Journal of the History of Biology **35:** 569–593, 2002.

The Cultural Politics of the Sociobiology Debate

NEIL JUMONVILLE
William Warren Rogers Professor of History
Florida State University
Department of History
Tallahassee FL 32306-2200
USA

Abstract. The sociobiology debate, in the final quarter of the twentieth century, featured many of the same issues disputed in the culture war in the humanities during this same time period. This is evident from a study of the writings of Edward O. Wilson, the best known of the sociobiologists, and from an examination of both the minutes of the meetings of the Sociobiology Study Group (SSG) and the writings of Stephen Jay Gould, the SSG's most prominent member. Many critics of sociobiology, frequently radical scientists who were attached to the lineage of the New Left, argued for the same multicultural values promoted by radical humanities professors in this period. Conversely, liberal sociobiologists defended the universalist values of the liberals in the humanities.

Those scholars whose work was important before the cultural revolution in the 1960s were usually committed to a liberal universalism that emphasized the similarity between people. Younger scholars, who took faculty positions in the 1970s and after, were more likely to owe an allegiance to an ethnos-centered social vision that valued identity politics. The struggle between these two agendas, more intellectual than generational, was at the core of the culture wars both in the humanities and in the sciences. The sociobiology debate should be viewed in this light.

Keywords: biological determinism, culture war, genetics, multiculturalism, Science for the People, social Darwinism, sociobiology, Sociobiology Study Group, Stephen Jay Gould, universalism, Edward O. Wilson

When Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* was released in 1975 it directly followed two decades of intense civil rights action and racial debate in the United States.[1] Despite the federal legislation that had passed in the 1960s, blacks and women were increasingly frustrated with their social, political, and economic progress. By the middle of the 1970s, student activists of the previous decade moved into faculty positions and began to use their academic positions to address the unfinished reform agenda, a campaign that gradually began to be known as multiculturalism. Into this charged atmosphere the new discipline of sociobiology emerged. And as reformist faculty members in the humanities attacked racial discrimination, sexism, canons,

[1] Wilson, 1975.

and ostensibly objective narratives, their counterparts in the sciences assailed racial discrimination, sexism, biological determinism, and sociobiology.

At precisely the same time and place that Wilson's volume was published – in 1975 Boston – a collection of professors and graduate students who opposed sociobiology and its associated theories of behavioral genetics formed the Sociobiology Study Group (SSG). As was apparent at the time, and is no less obvious in retrospect, the contributions of both sociobiologists and their critics reveal the extent to which this particular scientific controversy was also markedly political.

Among the best of the many accounts of the sociobiology debate is Ullica Segerstrale's recent *Defenders of the Truth*. But earlier studies – including Segerstrale's important volume, which is both encyclopedic and profound – do not focus on the connection between the sociobiology conflict and its ties to the larger cultural war that tore through the humanities at the same time. This is hardly a criticism of Segerstrale or other authors, all of whom were addressing important matters, and most of whom were not historians of political culture.[2] Further, the use in this study of the minutes of the meetings of the Sociobiology Study Group provides a clearer sense of the political and cultural preoccupations that drove this important circle.

It is evident that the politics of the sociobiology dispute were less about the traditional contest between left and right in the country – over jobs, tax credits, and military spending – and more about the new struggle over a multicultural future. In effect, the sociobiology battle over matters such as diversity, biological determinism, and human agency were the same issues disputed in the cultural war in the humanities in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Many critics of sociobiology, frequently scientists who were attached to the lineage of the New Left, argued for the same multicultural values promoted by humanities professors in the academic Cultural Left. Similarly, liberal sociobiologists defended the universalist values of liberal humanities professors.

The point is not that the politics of either the SSG or their sociobiologist targets were unwise. Instead, the case is that the agendas of both sides consisted of more than complaining about or defending sociobiology. Much of it reflected the struggle over multiculturalism that was beginning to rise in the humanities at the same time. The sociobiology debate should be viewed in this light.

* * *

Wilson's *Sociobiology* reignited a century-old debate in America about the extent of evolution's contribution to human behavior. Immediately the Socio-

[2] Segerstrale, 2000; Ruse, 1999; Degler, 1991; Kaye, 1986; Schwartz, 1986.

biology Study Group surfaced as the most prominent group to oppose Wilson and the ideas surrounding the genetic basis of human behavior and culture. Members of the SSG believed that the unsettling talk about sociobiology could produce a return to eugenics, social Darwinism, a harmful dependence on shoddy intelligence tests, and a loss of the gains that had been made by women and minorities. Sociobiology, as they saw it, was simply the newest form of science justifying the current distribution of power in society.

The lineage of the SSG is found in the radical science movement that arose at the end of the 1960s. By then, some scientists had joined the New Left campus protests that had been sparked by the Vietnam War, the nuclear threat, increased environmental problems, the civil rights movement, suburban homogeneity, a growing technological society, and a new youth culture.[3] Yet, even considering all of these important incitements, the Vietnam War stood as the greatest trigger for the radicalism of younger scientific students and professionals, partly because university and industrial scientists were employed on military projects, and partly because some were in danger of being drafted into the military.[4] As a result, the organizations of scientific radicalism in the 1960s initially were founded to oppose the Vietnam War. Just as in the 1960s younger African Americans wanted their own civil rights organizations and younger women wanted new feminist groups, so also younger scientists wanted their own organizations that were not directly connected to the earlier scientific protest groups.[5]

In 1967, Charles Schwartz, a professor of physics at the University of California at Berkeley, asked the American Physical Society (APS) to allow the membership to vote on any issues, even political matters, that had a connection to the interests of physicists. The next year, the Schwartz Amendment was voted down overwhelmingly by the APS membership, who believed that it would tarnish the organization's pursuit of pure science. Although even many radical scientists voted against the amendment because they thought the APS should represent nonpartisan knowledge, to some scientists the vote "clearly demonstrated that there was a *physics establishment* – and the rest of us." As a result, at the February 1969 APS meeting Schwartz and others announced the formation of a new more political group named Scientists for Social and Political Action. Because a variety of scientists and

[3] Moore, 1996, pp. 1600–1601; Greeley and Tafler, 1979, p. 18.

[4] Greeley and Tafler, 1979, p. 18; Beckwith, 1986, pp. 119–120; Haraway, 1975, p. 449.

