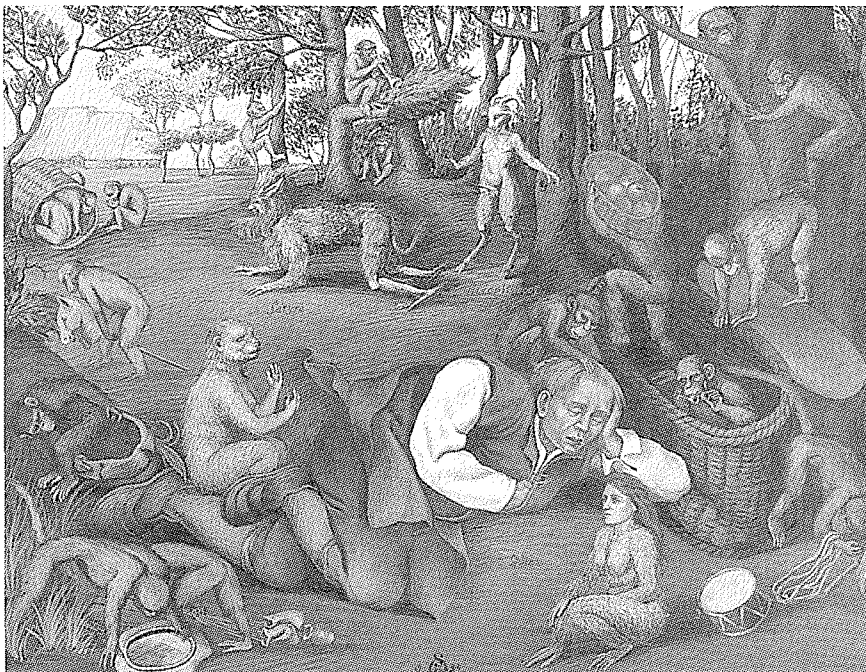


THE RETURN OF HUMAN NATURE

Since World War II, the academy has been the site of more than a few heated intellectual debates. None has been more passionate than the one set off by efforts to apply the bio-evolutionary perspective to human behavior. Even while provoking vicious criticism, the new applications of Darwinian principles—whether called sociobiology, biosociology, or evolutionary psychology—have shed valuable, and appreciated, light on everything from violence to sexist practices. The debate, however, is far from over. The very notion of an underlying human nature flies in the face of contemporary postmodernist theories held dear by many intellectuals and artists. Here we offer a history of the modern human nature debate, as seen by two participants.



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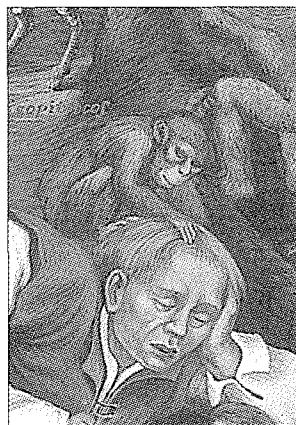
My Life in the Human Nature Wars

by Lionel Tiger

For venturing to explore the role of biology in our social lives, I have had more than my share of interesting moments. In addition to slander and calumny—depressingly standard fare in the academy today—I have received bomb threats at lectures in Vancouver and Montreal and the promise of a “kneecapping” at the New School for Social Research in New York. I have been the object of a demonstration of angry male transvestites at the Royal Institution in London, and I have seen one of the books I co-authored, *The Imperial Animal*, compared to *Mein Kampf*! All in a day’s work, you might say, though some 35 years’ is closer to the truth.

If the toll exacted by my career has occasionally been steep, it has been well worth the price to be able to participate in the most consequential intellectual debate of our time, a debate that goes back at least to Charles Darwin and the mid-19th-century publication of his magnificent and scandal-provoking theory of natural selection.

The main antagonists then were scientists and clerics. The former thought Darwin’s theory explained a great deal about nature and possibly even human nature. The latter considered it a rebuke to stories of divine creation as well as a potential threat to their power to define reality. But in recent years, the argument over the influence of biology on human society has been far more raucous within



science itself, particularly within the social sciences.

The evolving “biosocial” view that I have helped pioneer poses a direct challenge to some of the premises of 20th-century social science—and by extension, the cherished beliefs of many intellectuals and reformers. Foremost among these is the assumption that human beings and their institutions have largely transcended the biological constraints that govern the animal world, and, accordingly, that humans are all but free to make the worlds they choose.

I had not originally set out for such contentious territory. In fact, I took only the most conventional (that is, biology-free) courses toward my first two degrees at McGill University in Montreal, where I had been born and raised in the Jewish quarter immortalized by Mordecai Richler’s novels. Perhaps the closest I came to biology in my childhood were the featured herring in my father’s small grocery. Their immodest aroma joined with the waxing and waning of items in the produce section to alert me to the facts of seasonality and the reality of genuine physical decay. The one biology course McGill demanded I take, complete with ritual dissection of frog limbs and organs, confirmed my lack of interest in nonhuman life forms. At the time (the late 1950s), my energies were far more strongly directed toward student journalism and the local literary and political scenes, which included such figures of later fame as Leonard

Cohen and Pierre Trudeau.

After completing my master's degree at McGill with a thesis on the links between scientists and administrators in a research institute, I enrolled at the London School of Economics and turned to doctoral work on decolonization in Africa, a process I had witnessed earlier on a summer fellowship to Ghana and Nigeria. The focus of my research in 1960—the colonial service of Ghana as it became the newly independent nation's civil service—came with a bonus: it allowed me to study the colorful Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president and a seminal figure in postcolonial African history.

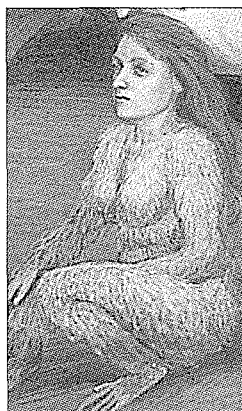
What I specifically wanted to determine was whether Max Weber's theory of the "routinization of charisma"—the process by which the almost magical power of the great leader is subtly but decisively transformed into the mechanisms of bureaucratic authority—applied to the political realities of newly independent Ghana. My research led me to a phrase in Weber's work that presumably reflected his desire to see sociology become an authoritative science. It is at the same time a surprising comment given the rest of his scholarship, and remains almost wholly ignored by those who mine his work. Weber wrote that charisma was especially difficult to understand and that "within the narrow limits of sociology" was comprehensible only "in its imperceptible transition to the biology."

Why, I wondered, was one of the founding fathers of sociology conceding so much ground to biology? I was intrigued for two reasons. First, the differences between Canadians and Ghanaians struck me as far less interesting and important than their similarities. Second, in West Africa in 1960–61, I became aware of the work of such figures as Raymond Dart and Louis Leakey then underway in southern Africa concerning hominid fossils and what they implied about our longevity as a species. It appeared we were a much older species than we had thought. Not only that, the breaking of the DNA codes in the early 1950s provided a way of understanding how very complex information about living systems could be passed from gener-

ation to generation.

