
Missing the Revolution: Darwinism for Social Scientists

*Jerome H. Barkow,
Editor*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Missing the Revolution

This page intentionally left blank

Missing the Revolution

Darwinism for Social Scientists

Edited by Jerome H. Barkow

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2006

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further
Oxford University's objective of excellence
in research, scholarship, and education.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Copyright © 2006 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Missing the revolution : Darwinism for social scientists / edited by Jerome H. Barkow.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13 978-0-19-513002-7

ISBN 0-19-513002-2

I. Evolutionary psychology. I. Barkow, Jerome H.

BF701.M55 2005

155.7—dc22 2004028949

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

CONTENTS

Contributors vii

1. Introduction: Sometimes the Bus Does Wait 3

Jerome H. Barkow

Part I. Gender 61

2. Feminism and Evolutionary Psychology 63

Anne Campbell

3. The Male Flash of Anger: Violent Response to Transgression as an Example of the Intersection of Evolved Psychology and Culture 101

Daniel M. T. Fessler

Part II. Controversies 119

4. Evolutionary Explanation: Between Science and Values 121

Ullica Segerstråle

5. Making Hay Out of Straw? Real and Imagined Controversies in Evolutionary Psychology 149

Robert Kurzban and Martie G. Haselton

Part III. Human and Nonhuman Primates 163

6. Behavioral Ecology and the Social Sciences 167

Lee Cronk

7. The Impact of Primatology on the Study of Human Society 187

Lars Rodseth and Shannon A. Novak

Part IV. Sociology and Criminology 221

8. Evolutionary Psychology and Criminal Behavior 225

Anthony Walsh

9. Evolution, Agency, and Sociology 269

Bernd Baldus

Index 295

CONTRIBUTORS

Bernd Baldus, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto
Jerome H. Barkow, Department of Sociology and Social
Anthropology, Dalhousie University
Anne Campbell, Department of Psychology, Durham University
Lee Cronk, Department of Anthropology, Rutgers University
Daniel M. T. Fessler, Department of Anthropology, University
of California, Los Angeles
Martie G. Haselton, Communication Studies and Department
of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles
Robert Kurzban, Department of Psychology, University
of Pennsylvania
Shannon A. Novak, Department of Anthropology,
Idaho State University
Lars Rodseth, Department of Anthropology, University of Utah
Ullica Segerstråle, Department of Social Sciences,
Illinois Institute of Technology
Anthony Walsh, Department of Criminal Justice Administration,
Boise State University

This page intentionally left blank

Missing the Revolution

This page intentionally left blank

1 Introduction: Sometimes the Bus Does Wait

Jerome H. Barkow

1. The Absent-Minded Sociocultural Anthropologist and Sociologist

The human sciences have been preoccupied, in recent years. Both sociology and sociocultural anthropology have been ever more concerned with issues of equity and power, with learning to hear the voices of minorities and of women, with seeking to understand macro-level phenomena such as globalization and micro-level phenomena such as the negotiation of social identity. Anthropology's core concept of culture and sociology's claims to empiricism and objectivity have become suspect. The scientific programs of Auguste Comte and of Bronislaw Malinowski have been largely discarded, and both natural and social scientists¹ who present themselves as searchers for the essential truths of human life are now likely to be seen as primarily pursuing their own power and influence. "Objective" is embarrassed to be seen without its quotation marks. Perhaps the only assumption beyond challenge is that of the social-cultural construction of a reality no longer held to be "out there" but instead understood to be consensual, with hegemonic collectivities self-interestedly striving to control that consensus. But while social scientists have been learning the vocabulary of "hermeneutics" and "gazes" and "narratives," of "discourses" and "texts," of "trope" and "power," of "othering" and "alterity" and "imagined communities," of "essentialism" and "agency" and "embodiment," of "hybridity" and "translocality" and "globalization," other disciplines have been having their own revolution: Darwin's

revolution. Almost unnoticed by many social scientists, the mighty labor of shifting humankind from our privileged position in the land of the non-animals to the natural world, the work of applying to ourselves the Darwinian framework that has been so astoundingly successful when applied to every other species, is well under way.

