

BEYOND EVOLUTION

HUMAN NATURE AND THE LIMITS OF
EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATION



ANTHONY O'HEAR

OXFORD

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Beyond Evolution

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Evolutionary Explanation*

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Preface

THE aim of this book is to examine the extent to which evolutionary accounts of human experience are adequate. In examining this question, I focus on human knowledge, on morality, and on our sense of beauty. I suggest that our current activities in each area certainly derive in important ways from our biological nature, but that once having emerged they cannot usefully be analysed in biological or evolutionary terms. I also attempt to indicate the significance of human community and of our cultural inheritance in the identity and rationality of each one of us. At the same time, I attempt to vindicate the traditional view that each human being is possessed of a rationality which means that he or she can transcend what is given in biology and culture. We are prisoners neither of our genes nor of the ideas we encounter as we each make our personal and individual way through life.

Early versions of parts of the book have been previously published as follows: part of Chapter 2, as 'Immanent and Transcendent Dimensions of Reason', in *Ratio*, 4 (1991), 108–23; part of Chapter 3 as 'Self-Conscious Belief', in *The Certainty of Doubt*, edited by Miles Fairburn and Bill Oliver (Victoria University Press, 1996), 336–51; part of Chapter 4 as 'Evolution, Knowledge and Self-Consciousness', in *Inquiry*, 32 (1989), 127–50 (reprinted by permission of Scandinavian University Press, Oslo); part of Chapter 5 as 'Knowledge in Evolutionary Context', in *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 8/2 (1994), 125–38; part of Chapter 7 as 'Beauty, Natural and Unnatural', in *Artists from Europe*, edited by Kevin O'Brien (Leeds Metropolitan University, 1995), 72–8; part of Chapter 8 as 'Two Cultures Revisited', in *Verstehen and Humane Understanding*, edited by A. O'Hear (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–21. Where appropriate, I thank editors and publishers for permission to reprint.

As will be evident, I have worked on this book and related themes over a number of years, and have benefited from many discussions

with many people for ten years or more. It would be hard to list all who have helped me in one way or another, though I would like to mention my gratitude for particular help I have received from Roger Trigg, Michael Smithurst, Peter Munz, and Roger Scruton.

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