

## SEVEN

### Darwin Knows Best

#### *Can Evolution Support the Classical Liberal Vision of the Family?*

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For decades, many have thought it obvious that Darwinian theory undermines traditional notions of family and society.<sup>1</sup> For instance, in recent times, Daniel Dennett has argued that Darwinism is a “universal acid” which eats through all such traditional ideas (Dennett 1995). The *traditional family*—by which I mean a normative notion of a nuclear family of husband, wife, and (typically) children—is only one more of its victims. Recently, however, some with a classical liberal vision of man and society have taken umbrage at the claim that Darwinism threatens the traditional conception of the family.<sup>2</sup> They claim that Darwinism actually supports the classical liberal vision by showing that the family is solidly rooted in human biological nature rather than open to the whims of Leftist cultural fashion.

In this chapter, I seek to respond to this novel species of Darwinians. Having first examined the nature of Darwinian science, the classical liberal vision of human nature, and the arguments of Darwinian conservatives, I then respond directly to Larry Arnhart and James Q. Wilson, two of the most noteworthy champions of Darwinism’s compatibility with the traditional family. In a time when the traditional family and traditional sexual norms are under increasing fire, some conservatives believe an appeal to Darwinian science may be the answer. I argue that these conservatives are wrong to maintain that Darwinian theory can serve as the intellectual foundation for the traditional conception of the family.

Contra Arnhart and Wilson, a Darwinian philosophy of nature simply lacks the stability the traditional family requires; it cannot support the traditional conception of human nature and the normativity contained therein. If conservatives are to maintain these traditional ideas, the theoretical foundation must lie elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

### WHAT IS DARWINIAN THEORY?

Before going any further, it should be noted that by “Darwinism” and “Darwinian theory” I mean non-teleological evolution driven by natural selection and random variation/mutation. Clarity about this matter is crucial because some theists use these terms in ways not seen in the biological literature—especially when they want to assert the compatibility of Darwinism with theism, political conservatism, and the like. Ernst Mayr (often known as the dean of evolutionary biology), having surveyed a great deal of primary literature on Darwinian theory from Dobzhansky to Lewontin to Wright, concludes, “One thing about which modern authors are unanimous is that adaptation is not teleological” (Mayr 1983, 324). I have no quarrel with those who wish to intertwine teleological concepts (such as divine purpose) with aspects of evolutionary biology. However, teleological evolutionists should simply be clear that their hybrid theory is not Darwinism, traditionally understood. It is certainly not Darwin’s theory (Ghiselin 1994, 2002; Bowler 1996, 24–25; Arnhart 1998, 231).

I have claimed that Darwinian theory is non-teleological. A brief explanation is in order. As far as I can see, the only way an intelligent agent (like God) could use the Darwinian mechanism for specific ends would be to (1) guide which organisms survive to reproduce, in which case the selection would be “intelligent” rather than “natural”;<sup>4</sup> (2) guide which mutations occur, in which case the mutations would not be random;<sup>5</sup> or (3) instantiate the possible world where random mutations, by chance, produce the agent’s desired outcome. This last option seems to equivocate on “chance” and “random.” It is true that this process might be seen as stochastic (as a great deal of the biological literature maintains Darwinism is).<sup>6</sup> However, this process clearly contains a *telos* achieved by an agent, albeit by circuitous means. Thus this is intelligent selection similar to that in (1). Much more could be said on this third option, but suffice it to say that this quasi-Molinist Evolution is not traditional Darwinism.<sup>7</sup> Darwin specifically rejected divine guidance of any sort. “The old argument of design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered,” writes Darwin. “There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows” (Darwin 1887, 278–79). Further, when

Asa Gray interpreted Darwin's theory as a great teleological work of the Creator,

Darwin protested that this was not at all what he meant. To find such evidences of design not only in the end product of natural selection but also in each stage of it was to deny his theory altogether. For if each variation was predetermined so as to conduce to the proper end, there was no need for natural selection at all, the whole point of his theory being that, out of undesigned and random variations, selection created an evolutionary pattern. "If the right variations occurred, and no others, natural selection would be superfluous."<sup>8</sup> (Himmelfarb 1996, 348)

It should not be implied from what I have said, however, that one cannot consistently maintain that biological history *appears* or *looks* non-teleological but is in fact teleological. Intelligent agents often cover their tracks for one reason or another. A gardener, for example, may arrange various plant species so that their organization *appears* natural rather than designed. It is designed nonetheless. I take it that a corresponding theistic evolution would be non-Darwinian, for while evolution appears non-teleological it is in fact designed.

Finally, nothing I have said should be taken to mean that Darwinism entails atheism. This is clearly not so. Even if Darwinism is incompatible with many traditional theistic claims, surely it is compatible with some views which include the existence of a deity. Deism, for instance, may fit quite nicely with Darwinism (Rosenberg and McShea 2008, 87). Still, given the non-teleological nature of Darwinism, it is unsurprising that the majority of Darwin's most vociferous defenders—from Darwin's bulldog Thomas Huxley to Darwin's rottweiler Richard Dawkins—have not been traditional theists. Nonetheless, a handful of Christian scientists and scientific organizations like the National Academy of Sciences seek to convince the public that there is no conflict between Darwinian theory and traditional religious belief (Collins 2006; McGrath and McGrath 2007; Miller 1999; NAS 1998, 58; NAS 2008, 49). Yet a 1998 study found that only seven percent of members of the National Academy of Sciences believe in a personal God. Interestingly, this number drops to a minuscule 5.5 percent among NAS biologists (Larson and Witham 1998, 313). Even more recently, a survey on the religious beliefs of eminent evolutionary biologists revealed that the vast majority view religion as an evolved adaptation. "Only two out of 149 described themselves as full theists" (Graffin and Provine 2007, 294). In short, Darwinian evolution is non-teleological, and this fact is recognized by its most prominent advocates.