Natural science seemed to be throwing up other teasing clues. Emergent long-term research in East Africa on primates in the wild revealed the complexity of their social systems. Just as William Foote Whyte in his extraordinary *Street Corner Society* (1943) had shown the previously overlooked intricacy of social life in an American working-class neighborhood, so primatologists such as John Crook and Jean and Stuart Altmann now identified rules and patterns behind primate hierarchies, matrilineal groups, socialization, and sexuality. And as primatologists became more sophisticated in their research techniques, they became increasingly aware of the importance of individual differences among animals of the same species. Suddenly, almost as if in a thrilling conspiracy, science was offering us an unexpected insight into nonhuman social complexity and the existence of "personality differences" among individual animals.

Here was a fundamental challenge to the accepted wisdom of social scientists. The dominant orthodoxy of the time was that only humans displayed ongoing and intelligent agency as opposed to the reflexive "instinctive" behavior of animals. Humans could fashion immensely variable and sophisticated social systems, but other species could sustain only relatively automatic patterns of group behavior. This remarkably rigid system of intellectual apartheid went almost completely unexamined. No major doctoral program in social science required or even encouraged its students to become familiar with the lives and systems of other species. To the contrary, the formal distinction between natural and social science was seen as self-evidently correct. And the implication was



that somehow social behavior was not natural and could not be analyzed with the same lens used to inspect other animals.

But new questions threatened the old boundaries. Was there a common human nature? Could we return to the concerns of the 19th century about that nature? What did it mean that there appeared to be a natural substrate, rooted in genetics, of complex animal social behavior? Did this substrate also extend to humans? Or did our kind of DNA, combined with the rich tapestry of our culture, secure us a fully distinct and privileged exemption from the rules governing the rest of nature?

A book that pulled much of this inquiry together in a lively but honest way was Robert Ardrey's *African Genesis* (1961), which I devoured when I laid hands on it in London in 1962. Ardrey was a Chicago-born playwright and screenwriter who, after a Broadway failure, sought solace in a *Life* magazine assignment that took him to southern Africa to learn about the archaeology and biology that was beginning to attract the attention of a few alert scientists. His path-breaking book influenced many people looking for new directions in biology and social science, and in their relationship. Ardrey's accomplishment, unique at the time, was to integrate findings in studies of human evolution, animal behavior, and the long archaeological and historical record. Not all readers were thrilled by the resulting synthesis. Some social scientists strongly objected to its emphasis on the role of aggression in evolution and its challenge to the then-orthodoxy that *Homo sapiens* originated in Asia. "Not in innocence, and not in Asia, was Man born" was Ardrey's defiant opening line.

Inspired by Ardrey's boldness and cogency, I finished my thesis on bureaucracy and charisma in Ghana and included Weber's note about charisma and biology in the concluding chapter. The members of my thesis committee, distinguished social scientists all, approved my thesis for publication on the condition that I remove

some "offensive" pages dealing with Weber's "lapse" about charisma and a few others in which I discussed primate political systems and the potential role of biology in social science. Though it was an unexpected irritation, the committee's censorship was a clue to something rotten in the state of scholarship.

What I had come up against, I later realized, was the hegemony of behaviorism. A doctrine with deep and varied roots, it goes back at least as far as John Locke's notion that human beings begin their mental lives as blank slates and are formed, morally and socially as well as intellectually, by the sum of all subsequent sense impressions. By this logic, environment, and environment alone, makes the human.

The doctrine acquired formal scholarly shape in the early 20th century, notably in the work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. His *Rules of Sociological Method* (published in English in 1938) established the unacceptability of using a biological or even a psychological explanation for social behavior when a sociological one would do. To violate this principle was to succumb to "reductionism," the supreme sin in Durkheim's catechism.

In the United States, the most forceful advocates of the doctrine were the social scientists Franz Boas and John T. Watson. Emphasizing the principle of cultural relativism, they pointed to the enormous variety of existing social patterns as proof that nearly any other social arrangement was possible as well. From his base at Columbia University, Franz Boas introduced a generation of anthropologists, including Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, to the orthodox view.

But the triumph of behaviorism was more than an intellectual matter. After Nazism tainted all efforts to bring genetics and other biological considerations into the study of human beings and their collective lives, the behaviorist position occupied the moral high ground as well. The ambient liberal progressivism of the academy in the early postwar period all but assured the dominance of the doctrine.

> LIONEL TIGER is Darwin Professor of Anthropology at Rutgers University. He is author, co-author, or editor of 10 books dealing with biosociology, the most recent of which is *The Pursuit of Pleasure* (1992). Copyright © 1996 by Lionel Tiger.

Despite my thesis committee's best efforts to keep me on the straight and narrow, my interest in the potential uses of the biological perspective did not wane when I took my first job, teaching political sociology at the University of British Columbia, in 1963. I was still eager to connect with that invisible college of scholars—Konrad Lorenz, Raymond Dart, and Sherwood Washburn, among others—to whose work Ardrey's book had alerted me.

In 1965, I had the opportunity to work directly with some of this college, including one of the brighter young lights, the anthropologist Robin Fox, who would become a close friend, colleague, and collaborator. The occasion was a symposium organized by Julian Huxley at the Zoological Society of London. I had been invited to be social scientist in residence by Desmond Morris, then still curator of mammals. Shortly after being introduced, Fox and I withdrew to his office at the

London School of Economics and, after a few days' discussion, penned a brief and impudent paper on the deadness of most social science and the vitality of contemporary biology. Our proposed solution to this state of affairs was to bring the disciplines together. "The Zoological Perspective in Social Science" appeared a few months later in *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. But a paper seemed inadequate to the severity and scope of the problem. We resolved one day to take up the subject in a book.

Back in British Columbia, I returned to a question that had earlier captured my attention: sex and politics. As a graduate student, I had read Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1953) and been completely convinced by its argument that inequalities between men and women were thoroughly entrenched throughout Western society. Turning to research in

my own field, I found the reigning theories on discrimination and antifemale bias only partly convincing.

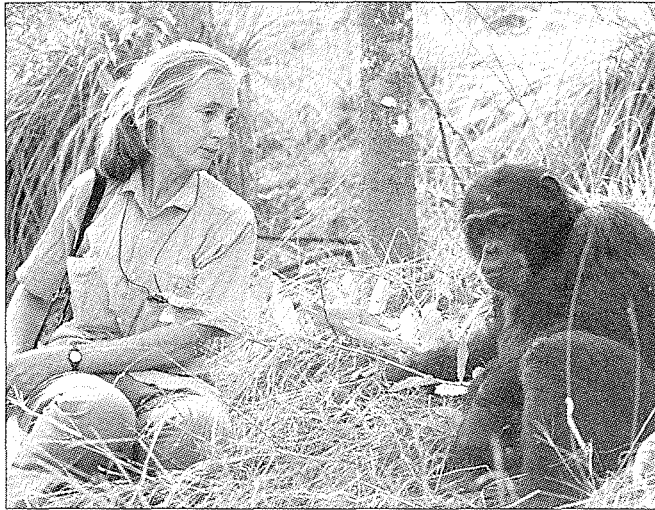
Far more promising, I thought, was the work of such scientists as Jane Goodall, Desmond Morris, and Irven DeVore, who were learning that other animals, including primates, had social and political systems marked by equally sharp distinctions between males and females. We knew, too, that primates sustained these divisions without benefit of the cultural conditioning considered the overwhelming cause of



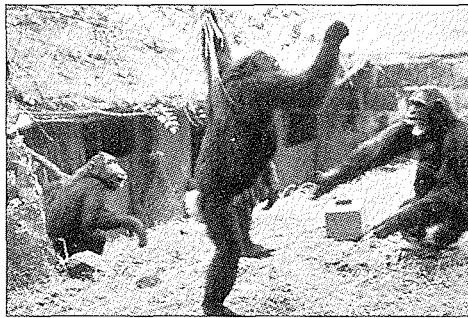
Robin Fox (left) and Lionel Tiger at work on *The Imperial Animal*.

the human pattern. Primates had no magazines, no *Father Knows Best* on television, no cultural stereotypes, no patriarchal legal and religious systems. Furthermore, the human cross-cultural record was impressively consistent on the subject of male-female differences in political as well as other behavior. This was in fact precisely one of the major grievances expressed by early feminist writers. Did the primate data and the consistent human record suggest we had to look again for deeper causes of sexual politics?

