

HEREDITY AND THE NATURE OF MAN. Theodosius Dobzhansky. George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1965. Pp. 179. 25s.

*Heredity and the Nature of Man* is based on a series of lectures given by Professor Dobzhansky to what one gathers was essentially a lay audience. However, although the book can be regarded as a "popular" one, it can be read with pleasure and profit by all those who are concerned with the relation between human genetics and everyday affairs. Dobzhansky is one of the few animal geneticists who, on turning their attention to the human situation, have made themselves fully familiar with the whole of human biology, and this book epitomises all that a popular book on the subject should be.

The book is divided into five general chapters which deal with the nature of heredity, variation, race, genetic load and radiation hazards and the future of mankind. The writing is at all times clear and simple yet many sophisticated concepts are presented. One is unlikely to find anywhere a better popular explanation of the exciting advances that have been made in recent years in our understanding of the structure of the gene and the nature of gene action, nor of the profound implications of these discoveries. Similarly, the discussion of human race biology is a perfect example of how this intricate subject, so often overlaid with emotionalism, should be presented to the layman. The facts, so far as they are known, are clearly separated from the judgments and the deep concern for humanity, which is evident in all Dobzhansky's popular writings, is the only expression of the writer's personality.

Throughout the book, the facts, of course are right, but the merits of general scientific books rarely need to be assessed on this basis. What does differentiate them is the selection of the material, the clarity of presentation, the emphasis given to particular points, the interpretation, and the integration. In all these respects Dobzhansky's judgment is impeccable. Nevertheless, there are some general issues, with which I think it is reasonable to disagree. Thus, Dobzhansky argues that whilst it is patently evident that not all individuals are equal, and that the "spice" of variety is as much a function of the genotype as of the environment, yet all human beings are entitled to the same opportunities to develop their inherent talents. "Equality of opportunity", however, though at first sight an extremely humane philosophy, surely carries with it dangerous implications. Its logical extreme is to separate children from their parents at birth, if not at conception, so that their opportunities are not made unequal from the effects of parental genetic variation which must create better environments for some children than for others—a policy which I am sure none would deplore more than Dobzhansky. This, of course, is yet another example of the ever-present difficulty of finding the balance between social justice and individual liberty. In practice the best that can be hoped for is that ever increasingly human beings will be offered the ideal environments for developing to the full their socially acceptable attributes and talents. The ideal may be a long way off, but it is brought a little nearer when men like Dobzhansky bring their scientific experience and sense of humanity to everyday human problems and write such books as "*Heredity and the Nature of Man*".

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