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## ***Book Reviews***

*Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*, by Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. 350 pp. \$24.95 (cloth).

Evolution is in perpetual need of rescue from those who profess to be its strongest supporters. And those of us who have dedicated ourselves to teaching evolution to the next generation need all the help we can get. This book will not make our jobs any easier.

*Demonic Males* is a titillating and simplistic account of our origins, with just enough grounding in modern discoveries to be taken seriously, in the long lineage that subsumes Robert Ardrey, Desmond Morris, Ignatius Donnelly, Immanuel Velikovsky, and Erich von Daniken.

The book's thesis is that our familiar social world is the product of eons of biological evolutionary forces and not an ephemeral construction of social history. In particular, it is natural for men to fight to the death as individuals and as groups and for women to dig it, which perpetuates the fighting. And this is "written in the molecular chemistry of DNA" (p. 198), Wrangham and Peterson assert, despite the minimal evidence for such demonic male competition inferable from our bodies and teeth (p. 178). I, for one, would love to see those Southern blots.

But the imaginative chemistry is nothing compared to the imaginative ethnology. The Yanomamo are blithely compared to the Gombe chimpanzees and are represented as pristine warriors outside of history—unfortunately without the benefit of the scholarly insights of such anthropologists as Brian Ferguson. Margaret Mead gets predictably bashed, as if hers were the only evidence ever marshaled for the influence of culture on behavior and Derek Freeman were a reliable and fair critic.

If there was an award for the most ink spilled in simplistic interpretation of an ethological factoid, it would have to go to the bizarre killings of the Kahama chimpanzee community by the Kasakela males at Gombe in the 1970s. *Demonic Males* says it is paradigmatic for chimpanzee behavior and of a piece with organized human violence. Wrangham and Peterson would have us believe that this episode of chimp "warfare" throws more light on Gaugamela, Actium, Agincourt, Balaklava, Vicksburg, Ypres, Nagasaki, and Sharpeville than on Dogs Playing Poker. One, however, searches vainly for the evidence that it is actually anything more than an imaginative projection of highly specific cultural ideas and motives onto nonhumans (as if that would be the first time human cultural values had ever been projected onto chimps!).

Chimpanzees not only kill each other like humans do, but also "share other evils: political murders, beatings, and rape" (p. 131). Apparently, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is needed to investigate the Gombe

situation, perhaps with Kanzi the bonobo as interpreter. And naturally, rape is reduced to a reproductive tactic by “analogy” (p. 140) to orangutans. Of course, the distinction between analogy and homology is crucial here, and it is exceedingly unclear in *Demonic Males* just what the relationship between the behavioral and mental phenomena imputed to the apes is to those of humans. If the phenomena were indeed homologous, that would at least reflect the contribution of Darwin to modern science. Otherwise, we’re left with the symbolic analogical associations of *Aesop’s Fables*, a parody of evolutionary anthropology, as if Darwin had never been born.

“Wars,” Wrangham and Peterson assert as an example, “tend to be rooted in competition for status.” But status for whom? The grunts? The generals? The sociopolitical entities they represent? Wrangham and Peterson continue that “we could well substitute for Sparta and Athens the names of two male chimpanzees” (p. 192). But a chimpanzee is certainly not homologous to a *polis*. Neither “Sparta” nor “the Tutsi” nor “the Axis” was descended from a common ancestor with chimpanzees; they’re not even fundamentally biological entities. Sparta may have been arguably “like” a chimpanzee, but that would be no more than a literary association. Sparta was a constructed social entity, the product of a specifically human symbolic social history. In other words, *Demonic Males* argues by recourse to a metaphoric non-Darwinian biology that begins by pretending we’re not human.

It sure takes nerve to call that science.

The classic tropes of hyperscientific quackery are all here: This is “evolutionary” (so to contest it is to be a creationist); it’s rooted in the latest finds from hi-tech genetics (yeah, so was the Final Solution); and it even manages to recruit that objective, well-traveled “biologist from Mars” (p. 178), if only there were biologists on Mars and they were as dopey as the worst of them on Earth.

The reconstruction of prehistory is the most interesting part of the book. It is doggedly deterministic, which makes it a particularly amusing origin myth. Astronomical events led to major climatic changes (p. 228), which isolated the ancestors of humans, chimpanzees, and bonobos. Gorillas were not adaptable enough to survive on the left bank of the Zaire River, which left it open for bonobos. Bonobos snacked on what the gorillas would have eaten if the gorillas had been there, which permitted them instead to form female coalitions, which squashed male violence. Chimpanzees, however, being sympatric with gorillas, had to rely on other foods and couldn’t form the female coalitions that kept the males in check. And somewhere else the fruit trees were succumbing to dryness “and thereby made humans” (p. 228). Yes, you really are what you eat.

