
book, that they have found their historian. They will be surprised, then, and perhaps dumbfounded by the conclusion. In his closing pages, McDougall describes an America in diplomatic and economic retreat from Asia, just one generation after the end of the Korean War. He sees this withdrawal as, in fact, having been fated to occur "exactly because the United States won such a thorough victory in the Pacific War [World War II]," and because America so overextended itself thereafter. America, he writes, "took upon [itself] the burden of defending the rimlands and opened its markets and lands to the enterprise and immigrants of Asia and Mexico—all in the name of ideals of freedom, enterprise, equality and

human dignity introduced to the North Pacific by white men." I, for one, do not disagree that America's most influential time in Asia now lies behind it. At this time of new hosannas to the Pacific Age, the supreme irony lies in the American *retreat* from the western Pacific. We are leaving to Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China the vibrant markets we helped nurture, protect, and create.

—James Clad, a former Wilson Center Fellow and formerly the Southeast Asia correspondent for the Far Eastern Economic Review, is the author of *Behind the Myth: Business, Money, and Power in Southeast Asia* (1989).

The Nature of Virtue

THE MORAL SENSE. By James Q. Wilson.
Free Press. 313 pp. \$22.95

For nearly three decades, James Q. Wilson has been one of America's leading authorities on crime and drug abuse. No narrow technocrat or data-cruncher, Wilson, a political scientist at the University of California at Los Angeles, is that rare academic who possesses both the gift of lucid expression and the respect for the ordinary citizen necessary to discuss complex social problems in a broad, accessible way. He has written important books on bureaucracy, government regulation, urban politics, schooling, and welfare. But the study of crime and its regulation has remained at the center of his interests, not simply as a social and political problem but as a philosophical conundrum. Through his study of criminality, Wilson examines the fundamental questions of political philosophy: What is the nature of human nature, and what are the sources of social order? What are the "natural" human drives, dispositions, and poten-

tialities (if any), and how can they be melded into a relatively stable and peaceful social order? What causes individuals to violate that order? Does criminal conduct represent the breakthrough of unruly nature, aberrations of biology, or the failure of social order? How can such conduct be prevented without jeopardizing the flourishing of humanity?

In *Crime and Human Nature* (1985), Wilson and his co-author, psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein, explored the question of why the few engage repeatedly in criminal conduct. In this splendid new work, Wilson examines the rest of us: the vast majority who remain essentially decent, law-abiding, and, at times, compassionate, even in the face of desperate circumstances and obvious self-interest.

Crime and Human Nature proved controversial among social scientists largely because of its willingness to take seriously the possibility of biological causes of persistent criminality, a position that raises fears of discrimination, indifference to the social causes of crime, and ultimately, eugenics. *The Moral*

Sense may well provoke a similar reaction, for it too appeals to a concept of "human nature" informed by contemporary biological research—only here to support the politically more acceptable conviction that human beings are naturally social and hence naturally moral. Nevertheless, any belief in human nature challenges the reigning intellectual pieties of the day, indeed of the last two centuries, which have proclaimed human beings to be either natureless lumps formed by their social maker or rational calculators of economic, biological, or psychological self-interest. Human morality is thus unmasked as nothing more than ideology, social utility, rational choice, or simply taste.

Wilson attributes the pervasive moral skepticism and relativism of our age to the intellectual triarchy of Darwin (wrongly understood), Marx, and Freud. To revive a view of human morality more consonant with both ordinary experience and contemporary science, he turns instead to the triumvirate of Darwin (rightly understood), Adam Smith, and, above all, Aristotle. From this perspective, human morality—in the sense of feelings such as sympathy and fairness, which guide our moral judgments if not our conduct—is the natural and legitimate outgrowth of a child's innate sociability and normal development. Because the human infant is so dependent on adult care, the formation of "attachment" between caregiver and child—what used to be called "love"—is biologically essential and, thanks to natural selection, innate. Behaviorally and psychologically, this translates into a growing child's natural desire to please those upon whom he or she depends and a natural fear of failing to do so. From such fear and desire we learn to be sensitive to the feelings and reactions of others and to control and judge our own. Out of this "universal attachment between child and parent," Wilson writes, "the former begins to develop a sense of empathy and fairness, to learn self-control, and to

acquire a conscience."

