fit a multitude of transformational events into an extremely narrow timeline. This essay will offer a more straightforward account of human behavioral modernity, outlining a depiction of modern humanity that can be directly observed today. This depiction underscores how humans have transitioned from

once being purely animal to being *still* animal, but now with a significant and discernible addendum layered upon the entire species. This additional aspect of modern humanity can be denoted with the word *construct*, a word intended to consolidate the two indisputable categories of alteration that distinguish modern humans from their former purely animal selves:

1. The artificial reconstruction of the human environment; and,
2. The novel behaviors resulting from that artificial reconstruction.

Whereas humans were once animal and *only* animal, living in an entirely natural setting and displaying nothing but survival-and-procreative behaviors, humans today are both animal *and* construct, living in an environment that is more artificial than natural and displaying a mixture of behaviors that reflect both biological and synthetic roots. Therefore, modern humans and their activities are dual origined, a unique occurrence within the animal kingdom and a unique occurrence across evolutionary history.

Although this dual aspect of modern humanity has clearly had momentous impact, giving rise to the rich cultural tapestry currently experienced throughout twenty-first century civilization, it has also engendered an inevitable conflict, a conflict experienced by humans both interpersonally as well as internally. The two aspects of modern humanity, animal and construct, they are seldom in accord. The animal aspect of humanity is ancient in its origin, is grounded in immediacy, and gets its motivation from the self-serving needs of survival and procreation. The constructed aspect of humanity is extremely recent in its origin, requires delayed gratification, and receives its motivation from the desire for effective creation. The inherent conflict between these two aspects, distinctive to modern humans, is what gives birth to ethics and morality. Every ethical dilemma, at its core, comes down to the incompatibility between the animal and constructed sources of humankind, with each

aspect striving to gain ascendency. Every moral quandary is ultimately a choice as to which influence is to be given the decisive sway, the beast within or the artificial structures all around.

This conflict has grown more intense over time and is now reaching a critical junction. The constructed aspect of humanity, once nonexistent, has continued to increase in both size and clout, and in many respects has become dominant over the species, including an authoritative claim upon morality itself. But as Nietzsche both recognized and railed against, an excessive suppression of humanity's animal nature brings unintended and unproductive consequences, including a loss of the vitality that has been spurring humanity onto its alternative course. Ultimately, for humans to continue to make progress on their unique biological path, they must find a way to reconcile and to transcend the inherent conflict between their two defining aspects, avoiding a return to complete animality and eschewing any acceptance of a complete artificiality.

2. Three Scenarios

First Scenario. A wild animal enters the territory of a mating pair of its own species. It surprises the male of the pair and attacks it, eventually killing it. The attacking animal then forces itself upon the female. It remains in the territory for the rest of the day and helps itself to the stashes of food the mating pair had gathered.

Second Scenario. A man breaks into a couple's apartment. He uses a baseball bat to stun and then kill the man of the couple. He then forces himself upon the woman. He lingers in the apartment for the remainder of the afternoon, eating the couple's food and eventually stealing the woman's jewelry.

Third Scenario. Around a half million years ago, before the beginning of the human turn towards behavioral modernity, a lone male hominin enters the territory of a hominin tribe. He surprises an isolated couple and uses a rock to stun and then kill the male. He then forces himself

upon the female. He searches the outskirts of the territory and helps himself to any stashes of food he finds.

From a factual standpoint, these three scenarios appear to be almost entirely identical, and yet from an ethical standpoint, they seem to be considerably different. The second scenario crystallizes the ethics potentially at stake here, because its modern human setting removes any uncertainty as to whether an ethical standard can be applied. The intruder has committed murder, assault and robbery, three of the main classes of proscribed activity to be found in almost any modern ethical or criminal standard. Few people would attempt to justify the man's actions, and almost everyone would agree that if such activities were not regularly and severely punished, civilization as humans currently know it would soon be in danger of collapse. But if this second scenario is such a straightforward and obvious case of an ethical violation, why do the first and third scenarios seem more ambiguous? Is it simply the context of a modern human setting that makes the critical difference, and if this is so, what does this imply about ethics in general?

