

Cognitive Evolution and the Definition of Human Nature, Merlin Donald

Introduction

Our society's collective definition of human nature provides a conceptual foundation for our ideas of human rights, individual responsibility, and personal freedom. Western society has traditionally derived its ideas in this regard from the liberal Humanities, which are the secular modern descendants of our earlier religious and philosophical traditions. They are the conceptual foundation of most of our laws and constitutional protections. However, since Darwin, there have been many attempts to develop a scientific approach to defining human nature, and to deriving a new natural law based largely on the theory of evolution.