

I was born in June, 1905 in London, England to a poor working class Jewish family. My father was very difficult. I think he meant well but didn't understand me. He'd take the books, that I borrowed from the public library, and tear them to pieces, which he eventually had to pay for. So I used to read under a lamp in the street. He knew nothing about children anymore than my mother did. So my life had become intolerable by the time I was fourteen.

My parents thought something was wrong because I had nothing to say to them and they had nothing to say to me. I felt that I was living in an occupied country, occupied by tyrants who gave all sorts of orders, which didn't make any sense to me, orders I had to obey without question.

This puzzled me - why human beings were the way they were? Men would come up to me grasp me by the cheek give me a tremendously painful whirl, sometimes flick my ear and muss up my hair and say "what a nice boy you are". Trying to understand why women and men were as they were led to my book, *The Natural Superiority of Women*, why education wasn't what it should be led to my book *Education and Human Nature in the Direction of Human Development*, why aging isn't what it should be led to *Growing Young*, and so on.

I studied anatomy, embryology and zoology and the science of heredity. At the same time, I studied cultural anthropology and the history of science and medicine. All that early experience determined what I would become by way of solving this question, "what are human beings born for?"

Question: And what did you discover?

The species characteristic of homosapiens, which by the way is the most officiously arrogant and primitive definition ever self-bestowed by a species. "Homo-Sap" is the appropriate definition at the present time, because he has become so confused as a creature, at the same time being the most intelligent. When you put intelligence and confusion together you really don't get intelligence, you get a terrible mess.

To be born human is to be in great danger because you are free of the instincts which largely determine the behavior of other animals. We have to learn everything we come to know as human beings. We share a great many traits with other animals, yes, but those, which are exclusively human, we have to learn from others.

We know that we're all born with physical needs, like the need for oxygen, for liquid, for rest, activity, sleep, and so on. These must be satisfied if we are to survive physically. The extraordinary thing is that we're also born with basic behavioral needs. These are the need for love, about which we know very little, the need for creativity, the need for sensitivity, the need for learning, the need for the acquisition of knowledge, the need for play, for song, for dance, for curiosity, for imagination.

All these are basic behavior needs, which are as much a part of our genetic system as the physical needs. Yet, we haven't recognized them. Look at any textbook on the nature of human nature and you won't find any mention of them.

If you would understand what human beings are born for, you first must understand what they're born as, and this is what I have dedicated myself to, to attempt to show that we are borne with the capacity to love. But we will never know how to love unless we are taught to love, unless we learn to love others who know how to love. Not that it is impossible to correct this at any age, because we remain educateable all the days of our lives. It's never too late.

Question: What do you mean by love?

Love: what is love? Well, to spell it out briefly, it is the ability to communicate to others your profound involvement in their welfare, such that you will never commit the supreme treason of letting them down, whenever they most stand in need of you, and that you will minister to and encourage the growth and development of their potentialities. That's love.

Question: What about survival of the fittest and competition?

Survival of the fittest is a term coined by a sociologist name Herbert Spencer. And that was a very unsound view of Charles Darwin. What Darwin was saying was not survival of the fittest but the survival of the fit. The fittest won't survive if the environment changes. In the age of conflict of the 19th century, competition was the principal by which most of the imperialists nations lived, and was therefore readily accepted, joyfully by the military staffs of every country.

We have elevated competition into an idol, the foot of which everyone has been taught to worship. But research has shown that not just human nature but all of nature is really cooperative. As early as 1872, a Frenchman published a book on the subject of cooperation being a more important factor than competition in the social Darwinism sense. And now we have a large number of people who are beginning to see that the formative years of human evolution were in cooperation with each other, it could not have been otherwise.

Question: What lies at the root of this spirit of cooperation?

The basic pattern and patent of social behavior in the human species lies in the relation between mother and child. She has carried that child in a womb for 266 1/2 days, which is actually the average from conception to birth, not delivery. Doctors deliver babies but shouldn't.

Babies get themselves naturally born in most cases, and that child is looking forward to a continuation of the life that it had in the womb. The temperature and pressure are constant, no work is required, and he or she is looking forward to a continuation of this. What they are looking forward to is a "womb with a view".

But they are expelled rather roughly and usually taken away from their mother, which is wrong. It's physiologically/psychologically wrong. Both baby and mother need each other more at that time than they ever will again. The baby should be put to nurse at his mother's breast whereupon it induces an enormous number of wonderful changes in the mother, such as an arresting of the postpartum hemorrhage, which no obstetrician can do under the circumstances, but a baby can do. Which indicates that there is more intelligence in the upper and the lower lip of one baby than all the brains of all the obstetricians put together.

There is love between those two. All of this is communicated through touch which would be lost if the baby was taken away from the mother and the mother would lose all the advantages she gains from the presence and the suckling of the baby.

