Darwin's Darling & A Reply

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Darwin's darling

She's an evangelical evolutionist who runs an influential salon and courts controversy with her views on feminism and parenting. Anne Perkins on the philosopher who claims to have no ambition yet has ensured that her views are at the heart of British political debate

She is the feminists' bete noir, the woman who argues that all women have certain pre-set programmes of behaviour, a kind of psychological default setting that disposes them to want a single mate whom they select for status before devoting themselves to rearing the inevitable offspring. Men, on the other hand, are disposed to have lots of mates, chosen for their looks, thus making female beauty a legitimate subject for scientific inquiry and lusting after page 3 totty nothing more than a natural expression of the biological quest for genetic advantage.

Helena Cronin's crystal-clear vowel sounds can be heard somewhere on the airwaves most weeks at the moment, taking issue with feminists and evangelising for Darwinian theory in general and evolutionary psychology in particular. She is a ferocious debater, steely in her conviction that Darwin got it right.

"I have enormous confidence in Darwinian science, what it's got to tell us about, for example, sex differences, enormous confidence about how a lot of standard feminist views about it are, therefore, wrong," she says in the kind of unswerving, unapologetic tones which reduced not just Germaine Greer but Melvyn Bragg too to bad-tempered frustration on one radio programme.

Another feminist, Helen Wilkinson, had a brisk exchange of views with her last month on Wilkinson's ideas about the future of the family. "The frustrating thing is Cronin's fundamentalism. She's very naive. She doesn't seem aware of the consequences of her ideas, the way they are used by the right."

Now, though, as the tide of interest in man-of-the-millennium Charles Darwin's theories of evolution surges ever upward, Cronin herself is pursuing those consequences. In the first attempt to take Darwinian theory into real policy making since the 60s (and since Charles Murray argued in The Bell Curve that black people were genetically less intelligent than whites and therefore positive discrimination was a waste of time), she and a colleague in March submitted a detailed response — which they're already reworking — to Supporting Families, the government's family policy green paper published at the beginning of this year.

"Evolutionary psychology provides possibly the best opportunity yet for designing targeted, efficient and effective policies to shape human behaviour in the ways in which we desire," they write in the introduction, without even the smallest nod to the awful history of subverted Darwinism, of genetic determinism and theories of a master race.

Unflinchingly, Cronin sets out the evolutionary stall for the millennium: on the significance of contraception, for example (the invention of which shows we don't just single-mindedly want to reproduce, however selfish our genes): "For the first time ever,

women can go out and earn. They had always done the gathering, but they needed a male as well. Now they can do without."

The problem — one of the problems — is that there aren't enough jobs. "For a man, status comes from material resources which come from a job. Without it, they turn to crime to get the resources. The past 20 years have completely overturned 10,000 years of society, of male:male competition for status, which had been powerfully reinforced by modern industrial society."

And on parenting: "We're mammals. In any mammalian species you've got to recognise the relationship with the mother is going to be rather different from the father's. Males always have the option of walking out, women only have the option of infanticide or early abortion. We have certainty of maternity, they don't have certainty of paternity. Men are always potential non-investors.

"It's not that there is no such thing as paternal love — manifestly there is — but that doesn't mean it's the same as maternal love. I'm not saying it's worse, or better, but it's different and anyone who says it isn't just doesn't understand what being a mammal is all about." Plainly, Cronin is not afraid of controversy. What she wants is the "right" answer.

She likes Darwin's theories, because she is convinced they're "right". She says she was never comfortable with pure philosophy because there weren't enough right answers. Instead she turned to the philosophy of science. "There were genuine philosophical problems and there were solutions, and one could actually judge the solutions and tell whether you'd got the right one, or whether it was at least better than previous ones."

A favourite Cronin test of the rightness of Darwin's arguments is their provability by someone from another planet, as in: "A Martian with no knowledge of the species could tell we reproduce sexually because there are clearly males and females ..." Talk to Cronin about her childhood and the factors which might have influenced her, and it is almost as if she too were a Martian, she is so oddly amnesiac about her family.

