



Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society

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One of the great intellectual battles of modern times is between evolution and religion. Until now, they have been considered completely irreconcilable theories of origin and existence. David Sloan Wilson's *Darwin's Cathedral* takes the radical step of joining the two, in the process proposing an evolutionary theory of religion that shakes both evolutionary biology and social theory at their foundations.

The key, argues Wilson, is to think of society as an organism, an old idea that has received new life based on recent developments in evolutionary biology. If society is an organism, can we then think of morality and religion as biologically and culturally evolved adaptations that enable human groups to function as single units rather than mere collections of individuals? Wilson brings a variety of evidence to bear on this question, from both the biological and social sciences. From Calvinism in sixteenth-century Geneva to Balinese water temples, from hunter-gatherer societies to urban America, Wilson demonstrates how religions have enabled people to achieve by collective action what they never could do alone. He also includes a chapter considering forgiveness from an evolutionary perspective and concludes by discussing how all social organizations, including science, could benefit by incorporating elements of religion.

Religious believers often compare their communities to single organisms and even to insect colonies. Astoundingly, Wilson shows that they might be literally correct. Intended for any educated reader, *Darwin's Cathedral* will change forever the way we view the relations among evolution, religion, and human society.

Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society Details

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From Reader Review Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society for online ebook

Tomas Kristofory says

Sloan Wilson applies his multilevel selection scenario to outline an analysis of the evolution religions. It is just an outline, not an inquiry. An outline goes as follows. A within-group selection occurs in original small tribes. In more populous groups there prevails a between-group selection because of the need to cooperate in larger groups. An adaptationist argument applies here. Sloan Wilson traces adaptationist argument from Durkheim on. Religions help societies adapt to their environments, thereby reinstating themselves. Adaptationism is portrayed on some examples, but not systematically. Sloan Wilson humbly says that the whole generation of scholarship needs to come to portray the whole picture of group selection in religions.

However Durkheimian adaptationist basis is rather cheap and not to be swallowed by scientists. What is the criterion of fitness? There is Sloan Wilson not clear. What does it imply in recent debates about the usefulness of religions (eg. what can he say against Dawkins)?

If only Sloan Wilson used more of Hayek, whom he recognizes along the way, but doesn't suck much of Hayek at all. First of all, Durkheim's reduction of religion to some function in society is supposedly a target of Hayek's sharp criticism. Hayek states, that when we see not a supernatural belief "above" a society, but only "in" society, we'll thus sort of try to divinize society. Where did "divinizations of society" lead to in history, is the road to serfdom. Here applies a Hayek's argument (Fatal conceit, 1988, pp. 140 <http://www.libertarianismo.org/livros...>):

"The source of order that religion ascribes to a human-like divinity - the map or guide that will show a part successfully how to move within the whole - we now learn to see to be not outside the physical world but one of its characteristics, one far too complex for any of its parts possibly to form an 'image' or 'picture' of it. Thus religious prohibitions against idolatry, against the making of such images, are well taken. Yet perhaps most people can conceive of abstract tradition only as a personal Will. If so, will they not be inclined to find this will in 'society' in an age in which more overt supernaturalisms are ruled out as superstitions? On that question may rest the survival of our civilisation."

So yes, Durkheim is an idolatrist. In both science and religion. And Sloan Wilson as well - regrettably, because his outline will not be that useless, when reinterpreted in proper framework. Hayek, despite being older, at least outlines a criterium of fitness, that being the ban of idolatry - making an image of God. That is tough also these days, both because it is always a great temptation and because a cartesianally rationalistic and fatally conceited reason of people like Dawkins (or Robert Wright) try to force religions to forgo supernatural beliefs. Further research can well use Sloan Wilson's insights in Hayekian framework. So it is worth reading both for every religion scholar and cultural evolution scholar.

Jacob van Berkel says

Jonathan Haidt on this book's thesis:

When opponents of evolution object that humans are not mere apes, they are correct. We are

also part bee.

And I liked the thesis. But the book, *as a book*, not so much. Especially the first 85 pages or so were quite the slog.

Clif says

Science and religion in our time are boxers in the ring. Is it possible to bring the two together in a way that makes one appreciate both?

Darwin's Cathedral has achieved this seemingly impossible task. David Sloan Wilson looks at religion as a practical adaption, a way in which a group of human beings can fit itself better for survival. This useful aspect of religion is something that has no connection with the factual authentication of beliefs, quite the contrary, as Wilson states when speaking of Calvinism, "Calvin's catechism (statement of beliefs) turns faith from a belief designed to be modified by experience into a fortress designed to protect the belief system from experience."

