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Book review
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Darwin and International Relations: On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict

Bradley A. Thayer, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004, 425 pages, \$40, ISBN: 978-0-8131-2321-9.

Using an innovative approach, Bradley A. Thayer attempts to bridge the gap between the natural and social sciences through the use of evolutionary theory, with particular application to the study of international relations. Primarily he focuses on the reductionist methods of neoclassical Darwinism, natural selection and the more recent concept of inclusive fitness. It should be noted, however, that he goes to lengths to distance himself from Spencerian notions of social Darwinism of the late 19th and early 20th century. Rather earnestly he states that evolutionary theory will allow us to 'realize Condorcet's dream of a unified natural and social science for the first time' (p. 9), declaring that we are entering the 'century of biology' and Darwin represents 'the Robespierre or Lenin of this revolution' (p. 1). Irrespective of his unashamedly positivist position, Thayer's work is impressively well researched and represents an attempt to breach hardened disciplinary barriers.

The book itself is made up of five chapters. The first looks directly at the application of evolutionary theory to the social sciences. Thayer explains the reductionist and probabilistic nature of his approach but argues that evolutionary theory does not deny the importance of environmental factors. However, he maintains, as he does throughout the book, that this research project provides an irrefutable scientific foundation for social inquiry. In many respects he is proposing a unified theory that explains the underlying ultimate causation of social interaction, whilst emphasising that it does not assist in the explanation of proximate causation. It is not difficult to conclude that he has reinvented Hobbes' leviathan with scientific absolutism at its base.

The second chapter moves directly into the realm of international relations theory, promoting evolutionary theory as a panacea for realism and rational choice theories. Dismissing liberalism out of hand (critical theories receive almost no mention) he focuses on presenting the objective laws of human nature, suggesting that classical realism benefits from the scientific certainty that human nature is driven by ego (as the concept of evil is not testable) which evolved through the self-interested need to protect one's genetic legacy. Surprisingly, Hobbes receives only brief mention and Machiavelli none at all. Moving onto structural realism, Thayer finds Waltz to be an improvement on classical realism as it is 'more scientific' (p. 64), concluding that evolutionary theory can improve the structuralist approach because 'it places the theory on a scientific base for the first time' (p. 65). Thayer's position is that this line of attack is not only superior but will lend itself to an 'evolutionary realism' (p. 79); an interesting

concept, but one that needs to extend itself to many of the approaches that are emerging from the non-linear sciences.

The third and fourth chapters focus on war, with large segments devoted to the examination of animal wars (primarily ants and chimpanzees), disease and biological warfare, war in tribal societies and the thrill of war for many modern day (male) soldiers. He explains how warfare contributes to fitness and why men are more likely to be warriors, as to include women would limit the group's 'reproductive resources' (p. 193). In many instances some of his examples are a little lengthy and laboured but nonetheless represent some interesting reading. He also suggests that Clausewitz's definition of war should be extended to include the idea that war 'is conducted for resources as well as political ends' (p. 179), a nonsensical idea as the acquisition of resources by a state is nothing short of a political process.

The most interesting chapter is the fifth and final one, dealing with ethnic conflict, and would certainly provide for fascinating if not energetic debate at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Thayer provides precise definitions of nation, nationalism and ethnicity with a discussion of in- and out-groups that has emerged from psychology. The idea of the 'other' (p. 245) is explored at the evolutionary level, where the 'low tolerance of strangers, or xenophobia, contribute[s] to fitness' (p. 256), which would make for interesting discussion if contrasted, for example, with cultural and normative arguments (remembering that his position does not deny the impact of environmental factors). Thayer concludes with the sobering thought that, because of our genetic composition, ethnic conflict, along with war and peace, will continue to remain a 'part of the fabric of international relations' (p. 265).

As a final note Thayer's attempt to build a bridge between the natural and social sciences is not far-reaching enough, indeed it is flawed, as he is still relying on a Newtonian and linear methodology. The 'revolution' of interdisciplinary exchange is already taking place and it is concentrated in the area of the non-linear sciences. Chaos and complexity theory fail to receive a mention, and concepts like emergence, self-organisation and feedback would greatly strengthen his attempt to create an 'evolutionary realism'. Similarly, stepping back from the reductionist approach would enable him to move away from some of his more contentious claims, for example in the area of gender, as he would find himself less restricted by the epistemological and methodological constraints he has placed upon himself.