The first scenario contains no nuance—the event is immediately rewarding to the attacking animal and is no doubt a terrible experience for the victims. If there were ever a case in which an ethical precept could be applied to a wild animal, this instance would surely qualify. But that statement already betrays how easily humans can add an anthropocentric bias into the consideration of such matters. From the biological and evolutionary point of view, the attacking animal's activities are not only advantageous to itself and its genes but also might be advantageous to the entire species, possibly even essential (Gómez et al., 2021). If it were known that should certain members of the species not engage in such activities then the species would eventually weaken genetically and go extinct, would these activities still be judged as bad? Would they not instead be good? It can be reasonably argued that in nature, viability is the sole arbiter of what qualifies as "ethical," and at any rate, it never appears to be a matter of moral choice. In nature, what a wild animal *should* do is

exactly what a wild animal is *driven* to do, and what a wild animal is driven to do is that which is most promising and satisfying in terms of increasing survival-and-procreative success.

So if ethical standards are not to be applied to the first scenario, a case of wild animals, and if ethical standards must be applied to the second scenario, a case of modern humans, then what is to be said about the third scenario, a case of humans just before they became modern humans? Many people today seem scarcely aware that humans were once—and not that long ago—purely animal, no different in nature and behavior than all the other wild animal species. But this fact is a critical input into understanding how humans have arrived at the circumstances they find themselves in today. Around a half million years ago, it would have made no more sense to apply an ethical standard to the interloping hominin than to apply that standard to the wild animal of the first scenario—indeed, the first and third scenarios could be different descriptions of the same event. Therefore, humans were not always an ethical creature. But this then raises the question of when did the transition take place, when did human activities become subject to ethical scrutiny? Was it around two hundred thousand years ago, when the features of behavioral modernity were still inchoate? Or was it around fifty thousand years ago, when the human turn had become more distinctive but still quite primitive? Or was it closer to ten thousand years ago, when agriculture and civilizations were on the verge of getting started? And was this transition sudden or gradual, and when did it apply effectively to the entire population? And finally, given this transitioning history, is it still reasonable to think that human ethical behavior can be attributed to human neurons and genes (Killen & Smetana, 2007)?

There are two further points to be gleaned from these three scenarios. First, the main classes of proscription to be found in modern ethical and criminal standards—for instance, murder, assault and robbery—they are clearly not arbitrarily chosen. They seem to be targeted exactly against the type of biologically self-advantageous behavior epitomized by the attacking animal of the first

scenario. It is as though humans have come to realize that they have a compelling interest towards suppressing the beast within.

And second, to turn this motivation entirely around, modern humans also appear to have an inherent and nearly compulsive fascination with instances of raw ethical violation, such as outlined in the second scenario above (Binik, 2020). True crime podcasts, heist movies, rape fantasies, mob dramas on TV—there seems to be something fundamentally exciting and irresistible about the breaching of ethical laws. It is as though humans possess a deep-seated urge to unleash the beast within.

3. Modern Humans as Both Animal and Construct

Humanity's current circumstances are biologically unprecedented. Until now, every animal species has remained purely animal, with its behavioral characteristics fixed exclusively upon survival-and-procreative demand. In fact, so rigid and so predetermined have been animal behaviors across all species and across all time that they can be effectively summarized with nothing more than a simple phrase: *eating and drinking, fighting and fleeing, mating and rearing*. Hominins were like this too, for millions of years. But of late—and, evolutionarily speaking, over an extremely short period of time—humans have undergone a stunning transformation (Henshilwood & Marean, 2003). While retaining every animal characteristic with which they were originally endowed, humans have added an impressively broad range of behaviors heretofore unwitnessed and unexperienced upon the planet Earth—for instance, language, experimentation, art, and of course ethics.

