

ical grounds that anybody who pays money for a newspaper is going to read it.” During the past few decades, however, dailies failed to expand their paid circulation to keep pace with growing population, especially in the suburbs. Free weeklies sprang up, offering low advertising rates. Though the weeklies, with no circulation revenue, “tend to be only half as profitable as paid dailies . . . they do make money,” Morton notes.

He suspects that the *Daily News* decided to give away the boiled-down *Express* edition in the hope that once exposed to it, commuters would start putting down 50 cents for “the real thing.” (If the rival *New York Post*’s swift response of cutting its 50-cent price in half

lures readers away from the *Daily News*, observes Morton, the *Express* move “could turn out to be a huge tactical mistake.”)

Meanwhile, the *Metro* in Philadelphia claims a daily distribution of 125,000, but advertising sales—especially to the all-important big local retailers—have been “disappointing,” says Morton.

The most likely places for free dailies to prosper, in his view, are not large metropolitan areas but affluent small towns that do not have a paid daily. The resort town of Aspen, Colorado, full of wealthy residents and visitors, has had two free dailies—the *Aspen Daily News* (distribution 12,100) and the *Aspen Times* (13,865)—for years.

## *Wonk If You Love Policy*

“Think Tanks in the U.S. Media” by Andrew Rich and R. Kent Weaver, in *Press/Politics* (Fall 2000), Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Policy wonkery is manifestly a growth industry. In just three decades, the number of “think tanks” devoted to public policy research has soared from fewer than 70 to more than 300. Yet despite their often frantic efforts at self-promotion, most of these organizations remain largely hidden from public view. Rich and Weaver, political scientists at Wake Forest University, looked into what makes some think tanks more visible in the news media than others.

Taking a sample of 51 think tanks of various resources, outlooks, and locations, they examined how the organizations and their “experts” fared in news coverage and op-ed pieces in six national newspapers—the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Washington Times*.

The papers “tend to rely on the same think tanks as sources,” they found. The centrist Brookings Institution was the most commonly cited think tank—except in the conservative *Washington Times*, where it ranked fifth. In each of the other five newspapers, Brookings, the conservative Heritage Foundation, and the conservative American Enterprise Institute (all located in Washington) were the three most-cited

think tanks, accounting for a third or more of the mentions.

Washington-based institutions got the lion’s share of the coverage, from almost 69 percent of the mentions (*New York Times*) to more than 86 percent (*USA Today*). Nationally oriented institutes headquartered elsewhere, such as the conservative Hudson Institute in Indianapolis, got only between 12 percent (*USA Today*) and 24 percent (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*).

Though state-oriented think tanks are the fastest-growing type, say Rich and Weaver, they “are almost invisible” in the national newspapers, getting less than two percent of the mentions in five of the papers.

The organizations’ financial resources vary widely. The conservative Heritage Foundation’s 1996 budget was \$24.2 million, 11 times that of the liberal Worldwatch Institute. Washington-based, nonliberal think tanks “have major advantages,” Rich and Weaver say, in attracting money from foundations, corporations, and governments—and this translates into more media visibility. The conservative outfits received from 29 percent (*New York Times*) to 62 percent (*Washington Times*) of the think tank mentions. Liberal ones got only between four percent (*Washington Times*) and 13 percent (*Christian Science Monitor*).

However, in four of the newspapers, the centrist think tanks were the most visible, getting a majority of the mentions. The “biases and

agendas” of the news organizations themselves, note Rich and Weaver, also affect think tank coverage.

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

# *A Medieval Sociobiologist*

“Thomistic Natural Law as Darwinian Natural Right” by Larry Arnhart, in *Social Philosophy & Policy* (Winter 2001), Social Philosophy and Policy Center, Bowling Green State Univ., Bowling Green, Ohio 43403.

In his controversial works *Sociobiology* (1975) and *Consilience* (1998), Edward O. Wilson argued that ethics is rooted in human biology: the deepest intuitions of right and wrong are guided by the brain’s emotional control centers, which evolved through natural selection to help the human animal exploit opportunities and avoid threats in the environment.

Many critics contend that Wilson’s explanation of human ethics promotes a degraded view of human life. Some religious critics deplore it as a denial of God’s moral law as the basis for human ethics. But Arnhart, a political scientist at Northern Illinois University, argues that the Harvard University scientist belongs to the same tradition of ethical naturalism as Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, Wilson’s Darwinian view of human nature, in Arnhart’s view, lends support to Aquinas’s “natural law” reasoning.

Drawing on Aristotle’s biological psychology, Aquinas (1225–74) “explained natural law as rooted in ‘natural inclinations’ or ‘natural instincts’ that human beings share with other intelligent animals,” notes Arnhart. Thus, as with other animals whose offspring require care from both parents, Aquinas said, nature implants in the human male and female an inclination to stay together. Unlike other such animals, humans—using their unique cognitive capacity for conceptual reasoning—devised customary or legal rules of marriage, in conformance to natural law, thus giving formal structure to their natural desires.

Starting in the 17th century with Thomas Hobbes, says Arnhart, there was a modern break with “the Aristotelian and Thomistic account of natural law as rooted in the biology of human nature.” Hobbes insisted “that social and political order is an utterly artificial human construction,” not rooted in biology but requiring that humans transcend their animal nature.

In the 18th century, however, says Arnhart, there was, in effect, “a revival of the Thomistic conception of natural law as founded in the inclinations or instincts of human nature.” Adam Smith showed “how ethics and economics could be rooted in the moral sentiments of human nature and the natural inclination to sympathy.” In the next century, Charles Darwin “explained the moral sentiments as manifesting a moral sense rooted in the biological nature of human beings as social animals.” He argued that natural selection implanted in humans the natural inclinations that lead to the moral sentiments. Adding comparative data on social behavior to Darwin’s and Smith’s ideas, sociologist Edward Westermarck (1862–1939) defended a theory of ethics “rooted in the natural moral sentiments,” says Arnhart. The nearly universal incest taboo, for example, worked via an emotional aversion favored by natural selection.

“While Wilson recognizes that he belongs to a tradition of thought that includes Aristotle, Smith, Darwin, and Westermarck,” Arnhart notes, “he explicitly rejects Aquinas’s views” because they seem to him to root ethics in absolute moral standards outside humanity. But though Aquinas regarded natural law as ultimately an expression of God’s will, says Arnhart, he distinguished “the natural law, as known by the human mind’s grasp of the natural inclinations, from the divine law, as known by God’s revelation of His will through the Bible.” Marriage, for instance, has both sacred and secular meanings, and the secular one is quite compatible “with Wilson’s ‘empiricist’ view of morality.” Similarly today, Arnhart concludes, the religious believer and the Darwinian scientist “can each look to the laws of nature as a ground of common human experience that can be known by natural reason alone.”