By then I had some interest in the relatively simple matter of how human males related to each other in basic ways. Virtually no research had been done with humans on the subject, even though we already knew that other primates engaged in what I called "male bonding" and that the coalitions between males were as important for politics and defense as male-female bonds were for reproduction.



Jane Goodall's work with chimpanzees helped to illuminate the complexity of primate societies—and to show that chimp behavior, both aggressive and cooperative, was not entirely different from that of humans.



(Later we would learn from Jane Goodall, Jean Altmann, and others how important female-female bonds were for social integration and stability.)

In *Men in Groups* (1969), I put forth my hypothesis about the evolutionary basis of the cross-cultural regularity of male bonds and groups. At first, the work met with an open and even receptive response—and with sales that astonished no one more than its author. Having intended it to be an academic book, I had signed a contract to write a popular version for a series edited by Alex Comfort in England. That proved unnecessary. The book took off, first in Canada and then in the United States. It made the *New York Times* best-seller list for a brief moment, was translated into seven languages, and was hailed by Robert Ardrey in *Life* as “the most creative contribution to the social sciences since David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd*.”

But there were ominous developments as well. An anthropologist reviewing the book for *Science* compared my search for a

biological element in human behavior to the early Greeks’ enthusiasm for that ubiquitous all-purpose substance, phlogiston. Other reactions were more directly hostile. A near-riot broke out when I appeared on *The David Frost Show* in 1969 in New York, and angry feminists staged a noisy demonstration outside *Maclean’s Magazine* in Toronto when an article about *Men in Groups* appeared as the cover story of the June 1969 issue.

Despite the hue and cry, the phrase “male bonding” quickly passed into the popular discourse, possibly because it accounted for clearly observable patterns in male behavior, from weekly gatherings for bowling to Pall Mall clubs in London to the secret societies of Sierra Leone. Now it is hardly possible to read a review of a movie for the 18-to-24-year-old set without seeing the phrase, and I am told women use it to categorize irritating behavior of the men they know.

The anger left me troubled, though. I had been stunned by the sharp political reactions to the book, some delivered with almost lethal fury. Embracing a liberal

political stance very common among Canadian academics, I regarded myself as a feminist. It seemed to me that the firmness and pervasiveness of obstacles women faced in human communities were serious indeed. I thought I had identified the depth of the issue, even its possible basis in an elemental primate struggle for dominance. It seemed clear to me that unusually fundamental social changes such as quota systems and remedial legislation would be necessary to achieve sexual equity in what was obviously a rapidly changing industrial system. Robin Fox thought the main resistance to the book would come from men because I had revealed one hitherto concealed source of their hegemony, one of their precious trade secrets.

But the resistance was two-headed and different. Women thought I was advertising a version of the Freudian view that biology was destiny and that therefore they should accept a barefoot-and-pregnant image of female behavior. Social scientists had been burned before by the crude connection of biology to social policy. Now they saw any effort to introduce biology into social science as a perilous echo of Nazism and a goad to potentially genocidal racism. And the work of such towering anthropological figures as Bronislaw Malinowski, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead was a substantial contribution to our knowledge of human variety and a stimulus to a wholesome kind of cultural relativism that did not equate social value with economic might.

These were reasonably cautious responses to a rather large hypothesis with wide ramifications. They came from a far higher level of intellectual and scientific integrity than did the subsequent broad and vicious ideological attacks of assorted barons of politically correct and "progressive" science. The reasoned responses were the ones to which I tried to respond carefully and fairly. Above all, I tried to make clear in my teaching and writing that a diagnosis is not a recommendation and that because something "is," and is natural, is no reason that "ought" should follow. After all, my demonstration of how

male bonding works could be used very profitably by women who wanted not only to understand men's organizational behavior but also to build networks to promote their own political and economic advantage. And many women have done so.

My early failure to anticipate the errors and enormities that would be imputed to my work placed me in somewhat the same position E. O. Wilson found himself after his masterful *Sociobiology* (1975) appeared. Attacked by the Marxist Science for People group, whose ranks included his Harvard University colleagues Richard Lewontin and Stephen Jay Gould, Wilson saw his work pilloried as "a genetic justification of the status quo of existing privileges for certain groups according to class, race, or sex."

His and my situations were no doubt made more difficult by the passions stirred up by the Vietnam War, passions that had largely driven civil discourse from American public life, especially from university campuses. Virtually all controversies in those years—particularly those related in any way to science, technology, and the despised technocracy—partook of the almost demonic fury that had been unleashed by a surrealistically awful war.

One's own personal political convictions made no difference. In 1971 Warren Farrell, who then worked for the National Organization for Women, asked me to debate Kate Millett, author of *Sexual Politics* (1970). I declined on the grounds that I agreed with much of Millett's agenda, but I proposed instead that we participate in a discussion. She refused. Clearly a civil intellectual exchange was not what she wanted or even thought possible with someone so far beyond the culturalist pale as was I.

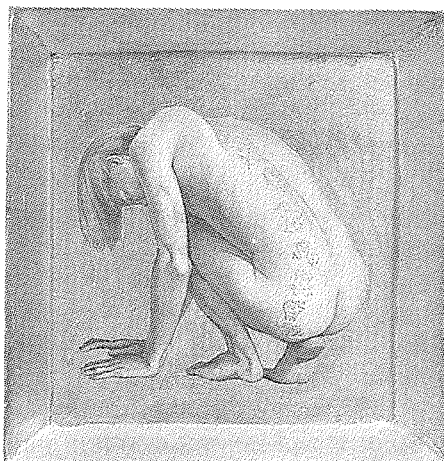
If the largely political responses to my biosocial assertions were shortsighted and even narrow-minded, they were nevertheless understandable as the heartfelt response of certain agitated citizens. What was not forgivable or even comprehensible was the view expressed by social and natural scientists that the introduction of biology into human social science was, *ab initio*, wrong.

Evidently the law of parsimony had been repealed. Finding ever more basic explanations of causality in nature is, of course, the glory of science. But not in social science, apparently. Anyone who tried to obey the law was clearly suspect, especially when it came to sexual issues.

Even before we became colleagues at Rutgers University in 1969, Robin Fox and I had agreed that this was a dangerous state of affairs, politically and scientifically. Working together in the newly created anthropology department that he chaired, we decided to start work on the book we had earlier contemplated. Fox would contribute his expertise on kinship, having written one of the classic books on the subject, *Kinship and Marriage* (1967), and I would bring in what I knew about state structures, bureaucracy, and the like.