## SOWELL AND HUMAN NATURE

Because Darwinian conservatives claim that Darwinism supports the classical liberal conception of human nature, it will be helpful here to describe that conception. Having examined classical liberalism's view of human nature, we will be in a position to assess its compatibility with Darwinian theory. As far back as ancient times, philosophers have recognized that social and political organization should be based upon human nature; after all, we seek a social and political order apt for human beings, not ants or aardvarks. One of the defining works on human nature and political theory for modern conservatives is Thomas Sowell's *A Conflict of Visions* (Sowell 2002). Sowell argues that different understandings of human nature are at the heart of disagreements between Left and Right: in short, the intellectual Left tends to hold a rather utopian or "unconstrained" vision of human beings as perfectible given the correct social arrangements, while the intellectual Right has held a "constrained" or realist view of human beings as inherently limited. The textbook example of a thinker of the former school is Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau maintained that human beings were originally free of any sort of state control; the state is unnatural. In fact, man was originally innocent—"Men are not naturally enemies"—and is only now corrupted by social structures (Rousseau 1998, 21). As Allan Bloom explains, for Rousseau, "[m]an was born whole, and it is at least conceivable that he become whole once again" (Bloom 1987, 170).<sup>9</sup> Going further, many Marxists believed that once class differences were erased through the collective ownership of the means of production, peace and justice would reign on Earth.

The classic example of the latter school of thought is Edmund Burke who, while he approved of the American Revolution, argued against the French Enlightenment's utopian dreams. French revolutionaries know not what they do, Burke argued *before* the revolution ran its course, for if they tear down social structures and norms which took the collective wisdom of centuries of human civilization to build, they have no idea what hell on Earth they will create (Burke 1955). But we do now; it was called "The Reign of Terror" for good reason. In Sowell's understanding, drawn upon by Darwinian conservatives, Burke's realist vision of human nature sees humanity as less malleable than the utopian or unconstrained vision.

Two intertwined and vitally important aspects of Burke's thought which remain important to modern conservatism are the twin ideas of limited human reason and preference for organic (rather than contrived) institutions. Far from being a mere nuisance or hindrance, traditional social structures and institutions are ways of transmitting collective wisdom. Each individual can only grasp so much reality. We need the wisdom of our ancestors; we must learn from their successes and failures as

embodied in our current institutions and mores. Social structures did not come about overnight but were built up organically through the collective experiences of the ages. These institutions may not be perfect, but neither are they arbitrary. They embody hard-fought knowledge and wisdom. This does not mean that social institutions should never change; it merely means they should change slowly and organically, for no single generation has the wisdom to erect entirely new social structures. According to Burke, the French Enlightenment too quickly dismissed this collective wisdom—what G. K. Chesterton called “the democracy of the dead”—and thus overestimated the knowledge and wisdom of individual men or even a single generation of men (Chesterton 1986, 251).

For these reasons, conservative thinkers like Nobel Prize-winning economist Friedrich Hayek argued in *The Road to Serfdom* that the socialist ideal of a planned economy could never work—and this, decades before the collapse of the Soviet Union (Hayek 1994). Individual men, or groups of men, simply do not have the knowledge necessary to plan something as complex as a national economy. It is impossible for them to know in advance what the wants and needs of millions of people will be—how much bread and milk they will desire, for example, and at what prices. Contrary to many streams of modern Leftist thought, Hayek argued, human reason is inherently constrained in this important respect.

Sowell is by no means the only conservative to note these contrasting views of human nature. Russell Kirk, a conservative giant of the twentieth century, agreed. Modern conservatives are “contemptuous of the notion of human perfectibility,” he writes.

Conservatives are chastened by their principle of imperfectability. Human nature suffers irremediably from certain faults. . . . To aim for Utopia is to end in disaster, the conservative says: we are not made for perfect things. All that we reasonably can expect is a tolerably ordered, just, and free society, in which some evils, maladjustments, and suffering continue to lurk. By proper attention to prudent reform, we may preserve and improve this tolerable order. (Kirk 1982, xvii–xviii)

Similarly, in *Federalist 10* and *Federalist 51*, James Madison lays out a constrained vision of human nature as the basis for the U.S. Constitution. Human beings are inherently factious, intellectually limited, and selfish. For this reason, power must be distributed and checked by other powers. “It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?” “If men were angels,” he famously wrote, “no government would be necessary” (Rossiter 1999, 290). Our limited form of government, then, is only a necessary evil *given human nature*. With this classical liberal heritage, modern conservatives see human beings and social institutions as *constrained* by human nature.

## DARWINIAN CONSERVATISM

Having explicated the classical liberal view of human nature, I will now describe how Darwinian conservatives attempt to advance this constrained view of human nature. In short, the central claim of Darwinian conservatism is that *Darwinian biology lends scientific support to the conservative claim that human nature is not malleable in the way modern liberals suppose*. As Arnhart puts it, “Darwinian science is on the side of the realist vision of the conservative tradition” (Arnhart 2005, 7). He is not alone in thinking this. Conservatives from Francis Fukuyama and Friedrich Hayek to columnists George Will and Charles Krauthammer hold similar views. Conservative law professor John McGinnis, for example, thinks Darwinian science drives a stake through the heart of liberal political philosophy: “The constraints of our biological nature explode the most persistent delusion of the Left: that man is so malleable that he can be reshaped or transformed through political actions” (McGinnis 1997, 31). For many conservatives, the chief lesson of modern times—from the French Revolution to the collapse of Soviet communism—is that a sustainable political order must have a proper view of human nature; and they see Darwinian science as supporting this limited view of man. As Arnhart argues, “the conservative tradition of thought from Burke and [Adam] Smith to Hayek, Kirk, and Wilson rests on a view of human nature that is supported by Darwinian biology” (Arnhart 2005, 10).

For Arnhart, Darwinian biology definitively establishes that, contrary to many on the Left, nurture is not everything; nature is a constraint on humankind. Fellow Darwinian conservative James Q. Wilson gives the following example from empirical research: “Young children can be conditioned to be fearful of caterpillars but not of opera glasses. Something in them prepares them to believe that creepy, furry things might be harmful but odd, glass-and-plastic devices probably are not” (Wilson 1993, 125). New research in cognitive and developmental psychology also appears to show that humans are natural dualists (Barrett 2009, 89). We naturally tend to believe the mind can function after death. We even naturally tend to believe in God or gods (Barrett 2009, 89–93).<sup>10</sup> Children are indeed sponges, but they come with innate dispositions and tendencies toward certain beliefs. The implication is that social conditioning only works with what nature provides. Social conditioning has natural limits.