This volume is an invitation to social-cultural anthropologists and sociologists who have been missing the great evolution-revolution of our time to come visit: to visit the metanarrative of Darwinian thought that is now so large a part of the nonsociological study of human nature and society. It asks the reader to put aside the preconceptions and stereotypes social scientists often have of the “biological” (ably deconstructed by Ullica Segerstråle and by Robert Kurzban and Martie G. Haselton in part II of this volume), and to *engage* a powerful paradigm that is far away from those past generations—and current criminals—who would invoke a vocabulary of “genes” and “Darwin” as justification for genocide. “Biological” connotes “product of cascades of incredibly complex processes in which endogenous and exogenous factors cannot necessarily be distinguished from one another”: social scientists often think it means “rigid and invariant” when they should be thinking “complex and contingent and dependent on environment.” There are no genes for complex behaviors. “Genes for” is just shorthand, metonymy, attention-getting trope, and no one really believes in single genes causing complex behaviors (cf. Dawkins, 1982). The evolutionary perspective provides no particular support for the status quo, no rationalizations for racism or any other form of social inequality. It has often been associated with the political Left, not the Right. “Cultural” cannot possibly be opposed to “biological” because culture and society are the only means we have of expressing our evolved psychology: like the beaver’s dam, culture is both our own construction and our environment (Laland, Odling-Smee, & Feldman, 2000, 2001). Social-cultural constructionism is, within broad limits, not only compatible with an evolutionary approach but demanded by it! If your impression was that most evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologists thought otherwise, it is good that you are reading this book.²

Missing the Revolution is also intended for the practicing evolutionary psychologists/behavioral ecologists and other evolutionists who are bewildered, dismayed, or just plain angry over the scorn and sneers³ so often directed at the work they do in good faith and fascination. When intelligent people insist on talking past one another, it usually means that there are unshared assumptions about what they think they are talking about. *Missing* aims in part to help evolutionists to spot the assumptions made by many social scientists and to explain how the perspective and findings of evolutionary psychology are essential if we are to have a systematic,

cumulative social science that is not utterly isolated from the other human sciences.

Missing's perspective is not just that we need both the social and biological sciences but that they are so intertwined that the one without the other is at best incomplete; at worst, in error. It comes at a point in history when many social scientists seem to be defining their interests and identities in *opposition* to the biological (Bauerlein, 2001), and at a time when much of the debate seems to involve the torching of conveniently constructed straw houses in which no one ever really lived (see Kurzban & Haselton, this volume). *Missing* presents some applications of evolutionary psychology (and related approaches) in a manner intended to illustrate their relevance to current concerns of social scientists. It hopes to be a bridge. Its goal is to persuade social scientists to put aside preconceptions and think about the likely links between what they are doing and what evolutionists are doing. That is, after all, what is happening both for the general reading public and in most non-social science academic disciplines. First, though, what Darwinian field are we talking about?

2. What Field Are We Talking About?

There is no single term for those applying Darwinian theories of evolution to human behavior, and no clear consensus about how, precisely, this perspective is to be applied. The terms “human behavioral ecology,” “sociobiology,” “evolutionary psychology,” “Darwinian psychology,” and even “selfish gene theory” are in current use, though many evolutionists (particularly evolutionary biologists and some psychologists) find no need to apply a distinctive term to themselves or to their work because, for them, evolution is mainstream. The supply of labels is not endless but can seem so: Iver Mysterud (2004) found 57 appellations that deal with what he considers “humans and modern evolutionary theory” (p. 107). To use my own work as an example of the fluidity of labels, in 1973 the term I used was “Darwinian psychological anthropology,” in 1974 it was “biosocial anthropology,” in 1980 it was “human ethology,” in 1989 “sociobiology,” in 1992 “evolutionary psychology,” in 1994 “evolutionary psychological anthropology.” Mysterud (p. 107) quotes Alexander’s (1987) hope that labels such as “sociobiology” will “melt away” because they lead to “artificial subdisciplines” associated with particular individuals or points of view and so impede the integration of biological arguments into the human sciences in general. Alexander is no doubt right, but for the moment labels seem to be a necessary evil.

