

NEEDS AND WANTS

If man sought to satisfy only his needs there would be far less social and political strife. But, as Robin Fox has said, man could almost be defined as the animal that wants things. And some of the things he wants he really does not need -- or they are needed by others. Hence the strife. As Fox says ("Rational ethics and human nature", Intern. Symposium on Ethics in an Age of Pervasive Technology, Technion, Haifa, Dec. 1974), "Our problem is that because of the dominance of wants -- wishes, desires, aspirations and utopias -- we have lost touch with our needs; lost touch to the extent that we constantly sacrifice needs to wants".... "in order to restore our humanity, in order to jettison outrageous wants and return to the satisfaction of basic needs, we may have to cut through a Gordian knot of 'civilized' behavior and industrial institutions that have ~~outstripped~~ our capacity to handle them." A naturalistic ethics should eschew utopian expectations, utilitarian formulas, and theological vistas: it should be conceived in terms of what we know about human nature -- in terms of needs rather than of wants fostered by "civilization". (This is an abstract of R.Fox.)

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