THE NEW ATLANTIS
A Journal of Technology & Society

The Evolution of Human Nature IV

Moderately Socially Conservative Darwinians

Peter Augustine Lawler

Sophisticated Americans these days think of themselves, or at least talk about themselves, as *autonomous* beings—free from old-fashioned social restraints, and free even from the limitations of nature. Men and women both feel free to define who they are for themselves, without being saddled by the imperatives of their biology, their bodies. Our sophisticated form of sex is now, of course, safe sex—or free enjoyment detached from the biological events of birth and death. Meanwhile, even as new medical technologies keep extending our life spans, we are more than ever death-haunted and worried about the contingency of our personal existences. And so, the newest and most genuinely personal form of hope is that with the prudent avoidance of "risk factors"—the ways nature and other people are out to kill us—we might be around for the Singularity, the liberation of our self-consciousness from all the limitations of biological embodiment.

Among the consequences of our creeping and sometimes creepy libertarianism is the demographic crisis. We have more and more old people and fewer and fewer kids, a fact that threatens the viability of our social safety net. The caring connections that bind together the generations in any healthy society are eroding for not-unrelated reasons. Not only do young people see having children as constraining their autonomy, they increasingly see the unproductive elderly as a costly burden as well. And studies show that Americans are increasingly anxious, experiencing life as too contingent and isolated to be happy or even in love, or just content in the present, with the goodness of life and other people.

Our aspirations for autonomy can be traced back to René Descartes, who saw each person as an individual self—an "I" existing independently of the impersonal and mechanical natural world. To Cartesian science, nature is nothing more than a source of raw materials for us to become "masters and possessors of" in order to secure and sustain our particular

***Peter Augustine Lawler**, a* New Atlantis *contributing editor, is Dana Professor of Government at Berry College. His most recent book is* Modern and American Dignity: Who We Are as Persons, and What That Means for Our Future *(ISI, 2010).*

existences. In a roundabout sense, Descartes' best student was arguably America's founding philosopher, the classically liberal John Locke. Under the U.S. Constitution, written in Locke's spirit, each of us is defined not as man or woman, Christian or Jew, black or white, but free persons or individuals, liberated from social and biological categories. Without denying for a moment the great success of the free political institutions founded in this spirit, we can wonder whether it is good for us to believe—and to live as though—we are simply autonomous beings.

Science offers one way to get beyond the personal isolationism of American Cartesianism. The view that the personal or autonomous self is free from impersonal or mechanical nature is contradicted by the increasingly pervasive view that biological science, and evolutionary theory in particular, can explain the whole truth about who we are. Some Darwinians who are attuned to philosophical currents, such as political scientist Larry Arnhart and psychologist Jonathan Haidt, point out what they see as the deep flaws in Cartesian science and the autonomy-maximizing morality it supports. In his insightful book *The Happiness Hypothesis* (2006), Haidt explains that the ancients' passionately unempirical "worship of reason" as "a tool to control our animal lusts" morphed into the modern worship of the "I" detached from animal passions. For the ancients, reason had to be in charge; for the moderns, the self has to be in charge. But the truth is—as even Plato had to admit in his way—that reason always serves some passion or another. And all our passions, the Darwinians teach, can finally be traced to the requirements of our evolutionary development as embodied or material beings. So the most basic human moral question,

Darwinian Conservatism
By Larry Arnhart
Imprint Academic ~ 2005 ~ 162 pp.
$17.90 (paper)

The Social Conquest of Earth
By Edward O. Wilson
Liveright ~ 2012 ~ 352 pp.
$27.95 (cloth)

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion
By Jonathan Haidt
Pantheon ~ 2012 ~ 419 pp.
$28.95 (cloth)

The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom
By Jonathan Haidt
Basic ~ orig. 2005 ~ 297 pp.
$16.99 (paper)

for these evolutionary scientists, is not how we can ensure that the passions are controlled by a rational will but rather which passions direct us toward our true purposes and our true happiness as social animals.

Who Wants to Live Forever?

