

choose, and a love for uniquely human activities such as philosophy, poetry, conversation, and friendship. What was unique about Oakeshott was his decidedly equivocal attitude toward the political, despite the fact that he is most famous for his works about politics. And though most readers know Oakeshott solely as a political philosopher, he ought also to be considered an important philosopher *simpliciter* as well as a teacher and theorist of education. His collection of essays entitled *The Voice of Liberal Learning* is a brilliant description of what it means to acquire a liberal education. It should be read by anyone who has an interest in the modern university.

In short, what has emerged in the years since Oakeshott's death in 1990 is a much fuller picture of the man himself and of his philosophy. It is no longer possible, given the copious early writings that are now available, to dismiss Oakeshott as merely an ideological defender of the Tory party or an English gentleman out of touch with reality. All the books reviewed here contribute to this reevaluation of Oakeshott as a serious philosopher who was concerned with the permanent things. To read Oakeshott is to enter into a world informed by art, poetry, literature, philosophy and by no little reflection on religion and the transitory nature of human life. Oakeshott never forgot that one ought to "use and to enjoy what is available" instead of "looking for something else." The essence of conservatism for Oakeshott was to "delight in what is present rather than what was or what may be." If only we could all remember this, and live according to it.

Our Friend Mr. Darwin?

Peter Augustine Lawler

Darwinian Conservatism, by Larry Arnhart, *Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2005. 156 pp.*

DARWINIAN CONSERVATIVES, such as Larry Arnhart, hold that it's inevitable and good that we're stuck with our natures. We are, for example, inescapably "sexual animals." We can't help having identities formed by being either male or female, and the sex we have been given by nature (as opposed to the gender that has been constructed for us by society) determines in large measure the choices we make that organize our lives. It's not true, despite what some feminists say, that in a gender-neutral society we would free to be androgynous beings—or take on male or female characteristics at will.

Our freedom is not that of "disembodied spirits." The limited but real freedom we enjoy as rational animals is for deliberation about how best to satisfy the desires and the inclinations we have as male and female animals of a certain kind. According to nature, the good is the desirable or what makes us happy, and our moral dignity consists in choosing to do good or what nature intends and being happy as a result. The Kantian choice between being good and being happy depends on understanding ourselves as dignified humans only to the extent that we can free ourselves from natural determination.

Conservatives usually object to the

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Darwinian denial of the real existence of the human soul, and Arnhart admits that Darwin himself argued that human beings don't differ in kind—but only in degree—from the other primates. But Darwin, Arnhart added, actually contradicted himself: He couldn't help but notice that no other animal is self-conscious in the sense of reflecting on his own origin and destiny and particularly on death. No other animal has the resulting moral self-awareness, which could properly be called the source of our dignity and other qualities of soul. Darwin didn't consistently acknowledge differences in kind, Arnhart explains, for fear that they "would imply a miraculous intervention of a supernatural power that would transcend the limits of natural science." Rather than admit—much less reflect on—the mystery of some natural discontinuity, Darwin characteristically decided quite unscientifically to deny what he saw with his own eyes.

Arnhart isn't afraid to admit that the emergence of the natural human soul in a world that otherwise can be explained in terms of natural bodies is an undeniable fact. The uniquely human qualities might have been a result of an "evolutionary trend" in the other animals, but their emergence remains a quite singular and unprecedented development that could not have been predicted on the basis of that trend. "Exactly how human consciousness emerges in the human brain," Arnhart concedes, "will probably always be a mystery." That mystery, it appears, leaves space for a God who is not merely a "First Cause," although Arnhart doesn't dwell on that fact.

Instead, he makes a big deal of siding with the Darwinians against the "religious conservatives" who hold that "the spiritual freedom and dignity of the human soul as the image of God requires that the soul be immaterial and separable from the body." There are certainly some vulgar Platonists—including vulgar

Platonist Christians—who believe that. But that belief, Arnhart rightly claims, is not even authentically Christian; "the Bible suggests a union of body and soul, and so immortality requires the resurrection of the body to sustain the soul." Human manifestations of soul, of course, depend on the material activity of the brain, and human souls and minds as we experience them exist nowhere but in human bodies.

Aristotelians and Thomists mean by the soul human thought, desire, and action that can't be explained only or mainly by the enhancement of the prospects for the species' survival. Arnhart, from their view, is at best ambivalent on the soul's real existence. He generally contends that all human thought, desire, and action can be explained in terms of favoring those traits that enhance the flourishing of our species. Even the soul itself is finally a "means" for the effective pursuit of the physical ends evolved nature has given members of our species. Today, the most obvious rejoinder to this "reductionistic" view isn't found in the Great Books but all the evidence we have around us that human beings have the singular capability quite consciously to resist evolved nature's pitiless, cruel, and impersonal intention for each of them.

Can Darwinian theory explain the rapid drop in birthrate—far below the rate of replacement—among sophisticated Americans and Western Europeans as a whole today? The Darwinian Hayek was not just wrong, he was way wrong, about the reproductive results of modern wealth, power, and freedom, about how members of our species living in the best environment ever would organize their lives. Human beings seem to be able to vote quite consciously against their replacements and for themselves. Part of our dignity and perversity is that we are able to act as *individuals*.