Arnhart’s agenda is ambitious. He seeks to show that the classical liberal vision of human nature—as expressed in the economic, social, and political orders—is supported by Darwinism. We will zero in particularly, however, on his view of the family, which classical liberals traditionally see as the primary and natural community in which human nature is manifest and out of which springs the larger social order. In short, Arnhart maintains that, “*Darwinism supports the conservative view of sexual*

*differences, family life, and parental care as fundamental for the social order of liberty.*" In particular,

a Darwinian account of the natural desires for sexual identity, sexual mating, and parental care confirms the conservative commitment to the traditional social order of sex, marriage, and the family. . . . Darwinian biology sustains the conservative understanding of sexual conduct and familial bonding as innate propensities of human nature. (Arnhart, 2005 10; emphasis added)

So, contrary to many on the political Left, the family is not merely a social construction. Human sexuality is not whatever we desire it to be. Rather, the basic social order of the family, according to Arnhart and Darwinian conservatism, is rooted in hard facts of human biology. The constraints placed upon human behavior are not arbitrary. They are natural and cannot be changed.

Arnhart develops a Darwinian conservative account of family values, sex differences, and male dominance. First, as regards family values, Arnhart argues—like Adam Smith and Edmund Burke before him—for the naturalness of the family. Family ties are natural, he claims, because they stem from basic instincts humans have evolved. That is,

nature instills the instinctive desires for self-preservation and propagation of offspring to promote the two great ends of nature—survival and reproduction. Like other animals whose offspring cannot survive without parental care, human beings are formed by nature to feel instinctive desires for sexual mating and parental care. (Arnhart 2005, 47)

This being the case, the family is the simple output of human culture and reason reflecting upon these desires. Further, as Darwin understood, the natural human sympathy and fellow-feeling which is developed in the family extends outward to produce the larger order of society.

This runs contrary to the utopian stream of Leftist thought which sees the family as an unnatural institution. There was a time when there were no families, this vision claims, and perhaps there will be a time without families in the future. So Friedrich Engels, for example, thought the family could be abolished and all children taken off to be educated equally (Arnhart 2005, 48–49). Against such utopian dreams, conservatives see the family as rooted in natural human sexual and parental instincts. They are part of human nature and “will always constrain culture and law to support marital and family bonding” (Arnhart 2005, 50).

Second, the differences between Left and Right on sex differences are almost too obvious to mention. The Left has often held that gender identity is a mere social construction and the traditional family only one arbitrary, patriarchal way to organize society. But, Arnhart claims, Darwinian biology is on conservatives’ side: The different instincts and drives of men and women flow from their different biological natures. Citing Steven Rhoads’ work on sex differences, Arnhart claims “the re-

productive fitness of males was enhanced by being more sexually promiscuous and more physically aggressive than females" (Arnhart 2005, 53). Thus, natural selection selected for these traits in men. For this reason, human culture must respect these enduring traits and work with them rather than organize the social and political order in a way which denies these basic facts.

Finally, Arnhart argues that male dominance is natural, as is evidenced by its universality in human beings (and other species). This too can be accounted for by a biological human nature, forged by natural selection selecting for male dominance over millennia of human struggle. So, for instance, it is not surprising that the vast majority of world leaders are men, for this dominance instinct is in their genes (Arnhart 2005, 58). The Left may not like it, says Arnhart, but this is a cold hard fact of Darwinian biology. Survival is paramount. And we must follow facts, not wishes when constructing a fitting social, political, and familial order.

### CHALLENGING DARWINIAN CONSERVATISM

With this background on the non-teleological character of Darwinian science, the classical liberal view of human nature, and Darwinian conservatives' alleged concord with it, we are now in a position to assess Darwinian conservatism's understanding of the family. At first glance Darwinian conservatism appears to both bolster the conservative claim that there is a real human nature grounded in human biology and counteract conservatives' public relations problem over their alleged "war on science" (Mooney 2005). But as I will explain in four steps, Darwinian theory not only fails to support conservative positions on the family but positively undermines them.

#### *Biology or Darwinism?*

The first error of Darwinian conservatism is to confuse biology with Darwinian theory. In a time when Darwinian theory has dominated biological research for decades, this mistake is easily made. It is a mistake nonetheless. Arnhart is surely right that much political philosophy on the Left proceeds without moorings to biological reality; it philosophizes in the abstract, apart from the tedious constraints of human biology. Nowhere is this better seen than in the discussion of sex differences. Many on the Left blithely ignore evidence of basic differences in behavior between boys and girls. For instance, at one point Hasbro Toys considered marketing a doll house to both girls and boys in order to increase sales. But research quickly revealed that boys and girls played with the doll house in quite different ways. As Christina Hoff Sommers recounts, "The girls dressed the dolls, kissed them, and played house; the boys cata-



pulted the toy baby carriage from the roof. A Hasbro general manager came up with an explanation: boys and girls are different" (Sommers 2001, 73). No doubt many Leftists respond by adding epicycles to their theory and appealing to the many unseen behavior reinforcements which shape our dualistic, masculine-feminine social construction of gender identity. But a great deal of scientific research suggests that many differences between boys and girls are innate rather than learned. To take but one example, males tend to be much better at spatial reasoning than females. Females, on the other hand, tend to surpass boys in verbal ability (Sommers 2001, 87). These differences shape social patterns from children's play to choices of college major. Regardless of those who wish there were no differences—no doubt motivated by numerous injustices of past and present—the realities of gender identity and sex-specific behavior persist.

But what does Arnhart's addition of Darwinian biology add to the case for sex differences? In a word: nothing. These differences are empirical facts regardless of the truth of Darwinian theory. Even a young-Earth creationist could point to the same biological realities as the Darwinian conservative to rebut the idea that gender identity is wholly a product of social conditioning. As Arnhart admits in another context, "That what is naturally good for us depends to some degree on our biological nature as men or women with sexual, conjugal, and parental desires is true regardless of whether that biological nature is eternal or evolved" (Arnhart 2005, 55). If this is so, then it is human biology *simpliciter*—not anything specific to *Darwinian* biology—which undermines the utopian vision. Appealing to the hard and fast facts of human biology is certainly worthwhile; these facts should indeed guide social and political philosophy. They are facts, however, to which all parties can appeal.