While I can't speak for Fox, I think it is fair to characterize our approach in *The Imperial Animal* (1971) as aggressively synthetic and radical with respect to our own academic traditions. Essentially, we wanted to draw a plausible picture of human nature that accorded with materials from the study of evolution, other animals, human physiology and cognition, and the cross-cultural record.

Searching for an organizing framework, we came across Noam Chomsky's hypothesis of a "universal grammar" for language. Chomsky claimed that the necessary neural equipment for language and some of the core operating "hard-wiring" was part of the human genetic make-up. People might learn different languages, but they would do so using a common program for language with which all children are born. How else could inexperienced children acquire such phenomenal skill at such a demanding task? They could because they were born with the rules, a "universal grammar," in their heads.



Detail from *Atavism* (1994), by Suzanne Scherer and Pavel Ouporov

We called our behavioral grammar the "biogrammar." Before publication, we sent a description of the use of his concept to Chomsky, who remarked in a warm return letter that while we had misused his minor point about deep structure, he was in accord with our approach. Furthermore, he allowed that he viewed that

approach as "the only possible non-trivial approach to social science." And if language, again a relatively recent human characteristic, was linked to a biosocial substrate, it seemed all the more likely that earlier behaviors such as politics, sexuality, nurturance, and grooming were also anchored in a phylogenetic history to which the discovery of DNA had given a technical foundation.

The book was well reviewed, sold briskly, and found its way into eight other languages. (Konrad Lorenz's gratifyingly supportive introduction to the German edition was added to all subsequent editions.) Partly on its merits, Fox and I were asked by the H. F. Guggenheim Foundation to direct research support to people studying causes of violence and inequality. Because Guggenheim was almost unique among foundations in thinking such phenomena were biologically grounded, we were able to underwrite the efforts of a disparate but commonly driven group of scientists and scholars who otherwise would have gone wanting for support. It was a rewarding 12-year experience.

As exhilarating in another way was the nastiness the book occasioned. A rump assembly of radical anthropologists at its annual meeting debated the proposal of one of its constituent groups, the all-female Ruth Benedict Collective, that (1) there be no Stalinism in the women's movement and (2) that Fox and Tiger be

forbidden to speak at any American campus. In the *New Statesman* in London, Maureen Duffy made the famous comparison of our book to *Mein Kampf*. The *American Anthropologist*, having received a positive review, sought another from a known opponent of our position and ran both of them—the last review of any of my publications in that journal of anthropological record. Sir Edmund Leach of Cambridge University produced a characteristically inept assessment for the British journal *New Society* in which, among other things, he accused us not only of ignoring the work of someone who had been in our department for two years but also of overlooking a relevant thesis on kibbutz incest written (the ever-solipsistic Sir Edmund failed to register) by our first Rutgers doctoral student.

Understandably, Fox and I were largely unimpressed by the quality and balance of the response we had from many social scientists. We became more convinced than ever that the issue was not the book itself but its challenge to the jurisdictional boundaries of the academy—a new version of arguments about the soul and the body.

For all the attacks, however, the book and the science it reflected were now part of the international game. The intellectual discourse was changing. Opponents of our view were moving ever more firmly away from empirical natural science and toward the chilling nihilism of poststructuralism and deconstruction, where all descriptions of reality are held to be subjective, culturally biased, and politically motivated.

The opposition was determined not only to banish the notion of objectivity but to further isolate humankind from its connections with the natural order. As Alexander Argyros of the University of Texas shrewdly observed, such scholars were creationists of a special kind: they had no God, but they had an unshakable faith in radical human exceptionalism in the scheme of nature. That faith in turn supported much of their fuzzy utopian thinking.

The impulse behind utopianism and other forms of idealism is not a trivial mat-

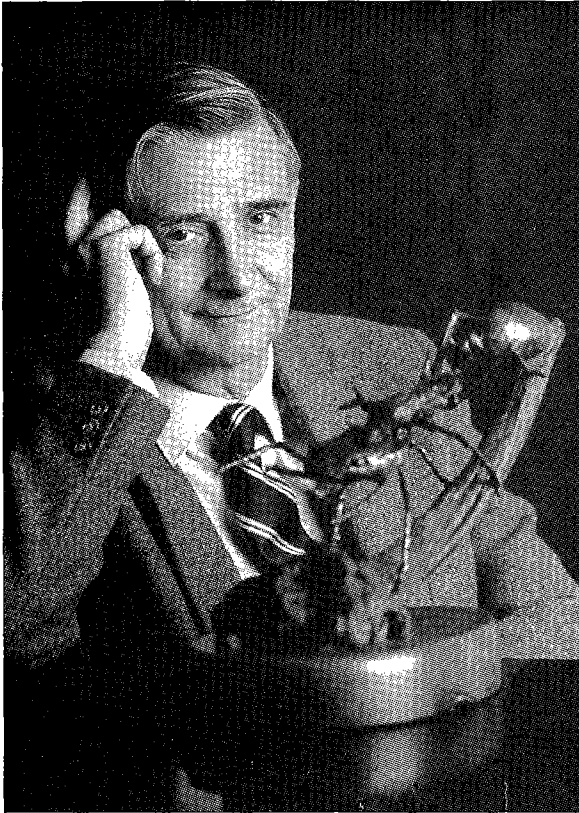
ter. I would treat it directly in a later book, *Optimism: The Biology of Hope* (1979). But I have long had a fascination with utopian schemes—a fascination tempered equally by sympathy and skepticism.

Back in my high school years in Montreal, I briefly belonged to a Labor Zionist organization that offered discussions of socialism and the building of new worlds. The group's ultimate goal was to recruit young people for collective settlements in Israel, where we would join in creating little socialist utopias far superior to our petit-bourgeois worlds. In my case, though, the proselytizing didn't take. I soon left the organization with neither drama nor regret.

Nevertheless, the kibbutz movement as a human experiment continued to intrigue me—so much so that I jumped at the chance to undertake a large-scale study of kibbutz women with Joseph Shepher of the University of Haifa, a former Rutgers doctoral student. Predicting that mammalian imperatives such as mother-infant bonding would overwhelm ideological purity, we studied three generations of men and women in two of the three federations of the kibbutz system—34,040 people in all. We possessed detailed census data on these subjects, and conducted interviews in four kibbutzim and detailed ethnography in two.

I couldn't imagine why someone had not taken on the subject before. It was the perfect venue for testing assumptions about human nature held dear by a range of ideologues. What would happen when men and women received the same income—that is, none at all? When everyone worked? When all decisions were taken by all men and women in public? When all children were raised in “children's houses” from six weeks on? When all food, laundry, and purchasing were handled by the community at large? In a word, what would happen when nearly all the fundamental conditions against which much contemporary feminist and political thought were struggling were absent?

The book that we published in 1975, *Women in the Kibbutz*, showed the division of labor by sex to be greater in the kib-



Edward O. Wilson, author of the groundbreaking and controversial *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975)

butz than in the rest of Israel. We found sharp differences in what men and women cared about in public life and in their choices of political and managerial behavior. Amusingly, we found a negative relationship between attitudes about sexual similarity and actual behavior. Each generation was more divided than the last—a clear rebuke to the role-model theory of behavior. And most important, we could see the beginnings of what has now become an almost total shift to family housing. Children began to live with their parents, a move overwhelmingly supported by women and their mothers who routinely outvoted the men of the communities. The men considered this move a reversion to bourgeois pathology and an expensive violation of the founding dream. At times, indeed, it seemed as though we had been studying two different communities, men and women.