She is prepared to reveal that she is the only daughter of Jewish parents. Her father was born here, but her mother arrived only as a small child in the 20s, wrapped in an aura of central European political persecution. By the time Helena was born in 1942, they were living in comfortable prosperity in Hampstead Garden Suburb.

She talks of them fondly, but impersonally. "They were terribly modern. They had a book called The Child Is Always Right. There is a passage in Orwell somewhere where he describes sandal-wearing vegetarian socialists: my parents were a bit like that." Maybe it's because she sees herself as the daughter of 2m years of evolution rather than the product of a particular genetic union nurtured in 50s culture.

As a child she was, according to a cousin, most remarkable for her stunning looks. By the time she went to Manchester University in the early 60s, it was not exceptional in her family to go on to higher education, but there had been an assumption that she would do the typical good Jewish daughter bit and marry very young. Her father was perplexed by the decision to read philosophy. "What job will she get with a philosophy degree?" he asked.

She wasn't sure either. But: "I liked the idea of understanding logic, and knowing how to argue. I thought that was important because that's really the key to understanding things." Not that she enjoyed it. Only when she discovered the philosophy of science did she felt comfortable. That led her to a master's at the London School of Economics and to Darwin.

"Wittgenstein said Darwinian theory had no interest for philosophers, and even in the 60s — even now — they turn up their noses at it, saying, 'it's not real science, it's a tautology because it's to do with the survival of the fittest, and how do you judge who is fittest of those who survive?'On the other hand, this was the foundation of the theory of modern biology, about all living things and indeed about any system in which you get apparent design without a designer. It's one of those theories likely to be right, always.

"Einsteinian theory might very well one day be shown to be wrong, but biologists are very likely to be forever Darwinians so it seemed very odd to be a philosopher on the sidelines shouting it down."

She doesn't say so, but Darwinian theory seems to shape even her view of her own past. Where many of her contemporaries would curse the male-dominated culture in which they grew up, she says: "I, being a girl, didn't have any ambitions whatever. I didn't want to do the extra year for Oxbridge entrance. My older brother went to Oxford, he just had that single-mindedness that males have, and that ability to apply himself."

So it is unsurprising that she was sidetracked from a PhD to explore Darwinian theory further by domesticity and the life of a North London wife. She is married to a South African, Aubrey Sheiham, professor of epidemiology and public health at University College, London. On the other hand, she rejected motherhood. They decided not to have children. "When Aubrey suggested it, I was astonished. It had never occurred to me one could just decide not to have them, it was a startling idea."

It is not, apparently, a decision she regrets, even though her cousin, Judy Oddy, describes her as a very loyal member of her extended family and "very good with children, very encouraging and admiring. They would have been super parents."

Yet, if there is an evolved disposition among women to want babies in the same way they want a mate (no one has looked at it scientifically yet), Cronin, at this distance at least, found it easy to override. Women may be disposed to make a careful choice of mate, but babies, she thinks, are probably merely consequential. "Childcare is a very precious good, it's not something that's going to be given out indifferently, but it's possible that we have reproduced in just the way we have without a prior wish to have children."

Without the untidiness and clutter of motherhood, Cronin has instead created a little island of minimalist perfection in London N7 — inspired garden outside and cool order inside. She matches it herself: all this can only be the product of a very orderly mind.

A decade of drift seems most unlikely for the virago of the airwaves but she insists she has always been without ambition. She kept trying to give up philosophy, claims she was " egregiously bad" at it, and only carried on because at key moments when she was on the brink of changing direction someone came along and told her she was good at it and should stick with it. But by the end of the 70s (she can't quite remember when) she had had enough of pottering about and picked up her PhD again, just for the sake of neatness it seems, and the rest isn't yet, but may well become, history.

It was a new dawn for Darwinian theory. There had been a resurgence of interest in the understanding of animal behaviour, and by the 80s there was growing interest in its potential for understanding the human mind. At the same time, Darwinian theory was finally regaining acceptance as a tool in other disciplines. Now there is evolutionary psychology, sociology, even economics.

