

and the parties' strategy and influence on each other. Each of these chapters could have had interviews with the television and newspaper executives responsible for election coverage and with the parties' campaign directors and media managers. This type of analysis would have more effectively identified the interaction between the media, the parties, and the polls through each twist and turn of the campaign.

Another weakness of the book is its treatment of the normative issue of what the public need from the media to inform their electoral decision. There are scattered references to Habermas's public sphere, 'citizenship,' 'democracy,' and political participation and engagement. But these references are not developed into a sustained argument in any convincing way. The final chapter, purporting to examine the disconnect between what the public 'need' and what the public 'want,' is peculiar in that Young does not properly explore the normative issue. She avoids any direct reference to the need for better media performance to enhance these normative ideals. She concludes, rather glibly, that the media's performance is 'often no higher than the purposes and responsibilities that journalists ascribe to themselves.'

Young's book is an accessible read and a useful empirical contribution on a rapidly changing and diversified media landscape. It has a ready market in undergraduate political science and media studies courses. A revised edition, covering

subsequent election campaigns, should consider a narrative on the day-to-day manoeuvrings of election campaigns, and focus on the circumstances in which media outlets and party campaign strategists collude, conflict and compromise on their agendas.

Reviewed by Richard Grant

The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character and Achievement
By David Brooks

Random House, New York
US\$27, 424 pages
ISBN 9781400067602

David Brooks is best known for his 2000 book *Bobos in Paradise*, a gently satirical portrait of upper-class American life in the 1990s. By fusing together elements of bourgeois and bohemian culture, bobos arrived at a pragmatic style of politics that defused the conflicts of earlier decades. According to Brooks, the new upper class no longer sees politics as a struggle for personal freedom or economic liberation, but as a way of nurturing responsible citizens and building strong communities.

His latest book, *The Social Animal* picks up where *Bobos* left off, arriving at the same conclusions by a different route. Much of the book is devoted to summaries of findings from neuroscience and psychology. To make all this research easier to digest, Brooks has created two

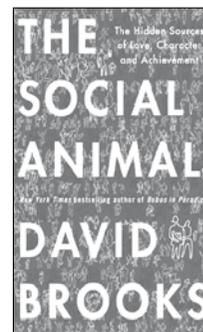
fictional upper-class Americans, Harold and Erica, whose lives form the narrative framework for the discussion.

For people familiar with Brooks' work, it might seem odd that he has written a book about neuroscience. After all, he is not a science writer and once described himself as a 'scientific imbecile.' But neuroscience and psychology are hot topics, with obvious implications for political philosophy, an area where Brooks does have considerable expertise. In a recent interview with James Atlas he said, 'Philosophy and theology are telling us less than they used to. Scientists and researchers are leaping in where these disciplines atrophy—they're all drilling down into an explanation of what man is.'

Disputes in political philosophy hinge on assumptions about human nature and how the world works. Research in neuroscience promises to resolve these disputes by substituting fact for supposition. Brooks believes that new findings

from the science of brain and cognition support his assumptions about human nature and his neoconservative/communitarian approach to politics.

Economically minded libertarians tend to assume that human beings are rational and self-interested. Many argue that success in the marketplace depends largely on inherited cognitive ability. And because they believe IQ is largely fixed, it follows that government efforts to alleviate disadvantage through education and training will fail. Combined



with the view that redistribution is unjust, this brand of libertarianism suggests the best we can do is discourage less intelligent people from having children and get used to inequality. Everything else will just make things worse.

After looking at the research, Brooks draws a very different conclusion: that human beings are much less rational and self-interested than most modern political thinkers have assumed. He argues that IQ matters much less than the emotional and social skills that people develop in early childhood. These skills constitute a person's character. Character can be developed by adequate parenting, healthy social environments, and good schools.

Harold eventually finds himself working for a Washington think tank where he discovers a *New York Times* columnist whose views are 'remarkably similar to his own' (Brooks is a *New York Times* columnist). Harold supports programs that develop character in children from disadvantaged families—parenting classes for teenage mothers, nurse visits for disorganised families, and integrated neighbourhood approaches like the Harlem Children's Zone.

Harold is unsure whether to call himself a liberal or a conservative. He finds himself agreeing with Daniel Patrick Moynihan's comment that 'The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself.'

Harold realises that while government cannot and should

not run people's lives, it can influence how they live by shaping their institutional environment. Government should not only maintain a basic framework of order and security but also play a positive role by funding national service programs, social-entrepreneurship, and charter schools. By bringing government closer to communities and allowing decision-making at the local level, governments can encourage habits of active and responsible citizenship.

Values are a key element of culture and Brooks sees these as flowing from communities. He writes: 'If you felt, as Harold did, that in some low-income communities achievement values were not being transmitted from one generation to another, then you had no choice but to try to instill them. That meant you had to be somewhat paternalistic.' Brooks illustrates this point through the story of Harold's wife, Erica, who overcomes the disadvantages of her family background and childhood neighbourhood thanks to the tough discipline of a charter school.

Applied in an Australian context, Brooks' approach might resemble Noel Pearson's response to Indigenous disadvantage. Rather than dealing with disadvantage through redistribution, Brooks argues for initiatives that foster local decision-making and reinforce positive social norms. The stress on local control is a key difference between Pearson's approach in Cape York and Mal Brough's and Jenny Macklin's intervention in the Northern Territory. As in Pearson's approach, there is a strong focus

on parenting and children. Where families are weak, local institutions like schools step in to fill the gap.

Reviewers like Will Wilkinson in *Forbes* and Christopher Chabris in the *Wall Street Journal* have pointed out shortcomings in Brooks' handling of research in neuroscience and psychology. And it is true that he often cherry-picks findings to illustrate his favourite claims. But for readers willing to engage with the research themselves, Brooks' book is a useful place to begin. With a growing body of research on the brain and mind, it no longer makes sense to rely on assumptions about human nature.

Reviewed by Don Arthur

The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life

By Alison Gopnik

Picador, New York, 2010

\$US16, 288 pages

ISBN 9780374231965

Today's parent is regularly confronted with what can be described as the 'scientification' of parenthood—everywhere there is a new study on some aspect of early childhood behaviour. This is reassuring in some ways—parents have a better knowledge and understanding of today's offspring. But it can also cause parents to feel overwhelmed and incompetent. If you are not an expert, you may very well be 'doing it wrong' and with dire consequences.