[5] Moore, 1996, pp. 1599–1600; Beckwith, 1986, pp. 119–120; Haraway, 1975, pp. 451–452. For young radicals wanting their own groups, see Carson, 1981; Evans, 1981; Miller, 1987.

technicians joined the organization, it soon changed its name to Scientists and Engineers for Social and Political Action (SESPA).[6]

As a radical group formed in the late 1960s, naturally the SESPA was influenced by the New Left beliefs of some of its founders. "The principles of the new organization," according to Herb Fox, an early member, "were that it was to be a *nonorganization – a* group with no officers and no constraints on membership." SESPA organized locally and voluntarily, and a newsletter kept the various chapters informed about each others' activities. From the beginning, SESPA encouraged its members to meet in topical discussion groups to analyze social and political problems relating to science. Then, at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Boston in December, 1969, where SESPA members went to challenge the more mainstream organization that they called the AAA$, there emerged "a newly vitalized and enlarged Boston SESPA with the alternate name Science for the People."[7]

Like the rest of the New Left, SESPA found itself vacillating about the form it should embody. Members hoped for an anti-elitist, decentralized, non-hierarchical, participatory democracy at the heart of its organizational engine, but it also experienced frequent bouts of worry about whether the group would be more effective if its politics were more unified, understandable, and coherently articulated. One way to address these fears was to turn the SESPA newsletter into a more ambitious magazine of dissenting ideas meant to reach beyond the confines of the group's membership. In August, 1970, the new publication began, now called *Science for the People* magazine and produced mainly in Boston.[8] At this point, other members of SESPA followed the lead of the Boston chapter and took as their organizational name Science for the People (SftP).

In its first five years the Boston SftP created a collection of study groups that at one time or another met around individual topics: the Science Teaching Group, the Busing Group, the Genetics and Social Policy Group, the Women's Issue Group, the China Group, the Chemistry Collective, and the Industrial Group.[9] Then, in 1975, in order to counter the favorable press

[6] Fox, 1970, pp. 2–3; Moore, 1996, pp. 1609–1610. For the scientific protest against the Vietnam War at MIT in March of 1969, see Moore, 1996, pp. 1610–1612; Haraway, 1975, pp. 452–453.

[7] Fox, 1970, p. 3, italics in the original. For the AAA$, see *Science for the People*, December 1970, February 1971, and other issues.

[8] Fox, 1970, p. 3; Magazine Coordinating Committee, 1974, p. 37.

[9] "Chapter Reports," 1973, p. 42. (The January 1973 issue was accidentally mislabeled as the May issue on its cover, but inside both of the issues are labeled correctly.) Most issues of *Science for the People*, on their contents page, listed which discussion groups had contributed to the magazine.

generated by the publication of Wilson's *Sociobiology*, a study circle named the Sociobiology Study Group was organized by Jon Beckwith (Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics at Harvard Medical School) and Richard Lewontin (Professor of Population Genetics at Harvard). Almost immediately the new group affiliated with SftP and by 1976 the SSG began appearing regularly in the magazine along with the other groups. Although formally it was the Sociobiology Group of the Boston chapter of Science for the People, it came to be known simply as the Sociobiology Study Group, with a reputation that soon exceeded that of SftP itself. The SSG was to last eleven years before it changed its name and focus and sank out of view.[10]

The SSG gained such notoriety because members such as Lewontin and Stephen Jay Gould (Professor of Paleontology at Harvard) became the most outspoken and recognized critics of sociobiology in the final quarter of the twentieth century. The political interests of Gould and Lewontin met on the field of evolutionary theory. Both focused their attacks mainly but not exclusively on the sociobiological writings of Wilson. With a talent for analogy, metaphor, and language, Gould wrote popular books and academic articles arguing that research in the evolution of species showed that human culture was not the product of genetic encoding but instead was a product of human learning, adaptability, rationality, environment, and culture itself.[11] Lewontin, a more scientific writer, targeted much of his anti-sociobiological writing on the dangers and misuse of intelligence tests and their statistical interpretation, which, he argued, showed the greater problem of drawing conclusions about ability and culture from genetic research.[12] Both drew substantial media attention, not least of all because Gould and Lewontin were members of the same department at Harvard as Wilson, and the idea of a departmental brawl appealed even to the lay person.

To many observers, Gould and Lewontin were the SSG. Yet, in truth, Gould attended very few of the meetings, which were held on alternating Tuesday evenings at the house of one or another member. While Lewontin was slightly more active, neither of them attended meetings after May 1977.[13] The most active members – those who attended the most meetings and

[10] Beckwith, 2001. In the mid-1980s the SSG changed its name to the Genetic Screening Study Group, and added more M.D.s and lawyers. Science for the People dissolved in about 1990 because of IRS problems.

[11] Gould, 1977, 1987, p. 7.

[12] Richard Lewontin, 1974a, 1974b, 1976, 1982a, 1982b, 1991; Lewontin, Rose and Kamin, 1984; Segerstrale, 2000; Ruse, 1999, ch. 8.

[13] Sociobiology Study Group, 1975–1980. Most of the meeting minutes, which were typewritten, listed the names of those in attendance and identified who wrote and later distributed the minutes for that week. Occasionally the membership information is unclear because usually only first names were recorded.

performed the most functions – were Beckwith, Joseph Alper (Professor of Chemistry, University of Massachusetts at Boston), Robert V. Lange (Professor of Physics, Brandeis University), Freda Salzman (Professor of Physics, University of Massachusetts at Boston), Lila Leibowitz (Professor of Anthropology, Northeastern University), Bertram "Chip" Bruce (Senior Scientist, Bolt Beranek and Newman), Hiroshi Inouye (graduate student in Jon Beckwith's lab), and Ed Egelman (graduate student in molecular biology at Brandeis).[14] A collection of peripheral members participated in SSG meetings less frequently.[15]

From the group's inception, then, SSG members represented a variety of academic levels, and its most famous were not necessarily its most active members. It was a far more diverse group, in terms of status and academic rank, than is normally thought. Beckwith, whose lab was the first to isolate a gene, in 1969, was the most active – and was the leader of the SSG, insofar as a leaderless, anti-elitist group can be led.[16] But graduate students such as Ed Egelman and Hiroshi Inouye, and a collection of professors who were not household names, constituted much of the energy and force for the circle. The Sociobiology Study Group, that is, was not simply a couple of star biology professors from Harvard. It grew out of Science for the People (especially in the person of Beckwith), which in turn was bred in the radical science movement and the New Left, and, in keeping with that lineage, the SSG was peopled by a variety of academic scientists.