There were some positive reviews of the book—by the respected Zionist writer Marie Syrkin in the *New Republic* and by many commentators in Israel itself. But in

something close to a kiss of death, the *New York Times Book Review* gave it to Juliet Mitchell, whose peculiarly convoluted psychofeminism we had criticized in the book. The only feminist journal that reviewed the book dismissed it on the grounds that the kibbutz experiment was itself impure because it was conducted by Jews who—don't forget—carried the patriarchal spirit in their blood. No matter that all the kibbutzim we studied were at least agnostic and some were aggressively atheistic.

The pettiness aside, Shepher and I were far more surprised that the crucial finding of the book—that deep, very long-range, and substantial social engineering had failed to change certain fundamental sex roles—had so little impact. That revelation, so salient to what was going on at the time, was almost swept away by a tide of studies of attitudes, scales of self-esteem, and gaseous seminars

about expressing human potential. Possibly the most depressing part of the adventure was the unwillingness of critics to accept that kibbutz women made conscious choices in a dignified and skillful manner. It was more comforting to attribute their behavior to patriarchal brainwashing.

Throughout the 1970s and early '80s, the opposition to the biosocial—or sociobiological—enterprise grew more heated. I felt a sense of almost physical apprehension, knowing how easily I could become the object of censure. At meetings of the American Anthropological Association, conversation would stop and people would stare when I entered an elevator and they saw my name tag. I wasn't alone. There was an unseemly ruckus over E. O. Wilson's further elaborations of his sociobiological insights, opponents going so far as to dump water on him when he made an appearance at the 1979 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington. The

American Anthropological Association tried to censure Napoleon Chagnon of the University of California for chronicling aggression among the Yanomani of Venezuela, as though he had caused it by describing it. The same association voted unanimously to support the "Seville Declaration," a sanctimonious assertion by a number of otherwise sensible scientists that any effort to explore human nature factors in human aggression was ethically wrong and scientifically inappropriate. As part of a series of seminars at the University of Chicago in the mid-1970s, a few of us who shared the biological perspective tried to invite Wilson and his colleague Richard Lewontin to discuss their differences over sociobiology. But Lewontin refused to be in the same room with the man who had been among those responsible for Harvard's hiring him in the first place. For their part, many radical feminists were convinced that anyone who disagreed with them was politically reactionary, pathological, or an agent of a devious male conspiracy.

Such ideological zealotry drew sustenance from major social changes that were already under way in the United States and Europe, stimulated in large measure by the "pill" and other birth control devices that had become widely available in the mid-1960s. There was surprisingly rapid abandonment of the conventional certainty that it was man's role to work and provide and woman's to bear children, raise them, and keep house. While we did not think that modifications of gender roles were impossible or undesirable, we did believe that they raised profound biological questions. But biological analysis was still largely kept out of the conventional national dialogue. One reason, no doubt, was that proponents of biological approaches, who confronted such issues as aggression, hierarchy, sexual differences, and xenophobia, were seen as bearers of bad news.

Nevertheless, Fox and I continued together and separately to play active roles in academic life, and in such practical precincts of government and business where biosocial perspectives and information were wanted. One project grew out of

an opinion I offered in *Men in Groups* to the effect that contraceptive pills would likely influence the sexual enthusiasms of men. Nature, being economical, surely would see to it that pregnant females would have less appeal to males seeking reproductive success. Since females taking the pill were chemically pregnant, we wondered whether nature's design would apply to them as well.

With a small amount of money from the Guggenheim Foundation and working with colleagues at Rutgers Medical School and other parts of the university, we administered the contraceptive drug Depo-Provera (the basis of Norplant) in injections effective for three months to monkeys in a colony we were able to establish on an island off Bermuda. The medicine completely extinguished hitherto robust sexual relations. When its effects had worn off, the original dating game resumed. We tried to publish the report in *Science* but were told we had no control group. We protested that we had produced an ethological record of a community over a year, under carefully controlled and evaluated conditions. But to no avail. And so subsequent publications appeared in more specialized journals.

Were the findings too controversial in the light of then-current sexual practices and beliefs? It appeared as though no one wanted to challenge a widely appreciated medical innovation—or even to see whether the primate pattern also applied to human communities where the pill was widely used.

It seemed to me then and does still that there had to be some discernible effect when a large percentage of women in a community were chemically pregnant. No other drug, until Prozac perhaps, had been given on a daily basis to healthy people. And the contraceptive pill affected nothing less than sexual selection, the core relationship at the heart of biological process and evolution itself.

It had no behavioral effect at all? Please.

Here was a case in which biosociology had direct policy relevance. Most tests of drugs by the Food and Drug Administration and equivalent agencies deal first

with clear physiological and systemic effects—your liver clogs, your eyebrows turn orange, there are carcinogens, and so on. Behavioral impacts are far less thoughtfully and substantially evaluated, even with drugs such as contraceptives or psychoactives explicitly designed to affect behavior. For example, it took the FDA years to realize what any biosocial scientist could have seen right away: that Valium and Librium (the widest-selling drugs in the world for a while) were not harmless social lubricants but powerful drugs with substantial addictive and cultural effects.

Unfortunately, the bias of the industrial system is to look for easily quantifiable technical factors and deal primarily with them. It does not emphasize the kind of sensitive full-life-cycle assessment that even mediocre zookeepers currently demand when they manage the routines and housing of their charges.

The prejudice against biological analysis did not immediately abate when I published *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*, but it was around that time that we began to witness some turning of the tide. In *Optimism*, I suggested that idealism and social vision, to say nothing of love affairs and feelings we have on the first day of school, are as much part of our nature as tribal antipathy and sexual ruckus.

“Hope springs internal,” I announced, because it seemed obvious to me that if neurophysical substances (about which more and more was being learned) were associated with depression and hence treatable with other substances, then there must be a comparable material basis of happiness and optimism. About halfway through my research on the subject, in the mid-1970s, endorphins were discovered. If not the elusive substance themselves, these were certainly signs of the the material neural basis of feelings of well-being.

I went further to speculate that any species with as large and fertile a thought factory as ours had somehow to discipline what it produced. There had to be a neurophysiological basis for our getting up in the morning and deciding it was a great day to trap an elephant or court a partner.

Human beings had surely evolved the capacity to plan ahead, to hope, to create, and to believe in the value of life itself.

Perhaps that evolved knack was even the basis of religious behavior, which is virtually ubiquitous in human communities. Was it not reassuring to think that human idealism and hopefulness had their roots in brain physiology and other mechanisms that supported our evolution?

Not until 1992, however, when I published *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, with its argument that pleasure was an evolutionary entitlement as important to our species as discipline and the goad of pain, did the formal recalcitrance change to a suspension of disbelief and distaste. Perhaps it was the failure of various utopian schemes, including industrial-strength Marxism, that made it easier to argue that human behaviors were related to human evolution and constrained by the particular pattern of species. But this need not be a gloomy conclusion, I argued.

To change a system, one must first understand it, and a knowledge of human biology can be as much a basis for idealism and action as for paralysis and despair.