Cronin's interest was in its importance to philosophy. "If you think about epistemology — the theory of knowledge — it is really all about how humans can understand the world, and if we don't do that by the means that natural selection has given us, then you just don't begin to understand," she says. She turned her PhD thesis, which looks at the evolution of understanding of two Darwinian "problems" — sexual selection and altruism — into a successful and well-regarded book, The Ant And The Peacock, a history of Darwinian interpretation.

Geoffrey Miller, an economist drawn into the Cronin salon, describes it as "a vital source book. Anyone who's interested has a copy on their shelves." None of this sounds particularly exceptional until you consider the context. Although biologists remained unblushingly Darwinian, the idea of applying evolutionary theory to other disciplines had become thoroughly discredited after it was picked up by late Victorian imperialists with an interest in ideas of a "master race", subsequently a justification for eugenics and the Final Solution, and an interpretation which lingered right through to support theories of racial superiority in post-war America.

For almost all academics, it had become a pariah subject. For many, it still is. Ideas in sociology developed almost in opposition to Darwinian ideas about evolved behaviour, insisting that environment was, if not the only then certainly the dominant influence in any human life. The infant brain was a blank page, a tabula rasa , on which experience would write a set of responses which would accumulate into a character with skills like language, capable of emotions like love, as long as the opportunity for learning them was available. The science of the mind kept a very long arms' length from the science of the body.

What Helena Cronin has done is provide a forum to bring them together. It all began with an international conference in 1993 at LSE. "I did it in my usual sleep-walking way, not realising it was groundbreaking. People from different disciplines met for the first time. Maybe because I had no training in any particular discipline, no loyalty to a history, I didn't see the problem. I still don't understand why people are so resistant, so fearful of genetic determinism and not of, say, environmental determinism."

The conference, in the aftermath of the collapse of communism and with old belief systems in disarray, led the following year to a series of seminars, under the aegis of Darwin@LSE, an offshoot of the centre for philosophy and natural sciences. "Darwinian theory now promises to provide the first fully scientific insight into human nature — exploring our brains, minds, consciousness, bodies, behaviour and aspects of our culture as adaptations evolved by natural selection," the introduction to the first report said.

In a series of seminars which fans say have had the impact of the salons of the Enlightenment, Cronin brought together celebrated biologists like Professor John Maynard Smith and Lewis Wolpert with geneticists like Steve Jones and pioneers of what was becoming known as evolutionary psychology, like the American Leda Cosmides. She coined the phrase in the first place to describe the work she and her husband John Tooby were doing to advance the theory that the mind, far from being an all-purpose computer responding impartially to the world around it, had, through natural selection, evolved to respond in a particular way to particular environmental circumstances.

"Because of eugenics," says Professor Maynard Smith, "any notion of genetic influence had become completely unacceptable. Biologists stuck to biology and sociologists ignored genetics. We biologists ran away from the issue. The series of discussions and seminars really were very striking, I met a whole range of people I would never have met otherwise, and that wouldn't have happened without Helena. She does have a great gift for bringing people together." The then director of the LSE, John Ashworth, predicted at the time: "The application of evolutionary theory to the social sciences, many of which have never been able to do more than assume that the heritable component in what they were studying was small, unknowable and thus necessarily had to be neglected, will produce social sciences far different from any we can envisage now."

The press loved the seminars and they loved the science. At last, science might explain why rich old men can take their pick of pretty young women (status, stoopid), and why there is a universal cross-cultural standard of feminine beauty, science that could be illustrated by pictures of naked women with "perfect" bodies, under headlines like "The Sexual Power of the Waistline". (Attractiveness, health and fecundity at a glance, according to another headline.)

Even its supporters admit that there is a danger in the way the evolutionary psychology is sometimes used to provide ancestral functions for all human behaviour. This is accentuated when its gods, like Steven Pinker, write articles for mainstream publications on, for example, "an evolutionary explanation for presidents behaving badly". But there is also serious and less eye-catching work. Another contributor to the seminars, and Cronin fan, the eminent historical sociologist Lord Runciman, believes her success lies not only in bringing together different disciplines, but increasingly people from across the political spectrum, not only conservatives who believe Darwin supports the status quo.