Darwinian thinkers' thoroughgoing naturalism leads them to be characteristically confident that as reason progresses, it does so alongside our moral sense. Psychologist Steven Pinker argues in *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011) that the progress of reason leads to moral progress, so there is more morality and less sociopathological cruelty in the world now than ever before. That is also why naturalist and founder of sociobiology E. O. Wilson is so confident that the human domination of the earth is due much less to some liberated techno-impulse than to our superiority as social animals. Because science itself must be in the service of our species' social flourishing, it doesn't occur to Wilson that scientific enlightenment could, on balance, undermine social cohesion or humane progress. Larry Arnhart, meanwhile, who is more attuned to concerns about the morally degrading effects of evolutionary science expressed by philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Leo Strauss, dismisses or mocks the idea that there are scientific truths that we are better off not knowing. Wilson and Arnhart agree that the reality of human nature as revealed by Darwinian science must be good for us to know. Arnhart calls for "Darwinian liberal education," and Wilson explains that the true narrative about who we are as a species, one that dispels the more narrow tribalism of religious illusions, might well help bring about a twenty-first-century paradise in which human beings find themselves fully at home with, and completely responsible for, flourishing as natural beings made for our planet. Scientific truth is not only about making us "masters and possessors of nature," but also about setting us free to be fully who we are, and so to be as happy as our evolved nature intends us to be.

Because Descartes' unlimited techno-domination is not the main or truest current in modern science, today's Darwinians believe that the transhumanist hopes and "Brave New World" fears about making ourselves more or less than what we are by nature are overblown. It is not true that we are aliens thrown into a hostile natural environment, as the Cartesians say. But it is also not true, as philosophers like Leo Strauss claim, that nature is the home of the human mind. Nature is the home of the human animal. We cannot, in truth, transcend the limits and directions given to us by our embodied, social lives, and we would be nothing but miserably disoriented if we could. The Cartesians and Lockeans are all about the aim-

less, empty, and unreal pursuit of happiness; the Darwinians are all about the happiness we find in our real, embodied, social lives. They concur with Aristotle, the scientist who discovered that we are most likely to be happy if we live according to the purposes or functions that we have by nature.

Arnhart and to a lesser extent Haidt know that the objection they have to Descartes applies to Christians like Augustine and existentialists like Heidegger: Christians and existentialists think too personally or unnaturally. They deny that the person can be defined by his or her biological limitations, and that personal identity and personal destiny can be reduced to animal nature. The Darwinians contend that there is not—as the Christians, the existentialists, and the U.S. Supreme Court claim—some mystery to each of our beings, and that we do not define for ourselves who we are either through faith in God or personal decisions. And we are certainly not absurd leftovers who constantly have to fend off suicide once we realize that there's no point at all to our particular existences. The Darwinians explain that our religious experiences or our existentialist anxieties are based on fantastic self-deception, sociopathological natural disorders, unnatural social isolation, or material deprivation. Such experiences are not caused by any real transcendence of the world of nature—because nature is the only reality there is.

Darwinians downplay the connections between love and death, and they find something abnormal in making too much out of one's own death. Arnhart, for instance, admits that we are moved somewhat by the terror of death. But he does not count immortality or even indefinite longevity among our natural desires. We desire instead "a complete life," one long enough to fulfill all our natural, social functions. We do desire to live on through our genes and so through our children. So what seems to be our desire to transcend our biological limitations can be explained in terms of fulfilling our biological function. Even our desire for immortal glory is really about social service to our group or tribe, our country, or to some other social whole of which we are a part. Because the impulses of our social natures will characteristically trump personal obsession, Arnhart is confident that we will use biotechnological progress not mainly for some futile effort to keep ourselves around far longer than nature intended but rather for the health and wellbeing of our children.

Arnhart and Haidt, despite their philosophical sophistication, defer to the more rigorously scientific Wilson in attributing fundamental significance to evolutionary science's recovery of the idea of human nature in our time. For centuries, the dominant modes of thought—likely beginning with Descartes—have suggested that human nature is an

oxymoron. To be human is to be undetermined by nature, to be free, to not be explained by the methods of natural science that capture the truth about mechanical nature. Even Locke, who did trumpet natural law, explains that what distinguishes each of us is self-identity or personal ownership. In the service of who we are, we recreate ourselves and our environment, inventing our way to an artificial or cultivated reality not given to us by nature. From a personal or self-won view, nature provides only some almost-worthless materials. This self-invention or movement away from nature toward some indefinite perfectibility, whether accidental or conscious or some combination thereof, is what philosophers from Rousseau to Marx to Nietzsche to Heidegger would call History.

Hive Mammals

The study of history or culture has become known as "the humanities"—a kind of knowing different from that of the natural sciences. But the "consilience" (a term popularized by Wilson's 1998 book of that name) promised by Darwinian science overcomes that split in human knowing. Darwinians think of our cultural evolution as an extension of our natural evolution, and they see both as having an equally social and biological foundation.

