

The New Natural Philosophers

"The New Darwinian Naturalism in Political Theory" by Larry Arnhart, in *American Political Science Review* (June 1995), American Political Science Assn., 1527 New Hampshire Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Most modern political theorists, like social scientists in general, reject out of hand the possibility that human behavior—as well as morality—has roots in biology. Nature, they insist, is nothing next to nurture in the for-

mation of human beings.

But recently, writes Arnhart, a professor of political science at Northern Illinois University, political scientists such as Robert J. McShea, author of *Morality and Human Nature* (1990), and James Q. Wilson, author of *The Moral Sense* (1993), have been reasserting the importance of biology—and reopening some fundamental debates.

"One of the most pervasive assumptions in the social sciences," Arnhart writes, "is that there is an unbridgeable gap between *is* and *ought*." What is belongs to nature; what

A Catholic Atheist

In *The Sewanee Review* (Winter 1995), John McCormick, author of *George Santayana: A Biography* (1987), describes the philosopher's religious beliefs.

Santayana was born in Madrid in 1863 and was baptized a Catholic. From age nine to age 49, he lived in Boston as a boy, then in Cambridge, where at Harvard he was both student and finally professor of moral philosophy. Skeptical by nature and preference, he attended Catholic services from his early days more as admirer than as believer. Several of his earliest writings and reviews concerned religious questions; their contents were included and expanded in Interpretations of Poetry and Religion (1900). Here, and in his many later philosophical and autobiographical writings, Santayana revealed himself, at least to my reading, as a Catholic atheist, a position I found comprehensible, sympathetic, and almost rational.

Central to Santayana's position is his belief that religious doctrines do not refer to matters of fact, since they are poetic, the work of the imagination, not a product of revelation. The proper task of religion is to express an ideal, and when liberals seek to reinforce religion by forcing it into synchrony with popular contemporary modes, its symbols are vulgarized and impoverished. Hence, I thought, the contrast be-

tween medieval and Renaissance painting and architecture, and the ugly painted plaster saints of modern Catholicism, housed in churches outstanding for their inappropriateness. And the contrast between the Latin mass and its music and the current Reader's Digest translations, against the background of "I'm Hangin' Out With Jesus" on a guitar, was appalling. Santayana did not oppose religion, in the manner of the ideologists of atheism, but he continued to insist on the moral function of the imagination and the poetic nature of religion. Poetry and religion, he wrote, "enhance emotional life and make articulate public conscience, family and national spirit." Without poetry and religion our history would have been even darker than it is. Without imagination the soul is chilled, and even clear perceptions of truth remain deprived of joy and "the impetuosity of conviction." As he became fully grounded in his materialism and his conviction of our animal nature, Santayana would modify some of his "humanism" of 1900; but he never abandoned his early position concerning the aesthetic origins and satisfactions of religious observances.

ought to be is a product of reason. Often mistakenly attributed to David Hume, this dualistic view was formulated by Immanuel Kant, who used it as an argument against the sort of ethical naturalism developed by Hume. "If we agree with Kant that the 'moral ought' belongs to an utterly autonomous realm of human experience that transcends the natural world," Arnhart notes, "then we would have to say that any move from human nature to human morality is mistaken. But if we agree with Hume that moral obligation is grounded in natural human sentiments or desires, then we would have to say that human morality must be rooted in human nature."

Thus, James Q. Wilson—taking cues from Aristotle and Hume as well as Charles Darwin and modern genetic science—argues that natural selection may have promoted a psychological propensity to "attachment" or "affiliation," which enhanced reproductive fitness by inclining parents to care for their young. Out of this natural phenomenon, in Wilson's view, grew more generalized sentiments of "sympathy" and "benevolence," which form the basis of abstract ideas about ethics. Human values, Robert McShea maintains, arise from reflections on *natural* human feelings. If that is so, Arnhart says, then there is no absolute gap between *is* and *ought*.

"Kant's primary argument for a radical separation of the natural *is* and the moral *ought*," he observes, was that all moral judg-

ment required "freedom of the will." Moral freedom was freedom *from* nature. But for Aristotle, Hume, and Darwin, Arnhart points out, "the uniqueness of human beings as moral agents requires not a free will that transcends nature but a natural capacity to deliberate about one's desires." If choice is what matters, he says, then there is no absolute gap between nature and freedom.

In practical terms, accepting the biological origins of moral thought opens many doors. Instead of an absolute gap between nature and nurture, there is a complex interplay between them. Many psychologists assume that the effects of parental care on children demonstrate that nurture is more important in human development than nature. But Arnhart notes that recent research in behavioral genetics (largely based on adoption and twin studies) "indicates how the natural temperament of the child shapes the social environment. . . . Successful parenting is not the imposition of external norms on the child but the cultivation of the child's innate potential."

The false dichotomies between facts and values, freedom and nature, and nurture and nature, Arnhart says, have kept the social sciences separate from the natural sciences. If the new Darwinian naturalists carry the day, he concludes, then social science "could become once again—as it was for Aristotle, Hume, and Darwin—the science of human nature."

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

The Science of Sex Differences

"Sex Differences in Mental Test Scores, Variability, and Numbers of High-Scoring Individuals" by Larry V. Hedges and Amy Nowell, in *Science* (July 7, 1995), 1333 H St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

More men than women do extremely well on intelligence tests. Does that mean the average

man is smarter than the average woman? Not at all, say Hedges, a professor of education at the University of Chicago, and Nowell, a graduate student there. But the disparity may pose problems for efforts to equalize the number of male and female scientists.

Six national surveys of adolescents and young adults conducted between 1960 and 1992 generally showed little difference in the