If you want to know what love is, interrupt what is going on between that mother and that baby. That baby wants to love, striving to love. By not separating them you not only enable them to live longer, but you enable them to grow and develop rapidly in the ability to love themselves.

It's enormously important to understand that we have proof for every one of these statements. The very origin of life is associated, not with competition but with cooperation. If you study ameba you will find that the single cell begins to experience an increase of surface pressure. This means it's going to divide. And if you take one cell and put it at the other end of the slide, and observe what happens, both of them tend to migrate toward each other.

This I believe is the basic pattern of all living forms. It's right there in the nature of your protoplasm. And then you develop into 2 cells, 4 cells, these endear together into millions of cells, all of which are in cooperation with each other. There is a biological basis which is characteristic of all living things, a cooperative behavior which binds the society closely together. What we are born for is **to live as if to live and love were one**. Unless we learn that lesson "the goose is cooked" as it were.

Question: Cooperation and love often seem distant in our world of nationalism and increasing violence.

I've had great intellectuals, great minds, who say, but Ashley, how can you take the view that we are born to love? Didn't Freud, in answer to a letter of Einstein, say that man is born innately aggressive? That's what Freud said, but Freud was wrong.

I had the privilege of talking with Einstein about this on several occasions. He had one of those open minds, very critical and very, very sound. And I said to him that all the evidence we have, from every possible source, points in the same direction, that this child is formed to grow and develop as a warm loving human being, embracing not only the whole of humanity, but the whole of nature.

We can't solve any problem without first solving the problem of human nature. We won't be able to solve the problems of homeless, impoverished, illiterate people, of murders who would never have become murderers had they been adequately loved. You show me a murderer, and I'll show you a person who's been failed in the supreme need for love - who never learned how to love, and will hate, as I heard one of them saying, "I hate the whole world's guts and the whole world hates mine." These are the victims of our society, just as the doctor's a victim of his society, as most of us are victims of our society.

We're interdependent, not only with other human beings of every color, kind, and complexion, but also with animal and plant kingdoms and inanimate nature. If we understood this, we wouldn't do the things that we're doing to our environment and to our own children, with the best of intentions.

Question: How have we failed our children?

We don't love children adequately; we don't even know what love is. It's a great help to know exactly what the criteria of love is, because these murderers, these violent people, these terribly undisciplined characters are exhibiting the frustration of love.

What is frustration - it is the thwarting of an expected satisfaction. And what every baby expects is to be loved. And when you thwart that expectation and you make the character sink lower and lower into despair, and frustration, and the reaction to frustration is hostility, aggressiveness, "I don't care a damn about you anymore. You haven't cared a damn about me, why should I worry about you? Why should I become involved in all this?" This is the massive alienation, the disengagement, the detachment, which we are suffering from in our culture.

Question: How did you discover this relationship between love and hate?

By observing what was going on with other human beings, by reading a lot of case histories, observing how people grew into older people, how some of them changed and how others didn't.

On one occasion I was lecturing in New York, at the new school for Social Research, on Child Growth and Development about the criteria of love and the unloving person, when suddenly, it dawned upon me, that I was describing my own character; the unloving, stuffed-shirt Englishman, that I had become, with a proper accent, and how terrible this was.

Happily I had married a very sympathetic woman with high intentions. Then it began to dawn upon me that my children were going to be the effects of my behavior and my wife's behavior. But the important thing to realize is that no matter how badly you've been failed in the need for love and have become a cold fish, a stuffed shirt, that this is not the end, that you can change, but it takes work.

If you can go through this with other people, and give of yourself, then one day you will wake up and find that you've become what you've been doing. You will have become a loving human being.

When people ask me what do, I tell them to just give the child all the love that they can. Don't worry so much about anything else. And when it comes to discipline: never, never physically assault the child in any way, and certainly don't assault them in with words, which can be just as cruel as physical punishment. And communicate that deep love and discipline, which should be another word for love, so that when you do say "no" it passes like a summer shower, because they know, from past experience, that whatever you've done and said is for their welfare.

Question: One of your most influential books was on Touch. Why is touch so misunderstood in our culture?

The first article ever written, as far as I know, in any language, on touch was written in 1950 and I think I wrote it. It's strange that we should have to wait till the middle of the 20th century for someone to pick up the importance of this tremendously complex organ. The largest organ in the body, which most of us felt was just a covering to prevent us from falling apart. The skin is the external brain and nervous system of the body. It is derived from exactly the same embryological layer as the internal brain and spinal chord. And, both are closely inter-related.

All the messages that this skin receives must go to the internal brain, and the reactions or responses go back to the skin, and every other organ of the body. These are not theories; these are facts, observable facts. We don't understand that the touch of a hand can make all the difference to another human being - literally between life and death. But doctors don't touch their patients. They sit behind a desk in their high-priestly white coat, and there's a distance. And the idea of taking babies away from mothers is wrong from a hundred points of view.