### *A True Human Nature?*<sup>11</sup>

A second and extremely important problem with Darwinian conservatism is its stark incompatibility with the classical idea of human nature. G.K. Chesterton once quipped that, "Evolution . . . does not especially deny the existence of God; what it does deny is the existence of man" (Chesterton 1989, 196). In this one remark the ever-perspicacious Chesterton summarized a serious conflict between classical philosophy and Darwinism. Arnhart and Darwinian conservatives claim continuity with classical liberal ideas, Aristotle, and even Moses and St. Thomas Aquinas (Arnhart 1998, 258–66). But their claim that Darwinism supports the classical view of human nature is deeply mistaken.

In traditional Western (Aristotelian and Scholastic) thought, each particular organism belongs to a certain universal class of things. Each individual shares a particular nature—or essence—and acts according to its nature. Squirrels act squirrelly and cats catty. We know with certainty

that a squirrel is a squirrel because a crucial feature of human reason is its ability to abstract the universal nature from our sense experience of particular organisms. How is it that we are able to recognize different organisms as belonging to the same group? The Aristotelian provides a good answer: It is because species really exist—not as an abstraction in the sky, but they exist nonetheless. We recognize the squirrel’s form, which it shares with other members of its species, even though the particular matter of each squirrel differs. So each organism, each unified whole, consists of a material and immaterial part (form). (“Species” here may be more encompassing than certain biological definitions. For example, wolves and dogs might share a common essence.)

One way to see this form-matter dichotomy is as Aristotle’s solution to the ancient tension between change and permanence debated so vigorously in the pre-Socratic era. Heraclitus argued that reality is change. Everything constantly changes, like fire which never stays the same from moment to moment. As Heraclitus memorably put it, “It is not possible to step twice into the same river” (Curd and McKirahan 1996, 36). Philosophers like Parmenides (and Zeno of “Zeno’s paradoxes” fame) argued exactly the opposite; there is no change. Despite appearances, reality is permanent. How else could we have knowledge? If reality constantly changes, how can we know it? *What* is to be known? Aristotle solved this dilemma by postulating that while matter is constantly in flux—even now some somatic cells are leaving my body while others arrive—an organism’s form is stable. It is a fixed reality, and for this reason it is a steady object of our knowledge. Organisms have an essence which can be grasped intellectually.

Enter Darwinism. Recall that Darwin sought to explain the origin of *species*. Yet as Darwin pondered his theory he realized that it destroyed the traditional conception of species altogether. Darwinism suggests that, given enough time, the progeny of living things can potentially morph into any other material arrangement without the aid of an immaterial organizing principle.<sup>12</sup> Scientists in Darwin’s day were prone to think cells were like simple blobs of Jell-O, easily rearrangeable. It is not surprising, then, that Darwin held that there is no immaterial, immutable form. In *The Origin of Species*, he writes:

I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given, for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms. The term variety, again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is also applied arbitrarily, for convenience’s sake. (Darwin 1993, 78–79)

Contemporary Darwinists agree. In the neo-Darwinian view, Richard Dawkins maintains,

individuals and groups are like clouds in the sky or dust-storms in the desert. They are temporary aggregations or federations. They are not stable through evolutionary time. Populations may last a long while, but they are constantly blending with other populations and so losing their identity. (Dawkins 2006b, 34)

Statements like these should make the classically-minded shudder. These are typical expressions of the anti-Aristotelian (and anti-Thomistic) philosophy of nominalism (Arnhart, 1998, 233). Nominalism (stemming from the Latin *nomen*, or “name”) suggests that the individual is the only reality—not the universal, form, or essence. The mind invents universals in order to group similar objects. The universal is not a reality in which the individual in some way participates.

Arnhart thinks modern Darwinians can walk a middle road between essentialism and nominalism (Arnhart 1998, 235). But this is untenable. At issue is whether the term species represents a stable ontological reality (that is, a substantial form and/or divine idea) rather than a temporarily useful description. The essentialist says yes, the nominalist no. There is no middle ground. Arnhart’s asseveration that species can be “enduring” without being “eternal” is a distraction. He is right that individual organisms’ similarities are not arbitrary given universal common descent, but the designation of “species” (if meant in the classical sense) on a given group of individuals is. In this way, Arnhart and Darwinian conservatives do not just deny the eternity of species but their classical ontological status.

The broader Western tradition—from which classical liberalism inherits much—embraced essentialism. Far from being an accidental by-product of millennia of random mutations, in the classical view the form of the species reflects purposiveness, and in most of the tradition outright rational design. Species are forethoughts, not afterthoughts. There is a serious conflict between Darwinism and the classical Western tradition, then, in the denial of true species or essences. For the classically-minded, this denial is a grave error, because the essence (the species in the Aristotelian sense) is the true object of our knowledge. As Benjamin Wiker observes, Darwin reduced species to “mere epiphenomena of matter in motion” (Wiker 2002, 218). What we call a “dog,” in other words, is really just an arbitrary snapshot of how some particular organisms look at present.<sup>13</sup> In the Darwinian view, Wiker suggests, there is no species or natural kind “dog” but only a collection of individuals, connected in a long chain of changing shapes, which happen to resemble each other today but will not tomorrow.

More to Chesterton’s point, man, the universal, does not exist. According to Stanley Jaki, Chesterton detested Darwinism because “it abolishes forms and all that goes with them, including that deepest kind of ontological form which is the immortal human soul” (Jaki 1986, 76). And

if one does not believe in universals, there can be, by extension, no true human nature—only a collection of somewhat similar individuals. As David Hull notes, on a Darwinian account, organisms are not part of a species “because they possess any essential traits. No species has an essence in this sense. Hence there is no such thing as human nature. There may be characteristics which all and only extant human beings possess, but this state of affairs is contingent, depending on the current evolutionary state of *Homo sapiens*” (Hull 1978, 358). The nominalist might, however, follow Locke in distinguishing between a *real essence* and a *nominal essence*, denying only that species have the former. Even so, nominal essences do not afford knowledge of universals but only of accidents—accidents which, according to Darwinian theory, are constantly in flux over evolutionary time. One could postulate a real essence “human being” beneath the flux, on this view, but importantly we have no access to it. As Locke writes, “I do not deny, but Nature, in the constant production of particular Beings, makes them . . . very much alike and of kin one to another: But I think it is nevertheless true, that the boundaries of the Species, whereby Men sort them, are made by Men” (Locke 1990, 462).