The book is loaded with insight and rewards the careful reader again and again. I read it twice.

In his investigation, Wilson shows us the scientific method in action, establishing his premises, defining his terms carefully, stating his hypothesis, examining the history of the topic, addressing the challenges to his theory posed by those who have other views.

I can't think of a better example of the beauty of the scientific method, which at the same time shows the utility of religion at a time when many scoff at it as nothing but fairy tales for the fearful. Wilson says he has a respect for religion, something any good researcher must have for the subject of study.

The book first brings the reader into the know about evolution. What is adaption? What is fitness? What defines an organism? Can a group of individuals qualify as an evolutionary unit? What is the basis of Darwin's theory of evolution and what did he think of group adaption?

Anyone looking for a quick read will be disappointed. Each page conveys a wealth of information that must be digested. The language is clean and precise yet at the same time warm and inviting. Please plan to spend a few days with the first part of this work.

The second part gives examples of religion in history that the author believes prove his hypothesis: Calvinism, Judaism and early Christianity. The detailed dissection of beliefs and practices with each identified with specific benefits for group survival is history at its best.

I've left my copy of this book dog-eared and heavily annotated. Though I read a hard copy, I think an electronic edition might be preferable for the ease with which you could find terms and refer back to earlier mentions of a topic. It's imperative to keep definitions in mind or you will lose your way. When the author says, "there are three reasons for this..." take a pencil and note 1 - 2 - 3. I didn't make a single note on the first reading then read it again with my pencil very busy and it all came together. Sloan is at pains not to lose you, taking every opportunity to clarify and summarize the concepts under examination, but you have to pay attention. The Professor from Heaven won't succeed with a dozing student.

Education is a joy that, unfortunately, too many people consider drudge work. Discovery, insight and the

dawning of understanding on any topic are, for me, things that make life worth living: immaterial, gaining appeal with one's age, always sitting in the distance gleaming, beckoning, enticing, welcoming, challenging, more wondrous than any materiel El Dorado.

Approached with mind open, Darwin's Cathedral will let you experience these joys and leave you enlightened.

Jonathan Tweet says

Evaluates religion from a naturalistic perspective, as a system for coordinating social behavior.

Simon Lavoie says

Wilson soutient que les groupes sociaux constituent des unités adaptatives biologiques sous certaines conditions, et que les religions figurent parmi les ensembles de croyances et de comportements par lesquels les groupes satisfont de telles conditions. Elles y parviennent par la sacralisation des biens pour l'obtention desquels la collaboration est nécessaire, et par l'octroi, aux croyances et comportements collaboratifs pertinents, d'un halo de sérieux, de gravité et de prescription. Les groupes religieux, églises et monastères se décrivent eux-mêmes en recourant aux métaphores du corps ou de la ruche, et cette vision d'eux-mêmes, apprend-on, a un fondement scientifique d'après la théorie de l'évolution.

Dans la défense de cette thèse, l'auteur met à distance une période de construction de la théorie biologique, l'âge de l'individualisme (le gène égoïste, l'élimination des groupes), qu'il considère à juste titre un mauvais tournant ("a "wrong turn"). Le présent ouvrage est une contribution, non au retour à une défense axiomatique du bien collectif comme valeur adaptative, mais une contribution au juste milieu à éclaircir entre la référence à l'individu et au groupe compris biologiquement : comme des acteurs de modification du milieu, et de réponse aux pressions sélectives du milieu. Les partisans de l'individualisme ont commis une erreur, notamment en calculant la valeur moyenne du succès reproductif sans tenir compte des groupes ("the averaging fallacy"). Wilson prend soin de rétablir la procédure permettant de soutenir et de vérifier empiriquement la sélection de groupes.

Nous rencontrons plusieurs éclaircissements théoriques dont le but est de bénéficier à la défense de ce point de vue. Les mécanismes fondamentaux de l'évolution darwinienne sont mis de l'avant (diversification phénotypique, hérabilité, rétention sélective), de manière à montrer pourquoi la diversification pertinente, et la suite du processus, débordent le cadre uniquement génétique pour embrasser celui, culturel, des comportements prescrits par la coordination et la production de bénéfices collectifs.

