

the fascist radio, was jailed at Pisa, put on trial for treason, confined at St. Elizabeth's, and finally returned to Italy. A strange, cautionary life, almost in complete contrast to his fellow American expatriate, T.S. Eliot.

If Pound's rash missteps led to his downfall, then Thomas Stearns Eliot's more thoughtful moves can be said to have led to his triumph. Of course, he had advantages. His forebears, Zwerdling notes, were prominent in "cultural bodies, government agencies, schools, churches, welfare organizations." His grandfather, a minister, moved the family to St. Louis, becoming a founder and later chancellor of Washington University. In coming to England, Eliot had as well a powerful sponsor, Bertrand Russell, his professor while at Harvard. Though a young rebel, expatriate, and a poet, Eliot eventually came to be known as "the dean of English criticism," and, as Zwerdling notes, "his associations with a major bank, a prestigious publisher and an authoritative journal are versions of family tradition."

Unknown when he arrived in London, the patrician Eliot chose his connections with care. Pound was useful, but Eliot soon moved in realms beyond Pound's scope, "the exclusive circles where the titled and intellectual aristocracies meet." But the source of Eliot's rise, of course, was not alone in his family prominence and the right connections, but in his poetry. In the five years, 1917-1922, that separate "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste-Land," with a strong assist at the beginning from Pound, Eliot had become famous. He was aware of the successes and the failures of his predecessor Adams, to whom he was distantly related, and of James, and he was determined not to make the same mistakes and to achieve even greater international stature.

In his half-century career, Zwerdling notes, "every conceivable honor was

bestowed on Eliot." He was awarded both Britain's highest honor, the Order of Merit, and the Nobel Prize. It is perhaps the ultimate mark of Eliot's success that he eventually became a British subject, converted to the Church of England, and was no longer the elegant exile, the improvised European, a wanderer between two worlds, but at home at last.

In considering this excellent work it should be added that each "career narrative" is enriched by astute, pertinent comments on the writings of the four men. Finally, Zwerdling's effort illustrates the obvious, of course, that there is no simple single answer to why they turned their backs on America and lived mostly abroad. As in most human endeavors, motives are mixed, compounded of brilliance and sheer muddle, right choices and poor ones. *Improvise Europeans* is learned, lively, provocative, a tribute to the travails and the triumphs of four elegant exiles.

## ***The New Scientism***

JEREMY M. BEER

### **Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge,**

by Edward O. Wilson, *New York:*

*Alfred A. Knopf, 1998. 332 pp.*

### **How the Mind Works,** by Steven

Pinker, *New York: W.W. Norton & Co.,*

*1997. 660 pp.*

FROM TIME TO TIME one reads that scientism is dead. Unfortunately, as those familiar with contemporary psychology know, it is not even dying. In psychology, scientism is not only an omnipresent

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characteristic, but also the authoritative lens through which all data and hypotheses must be viewed and evaluated. Those theories which build upon contrary tenets are ignored, belittled, or discarded. Evolutionary psychology, or sociobiology, represents the apotheosis of scientism within the field.

One learns by the second chapter of Edward O. Wilson's *Consilience* that his defense of scientism will be unabashed and unadulterated. In the spirit of his Enlightenment heroes, Wilson, the father of sociobiology, tries to give a coherent account of the whole of reality based upon the physicalist doctrine "that all tangible phenomena, from the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequences, to the laws of physics." Wilson believes that this idea, hardly novel, has been made newly plausible—indeed, increasingly indubitable—by our improving understanding of the consequences and meaning of Darwinian evolution.

Evolution, in fact, provides the key to "consilience," Wilson's obscure word for the unification of knowledge under a single conceptual umbrella. Armed with a sophisticated understanding of evolution, we can, according to Wilson, unite the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and arts under a single system of physicalist description and explanation, and thus jump-start the temporarily (and unfortunately) stalled Enlightenment project. Most of the book represents Wilson's illustrations of how accounting for evolution enlightens our understanding of human nature as approached in the various realms of inquiry.