For this volume I will again favor “evolutionary psychology” because it clearly indicates that the goal is not to focus on individual or population

differences but on human nature as a product of biological evolution. But note that the title of evolutionary psychology's first major edited volume was "Evolutionary Psychology and *the Generation of Culture*" (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992)—there was never any intention to make the field just one more kind of psychology. In the present context I will use "evolutionary psychology" rather inclusively and often in conjunction with "sociobiology." I will also use "human nature" as synonymous with "human evolved psychology." However, many of the contributors to this volume would definitely not call themselves evolutionary psychologists. Most but not all, I believe, would accept that *evolutionary psychology is the infrastructure of culture and society*. (This last phrase, abbreviated as "EPICS," was the original working title for this volume.)

3. An Insurgent Biology and What the Public Reads

In a *New York Times* review of David Buss's (2000) *The Dangerous Passion*, Courtney Weaver writes: "Is Darwin replacing Freud as the spokesman for a millennium? Judging from the recent publication by evolutionary scientists of decidedly politically incorrect theories, it certainly seems that way" (Weaver, 2000). Yes, and however belatedly, Darwin is replacing not only Freud but perhaps Marx and Max Weber as well, for the reading public, as the source of insight into human nature and society.

If physics was the preeminent field of most of the twentieth century, biology is queen of the first part of the twenty-first. Parsing the human genome was only the opening round, with proteomics (the study of the proteins produced by the genes) likely to compete with space weaponry in scope of funding requirements. The media are filled with stories of cloning and of the genetic engineering of food crops, while biomedicine promises imminent cures for a host of illnesses. Explainers of biology such as Helen Fisher (1992, 1999, 2004), Helena Cronin (1992), Richard Dawkins (1976, 1989, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 2000, 2003; Dawkins & Dennett, 1999), Richard Wrangham (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996; Wrangham, McGrew, de Waal, & Heltne, 1994), and the late Stephen Jay Gould (e.g., Gould, 1989, 1995, 2002) regularly find their work on the bestseller list, as do those who, like Michael S. Gazzaniga (1992, 2000), Jean-Pierre Changeux (1997, 2004), Changeux and Riocoeur (2000), Edelman and Changeux (2000), Antonio Damasio (1995, 2000, 2003), Daniel Dennett (1995, 1997, 2003), Oliver Sacks (1990, 1995a, 1995b), and Steven Pinker (1993, 1997, 2002), explain to the reading public how the brain and its mind work. The heroes of our time are not the anthropologists who study our own species, as Margaret Mead did, but those who, like Jane Goodall (1990) and Dian

Fossey (1983), have studied nonhuman primates. *Science*, the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, allocates far more space to biology and biomedicine than it does to any other fields. In psychiatry, Freud has moved to the margins, and a powerful pharmacopeia has situated disorders not in the spirit or mind but in the brain and the biochemistry. Literature, music, the arts, film, and journalism are being revealed as structures that rest on a base of biology and evolution, thanks to thinkers and researchers such as Joseph Carroll (1994); Hank Davis (Davis & McLeod, 2003; Davis & Javor, 2004); Ellen Dissanayake (1992, 2000); Pamela Shoemaker (1996); Nils Wallin, Bjorn Merker, and Steven Brown (Wallin, Merker, & Brown, 2000); Robert Storey (1996); and Karl Grammar and Eckart Voland (Grammar & Voland, 2003). In the media, not nuclear war but bioterrorism and bioweaponry take pride of place among our fears. For better or worse, we live in the Age of Biology.