The conventional explanation for the human transformation centers around the concept of evolution (Brown et al., 2011). For instance, maybe it was the emergence of a language gene or a significant neural alteration (Neubauer et al., 2018) that launched humans onto their more modern path. But these evolution-inspired explanations face some serious challenges. For one, they lack

specificity. No identified language gene or detailed neural alteration has ever been put forth with any consistency or cogency, and even if they were put forth, no comprehensive or compelling description has ever been offered that would connect particular genes and neurons to actual human behaviors (Schaffner, 2016). The purveyors of such theories certainly have faith that such details will eventually be uncovered (Goetz & Shackelford, 2006), but they do not currently possess any direct evidence.

And perhaps even more troubling is the fact that evolutionary explanations of the human transformation must somehow be made to fit within an extremely narrow timeline. The beginning of the turn towards human behavioral modernity appears not to have taken place before more than a few hundred thousand years ago, and its initial impact must have been minimal for quite some time. By fifty thousand years ago, although the evidence of the human turn was now unmistakable—control of fire, structured tools and weapons, cave paintings, etc.—human behavior was still quite primitive, resembling hardly at all any of the modern forms of human experience (Christian, 2018). Indeed, the majority of the current behaviors arising from the human transformation—for instance, driving, flying, long-distance communication, effective surgeries, etc.—these all have appeared only within the last century or two, suggesting that the human behavioral transformation is still an ongoing and accelerating process. These rapid and accretive behavioral dynamics would be difficult to explain with just language genes and neural alterations—the dynamics do not fit to the usually slow-moving contours of a biological and evolutionary process.

Since there is little actual evidence to indicate that modern humans have undergone any kind of significant physical or biological change—including genetic or neurological change—it would seem a more effective approach to explaining the human transformation would be to concentrate on those human features that *have* changed. Since the beginning of the turn towards behavioral modernity, there have been two major categories of human transition for which there is now an

overflowing abundance of observable evidence. The first category of indisputable human change is the amount of artificial construction that has been accruing within the human environment. Before the turn towards behavioral modernity, humans—just like all pure animals—lived within an entirely natural setting. But at the beginning of the transformation, several unusual artifacts started making a more or less permanent appearance within the human environment: structured tools and weapons, fire pits, animal skin clothing, ornamental jewelry, abstract gestures and sounds. And as the turn towards behavioral modernity progressed, the amount and types of these constructed artifacts continued to increase at an accelerating pace. Around ten thousand years ago, with the advent of agriculture and civilizations, humans experienced a massive surge in this reconstruction of their surrounding environment: houses, roads, ships, papyrus scrolls, gigantic monuments, etc. And around four hundred years ago, with the widespread introduction of scientific and industrial techniques, humans experienced yet one more leap in this rebuilding of their experienced world: trains, factories, skyscrapers, computers, and so much more. So pervasive has been the artificial reconstruction of the human environment that today nearly every human lives in a setting in which nature has been mostly, if not entirely, eclipsed from view.

The second category of indisputable human change is the enormous number of novel behaviors that have been engendered in direct response to this artificial reconstruction of the human environment. Every alteration to the human surroundings provokes a corresponding change in human behavior. Clothing alters where humans migrate and live (Gilligan, 2010), controlled fire alters what humans eat (Scott et al., 2016), structured weapons alter what humans hunt (Ben-Dor & Barkai, 2023), and so on. And in the modern world, the catalog of human behaviors developed in direct response to the environment's many constructed artifacts has become so extensive and so all-encompassing as to be almost overlooked: humans drive because there are cars on the street, humans read because there are books on the shelf, humans shave because there are razors in the

cabinet, etc. Human behavioral modernity did not arise within a vacuum, it arose instead in direct response to those many artificial constructions now saturating the human environment.

Nonetheless, and quite remarkably, in the midst of all this artificial reconstruction and its resulting behavioral novelty, humans have also retained the entirety of their former animal nature. Humans must still eat and drink, humans must still avoid danger, and humans must still procreate and rear their young. Humans have retained their communal instincts and still give evidence of their tendency towards gregariousness, with many of society's current activities and operations hearkening back to a more kindred time. Soap operas, org charts, crosstown sports rivalries—if one knows how to look carefully, one can still see the contours of a more tribal existence. And although humans are no longer raised to be self-sufficient hunter-gatherers within the natural surroundings of the African plains, humans still possess all the biological characteristics to do so. Humans carry with them today the same animal traits as they did several hundred thousand years ago.