Wilson sees members of our species as much more like bees and ants—the insects that he studied during his distinguished career as an entomologist—than even our fellow primates. These insects achieve their unrivaled social cooperation, which includes a complex division of labor and shared responsibility for taking care of the young, through robotically perfect obedience to social instinct; these instinctual traits define what Wilson and other entomologists have termed "eusociality." We human beings much more consciously employ our intellects in the service of social instinct to reach our own heights of cooperation. The social intelligence of human beings—the self-aware animals with complex speech—leads to a tension between the selfish desires created by individual-level selection and the social impulses created by group-level selection, a tension that hardly exists for the instinctively self-sacrificial eusocial insects.

The success of our species in dominating the earth comes from our ability to resolve this tension in the social or group direction. It is true that the selfish individual usually prevails over the altruistic one. But groups dominated by altruists or animals strongly guided by social instinct typically defeat groups full of selfish individuals. Despite the cost on the individual level, Wilson observes, "all normal people are capable of true altruism," of selflessly feeling for and acting on behalf of others. Along with other

biologists like David Sloan Wilson, E. O. Wilson has been working to rehabilitate the idea that traits like altruism are sometimes favored by evolution because it strengthens the competitiveness of groups, rather than individuals. Actually, this idea of "group selection" is still controversial among many of today's Darwinians—like Steven Pinker and Richard Dawkins, who argue that altruism evolved through "kin selection" that favored animals who help only their genetic relatives (a theory that E. O. Wilson himself helped to advance in the 1960s). Still, Wilson and Wilson now argue that the evolution of our species privileged group survival over personal survival.

But whether our social instincts evolved through group selection or not, each of us is, as E. O. Wilson contends, "a compulsive group-seeker, hence an intensely tribal animal." It is as members of tribes and groups that we struggle for status or significance or honor. It is through identification with groups that we develop the social virtues of loyalty, trust, and heroism. Such identification or "empathy," Wilson explains, is coercive in the sense of being instinctual or almost automatic. For Darwinians like Wilson, it is in service to a group or tribe that we find the only real significance nature can accord us.

Haidt, who claims that evolutionary psychology is nothing more than the fleshing out of Wilson's audacious insights about the relationship between natural selection and human behavior, follows Wilson in saying that each of us is shaped by both individual selection and group selection. It is true that we are selfish and struggling by nature. But, as he argues in *The Happiness Hypothesis*, we are also "hive creatures who long to lose ourselves in something larger." The only thing that gives us a sense of purpose worth dying for—that saves us from what would otherwise be our lonely and self-destructive personal obsessions—is the group, or our relations with members of the group. We cannot live well without knowing that there is something that makes self-sacrifice significant. We are unable to achieve what the bees and ants have—complete instinctual self-surrender. But our happiness is still fundamentally about having the "right relationships." We are, as Haidt puts it, both "sociocentric" and "individualistic," but we find home, place, significance, and happiness in the sociocentric mode, being "full of emotions finely tuned for loving, befriending, helping, sharing, and otherwise intertwining our lives with others." So we find happiness not in autonomously pursuing it as a right but by satisfying our natural social desires to belong.

That's why Haidt regards Émile Durkheim as the most evolutionarily sound of the social theorists: human happiness, human longevity, human health can all be predicted from the quality of one's social relationships. Even

those who seem naturally introverted (but not sociopathological) become happier when "forced to be more outgoing." Consider that Tocqueville makes a similar observation, finding that Americans are happier—or less restlessly miserable in the midst of their prosperity—when they are forced by the presence of free, local institutions to act as citizens. Calculation, Tocqueville explains, is displaced by instinct. And American men, he adds, are happier because their social circumstances and calculation about the most effective division of labor compels them to marry; whatever they might say in their proud, delusional perception of their Cartesian freedom, they cannot help but learn to love and even live for their wives and children.

But despite the profound importance of social relationships for human happiness, we are, by evolution, tragically divided as animals both so intelligently self-conscious and deeply social. The unity we seek with others will always elude us, and it is good for our species' domination of the planet that it does. There is something to the existentialist whine that hell is other people. Social life will always be a source of painful disappointment, as we are never quite capable of finding what we seek in our relationships with others.