* * *

At the same time that the SSG was founded in the mid-1970s, a cultural struggle that had been brewing for at least a decade came to life across campus in the humanities. At the heart of the dispute was the clash between very different beliefs, agendas, and commitments – with one side defending a longstanding liberal Enlightenment universalism, and the side other battering it with a newer creation soon to be called multiculturalism, a product of the

[14] Sociobiology Study Group. Meeting minutes show that, between June 22, 1976 and March 4, 1980, the attendance of those members already mentioned are as follows: Jon Beckwith (53), Joseph Alper (53), Edward Egelman (52), Robert Lange (51), Freda Salzman (49), Hiroshi Inouye (42), Bertram "Chip" Bruce (40), Lila Leibowitz (23), Richard Lewontin (11), and Stephen Jay Gould (6).

[15] Those less frequent members included Robin Crompton and Val Dusek (both of whom became active in about 1980), Herb Schreier, Ted Judd, Marian Lowe, Debbie Fein, Lisa Dennen, Barbara Chasin, Steve Chorover (3), and Mimi Rosenthal (2). Others who are sometimes mentioned as prominent members, such as Ruth Hubbard (1), almost never attended meetings for which minutes still exist. Another dozen or more people attended the meetings once or twice.

[16] On Beckwith isolating the first gene, see Segerstrale, 2000, pp. 221–222.

1960s belief in the benefit of group identity (whether based on race, ethnicity, or gender).

Universalism, in which people are considered to be from the same creator or creation, and are therefore to be afforded the same basic rights, has national and global rather than ethnic, racial, or particularist commitments. John Higham has explained that American universalism "is universal in grounding public life and institutions not on an exclusive heritage but on natural rights – that is, on rational principles, supposedly valid everywhere, that grant all citizens equality in public life and encourage all residents to claim a common citizenship." As it progressed from its Enlightenment foundation, universalism in the United States embraced the immigration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and its adherents believed that all people, regardless of heritage, could become one citizenry, blended in a melting pot.[17] Liberalism (classical and otherwise) honored this universalism with varying degrees of allegiance and exception from the eighteenth century to the present.

But as David Hollinger has pointed out, "a transition from species-centered to ethnos-centered discourse" entered American culture after World War II, and "universalist aspirations were replaced by particularist aspirations in politics, social theory, anthropology, and other spheres of discussion." Instead, where all of humankind was once taken to be the referent, we are now more inclined to speak about, or on behalf of, an "ethnos," a particular solidarity rooted in history. Increasingly in the 1960s, scholars, minorities, and social observers became uncomfortable with universalism. People began to realize that "in the name of an essential human nature," historians, social scientists, novelists, and others "offered the planet prescriptions that now seemed culturally specific."[18]

The conflict in the humanities, then, cast on one side a younger group of leftist scholars who had been influenced by the cultural and linguistic theories associated with structuralism and post-structuralism, and who were fashioning the democratic, egalitarian, and anthropological insights of the 1960s into what was the beginning of multiculturalism. On the other side were grouped older academics – liberals, moderates, and conservatives – who believed in the worth of studying the Western canon of authors, from Greece to the United States, and who endorsed the values of universalism instead of multiculturalism.

That this conflict in the humanities arose during the mid-1970s, concurrent with the formation of the SSG, is evident. Articles advocating diversity, for example, first surfaced in 1974 and 1975 in the *American Quarterly*, a central journal in the humanities. Appearing in these years were articles on

[17] Higham, 1993, pp. 197–199.
[18] Hollinger, 1995, pp. 9, 4, 53.

Indians, African Americans, racism, ethnicity, women and gender, sexuality, and structuralism.[19] In the social sciences the same trend was evident, with one anthropologist remarking with surprise that "quite suddenly, with little comment or ceremony, ethnicity is an ubiquitous presence."[20] Hollinger is another who noticed that the early 1970s "is the chronological point at which the contrast between an older species-consciousness [universalism] and a newer ethnic-consciousness [multiculturalism] can be seen most vividly."[21]

Although the cultural antagonism in the humanities began to fester in the 1970s, open combat did not burst into view until a decade later. By that time, many of those who opposed the liberal universalist traditions characterized themselves as "the cultural left." John Searle described this group as "1960s radicals, feminists, deconstructionists, Marxists, people active in 'gay studies' and 'ethnic studies,' and people of leftwing persuasion who happen to teach in universities." Similarly, Richard Rorty wrote about a conference of which he was a part, which he described as "in large part a rally of this cultural left. The audience responded readily and favorably to notions like 'subversive readings,' 'hegemonic discourse,' 'the breaking down of traditional logocentric hierarchies,' and so on. It chortled derisively at mentions of William Bennett, Allan Bloom, and E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and nodded respectfully at the names of Nietzsche, Derrida, Gramsci, or Foucault."[22]

This Cultural Left resented the way that their "elitist" colleagues designed the past to fit the ambitions and comforts of the privileged. These privileged universalists ignored the democratic citizenry and its diversity, and instead chiseled a representation of a unified culture. They defended a Western Civilization that oppressed women, slaves, and other minorities both at home and abroad. The literary canon they marketed was crafted by white males and perpetuated the weakness of the conquered.[23]

The universalists, however, had complaints of their own. They believed it important to maintain some unity and commonality in culture, in the face of the Cultural Left's wish to diversify and decenter inherited traditions. Universalists resented that, in the 1970s, deconstructionists accused "universal truths" of being an elegant wrapping for self-interest, and were angry that the Cultural Left assigned literature to a merely equal status in the museum of culture to other semiotic systems such as fashion and sports.

[19] McLoughlin, 1974; Baxter, 1974; Saxton, 1975; Shumsky, 1975; Hollinger, 1975; Horsman, 1975; Washburn, 1975; Karcher, 1975; Stage, 1975; Blair, 1978.

[20] Cohen, 1978, p. 379.

[21] Hollinger, 1995, p. 57.

[22] Searle, 1990, p. 34 (Rorty is quoted in the Searle article.) Other works that will lead the reader to good sources on the culture war in the humanities are Linenthal and Engelhardt, 1996; Novick, 1988; Jay, 1997; and Delbanco, 1999.

[23] Searle, 1990, p. 35.