Therefore, to characterize the human turn towards behavioral modernity, it is necessary to bridge the gap from humans as pure animal to humans as still animal but no longer purely so. A way to accomplish this feat would be to depict modern humans with the phrase *animal and construct*, a phrase meant to highlight the dual source of modern human behavior. The word *animal* of course needs no further justification. The word *construct* is being used to denote, as outlined above, the two categories of indisputable human change:

1. The artificial reconstruction of the human environment; and,
2. The novel behaviors resulting from that artificial reconstruction.

The word *construct* and its two-category meaning emphasizes how the newer aspects of humanity have been *built* into the species, forged tangibly into the human environment and fashioned

perceptibly into human behavior. Thus, it is not really necessary to search for these new characteristics inside human neurons and genes, because these new characteristics can be observed directly right before one's very eyes. Furthermore, the word *construct* captures precisely the total amount of change that has been layered on to the species over the course of the human transformation, for if one were to remove every artificial feature that now exists within the human environment, and if one were to suppress every human behavior that can trace its origin back to those removed artifacts, all that would then remain would be the biological and evolutionary organism that once used to define *Homo sapiens*. All that would then remain would be the pure animal humans once used to be.

4. The Inherent Conflict

The dual-origined nature of modern humanity—animal on the one hand and construct on the other—gives rise to an inevitable tension. These two aspects differ greatly in their history, in their relationship with space and time, in their motivations, and in their ultimate goal. The animal aspect of humanity tends to pull the species backwards in time, towards the natural days of pure survival and procreation. The constructed aspect of humanity tends to push the species in a new direction, towards greater creation and towards a purpose that remains mostly unknown. This push-and-pull battle impacts the entire population and gives birth to ethical conflict, the species caught between the demands of its two competing interests. And this push-and-pull battle impacts each individual, now with the freedom of moral choice but also with no clear indication as to which influence is to be given the greater authority—the animal instincts within or the structured conditions all around.

It can be difficult to remember, amidst all the artificial construction humans find themselves immersed within today, that a person's most fundamental and deep-rooted nature is still that of a

biological creature (Winston, 2003). And yet, humans are born, humans die, humans delight in their sexual congress, humans nurture their children towards adulthood, humans suffer through fear and pain, and humans experience every event of their entire existence in the immediacy of the here and now, just as was the case on the African plains several hundred thousand years ago. The most pressing of human needs are still those which are self-preserving, and the next most pressing of needs are those associated with family, betraying the continuing genetic favoritism of human evolutionary drive. Most humans still desire the comforts of close communal belonging, and many still cling to the security associated with tribal hierarchy. And although humans have learned they can suppress and assuage such needs and interests in favor of alternative goals, humans seldom do so with a feeling of unmitigated joy. Humans can sense instinctively that there is a *sacrifice* involved with taking the constructed path, the sacrifice of denying one's more natural wants and needs. The question is always lingering in the air: is the sacrificial benefit worth the cost? An observation of modern human behavior, in which the breaking of the rules is celebrated almost as frequently as the following of the rules (Morrall et al., 2018), would suggest the answer is still frequently no.

Therefore, the constructed aspect of humanity faces a daunting task. Having arisen from nothing and needing to build an expanding foothold onto the human scene, the constructed aspect of humanity must convince its subjects to forgo their immediate desires in favor of a promise for something better later on. Admittedly, artificial construction has frequently been able to deliver on this promise. From animal skin clothing and structured tools and weapons to the immense power of modern medicines and electricity, the built-up innovations of humankind have benefited the species to such an extent that there are now eight billion people living on the planet. But each new promise and each new construction requires a mastery of, and a patience with, time and space, a nod towards delayed gratification over more immediate alternatives. Not every human is willing to wait that long,

and not every human foresees the personal benefit behind the promise. Human change is made in the face of a constant resistance, the resistance against doing what one is not naturally inclined to do.