Wilson's effort fails, as every scientific account of reality must. The reasons for this failure are numerous, but here let us concentrate on just a few of the specific deficiencies in Wilson's argument. First

and most obviously, Wilson seems to be unaware of the circularities of scientism. He never, for instance, fully answers the objection, recently made forcefully by Alvin Plantinga, that scientism undermines whatever basis we might have for believing in objective truth, including the truth of scientism. As C.S. Lewis put it in his discussion of the "Myth" of naturalistic scientism:

Unless you start by believing that reality in the remotest space and the remotest time rigidly obeys the laws of logic, you can have no ground for believing in any astronomy, any biology, any paleontology, any archaeology. To reach the positions held by the real scientists which are then taken over by the Myth you must, in fact, treat reason as an absolute. But at the same time the Myth asks me to believe that reason is simply the unforeseen and unintended by-product of a mindless process at one stage of its endless and aimless becoming. The content of the Myth thus knocks from under me the only ground on which I could possibly believe the Myth to be true.

That is, there is no reason to believe that evolution has constructed my brain so that I have the capability to reach "true" conclusions about the "real" world. And yet Wilson and virtually all evolutionists assume just this. As Wilson admits from the outset, science merely assumes metaphysical realism. But he argues that the very success of science is a proof that there is a real, external, objective, lawful, orderly world, and that evolution must have made our brains in such a way that we can know it and investigate it (Wilson does not spend much time marveling about this, but he should). Whatever the merits of this argument for realism, Wilson misses the key point: whatever success science has achieved has only been in the realm of the non-human material world. He completely ignores, or downplays, the demonstrated ineffectiveness of science in explaining

man, society, and culture. If anything, should this not be a proof of science's inadequacy to explain all of reality?

Wilson also greatly underestimates the strength of rival accounts, especially theism, his understanding of which is extremely unsound. Consider Wilson's statement that in "[t]he traditional theism of Christianity...reason and revelation cannot be in conflict, because in areas of opposition, revelation is given the higher role...." *Traditional* Christian theism holds no such thing, unless one is excluding the Catholic tradition embodied by philosophers and theologians since Aquinas, including Newman, Maritain, and Pope John Paul II. All of these have stated unequivocally that, though revelation be supra rational, it cannot be irrational, that is, contrary to reason. If reason and revelation were ever truly in direct conflict, then revelation would be thereby falsified. In fact, the most visible defenders of reason today are the Catholic Church and those like Wilson who do not see that Enlightenment-style rationalism has undone itself.

Further misunderstanding is manifest in Wilson's confused discussion of natural law and natural rights in the chapter entitled "Ethics and Religion," wherein he stages an argument between a purportedly representative theist and a skeptic concerning whether ethics has a transcendental source. If any contemporary natural law theorist rests his case upon the silly and irrelevant arguments Wilson ascribes to his theist, I am not aware of him. Probably Wilson has simply not read widely or wisely in natural law theory and theology. As he admits, the theist's argument "is the one I first learned as a child in the Christian faith" (Wilson was raised a Southern Baptist.) Unfortunately, his theological understanding has advanced little since.

It must also be mentioned that there is little or no actual evidence for Wilson's

claim that the various mechanisms by which blind, materialistic evolution occurs can or actually did produce some of the products he ascribes to them (e.g., consciousness, language, artistic genius). Michael Behe, a biochemist, has argued persuasively that evolutionists have overlooked, in their theorizing, the fact that many biochemical systems (upon which all the more complex organic systems depend) are "irreducibly complex." That is to say, they could not possibly have evolved in the gradual Darwinian manner of selection acting on variation since no adaptive advantage accrues until the entire system is functioning. Wilson does not engage this or similar arguments.

Finally, despite his protestations,



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Wilson's scientific ideology underlies his understanding of science, not vice-versa. This is demonstrated in Wilson's discussion of free will. After some confusing disclaimers, Wilson finally informs his reader that, yes, science tells us that free will is an illusion. If "within the interval of a microsecond the active networks composing the thought were known down to every neuron, molecule, and ion, their exact state in the next microsecond might be predicted." But in the next breath he goes on to say that to demonstrate this using the tools of science would be impossible. How could the reader gain greater confidence that Wilson's conclusions are really based upon his philosophical presuppositions?