But the Cultural Left's multicultural view soon lost its playfulness, according to Andrew Delbanco, "and turned into the dogma that literature, like any constructed system of meaning, must be assessed in relation to this or that 'identity' (race, class, gender, etc.) to the exclusion of every other point of view. Here began in earnest the fragmentation of literary studies that is so evident today – and that has left a legacy of acrimony, and of intellectual and professional fatigue."[24]

The attack on the literary canon also upset Searle, who warned that "the very ideal of excellence implied in the canon is itself perceived as a threat. It is," he complained, "considered 'elitist' and 'hierarchical' to suppose that 'intellectual excellence' should take precedence over such considerations as fairness, representativeness, the expression of the experiences of previously underrepresented minorities, etc." Searle was aggravated, for example, by the debate at Stanford about its course in Western Civilization. Mary Louise Pratt, a professor of comparative literature there, opposed the canonical course because, as she said, "A course with such readings creates two sets of books, those privileged by being on this list and those not worthy of inclusion. Regardless of the good intentions of those who create such lists, the students have not viewed and will not view these separate categories as equal." Searle was stunned. "One obvious difficulty with it," he noted about her position, "is that if it were valid, it would argue against any set of required readings whatever; indeed, any list you care to make about anything automatically creates two categories, those that are on the list and those that are not."[25]

Much of the cultural conflict in the humanities in the last quarter of the twentieth century, then, had to do with whether culture would be seen as the reflection of all of society, and would be shared by all as a common ground (as a universalist would wish), or whether culture would derive from our local ethnic, gender, and other identities, as those associated with the Cultural Left and multiculturalism increasingly believed after the mid-1970s.

Interestingly, Searle wondered why this conflict was confined largely to the field of literature. "No one seems to complain," he noted, "that the great ideas in physics, mathematics, chemistry, and biology, for example, also come in large part from dead white males."[26] But he was mistaken. Actually there were similar complaints from scientists about the oppression, injustice, and lack of diversity in the theories wielded on the science side of campus. Searle would only have needed to look at the dispute over sociobiology, which illustrates that elements of the culture war occurred in the sciences as well as the humanities.

[24] Delbanco, 1999, p. 36.
[25] Searle, 1990, p. 36.
[26] Searle, 1990, p. 36.

* * *

What were the political commitments of sociobiologists such as Wilson and their critics from the Sociobiology Study Group? The question is justified, because, although the main participants in the conflict were scientists, many of them defined their mission at least as much in the rhetoric of politics. Gould promised that the critics of sociobiology "raise the political point because [sociobiology] cascades from poor science," but Wilson was convinced that "the attack on it was political, not evidential."[27] Wilson would not have been surprised to hear Beckwith tell his compatriots in the SSG, in the autumn of 1976, that "while we believe that it is important for the left to combat pseudoscientific theories, which are used to justify the status quo, we are concerned that we don't lose touch with the every day manifestations of classism, racism and sexism in our country."[28]

Looking back from the vantage of two decades later, Wilson claimed that "in 1975 I was a political naif: I knew almost nothing about Marxism as either a political belief or a mode of analysis, I had paid little attention to the dynamism of the activist left, and I had never heard of Science for the People."[29] Yet Wilson had his own cultural and political principles, and, while he was not as overtly political as members of the SSG, he was caught up in the ongoing cultural debate.

Wilson considered himself a liberal, and his work had culturally political implications in such areas as race, gender, and human hierarchies. The word "liberal," of course, has lived so many different lives that it needs to be characterized more specifically to be of use. As was the case with many late-twentieth century liberals, Wilson's term retained values spread through centuries – from the time of Thomas Jefferson to John Dewey to the post-WWII advocates of liberal universalism.

First, Jefferson's "classical liberalism" contributed to Wilson's liberal outlook the decentralization and competition associated with a marketplace of ideas or economic goods. The attraction of a decentralized market competition appealed to a sociobiologist who studied a world of competing genes. Successful competitors – whether economic actors, philosophers, or genes – deserved their rewards. "Members of human societies sometimes cooperate closely in insectan fashion," Wilson wrote in 1975, "but more frequently they compete for the limited resources allocated to their role-sector. The best and most entrepreneurial of the role-actors usually gain a disproportionate share

[27] Gould, 1987, p. 30; Wilson, 1994, p. 339.

[28] Sociobiology Study Group, August 31, 1976 (?). This is a one page document which, from its placement in the folder and the context of its discussion, would put it at or near the date above.

[29] Wilson, 1994, p. 339.

of the rewards, while the least successful are displaced to other, less desirable positions."[30]

Second, the twentieth century liberalism of Dewey believed that, in an increasingly bureaucratic and corporate world, the government needed to manage and regulate decentralization and competition in order to guarantee the survival of those values. As Herbert Croly foresaw in 1909, Hamilton would have to be fused with Jefferson in order to preserve liberty and equality; or, as Charles Forcey later rephrased Croly, the new liberalism would be "the pursuit of Jeffersonian ends by Hamiltonian means."[31] This was the managed liberalism initiated by Teddy Roosevelt and extended by his cousin Franklin Roosevelt, a political outlook that Edward O. Wilson embraced. After a childhood in the conservative South, Wilson journeyed to Cambridge in 1950 for graduate school at Harvard, where he became a Franklin "Roosevelt liberal turned pragmatic centrist."[32]

Third, many liberal figures in the last half of the twentieth century supported an Enlightenment universalism, and promoted a color blind society dedicated to integration (not assimilation) instead of ethnocentrism. Figures as diverse as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Henry Steele Commager, and Martin Luther King, Jr. held the universalist belief that identity should be centered on the species instead of the race, and should be national or global instead of local.[33] It is hardly surprising that Wilson – whose political attachments were rooted in the Enlightenment, and whose scientific judgments suggested that a shared genetics provided the human species with a common human nature – subscribed to the liberal universalist view.[34]

In his only bout of political writing, Wilson fashioned a short intellectual history of the Enlightenment in which Condorcet emerged as a leading figure of liberal principles. Condorcet, according to Wilson, subscribed to the "universal" and "natural rights of men," and to "the idea of a progressive, egalitarian state." Humans, whose lives "can be improved indefinitely" into perfection, should be "free to make themselves and society as they please." Perhaps most important, Condorcet "was committed to the idea of the unity of the human race," a position that Wilson thought sociobiology validated. Similarly, Kant considered the "human race" to be "one vast whole," and believed "that man's rational dispositions are destined to express themselves in the species as a whole, not in the individual." Condorcet, Wilson explained,

[30] Wilson, 1975, p. 554. See also Wilson, 1978, pp. 158–159.

[31] Croly, 1965, pp. 169–170, 152–154, 212–214; Forcey, 1961, p. 29.

[32] Wilson, 1994, p. 347.

[33] On universalism, see Hollinger, 1995, pp. 4, 9; Higham, 1993; Schlesinger, 1992; Jumonville, 1999, ch. 8.

