



The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit

By Melvin Konner

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A vital updating of a seminal work of science

First published to great acclaim twenty years ago, *The Tangled Wing* has become required reading for anyone interested in the biological roots of human behavior. Since then, revolutions have taken place in genetics, molecular biology, and neuroscience. All of these innovations have been brought into account in this greatly expanded edition of a book originally called an "overwhelming achievement" by *The Times Literary Supplement*.

A masterful synthesis of biology, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, *The Tangled Wing* reveals human identity and activity to be an intricately woven fabric of innumerable factors. Melvin Konner's sensitive and straightforward discussion ranges across topics such as the roots of aggression, the basis of attachment and desire, the differences between the sexes, and the foundations of mental illness.

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The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit By Melvin Konner Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #633877 in Books
- Published on: 2003-02-01
- Released on: 2003-02-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.00" h x 1.14" w x 7.00" l, 1.33 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 560 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"How wonderful to have a new *Tangled Wing* which incorporates the rich findings made in the last twenty years in the fields of evolutionary and behavioral biology. We find the same graceful writing as in the original classic and the same facility to clarify complex issues and to come to stimulating conclusions."
Ernst Mayr, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University

From the Inside Flap

"The evolutionary analysis of human behavior has sometimes been referred to as the 'moral equivalent of fast food.' This is why over the years I have returned again and again to the writing of Mel Konner, for a gourmet's account, nourishing the senses and the soul as well as the intellect. — Sarah B. Hrdy, U. C. at Davis, and author of *MOTHER NATURE: MATERNAL INSTINCTS AND HOW THEY SHAPE THE HUMAN SPECIES*

"How wonderful to have a new *TANGLED WING* which incorporates the rich findings made in the last twenty years in the fields of evolutionary and behavioral biology. We find the same graceful writing as in the original classic and the same facility to clarify complex issues and to come to stimulating conclusions. — Ernst Mayr, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University

"Indecently elegant—a beautifully written book by any standard—and it's about language, love, lust, learning and all the rest of our apes-and-beyond nature.... Every behavioral biology topic reflects the enlightenment of the past two decades since this classic book first appeared." — William H. Calvin, author of *THE CEREBRAL CODE*, co-author of *LINGUA EX MACHINA* and *CONVERSATIONS WITH NEIL'S BRAIN*

"The word 'masterpiece' almost never springs to mind about a work in biosocial science. It does about *THE TANGLED WING*. This is a jewel of virtuoso scholarship written with lustrous and punctilious warmth. It's a remarkable accomplishment." — Lionel Tiger, Charles Darwin Professor of Anthropology, Rutgers University, author of *THE DECLINE OF MALES*

"Melvin Konner is. . . the nearest we have to a poet laureate of behavioral biology. This is an indispensable book." — Robert Sapolsky, Stanford University, author of *WHY ZEBRAS DON'T GET ULCERS* and *THE TROUBLE WITH TESTOSTERONE*

"The *Tangled Wing* is a magnificent synthesis of the latest knowledge of biology, psychology, and anthropology. No one is better qualified than Melvin Konner to illuminate the complex workings of the mind. This volume should be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in human nature - - and who is not." — Aaron T. Beck, M.D., University Professor of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania

"Mel Konner has a breath-taking set of skills. I do not think anyone else could have put together this synthesis, ranging from rigorous medicine, to cutting-edge psychology, to some funky field anthropology. He also has a rare command of language and knows how to tell a story. *THE TANGLED WING* is heavy-weight scholarship, rendered in an attractive and readable style." — Mark Ridley, Professor of Zoology, Oxford University, author of *MENDEL'S DEMON*

"Mel Konner has taken on the most fundamental question-what is our nature?-and provided a beautifully

written, original account, as broad as it is deep. It is rare for a book by a scientist to be a page-turner, but Konner keeps the reader ever alert to his rare insights and profound understanding of our nature. Konner joins Lewis, Gould, and Pinker—a scientist who can write, who teaches us without realizing we are being taught. — Paul Ekman, Professor of Psychology, U. of California, San Francisco

This new edition of *THE TANGLED WING* updates and expands a seminal work on human nature. Mel Konner is a gifted synthesizer and a great teacher. . . Whether describing studies of single gene mutations or hunter-gatherer societies, he tells us not only what is known but what is not yet known and what may not be knowable. With clarity, insight, and, at times, poetry, he simultaneously explores and demonstrates the wonders of human nature. This is a superb book. — Thomas Insel, M.D., Director, Center for Behavioral Neuroscience, Emory University

If you read the breathtaking first edition of *THE TANGLED WING* and were mesmerized, your pleasures have just begun. Now Konner does it again, with a vastly new account of our nature. Each sentence is a pleasure to read, and the powerful points he makes about the human condition can leave one sleepless. — Michael Gazzaniga, David T. McLaughlin Distinguished Professor, Director, Center for Cognitive Neuroscience, Dartmouth College

In the great tradition of Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley, Konner updates the argument for a biological basis of the human mind and spirit with force, clarity and eloquence. — J. Allan Hobson, Director of the Laboratory of Neurophysiology, Harvard Medical School, author of *CONSCIOUSNESS*

In the upcoming postgenomic era, linking basic biology and behavior is likely to be the most important challenge of the life sciences, demanding an ability to move with poetic creativity yet with rigor from the humanities to molecules. *THE TANGLED WING* is the finest such effort I have seen. Konner has penetrating insight into hitherto unappreciated difficulties of Darwinian and Skinnerian approaches to sociobiology. He comes up with novel, creative formulations. All of this in a volume that is as gripping as a mystery novel. — Solomon H. Snyder, M.D., Director, Department of Neuroscience, School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins U.

". . . it is rare to find an author with a depth of knowledge in both the biological and social sciences, combined with superb writing skills sufficient to provide readers with a breathtaking new understanding of human behavior. Mel Konner did that twenty years ago in the first edition of *THE TANGLED WING*. The updated and revised edition of this book is an even greater achievement . . . *THE TANGLED WING* is sure to be among the most important books published in the first decade of the new millennium. — Alice S. Rossi, Harriet Martineau Professor Emerita of Sociology, University of Massachusetts (Amherst)

Anyone, scholar or general reader, who is seriously interested in the human ought to engage this thorough revision of *THE TANGLED WING*. Konner's general erudition, his comprehensive research, his combination of deeply moral and humanistic sensitivity with scientific rigor, his wonderful prose, his critical analytical prowess, but most important his brilliant synthetic capacities provide a powerful and distinctive interpretation. This new version will, like the first, become a point of orientation for many persons in the coming decades. — James M. Gustafson, Former Henry R. Luce Professor of Humanities and Comparative Studies, Emory University.

About the Author

Melvin Konner, M.D., Ph.D., is the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Anthropology and an associate professor of neurology at Emory University. He is the author of *Becoming a Doctor* and *Why the Reckless Survive and Other Secrets of Human Nature*. A Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, he lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Users Review

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