REVIEWS

Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature.*Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. Pp. xvi + 332. ISBN 0-7914-3694-2 (paper), $25.95.

Arnhart has brought together, in a clear, accessible, well-researched paperback, the core arguments for concluding that humans are by nature moral animals, that there is every reason to speak of an ethical naturalism. He skillfully integrates the writings of Aristotle and Hume, who arrived at this conclusion via philosophical insight, with the writings of Darwin and contemporary biologists such as de Waal and E. O. Wilson, who arrive at this conclusion using evolutionary principles. Being a political scientist, albeit one well versed in both biology and the philosophical tradition, he uses his later chapters to analyze such institutions as slavery and genital mutilation, and such social issues as male/female differences, from the perspective of ethical naturalism, chapters that will serve as excellent material for discussion in undergraduate and graduate courses.

Arnhart summarizes his perspective succinctly(p. 69): "My position is Aristotelian in that I agree with Aristotle that human beings are by nature social and political animals. It is Humean in that I agree with David Hume that human beings are by nature endowed with a moral sense. And it is Darwinian in that I agree with Charles Darwin that human sociality and morality are rooted in human biology." And (p. 83), "The ethical naturalist would argue that our moral experience requires a notion of moral freedom as freedom within nature. For Aristotle, Hume, and Darwin, the uniqueness of human beings as moral agents requires not a free will that transcends nature but a natural capacity to deliberate about one's own desires." Such straightforward declarative statements are a most welcomed antidote to the usual treatment given to this material, where competing perspectives are given equal time and qualifiers are added to every paragraph. Moreover, although we are given an adequate account of kin selection and reciprocity, he does not dwell on these strategies the way many writers do: he understands, correctly to my mind, that there is much more to morality than defending your relatives and games of tit for tat.

So, I greatly admire this book and think it should be required reading for any and all students of moral and political philosophy. I will go on to offer a few comments that do not in any way detract from that evaluation but rather indicate where I hope persons in this field, Arnhart among them, will be heading next.

A great deal still remains to be done to sort out what we mean, exactly, by the moral sense that is rooted in human nature. Arnhart has a go at it, stating that he advocates "an ethics of desire: the good is the desirable, and reason judges how best to satisfy the desires." He then lists 20 natural human desires and tells us that "if the good is the desirable, then human ethics is natural insofar as it satisfies natural human desires." We know that this can't be the whole story, in fact, because just as we inherit our moral sensibilities, our moral susceptibilities are likely to be "natural" as well, and words like sin and evil, which do not appear in Arnhart's index, are very real to us. Arnhart has a strong chapter on psychopathy, where egregiously amoral individuals are described, correctly, as neurologically compromised; for the rest of us, he makes the Aristotelian move of saying that somehow we will be able to figure out what to do if we act with prudence (his translation of *phronesis*), prudence being the "intellectual virtue" that allows us to make appropriate judgments. At the same time, he cites approvingly Aristotle's maxim that "thought by itself moves noth-

ing," and when he tries to indicate how our emotion-laden moral sensibilities might come to be integrated with our prudence, things get a bit muddy.

It should quickly be added that these things get muddy in most other people's hands as well; to my mind, the best contemporary navigator of this interface is philosopher Rosalind Hursthouse, who uses a book (*On Virtue Ethics* [Oxford, 1999]) to consider ground covered by Arnhart in a few pages. Moreover, Hursthouse is not deeply informed by modern biology/neuroscience, and in general, there is much left to say, from many perspectives, about how best to understand, and nurture, the sensibilities we bring to the project of being good social animals.

Arnhart also evinces a curious negativity towards idealism. To be sure, one of his central targets is the Kantian-type notion that morality is somehow "out there to be found" rather than "in here to be cultivated," and perhaps this has biased his outlook. But his account of human nature does not include the impulse to revere persons of exceptional moral worth and to set lofty moral goals for ourselves, our kin, and our communities. In his one negative set of comments on Darwin (p. 142 ff), he faults him for his "utopian yearning for an ideal moral realm." While Arnhart is, of course, free to hold this view, it is not, to my mind, inherent in ethical naturalism. If one believes, as I do, that the capacity for idealism is as robustly in our nature as our capacity for empathy and justice, then the ethical naturalist can view morality both as a fully natural capacity and as an ideal to strive for, an ideal not "out there" but recorded in the best writings and art of our cultural heritage. Nor need moral ideals be framed in supernatural contexts. Here, for example, is Howard Bloom's "Promethean Benediction":

> God is not a being, he is an aspiration, a gift, a vision, a goal to seek.
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> Since there is no God, it is our job to do his work.
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> Ours is the responsibility of making a cruel universe turn just, of creating ways to the skies for generations yet to come, of fashioning wings with which our children's children shall overcome, of making worlds of fantasy materialize as reality, of mining and transforming our greatest gifts—our passions, our imaginings, and our lusts.
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> This is the work of deity, and deity is a power that resides in us.

If thought by itself moves nothing, such exhortations can go far to move us along in the cultivation of our moral sensibilities.

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