To suggest that the development of such moral sentiments as sympathy, fairness, self-control, and duty is natural is, however, not to say that human beings are innately good or that universal moral rules exist. Wilson acknowledges that awareness of this universal human nature enables us to deduce only "a handful of rules or solutions [e.g., incest taboos] to any but the most elemental (albeit vitally important) human problems." Why then does Wilson believe that such knowledge is vital to us? Why should this whole intellectual squabble over "human nature" and "human morality" matter to those beyond the agonistic world of academia? After all, if the moral sense develops naturally even among skeptical intellectuals and their offspring, not to mention among the rest of us, who ought to care about such wrong-headedness?

Wilson's answer, both wise and subtle, is rooted in the traditions of political philosophy and informed by a careful examination of modern social-scientific and biological research. Like Aristotle, Wilson holds that however "natural" the various human virtues may be as potentials, we develop them by habit. In Aristotle's words, "we become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage." The family may be the primary training ground of virtue (and of vice), but the completion of such moral development depends on the *polis*. For Wilson, no less than Aristotle, lawgivers help make citizens good "by inculcating [good] habits in them." To accomplish this goal, both families and lawgivers must have a correct understanding of human nature and of their proper task; otherwise, moral development will be stunted or distorted. In Wilson's view, this latter fate—misunderstood human nature leading to a troubled social order—is our own. The inadequacies of our contemporary thinking about character, he argues, have contributed to many of our current public problems (such as crime, drug abuse, and welfare de-

Kaahumanu: So they stole my kingdom after all. . . . So the Americans took my islands. Why do you say the Japanese own Waikiki?

Scholar: There are tidal waves yet to come, Kaahumanu.

Seward: Excuse me, your highness, but Americans did not steal your kingdom. They settled it, made it prosper. . . .

Scholar: But they did use force, Mr. Seward. . . . The Army Corps of Engineers finally got its chance, and did some outstanding work on ports and roads—

Saito: —to make Hawaii a military base and exclude the Chinese and Japanese?

And on it goes for another seven pages. Yet one must ask what this device finally achieves. Yes, it keeps the narrative fresh, providing the reader relief from the dense currents of economic, diplomatic, and military fact. It also allows McDougall to clarify and qualify his own narrative. Still, it will be a very patient reader who is not irritated by the distracting jump-cut rhythm thus given to the book.

My greatest misgiving, however, concerns the coherence of the "North Pacific" as a region. Large reaches of the map have assumed, in different ages, a recognizable coherence through shared experience of conquest, culture, trade, or ecology. Obviously that coherence is also a historical phenomenon, which can exist in one period and vanish in another. Consider how "Turkestan" or "Hindustan" show, by the quaintness of their names today, the transience of shared experience. The area encompassed by "Southeast Asia," in fact, became a widely recognized region only during the 1940s, when the term denoted a theater of war.

Incontestably, the North Pacific has a special coherence as a geographic area. The case for it as a distinct region of cultural coherence is less clear. By joining hitherto separate imperial or national histories, McDougall's "North Pacific" lends new perspective to the Ameri-

can westward expansion, to the sale of Alaska to the United States, to Japan's opening to the West, to the humiliations of China, and to the diplomatic chicanery over the Hawaiian Islands. All these fit without too much artifice into a North Pacific structure.