La voie privilégiée par Darwin afin d'expliquer nos aptitudes morales est reprise et défendue sous le nom de théorie sélective multi-niveau : celle-ci permet de résoudre l'aporie présumée selon laquelle les comportements moraux, ne favorisant pas la survie et la reproduction de leurs auteurs, bénéficient au contraire aux profiteurs qui, eux, prospéreraient et verraient leurs gènes mieux se répandre de génération en génération. La théorie multi-niveau dénoue cette apparente tension de la théorie en rétablissant la distinction entre compétition interne au groupe, et compétition entre groupes. Si un comportement moral ou altruiste ne

bénéficie pas à son auteur aux plans survie et reproduction au sein de son groupe, mais qu'il favorise un taux de survie et de reproduction moyenne supérieur à celui des autres groupes démunis d'agents moraux ou altruistes, le premier s'avère avantagé au plan évolutif, adaptatif.

Wilson précise que le contrôle social est une notion permettant de diminuer le coût de l'altruisme sacrificiel présumé si difficile à satisfaire, y compris dans une théorie multi-niveau : ce contrôle consiste en un bien de deuxième ordre ("causing another to perform a public good is itself a public good" p.19). Un groupe peut ainsi être richement doté en agents orientés au "service public" sans pourtant devoir encourir de lourds sacrifices au plan de leur chance reproductive.

Du code génétique à la cellule jusqu'aux sociétés en passant par les ruches et les fourmilières, l'histoire de la vie est ponctuée de 8 transitions caractérisées par un même mécanisme fondamental : la suppression de la compétition entre individus, et la relocalisation de la compétition au niveau du groupe comme méta-organisme avec d'autres groupes ("from groups of organisms to groups as organism"). Le rattachement de la thèse de l'ouvrage à cette logique de l'histoire du vivant, que Wilson considère être un nouveau paradigme, initié par Lynn Margulis, par John Maynard Smith & Eörs Szathmáry (auxquels on peut ajouter François Jacob, voir le dernier chapitre de La logique du vivant, une histoire de l'hérédité, est éclairante et stimulante. Le corollaire, dans la théorie évolutionniste du groupe, de l'émergence de la morale religieuse est l'accroissement de la rivalité intergroupes (ainsi que nombre d'auteurs, dont Joshua Greene, Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them, l'ont démontré, à la suite d'un article phare de Samuel Bowles, 2009, Did Warfar Among Ancestral Hunter-Gatherers Affect the Evolution of Human Social Behaviors).

La distinction entre causes prochaines et causes lointaines (avec leurs mécanismes correspondants) est un des autres piliers théoriques sur lesquels Wilson construit sa thèse, ainsi que sa critique des théories rivales de la religion dans une perspective de sciences sociales et de théorie de l'évolution.

La reprise et la défense de la vision durkheimienne de la religion contre les théories rivales, dont celle de l'acteur rationnel, semble devoir être située au coeur de la démarche et de la réflexion de Wilson. Lorsque celui-ci écrit : « It often seems as if the integration of biology and the social sciences is a one-way street, more a conquest by biology than a fertile interchange. Here is a case where the influence needs to flow the other way », le Here est bel et bien la théorie durkheimienne de la religion comprise comme représentation symbolique de la société, comprenant une distinction Sacrée/Profane. Les agents qui partagent un même ensemble de croyances et comportements relatifs aux entités et objets sacrés (ce qui est au-dessus d'eux et qui leur commande respect et déférence) sont dotés, en même temps que d'une représentation du groupe qu'ils forment, des guides pour la conduite de leur vie en groupe -- des guides de coordination pour l'obtention des avantages séculiers que sont les bénéfices du travail collectif, les bénéfices de la résolution des conflits et du pardon.

Les pré-requis à satisfaire afin de constituer le symbolisme (la description métaphorique de soi du groupe, c'est-à-dire sa saisie sous une forme imagée, malléable en pensée) et le sacré en objets de la science biologique ont trait à l'impact de l'un et de l'autre sur les comportements individuels - ce dont on peut convenir aisément.

