



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Triumph of the Intelligent: The Creation of Homo sapiens sapiens. The Evolution of Human Intelligence, Volume 2. by Seymour W. Itzkoff

Martin Daly

The Quarterly Review of Biology, Vol. 61, No. 1. (Mar., 1986), p. 154.

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ligion has always claimed — to higher forms. . .” (p. 339).

Second, the author offers no novel reason for drawing support for humanism from evolution. She points out, for example, that seeing human nature as a determinant of culture vitiates extreme forms of cultural determinism with their implications of human helplessness (e.g., Leslie White's views), and that the indeterminate nature of future evolution (both biological and cultural) supports in some ways a view similar to the traditional notion of free will. None of the arguments, however, are new, nor are they presented especially effectively.

Third, the book skirts the difficult issues. For example, current evolutionary theory sees the interests of all individuals as fundamentally in conflict (genetically identical individuals aside). Unless one believes that group selection at the species level overwhelms selection at the individual level, it is hard to accept as unproblematic the view that *we* are responsible for human destiny.

WILLIAM IRONS, *Anthropology, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois*

TRIUMPH OF THE INTELLIGENT: THE CREATION OF *Homo sapiens sapiens*. *The Evolution of Human Intelligence, Volume 2*.

By Seymour W. Itzkoff. *Paideia, Ashfield (Massachusetts)*. \$16.00. 210 p. + 7 pls.; ill.; index. 1985.

This is Volume 2 of an intended four-volume opus, “The Evolution of Human Intelligence.” According to the dust jacket, the author is a professional musician and sometime philosopher. Human evolution, it seems, is a topic open to all.

How can one convey in a brief review the sustained dreadfulness of this ill-informed, incoherent book? Its style is execrable, its message garbled:

The big successful guys fall hard. Life has had a succession of them. Even the vaunted redwoods, of an incredibly ancient floral line, have come a cropper to the ultimate enemy, man. Over the eons it has paid *not* to be too big a winner; better just hang on, for with each millenium comes another round of opportunity. Nature may offer the big break (p. 28).

It is vacuous:

250,000 years ago, *Homo erectus* was straining at the bit, roaming, struggling, surviving. Perhaps he was experiencing in these last, anxious, pregnant centuries the thumping

birth pangs of his successors' impatience to take up the challenge” (p. 102).

It is racist:

Examples of failed paedomorphosis can be found in the platypus (monotremes) and even in dwarfed humans, especially the highly paedomorphized Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert (p. 109).

That such a book can be written (and published) is testimony to the continuing scandal of biological illiteracy.

MARTIN DALY, *Psychology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada*

ON THE NATURE OF HUMAN PLASTICITY.

By Richard M. Lerner. *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York*. \$49.50. xiv + 208 p.; ill.; author and subject indexes. 1984.

This book by a developmental psychologist reviews a wide range of material to support a “life-span perspective.” The essence of this view is apparently that organismic development can be influenced throughout life by any number of “interventions,” and that the causal webs linking organism and environment are complex. It is repeatedly implied that most students of development are nasty “determinists” who doubt these propositions. (S. J. Gould is one of Lerner's heroes, T. C. Schneirla another.) As an example of the bad old way of thinking, Lerner quotes pediatricians Klaus and Kennell: “Early events have long-lasting effects. Anxieties a mother has about her baby in the first few days after birth, even about a problem that is easily resolved, may affect her relationship with the child long afterward” (p. 14). I was curious to see how Lerner would debunk this seemingly unexceptionable claim. Having finished his book, I still am.

Life-span developmentalists, like all good scientists, believe in “causality.” Determinists, by contrast, believe in “constraints,” which is very pessimistic. Lerner is nothing if not optimistic. He reviews molecular biology and recombinant DNA technology (from “News & Views” pieces in *Science* prior to 1981) to arrive at a cheery prediction of imminent “gene therapy.” He reviews the neurosciences (from the same source), happily looking forward to “brain transplants” and new chemical treatments to control stress. Every chapter contains enthusiastic assertions about opportunities for “interventions” that will “enhance human development,” but nowhere is there a critical look at the question of what constitutes “enhancement.” Lerner's upbeat outlook seems to be untouched by