It is to overcome this resistance that ethical precepts are formed. An ethical precept is much like other human-built artifacts—similar to language, to music, to agriculture, and to all the rest. But an ethical precept differs in this one important respect: it does not of itself serve any directly constructive purpose, it is instead *meta*-constructive, it makes room for other constructions to take place. An ethical precept accomplishes this task by confronting a stubborn obstacle, by cajoling, threatening, shaming, and otherwise convincing humans into giving up some aspect of their animal nature. A later reward over immediate pleasure. Civility as opposed to conquest. Cooperation instead of appropriation. Humanity's animal nature must be subdued in this manner because it is fundamentally opposed to humanity's more artificial alternative. Animal nature is often *de*structive instead of *con*structive. Animal nature is concerned only with the immediacy of the here and now, never with the expansiveness of time and space. Animal nature is motivated by the particular, the individual, the concrete, the familial, and remains oblivious to the abstract, the symmetrical, the numerical, the universal. Almost every concept upon which artificial construction can thrive is contravened by humanity's instincts, and thus there can be no human transformation without significant abeyance of this deep-seated bestial drive.

At the beginning of the turn towards behavioral modernity, humanity's animal aspect would have been dominant, with only a few sporadic instances of artificial construction to be found anywhere within the human surroundings, generating only the barest of need for any form of non-biological proscription. By around fifty thousand years ago, at the beginning of the last migration out of Africa, humanity's environment would have found itself more cluttered with newly developed artifacts—clothing, spears, hooks, jewelry, body painting, abstract gestures and sounds—with the impact of these artifacts nudging human activity onto alternative paths, creating a greater

requirement for interactive structure and corporeal restraint, even if the balance at that time still stood in favor of the more primitive. By around ten thousand years ago, with the development of agriculture, permanent abodes, methods of transportation, and larger communities, the parity between animal and construct would have been shifting rapidly towards the latter, resulting in more multiplicity in human behavior and creating a burgeoning need to restrict instinctive conduct, leading to codified bodies of law, formalized means of enforcement, and more frequent entreaties towards habits of self-control.

Thus, as the human turn towards behavioral modernity has progressed, and as the amount of artificial construction within the human environment has continued to accrue, and as the influence of that construction upon human behavior has become more impactful, the need for ethical machinery has grown ever more intense. Ethical precepts have been combined into ethical systems, ethical systems have sought for justification (deity, rationality, utilitarian principles, etc.) (Griffiths, 1957), justification has brought stricter prosecution from the human surroundings. Reflecting the complexity of modern human circumstances, the ethical and moral systems of today are comprehensive, intricate, filled with nuance, and sometimes even contradictory (Francot, 2014), but at their core, all ethical systems still state the same basic tenet: humans must in some respect suppress the immediacy of their animal instincts in favor of more expansive, more distant, and more artificial goals. And at their perimeter, all ethical systems still encounter the same rudimentary defiance, the deep-seated human unwillingness to let go of the species' biological prerogative. Fundamentally, an ethical struggle is not a battle between good and bad, not a decision between right and wrong. Fundamentally, an ethical struggle is the expression of the inherent human conflict between animal and construct.

5. Consequences

Whereas the animal aspect of humanity would have been dominant at the beginning of the human turn towards behavioral modernity, today the circumstances have nearly reversed. Most humans today live in settings, such as large modern cities, in which nature has been almost entirely eclipsed from view, replaced everywhere by an assembled infrastructure that has become staggering in the degree of its depth and breadth (Guidotti, 2015). Human behavior, guided at every turn by the environment's many constructed artifacts, resembles hardly at all that of the other animal species, and resembles hardly at all that of hominins from a few hundred thousand years ago. Even the most elemental of human events—eating, drinking, sex, childbirth—these are accomplished today with the support of an entire host of artificial accoutrements—grocery stores, plumbing, contraception, anesthesia. And if modern humans find they must occasionally give vent to their animal essence, they can usually do so indirectly, through an assortment of vicarious, sublimated and assisted means—sports, beauty pageants, social media, pornography, alcohol, etc. Humans today expend as much effort *assuaging* the beast within as they do *expressing* the beast within; indeed, most people today fail to recognize that they are beasts at all.

