

the United States, seeing itself as a “city on a hill,” may be the last Whig nation. But—and this was Butterfield’s point—we must not view the Whigs’ times as mere prelude to

our own. *Nobody’s Perfect* fails to explain how the “new Whig” interpretation of history improves on the old.

—GERALD J. RUSSELLO

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

---

### *SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.*

By Richard Pierre Claude. Univ. of Pennsylvania Press. 267 pp. \$42.50

In this wide-ranging survey, Richard Pierre Claude argues that fighting for human rights falls within the bailiwick of scientists and physicians. A professor emeritus of government at the University of Maryland, Claude also shows how scientific abuses of the past have engendered reforms. The grotesque “experiments” of Nazi scientists, for example, led to adoption of the Nuremberg Code and internationally accepted ethical guidelines. The Holocaust’s lessons also inform what Claude terms “the moral backbone of international human rights law,” the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose adoption in the late 1940s, amid early Cold War tensions, represented a near-miraculous accomplishment.

Scientific tools have done much to reveal violations of the Declaration and other human rights codes. Genetic markers have been used to identify massacre victims from Argentina to Bosnia, and statistical analysis helped establish the pattern of abuses against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and against Filipinos under Ferdinand Marcos. Claude calls for human rights groups to undertake more such studies, rather than rely mainly on the weaker evidence of case reports of human rights violations.

Most books on human rights, even highly acclaimed ones, focus single-mindedly on declarations, conventions, codes, and power-brokers. To his credit, Claude also considers non-governmental organizations, which, as he writes, “provide much of the driving force in the global human rights movement.” He discusses, among others, the Southern Center for Human Rights, which forced Georgia’s largest jail to provide treatment to HIV-positive inmates, and the Nobel Prize-winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

Claude largely credits the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the fact that “sectarian definitions of science are widely eschewed, and racist and sexist attempts to slant the work of science are subject to unfettered criticism.” But he faults scientific organizations for not sufficiently educating their members and the broader public: “To use their human rights, people need to know about them.” It’s a cause to which this book will most certainly contribute.

—SHERI FINK

### *THE TROUBLE WITH NATURE: Sex and Science in Popular Culture.*

By Roger N. Lancaster. Univ. of California Press. 442 pp. \$55 cloth, \$21.95 paper

Men are from Mars, women are from Venus. Aggression is an evolutionary survival strategy. Homosexuals are born, not made. Jealousy is nature’s way of promoting pair bonding, which gives offspring a better shot at success. These and other snippets of pseudo-scientific wisdom are dispatched by Roger Lancaster, an anthropology and cultural studies professor at George Mason University, with vigor and appropriate sarcasm.

His target, broadly speaking, is a concoction of sociobiology and “selfish-gene” theorizing that seeks to reduce all human behavior and psychology to brain functions controlled by genes. The eugenics movement of the early 20th century gave this kind of thing a bad name, and by the 1960s right-thinking (i.e., left-thinking) intellectuals embraced a loosely Marxist view in which human behavior was all about “cultural constructs” and had nothing to do with biology. But the Human Genome Project, Lancaster warns, signals the return of that never-vanquished bogeyman, scientific reductionism.

He dissects numerous press accounts of claims for genes that make people heterosexu-

al or homosexual, or daring or timid. He lays into suggestions from evolutionary psychology that male assertiveness and female coyness (not to mention everybody's sweet tooth) are genetically hard-wired. Much of his argument is that the things the sociobiologists say they are explaining do not exist in the first place. Male and female roles are not the same in every society; there are no universal standards of female attractiveness or male desirability; even the human sweet tooth is not universal (Nigerians don't like candy, or so he says a friend told him).

This is a polemic, in other words, but a polemic against what, exactly? In his attacks on oversimplified misconceptions, Lancaster will find many allies among scientists. When it comes to assessing the science itself, he is less authoritative. For example, he makes much of the alleged "gay gene," announced in the 1990s, and explains at some length why the idea of a single gene determining sexual orientation won't fly. Fair enough, but he seems unaware that few scientists took the idea or the evidence all that seriously in the first place.

In fact, I think it would be difficult to find many reputable scientists who are unreconstructed reductionists of the type Lancaster

finds so irritating. He convincingly demolishes a number of simplistic arguments from evolutionary psychology, but seems to think he has thereby undermined the whole enterprise. And he hews to an extremism of his own, embracing the social constructionist's creed that "there is no such thing as human nature independent of human culture." He never provides any justification for this ideology, apart from rounding up declarations from the usual suspects: Karl Marx, Clifford Geertz, and the like.

Still, for all his vehemence, Lancaster is a fluent, often funny, and (dare I say it?) good-natured writer. He divests constructivist theory and gender studies of their usual obtuse jargon and acknowledges the silliness of some ideological critiques of science.

In the end, though, he seems to wish that genes, insofar as they have anything to do with brain function and psychology, would just go away. In the old nature-versus-nurture argument, the correct but murky position, it seems to me, is that both are important, and in ways that cannot be fully disentangled. Some people are happy inhabiting this gray, ambiguous middle ground; others hanker for black or white. Must be one of those genetic things.

—DAVID LINDLEY

## ARTS & LETTERS

### *THE EDEN EXPRESS:*

#### *A Memoir of Insanity.*

By Mark Vonnegut. Seven Stories.

301 pp. \$13.95 paper

First it was the constant crying. Then the trees were angry at him. Out of nowhere came the wrinkled, iridescent face. When he threw a cue ball at a window, his hippie friends called his famous novelist father, who got him to a mental institution. Mark Vonnegut had two more breakdowns, but after Thorazine shots and electroshock therapy, he was cured, never to be schizophrenic again.

When this account of Vonnegut's illness first appeared, in 1975, it was a rarity. At the time, the only other memoir of schizophrenia was *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* (1951), by an author who, with pre-Jerry Springer delicacy, had given only her first

name, Renée. Since Vonnegut's book, the schizophrenic memoir subcategory has blossomed: Jane Rittmayer's *Lifetime* (1979), Lori Schiller's *The Quiet Room* (1994), Ken Steele's *The Day the Voices Stopped* (2001), and even Philadelphia Eagles cheerleader Christina Alexandra's *Five Lost Years* (2000).

Vonnegut's book differs from all of them. He intends *Eden Express* to be something of an apologia for the 1960s—"We were not the spaced-out, flaky, self-absorbed, wimpy, whiny flower children depicted in movies and TV shows. . . . Things eventually went bad, but before they went bad hippies did a lot of good. Brave, honest, and true, they paid a price." The majority of the book describes the commune Vonnegut and other 1969 graduates of Swarthmore College set up on an old farm in remote British Columbia. They raise goats, repair a house, live off