Question: What are the consequences of not being touched?

Renny Spitz was an Austrian/American psychoanalyst of great genius, made a study of small children. Those that received a great deal of tactile stimulation had much lower mortality rates than those who were neglected. This observation was confirmed by Harry Harlow, Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin.

Harlow conducted a series of experiments in which infant monkeys were isolated from their mothers and compared their brothers and sisters who had not been isolated. Again, the same findings were found, emphasizing the enormous importance of the tactile experiences for these creatures.

Namely, those infant monkeys that had been deprived of maternal contacts, were unable to establish any kind of social relations, were always in a state of anxiety, fearful, and they did not know how to behave sexually.

They certainly didn't know how to behave towards their young. And the same is true of the great apes and of human mothers.

Question: Can we talk a little more about touch and how the failure to be touched may lead to violence?

One of the outstanding examples is rape. Who commits rape? If you'd discuss this with rapists you'll find that they will invariably reject the statement, this is a sex crime. They're not interested in sex at all. It is a crime of violence. And what is the violence about? Rejection by the mother. They hate all women. Mother may have loved them until they were 5 years of age and then pushed them away saying, now you've got to identify with this other character, your father. And this is a switch which girls are not required to make, only males.

Question: You said, "the basic pattern of social behavior in humans lies in the relation between mother and child," which naturally begins before birth. What about birth itself?

I'm all for birth taking place in the home. There are some homes, which for some reason or another, it may not be possible, but ideally, one's home would be the best place, and it would be the work of a midwife rather than a male obstetrician. I think there is great sympathy one woman has for another, especially one who is giving birth to a baby, especially when the woman has given birth herself, and one who is thoroughly qualified to take care of any emergency, emergencies being the exception.

This is done in Scandinavia, which is a hundred years ahead of obstetrics in America. In Finland, where I visited, the baby is normally born in a sauna, in the anti-chamber, where the temperature and the humidity are just right and the baby is born there and cared for and they have the lowest mortality and morbidity rate in the world.

Question: Why is birth in the United States so out of sync with "this natural process"?

Medicine has become interested in disease to the exclusion of health. Most of the colleges and medical schools don't have a department of preventive medicine. They may have a lecture or two on preventive medicine but that would be a token. Most people think of health as something that you acquire only after you've been cured of a disease by a doctor. And so, pregnancy is regarded as a disease.

Take, for example obstetricians like Emit Holt who was like a machine. He wrote one of the most influential books on pediatrics; which lasted for thirty-five years. He wrote a government booklet on the care and feeding of the child in which he made very clear that breast-feeding and bottle-feeding were the same. They're not the same. Breast-feeding is far superior because it contains all the natural elements which the baby needs. It is so complex, so interesting and wonderful. It confers immunities upon the baby, which the baby would not otherwise receive. Cow's milk is fine for little cows but not for human babies. It has the wrong kind of proteins, carbohydrates, whey and so on, in wrong amounts and is damaging to babies.

When I wrote a paper on this, it was rejected for publication. They claimed there's no evidence for this. Well, there was plenty of evidence. I'd worked it out on empirical grounds. I wonder how many pediatricians or obstetricians know this today.

*Question: The way in which our culture has changed over the last fifty years was the subject of another book, *The Dehumanization of Man*.*

Most of us are no longer really human, we have been deprived of our humanity. We have been dehumanized by the processes of conditioning, upbringing and socialization. We are no longer the organized authentic self, which we were once capable of being. We substitute power in our search for what is missing - if I get a lot of money, if I get a lot of power - then I can get people to love me, and it never works. Television, for example, has robbed children of their childhood and replaced it with an amalgam of mal-adult, mal-feeling, mal-thinking, sick feeling, violence and creates an incapacity for young people to think for themselves. I call television the lobotomy-box. If you put an electroen-cephalograph on the head of the average viewer you would not get any reaction whatsoever. Because he's given over all cognitive processes, all evaluative processes to this machine.

Look what we have done to sports. It is a corruption of the spirit, a game of big business in which a person who can hardly read or write gets a contract of \$26 million for years because he can hit a ball. Here are the successes we imitate. And all these children who make a \$1,000 a day selling drugs. This is the education they get. Well, it isn't education. Its corruption of the human spirit, and this is what we're suffering from.

END

Ashley Montagu was an anthropologist who has taught at Harvard, Princeton, University of California & New York University. He is the author of more than fifty books including, *Life Before Birth, Touching, On Being Human, The Nature of Human Aggression, The Natural Superiority of Women & Growing Young*. These and other works help to revolutionize our understanding of human nature, and especially the appropriate care and nurturing of children. Ashley was a friend and inspiration to Touch the Future for many years.