Classical notions of ethics (including moral reasoning about human dignity and the family) vitally depend upon this notion of a real, knowable human nature. Aristotle and others argued for what is ethical in terms of what leads to *human* flourishing. Aquinas argued for the naturalness of marriage in terms of its apt fit to human needs and desires (Arnhart 1998, 262). Yet if there is no human nature, how can we know what human fulfillment looks like in general? Individuals might, after all, flourish under different moral codes. Lack of a common human nature may leave us with “different strokes for different folks.” This is not exactly the familial ethics most conservatives seek to defend. Rather, they clearly defend a view of the family and sexual ethics they see as applicable to all human beings. Underlying this is the classical idea of a common human nature, not Darwinism’s implicit nominalism.

As Alasdair MacIntyre argued in *After Virtue*, the way out of modernity’s ethical skepticism is to recognize that if something’s nature includes purposes or proper functions, then “oughts” follow from that “is” (MacIntyre 2007). For if man *is* a certain sort of being, if he has a certain formal nature, then there are facts about how man *ought* to behave. There are objective criteria by which we can judge a human being good or bad. This kind of *telos*-infused nature cannot be sustained by Darwinian theory, however, for it requires that objects have formal natures or are purposefully made.

But, the Darwinian will object, “We believe in function, too!”<sup>14</sup> True, the Darwinian knows of function—that ears typically hear, for example. The information encoding ears was passed to progeny because ears happened to increase reproductive fitness. If in 10,000 years humans walk on their hands because this somehow aids reproduction, the Darwinian can-

not claim that hands are *meant* for walking, only that hands in fact *do* walk at this time.<sup>15</sup> The Darwinian, then, rightly speaks of (currently) typical functions with (currently) regular effects. What the Darwinian cannot support is the notion of *proper* function for human beings across time, geography, and culture, for she lacks a *normative* notion of natural kinds which are stable over time. Without this, natural law ethics is doomed. One might think that the Darwinian can still judge a given organism dysfunctional if it fails to look or behave like the organisms most similar to it. But without the traditional, rich notion of species, one cannot tell if this “dysfunctional” organism is truly defective (with regard to its natural kind) or whether it is on the cutting edge of evolution. Its progeny may soon outnumber the supposedly “well-functioning” organisms against which the Darwinian labeled it dysfunctional.

This crisis of natural kinds is playing itself out in contemporary debates in bioethics. Who are conservative bioethicists like Leon Kass (neo-Aristotelian and former chairman of the President’s Council on Bioethics) sparring with today if not thoroughgoing Darwinians like Princeton’s Peter Singer who deny that humans, *qua* humans, have intrinsic dignity (Kass 2002; Singer 1975)?<sup>16</sup> Singer even calls those who prefer humans to other animals “speciesist,” which in his vocabulary is akin to racism. So what justifies the excessive expense and effort required to keep a Down syndrome baby alive? For the traditionalist, it is the baby’s membership in the human species. This gives the baby intrinsic value. For the utilitarian like Singer, such expense is *not* justified; one would do as well to contribute to the World Wildlife Fund, for species’ differences are not essential but accidental. As Singer notes,

All we are doing is catching up with Darwin. . . . He showed in the nineteenth century that we are simply animals. Humans had imagined we were a separate part of Creation, that there was some magical line between Us and Them. Darwin’s theory undermined the foundations of that entire Western way of thinking about the place of our species in the universe. (Hari 2004)

If one must choose between saving an intelligent, fully-developed pig or the Down syndrome baby, Singer thinks the choice of the pig imperative. Once again, this is not exactly the family values conservatives were hoping for. But it is a reasonable extension of Darwinism’s denial of the classical idea of human nature.

But not so fast, says Arnhart: Singer’s arguments are not really Darwinian at all, only his Leftist assumptions lead him astray (Arnhart 2005, 122–29). According to Arnhart, Singer over-emphasizes the role of reason in forming moral judgments at the expense of our evolved moral sentiments. Arnhart is surely right that Darwin himself put great stock in our natural moral sentiments. But what Arnhart misses (as I argue later in this chapter) is that Darwin’s *theory* undermines the normativity tradi-

tionally attributed to the sentiments by which humans naturally prefer their own species. So, Darwinians have a reason to prefer other humans, namely their feelings. Yet they also have great reason to distrust their feelings: They are not, after all, an ethical tool fashioned by a wise Creator but a contingent fact of evolutionary history with seemingly no connection to forming true ethical judgments.

Singer's basic problem is not that he dismisses the role of emotions in moral reasoning. It is his denial of essentialism. If there is no essential difference between humans and other animals, on what *principled* basis could one show fellow humans partiality? As James Rachels writes, "Darwin's theory does undermine traditional values. In particular, it undermines the traditional idea that human life has a special unique worth." In fact, "The idea of human dignity turns out, therefore, to be the moral effluvia of a discredited metaphysics. . . . the bare fact that one is human entitles one to no special consideration" (Rachels 1990, 4–5). By denying true species, the Darwinian undermines the entire classical natural law tradition of ethics.<sup>17</sup>

### *Changing Human Nature*

Third, throughout *Darwinian Conservatism*, Larry Arnhart rests his case on the idea that human nature cannot be changed. The family cannot be redesigned by a political committee; gender roles cannot be wholly re-envisioned; property cannot be done away with in the name of social justice. Rather, these institutions are rooted in human dispositions which are, in turn, rooted in human biology. But we have just seen that Darwinian conservatism does not subscribe to the classical vision of an unchanging human nature. Rather the group we now call "human beings" has certain tendencies, rooted in biology, which did not always exist and which will not exist at some point in the future. So what is to stop us from changing biological facts we don't like? Arnhart dismisses this question, claiming that we do not possess the technology to make any radical changes; this threat, he claims, is overblown (Arnhart 2005, 130–42).

