

# CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship entails rights common to all. It starts with the participation of all.

---

# STATELESS IN PALESTINE

What does it mean to have human rights if there is no one to protect those rights?

---

# DENATURALIZATION AND ASYLUM IN INTERWAR EUROPE

Denaturalization rising, asylum sinking, at least on the angry right

---

# THE MASS MIGRATIONS CAUSED BY WWI

The text for the next posts is Chapter 9 of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins Of Totalitarianism*, titled "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man". It's a short chapter, 37 pages, and can be read as a stand-alone essay. I didn't discuss it in my series on the book, partly because I didn't think about its

relevance to our current situation. I did remember her discussion of the Rights of Man; and rights are the subject of the current series.

### **Pre-WWI context**

The book focuses on Europe, and ignores much of the rest of the world. The first chapters discuss anti-Semitism and imperialism. Both cover the period from the mid-19th Century and the early 20th. During that time most of Europe coalesced into one of two types of states, nation-states and empires, with the boundaries created by the 1815 Treaty of Vienna as a starting point..

Western Europe was mostly organized into nation-states. Here's the Wikipedia definition:

A nation-state is a political unit where the state, a centralized political organization ruling over a population within a territory, and the nation, a community based on a common identity, are congruent.

The term "common identity" means roughly cultural homogeneity, so I use the term cultural group instead of nationality. The term nation-state itself isn't widely used today, perhaps because there aren't many, if any, today.

The other form, empire, included Austria-Hungary; the Czarist Empire; and, though it's not wholly in Europe, the Ottoman Empire. Each of these included a large number of culturally dissimilar groups, including different language groups. Many of these groups had at one time lived in their own Nation-States, including, for example, Poland and Ukraine. Cultural groups in these empires did not have national sovereignty, and often were mixed in with other groups or jammed up against others without formal borders. Ancient animosities persisted for generations. We can see it in recent history, as the break-up of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia after the fall of the Soviet Union.

## **WWI and its aftermath**

Arendt describes the impact of World War I as an explosion. I usually think of WWI as a trench warfare stalemate between the English and French and later the Americans against the Germans, but across the European continent and into what we now call the Middle East, there were battles among all of the smaller cultural groups, and destruction aimed at revenge for ancient, if not forgotten, insults. Among the larger groups on the move were Armenians facing genocide by the flailing Ottoman Empire, Poles, Ukrainians, Balkans, the list is endless, and that's just in Central and Southern Europe. Many Germans lived in the outskirts of the Austria-Hungary Empire, and they were forced out or ran for their lives. And, of course, Jews across the continent were assaulted and expelled.

The war ended in 1918, and the struggle to reorganize European states began. The basic idea was to create nation-states for the large populations, giving them defined borders and international recognition. This animated map gives an idea of the major changes in Europe. One group of people in each successor state was put in charge, and the other large minorities were assumed to somehow participate in the government, as, for example, the Slovaks in Czechoslovakia.

The enormous numbers of migrants were to be protected by the Minority Treaties, which all the new nations except Czechoslovakia signed. These offered some protection, enforceable by the League of Nations. That didn't happen. The choice faced by the migrants was to assimilate, or to be treated as stateless people. Naturally, many didn't like that choice.

There were two groups of stateless people: those whose nations had disappeared, like the people formerly in the Austria-Hungary Empire, and those who could not return to their homelands because they'd be murdered, like the Armenians. The Jews fell into both camps.

The entire approach was, in Arendt's word, "preposterous". The outcome was obvious. The minorities and stateless peoples were horribly mistreated by the dominant group. At best the minorities were forcibly assimilated, their own culture lost. At worst they were preyed on by an unchecked police force and their new neighbors. The demands of cultural groups, many of which had never controlled their own states, for self-determination were frustrated. This project was doomed, as was the whole idea of a viable nation-state for every aspiring national group.

Ultimately, the interests of nationality dominated the states across Europe. Law itself became subordinate to the demands of dominant nationalistic cultural groups. And the odd part is that across Europe about this time, the idea of self-determination for these cultural groups was gaining ground.

### **The Rights Of Man**

The concept of the Rights Of Man springs from the American Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, a document of the French Revolution. The idea is that from birth all men are equal before the state, all are entitled to certain rights, including life and liberty, and participation in self-government. This last is critical: the state exists to insure the Rights of Man to all. As Jefferson put it: "... to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...".

The Rights of Man is a lovely sentiment. But it turns out that the second part is crucial: there are no Rights of Man without a state that can and will enforce them. High-minded principles are useless in the face of a marauding police force.