"This is not genetic determinism," he says. "The question is, if we are not genetically different, how, over 60,000 years, have we produced this cultural variety? How does the environment interact?" He adds: "It's the only game in town. It's a paradigm shift.

I suddenly realise that a whole lot of people are now looking at the same data in a different way."

The left is not convinced. Nor are all scientists. Where is the evidence, they demand, to back up some of the claims of historical origins of behaviour. Brains, after all, don't make fossils. It is impossible to prove or disprove some assertions. Sceptics ask whether all the theories add up to a coherent theory of the mind rather than a mechanistic description which overlooks the way individuals are clearly capable of modifying their behaviour.

None of this though, shakes Cronin's confidence. She can sound, sometimes, like the keeper of the Holy Grail in her enthusiasm for her subject. "All political theories, all policy decisions, make assumptions about human nature," she told the Rationalist Press Association in June, "Human nature is our evolved nature, the evolved psychology of our species. And in the past decade or so, Darwinian theory has begun to reveal what that psychology is. We at last have within our grasp a fully scientific understanding of ourselves."

So, we have not yet had time to adapt, the 6,000 or so years since we were hunter gatherers being the merest blink in 2 years of evolutionary time. But we are as, Runciman argues, flexible. We have hundreds of different cultures to prove it. Hence Cronin's conviction: "If we want to bring out desired policy outcomes, desired changes in behaviour, we have to understand our evolved psychology and then work out what aspects of our environment we need to change." Which is why she wants to contribute to contemporary policy debates like the government's current concern about young lone mothers and absent fathers. Darwinian theory can be made to explain the kind of behaviour the government wants to change so creepily neatly that the hairs on your neck stand on end.

In the detail of the Cronin view of how the state can intervene to help support families, there is no acknowledgement of the way society and culture have worked to reinforce the way mothers and fathers behave, and overwhelming emphasis on the evolutionary predictability of their behaviour.

She argues: "By overlooking possible sex differences in parenting, the government runs the risk of promoting an androgynous parenting 'role' that may not be attractive to either sex, or be perceived as attractive in a partner and hence may have little effect in shaping parenting behaviour. Teaching men to be back-up mothers — even if it were possible — may not be in the best interests of any member of the family."

But when you suggest this analysis ignores all other factors, Cronin strongly denies that it's by design. She is merely trying to explain there are differences which need to be taken into account or you end up with the domestic equivalent of Stalinist forced collectivisation. "Just saying blithely that androgynous parenting roles are desirable is likely to produce models neither men nor women will be comfortable with." She accepts that if "equal" parenting, in terms of time and quality, is considered a desirable objective, (she sounds uncertain herself) it is perfectly achievable. "We can do pretty

well anything with our society. There is no need to set limits. But you can never ever do it without a knowledge and understanding of evolved human behaviour."

Taking this kind of argument on public outings is a high risk strategy. Even though thinkers on the right like Matt Ridley would endorse the sentiment, he questions its usefulness in formulating policy. "It is helpful for individuals to understand each other," he says, "but it doesn't necessarily lead to government action. Do you have a policy which reinforces a kind of behaviour, or redresses it or suppresses it?

"Science nearly always gets into trouble when it's applied rather than used to understand [the world around us]. It's the same in social sciences. It's trying to apply an understanding of how human beings are to decide what social policy should be. It's jumping the gun and it'll come out wrong."

Cronin acknowledges the dangers. As she points out, she belongs to the generation who grew up in the shadow of the Bomb. "I might well have a misunderstanding about how to apply Darwinian theory to policy because that's not science, that's an extra-scientific view of how you might use the science."

But that is not the same as conceding the science could be faulty. "It might turn out that this latest model of how you understand human nature is wrong, but it seems to look as if it will turn out to be right, and it's certainly the best one we've got. Better than original sin, or saying that men and women are exactly the same."