[34] Wilson, 1994, pp. 124–138.

was egalitarian, but "he was not a multiculturalist in the present-day sense." Wilson, who could hardly have expressed more succinctly the dispute then raging in the humanities, concluded that "postmodernism is the ultimate polar antithesis of the Enlightenment."[35] He found none of Condorcet's liberal Enlightenment values to be in direct conflict with a liberal sociobiology.

In his first volume on sociobiology, Wilson had more to say about gender than about race. Genetically, he said in 1975, males were aggressive and socially dominant, foraged for game or money, and, if powerful enough, kept several women. Through evolutionary shaping of social relations, women, as an important but dominated group, were bartered as objects of exchange, fed and socialized the young, and remained "in the residential area."[36] Although Wilson spoke descriptively instead of prescriptively, his works infuriated female scholars and most of the left. Three years later, while telling the same story, this time based on research on the !Kung tribe, Wilson regretted that evolution had produced this universal subjugation of women. Society has proclivities produced by genetics, he acknowledged, but an unequal position for women "need not be the case," because with quotas and education a more egalitarian society can be produced. Similarly, Wilson was not conservative about homosexuality. Society should not suppress gays, deny them civil rights, nor treat them as though they have a disorder. It is likely, he wrote, that homosexuality is biologically normal and culturally beneficial for the human species, and that "homosexuals may be the genetic carriers of some of mankind's rare altruistic impulses."[37]

Research convinced sociobiologists such as Wilson that different genetic inheritances produced individuals with different capabilities, although many of these genetic proclivities could be changed by the environment or individual will. Wilson's metaphor was that genes work like canyons that direct water one way or the other, but which water will change under storm conditions. Still, individuals were endowed better in some areas than in others. The genetic personality differences he saw in honeybees and ants also existed in humans, he believed. Within !Kung society there were different aptitudes, most of which were established by the age of thirty or else did not occur. Yet humans magnify these genetic nudges more than they should, he said, because "genetic differences in mental traits, however slight, tend to be preserved by the raising of class barriers, racial and cultural discrimination, and physical ghettos."[38] Again, as a liberal, Wilson believed that if opportunities were left

[35] Wilson, 1998, pp. 15, 18, 20–22, 40.
[36] Wilson, 1975, pp. 551, 553.
[37] Wilson, 1978, pp. 91–92, 128–129, 132–135, 142–143.
[38] Wilson, 1975, pp. 549, 555.

open, competition would distribute the rewards in a cultural and economic market.[39]

The most explosive issue in the cultural war, of course, was race. In his first volume on sociobiology, however, Wilson made relatively little mention of race. Three years later, in *Human Nature* in 1978, Wilson spoke very gingerly about the genetics of racial differences. Before he would even address whether " 'racial' differences in behavior occur," he thought it necessary to "issue a strong caveat, because this is the most emotionally explosive and politically dangerous of all subjects." He acknowledged that "it is a futile exercise to try to define discrete human races. Such entities do not in fact exist." Showing his proximity to the position of the SSG, Wilson told his readers that "the evidence is strong that almost all differences between human societies are based on learning and social conditioning rather than on heredity."[40]

And yet, Wilson admitted, "perhaps not all." It was this difference from their own position for which the SSG pilloried him. Infants of different races have been found to have physical and emotional differences, he pointed out, that could not easily be attributed to the effects of the environment or womb. Wilson believed it probable that genetic variations caused differences between individuals, if not races. For example, he thought it possible that the XYY males (0.1% of males acquire an extra Y chromosome at conception), because they are larger than other males, are more aggressive, more criminal, and more apt to be found in prison.[41] But even though the XYY hypothesis was controversial at the time, a genetic difference between *individuals* (as liberals such as Wilson were likely to frame issues) has none of the racial overtones that ought to have upset proponents of a diverse multicultural society.

It was obvious to most observers how sociobiology can be employed for conservative or inegalitarian ends, but it was seldom acknowledged how it can also be used as a tool for reformist and egalitarian purposes. Sociobiology is a less partisan body of knowledge than was usually assumed by its critics, and it can be used as easily by the left as by the right. Sociobiological information, for example, can be used to create a more egalitarian society, one with more widespread opportunity, by allowing early intervention in the lives of some individuals who are at a high genetic risk of not doing as well in mathematics, or in languages, or in specific competitive situations.[42]

[39] Wilson, 1975, pp. 554; Wilson, 1978, pp. 158–159.
[40] Wilson, 1978, pp. 47–48.
[41] Wilson, 1978, pp. 48, 43.
[42] Konner, 1999.

* * *

Members of the Sociobiology Study Group felt more comfortable than Wilson acknowledging the political nature of their involvement in the sociobiology dispute. In contrast to Wilson's liberalism, members of the SSG thought of themselves ideologically as an ecumenically diverse group on the political left. As suggested earlier, many of their political values were connected to those of the earlier New Left and they were committed to political activism. "The group," the SSG told an SftP audience in 1977, "conceives of its chief function to be, in addition to self-education on the scientific and political issues, the production of ideological weapons to counteract and delegitimate sociobiology and biological determinism in general."[43] Marian Lowe and other SSG members recommended that the SSG tell new members that "we are engaged in a political struggle. Being a member of the group entails political commitment." Barbara Chasin and Ed Egelman objected, but Lowe responded that "many people are coming out of a sense of outrage and want to be connected to the struggle."[44]

In 1977, with the organization already two years old, the group wondered: "Are more militant activities called for? Is it enough to work among academic elites?"[45] The summaries of the biweekly gatherings were peppered with activist political and cultural expressions echoing the ongoing cultural war. "Breaking out of the intellectual salon: several ideas were discussed to reach beyond the usual academic audience for SB debate . . .," Chip Bruce wrote about one deliberation at Ed Egelman's house. "Also discussed making more contacts with groups already working on such issues as rape, male dominance, sex roles, etc. – offers to write, talk, carry signs, or whatever, especially on SB as intellectual support for sexism, e.g., recent work on 'rape' in birds . . . ."[46]

The SSG frequently described their ideology as radical in *Science for the People* magazine, in their bi-weekly meetings, and in their attacks on others. By the standards of the university, however, their radicalism was not extreme – and mostly featured a mix of Marxist rhetoric, feminism, and some New Left strategies and commitments. Most of the group's Marxism was exercised lightly, and, instead of serving as a guide for specific scientific strategies, it was usually employed to serve as a map to locate large questions to ask and important values to defend. Members of the group, for example, discussed Engels in 1976, and two years later they read a "historical study of [the]

[43] Sociobiology Study Group, April 15–17, 1977.
[44] Sociobiology Study Group, May 10, 1977.
[45] Sociobiology Study Group, April 15–17, 1977.
[46] Sociobiology Study Group, June 13, 1979.