Steven Pinker is one of the brightest and best-known thinkers among the growing cadre of evolutionary psychologists. He is also one of the most controversial, thanks to an article in which he suggested that women may have a cognitive mechanism which leads them to murder their newborn babies under certain circumstances; or, in other words, that infanticide cannot really be considered abnormal at all. Few folks cared for this line of argument, charging that Pinker was trying to excuse infanticide. Pinker's book helps clarify the context within which he formulated his claim.

Though his title, *How the Mind Works*, does not exactly connote intellectual humility, Pinker's aim and scope are actually less ambitious than is Wilson's. Drawing on many strands of contemporary research, Pinker attempts to explain the functioning of the "mind" (that is, brain) with the guidance of two theories: the computational theory of mind, and Darwinian evolution. The mind, Pinker informs us at some length in the opening chapter, is a wonderful thing, capable of performing truly extraordinary "feats of engineering." But it is nothing more nor less than "a system of organs of compu-

tation, designed by natural selection to solve the kinds of problems our ancestors faced...." "The mind is what the brain does," the information processing performed by a highly sophisticated information processor, or rather processors, since the mind is composed of distinct "modules," or mental organs, specified by genetic programs.

The lengthy chapters that follow constitute Pinker's attempt to illustrate the usefulness of an evolutionary approach to the mind. For example, there are the aforementioned evolutionary benefits of infanticide. Some theorists have argued that it is reasonable to expect that women possess a cognitive mechanism leading them to commit infanticide under certain unfavorable conditions (e.g., when they have several children already and few resources). Now Pinker, like most evolutionary psychologists, realizes that such a mechanism would not represent an adaptation to our current physical and social environments, but to those physical and social environments in which the human brain evolved. Thus, to the objection that mothers who kill their newborns are not acting adaptively because the resources to care for their children are readily available, he would respond: Of course not. Our minds were not made to deal with an environment in which such resources were available. That is why these mothers kill their newborns; by hypothesizing a cognitive mechanism for infanticide, evolutionary psychology can explain why they fail to act rationally.

But consider contraception. That many fertile women with plenty of resources use contraceptives is not "adaptive" in the Darwinian sense, either. Pinker realizes this. To this objection he would respond: Of course not. Our brains did not evolve within an environment in which contraceptives were available. Women who use contraceptives are simply reacting to the new circumstances of

life; they do not have a cognitive mechanism which might lead them to act otherwise. Now how can the evolutionary psychologists have it both ways? How can both the presence and the absence of relevant cognitive mechanisms explain essentially similar non-adaptive behavior—infanticide and the widespread use of contraceptives? Explanation in terms of mental modules or cognitive mechanisms is too flexible to be of much use precisely because these cannot be seen. We infer their existence from the observation of our own minds and the behavior of others. They can be invoked whenever they prove useful, and ignored otherwise.

Pinker is less radical than Wilson on some matters. Unlike Wilson, he readily accepts that the naturalistic fallacy (that what biologically “is” and ethically “ought to be” are somehow linked) is in fact a fallacy. But the basis on which he makes this distinction marks him as less intellectually courageous than Wilson. It is not that he accepts any such fanciful notion as free will; science does not allow it. It is that science and ethics “are two self-contained systems played out among the same entities in the world, just as poker and bridge are different games played with the same fifty-two card deck.” Science treats men as material and mechanical objects; ethics treats them as rational and sentient and free. The important distinction is that, like the assumptions of Euclidean geometry, the assumptions of ethics are not true, just useful. Pinker does not apparently see, or believe, that materialism is likewise a scientifically unproved, and unprovable, assumption.

