

In 1976, Julian Jaynes published his thesis, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Audaciously, it claimed among other things that consciousness was a socially emergent phenomenon, and had actually emerged sometime after the start of recorded history. As did *The Origin of Species*, the book caused a minor sensation and quite a bit of controversy, but interest in the theory lulled after a short time. Many facets of 21st century society are most aptly described or explained through Jaynes' theory, and his work exhibits many similarities to the work of Charles Darwin.

In the 30-odd years since the publication of Jaynes' theory, many aspects of pop culture seem to shine in a new light when viewed in the framework of the bicameral mind. Jaynes argues that bicameralism is most active in the analogue area to the Wernicke's Area in the right side of the brain. Patients with receptive aphasia (or damage to Wernicke's area) are often unable to speak coherently, but retain the ability to sing with near-flawless diction and pronunciation. Jaynes posited that *The Iliad* and other "Bicameral Poetry" were spoken tonally (that is, emphasis was made with musical pitches rather than with timing or volume); recent studies have shown increased activity in the area Jaynes claims is responsible for bicameral activity in tonal-language-speakers. (Passingham) In this way, epic and bicameral poetry can be most effectively compared to rap music, where an MC adjusts the pitch of his words, but the rhythm remains constant. In the book "How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC", Paul Edwards presents a formal framework for interpreting flow in hiphop. By counting the number of syllables per beat, the author identifies how the basic rhythm can be used to communicate

meaning. This is an interesting parallel with Jaynes' contention that bicameral voices communicate through metered verse. If tone, rhythm and verse can be used to convey information, then perhaps it is not too far fetched to suggest that this could be a mechanism of instruction. This kind of blending of different walks of life is a part of the theory that makes it difficult to criticize -- in order to effectively understand and judge the theory, one would have to be an expert such diverse topics as poetry, neuroscience, ancient history, and religious studies. Darwin encountered a similar phenomenon: his arguments were logical and intuitive to someone well versed in pigeon breeding, but not to the biologists of the time.

In the last 20 years in film, Hollywood convention has shifted from long and medium shots to many more close-ups and extreme close-ups. The increased use of close-ups can be traced back to films such as *The Silence of the Lambs*, or even *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. Indeed, in his two theses 'The Shape of 1959' and 'The Shape of 1999', Barry Salt demonstrates that this trend has been happening since (at least) 1959. Could this be yet another remnant of the bicameral mind? It is a simple matter to posit that audiences would prefer a giant face for the same reason ancient audiences preferred faces and idols -- they both stimulate the bicameral areas of the brain.

Many fiction writers have been influenced by Jaynes and his theories. Science fiction writer Alan Moore cites Julian Jaynes as a source (once implicitly, twice explicitly) in the final issue of *Promethea*, as well as in the Jack the Ripper tale *From Hell*. William Burroughs also cites Jaynes as inspiration in an interview, and Phillip Dick also incorporated elements of Jaynes' work into his writing. This type of bicameral fiction closely parallels the prose of H.G. Wells, who advocated an evolutionary ideology. Indeed, Moore uses homage to H.G. Wells almost

constantly, even going to so far as to base an entire comic (The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen) on the fictional alien invasion in *The War of the Worlds*.

In many ways, Jaynes' theory is an extension of the materialist perspective that began with Lyell, and continues today with the work of E.O. Wilson. It explains religious phenomena and iconography while staying exclusively grounded in the physical world. Jaynes has probably affected the study of philosophy more so than any other field, influencing the works of Daniel Dennett, (labeled one of the contemporary "Strong Atheists", along with Richard Dawkins). Dennett's *Content and Consciousness* breaks up the study of consciousness into two distinct parts, and his claim that content is separate from consciousness mirrors Jaynes' claim that consciousness is separate from learning. (Holt 192) In Psychology, Steven Pinker was largely influenced by *The Origin of Consciousness*. His first book, *The Language Instinct*, incorporated evolutionary principles and the linguistic work of Noam Chomsky into Evolutionary Psychology. Even while outright Jaynesian bicameralism has fallen out of favor, the science has continued, dispersed across other fields.

*The Origin of Consciousness* bears many more similarities to Darwin's theory. Both authors exhibit a tremendous self-awareness in the flaws of their respective works. Both take an interdisciplinary approach, examining their theory from the perspective of many different professions and perspectives. Their rhetorical styles are similar, complex but accessible. Both express a deep seated love for music. In his 16-17 June 1868 letters to J.D. Hooker, Darwin expresses his desire to see Handel's Messiah again (though he thinks that perhaps "his soul is too weathered" to appreciate it.) He discusses Handel's use of negative space, saying that he preferred there to be no trumpet blast during the bass air "The Trumpet Shall Sound." This air

features *Sprechstimme*, a form of speech-singing that Jaynes describes as activating the lateralized right side of the Wernicke's Area. (Jaynes 366)

Jaynes bears many more similarities to Darwin. Like Darwin, his theory is not immediately provable. Instead, he offers a lens through which to view the world, followed by hundreds of anecdotes that only begin to make sense when viewed with that lens. Like Darwin, one of the major criticisms of his work is that his timeline does not fit the facts -- that his timeline for the emergence of consciousness is contradicted by a number of artifacts and records. It is important to remember, however, that there is a fairly large factor of mimesis at work on Jaynes' part -- he is consciously emulating Darwin, so to argue his validity by his similarities to Darwin is circular reasoning. As an interesting aside, his use of Homage bears a striking similarity to the incorporation of qualities and symbols to individual bicameral deities, a similarity Jaynes was no doubt aware of.

Richard Dawkins famously said “[*The Origin of Consciousness*] is as strange as its title suggests. It is one of those books that is either complete rubbish or a work of consummate genius, nothing in between! Probably the former, but I'm hedging my bets.” The evidence in support of Jaynes remains anecdotal, but when viewed as a temporary lens, it provides a rather convincing illusion of focus and depth. Were *The Origin of Consciousness* eventually accepted as an established theory, it would certainly cast the public debate in America regarding evolution in a rather ironic light. Regardless of the veracity of Jaynes theory, he began asking questions that no one else had asked as concisely or effectively. Only time can show how his work will fare in the torrent of history.



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