To my mind, Arnhart drastically underestimates what may be possible in the future. He urges conservatives to tell the Left that they must accept gender differences and the traditional family because they are deeply rooted in human biology. But this seems a foolhardy strategy if it is likely that the more we understand about human biology, the more the Left can start to change biological facts it does not like. For instance, if the Left believes that the aggression found in young boys, while rooted in biology, leads to the horrors of gangs, crime, and war, why shouldn't they seek to change it (Wilson 1993, 166, 180)? Indeed, what difference is there—in principle—between the accidental enhancements postulated by evolutionary biology over millennia and deliberately designed enhancements (Buchanan 2011, 145)?

Arnhart is right that the many prophecies of our post-human future are premature. Every year a new book claims we are only ten years away from being able to refashion our species. But it would not take a complete overhaul of human biology to, for instance, lower male aggression and change gender identity as we know it. If modern conservatives merely argue that the reason the Left should not seek to remake the family, sex differences, and so on, is because it is impossible to change human biological nature, what will they say as these changes become more and more possible? Who in the Victorian era, for example, would have dreamed that anyone would desire a sex change operation, let alone that it would actually become possible—that with a few hormone pills men could begin to grow breasts? Today, scientists may be well on their way to figuring out how to impregnate men (Silver 1997, 191–96). The future may not be the biotechnological hell on Earth some imagine, but surely it will surprise us. For this reason, Arnhart and Darwinian conservatives are surely on shaky ground when they argue that changing human biological nature is close to impossible. Secular bioethicist Allen Buchanan is right: The only outlook “capable of grounding a policy of refraining from the [biotechnological/biomedical] enhancement enterprise” is a “pre-Darwinian teleological biology” (Buchanan 2011, 145).

The danger is not simply that Darwin’s theory demolishes reasons to avoid enhancements. On Darwinian theory, there is no divine plan followed by organisms; species are not fixed; and all we really know is that these organisms are suited to survive in *past* environments (not necessarily the current one). Hence there is great pressure to concede the value—and perhaps the necessity—of the enhancement enterprise (Buchanan 2011, 156). And given that Darwinian evolution works by culling many unproductive (or even counter-productive) mutations, selecting only those beneficial to reproduction, great waste and suboptimality in nature is to be expected: “evolution *inevitably* produces suboptimal designs. The clumsy, wasteful, blundering forms that so impressed Darwin are not perturbations in the process, they are essential to it” (Buchanan 2011, 157). Given its implications that creatures are not designed and that suboptimality in nature is so widespread, and given humans’ desire to improve life for those they deem valuable, Darwinian theory provides the scientific moorings for reengineering features of human biology regarded as suboptimal.

### *Arnhart and the Problem of Normativity*

What, then, should modern conservatives say to those who wish to drastically alter human biology and may do so in the all-too-near future? What should they say, for instance, to philosophers like Erik Wielenberg who argue that we should alter human biology to solve the problems of

humanity? The source of many of our problems is simply the human nervous system, and it, after all,

is part of the natural, physical world; it is not a nonphysical soul, forever inaccessible to science. In a naturalistic world, the human mind is fully a product of blind forces at work over countless eons. There is nothing sacred about its design; it is not part of a divine plan, or a divine construction that we are forbidden to manipulate. (Wielenberg 2005, 140–41)

Dismissing this position by claiming that it is not *currently* scientifically feasible, as Arnhart does, misses the point.

The fourth problem of Darwinian conservatism, then, is this: Arnhart and other Darwinian conservatives can give no reason to think that marriage and the family, sex differences, and so on—as they have traditionally existed—*ought* to be preserved. Sure, if Darwinian conservatives are correct, these things are rooted in human biology (a claim all conservatives can make). But what is the reason for thinking that these traditional structures are *normative*? Evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala has it right: “Because evolution has proceeded in a particular way, it does not follow that that course is morally right or desirable” (Ayala 1987, 245). What if Kate Millett and other feminist critics are correct that the traditional family is an oppressive, patriarchal institution? “Patriarchy’s chief institution is the family,” Millett writes, for the family is where men are propped up, women kept down, and the next generation taught to repeat this pattern (Millett 2000, 33). Or what if some religious sects desire a polygamous sexual order? The Darwinian conservative might reply that such people are just crazy. So it is worth considering what Arnhart has to say about crazy people. Psychopaths, he claims, lack our desires and emotions and thus have no obligation to conform to *our* moral sense (Arnhart 1998, 229). Even if Arnhart is correct that the traditional family is rooted in natural sentiments springing from the biology of *most* men and women, does this make the traditional family morally normative for this majority, let alone the minority? By Arnhart’s own reasoning it appears not.

Arnhart also paints a one-sided portrait of what can be considered “natural” in Darwinian terms. True, the pairing of male and female to raise children is in one sense natural; after all, whatever exists in the biological realm—including humans and their institutions—can be considered natural by Darwinians. But, scientists like Alfred Kinsey—who has affected intellectuals’ attitudes toward sexual behavior as much as anyone—have also wielded the Darwinian logic of the “natural” in favor of a very different sexual order. Kinsey, a Harvard-trained Darwinian zoologist, argued that normal human sexual behavior is not far removed from that of other mammals. For instance, promiscuity is just as natural, if not more so, than pair bonding in marriage. As Kinsey writes,



There seems to be no question but that the human male would be promiscuous in his choice of sexual partner throughout the whole of his life if there were no social restrictions. This is the history of his anthropoid ancestors, and this is the history of unrestrained human males everywhere. (West 2006, 29)

So marriage is an invention of human culture which actually cuts against the natural instincts of men. Conservatives like George Gilder have also argued that marriage constrains the natural instincts of men, channeling them into a positive social order. Gilder however, unlike Darwinian commentators, assumes the normativity of marriage; marriage is supposed to perform this invaluable social function of “taming the Barbarians” (Gilder 2001, 39–47).

Biologist Randy Thornhill and anthropologist Craig Palmer, using the same Darwinian logic as Kinsey, argue that even rape has its roots in the evolution of human sexuality (Thornhill and Palmer 2000). Rape is a common feature of human life. So it too is natural in the Darwinian sense. Given Darwinism, such a persistent fact of human life must have its roots as an adaptation to environmental conditions. Rape is one “reproductive strategy” which has survived the centuries by subverting females’ typical reproductive strategy of choosing their mates.

