The radical Conservative Carl Schmitt suggested that ‘one could test all theories of state according to their anthropology and thereby classify these as to whether they consciously or unconsciously presuppose man to be by nature … a dangerous being or not’. But perhaps not all pessimistic images of ‘natural man’ are as readily assignable to a conservative style of thought. Such is the case I suggest with Francois Flahault’s ‘de-idealized’ anthropology — ‘realist’ yet informed by a social-solidarist ethic — which turns on an arresting depiction of human malevolence and its psychological sources. I argue that Flahault’s program might be thought of as contributing to recasting the ethical aspect of realist understandings of political questions. Though not constructed with sovereign statehood in mind, in one respect his moral anthropology echoes the de-sacralized image of the human propounded by the early modern ‘civil-prudential’ sovereignty theorist Samuel Pufendorf, an image which a modern realist ethic of state might do well to incorporate. I show how Flahault uses his moral anthropology to modify the mission of reformist social policy and put a case for seeing his program as a contribution to a civil prudential philosophy of government. Supposing man to be dangerous by nature may not after all be the hallmark of a conservative political stance.

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