In fact, in an earlier book, *The Manufacture of Evil: Ethics, Evolution, and the Industrial System* (1987), I had argued that our species was still trying to make do with skills that it had slowly acquired for dealing with the social and ethical dilemmas of a hunter-gatherer existence in communities of between 25 and 200 souls. I pointed out the obvious: that such skills, products of lengthy evolutionary change, are ill-suited to the social and economic realities of modern mass industrial societies; and, furthermore, that our prevailing ethical systems, which arose during the adoption of agriculture and pastoralism, do little to address the incompatibilities.

Take for example the vexed issue of the growing chasm between the leaders and the led, the elite and the common folk, the winners and the losers in what is called our “winner-take-all” system. One of the bonds that used to tie leaders to their constituencies was kinship, a deeply biological tie.



Yet for the sake of justice, a noble ethos, modern legal strictures against nepotism discourage the exercise of such primal connections. One biologically predictable result is that our leaders feel less and less responsible for those beneath them. It is an unhappy biological reality, but our refusal to face it, and others like it, may actually aggravate social inequalities and tensions. The biosocial perspective I urged in this book clearly offers little easy reassurance to idealogues of either the right or left persuasions. But as anthropologist Melvin Konner noted in a review in *Science* magazine, the book's argument is "probably a far more radical critique of modern industrial capitalism than was Marx's and Engels's."

Today it is clear that the biological account has left its mark on the intellectual landscape. Even daily newspapers purvey information about behavior involving definitive brain images of sex differences in human cortical function. More importantly, there is now a sophisticated body of work that knits together the biological and social sciences. And there is every reason to expect that the expansion of the explanatory power of biosociology will continue. Developments in Darwinian medicine, neurophysiology, paleoanthropology, economics, and political science, and a host of other disciplines will continue to help sketch a picture of *Homo sapiens* rooted in nature, in history, and—critically—in prehistory. It is no longer heart-stopping to discuss human biology in the academic community, while among feminists there is at last a potentially productive dialogue between those who still regard all sex differences as social constructs and those prepared to see them as embedded in the nature of humanity.

However satisfied one might be with such developments, large areas of darkness remain in the intellectual community. In my own discipline, anthropology, the majority social-construction-of-reality

crowd has created a world of solipsistic relativism founded on a commitment to the notion that positive, objective science is an impossibility. Though they may have as much impact on international science as phrenologists, their impenetrable obfuscation of behavioral matters may cause physical anthropologists to drift away from the main association. They will continue to produce a barrier between the worlds their readers experience and the one the professors describe. As Robin Fox says, "If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, it is a social construct of a duck." The most dispiriting feature of the delta of pressure toward political correctness is not its apparatchik banality but its scientific ludicrousness and its utter impracticality.

As I started these reflections on my service in the human nature wars, I recalled the quotation that I was required to supply for my college yearbook. The words were supposed to be self-epitomizing, and so I had chosen William Blake's "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's." For a moment, I shivered at the thought that my whole career amounted to a petulant and antisocial act of intellectual defiance.

But then I realized: no, I am firmly in Mr. Darwin's system. I love his commitment to the elegance of life's flow and the vast importance of individual decisions about whom to love, to hate, to play with, to avoid, to feed. I admire and applaud his precise awareness of the meld of physical form and behavior and his tutored bystander's appreciation of the artfulness, the color, and the intimate drama of animal life. This scientific community in which I found myself so unexpectedly has been no cruel master, no impediment to exploration. To the contrary, it has provided me passage to a world in which the marriage of precise perception and broad thought is celebrated, where open and inquiring minds are free to stride, wander, and wonder.



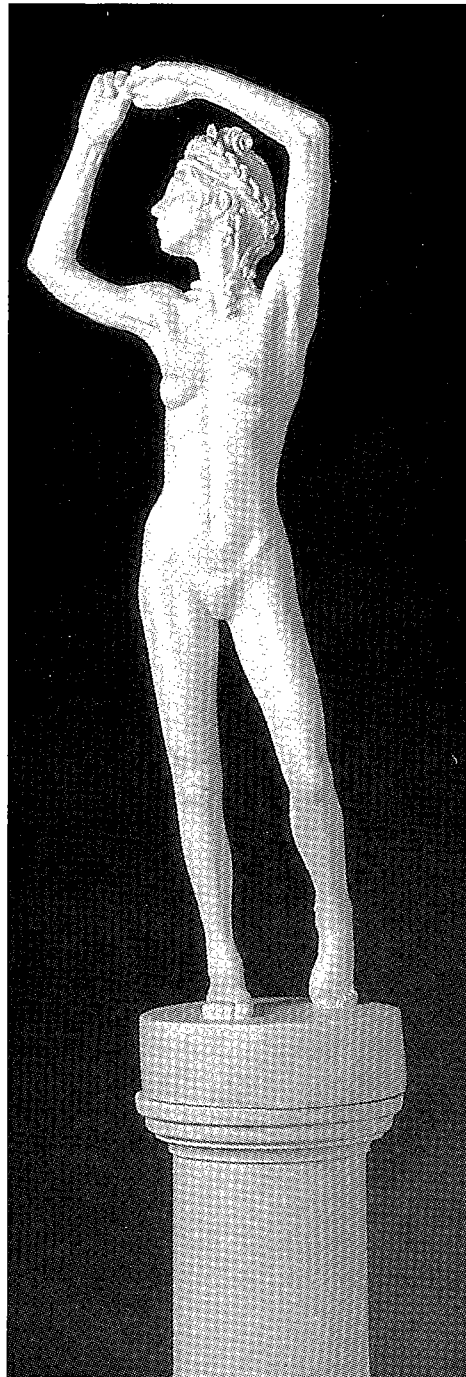
The Birth of Natural Classicism

by Frederick Turner

The artists, poets, composers, and dramatists now reaching their maturity have lived through a time of crisis for the arts. Some of us are questioning the whole 200-year-old tradition of the avant-garde and rethinking our aesthetics from the ground up.

The moment we realized we had crossed the invisible boundary from one cultural era to another was surely different in each case; it was, especially at the beginning when we did not know that others were going through the same thing, an intensely individual and sometimes lonely experience. For some of us, it came when we first began asking the awkward questions; for others, it was when we saw with a shock that we had already been asking them for some time; for others, it was when we first recognized an alternative view of the world; and for yet others, it was when we met somebody else who shared the same heterodox opinions.

The late modernist inheritance we came into in the 1950s and '60s, despite its seductive surface of countercultural lifestyle and apocalyptic rhetoric, was even then hoary and stereotyped in its intellectual and spiritual provenance. There was little in its armory that did not derive ultimately from Romantic egoism, 19th-century political radicalism, and early-20th-century modernist movements such as Dada. Such indebtedness to the past would be harmless, indeed laudable, in an artistic movement whose theory and dynamic was one of the incorporation of the past into the present; but it was incon-



The central figure in Audrey Flack's Sky Gateway Introducing Diana (1990)

sistent in one that claimed the cachet of innovation, courageous nonconformity, and revolution.

In poetry, what we inherited was confessional free verse; in visual art, abstract expressionism and pop art; in music, 12-tone composition; in drama, the theater of the absurd, the theater of cruelty, and happenings. Avant-garde novels and films were plotless and autobiographical. The arts showed all the signs of decadence and exhaustion: the abandonment of technical discipline, the harking after unrealistic and potentially bloody schemes of social revolution, the extreme subjectivism, the studied ignorance of and hostility to scientific fact, the moral cynicism.