Darwinian scientists and psychologists inevitably claim that they do not condone evolved behavior such as rape. Evolved or not, it is morally wrong. But if Darwinian evolution produces both rape and marital relations, what natural basis is there to prefer one over the other? Both are natural. As John G. West explains, “in the Darwinian system there can be no one ‘naturally right’ pattern of sexual relations between human beings.” For,

[a]ccording to Darwinism, there is nothing sacred or permanent about any of the forms of family life found in nature. They are all adaptations to the particular environment humans faced, and presumably when the environment changes, so too will the adaptations. (West 2006, 31)

Although West uses “adaptationist” language, his basic point can be made without reliance on an adaptationist interpretation of evolution (which has been criticized by Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin, among others). The basic point is simply that, given Darwinism, forms of family life found in nature are not necessarily sacred or permanent. Darwinian conservatives may be fooled into thinking that the way things are at present is the way things have always been or the way things *should* be. Even if our current moral sentiments now favor marital relations to rape, these sentiments are themselves contingent facts of evolutionary history. There is no objective reason to prefer these sentiments to any others, except that we happen to possess them at present. We should not mistake them for reliable guides to forming true normative judgments.

Darwinian conservatives might respond to this challenge along the following lines. Sure, as Darwin knew, marriage “gradually developed” over a long period of time as an adaptation to certain environmental pressures (Darwin 1936, 895).<sup>18</sup> It is clear that Darwin thought it probable that traditional marriage had *not* always existed. Promiscuous intercourse used to be common throughout the world. But regardless, the Darwinian conservative might proceed, the fact is that the traditional family fits our *current*, evolved nature, and this nature is not going away next week. There are serious problems with this reply. First, it still provides little rational basis for those who prefer a different sexual or familial order to acquiesce to the moral normativity of the traditional family. Wilson argues that “two-parent families do a better job of developing the moral senses of male children” (Wilson 1993, 178). But those whose sexual and social inclinations are not geared toward the traditional family may conclude that they should let other people pursue traditional marriage, so that boys are well socialized, but this institution is not for them. Darwinian conservatives have no response, because they give no basis for the moral normativity of the traditional family.

Second, how would Darwinian conservatives know how long humanity will need the traditional family? Even a half century ago, the world was a dramatically different place for women. Today women graduate college in larger numbers than men, have excellent careers where they often make more money than men, have ready access to effective birth control, and choose to delay if not forego marriage and childbirth altogether (Fry and Cohn 2010).<sup>19</sup> Some women simply have children without a spouse. From a Darwinian perspective, it appears that they may be adapting to new realities by rejecting many aspects of the traditional family. If it is an evolved institution only adapted to meet past needs in a past environment, what principled objection could Darwinian conservatives have to these new adaptations? Before the Civil War, only one American woman in a thousand was divorced annually (Paul 2002, 20). Perhaps divorce is more common because marriage is no longer meeting the needs of our new, industrialized environment. Arnhart himself seems to think that while traditional marriage prevailed in times past (say, Medieval Europe) the natural pattern in industrialized economies is “serial monogamy, in which human beings marry, divorce, and then remarry” (Arnhart 1998, 265).

Without the kind of teleology specifically rejected by Darwinism, the “natural” loses all normative force. If there is no one nature humans are supposed to fulfill regardless of their inclinations, what force can Arnhart’s argument for the naturalness of the family have against those who do not share majoritarian inclinations? As West explains, the problem of Darwinian relativism as regards the family is just this:

Monogamy is natural according to Darwinism, but so is adultery. Marital fidelity is natural, but so is promiscuity. Parental love is natural, but so is infanticide. Since Darwinism provides no basis for preferring one natural trait over another, we are left with a biological justification for sexual relativism rather than the traditional family. (West 2006, 25)

Far from supporting the normativity of the family, Darwinian theory undermines it by eliminating the rationale by which men and women have historically given the family a status of honor: the family is the product of divine or cosmic order which lends it normative force. In its stead, Darwinian theory leaves no objective basis to prefer some behaviors to others. All that is, is natural.

### *Wilson and the Problem of Normativity*

Distinguished social scientist James Q. Wilson, one of the first thinkers of the modern era to attempt to ground the classical liberal vision of the traditional family in the deliverances of Darwinian science, also runs into the problem of normativity. Wilson detects a dire problem in modern Western culture felt by many of us. Whereas we desperately want (and need) to make moral judgments, our intellectual culture provides little basis on which to do so. People in our society “often feel like refugees living in a land captured by hostile forces. When they speak of virtue, they must do so privately, in whispers, lest they be charged with the grievous crime of being ‘unsophisticated’ or, if they press the matter, ‘fanatics’” (Wilson 1993, x). But this relativistic trend spells trouble for the family; for, practically speaking, the family relies upon simple morality: honoring proper authority, sexual self-control, promise keeping, mutual love and support.

The aim of Wilson’s acclaimed book *The Moral Sense* is to “help people recover the confidence with which they once spoke about virtue and morality” (Wilson 1993, vii). But how can modern people find a rational basis to assert moral truths? Wilson’s answer: science. Not only does he reject the long-held view that Darwinism undermines traditional morality; he positively seeks to rest normative moral discourse on a bedrock of Darwinian science. On this sure foundation, Wilson believes, moral relativism and subjectivism can be rightly rejected and objective moral truths—including moral truths about familial relations and structures—secured. Thus in an elenchus worthy of Socrates himself, Wilson the classical liberal argues that Darwinian science—considered by many to be the basis of their moral skepticism—supports objective moral truths.

Wilson first turns to evidence from social science to establish that “people necessarily make moral judgments, that many of those judgments are not arbitrary or unique to some time, place, or culture” (Wilson 1993, xii). In short, social science suggests humans have a moral sense, deeply held beliefs about how humans ought to behave. He next moves

to consider the sources of our moral sentiments, two of them being human nature and family experiences. Wilson, I believe, demonstrates that there is a natural moral sense. But he, like Arnhart, takes for granted the normativity of this moral sense. If natural selection has given us this particular moral sense when it might have given us a quite different one (perhaps it did in the past and will in the future), what reason is there to believe that this moral sense lines up with eternal, abstract truths of the universe? In other words, non-teleological evolution gives us little reason to trust our moral intuitions. After all, Darwinism demands that our moral sense had adaptive value (Wilson 1993, 23). Thus it was fashioned with the aim of helping us survive, not the aim of helping us find universal moral truths.