Lacking much of a sense of history or scientific responsibility, *Demonic Males* finally manages to revisit many of the classic corruptions of human science of the last century.

You want racism? The book's very cover compares a gorilla to an African human from an old and embarrassing drawing by Schultz. Were the authors oblivious to the connotations? Or did they just not care? Unfortunately, Wrangham's writing is vested with authority—he's a Harvard professor—and with authority comes responsibility. To compare an African human to a gorilla on the cover of a book about violence, given the social history of scientific racism (Schultz's original drawing dates from the 1920s), is a stunning act of thoughtlessness. As far as I'm concerned, it is entirely irresponsible and inexcusable from anyone with pretensions to modern scholarly standards.

You want social Darwinism? "The chimpanzee-human system looks clear. The downtrodden of the earth can rail against the imperialism of the temporarily dominant, but imperialist expansionism is nevertheless a broad and persistent tendency of our demonic male species" (pp. 236–237). In other words, vast inequalities of wealth and social power are natural, and we are simply obliged to live with it—a rather self-serving inference coming from a professor at an institution whose endowment is larger than the GNP of most of the nations of Africa.

You want eugenics? "With some concerted worldwide action we could probably get measurable results within a few generations . . . [to] breed a kinder, gentler man" (p. 239). Oh, sure, they tell us it wouldn't work because women actually *prefer* "male demonism" so it would be unfair to them. But is that really the problem? Or is it that we just can't entrust demonic professors with the reproductive rights of the populace, because they tend to have too much education and too little wisdom—because the last time we did, they helped to enact legislation to sterilize just that part of society that was least able to protect themselves? Remember *Buck v. Bell*?

What we need is the *extension* of rights, not moronic males with little understanding of genetics or evolution glibly suggesting ways to control and curtail the reproductive rights of other, more vulnerable people. *That's* the difficulty with human breeding programs, and some deeper bioethical reflection by Wrangham and Peterson would have been welcome.

Perhaps the most striking indicator of the superficiality and poverty of scholarship reflected in *Demonic Males* is that Wrangham and Peterson set up their book by invoking the same discredited argument that Jared Diamond used (*The Third Chimpanzee*), namely, that the Sibley-Ahlquist DNA hybridization has shown humans and chimpanzees to be closest relatives, which makes them the sole, most credible model for the origin of human social behavior. But it is well known now that Sibley and Ahlquist subjected their data to unreported illegitimate operations, which determined their highly publicized result and which implies that the paper was reviewed and published under false pretenses. Without those alterations, Wrangham and Peterson themselves admitted "it is virtually certain that Sibley and Ahlquist would have concluded that *Homo*, *Pan*, and *Gorilla* form a trichotomy" [*J. Molec.*

*Evol.* 30:225 (1990)]. A self-proclaimed “replication” of the results was easily seen to be entirely inconsistent with the first study and itself egregiously misrepresentative [*Am. J. Phys. Anthropol.* 85:207 (1991)]. Anyone with the merest inclination to examine the literature critically can see that the only place for that work is alongside Piltdown Man and the Tasaday and that most of the genetic data simply fail to link chimpanzee and human—rather an insecure peg on which to hang this book’s central premise, to be sure.

Let us give the final thoughts to Thomas Huxley, who was asked to review an audacious work of pseudoscience a century and a half ago. “Time was,” he wrote, “that when a book had been shown to be a mass of pretentious nonsense, it . . . quietly sunk into its proper limbo. But these days appear, unhappily, to have gone by. . . . We grudge no man either the glory or the profit to be obtained from charlatainerie . . . but a book may, like a weed, acquire an importance by neglect, which it could have attained in no other mode.”

We can’t afford professionally to neglect *Demonic Males*, but it would be somewhat reassuring to learn it is just a put-on, and that Wrangham and Peterson really do know better.

JONATHAN MARKS

*Department of Anthropology*  
*University of California*  
*Berkeley, CA 94720*

*The Primate Anthology: Essays on Primate Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation from Natural History*, edited by Russell L. Ciochon and Richard A. Nisbett. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ: 1998. 246 pp. \$26.00.

I have always enjoyed articles on primate behavior published in *Natural History* for numerous reasons. First and foremost, the authors are primatologists, not “science journalists.” As a result, a greater sense of the excitement and difficulties of conducting research are conveyed, commonly in ways that seemingly transport the reader into the field to share in the adventure of observing primates in the wild. In the process the material presented is informative and entertaining for both the professional and the more casual reader. For serious undergraduate students who have yet to discover their interests in animal behavior, such articles can serve as a bridge to motivate their investigation of more technical journal articles written by the same highly regarded researchers.

*The Primate Anthology* places 33 articles on primatology, originally published from 1975 to 1995, at the fingertips of both students and faculty—and at a time when copyright laws are increasingly difficult to follow. To