Pinker might not be as scientific as Wilson, but whereas Wilson adopts the tone of a gracious victor toward religion, Pinker is strident and uncompromising in his atheism. Religion, he informs us dispassionately, “cannot be equated with our higher, spiritual, humane, ethical

yearnings (though it sometimes overlaps with them). The Bible contains instructions for genocide, rape, and the destruction of families, and even the Ten Commandments, read in context, prohibit murder, lying, and theft only within the tribe, not against outsiders. Religions have given us stonings, witch-burnings, crusades, inquisitions, jihads, fatwas, suicide bombers, abortion-clinic gunmen, and mothers who drown their sons so they can be happily reunited in heaven.” Indeed, let us not expatiate on the wonders of theology. “Compared to the mind-bending ideas of modern science, religious beliefs are notable for their lack of imagination (God is a jealous man; heaven and hell are places; souls are people who have sprouted wings).” Who believes this stuff? Only the lazy or the stupid. “For anyone with a persistent intellectual curiosity, religious explanations are not worth knowing...” writes Pinker, paraphrasing Mencken.

And yet Pinker and Wilson are nothing if not religionists. Science, with a capital “S,” is their religion, and Evolution is its central dogma, the one thing that must be held at all costs for Truth to be known and for us to be Free, indeed for us to be Saved (from ourselves, primarily). Man’s failure to believe in Evolution inevitably leads to utter misunderstanding and confusion—to Hell. Wilson’s sect even acknowledges, in the figures of the Enlightenment, its Fathers of the Faith. Both Pinker and Wilson are as evangelical as the most fervent religionists. Competitors, actual or perceived, both within and outside science, are therefore mocked and denigrated. This religious zeal betrays their religion, not their profession.

Yes, the psychology of evolutionary psychologists is more interesting than any of their conclusions. In drawing out the implications of naturalistic doctrines with what he believes to be brutal consistency, the evolutionary psychologist sees

himself as a martyr for the truth. Those who are against him fall into one of two categories: soft-headed, mushy, liberal, and perhaps Marxist humanitarians who believe in the infinite malleability of human nature (Stephen Jay Gould), or religionists wallowing in obscurantism (Pat Robertson). As Matt Ridley writes in *The Red Queen* (1993), a representative book of the discipline, there are two basic opponents of evolutionary psychology, "those who believe that the world was made in seven days by a man with a long beard and that therefore human nature cannot have been designed by selection but by an Intelligence," and "those who protest that human nature did not evolve, but was invented de novo by something called 'culture'...."

Not all evolutionary psychologists subscribe to scientism, of course. Nor could it be said that evolutionary psychology has no value. It has been, in a certain sense, a definite advance within the field. After all, it is only a rigorous application of the implicit assumptions of almost every psychologist; that is, evolutionary psychology is really no more materialistic or naturalistic than any other school of mainstream psychological thought. Although evolutionary psychology might be more strident in proclaiming the doctrines of naturalism or physicalism, their presence has been at least implicit in psychology since it carved out a niche for itself as an independent discipline just over one hundred years ago. Evolutionary psychologists have performed a valuable service in that, so far as these assumptions are made explicit and developed to their limits, their deficiencies are more easily seen than when they lay buried within flaccid theories.

Ultimately, it is the materialistic view of man that must be refuted for the establishment of a fundamental critique of evolutionary psychology—and psychology at large.

## Versions of The Federalist

K. R. CONSTANTINE GUTZMAN

**Friends of the Constitution: Writings of the "Other" Federalists, 1787-1788**, eds. Colleen A. Sheehan and Gary L. McDowell, *Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1998. lii + 523 pp.*

IN CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS of the meaning of the federal Constitution, *The Federalist* claims great attention. Part of the respect traditionally bestowed upon that collection of New York newspaper articles results from the enormous prestige of the authors of the "Publius" essays, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. In the days when the Constitution lay under active consideration by the state conventions, however, *The Federalist* gained only a limited circulation. The speeches, newspaper articles, and pamphlets of several other Federalists played larger roles in securing the constitution's final ratification.

Publius (in this case, James Madison) himself conceded that the people's understanding of the Constitution at the time they adopted it formed the true basis of interpretation, so mere resort to *The Federalist* whenever a question of the Constitution's meaning arises fails even its authors' test. In addition, the final number of *The Federalist* first appeared in May 1788, by which time Federalists in eight states already stood victorious in their local ratification debates.

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