

Letters

tected as man's silent ancient companion in evolution. Only by defending a biological equilibrium, and not by manipulations of our genotypes or technological constructions of "better" environments, can a self-enlightened humanity give valid evolutionary directions to the changing of man.

HUGH H. ILTIS

Department of Botany,
University of Wisconsin, Madison 53706

A Plea for Man and Nature

While Dobzhansky's humanism is to be admired ("Changing man," 27 Jan., p. 411), his "evolutionary optimism" is incongruous, not because man cannot change, but because of long life-span and genetic limitations he cannot change fast enough! Today, technological effects are so enormous and rapid that man soon will live in a radically changed environment where his heredity will be out of phase with the natural forces that shaped it. Thus, evolutionary optimism is ill-founded. Anyone driving from New York to Washington or from Palo Alto to San Francisco can see, not a better world, but a natureless ecological nightmare. Can man function here as a well-adapted human? Will selection to "higher" evolutionary levels really occur? Dobzhansky seems blind to the technological impact on a highly vulnerable nature, especially in the tropics. As highly evolved as we are, our core of biological adaptations are still programmed to the *natural* environment and not to the big cities. Is it sensible to suggest that natural or even rural environments are of no value to man, that "we must certainly prefer an adaptedness to the present environments, not to those long defunct?" In effect, has there been, or will there soon be sufficient selection by polluted metropolitan environments to erase man's unspoken needs for open spaces, wild mountains, clean lakes, or small towns? Does Dobzhansky mean it is desirable to permit (let alone encourage) adaptation to New York-type cities, their bleak lifeless canyons of stone crawling with humanity, their noisy sunless streets and overcrowded subways? He sounds like so many of our big city students who brag of dislike for nature; who glory in technological sophistication, but are blind to flowers or songbirds in the spring. Yet without nature they, as members of the human species, are unadapted and meaningless. Dobzhansky decries

the prophets of doom. Yet their emphasis on the interrelatedness within the web of life, of man's dependence on living nature, is quite realistic! That "evolution may some day be directed by man" independent of nature, which presumably by then will have gone the way of all Dodo's, seems more absurd.

Recently, in San Francisco, I heard two symphonies, Roger Sessions' cacophonics followed by Beethoven's melodies. And why did I prefer Beethoven? Because it is like a sunny day on Cape Cod compared with downtown New York. I don't know whether Dobzhansky has forgotten what it was like to walk the dunes in solitude or to swim in the ocean, but to most humans, as products of natural selection, it is pleasanter than basking in 5 p.m. traffic on Fifth Avenue. Man will never become genetically adapted to technological society and remain human. Even if he could adjust genetically to this disbiological change, a biological and cultural absurdity would result.

Blind faith in the ecological good sense of man has dug graves for many human societies. Long before the problems which geneticists fear become realities, the population explosion will have destroyed those very qualities of nature to which we, as vertebrates, mammals, and finally as humans, have become adapted through 200 million years of natural selection. The most precious values of man, the enjoyment of life and of living, will then cease to have meaning for *Homo post-sapiens*. He will end as a species which has devoured its evolutionary mother, with a culture which has lost its biologic roots. Beethoven and Shakespeare, like flowers and hummingbirds, wild geese, and the free human spirit, will be incomprehensible curiosities.

Let us realize that future human evolution can develop only within contexts of diverse environments which are at least partly untamed in a nature pro-

Political Arena at Berkeley

I enjoyed Langer's excellent article on Berkeley's political problems ("Report from California," 10 Mar., p. 1220), but I cannot get too anguished about them. Any institution which wishes to keep politics outside itself must keep itself outside of politics. Obviously the administrators, faculty, and students have the right to enter politics as individuals and this seldom causes problems. But when these individuals band together in organizations, identified with the institution, and make political matters the prime function of these organizations, when they seem to have an affinity for unpopular causes, and when they frequently gain national publicity by conducting political forays outside the institution, then they have brought politics into the institution—first by becoming politicians themselves, and second, by inviting retaliation by their political foes. There are no privileged sanctuaries in politics. If you enter the arena, the bulls will try to gore you. The picture of the students demonstrating on the steps of the State Capitol should be a warning to all who have the interests of higher education at heart. As long as such pictures are possible, then politics are in higher education.

WALTER F. ZELTMANN

Post Office Box 176, Bay Ridge
Station, Brooklyn, New York 11220

I am highly indignant at the completely unwarranted statements about Governor Ronald Reagan of California. I believe the Governor *is* in full sympathy with the values and priorities of the state's educational institutions and has no intention of dragging education into politics. Nothing in the succeeding paragraphs of Langer's article supports these initial statements and nothing in the general press does either. For an impartial and scientific magazine and a spokesman for the scientific