And if Darwin appeals instinctively and only to the right? "Fight the prejudice then. You don't say stop being Catholic or Jewish or whatever because people are prejudiced against you, do you?" And what about critics who say Darwinism is simply genetic determinism? "That assumes that ideas based on the tabula rasa view of the human mind, or the androgynous analysis of human behaviour, are in some way totally harmless and perfectly OK as a basis for social policy or education. Look at feminism, so desperately trying to explain standard sex differences as purely environmental when they have maintained themselves for thousands of years. They can't be purely environmental."

Ah, feminism. Maybe the real challenge for Cronin, and for her gifts both as a populiser of philosophy and as a facilitator between different disciplines is to find an accommodation there. She says she's willing, that she wants to influence feminist arguments, as long as she can do it without compromising Darwinism. Feminist thinkers, like Helen Wilkinson, are interested too in finding common ground.

"One is a feminist," Cronin says, sounding irresistably like the Queen, "in the same way one worries about any 'ism'-racism or species-ism — because people shouldn't be discriminated against on the basis of their sex." But what does she think feminism can achieve now? "I'm still working it out. One of the frustrations is that one can't turn to current feminist thinking for help because they continue to deny basic sex differences.

"I don't think we understand yet what women want. It's very obvious what men are all about, but much less easy to know what women are about. They are the species as it existed before sexual selection drove men apart. Men have set up society, shaped the

world we know. Women's lives are far less public and visible and understood. I would like to know much more about them."

Darwin is now at the heart of the British political debate. Although the prime minister's favourite sociologist (and director of the LSE) Anthony Giddens is dead against Darwin's escape from the biology lab, the man in charge of rethinking social policy in the Downing Street policy unit, Geoff Mulgan, believes the evolutionists' ideas are so important he devoted a whole issue of the Demos quarterly to them when he ran the think tank.

Feminists are increasingly frustrated by their inability to catch Tony Blair's attention. Perhaps making friends with Helena Cronin is the way to sneak under his guard.

Life at a glance: Helena Cronin

Born: July 2, 1942.

Education: Henrietta Barnett School, north west London; Manchester University (BA hons philosophy); LSE (MSc econ, PhD).

Married: 1966 Aubrey Sheiham.

Position: Codirector of the centre for the philosophy of natural and social science, LSE; research associate in the zoology department, Oxford University.

Publication: The Ant And The Peacock (CUP) 1991.

A reply to Helena Cronin

Camilla Power

Helena Cronin, authoress of *The Ant and the Peacock*, was pontificating a few years ago now in *The Guardian* on how Darwinian theory should inform Blairite social policy...this is a Darwinian's response.

So, men 'set up society', according to Helena Cronin (Profile August 28). I usually shrug aside the routine media distortions of evolutionary theory applied to human behaviour — the 'higgamous, hoggamous' stereotypes about men running around while women stay put. But when someone with the influence of the author of *The Ant and the Peacock* puts up a bourgeois, bowdlerised travesty of Darwinism as gospel, and seeks to apply it as Blairite social policy, it's time to nail a few myths.

First, the myth of women disposed 'to want a single mate'. We are the descendants of fit, female ancestors who reproduced successfully. As mammals with very large brains, human females have to expend a lot more energy to get an offspring up and running than a male *at minimum* has to. So there are going to be differences of strategy and conflicts of interest between the sexes. Nowadays, this battle of the sexes — called by Darwinian feminist Patty Gowaty 'sexual dialectics' — is seen as the engine of

evolution. Gowaty deliberately draws analogy with dialectics applied to theory of class struggle as the engine of history and revolutionary change.

For sexually reproducing species, evolution goes like this: males *do* run around, competing to control access to fertile females. But females *don't* stay put; they resist male efforts to control them because they want to choose which particular male gets them pregnant. Males are then forced to counter the females' resistance strategies. Evolution is this process of strategy, countered and countered again.