Academic disciplines have responded to the “evolution revolution” with varying degrees of engagement and incorporation (as [incompletely] summarized in Sidebar 1.1, “The Response of Disciplines”), just as they did in the past with Marxism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. Strangely, though, sociology and

Sidebar 1.1. The Response of Disciplines

Academic disciplines have engaged in various ways with the developments in evolutionary theory. This sidebar is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, its point being that the evolutionary revolution is omnipresent except for mainstream sociology and social-cultural anthropology.

a. Political Science

Political science has, since 1980, boasted the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences, a group whose meetings and journal include a strong evolutionary stream. Major books in the field include Schubert and Masters's (1991) edited collection *Primate Politics*, Masters's (1989) *The Nature of Politics*, and Rubin's (2002) *Darwinian Politics*. Courses in what is sometimes referred to as “biopolitics” include discussions of evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, and primate behavior along with other relevant biological topics such as the new reproductive strategies.

b. Economics

Many economists are interested in evolutionary approaches to their discipline, resulting in, for example, the *Journal of Bioeconomics*. Peter Koslowski's (1999) *Sociobiology and Economics* presents a good overview of the evolution revolution in economics. There is widespread interest in game theory, with emphasis on mathematical models of the Prisoner's Dilemma type common in evolutionary biology and economics. This interest is reflected in, for example, Larry Samuelson's (1997) *Evolutionary Games and Equilibrium Selection*, Jurgen W. Weibull's (1995) *Evolutionary Game Theory*, and Herbert Gintis's (2000) *Game Theory Evolving*. Economists are also interested in the evolutionary nature of human self-interest, particularly with regard to contract behavior (e.g., Brian Skyrms's [1996] *Evolution of the Social Contract* and Peyton H. Young's [2001] *Individual Strategy and Social Structure: An Evolutionary Theory of Institutions*). The contrast between the traditional rational choice assumption of classical economics and the heuristics and decision-rules approach favored by evolutionary psychologists has provoked much intellectual interest.*

c. Law

The field of law enjoys a growing number of analyses of the implications of evolutionary psychology for its domain. For example, there is Roger D. Masters and Margaret Gruter's (1992) *The Sense of Justice: Biological Foundations of Law*; John H. Beckstrom's (1993) *Darwinism Applied: Evolutionary Paths to Social Goals*; and Kingsley R. Browne's (1998) *Divided Labours: An Evolutionary View of Women at Work* and (2002) *Biology at Work: Rethinking Sexual Equality*. These analyses have considerable importance not just for law but for sociology and for women's studies. Each year, the conferences of The Society for Evolutionary Analysis and the Law bring evolutionary and legal thought together.

d. Psychiatry, Medicine, and Nutrition

Aside from psychology, the field that perhaps has most engaged with evolutionary psychology and sociobiology is psychiatry. Evolutionary psychiatry is a burgeoning field. A few representative titles might include Stevens and Price's

(1996) *Evolutionary Psychiatry*; McGuire and Troisi's (1998) *Darwinian Psychiatry*; Bruce Charleton's (2000) *Psychiatry and the Human Condition*; Gilbert, McGuire, and Bailey's (2000) *Evolutionary Psychotherapy*; and Glantz and Pearce's (1989) *Exiles from Eden: Psychotherapy from an Evolutionary Perspective*. Any social scientist with a focus on "deviant" behavior or mental health needs to keep abreast of this exciting work.