### **Discussion**

Several of the books I've been writing about here, and reading but not writing about, provide evidence that in-group/out-group hostility has

roots in our evolution. For example, Michael Tomasello in *The Evolution of Agency* says that socially normative agency, the kind he attributes to human beings, is tied to the community of which our ancestors were members. Tomasello says that individual humans can't survive on their own, that they must belong to a group for survival. He attributes this to the inter-group struggle for scarce resources.

Even if this were true for our ancient ancestors, it doesn't explain the hatreds we see today. Conflicts over religion, national origin, racial differences, aren't about resources or physical needs. They're purely abstract, purely created by us humans. Of course it matters to the rich and powerful. But why would it matter to an IT professional or a goat farmer?

What difference does it make to me who you worship or whether you worship anyone or anything? Why would it matter if long ago some Armenian Hatfield got cross-ways with some Turkish McCoy? Why does some Dublin Catholic boy care who some Derry girl worships or how? Name an inter-group conflict and ask what its basis is. It's not going to be about whether there's a tree with ripe fruit or a river full of fish. It's going to be some mental construct.

It seems to me there's a deeper issue here. If you were to go to Beijing or Delhi or Harare or Buenos Aires and pick a pair of twenty-somethings, I bet you could plop them down in Pittsburg or Mexico City and except for language you wouldn't notice them as you walked by. They'd have no problem finding food they liked, and they might even learn to love brats or pork in molé sauce.

Killing people over abstract ideas is stupid and pointless. Worse, it's going to make it impossible to solve the worldwide problems we've created with climate breakdown. Right now, there's pressure on the poor in equatorial regions to move to more temperate climates. Some of the pressure is grotesque governments, some is hunger, some is massive climate change. Think

what will happen when the gulf stream stops. The pressure will be the other way, people from the north will want to move south. These problems aren't solvable if we don't grow up as a species. These are real problems, not the fake culture war gibberish spouted by the right wing, not abstract ideas about the proper way to worship the proper Deity.

---

## **COMING TO GRIPS WITH FREE WILL**

Tomasello shows how agency might have evolved. Is there another form of free will?

---

## **SOCIALLY NORMATIVE AGENCY AND RIGHTS**

Rights set the boundaries of the demands society can make on us. Why do unaccountable and unconstrained judges get to make the final decision?

---

## **SOCIALLY NORMATIVE AGENCY**

Human agency is formed and controlled socially, through family and community.

---

# GREAT APES AS RATIONAL AGENTS

The long evolutionary step to the great apes includes rationality and new psychological processes.

---

## GOAL-DIRECTED AGENCY AND INTENTIONAL AGENCY

Index to posts in this series

### Lizards

Lizards are a representative of the first category of agency according to Michael Tomasello in his book *The Evolution Of Agency*. As with the other categories, Tomasello focuses on the way lizards forage for prey. C. elegant, the nematode we looked at in the last post, moves and food either does or doesn't go into its mouth. That obviously won't work for lizards. Most species survive largely on a diet of insects, small creatures that move and flit about unpredictably.

So lizards have a different strategy. They have a goal, finding food, but they have to do several things to reach that goal. They have leave their hiding places and move to a place where there are insects. They have to spot a specific insect and then catch it and eat it. At the same time, they have to make sure they don't become prey for other creature.

Here's a video of a guy feeding crickets to his pet crested lizard. The lizard is in a special

feeding cage. The crickets must be alive or the lizard won't eat them. Bonus: you learn a new term: gut-loading crickets.

Following Tomasello here's how I read this video. The lizard stands still orienting itself to its surroundings. The guy throws a cricket into the cage. The lizard sees the cricket. It takes a few steps forward. It pauses. It charges and grabs it and eats it. The guy throws another cricket into the cage. The lizard sees it, turns to chase it, misses, and pursues it in short bursts. It catches and eats the cricket. The guy throws a bunch of crickets into the cage. The lizard singles out one, chases, catches and eats it. The other crickets run around. The lizard spots one, chases, catches and eats it. This is repeated.

In this video we see a frilled lizard, a native of Northern Australia and southern New Guinea. It's about a meter in length, and weighs over a pound. This video is heavily edited but again following Tomasello, here's how it can be read. The lizard descends from its hiding place in a tree. It forages for prey, meaning any insect it might find on the ground. It sees one, approaches, catches and eats it. While chewing it looks around. It spots a predator, a black-headed python. Its frill blows up. The snake approaches. The lizard runs really fast (also amusing). It eventually runs up a tree, making a full escape.