On the traditional account, however, the mind is purposely fashioned so as to know such truths. It may even be that, as Anscombe famously argued, the language of “morally wrong,” “illicit,” or “obligated not to do” is a vestigial remnant of Judeo-Christian, divine law ethics and ought to be abandoned in modern, naturalistic ethical discourse (Anscombe 1958, 17–18). Darwinian conservatives might believe in Darwinian evolution *and* objective moral truths (even ones grounded by God). But the question remains as to how non-teleological evolution blindly stumbled upon moral intuitions which line up with these eternal truths. Furthermore, while we have a moral sense, Wilson acknowledges we also have competing passions of all sorts (Wilson 1993, 24). Our sense of empathy, on which Darwinian conservatives place so much emphasis, may not even be a strong moral motivator. Surveying a number of recent studies, Jesse Prinz concludes that “empathy is not a major player when it comes to moral motivation. Its contribution is negligible in children, modest in adults, and non-existent when costs are significant” (Prinz, 2012). So what makes our moral sense normative but not our sense of violence or other passions? Why is this impulse special? In short, it appears Wilson is attempting to force an old moral ontology, a remnant of the Judeo-Christian worldview, into new Darwinian wineskins.

## CONCLUSION

I have given four reasons to think that Darwinian conservatism, for all its worthy aims, cannot support the classical liberal vision of the family. First, Darwinian conservatism confuses Darwinism with all of biological reality. Yet one can appeal to empirical biological facts with or without Darwinian theory. Second, Darwinian theory destroys essentialism. Yet essentialism is critical to the conception of a common human nature robust enough to bear the weight of natural law ethics. Third, Darwinian conservatives rest their case upon the notion that human biological nature cannot change. Yet a Darwinian understanding of that nature holds

that it has changed in the past and will change again—perhaps at our hand, and perhaps soon. Last but not least, Darwinian conservatism fails to support a *normative* understanding of the family. More than this, it positively undercuts the purposive character of nature and human moral intuitions which traditionally undergirded normative claims. In sum, due to its non-teleological character, Darwinian theory cannot provide a stable conception of human nature upon which modern conservatives can rest their social and political thought.

## NOTES

1. Elizabeth J. Gage provided invaluable research for this chapter. In addition, I am grateful to Stephen Dilley for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

2. “Classical liberal” and “conservative” are largely interchangeable for my purposes. “Classical liberal” is apt in many instances, however, to capture the intellectual roots—from Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas to Edmund Burke and Russell Kirk—of modern conservatism. Classical liberal thought is the milieu in which Darwinian conservatism has arisen. I also use the terms “Left” and “Leftist” throughout so as to not confuse the reader with the word “liberal” unless modified as “modern liberal.”

3. Note that my argument is that Darwinian theory cannot serve as a coherent *conceptual foundation* for the traditional family. I am not arguing that Darwinian theory actively undermines the family. For an argument that Darwinian theory has had adverse social consequences see West (2007).

4. Darwin called this “artificial selection” specifically to contrast it with natural selection (Darwin 1993, 141).

5. Darwin himself specifically rejected this “God guides variations” view in *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* (Rachels 1990, 122–23).

6. Brooke discusses the sense in which Darwin saw his theory as stochastic (Brooke 1991, 304). On the stochastic nature of neo-Darwinism see Berlinski (2009).

7. Later on, I discuss the problem of how Darwinism can account for the classical vision of human nature and normativity. Note that in this quasi-Molinist evolutionary scenario it is God, not Darwinian theory, which provides for a true human nature and normativity. In other words, God rather than Darwinism is doing all the work.

8. Darwin to Asa Gray, May 8, 1868.

9. Bloom notes that the search for solutions to man’s dividedness is a hallmark of modern thought; “antiquity treated the fundamental tensions as permanent” (Bloom 1987, 170–71).

10. Some allege that this research poses a problem for religious belief. For a brief reply see Gage (2008).

11. For more on Darwinism and classical philosophy, see Gage (2010), from which this subsection is largely taken.

12. “Natural selection” can be a misleading phrase. It is not an immaterial force but a backward-looking description of differential reproduction.

13. One may still epistemically link creatures together, as Hull suggests, via genealogy—although this is not terribly enlightening, since (1) all creatures may be somewhat genetically related, and (2) if there is nothing but a long spectrum of particular organisms  $O^1$  through  $O^n$ , why not include  $O^{n+1}$  as part of the “species” (Hull 1978)?

14. See Rosenberg and McShea (2008, 88–89) for a fine discussion of the problem of Darwinian function. While they make a somewhat different distinction than I do, we share the conviction that non-teleological evolution must drop teleological terminology.

15. Thanks to Lydia McGrew for this colorful example.

16. Singer is also author of *A Darwinian Left*, which argues that a proper understanding of Darwinian evolution and human nature bolsters the ideals of the progressive Left (Singer 2000a).

17. Perhaps this is why one prominent natural law theorist writes, "If any contemporary scientific movement holds promise for the furtherance of the natural law tradition, it is not the stale dogma of natural selection, but frank recognition of natural design" (Budziszewski 2009, 95). For Budziszewski's rebuttal of Arnhart's attempt to form a Darwinian basis for natural law, see Budziszewski (2009, 88–95).

18. West takes Arnhart to task for carefully quoting from Darwin to make it seem as though *The Descent of Man* defended traditional marriage (West 2006, 26). It is true that Darwin said he "cannot believe that absolutely promiscuous intercourse prevailed in times past," as Arnhart quotes him (Arnhart 2005, 48). But, as West points out, Darwin's preceding sentence claimed: "it seems probable that the habit of marriage, in any strict sense of the word, has been gradually developed; and that almost promiscuous or very loose intercourse was once extremely common throughout the world" (Darwin 1936, 895).

19. Among native-born 30-to-44-year-old Americans, 53.5 percent of college graduates are women and 46.5 are men. In 1970, only 4 percent of native-born married women in this age range made more money than their husbands; by 2007, the number had risen more than fivefold to 22 percent.