(Nonpsychiatric) medicine and nutrition are also being influenced by evolutionary thought, particularly (though not exclusively) by "mismatch" or "discrepancy" theory—the premise that many of our ills (social, psychological, and physical) are due to the distance between our current environment and the environments in which we evolved and to which we presumably remain adapted. Good entries to this field would be Trevathan, Smith, and McKenna's (1999) collection, *Evolutionary Medicine*; or Nesse and Williams's (1994) *Why We Get Sick*. Eaton et al. (1994) will be of special interest to those concerned with the health of women, with special reference to cancer of the breast, ovary, and endometrium. A recurring theme of this field is that physicians have often misunderstood the body's adaptive response to disease (e.g., by taking the body's raised temperature and decreased iron levels in response to infection as illness to be treated rather than as adaptive defense); or have pathologized evolved prophylactic mechanisms such as (according to Profet [1992, 1993]) menstruation and pregnancy ("morning") sickness. In nutrition, Eaton, Shostak, and Konner's (1988) *The Paleolithic Prescription* remains a good popular introduction to using the likely diet of our ancestors as a guide to healthy eating. More recently, Loren Cordain (2001) has provided a similar argument and guide. (These authors are primarily scientific researchers rather than popularizers). The underlying assumption of these works is that our bodies are still adapted to the diet of our forager/hunting-gathering ancestors, rather than to the very high carbohydrate diet prevalent since the beginning of agriculture. Evolutionists (and others) argue that we are very poorly adapted to our current industrial diet of highly processed foods.

e. The Humanities and Philosophy

The humanities—literature and the arts—have not disregarded the evolution revolution. See, for example, Joseph

Carroll's (1994) *Evolution and Literary Theory*; Robert Storey's (1996) *Mimesis and the Human Animal*; Cooke and Turner's (1999) *Biopoetics*; Wallin, Merker, and Brown's edited volume (2000) *The Origins of Music*; and Ellen Dissanayake's (2000) *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began*. Grammar and Volland's *Evolutionary Aesthetics* (Grammar & Volland, 2003) replaces the mysteriousness of judgments of beauty with Darwinian analysis.

Philosophers have long been deeply involved with evolutionary theory, often criticizing, often supporting, often utilizing. The relevant literature is vast, but three illustrative works would be the huge tome edited by Hull and Ruse (1998), *Philosophy of Biology*; Daniel Dennett's (1995) *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*; and Larry Arnhart's (1998) *Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature*.

f. Management

In 1999, the journal *Managerial & Decision Economics* published a special, evolution-oriented issue titled "Management and Human Nature," while Nigel Nicholson's (2000) *Executive Instinct: Managing the Human Animal in the Information Age* explains the basics of evolutionary psychology to the business community.

To summarize this sidebar, a multitude of fields are engaging with evolutionary psychology and the evolutionary perspective in general, leaving the social sciences lagging behind.

*My thanks to James Bryan for his helpful suggestions contained in a personal communication dated August 31, 2001.

social-cultural anthropology have largely ignored the new perspective, for the most part summarily dismissing it, occasionally attacking it in passing, or, more usefully if less frequently, treating controversies over applying Darwin to the human sciences as interesting sociological phenomena to be analyzed (e.g., Segerstråle [2000] and this volume). Pierre van den Berghe (1990) and Lee Ellis (1996) have described the reaction of social scientists to evolutionary approaches to human behavior as "biophobia." But let us separate sociology from social-cultural anthropology, for a moment.

Despite mainstream sociology's largely dismissive and negative reaction to "naturalizing" human beings and societies, there are a number of sociologists who have begun to take an evolutionary approach to the subject matter of their discipline: Bernd Baldus's and Anthony Walsh's respective chapters in this volume attest to this interest (though their approaches and conclusions are very different). Lee Ellis and Anthony Walsh's (2000) monumental *Criminology: A Global Perspective* is strongly influenced by evolutionary thinking. Martin Daly and Margo Wilson's (1988) *Homicide* has proven to be an enduring classic in both evolutionary psychology and criminology. Pierre van den Berghe has been a pioneer in applying biological evolution to sociology, and his (1979) insightful *Human Family Systems* and (1981) *The Ethnic Phenomenon* should have made of sociologists early adopters of evolution, had it not been for the barriers discussed below. Other sociologists who use the evolutionary paradigm at least in part include Stephen K. Sanderson and his important (2001) work, *The Evolution of Sociality*, William Gary Runciman's *The Social Animal* (1998) and *The Origins of Social Institutions* (2001), and Joseph Lopreato and Timothy Crippen's (1999) *Crisis in Sociology: The Need for Darwin*. Mainstream or "textbook" sociology, however, continues to pay scant and often negative attention to the evolution revolution (Machalek and Martin 2004).