It seemed for a brief time that the emergence of postmodernism meant an end to the long, deadening twilight in the avant-garde arts. But in many ways it was a further descent. "Language poetry," visual and musical deconstructivism, political theater, and minimalist fiction seemed to have added little except a further element of self-congratulatory self-regard, while losing the late modernist emotionality that gave the avant-garde a semblance of life.

Instead of political utopianism, we got political correctness; instead of radical subjectivism, the deconstruction of the self. Instead of the subjective construction of reality, we ended up with the social construction of reality. Instead of scientific ignorance, we were given a wholesale attack on the possibility of any kind of knowledge at all. The cynicism remained.

The artistic origin of social construction can be found in modernism, in what at first was a glorious and defiant assertion of artistic freedom. The artist is free only if he (and "he" it usually was, for this was an intensely young male view of the world) can make up his own world and kick himself loose from nature. Painters broke the shackles of representation, fiction writers broke the shackles of naturalistic narrative, composers broke the shackles of melody and harmony, poets broke the shackles of meter. By fiat, they made up their own worlds. Artists were supported in this view by the philosopher J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts and "performatives," whereby

the very statement of something, such as a promise or the stipulation of a rule in an agreed context, could create a new reality without need for empirical verification. This, of course, meant that a world was something that could be made up, a point not lost on political interpreters, who, constitutionally suspicious, immediately began to ask: who gets to make up the world?

But the political correctness that resulted from asking this question was not the only problem that came out of the definition of art as freedom from nature. Another was the problem of critical judgment. How could one distinguish good from bad art? If nature was abandoned as a constraint, craftsmanship—which is a working with natural constraints—must disappear, and with it the virtuosity that is the excellence of craft.

Social construction became the perfect excuse for artistic incompetence. Any flaw could be pointed to in triumph as a subtle tour de force of deconstruction, a performative enactment of subversive delegitimation, or similar jabberwocky. Finally, the idea of artistic freedom as freedom from natural constraint had begun to come up against a tragically opposed principle: the desperate need, in this ecologically threatened world, to find ways of life for human beings that are not lethal to the ecosystem around us and to our own animal bodies. The heroic transcendence of nature can result in inhuman Bauhaus architecture, designer-drug addiction, AIDS suicide performance art, and bloated nuclear arsenals.

A countermovement of artists and poets, of whom I was one, began to seek ways to repair the damage we saw in our culture as the Cold War drew to an end and the great socialist ideals were shown either to be empty and destructive or disappointingly achieved and incorporated into the status quo. The problems bequeathed to us, as we saw them, were these:

§ The human person had been denatured; we had been taught to reject our animal nature, our sex, our genetic lineage.

§ As artists we were expected to dismiss the constraints of nature itself—this at a time when the planet urgently required human beings to accept their ecological responsibilities as part of a larger ecosystem not created by social fiat.

§ We had lost the great forms and disciplines of the arts, the biopsychic technologies of meter, representation, and melody, and were thus alienated from our own shamanic tradition.

§ The political separatism and cultural fragmentation that had been encouraged had dangerously attenuated that sense of human fellowship that is the womb of artistic creativity.

§ In a time of staggering and marvelous scientific discovery, when nonlinear dynamics and chaos theory were suggesting a vital rapprochement between the two cultures, avant-garde art and criticism were assailing science with a remarkable combination of malice and ignorance.

§ Hope, and all the other positive emotions that inspire the arts, were sneered at and dismissed; snideness and rage were the dominant signs of the artist.

Not surprisingly, the contemporary arts had lost contact with the general public; in some fields, such as poetry, publishers would no longer take the risk of producing collections of poems—and for good reason. The general reader, thrice burnt by boring, incomprehensible, and graceless verbal assaults, wisely avoided such collections. Worst of all, we found that as artists we were virtually expected to violate all standards of personal morality, as a sort of backhanded proof of our political morality.

It was not that all art and cultural criticism had succumbed to these tendencies; science fiction, for instance, and the biopsychological and sociobiological sciences, had continued to hold out visions of the human role in the world that might form the basis for true art. But these were enclaves of genuine nonconformity, marginalized by the official avant-garde.

It is hard, perhaps, for people who did not grow up within the milieu of the academic and artistic intelligentsia, to understand what an iron grip the tenets of avant-garde modernism (and later, postmodernism) could have on the mind of an artist or writer. My own moment of revelation was more painless than most. It was less a revulsion against the shoddiness and intellectual bankruptcy of the avant-garde than a blessed and amazing gift of happiness, an outpouring of creative energy, a sudden remembering of the whole human heritage, that made much of what I had been taught seem to be a dark dream from which I had awoken.

It was 1977, the year I became a citizen of the United States. My wife was pregnant with our second child, and I was building an energy-efficient house in rural central Ohio. I had decided to renounce any ambitions I might have had as a public literary figure and to devote myself to my teaching at Kenyon College, to the happiness of those around me, and to a deeper and deeper meditation upon nature, science, philosophy, and the spiritual dimension of life. The critic George Steiner, whom I came to know later, wondered why I had, as he said, buried myself there. I didn't feel buried, except occasionally when I toiled in the garden that I had designed.

Out of these conditions of self-imposed exile, poems suddenly began to pour forth—poems of praise and love and celebration, mingled with aphorisms and little discourses that contained in embryo much of my subsequent thinking. The verse was increasingly shaped to the demands of rhyme and meter, until it sprouted a wild plumage of formal invention. Lyrics were superseded by a series of narrative poems, two of them of epic length, *The New World* (1985) and *Genesis* (1988). Without intending to, I had completely violated all the then-current rules of poetry, which stipulated the short free verse non-narra-

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Disparity Among the Children-I (1975) by Ruth Weisberg

tive existentialist confessional lyric in contemporary vocabulary as the paradigm for the publishable poem.

It was just as well that I had renounced my desire for fame and publication. The periodicals and publishers of record would have turned down my new poetry, even though I knew it was my best work. Though I had published several books of poetry earlier, including one in the prestigious Wesleyan Poetry Series, I was not sending my poems out anymore. The people I was writing for were no longer the official avant-garde literary/poetic establishment. I circulated my poems in typescript, though, and a growing circle of people began to make copies of them and send them to others.

One of these was a small press publisher, a classicist, who insisted on meeting me, and after months of argument by correspondence, persuaded me to start publishing again. He printed *The Garden* (1985) in a small edition. Meanwhile a few writers and publishers here and there who were prepared to go out on a limb were beginning to publish the poetry of others who had had the same experience,

of the scales falling from one's eyes, that I had. Among these various and talented voices were Robert McDowell, Richard Moore, Dick Allen, Jack Butler, John Gery, R. S. Gwynn, Charles Martin, Frederick Feirstein, Dana Gioia, Jane Greer, Timothy Steele, and Annie Finch. Julia Budenz's enormous poem, *The Gardens of Flora Baum*, a meditation on the great cultural tree of Rome, exemplifies the scope of the new poetry.

I became convinced of the civic duty of the artist to society, and with my colleague Ronald Sharp revived the *Kenyon Review* as a voice for the new movement. Miraculously I found presses, mostly mavericks that were not afraid to defy the consensus, that would print my own new work.