Les chapitres à caractère empirique, dans lesquels Wilson veut démontrer la justesse de l'organicisme ou fonctionnalisme religieux au plan biologique (le groupe religieux comme organisme s'adaptant à un environnement de relations sociales) portent sur les avantages séculiers de (1) la réforme calvinienne, mesurés à partir d'une comparaison de la ville de Genève avant et après l'implantation des catéchismes pertinents (lesquels comprennent des prescriptions sur les relations des hommes entre eux, à chaque niveau

hiérarchique, et les relations entre Dieu et hommes); les avantages séculiers - ici-bas - d'(2) une église chrétienne établie par et pour des immigrants coréens de première génération aux États-Unis contemporains, d'(3) une étude du pardon chrétien dans la temporalité de rédaction des évangiles -- de ses avantages séculiers dans l'adaptation des premières églises à des contraintes, à des ennemis, et à des destinataires spécifiques ("Context-sensitivity is the key for understanding the nature of Christian forgiveness » p. 217), et de (4) une hypothèse explicative du cycle de vie des religions (de culte, de secte à Église, puis de secte et à culte).

En plus de la mise en place de l'armature théorique, une portion significative de livre est destinée à relever le défi consistant à se mesurer à une multitude de disciplines ayant toutes porté sur la religion des regards à la fois profonds (au plan des intentions) et contrastés : anthropologie, sociologie, "science" des religions, notamment. Ainsi, nous avons droit à un éventail d'exposés détaillés sur le sacré chez les Nuer (le chef à la peau de léopard, institution de résolution des différends) et chez une tribu chrétienne nomade du Monténégro, ainsi qu'à l'exposé de la théorie d'auteurs embrassant une vision adaptative au niveau individuel, ou exaptive (un "byproduct" de la pensée calculant les coûts/bénéfice dans un marchandage avec des puissances invisibles, pour l'obtention de biens inatteignables) de la religion.

Le projet d'établissement d'un programme de recherche pour la généralisation, au-delà des sources chrétiennes, de la définition organismique avancée dans ce livre est dessiné au chapitre 5. Il faut espérer que ce projet ait continué d'avancer. Il est constructif et il renouvelle considérablement la perspective dans laquelle la religion a été jusqu'ici théorisée dans une perspective évolutionniste/aire. Wilson procède dans un esprit, non de confrontation, mais d'admiration pour certains aspects de la religion, notamment pour son efficacité à souder des groupes coopératifs et moraux. Certains (Daniel Dennett en particulier) ont durement attaqué Wilson pour ces concessions quant aux variétés de réalismes qu'il nous faudrait admettre dans notre vision du monde et notre théorie de la connaissance : réalisme pratique, réalisme factuel (voir le dernier chapitre). Cet aspect de l'ouvrage peut être le plus susceptible de déplaire mais aussi de stimuler d'autres réflexions; lesquelles gagnent à être rapprochées de celles de Scott Atran et du Center for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict (voir L'Etat islamique est une révolution), qui mettent la valeur adaptative de la religion en contexte de conflits sous un éclairage dense et puissant.

Cet ouvrage est fort recommandable par sa clarté, par la nature de son entreprise, et par l'exemplarité avec laquelle Wilson argumente sur un sujet aussi controversé que la religion et son apport en bénéfices collectifs séculiers. La soudure des actions, des croyances et de l'appartenance semble s'être constamment défaite après que celle des dieux aux hommes aient été constatées, puis déclarées, mortes ou inopérantes. Peut-on retrouver la première sans la seconde ? Cette question demeure au cœur de la modernité philosophique et politique. Puisse un ouvrage comme *Darwin's Cathedral* nous éclairer sur l'impuissance et l'insuccès que nous avons eu à y répondre, et sur ce qu'il convient de faire et de penser.

Nebuchadnezzar says

David Sloan Wilson has made an interesting, if ultimately flawed, attempt to apply multi-level group selection to the study of human evolution and religion. Perhaps it's because the standards of this genre seem to have become non-existent in recent times, but I almost feel bad ragging on Wilson here. Quite unlike your average evolutionary psychology tract, Wilson's work is very much informed by the scholarship in religious studies and anthropology. There's much more to be had in this than many of the science/evolution/religion books on the market.

Wilson's thesis, however, not only lacks strong empirical backing, but is so conceptually muddled as to be flat-out wrong in principle. Attempting to apply group selection to humans, Wilson defines religions as "superorganisms." This reifies "religion" into a pseudo-biological entity. Scott Atran, in *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion*, dismantles Wilson's application of group selection and, in addition, exposes the biases in his ethnographic sample. The second major hole in this thesis is the conflation of religion with morality. It's simply not the case that all religions help to promote moral or social norms. Many religions in stateless societies have (or had) gods and spirits that couldn't care less about enforcing moral norms. The proliferation of the Abrahamic religions seems to have tricked even atheists into believing that religion and morality have historically always been necessarily interconnected throughout history. The promoters of the "religion as adaptation" thesis (and some of our "holy" men, no doubt) would do well to read Rodney Stark's "God, Rituals, and the Moral Order" (<http://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/u...>).

