
bery that sees only money-grubbing commerce in America. To the contrary, he saw a positive, enterprising spirit with the potential to apply America's wealth to the task of educating America's taste.

Anyone familiar with Starr's superb *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (1985) may expect *Bamboula!* to extend the earlier book's thesis that a commercial culture provides a healthy environment for the arts. *Red and Hot* illustrates the difference between the deadly "people's cultures" designed for the masses by their totalitarian masters and the rich popular culture that developed in the more-or-less free marketplace of America, giving rise to jazz among other musical glories.

Yet Starr's sympathy for commerce remains strangely muted in *Bamboula!*, possibly out of reluctance to pass final judgment

on Gottschalk the composer. Unfortunately, this reluctance means that Starr stops short of assessing Gottschalk's proper place in the history of Western music. But Starr does make it clear that even if the greatest strength of Gottschalk's music was a rhythmic force lost with live performance, his place should not be forgotten. Indeed, now that young musicians routinely gain fluency in both the European and the Afro-American idioms, a swinging revival of Gottschalk's music may be in store. Beyond that possibility, the life of this forgotten eccentric, this failed aesthete, sheds real light on how the music and culture of the last century gave rise to the perplexities of our own.

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How Beastly Our Beatitudes?

THE MORAL ANIMAL: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life. By Robert Wright. Pantheon. 467 pp. \$27.50

THE HUNGRY SOUL: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature. By Leon Kass. Free Press. 248 pp. \$24.95

What can the study of nature, and, above all, of human nature, teach us about how we ought to live? According to both Robert Wright and Leon Kass, the answer is clear: a great deal. Such an answer marks a valuable turning away from the dominant assumptions of an age that, believing in the moral silence of an indifferent nature and the moral neutrality of objective science, sees human nature as nearly infinitely malleable and solely shaped by social forces. Both Wright and

Kass are convinced that such a mistaken view of human nature, fostered by our social and natural sciences, is in part responsible for the moral confusions from which we suffer today. By their willingness to examine human nature, both authors return us to the originating Socratic question of our philosophical tradition.

Yet, beyond that common purpose, Wright and Kass can agree on very little because they look for human nature in opposite directions. Wright, gazing backward at our evolutionary past, constructs just-so stories of how our natural tendencies may have *come into being*; Kass, "taking human nature as we find it," explores its *current* meaning and its possible improvement through custom and culture. Which approach, then, is the correct one? Which ac-

count is more illuminating and compelling?

In *The Moral Animal*, Wright, a senior editor of the *New Republic* and a highly respected science writer, seeks to popularize the new science of "evolutionary psychology." This science, as he explains, is the study of human mental and moral traits as evolved devices for the maximization of genetic fitness. To Wright, evolutionary psychology constitutes a breakthrough in our scientific understanding of human nature. Its practitioners have discovered that we are really machines endowed with a common set of emotional "knobs" (love, guilt, hatred, empathy, etc.), the "exact tunings" of which are determined "by a generic, species-wide developmental program that absorbs information from the social environment and adjusts the maturing mind accordingly." The underlying biology of these knobs and tunings is to pass on as many copies of our genes as possible to subsequent generations by flooding our psyches with feelings, impulses, and judgments that will motivate us to act as natural selection "wants" us to act.

Wright believes this perspective has profound implications for our moral and political lives. "Can a Darwinian understanding of human nature help people reach their goals in life?" he asks. Can it help us choose properly from among our many impulses and goals, distinguishing the practical from the impractical, the legitimate from the illegitimate, and the worthy from the unworthy? "The answers," Wright boldly asserts, are "yes, yes, yes, and finally yes."

Wright's aims, however, go well beyond information and instruction. This book is, as he puts it, "a sales pitch for a new science . . . [and] for a new basis of political and moral philosophy." Such candor is welcome, but, as with any "sales pitch," readers should be wary of false promises and flashy packaging that conceal the same old contents. If we strip away the label of "evolutionary psychology" in *The Moral Animal*, we find "sociobiology" printed underneath. The name has been changed for marketing purposes

because, as Wright notes, the harsh criticisms of sociobiology's flaws had made the word too "tainted" for use. In some respects, *The Moral Animal* is an updated version of E. O. Wilson's *On Human Nature* (1979) and Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1976), complete with their reductionism, exaggerated determinism, and moral confusion.

For Wright, as for his predecessors, "everything that matters" about us, both high and low, is just a "device" designed by our "creator"—that "ingenious craftsman," natural selection. Romance and rape, honesty and deception, humility and social climbing are all part of our genetically constructed psychological repertoire that we employ as circumstances demand to enhance our genetic fitness. Sympathy for others is an "investment" aimed at long-term genetic returns; the grief of parents over the death of an adolescent child is just regret over lost "assets." Adultery is no vice and fidelity no virtue but simply the appropriate sexual strategies for different circumstances. Even the teachings of Jesus, Buddha, and Lao-tzu are merely ideologies serving their own personal social status and hence genetic interests.

Wright knows no bounds in his unmaskings, except for his own efforts, of course. But what follows from such a perspective? What of the behavioral insights and moral guidance Wright has promised? While Wright does succeed in demonstrating the fallacy of equating a Darwinian perspective with conservative politics, the implications and insights he offers tend to be either trivial or contradictory. Do we really need evolutionary psychology to tell us that human beings are often selfish and hypocritical and that our moral sense is often self-serving, or to learn that women in poor communities are more amenable to sex without commitment? If his analysis of Darwin's personality, which is presented as a "test of the explanatory power" of the new doctrine, culminates in the "verdict" that "he was a product of his environment," what have we gained?