As soon as the "New Formalism" and the "New Narrative," as they were dubbed by their opponents, emerged into public view, they were attacked by some of the major publications of the avant-garde, including *Contemporary Literature Studies* and the *American Poetry Review*. Then, when it was realized that even negative



A Vision of the Virgin and Child (1972) by Peter Rogers

critical attention was drawing new converts to the movement, there was a studied and icy silence. But we survived. By now the Expansive Movement, as it has been called, is a large and vital force in American poetry, though still a distinctly minority one, and still disapproved of by the avant-garde establishment.

A similar transformation has been taking place in the other arts. The openings made in the modernist orthodoxy by such composers as George Crumb and Philip Glass have been exploited by the “holy minimalists” Arvo Part and Henryk Gorecki; more radically classicist still are less known composers such as Stefania de Kenessey and Claudia Annis. Visual artists have formed artists’ groups, galleries, and periodicals to defy the party line. Classical realist painters such as David Ligare and Bruno Civitico illuminate a contemporary consciousness with ancient light. A remark-

able school of Los Angeles realist painters and sculptors has emerged, including Wes Christensen, John Frame, Jim Doolin, and Ruth Weisberg, and the old art of landscape painting is being put to new use by artists such as Cynthia Kriebel. Religious and civic sculpture is showing new vitality in the work of Frederick Hart, whose *Creation* group graces the façade of the National Cathedral and whose *Three Soldiers* adds resonance to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall. Figurative allegorical sculpture has been revived by Audrey Flack, and the bronze bas-relief by Athos Ongaro. And the power of myth and psychospiritual symbolism still runs strong in the paintings of Peter Rogers, Lani Irwin, and Alan Feltus, and in the sculpture of Michael Osbaldeston.

As these and other questioners have come together, often in the virtual world of the Internet, a sort of manifesto for

the new art of the 21st century has emerged. This program calls for an art that recognizes the infrangible bonds between human beings and the rest of nature, bonds that become evident in the creative capacities of our own bodies and nervous systems that we inherited from our evolutionary past as animals. Exponents of what I call natural classicism informally support the following broad principles:

§ Art should direct itself to the general public, and should grow from and speak to the common roots and universal principles of human nature in all cultures. Those members of the public who do not have the time, training, or inclination to craft and express their higher yearnings and intuitions rightly demand an artistic elite to be the culture's prophetic mouthpiece and mirror.

§ Art should deny the simplifications of the political Left and Right, and should refine and deepen the radical Center.

§ The use of art, and of cheap praise, to create self-esteem is a cynical betrayal of all human cultures. Excellence and standards are as real and universal in the arts as in competitive sports, even if they take more time and refined judgment to appreciate.

§ The function of art is to create beauty, and beauty is incomplete without moral beauty. True beauty is the condition of civilized society. We should restore reverence for the grace and beauty of human beings and of the rest of nature. There should be a renewal of the moral foundations of art as an instrument to civilize, ennoble, and inspire. Art recognizes the tragic and terrible costs of human civilization but does not abandon hope and faith in the civilizing process. Art must recover its connection with religion and ethics without becoming the propagandist of any dogmatic system. Beauty is the opposite of coercive political power: thus art should lead but not follow political morality.

§ High and low art, the avant-garde and the popular and commercial imagination, have been alienated from each other too long. In a healthy culture, popular and commercial art forms are the soil in which

high art grows. Theory describes art; art does not illustrate theory. Art is how a whole culture speaks to itself, and how cultures communicate with and marry each other.

§ High standards of craftsmanship and mastery of the instrument should be restored, hostility to virtuosity abandoned. Certain forms, genres, and techniques of art are culturally universal, natural, and classical. They are innate but require a cultural tradition to awaken them. They include such skills as visual representation, melody, storytelling, poetic meter, and dramatic mimesis. These forms, genres, and techniques are not limitations or constraints but enfranchising instruments and infinitely generative feedback systems.

§ The long enmity between emotion and intellectual depth needs to be ended. We do not need to abandon reason in the pursuit of artistic power; insanity is not a qualification for artistic validity. Art should come from and speak to what is whole in human beings. It is the product of passionate imaginative intelligence, not of psychological sickness and damage. Even when it deals, as it often should and must, with the terrifying, tragic, and grotesque, art should help heal the lesions within the self and the rifts in the self's relation to the world. The symbols of art are connected to the embodiment of the human person in a physical and social environment—thus, the human figure should not be avoided by visual artists, and the grand stories of birth, marriage, and death should not be avoided in literature or drama.

§ Art must be reunited with science. As the natural ally, interpreter, and guide of the sciences, art extends the creative evolution of nature on this planet and in the universe. The experience of truth is beautiful; thus, the artist's experience and the scientist's are at bottom profoundly akin. The recent deepening of our ecological understanding, which shows that radical change is just as natural as harmony and homeostasis, and that the human place in nature is as one of several species that accelerate natural change, suggests that art is the missing element in environmentalism. If aesthetics is recognized for what it is, an essential element of scientific understanding, we will be

able to redefine our environmental goals for a healthier planet.

§ Art can be reunited with physical science through such ideas as evolution and chaos theory; the reflectiveness of art can be partly understood through the study of nonlinear dynamical systems and their strange attractors in nature and mathematics. The human species itself emerged from the dynamical system generated by the mutual interaction of biological and cultural evolution: thus, our bodies and brains are adapted to and demand artistic performance and creation. Cultural evolution was partly driven by inventive play in artistic handicrafts and performance. We have a nature; that nature is cultural; that culture is classical, in the sense of the natural excellence striven after by all human cultures past and present.

§ The order of the universe is neither deterministic nor on the road to irreversible decay; instead, the universe is self-renewing, self-ordering, unpredictable, creative, and free. Thus, human beings do not need to labor miserably to despoil the world of its diminishing stockpile of order, and struggle with one another for possession of it, only to find that they have bound themselves into a mechanical and deterministic way of life. Instead, they can cooperate with nature's own artistic process and with each other in a free and open-ended play of value creation. Art looks with hope to the future: it seeks a closer union with the true progress of technology.

§ Art evokes the shared past of all human beings, that past which is the moral foundation of civilization. Sometimes the present creates the future by breaking the shackles of the past, but sometimes the past creates the future by breaking the shackles of the present. The

Enlightenment and modernism are examples of the former; the Renaissance, and perhaps our time, are examples of the latter. But in either case, no artist has completed his or her artistic journey until he or she has sojourned with and learned the wisdom of the dead artists who came before. The future will be more, not less, aware of and indebted to the past than we are, just as we are more aware of and indebted to the past than were our ancestors. The immortality of art goes both ways in time; it is only if we renew the lives of former artists and poets in our own lives that we will be renewed and remembered when we are dead.

These ideas, and others like them, have inspired a new generation of artists. We believe that we are the successors to postmodernism, and we can point to a growing body of exciting new artistic work. This work is not widely known, for the existing postmodern paradigm still dominates most venues of publication, performance, and exhibition. But it includes a renewal of the great tradition of landscape painting; science fiction composed in strict classical epic form; a new genre of heroic religious statuary; an outpouring of richly musical poetry in strict form; a new awakening in choral, operatic, and symphonic music; CD-ROM and Internet art and literature; a rebirth of mystical and allegorical painting; and remarkable collaborations among artists, poets, composers, and natural scientists.

The tradition of Homer, Dante, Leonardo, Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Goethe is not dead. It is growing up in the cracks of the postmodern concrete. Though it does not dominate the cultural landscape, it is there for the general public to find.

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