Arnhart reports the opinion of fellow sociobiologist James Q. Wilson that "the radically individualistic culture of the

French Enlightenment...finally subverted the traditional morality supporting the family in the last half of the twentieth century.” Can Darwinians even begin to explain why that “atomistic individualism” emerged, much less say anything certain about its limits? Could anyone have predicted, even a generation ago, that marriage would be reconfigured to be between any two individuals, and not necessarily between a man and a woman? And what about the growing separation of human sexual behavior from reproduction in general, which may well become more or less complete through biotechnology? Does that technological achievement—the product of the free human individual—have the power to change our natural desires? We already notice that the distance between male and female sexual behavior is narrowing.

The big issue lurking here, of course, is Darwin and death. Arnhart acknowledges, if barely, that the goal of the modern technological or biotechnological project is the indefinite extension of the length of the average human life, to act freely to bring the natural life cycle to an end. He claims that it’s unlikely that we will succeed in extending the maximum length of human life much at all. “It is,” he explains, “likely that aging is controlled by so many genes interacting in such complex ways that it would be hard to eliminate the genetic mechanisms for aging...without disrupting other beneficial mechanisms.” Maybe natural evolution is too complex to ever be brought under our conscious control, but Arnhart is more certain that we shouldn’t than we can’t make our lives indefinitely long.

“Instead of longing to live forever,” Arnhart urges, “we might desire to live... as fully as we can” during our natural lifespan. He lists the desire for a “complete life,” not the desire for immortality, among our evolved natural desires. But his more nuanced view is that whether or not we long to live forever, we *ought* to

regard that longing as unreasonable. He’s stuck with that moralistic tone because it’s so obvious that the limits we’ve been given by nature conflict in many basic ways with our interests as free individuals. Darwin can’t even begin to explain why we can be so dissatisfied with our merely biological existence, even if it he might be right that we make ourselves more unhappy than anything else with our only partly successful efforts to overcome our natural limits.

It could be that believing that Darwin teaches the whole truth is what makes us individuals today particularly dissatisfied with our natures. If nature intends nothing more than species survival and is utterly indifferent to individual longings for freedom, then we have every right not to defer to its guidance. Consider that those Americans who live most faithfully as evolved nature intends—who get married, have children, raise them well, and eventually not so unwillingly step aside for their replacements—are our observant religious believers. They don’t believe that Darwin tells the whole truth or the deepest truth about their purpose and destiny, and so they believe they need not rebel too intensely against their natural inclinations.

Those Americans who do believe—more or less—that Darwin does teach the whole truth about nature tend to live as rebellious or anti-natural individuals, preferring their own flourishing and perpetuation to getting their genes intact to the next generation. They may be making themselves unhappy, but they’d rather be anxious and lonely than dead. As Hobbes explained, they refuse to be species fodder like the bees and ants or even chimps. If life is really all about physical survival, then we will be individual survivalists, not species survivalists. And we’ll be more suspicious than ever about following our natural “moral instincts,” given that they intend to turn free individuals into really effective species fodder.

Conservatives might selectively use the Darwinian understanding of nature against the utopianism of feminist social constructionists and the wild speculations of libertarians who hope to use biotechnology to redesign nature according to their whims or preferences. Conservatives also know that believing that Darwin teaches the whole truth about our origin and destiny, our experience has shown us, may actually be devastating for our species from a Darwinian perspective. Genuinely conservative Darwinians do what they can to keep evolution from being taught in public schools as a comprehensive explanation of all things human, and they prop up traditional or non-Darwinian accounts of religion and virtue. A genuinely conservative Darwinian wouldn't write an intelligent, accessible and polemical book called *Darwinian Conservatism*.

Betraying Conservative Principles

George W. Carey

**Impostor: How George W. Bush
Bankrupted America and Betrayed
the Reagan Legacy**, by Bruce
Bartlett, *New York, Doubleday, 2006.*
310 pp.

BRUCE BARTLETT is widely known in conservative circles principally through his syndicated column which normally focuses on economic and fiscal concerns. Writing from a libertarian and free trade perspective, his columns are invariably informative, often identifying and elaborating on

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existing and emergent problems in these areas. Over the years, even among those on the Left, he has gained a reputation for being honest, straightforward, and principled. Thus, it comes as no surprise that his book, the main purpose of which is “to disabuse people of the idea that George W. Bush is a conservative president who has relentlessly pursued a conservative agenda,” has received so much attention.

Now, to be sure, most thoughtful observers of the American political scene have long realized that Bush, whatever he may be, is no conservative—at least as the word conservative was generally understood before he took office—despite the mainstream media's persistence in referring to him as such. While the significance of Bartlett's book is manifold, its most immediate goal is that of setting the record straight, *i.e.*, informing a much wider public of what was apparent to observers; namely, Bush's fiscal and economic policies, far from being conservative, have in fact alienated most libertarians and traditional conservatives who have long identified with the Republican Party.

While some reviewers have quibbled with Bartlett's analysis and conclusions by citing certain particulars—*e.g.*, Bush did identify the problems with social security funding, he did push for tax reductions on capital gains and dividend income, he did successfully push for the Central American Free Trade Agreement—there can be no gainsaying that Bartlett presents compelling evidence for his charge. Take, for example, the enormously troublesome issue of farm subsidies. As Bartlett notes, by 1996, through the elimination of “a number of subsidies and regulations,” we had finally moved “a long way toward creating a free market in agriculture.” Yet, in 2002, ignoring his campaign promises to encourage “a more market oriented agriculture policy,” Bush signed into law a farm bill that “raised spending by almost \$90 billion above previous law” and would, by Congressional