We can, however, also go too far in the direction of autonomy—and today we risk doing so. Haidt finds himself agreeing with religious conservatives in fearing that our culture of autonomy risks creating "a flat land of unlimited freedom where selves roam around with no higher purpose than expressing and developing themselves." He hastens to add that religious conservatives are wrong about a lot, but he also agrees with them that the specific danger of our time is too much of this autonomy-driven flattening, creating a world full of too much that is "ugly and unsatisfying." The main enemy of happiness in America today, Haidt contends, is not oppressive and closed-minded traditions, but the corrosive ideology of "extreme personal freedom"—a Lockean or Cartesian misunderstanding of who each of us is. It "encourages people to leave homes, jobs, cities, and marriages in search of personal and professional fulfillment." When we spend our time pursuing our own happiness and use other people as instruments toward that end, we make ourselves miserable by detaching our relationships with others from our social instincts.

Natural Justice and the Liberals

With an audacity rare among psychologists, Haidt agrees with social conservatives that we have lost something fundamental: "a richly textured common ethos with widely shared virtues and values," a society concerned with

honor, loyalty, propriety, sanctity, and so forth. What we have experienced, he says, is "the death of character." We have mistakenly privileged personal freedom over the social and cultural resources required to form and sustain the genuinely personal identity in the face of the eusocial (or "ultrasocial," to use Haidt's preferred word) aspects of our species. That does not mean, he clarifies, that we should go back to, say, the 1930s. Our more moderate task is to recover the common ethos required for character formation without the cruel and narrow social exclusion that flowed from bygone "hostile groups based on trivial differences." Social instinct, Haidt suggests, need not weaken as it becomes more expansive through scientific enlightenment; our empathy now opposes itself to injustices such as racism and sexism. Even if we cannot "rival the moral richness of ancient Athens," we can tolerate some moral flattening—but not too much—as we strive to reduce our own "anomie" or moral isolation "while far exceeding Athens in justice."

But what is justice for Haidt, and on what basis does he condemn the injustice of the ancient Athenian regime? Political philosophers have generally tried to ground justice in the demands of reason, but Haidt argues that reason is not fit to rule. In moral matters, he explains, reason seeks justification for what one wants to do anyway rather than the truth about what is right and wrong. This puts him on the side of Glaucon, Socrates' interlocutor in the *Republic*, who said that people only care about having the *reputation* for justice, rather than actually being just. In other words, they care how it affects their relationships with others, particularly others within their own tribe. A reliably just society is one ruled by those with genuine authority, who form characters and hierarchical relationships around shared conceptions of loyalty, sanctity, and the like. But if justice is simply what curbs egoism and preserves the integrity of the group, then shouldn't Darwinians accept the ostensibly just city of the *Republic*—the closest we could come to being hive animals—as the ideal by which all other societies be judged?

The Darwinian answer is that projects that take justice too seriously and that try to socialize away the tension between the individual and the group actually aim to extinguish the complexities embedded in the human being, the eusocial animal who succeeds through social intelligence. To be effective, social cooperation cannot simply be the product of calculation or self-interest rightly understood (as the Lockeans would have it); but it also cannot be imposed in a way that would abolish individual choice or responsibility (as in the *Republic*). For all his sympathy with social conservatism and understanding of the importance of relationships for morality, politically speaking Haidt is more of a libertarian. He's the increasingly rare kind of libertarian that idealizes not the liberated individual who

chooses to design himself from an ever-expanding menu of choice, but rather the intelligently eusocial animal who takes responsibility for his own relationships.

Haidt notes that socialists and big-government liberals have too much faith in reason and not enough in social instinct. They think of themselves as imposing order on a chaotic mass of individuals, believing that the Cartesian description of the world as full of liberated and isolated "I's" pursuing selfish interests is, regrettably, accurate. But social cooperation is more warped or crowded out than assisted by an intrusive government. Authority and sanctity and character formation flourish better when government is limited by a robust common morality rooted in social groups. Institutional religion, for example, cultivates the social virtues better than coercive government ever could, although it can also easily be distorted to serve violent tribalism. But even when religion is not so distorted, Haidt claims that it is ridiculous to expect it to generate "unconditional empathy"—or unconditional love, as the Christians claim it should. The empathy that religion encourages, Haidt says, is generally limited to members of the religious group, and is generally motivated by concerns over one's reputation within the group.

