
Mind : Past, Present, and (?)

Review By: NORMAN M. WEINBERGER

Review of: The Evolution of the Human Mind

By: Norman L. Munn, Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1971. Pp. v + 278. \$4.50 paper.

NORMAN MUNN has pulled off a difficult task quite successfully; he has written a scholarly review for a general audience in an engaging manner. The facts and issues are all there, as in a good textbook, but so is the wit and conversational tone which is never (well hardly ever) to be found in the texts that most readers endure rather than enjoy. Munn has managed all this without oversimplifying the material and without talking down to the reader or using simplistic diagrams. The total effect is all the more pleasing because he chose a difficult subject, one which invokes the spectre of inter- and cross-disciplinary efforts.

Lest the title confuse, Munn regards "mind" as coextensive with "behavior." This is not apparent from the definition which he chooses: "... a person's mind is the integrated totality of the conscious and unconscious processes involved in acquiring, storing, and utilizing information in his interactions with his environment." However the bulk of the book is concerned with behavior or with the remnants of behavior, such as tools and written language. One can only assume that Munn takes behavior to be a reflection of the "integrated totality of the conscious and unconscious processes," a view that should offend few but which begs the enduring question of why posit mind if it is known only through behavior.

The range of topics is impressive: evolution, concepts of mind, genetics (both molecular and Mendelian), the nervous system, animal and human behavior, the evolution of man and his cultures. These are handled well and sometimes in a pithy manner. The inheritance of acquired characteristics is dispatched thusly: "The Jews have circumcised their boys for many generations without any evidence of structural changes which would make the operation unnecessary." A chapter on the "shaping" of minds is a bit more controversial. For example, in emphasizing the modifiability of human behavior, the author states that "Any response may be shaped by appropriate use of reinforcement," a view of behavior which many readers including this reviewer consider constrictive and unreal. However, the same chapter includes many of the extremely good points that the author makes in a telling fashion. Regarding the apparently universal "gregariousness" of apes and man, Munn cautions against an interpretation of innateness, pointing out that these selfsame creatures are also quite helpless when born and depend upon social contacts for nourishment and survival. Munn's discussion of "savage" and "civilized" societies is a particular high point. The complexities of societies less literate than our own are discussed clearly and concisely, as are the problems of culture-free tests of intelligence.

A final chapter is concerned with some very immediate problems, 'relevant' as they say. Overpopulation and the possible loss of valuable genes from the human pool, due to a societal structure which permits opportunity on the basis of position rather than ability, are discussed. Mayr's hope that the biological aspects of man's evolution will be duly noted by "those entrusted with the task of planning for the future of mankind" is also voiced.

MUNN has provided a highly readable account of both the biological and social aspects of our evolution, and I heartily recommend it to the nonspecialist and the highly specialized as well. If the "planners" of our future can be found, they should read it and hopefully understand its message of psychobiological humanism. However I fear these planners are far more illusory than the human mind.

Biographical Information for Authors: Norman L. Munn, the author, is Professor of Psychology at the University of Adelaide. After receiving his PhD from Clark University in 1930, he taught in the US at the University of Pittsburgh, George Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Bowdoin College, until 1962 when he received his present appointment. He is a member of the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia. His other books include *Introduction to*

Animal Psychology; Psychological Development; Psychology; and Evolution and Growth of Human Behavior.

The reviewer, Norman M. Weinberger, is Associate Professor of Psychobiology at the University of California, Irvine. After receiving his PhD from Western Reserve University, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Brain Research Institute, University of California at Los Angeles. He was coeditor (with R. E. Whalen, R. F. Thompson, Marcel Verzeano) of *The Neural Control of Behavior*, and (with J. L. McGaugh and R. E. Whalen) he was coauthor of *Psychobiology*.

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Abstract: Originally published in Contemporary Psychology: APA Review of Books, 1972, Vol 17(8), 438-439. Reviews the book, The Evolution of the Human Mind by Norman L. Munn (1971). The author has pulled off a difficult task quite successfully; he has written a scholarly review for a general audience in an engaging manner. The range of topics is impressive: evolution, concepts of mind, genetics (both molecular and Mendelian), the nervous system, animal and human behavior, the evolution of man and his cultures. These are handled well and sometimes in a pithy manner. In sum, the author has provided a highly readable account of both the biological and social aspects of our evolution, and I heartily recommend it to the nonspecialist and the highly specialized as well. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2007 APA, all rights reserved)

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