There are a number of other issues as well. One not so tiny one is that the earliest uncontroversial evidence of some kind of religious or ritual behavior in the archaeological record we have is a few instances of ceremonial burial, which only date back to about 90,000 years ago. Even whether these burials represent a true belief in the afterlife or the supernatural or were simply a means of "honoring the dead" remains debated. If Wilson is correct, we should see some kind of evidence for religion much earlier in the course of human evolution. The analysis in the case studies is often interesting, but the choices (e.g., Calvinism) seem irrelevant in service of demonstrating religion as a biological adaptation. Wilson has made the classic mistake of confusing cultural evolution for biological evolution.

I'd like to say that this was a fine starting point for an argument that Wilson could refine and build on later into something really formidable. But the theoretical basis is filled with so many holes that I don't see how any of it can be salvaged.

Peter Makai says

Demonstrates our religious nature better than Dan Dennett. Nuff said.

Silvio says

Religion as something special

It was a hard read for me, maybe a little bit above my "paygrade". David Wilson have done a nice work trying to apply evolutionary science based hypothesis to the study of religion. One is group theory, which is not mainstream supported by other evolutionary biologists (my understanding and I could be wrong). Also he uses some of the conclusions to defend religions in general against the position of new atheists: this is a low point for me at least. However he notes that religion can be similar to other needed belief systems like patriotism still is unique and should be studied separately or as a special case. Which is not clear for me: there are many things that emerge from our symbolic brains, and each of them builds on lower structures of thought, patriotism, religion, are in the higher level, but they are not special cases. Ironically he recognizes that religious people will not like his thesis, which is based on evolutionary thinking! And reduces religion as a group mechanism to increase its fitness.

Jeremy Lyon says

The main thrust of David Sloan Wilson's argument in this book is that religion (and other human cultural institutions) can be meaningfully analyzed from an evolutionary perspective, that in certain circumstances it makes sense to discuss the purpose of religion as it applies to the adaptive fitness of human beings.

To make that argument he has to show that a lot of what the Academy believes about evolution, on the one hand, and social science, on the other, is either inaccurate or misguided. To those of us uninitiated in the literature, this effort can be tedious.

In the end, he presents a convincing case: he shows that adaptive explanation of religion has all the hallmarks of good science: it's predictive, it's logically consistent with what we know about evolution, and it can be clearly disproved.

What he doesn't do (and to be fair, never set out to do) is go on to perform that analysis in all but a cursory manner. I eagerly await the next installment.

Savyasachee says

TL;DR: Treat this book as a textbook and take your time reading it. It's brilliant, but the author's thesis is new, untested, and requires a lot of validation.

This book deserves more than a 3/5. David Sloan Wilson opened my eyes to a whole new way of applying a skillset consisting of math, evolutionary biology and economics to the study of human society. Actually, that is a misnomer. I had no conception of what it takes to really study religion before I began reading this book and thus, Darwin's Cathedral is a revelation and a miracle in my eyes.

At the same time, the book is dense. The first couple of chapters try to shoehorn entire classes worth of knowledge into a few dozen pages. Had I not already known a lot of what is explained about evolutionary biology, I'm quite sure I would have been lost understanding everything. Understanding proximate and ultimate causes, group selection theory, multilevel selection theory and most importantly, the theory of functionalism in an hour is next to impossible. To truly understand the meat of this book, one would need to pick up a couple of textbooks, understand some mathematics, Darwinian Selection, and a good deal of biology, not to mention do some background reading in anthropology and religious studies.

But once one does that, the fruits of one's labour are many. Religion is a topic couched in more mysticism and myth than anything else we study. There is no unified theory which explains the formation of religion, its growth, and its function. How does one explain Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Shintoism, etc. as anything more than a collection of beliefs which seem to have arisen in different societies through serendipity? Can one call Christianity a reaction to Islam? Calvinism a reaction to Catholicism? Is it even fair to say any of this? Is it right asking these questions? Are they the correct questions to ask?