But it seems to me that the North Pacific only rarely figured as an arena per se in the minds of the competitors working there. McDougall strains to fit European diplomatic maneuvering into a total North Pacific "game," one that is perhaps intended to resemble the "Great Game" that Victorian Britain and imperial Russia played for control of Central Asia during the last century. Sharp conflict in Manchuria? To be sure. Tense talks over Sakhalin? Definitely. But this reviewer is hard pressed to cobble together into some lasting, grander scheme the many conflicts, large and small, that have erupted in the North Pacific during the last four centuries. I cannot see how these add up to make the North Pacific a special, coherent place, a place (in McDougall's words) "of explosions . . . racial explosions, the explosions of war, the explosiveness of the environment itself, the sense of a dangerous heaven."

Perhaps McDougall himself may be secretly skeptical of the coherence of "the Pacific." For, if his region embraces *all* the Pacific Ocean north of the Equator, then he has allowed too many key places and events to slip past almost without notice. Korea's early history, Spain's and Portugal's dream of Christianizing China, and Canada's role during the 20th century only begin the list of raw data for a Pacific history that are omitted here. Such omissions add up. Instead of evoking a grand region that previous historians have neglected, McDougall often seems himself to be renarrating a familiar contest—a "North Pacific Triangle" with Russia, Japan, and the United States standing in each corner.

Finally, the book ends with a large irony. The ever-growing numbers of pundits who speak of the Pacific region and America's Pacific Century will feel, during most of the

pendency). To overemphasize the economic causes of crime or poverty—as many on both the Left and the Right are prone to do—may inadvertently discourage the sense of responsibility and reduce the stigma associated with such conduct, thereby helping to rationalize it. To unmask law, morality, and custom as if they merely constituted (in Plato's phrase) "the advantage of the stronger" may unintentionally weaken the legitimacy of constraints both external and internal.

The skepticism and relativism that prevail among intellectual elites thus encourage moral confusion among parents and policy makers, often masquerading as tolerance of lifestyle and value choices. The resulting crisis of confidence may lead to a lack of resolve on the part of families, schools, and governments, which then fail fully to establish and maintain the necessary limits on conduct, to nurture the necessary democratic virtues, and to encourage their extension beyond the narrowest social circles. The moral sentiments, Wilson acknowledges, are relatively weak and fragile by nature, especially in comparison to our "selfish desires" for survival, sex, and power against which they must constantly do battle. Family breakup, intellectual rationalizations, or an "adversary" culture's assault on bourgeois morality in the name of self-expression can all too easily upset the fragile balance between moral sentiments and selfish desires—particularly for those most vulnerable by either biology or circumstance.

Wilson is not arguing that our contemporary social problems all result from culturally induced malformations of character. He clearly recognizes the range of factors contributing to immoral conduct: "The problem of wrong action arises from the conflict among the several moral senses [e.g., duty and sympathy], the struggle between morality and self-interest, and the corrosive effect of those forces [both material and intellec-

tual] that blunt the moral senses."

As multifaceted as it is, though, Wilson's explanation may not go far enough. From the Old Testament to Freud, the Western moral tradition that Wilson seeks to revive has also included an awareness of the human "heart of darkness" and the possible complicity of the "moral senses" themselves in the doing of evil. It is the "dark knowledge" within the Western moral tradition that Wilson does not adequately confront. Although he acknowledges that "sociability is a two-edged sword . . . the source not only of our moral sentiments but also of our concern for reputation and respect" which may compel us to "join in a crowd's assault on an innocent person" or "obey leaders who order us to commit atrocities," the problem of evil may lie deeper. The desire to be liked and to win approval is not sufficient to account for the depravity of ordinary human beings engaged in extraordinary brutalities. Nor is the original parochialism of the moral senses enough to explain the hatred and violence that "we" may direct against "them." Moral particularism may account for *indifference* toward others but not hatred. There may be more of a tendency toward anger and resentment, cruelty and depravity, which is more universal among human beings, more powerfully aided by such moral senses as "justice" and "duty," and more frequently directed against our loved ones as well as against strangers, than Wilson cares to admit.

Such an objection does not, however, diminish my admiration for this wise and lucid book written against the spirit of our age. *The Moral Sense* is a powerful reminder of our nature as moral beings and of the responsibility of families, schools, and governments to foster its development.

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