Marxist formulation of the nature of science."[47] What Marxism existed in the group was worn casually enough to avoid problems between individuals. At one point, participants asked but did not determine "whether this group should allow itself to be considered as Marxist, when not all members are." A good indication of how doctrinal disagreement was diffused occurred at a 1976 SSG meeting in which an article was discussed. "Each discussant told the group what Marx had *really* said about human nature," noted the member in charge of keeping that evening's minutes, "but no definitive solution was reached, and, in the absence of a direct communication from Beyond, the meeting was adjourned."[48]

Looking back from the vantage of 1979, an article in *Science for the People* recalled the ideological diversity of SftP over the previous decade. The authors explained that "some of us have felt dissatisfied with our amorphous image," yet they were also proud of the mixed radicalism the group allowed. "Since we were founded as a 'non-organization' with no constraints on membership," they wrote, "our members have spanned the left spectrum and have included Marxist-Leninists, progressive-liberals, anarchists, democratic socialists and many others. With a few significant exceptions, Science for the People has tried to be an organization in which most left-progressive people would feel comfortable."[49]

Fittingly echoing their New Left heritage, members of the SSG decided that in order to change the world they must begin by reforming their own organization.[50] So the group frequently subjected itself to bouts of "criticism and self-criticism" to root out undesirable characteristics, a practice that sometimes led to "rather 'heavy' exchanges."[51] These exchanges and concerns over the years centered particularly on trying to eliminate what some members felt was the SSG's sexism and an elitist hierarchy of academic status within the circle. In its internal struggle to purify itself of elitism, hierarchy, sexism, racism, and imperialism, the Sociobiology Study Group was following the value pattern that was conceived in the New Left radicalism of the 1960s and that helped shape the postmodernist reformism in universities in the 1970s.

In one of their early meetings, in the summer of 1976, the problem of elitism was explained. Acknowledging that there already had been friction between members, some of the participants worried that "the nature of the group and of the subject matter has generated some problems in interpersonal

[47] Sociobiology Study Group, August 31, 1976, and July 18, 1978.
[48] Sociobiology Study Group, November 19, 1978, and September 28, 1976.
[49] Greeley and Tafler, 1979, p. 23.
[50] A good example of this is found in Miller, 1987, pp. 194–207.
[51] Sociobiology Study Group, September 27, 1977.

interactions within the group. Since some of the people with longer years of training can offer more in the way of concrete information, discussions have often been dominated by a few. We have spent a good deal of time talking of ways to break down these barriers and create a situation in which each one of us is competent to serve as a spokesperson."[52]

The issue of elitism was enough of a concern that the Sociobiology Study Group warned of it the next year in a report at a regional Science for the People conference. The national media, the SSG told the conference audience, presented the sociobiology debate as a dispute between a few famous Harvard professors, which angered the SSG. "At first we did not know how to cope with this and allowed our high-status academics to represent us to the outside, with disastrous results," the SSG admitted. "Slowly the group changed its tactics, imposed strong discipline on its members who had status, and now refers all requests for media contacts, interviews, etc. to a public relations committee." Specific action within the group had been necessary, the conference learned. "Since the early elimination of a couple of incorrigible 'heavies' by social pressure, gross elitism has not been a problem, but a subtle elitism of atmosphere and group composition remains. The group is somewhat older and contains more status-laden academics than is typical for SftP."[53]

The need to combat elitism within the group was assumed to be tied to the lack of a proper feminist consciousness. Members of the "women's subgroup" of the SSG felt that their smaller meetings were much more open and friendly, and there they felt more latitude to explore issues about which they had no expertise. Conversely, the women felt that in the full meetings there was "a lot of non verbal stuff" that revealed impatience with ignorance, and the women said the full meetings were "usually less pleasant and mutually helpful for men and women." With the intellectual gunslinging featured by experts in the meetings, there was a chance of getting nicked in a crossfire. "Within the full group," some complained, "the 'put-down' of Wilson was perhaps too flippant and became a model of the put-down others feared would befall them if they showed their ignorance."[54] The road to a new society began at home, so it was essential to work out a proper ethic in their meetings before trying to lead society to better values.

Through the self-criticism within the SSG, elitist and feminist problems within the circle slowly began to recede, although there was evidence of at least some trouble until 1980. In the spring of 1977 the SSG told an SftP conference that "overtly sexist males have been eliminated or suppressed by

[52] Sociobiology Study Group, August 31, 1976 (?).
[53] Sociobiology Study Group, April 15–17, 1977.
[54] Sociobiology Study Group, July 27, 1976.

social pressure," but the group also admitted that "sexism remains a serious problem in much the same way as elitism. It takes a passive but destructive form." Despite the progress, not all members had yet adopted a sufficiently feminist analysis. "Women have the feeling that they are punching a pillow in dealing with the group and the turnover of women has been especially high, particularly of younger non-academics."[55]

The problem of a hierarchy of elites within the group was difficult to eradicate completely. One of the offenders, it appears, was Lewontin. In late spring 1977, a month after the regional SftP conference, a discussion arose in an SSG meeting. Beckwith mentioned that two members of the SSG had left, and that both had spoken highly of the team nature of the protests against the Seabrook nuclear power plant a few years earlier – which they compared unfavorably with the atmosphere of the SSG. Lewontin responded that internal dynamics had been a continuing problem in the SSG, and he offered to leave the group. Lange and others thought Lewontin's idea was not a solution, but the circle continued to argue about the problem during the evening.[56] After this particular discussion, Lewontin and Gould showed up for almost no other meetings during the several more years of the group's active existence, which suggests that both of them might have felt as though the elitist criticism was aimed at them. Later, Beckwith doubted that the two had been pushed out, and said that Gould and Lewontin had always been more independent in the circle, and that after the initial debate cooled the two became less interested in the SSG.[57] Beckwith, who had as much claim to fame as either Lewontin or Gould, did not appear in the mainstream media as much as they, but he also seemed not to have as much trouble fitting in with the rest of the group and throughout the organization's course he remained one of its most active members.