Biologists have been learning recently how little monogamy exists among female birds and mammals. Females who exercise choice are not necessarily monogamous, as Cronin, an authority on sexual selection, knows well. Astonishing experiments by Robin Baker and Mark Bellis conducted with Manchester University students have demonstrated human sperm competition. This shows that men are disposed to 'believe' (not consciously, of course) that as soon as they lower their guard, their female partners are likely to check out alternative possible mates. Surprise, surprise, when a woman does this, it tends to coincide with her ovulation. This does not mean that all women all the time pursue cuckoldry strategies — just that, evolution has designed us to be good at it if we do. In other words, it paid our ancestors.

Carol Worthman worked with Ju/'hoansi women of the Kalahari, aligning the women's own reports of their sex lives to hormonal records of their menstrual cycles. Monogamy was not what these hunter-gatherer women wanted. Around ovulation, they went looking for love — extra-pair copulations (EPCs) in the jargon of evolutionary ecology.

Among indigenous peoples all over Amazonia, until recent interference by missionaries, it turns out that the most successful female strategy is to have backup fathers for each offspring. Children with more fathers survive better. So women carve up the cake of possible paternity, a strategy called 'partible paternity'. Their ideology insists that any man who contributed sperm is one of several fathers of the child. This works better in matrilineal than patrilineal groups. But, it can suit male strategies too, because if one of the child's 'fathers' dies, another man can step in to protect the child. If every man 'steals' roughly the same amount of EPCs, it works out quits in the end, but the children are more likely to survive. It's also more fun. So, there is room for cooperation between the sexes, not just conflict, even when it comes to females not being monogamous.

These small-scale societies are the kind in which we evolved our human nature. Women do not choose to be monogamous, because they get more resources, especially when the going gets rough, and more child protection, from a number of mates — safety in numbers. Having a different father for each offspring also improves the chance of some children surviving disease — the same advantage in genetic variability that lies behind the evolution of sex itself. Women may have to be discreet about behaving so badly, and may *let men think* that they want to be monogamous. But among matrilocal groups like the Canela in Brazil, before the missionaries got to them, both sexes were up-front about and proud of their sexual sociability.

Second, is it a myth that men run around? Current models of how pair-bonds arise among hunter-gatherers stress the male behaviour of 'mateguarding'. It results from male insecurity: he's worried that if he doesn't tag along after 'his' woman, she might find somebody else more genetically interesting. So unless males are there to stop it, female choice would run riot. Although, a majority of societies may *permit* polygyny — because the laws have been made by the rich and powerful in the past 5,000 years — for most men, throughout most of prehistory and history this is likely to remain 'in their dreams'. If a man succeeds in bonding with a healthy, fertile woman, his best strategy is likely to be 'don't lose her'.

Other ways of getting a piece of the paternity pie? Spend more time with the kids. Among the Aka, hunter-gatherers of the Central African rainforest, men who have few male relatives tend to have fewer resources. They compensate by playing for longer with children to get into mum's good books. Even male monkeys play with infants, never mind humans who put far more into parenting than any other primate. Transposing the strategies that work in small-scale, evolutionarily typical societies to post-industrial urban landscapes is extremely problematic. But, yes, women burdened with children are not likely to have much time for men with poor job prospects in areas of high, male unemployment unless the men have other attractions. One possibility is quality childcare — playing, carrying, babysitting — as demonstrated by the Aka and men of other kin-based societies. No Darwinian should foster an idea that men are somehow not 'meant' by evolution to be around young children. On the contrary, humans are differentiated from other primates by the extraordinary level of male parenting. Human male strategies are quasi-female by primate standards.

Third and thorniest, the myth of the 'lone mother'. In the recent case of a 12-year-old mother, it turns out her baby boy has a vigorous grandmother of 26 — not so alone after all. The presence of other close female relatives is not reported, but as it stands, the kinship structure of this household may be typical of human evolution. In evolution, so-called 'single' mothers formed the nucleus of close-knit coalitions of female kin. The most recent heroine of narratives of how we became human is the grandmother. Her strategies forged the peculiar pattern of human life history, with a long span following menopause. By working overtime foraging, providing high-energy weaning foods for her daughter's offspring, grandma enabled her daughter to wean quicker, and have more, well-nourished babies. Grandmothers, in other words, fuelled the evolution of large human brains. Males may have been useful now and then, providing meat feasts on a hit-and-miss basis. But grandma delivered day in, day out. Males could come and go. She could be depended on.

