
the triumph of sociobiology The Sociobiology/EP Debate?

Posted by Sam - 2008/06/29 04:30

Longtime reader, first time poster here. I'm trying to research the sociobiology/evolutionary psychology controversy for the purpose of writing an article on the topic (and in particular, its implications for the political Left, including the feminist movement) for submission to Left Hook webzine (www.lefthook.org). I'm finding it to be an extremely difficult subject to grasp. First, let me state that I sympathize with socialist ideals, and would like to think that the sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists are wrong. But I'm not necessarily seeking to debunk anything. I want to enter this project with an open mind. Still, when I was first introduced to sociobiology, it sounded like something in the same vein as the corporate-sponsored science of global warming skeptics and such. But those lackeys are easily refuted. The sociobiologists are not, because they have a mainstream scientific following. Of course, I'm skeptical of both sides of the debate. On one hand, we have Wilson, Pinker, Dawkins, and Dennett, among many others. I haven't looked into all their backgrounds, but Dawkins was born into a family of privilege, and Wilson was raised a Southern Baptist. And they certainly can all now be considered rich white men. Their background and current station could certainly serve as a source of bias. Certainly, the typical sociobiological interpretation of human history and prehistory conflicts with my limited knowledge. And at least some of them have used their work to make political statements, which makes me suspicious of their motives. And despite their protestations to the contrary, their writings (at least those excerpts which I've read so far) *do* reek fairly of biological determinism. On the other hand, we have Gould, Lewontin, Rose, Kamin, and Kitcher. It can be said that Gould, at least, did not come from a particularly privileged background. But they still were and are part of the academic elite now. Of more concern is the fact that they're all socialists. One can't easily discount the possibility of their bias, either. Lewontin has been accused of political bias in his research, and Gould's theories were much criticized by his contemporaries. The media have been considerably kinder to Wilson and company than their critics. Books proclaim The Triumph of Sociobiology, and magazines from The Nation to The National Review sing the discipline's praises. Indeed, in accounts of the history of the sociobiology debate, sociobiology's critics are routinely cast as the villains. The question arises: is this because the ideas of sociobiology are more to the liking of the folks who own the media and fund the research? Or is it because sociobiology has been vindicated in the eyes of the mainstream scientific community? Or perhaps it's just a fad? How much of a following does sociobiology actually have? Its opponents? I'm interested in hearing any thoughts on these topics. Also, I'd greatly appreciate any book or article recommendations. So far, I've acquired: Sociobiology: The New Synthesis by Wilson Not in Our Genes by Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin Myths of Gender by Fausto-Sterling The Use and Abuse of Biology by Sahlins Vaulting Ambition by Kitcher Why Men Won't Ask for Directions by Richard C. Francis Biology as Ideology by Lewontin Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense? by Ruse The Sociobiology Debate by Caplan Sense and Nonsense by Laland The Darwin Wars by Brown Human Natures by Ehrlich The Blank Slate by Pinker The Triumph of Sociobiology by Alcock Is Biology Woman's Destiny? by Reed

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