In addition to fighting organizational hierarchies, like much of America in the 1970s the Sociobiology Study Group also opposed racism. And, like the country as a whole, members of the SSG did not always agree with each other on the topic. In late 1977, for example, Robert Lange prepared a paper for discussion within the SSG on the racism implicit in Wilson's *Sociobiology*. "Since Sociobiology helps to legitimate racial conflict by postulating that it is genetically based," said the notes of the meeting summarizing Lange's position, "it helps to promote racial conflict and do directly what racism does indirectly." While sympathetic toward Lange's intentions, Freda Salzman disagreed. She warned that it was dangerous to brand as racism something that promotes racial conflict, and she cited Joe Alper's suggestion that racism

[55] Sociobiology Study Group, April 15–17, 1977.
[56] Sociobiology Study Group, May 24, 1977.
[57] Beckwith, 2001.

should be defined as racial stereotyping and a belief in racial inferiority. Because there is no racial stereotyping in Wilson's book, Salzman cautioned, liberals would balk at Lange's conclusion. The same problem arises, she said, when studies of the biological basis of sex differences are called "sexist."[58] Salzman, however, remained strongly engaged by questions of race. In her account of her participation at an SSG meeting at Joe Alper's house on September 18, 1979, she declared, "I still think that the connection between Nazi ideology and women's role in the Third Reich is an important one to make – for example . . . the Nazi eugenics program and its reduction of women to being breeders. It is as important for us to make this connection as it is for the Women's Studies Symposium on Sociobiology and Feminism to make the connection with racism . . ."[59]

Again, the politics of the SSG were not particularly radical within the context of the academic world of the period, although they were significantly to the left of the national culture as a whole during the Jimmy Carter administration. The SSG's relative moderation was evident, for example, when in 1977 it criticized the more radical Committee Against Racism (CAR) for its extremism. CAR earlier had scolded the SSG for being soft on racism. In response, the SSG pointed out that they had made many statements about the connection of sociobiology to racism, and the SSG warned CAR that attacking Wilson's *Sociobiology*, which was not a racist book, would be "a losing tactic." When Steve Rosenthal, the head of Boston's CAR group, told the SSG that sociobiology justifies not just the status quo but the move toward fascism and war, Marian Lowe of the SSG answered, "If you're going to be able to convince anybody, then you should be able to convince us [at the SSG]. But you haven't."[60] The SSG was satisfied to represent a more moderate radicalism within the left.

Similarly, Gould's public writing in support of multiculturalism and against sociobiology was strong and principled, but hardly radical by standards of university politics. Branding sociobiologists as biological determinists, Gould attacked what he considered to be racism in science – particularly in IQ studies. (Attacking racism and potentially unflattering scientific results are different matters, as he would admit.) Works of biological determinism, Gould reported, range from attempts to make money from popular books "to pernicious attempts to reintroduce racism as respectable science." These sociobiological works "blame the poor and the hungry for their own condition" instead of faulting the government or economic system. "And," he noted, "how convenient an argument for those who control govern-

[58] Sociobiology Study Group, November 8, 1977.
[59] Sociobiology Study Group, September 18, 1979.
[60] Sociobiology Study Group, May 10, 1977.

ment and, by the way, provide the money that science requires for its very existence."[61] In addition, sociobiology was sexist, Gould complained, "for interpreting what female animals do in the light of supposed role models imposed by sexist societies upon human females."[62]

Although Gould issued a constant list of charges against sociobiology for more than two decades, most of them, like his comments above, were not particularly harsh. His occasionally conciliatory tone helped him to continue a relationship of sorts with Wilson, whose office was in the same Harvard building as his. "We simply differ in our views about the relative importance of biology in this future alignment of social behavior, history, and genetics," he said of his conflict with Wilson. "I suspect that biology will not play an important part in explaining 'patterns of cultural diversity,' " and instead "the correct empirical equation will grant a large coefficient to history and a small part to genetics."[63]

Again, the sociobiology debate burst onto the scene with great energy in the immediate aftermath of two decades of national frustration with intractable civil rights problems among blacks, women, and others. A new multicultural agenda was slowly being fashioned to produce a more diverse, tolerant, open, and democratic culture, and much of the campaigning for that new vision was carried out on campuses. It is hardly surprising that sociobiology became entangled in the larger cultural disagreements between liberalism and the left. The intention here is not to criticize the politics of either Wilson or the SSG, but instead to clarify that the battle they were involved in paralleled the cultural dispute in the humanities at the same time.

* * *

It is usually assumed that Wilson was criticized by his opponents because they thought him bad on race, and that he wanted to perpetuate the concept of racial distinctions and all of the benefits that supposition brought to powerful whites. That hypothesis even characterized the attack on Wilson by some in the Sociobiology Study Group. Ironically, it is instead more likely that Wilson was reviled by the SSG and others in the multicultural camp precisely because he denied that there were significant multicultural differences to be preserved and honored between races and ethnicities.

Liberal universalist that he was, Wilson, in writing *On Human Nature*, emphasized that there were few genetic or other differences between members of the human family. Therefore he was far more willing than his adversaries to talk of a general human nature. No wonder he was surprised to

[61] Gould, 1977, p. 239 and parts 6–8.
[62] Gould, 1987, p. 41.
[63] Gould, 1987, p. 117.

be called a racist. As he proclaimed, "we are a single species, not two or more, one great breeding system through which genes flow and mix in each generation. Because of that flux, mankind viewed over many generations shares a single human nature within which relatively minor hereditary influences recycle through ever changing patterns, between the sexes and across families and entire populations."[64]

Wilson's liberal argument, as the SSG and his other opponents realized, resembled the naive integrationist belief in a harmonious beloved community without separatism that Martin Luther King, Jr. also had supported, and which the New Left and others who respected identity politics had worked so hard to cleanse from the national agenda in previous decades.[65] Wilson worried that the multicultural ethic produced an ethnocentric tribalism. "The force behind most warlike policies is ethnocentrism, the irrationally exaggerated allegiance of individuals to their kin and fellow tribesmen," he warned. Further, the modern world could not dismiss tribalism as a condition of the deep past, because any current group – a race, religious sect, or geographical body – that maintains a double standard of morality, one for insiders and another for outsiders, can be considered a tribe. Tribal behavior causes polarization, and then, "fearful of the hostile groups around them, the 'tribe' refuses to concede to the common good." Unfortunately, "no nation has been completely immune."[66]