Social-cultural anthropology has probably been even more resistant to evolution than has sociology. This may be because anthropology's disciplinary organization has had an unanticipatedly compartmentalizing effect on evolutionary thought. In the past, particularly in the United States, anthropology followed a "four-square" model consisting of social-cultural anthropology, anthropological archaeology, anthropological linguistics, and physical/biological anthropology. Though most anthropologists would specialize in just one of these areas, basic training in the discipline involved all. However, in recent decades the subfields have drifted apart, and increasingly their members read different journals, attend different meetings, and have different colleagues. In addition, many new subfields have developed within anthropology, so that the American Anthropological Society is now a federation of sections: "General anthropology" has become a residual category of membership for the temerarious, the courageous souls who scorn to escape the flood of journals and meetings by sheltering within a more narrow specialization. Thus it is that most social-cultural anthropologists automatically relegate to one of the physical/biological or archaeological subfields anything to do with "sociobiology" or evolution, including the evolution of human behavior and even the application of evolutionary perspectives to culture and current social phenomena. (Though not myself a biological anthropologist, for example, I found long ago that the only anthropologists who read my evolution-oriented work were the biological anthropologists, regardless of what audience I thought I was addressing.) The old fourfold

model of anthropology essentially functions today not to integrate, as it once did, but to compartmentalize: social-cultural anthropologists routinely react to anything evolutionary as “biological anthropology, not my field, nothing to do with me or my work” (when they do not react with various nefarious stereotypes, discussed below).

However, there are perhaps three groups of anthropologists who have taken an explicitly evolutionary approach and who at least in times past would probably have been part of the social-cultural subdiscipline.⁴ The first of these is the human behavioral ecologists, whose work Lee Cronk discusses in this volume. Many of these anthropologists, however, no longer identify with mainstream social-cultural anthropology, which by and large ignores them. In part, this is probably because behavioral ecologists see themselves as applying evolutionary biology to the human species and therefore doing “science,” while many social-cultural anthropologists appear to see such efforts as mere “scientism.”⁵

There has been a split within anthropology between those who think of themselves as doing “scientific” anthropology, with concerns about data, hypotheses, and objectivity; and those who see anthropology as largely a political and moral exercise sharing far more with the humanities than with the natural sciences.⁶ Perhaps the most visible fallout of this dispute was the splitting of Stanford University’s Department of Anthropology, in 1998–1999, into two separate administrative, degree-conferring units, one called the Department of Anthropological Sciences and the other the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology. Though the two units overlap heavily in subject matter, one sees anthropology as a science, the other as part of the humanities. The split does not follow the boundaries of the four subfields. Traditionally, anthropology was both science and humanities—for many of us, having a foot in both camps was part of its appeal—but today there are strong pressures to dissociate. In the context of evolutionary psychology and sociobiology there is irony here, because, as we have seen, the humanities, but not the humanities-influenced social sciences, are to a reasonable extent engaging with Darwinian thought.

The second group of (nonbiological/nonarchaeological) anthropologists who have been hospitable to the evolutionary perspective consists primarily of those influenced by the cognitive sciences and who also tend to find it useful to view culture as particulate (the particles having various terms, with some adopting Richard Dawkins’s [1976] term, “meme”). One thinks of the important analysis of the nature of religion being done by Pascal Boyer (1993, 1994a, 1994b, 2000, 2001) and by Scott Atran (2002), as well as Atran’s insights into categorization (1998, 1999); and of Francisco Gil-White’s (2001) analysis of ethnicity. Dan Sperber’s (1994, 1996) conception of culture as an “epidemiology of representations,” too, is informed by evolutionary and psychological perspectives. (Oddly, some social-cultural anthropologists

seem to be respectful of some of these evolutionary efforts while being scornfully dismissive of evolutionary psychology per se.)