Wright's attempts at moral guidance are even more problematic, not because they are unworthy but because his moral preferences, however admirable, are at odds with the theory that is supposed to sanction them. He fills hundreds of pages describing human beings as "robots," "puppets," "machines," and "Swiss watches" programmed by natural selection—a natural selection that he manages to endow with all the qualities of ingenuity, reason, and creativity that he denies to human beings. How then can he argue that "there is no reason to derive our values from natural selection's 'values'" because we are now free to choose our moral ideals? If "biochemistry governs all," how can we reflect on this "fact" and its underlying "value" (genetic fitness) and reject them both? Where do these non-evolutionary values come from and how are we to choose them if free will, as Wright tells us repeatedly, is sheer illusion, an illusion we can choose to abandon?

Wright recognizes that evolutionary psychology's unmasking of all thoughts and feelings as genetically programmed "investment strategies" may have a corrosive effect on our moral principles and social order through the cynicism, relativism, and despair that it seems to nourish. To escape such a prospect, he proposes a return to 19th-century utilitarianism as a natural moral ground upon which our lives are to be reconstructed. Leaving aside the problems with utilitarianism as a moral philosophy, how can Wright argue that Darwinism leads us in the direction of a non-hypocritical "brotherly love" and "boundless empathy" which truly recognizes that "everyone's happiness counts equally," when he has already told us that Darwinism unmasks such feelings as mere devices "switched on and off in keeping with self-interest"? If natural selection is "a creative process devoted to selfishness" and has "programmed" us accordingly, why wouldn't our understanding of this "fact" lead us to honest and self-conscious genetic selfishness instead? In short, Wright's utili-

tarianism requires a leap of faith, the very possibility of which his own theory denies. Faced with such contradictions, many readers will, I fear, find more grounds for rationalizing their moral failings and brutal interests than for their "love of humanity."

Kass's *Hungry Soul* is a powerful antidote to works such as Wright's that attempt to reduce living beings to mere machines. Kass may not have any breakthroughs to sell, but he has crafted a splendid and thoughtful essay. Through an examination of human eating, he sheds valuable light on the distinctiveness of human nature and how it is to be nurtured and perfected.

To Kass, a medical doctor by training, reductive accounts of our nature are "unnatural" because they ignore the reality of our *lived experience*. They are also "ethically subversive" because they discredit the moral sentiments, aspirations, and teachings by which we have attempted to guide our lives. Kass's "more natural science" aims at recapturing that lived experience, both our own and that preserved in "our accumulated moral and cultural wisdom."

Kass presents a fascinating account of human eating and the various taboos, customs, manners, and rituals surrounding it, to show what these reveal about ourselves. Even the eating behavior of animals requires that they possess the ability to recognize and respond to inner needs, sense the outer presence of what is needed, and act to incorporate it. In simple organisms such as bacteria, these powers may be experienced "automatically," without deliberation or conscious intention." But in complex organisms, such as mammals, the "nascent self" becomes more fully developed as the organism gathers and processes more information and coordinates more complex actions to satisfy its needs. In humans, consciously felt need and consciously directed actions generate a "realm of freedom" from automatic control by instinct or biochemistry, a "free-

dom" which is qualitatively different from other animals' experience.

Transformed into "hunger" and "craving," our metabolic needs stimulate both imagination and reason, which enable us to pursue satisfactions that may range far beyond physiological need, even to the point of harming our health. We come to eat for pleasure and not simply for nutrition and find pleasure in meals as diverse as an Atlantic City buffet or the Japanese delicacy of pufferfish, whose lethal poison, tetrodotoxin, rewards thrill-seeking gourmets with either euphoria or death.

But just as these "pleasures of the palate can be pursued as ends in themselves," so too may the other pleasures of the table that accompany them—conversation, fellowship, and refinement—which may ultimately become the real focus of the meal. Every step along the complex path by which our species satisfies its nutritional need, from planting crops to the preparation of food, requires faculties and pleasures of mind that can be applied beyond, and even against, the demands of our stomachs to satisfy our yearnings for understanding and meaning. With reason and imagination we can thus track down and capture an animal larger and swifter than ourselves and then worship rather than roast it.

Here, in the play of manners and cuisine, we see the ultimate inadequacy of reductive evolutionary accounts of our nature that explain divergence from adaptive value as a "malfunction." Wright acknowledges this inadequacy in the appendix to his book when he tries to explain the development of human homosexuality, a pattern of sexual behavior that defies evolutionary logic. Homosexual behavior points instead, Wright says, to "the malleability of the human mind" and a "general principle" of life: "Once natural selection has created a form of gratification—genital stimulation, in this case—that form can come to serve other functions."

Wright's intellectual honesty here is laudable, but by acknowledging the freedom and openness of human possibility, he is contradicting the argument of his work.

For Kass, it is precisely this potential freedom "to serve other functions" that constitutes our distinctive nature as a "moral animal" because of the possibilities for virtue and perversion that it opens up. How then to choose from the vast range of the possible—and choose we must—that which is better, while avoiding that which is worse? Kass proposes that our understanding of nature can serve as a "suggestive teacher." Those customs, laws, and beliefs—such as the ones surrounding civilized dining—that restrain the purely animal while cultivating the distinctively human qualities of intellect, self-command, civility, and reverence are "truer" and "better" than those that fail to do so.

As a guide to our inescapably moral lives, this image of human nature—human nature in the Aristotelian sense of what we can grow into, rather than what we have grown out of—may be imperfect. We may certainly disagree about which customs, laws, and beliefs best cultivate that distinctive human nature, but Kass has succeeded brilliantly in reminding us of who we really are so that we may endeavor to act accordingly. At a minimum, Kass's reminder enables us to reject images of our nature, such as those celebrated in evolutionary psychology, that are neither true nor good. In an age when such false images encourage our embrace of genetic reprogramming and biochemical manipulation, this in itself is a remarkable and valuable achievement.

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