Household composition today in the West is highly variable. But this is nothing new. It has been throughout evolution. I hope Cronin and colleagues will underline in their Darwinian recommendations that there are many ways of making a family. If young women opt to do so with support of female kin, they are following one of the time-honoured paths of human evolution. By no means should they be discriminated against in social welfare policy.

What disturbs us about a 12-year-old giving birth is that a girl can be sexually and physically mature when socially and psychologically she may not be able to cope. In evolution, this would not happen. Fertility is governed by nutritional state. Girls would not get pregnant until late teens, giving them time to learn the social and sexual ropes. The problem arises in our overfed society, because children can become physically mature long before they are socially adult. We experience this as a moral disjunction.

All human societies — by stark contrast with primate societies — place sexual behaviour within some moral framework. The specific version of morality varies enormously between societies. For the Canela, a girl who *won't* have extra-marital sex is considered selfish and immoral. But some collective notion of morally appropriate behaviour exists for all. This is likely to have emerged as a female resistance strategy, with older kin acting to protect young girls from possible aggression by males competing for the most desirable females. Language itself may have arisen as a key mechanism of moral judgement and social control. Robin Dunbar argues that language originated as exchange of social information, or 'gossip', firstly among largely female coalitions and alliances. Topics of conversation have probably not changed over evolutionary time: women bitching about menfolk (useless as usual!) and about women in other coalitions (slappers!).

Models of human evolution nowadays start from a premise of Pleistocene girl power. Female coalitionary action is seen as central in the emergence of uniquely human life history (childhood, adolescence, old age), of large brains, of language, art and symbolic culture — everything it is to be human. The energy-expensive human brain did not triple in size in the 3 million years since 'Lucy' while our female ancestors sat tight on the savanna waiting for the phone to ring. Those ancestors were strategists who manipulated, or, let's say, organised male behaviour using their sexuality and sociality to gain their ends (i.e. feed the kids). They succeeded to the extent that we are here today.

Cronin makes a mysterious statement about women: 'They are the species as it existed before sexual selection drove men apart'. It's hard to know what this means, but I suppose her point is that the past 5–6,000 years of history, in which a minority of men have been able to accumulate excess wealth and resources are, in terms of evolution, a superficial aberration. Does this mean that women's behaviour is somehow more species-typical, that is, more 'human'? So, are rich men, the tiny coterie of capitalists who own, control and dispose of the planet's resources, *not* species-typical in their behaviour? In that case, do working-class people follow more purely human instincts in their social interactions? Is this why *East Enders* and *Coronation Street* ring truer than *Dallas*? Why people jump to reggae, rap and hip-hop all over the world? Why the stinking rich are so lonely and miserable, and why we love to read about it in *Hello!* magazine?

Human nature was not forged in the historic period of social inequality. We evolved in Africa's Rift Valley, in small-scale, face-to-face societies where no one was richer or poorer. Early modern humans had attitude; they demanded respect: 'Don't mess with

me! I'm as good as you are.' One of the later Darwin seminars hosted by Cronin at the LSE proved very effectively that people are healthier in more equal societies. I hope she will be passing this on to the Blairites, recommending they tax the rich and pour funds into the NHS, on Darwinian grounds. The fat cats themselves would feel more human. Deep down, we all want 'we ting', to go and wine — non-monogamously — at the Carnival. Back in June, some stressed out City dealers looked eager to swap sides and join Stop the City coalition. It would be good for their, and our, health.

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The Ted K Archive

Anne Perkins, Helena Cronin & Camilla Power
Darwin's Darling & A Reply
28 Aug 1999 & ~2002.

<theguardian.com/science/1999/aug/28/1> &
<radicalanthropologygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/pub_contra_cronin.pdf>
The author of the reply, Camilla Power, notes that there have been some major developments since this text was written making some of the scientific theories out of date. Camilla recommends, in particular, Sarah Hrdy's breakthrough text Mothers and Others.

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