Professor Wilson takes the first step in answering these questions. He acknowledges that there is a lot more to be talked about, a lot more data to be collected, a lot more nuance to be uncovered, but his start is a promising one. He starts by outlining the methodologies he would use to do so, the theories whose principles he's operating by, and what other people have already done in this field. He puts the theories of behavioural

evolution to the test by testing them on religion. Do they pass? It's too early to tell. It's difficult to conceive of religion as a purely functional social mechanism, something evolutionary theory has done in the recent past to biological subjects. On the other hand, it's easy to dismiss religion using Marx's famous "opium of the masses" quip.

The task is arduous, the path difficult, yet there is a certain elegance in understanding religion as the first kind of superorganism humanity was progressing towards making. The study itself is niche, not properly defined and not entirely built on rock-solid foundations, but it's a start. The author hopes to build a unified theory of understanding all organisations using the bedrock of evolutionary theory, be they religious or secular. It's ambitious, and the rough-cut edges show.

A definite 3.5/5, rounded down because I probably need to read even more.

Peter says

Interesting but somewhat labored thesis that religions, like other human social structures develop according to an evolutionary model based on developing and nurturing characteristics that make them functionally more likely to persist. These characteristics are called group adaptive as they are played out in behaviors and actions which may not necessarily be to the advantage of the individual but are to the advantage of the group. Wilson breaks this theory down to specific characteristics which he examines from this perspective. The thesis is interesting and thought provoking. The book is quite academic with many citations and is not the easiest read. Frankly, I was happy to get to the end of it.

Katja says

This book should come with a warning – the first two chapters are terrifically boring and can probably be safely skipped. Wilson spends the first 100 or so pages (in a 230-page book) summarising in some depth evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology. This has the frustrating effect of Wilson constantly telling you for 100 pages what he's going to talk about but seemingly never getting there (I can hear Monty Python in my head yelling, "get on with it!"). These first two chapters are also unbelievably dry, academic and theoretical. Considering the fact that Wilson's stated goal in writing this book was to make the evolutionary psychology of religion readable and understandable to a layperson, sadly I think he fails in this regard. Some parts of the text were so dense they had me wanting to bang my head against a wall (and I'm a PhD student!). That's basically my only criticism of the book but it's a big one – Wilson's ideas are fantastic, but he's not a great communicator. The dryness of the writing and that long stretch of theory at the start will put a lot of people off. It's a great example of how NOT to write a book intended for the general public.

That said, when Wilson actually gets to the point (describing the adaptive nature of religion throughout history), the book gets really, REALLY good. He covers Calvinism, early Christianity, Judaism, and Balinese religions as examples of how religion has enabled people to cohere and succeed as a group. Having only heard New Atheist-type theories of religion (religion as by-product and parasite), Wilson's ideas were pretty much completely new to me and significantly changed my outlook on religion. I'd highly recommend this book but only with a caveat – just skip the first two chapters and go straight to the good stuff!

Steve Hegge says

Dry, academic.

Leonardo says

Reading Wilsons Darwins Cathedral is like taking a journey to Spaceland. You can look down on the vast tapestry of human cultures and see why things are woven in the way that they are. Wilson says his own private hell would be to be locked forever into a room full of people discussing the hypocrisies of religion, for example, that many religions preach love, compassion, and virtue yet sometimes cause war, hatred, and terrorism. From Wilsons higher perspective, there is no contradiction. Group selection erentes interlocking genetic and cultural adaptations that enhance peace, harmony and cooperation within the group for the express purpose of increasing the groups ability to compete with other groups. Group selection does not end conflict; it just pushes it up to the next level of social organization. Atrocities committed in the name of religion are almost always committed against out-group members, or against the most dangerous people of all: apostates (who try to leave the group) and traitors (who undermine the group).

A second puzzle that Wilson can solve is why mysticism, everywhere and always, is about transcending the self and merging with something larger than the self. When William James analyzed mysticism, he focused on the psychological state of “cosmic consciousness” and on the techniques developed in all the major religions to attain it. Hindus and Buddhists use meditation and yoga to attain the state of samadhi, in which “the subject object distinction and ones sense of an individual self disappear in a state usually described as one of supreme peace, bliss, and illumination.” James found much the same goal in Christian and Muslim mysticism, often attained through repetitive prayer.

The Happiness Hypothesis Pág.235-236

Dan Gorman says

A very solid and thought-provoking book, with major implications for the evolution of culture and the effects of group selection on how we think & behave. But as a non-biologist, I did not fully understand all of its contents. This is a book I would like to read in a seminar or book club with a few scientists participating.