What liberals have to offer is their humane and generous standing up for victims oppressed by and excluded from one group or another. But their caring and their anger blind them to the damage they are doing to the hive overall. The changes they fight for often "weaken groups, traditions, institutions, and moral capital"; consider, for example, that "welfare programs in the 1960s…reduced the value of marriage, increased out-of-wedlock births, and weakened African American families." To Haidt, justice combines liberals' caring with the recognition that it could hardly be just to undermine the indispensable conditions for happiness of eusocial animals. On his moderately socially conservative view, both "libertarians (who sacralize liberty)" and "social conservatives (who sacralize certain institutions and traditions)" reliably espouse partly correct views of who we are. The balance achieved through the clash of partisans is better than one set of factions prevailing at the expense of the other. Better still would be partisans who really listened to each other, who saw the limits of reason in the eusocial animal even in their own cases.

Evolutionary Science and Sexual Morality

With a few prominent exceptions, such as the political scientists Larry Arnhart, Francis Fukuyama, and the late James Q. Wilson, most of the

scholars studying human nature from a Darwinian perspective profess to be as liberal as the next academic. And while the idea that biology and evolution have a role in human behavior has long been sharply opposed by many on the left, many more moderate liberals share the views of Steven Pinker that evolutionary psychology is part of the antidote to the conservatism of fundamentalist religion. But the explorations of particular public controversies by sociobiologists suggest that the relationship is not that simple.

In his latest book, *The Social Conquest of Earth* (2012), E. O. Wilson criticizes what he sees as the dogmatic, unscientific ignorance of Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which explains the Catholic Church's ban on artificial contraception. In Wilson's interpretation, Paul holds that God intended sexual intercourse to be only for the purpose for conceiving children.

The pope seems very Darwinian here: the purpose of members of our species is to pair-bond, reproduce, and raise their young. On this view, sex is deformed when detached from those natural, social functions. But Wilson helpfully explains that Paul missed another purpose for sexual intercourse discovered lately by scientists: human females, you see, differ from those of the other primate species in not obviously displaying "estrus," or being in heat. That means that a woman bonded with a man invites "continuous and frequent intercourse." The evolutionary or "adaptive" function here, Wilson tells us, is that women use sexual pleasure to make sure the father is always around to help raise the children. Because the large brains that give us our "high intelligence" take so long to develop, human children need intensive help for much longer than the young of other species. It would hardly have been adaptive for social animals like us, Wilson says, to leave the natural mother of children stuck with raising the kids alone.

Wilson even adds that when it comes to raising children, there is just no good alternative to two "sexually and emotionally bonded mates." The mother, even "in tightly knit hunter-gatherer societies," simply cannot count on the broader community or tribe. So, to Wilson, the superiority of the two-parent heterosexual family with children is both natural and enduring. Other kinds of families are less natural or adaptive (which is not to say that they aren't better than nothing—Wilson's conclusion should not be taken to imply we should diminish our empathy and support for the struggle of single moms, or our admiration for gay couples with the generosity to choose to provide a home for children who do not have one).

It is striking how many areas Wilson and the pope agree on: marriage is for having and raising children; the capacity of women to be sexually available must be understood in the context of the stable, enduring marriages

that are required for children to be raised well; women suffer when they make sex too readily available to men who are unwilling to accept the responsibilities of sexual and emotional mating. Of course, none of this is to say that Wilson's Darwinian approach to sexual ethics would lead him to join the Catholic Church in opposing the use of contraception—or the woman's use of sexual pleasure—outside of marriage. On his account, the single mom might use both to bond with a mate who could help raise her children, for example.

Another example Wilson offers of evolutionary science employed to correct ignorant dogmatism involves homosexuality. Once again, the mistaken judgment of religious conservatives, Wilson says, is that sexual behavior not aiming at reproduction is wrong. One might think at first that evolutionary biologists would at least agree that homosexuality is maladaptive, but new findings suggest a subtle contribution of homosexuals to group fitness. Wilson highlights studies showing that "homosexual-tending genes" have been favored by natural selection to a limited but real extent, and so all societies have had some people with natural homosexual inclinations. The reason for this, he explains, is that homosexuals have contributed specific talents and qualities of personality not generally found in heterosexuals. So, Wilson argues, attempts to repress homosexuality and oppress homosexuals actually hurt society by suppressing beneficial diversity. Homophobia should give way to a scientifically informed valuing of what homosexuals contribute to the flourishing of the group or tribe.

It seems fortunate for all involved that Wilson's biological determinism happens to lead to such a congenially liberal conclusion. His discoveries purport to show that a more humane appreciation for homosexuals does not depend on a Cartesian science based on the liberation of the autonomous individual. Nor does it depend on mysterious beings defining who they are for themselves, unguided by nature, as the Supreme Court claims. It is easy to wonder whether, if evolutionary science purported to reach the opposite conclusion (that homosexuality were maladaptive and doesn't serve the group or the species), Wilson would encourage us to abandon our appreciation for it.