Because of this near dominance of humanity's constructed aspect, and reflecting that aspect's ongoing effort to maintain a tight control over a large and potentially unruly animal population, ethics today is almost always presented as a one-sided argument. The conflict between animal and construct is framed as a battle of evil versus good, wrong opposed to right, devil contra savior, with these pronouncements backed by an assortment of doctrinal and rational justifications, such as the Decalogue, Kant's moral imperative, and utilitarian formulas. These days, to label someone as an animal is to effectively insult them, to describe someone as renegade is to attempt to shame them, and to cast someone as self-serving is to place them under the deepest of suspicion.

Humans today expend as much effort *burying* the beast within as they do *expressing* the beast within; indeed, most people today refuse to admit that they are beasts at all.

Nietzsche's insight was to recognize the potentially debilitating impact of this stifling dynamic, arguing that the wholesale suppression of humanity's ingrained animal nature removes too much vitality from the quest towards human progress, and creates so much pent-up longing for zoic release that it manifests in unhealthy and unproductive ways. Despite their oppositional differences, humanity's animal and constructed aspects have managed to share a mutually supportive relationship, a relationship held together mainly by the species' biological impetus towards self-preservation and self-advantage. For instance, most of the constructed artifacts added over the years to the human surroundings have been targeted explicitly towards increasing the survival-and-procreative success of *Homo sapiens* and towards easing the more burdensome challenges of a biological existence. And it is the recognition and appreciation of these ecological benefits that motivates many humans to make the necessary sacrifices to give artificial construction an opportunity to grow, a motivation far more effective than any logical or theological justification. At the same time, it is often through an individual's desire for selfish gain that he or she will craft the next invention, formulate a novel idea, or build the newest towering structure (Weitzel et al., 2010). How many innovative projects have been launched by the egoistic actions of some person in search of greater power, wider fame and more lavish riches, and how many of these self-centered attempts have resulted in the advancement of circumstances for the population as a whole?

In humanity's better and more productive moments, there has always been a balance, a degree of equilibrium, between the animal and the constructed aspects of the species, with each aspect contributing its particular form of benefit to the cause of transformation. A complete dominance by either aspect would be of doubtful merit. For instance, a complete dominance by animality—such as might easily be experienced in civilization collapse—would mean at best a return

to the species' former biological regimen, confining humans to the harsh and static realities of a survival-and-procreative existence, forgoing whatever unique opportunities and potential destiny behavioral modernity might have happened to bring. Similarly, a complete dominance by artificiality—conceivable these days with the advent of genetic engineering, robotics, artificial intelligence, and the like—would mean an absence of vitality in the shaping of future events, leading perhaps to an entirely fabricated existence, one that could easily turn out to be mechanical, predictable, stale, cold.

Foreshadowing these potential outcomes for the species as a whole are the consequences experienced today by the species' individual members, who find themselves confronted on an ongoing basis by these same animal-versus-construct choices. And for those individuals whose concerns reach no further than the contingencies of the present moment, and who seek no advantage beyond that which can be gained out of immediate circumstances, and who find their motivations only in what is self-serving and self-preserving, they run the danger of forging an existence that is narrow, calamitous, nasty, and Darwinian. And for those individuals whose concerns look only towards the promise of a distant future, and who seek no activity beyond that which can be described as righteously ascetic, and who have their motivations in the conformity underlying every widely proclaimed rule, they run the danger of forging an existence that is rigid, stagnant, joyless, and unnatural. The task of modern humanity is to traverse a precarious course between the two abysses of animal and construct, with the immediate goal to keep from falling to either side. The ultimate goal—the ultimate *human* goal—is to transcend the inherent conflict between the two.

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