Finally, there is the important work of Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd on gene-culture coevolution. These authors view culture and genes as interacting systems of inheritance. Their approach is exemplified by their (2004) *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*. (One of their many original ideas, that of the “work-around,” will be discussed below in the context of “an evolutionarily informed praxis.”)⁷

4. Sources of Intolerance for the Darwinian Gaze

Why are so many social-cultural anthropologists so scornful of evolutionary psychology and sociobiology? Whence comes this impulse to stick one’s finger in the Darwinian eye whenever it dares to gaze at human behavior? The sources are (at least) five: First, there is the horrifying history of past and present misuse of biology in social science and in social policy. Second, there is the deeply embedded dominance of two strands of Cartesian thought in the social sciences: the fixed idea that there is a huge gulf between humans and other animals; and the belief that body and mind are separate rather than one and the same, which makes possible the implicit belief that biological evolution has to do with the body rather than the mind. Third, there is the Durkheimian fallacy, the idea that collectivities can share representations in ways somehow independent of the psychology of individuals, and its more recent adjunct that when such sociological determinism becomes insupportable then the protean concept of “agency” is all the psychology that need be added. Fourth, there is the nineteenth-century utopianism of Marx, with his romantic idea that if we can only get our mode of production and system of social relations right, all social inequality will be abolished and human nature will be perfected (or at least, greatly improved). Fifth, there is the idealistic belief that the social sciences have a mission, a moral mission, to oppose oppression and inequality wherever it is found, and the unexamined assumption that an evolutionary approach is somehow irrelevant or even opposed to that mission.

a. Misuse

We all know that the bad biology of the past has led to genuinely evil efforts, from selective sterilization to wholesale genocide: hellish policies have been conducted in the name of eugenics and of “racial” purification. The horror of these atrocities, culminating in the Holocaust, led to a wholesale repudiation of this pseudobiology and determinism and to a reshaping and

redefinition of sociology and social-cultural anthropology as antibiological fields. Of course, current evolutionary thought is light-years away from that horrifying pseudobiology, but that is no guarantor against its appropriation and misuse. Demagogues and would-be demagogues from all parts of the political spectrum are opportunistic and use and misuse whatever they can (e.g., David Duke's [1998] irrelevant and misleading invocation of sociobiology in his *My Awakening*). But the attempted appropriation of biology for political purposes does not contaminate it for other use: Shakespeare⁸ points out that "the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose," but this has not led the Christian world to abandon its Bible. Neither Pol Pot nor Stalin led to worldwide rejection of Marxism.

b. Humans First! Cartesian Social Science Resists Evolution

Ptolemy may be dead, but his spirit lives on. Yes, Copernicus was right and the Earth is not the centre of the universe; yes, we have learned to denounce the claims of racism and patriarchy and we struggle against the ethnocentrism that lurks within us, but no, species-centrism, that last and most pervasive of all the centrism, still seems self-evidently right to many people. Even some who consider themselves prejudice-free may speak (and more importantly, *think*) of "humans and animals" rather than "humans and other animals." Once, Descartes could preach that it was our souls that separated us from all other living things, making of them mere robots but of ourselves aspirers to the angelic; today's discourse has evolved, for now our separateness and superiority are due not to our *esprit* but to our *culture*: applicable as the theories of the evolutionary biologists may be to the sex of the praying mantis, the alarm calls of marmots, the plumage of the peacock, and the parenting habits of the mouth-breeding cichlid, surely they are irrelevant to the complexities of human culture and society, divorced as these are from the genes and instincts that control the actions of all others save ourselves. Surely, too, those who trespass by seeking to apply evolutionary psychology to our species and our societies must have dark motives: perhaps they seek to reduce glorious humankind to mere animal status or, even worse, to support the manipulations of eugenicists and the claims of racists. Much of the opposition to applying evolution to human behavior stems from this deeply conservative, even reactionary impulse to maintain the mysteriousness of human behavior and, at all costs, to keep a chasm between ourselves and the rest of "Creation." Social scientists and creationists are often strange allies in the campaign to continue to exclude human behavior and society from the natural world. What unites them is their Cartesianism.