Tomasello says that the lizard has hard-wired goals: including eating and avoiding predators. Both its prey and its predators are quick and unpredictable. It has evolved to deal with that unpredictability by paying attention to the crucial aspects of the situation it perceives at any moment. It then acts to achieve a goal applicable to that situation. In both videos, the lizard eats while checking the situation. In the second it detects danger. It freezes its eating, then flares its frill, then runs. It achieves its goals by a series of go-no go decisions. That's a clear step up from C.



Elegans.

## **Squirrels**

Squirrels are Tomasello's example of intentional agents. He gives an example of a squirrel on a tree branch spotting a nut on a lower branch. The problem is whether to jump to the lower limb or retreat to the trunk and run down to the lower branch. He says the squirrel looks at the nut then at the tree trunk and then back at the nut. He interprets this as the squirrel cognitively considering two alternatives, then forming an intention to act, then acting. This two step process is evidence of an executive tier of mental control of behavior.

I have a young cat who does something similar. Winston knows there is interesting stuff happening on the counter when I'm making coffee. I see him looking at me, then at the counter as if contemplating jumping up. Am I paying attention to him? If I say No in a loud voice, he won't jump. Maybe. But if I do nothing or am not paying attention, he works out an answer and acts.

Winston also knows how to open a door. Here's a video of cats opening doors. Note that in several of the scenes the cat stares at the handle before acting. Tomasello interprets this as the cat forming an intention and then acting on the intention. Again, that implies an executive tier of mental activity.

Here's a video of squirrels hiding nuts. Nut-hiding is a hard-wired activity, but it's a complex problem. The squirrel has to decide where to bury the nut, and it has to be able to find it in winter. There are other squirrels waiting to steal the nuts, and predators. There are obstacles, including roots and hard soil. The squirrels stop and look around several times. In each case it looks like the squirrel makes a choice.

This is a 20 minute video of a guy operating a squirrel maze in his back yard. It's not exactly relevant, but it looks like the squirrels are

playing, something we don't see lizards do. Also I enjoyed it.

### **The difference**

Tomasello says that when lizards perceive a change in the situation, they freeze their current behavior and then respond to the new situation. He contrasts this chain of go/no go decisions with

... an either-or process of decision-making in which the individual simultaneously considers more than one behavioral option simultaneously (which mammals arguably do...) Pp. 33-4.

Tomasello says squirrels and other small mammals have an executive tier in their psychological processes that controls their operating behaviors, like running and burying nuts. This is a function of their larger brains, especially a larger pre-frontal cortex, more complex neurons and neural connections, and increased memory. Larger brains and longer time spent as juveniles increase the possibility of learning about the environment and experimenting, including play, which we might see as rehearsal. Mammals seem to have what we would call emotions that also provide input to the executive tier.

The executive tier of the squirrel brain coordinates all these inputs. It considers alternative courses of action, "weighs" the costs and anticipated benefits of each and chooses one. That choice is communicated to the operant systems. The executive tier monitors the outcomes. It can inhibit one choice in favor of another if the situation changes or if the initial choice meets an obstacle or fails. Small mammals don't use words, so it does this with some form of remembered perception.

Here's Tomasello's version of an executive tier:

The executive tier oversees the operational tier, as it were, and attempts to facilitate behavioral

decisions via action planning and cognitive control. ... It requires individuals to cognitively simulate in an organized way their own potential actions, the potential obstacles and opportunities for those actions, and the probable outcomes of those actions. They do this by perceptually imagining all these action elements in the common cognitive workspace and representational format provided by an executive tier of operation. P. 49.

It is this executive tier that gives mammals a wider range of choices of action, which presumably increases the chances of survival of individuals.

### **Discussion**

1. Tomasello says that there isn't any way to find mental processes in brains, so scientists infer the mental processes from the overt behavior of the creature. I think this raises the potential of anthropomorphism, leading people to ascribe human characteristics to other kinds of creatures. The executive function in humans is a defining feature of our species, so this is a real possibility. Of course, here we're talking about a simple form of executive control.

The videos seem to provide at least some reason to think Tomasello is on the right track in ascribing an executive tier to small mammals. The empirical studies he cites may also be persuasive evidence.

2. I have described only a small part of Chapters 3 and 4 for this post. It's all fascinating, especially the discussion of the executive tier, but it's not relevant to my purposes in reading this book. As a reminder, this series is aimed at thinking about the origins and roles of rights in our society. I'll get there, I promise.

---

# **FREE WILL, AGENCY, AND EVOLUTION**

Agency as a feedback control mechanism.