Relational and Personal

Evolutionary scientists claim to overcome the dualism stemming from the false belief that we are more than biological beings—that is, the various forms of distinction between animal nature and personal or individual

freedom. Yet their talk about the tension between individual selection and group selection is a sort of *de facto* dualism. The socially intelligent human animal does not automatically behave in accordance with instinct like the bees and ants, and he does not experience himself simply as either a whole (and surely an organism should be a whole) or a part (as the eusocial ants and bees are parts of the hive).

Despite their best efforts, the Darwinians' descriptions of human beings reveal that we are too wayward to exist simply for some impersonal process. Wilson tells us, for example, that the rest of nature would cheer if our species were to disappear, and so we must assume conscious responsibility for not trashing beyond repair the planetary environment on which we depend for our being. He also grants that we just might not have enough empathy and enough science to meet that responsibility. The techno-domination that is supposed to bring about Wilson's vision of a scientifically informed paradise on earth could just as easily produce an unprecedented hell. Doesn't the promise of paradise, as the more political Arnhart and Haidt remind us, depend on forgetting that the tragic conflict between our selfish and social instincts will continue to be the fundamental characteristic of the human animal?

Another penetrating criticism of Darwinian social thinking comes from Christians like Robert P. Kraynak. In an essay in these pages ("Justice without Foundations," Summer 2011), Kraynak argued that those implicitly dualistic evolutionary theorists, though modern men and women and humane scientists, still cannot help but affirm the Christian view (semi-secularized by Lockeans) that human beings are more than members of a tribe and possess an irreducible personal dignity. Although evolutionary psychologists try to reach the same political conclusions as people devoted to the human rights of individuals mysteriously liberated from nature, evolutionary science offers no real evidence that could ground our sense of personal significance apart from the requirements of the group and ultimately the species.

The moderation of Darwinian conservatism comes from its implicit recognition that evolutionary psychology falls short of explaining everything about who we are. The Cartesians are onto something regarding our irreducible personal freedom and our dissatisfaction with our personal limitations—existential loneliness, misery without God, anxiety in the face of personal demise. In this sense, the reduction of religion to a form of social bonding and adherence to group morality does not capture everything about religion. Surely Heidegger is right to say that, in the absence of a personal God, one's own death and the dread it inspires are not social or relational experiences.

Pushing in the other direction, of course, is the scientific evidence that Cartesian thought does not explain everything about us either. The point of life is not to maximize our personal freedom by dogmatically harboring doubt about personal authority and paranoia about being suckered by even our most natural relational impulses. Freedom really does become another word for nothing left to lose if we consciously detach it from its instinctual foundation in relational life. We were made, in part, to be parts, to find significance in the service of wholes greater than ourselves. Facing personal extinction, we may take some comfort in the way we live on through our families, our friends, our countries, and our churches. (Living on solely through one's genes or species, it would seem, is considerably less existentially comforting.)

An unexpected way to unite the Darwinian and Cartesian perspectives can be found in Christian theology, as expressed in the thought of the lately abdicated philosopher-pope Benedict XVI. The Darwinians are right that we are relational beings, the Lockeans are right that we are personal beings. We can only be personal through being relational. And that is the point of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. We don't lose ourselves in God, just as we don't lose ourselves in our relationships with persons made in His image. We retain our personal identity; being personal is hardwired, so to speak, in the very structure of being itself. And we are made to be in relationships without becoming mere parts; each of us is a relational whole by nature. It is a mistake to believe, as the Cartesians do, that we have to win our personal freedom against an impersonal nature, because we are, in fact, free persons *by* nature.

The Darwinian conservatives have not actually discovered the secret to human happiness. Their teaching of moderation is really one of chastened expectations, and in that respect not so different from Plato and Aristotle. Living as healthy social animals only alleviates our misery as self-conscious and particular beings, and the aim of social and political theory is to strike the balance most people need to live as well as they can.

But to say that the Darwinian conservatives don't have the whole truth and nothing but the truth does not negate their real and welcome contribution to an understanding of who we are these days. They are right, after all, that the real beginning to being happy is renouncing the right to happiness. We Cartesian or Lockean Americans have, quite tragically and comically, been too much about pursuing happiness in all the wrong places.