Cartesian thinking makes evolutionary psychology appear exculpatory. When we argue that there is an evolved underpinning beneath even the most despicable of human acts, even rape and torture, are we really excusing such behavior while pretending to condemn it? Evolutionists often find it difficult to convince critics that their accounts are in no way exculpatory. Perhaps this lack of communication is also Descartes's fault, for most of us (and virtually all social scientists) remain mired in his insistence on a mind-body split. In our society, we tend to construct the mind as an essence, a self or soul or awareness that is the executive responsible for controlling the body. The body in turn is seen as being responsible for supporting and maintaining the mind, the self. But how can the mind be expected to maintain responsible control when the body fails it? Our legal systems, reflecting our Cartesian folk psychology, do not always expect it to. The mind's control is believed to weaken when the body (never the mind!) produces powerful emotions, or when the body suffers from physical or mental illness, or when the body's use of alcohol or other drugs prevents it from providing the mind with proper support. Given this folk psychology, legal responsibility can be mitigated by bodily failings. But what does all this have to do with anger against evolutionists?

In our folk psychology, it is the body and not the mind that is the product of evolution. Thus, if I argue that males use violence and even rape to gain reproductive advantage, and have been selected to do so, I am heard as arguing that this is another instance of seeking to excuse criminal behavior on the grounds that it is a fault of the body, a failing, and that the mind, that impalpable Cartesian essence, cannot be expected to control so imperfect a body. This defense elicits even more anger than claiming alcohol use as mitigation in cases of, say, vehicular homicide, because while drunkards can sober up, men cannot stop being male: to invoke evolution and crime in the same paragraph is likely to be read as "you can never blame men for their violence." Add to this misunderstanding the faulty assumption that "biological" means "fixed or rigid," and I am heard as saying that not only are men violent criminals and rapists, not only can they not be blamed for it because their behavior is a product of evolution, but nothing can be done about it because it is biological. Well, that argument certainly is enraging. It is also stupid. The misunderstanding is a product of our (usually unexamined) Cartesian folk psychology.

The argument that I read most evolutionary psychologists as actually making begins with a non-Cartesian tack: there is no separate physical body and spiritual mind; there is nobody there but you. The brain consists of various mechanisms of varying degrees of generality and specificity. As they operate, we experience. It may be that self-consciousness is part of that experience because our species has been selected for complex, predictive

- [read online God: A Very Short Introduction here](#)
- [download The Reversal](#)
- [White Witch, Black Curse \(The Hollows Book 7\) online](#)
- [download The Uplift War \(The Uplift Saga, Book 3\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [Excel Dashboards and Reports \(2nd Edition\) here](#)
- [read Vintage Tomorrows: A Historian And A Futurist Journey Through Steampunk Into The Future of Technology pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)

- <http://www.celebritychat.in/?ebooks/God--A-Very-Short-Introduction.pdf>
- <http://schroff.de/books/Reflecting-on-Cosmetic-Surgery---Body-image--Shame-and-Narcissism.pdf>
- <http://musor.ruspb.info/?library/White-Witch--Black-Curse--The-Hollows-Book-7-.pdf>
- <http://cavalldecartro.highlandagency.es/library/Places-Left-Unfinished-at-the-Time-of-Creation.pdf>
- <http://www.netc-bd.com/ebooks/Excel-Dashboards-and-Reports--2nd-Edition-.pdf>
- <http://patrickvincitore.com/?ebooks/Vintage-Tomorrows--A-Historian-And-A-Futurist-Journey-Through-Steampunk-Into-The-Future-of-Technology.pdf>