Gould complained repeatedly about Wilson's theory of universal behavior in humankind. "But a theory of universal behavior," Gould warned, "cannot provide a comprehensive account of human nature; we must also encompass the differences among cultures, and the astonishing speed and lability of cultural change."[67] In Wilson's *Sociobiology*, Gould found that "Chapter 27 abounds with statements about supposed human universals. For example, 'Human beings are absurdly easy to indoctrinate – they *seek* it.' Or, 'Men would rather believe than know.' I can only say that my own experience does not correspond with Wilson's." Yet, "When Wilson must acknowledge diversity," according to Gould, "he often dismisses the uncomfortable 'exceptions' as temporary and unimportant aberrations."[68]

Some might argue that Gould was no multicultural opponent of universalism, because, after all, he and Lewontin had been arguing since the early 1970s, on the basis of Lewontin's research in population genetics, that all

64 Wilson, 1978, p. 50.
65 On King as a universalist, see Higham, 1993, pp. 200–201.
66 Wilson, 1978, p. 111; Wilson, 1975, p. 565.
67 Gould, 1987, pp. 28, 39.
68 Gould, 1977, p. 254.

humans share most of their genes.[69] That explanation might proceed this way: that Gould and the SSG were not so much criticizing claims about universalism as about the kinds of universals Wilson chose to emphasize – universals such as xenophobia, traditional male-female roles, and the human eagerness to be indoctrinated. Gould and the SSG, it might be said, were merely pointing out that Wilson's particular universals were the wrong ones, and that they were nothing more than Western social values projected onto all evolutionary history.

A better answer is that Gould and the SSG were not universalists at all. They were arguing that, although people shared much in common genetically, it would be socially and culturally beneficial if these same people observed and maintained their social and cultural differences, their local attributes. The SSG was a part of a multicultural movement that suggested, in the words of David Hollinger, that "culture follows the lines of shape and color."[70] True, Gould has argued against the taxonomy of races. But racism is real even if races are not.[71] So Gould and the SSG could be fighting racism while still believing that we're all nearly the same, and while still encouraging the benefits of emphasizing a diversity among people in culture and identity. In order to support the multicultural agenda, Gould was not required to believe that people are genetically different.

The call within the multicultural movement to promote diversity is paralleled in Gould's writing about the importance of recognizing variation.[72] In most of his books, the subject of variation has been of great consequence. He complained that "our culture encodes a strong bias either to neglect or ignore variation."[73] An English professor at a meeting of the Modern Language Association might be expected to say the same about literary voices in a culture. In Gould's work he asked people to see the species as a spectrum of "irreducible variation," and claimed that "variation is primary; essences are illusory." Most liberal universalists, however, believe in an essential human nature that is shared to some extent by the whole species. One might wonder whether the following is from Gould, or from an American Studies panel: "Essentialism establishes criteria for judgment and worth: individual objects that lie close to their essence are good; those that depart are bad, if not unreal. Antiessentialist thinking forces us to view the world differently. We must

[69] For discussions of this, see Ruse, 1999, p. 160; Begley, 1999, p. 194.

[70] Hollinger, 1995, p. x.

[71] For example, Gould, 1977, ch. 29; Hollinger, 1995, p. 39.

[72] I am not suggesting that Gould and the SSG were influenced by the cultural disputes happening on the humanities side of campus. Instead, the cultural war seems to have run parallel on each side of campus at the same time. I am also not arguing that there was no genuine scientific disagreement in this dispute.

[73] Gould, 1996, p. 44.

accept shadings and continua as fundamental. We lose criteria for judgment by comparison to some ideal: short people, retarded people, people of other beliefs, colors, and religions are people of full status."[74]

Gould and the SSG weren't the only critics of sociobiology whose complaints were phrased like those from the humanities. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, for example, has argued that sociobiologists were wrong in their central premise that kin selection shapes social relations. Sociobiologists believe that human genes that are successfully passed from one generation to another are likely to have prompted traits or behavior that helped the individual compete profitably. Because an individual shares some genes with close kin, genes have a greater chance of success if their human host practices kin selection (the genetically prompted tendency to try to help one's close kin succeed long enough to pass related genes into the future). By that logic, sociobiologists endorse the idea that kin selection probably determines some of the important social interaction between humans.

But Sahlins countered that "the structure of social interest is not constituted by individual genetic interests. The ethnographic facts are that the members of the kinship groups which organize human reproduction are more closely related genealogically to persons outside the group than to certain others within," and so "reproductive benefits are often accorded to persons unrelated genetically." That is, many people live in a society in which genetic cohesion is not that important, in the kind of multicultural world of mixed and uncertain genealogy that remains a goal of many Americans with a progressive politics. People in this kind of society have an ethnic and cultural identity, which should be valued and nurtured, but it is an identity that should also be able to be lost in a crowd when that serves the individual's interest. Although we are born who we are, we should also be able to choose who were are. Or as Sahlins puts it, "genealogy is deduced from kinship, rather than kinship from genealogy."[75]

Kinship patterns in the real world, Sahlins insisted, are much sloppier than the orderly relationships calculated by the genes in the theories of sociobiologists. In his own research, Sahlins found that societies had "arbitrary rules of marriage, residence, and descent," and that "each kinship order has accordingly its own theory of hereditary or shared substance, which is never the genetic theory of modern biology." In other words, "the entities of social reproduction are precisely these culturally formulated groups and relations." This is the socially constructed multicultural society. It is a world in which "human reproduction is engaged as the means for the persistence of cooperative social orders, not the social order the means by which individuals

[74] Gould, 1985, pp. 160–161.
[75] Sahlins, 1976, pp. 40, 47.

facilitate their [or their genes'] own reproduction." Human society, in Sahlin's view, is not a genetic construction. "Human society is cultural, unique in virtue of its construction by symbolic means."[76]

The Sociobiology Study Group, therefore, was not alone in its involvement in the cultural debate over the science of sociobiology. But its case is a particularly clear example of scientists engaged in the culture war. The SSG rose out of the New Left, a lineage that is evident in its connections to SESPA and Science for the People, and by its self-conscious involvement in New Left and multicultural issues within its own group – issues such as feminism, racism, anti-elitism, and class issues – as preserved by the minutes of their meetings.

Again, consider the essential similarities between the two sides in the culture war. Humanities professors on the left complained about the inequity in the *inheritance* of canons, authorial voices, and characterizations – structures associated with universalism that are accused of maintaining the status quo and keeping some groups powerless. Similarly, science professors on the left who opposed sociobiology complained about the inequity in the supposed genetic *inheritance* – another concept associated with universalism that is accused of maintaining the status quo and keeping some groups powerless.

On one side of this conflict stood a collection of liberals who often disagreed with each other, but who also supported the values of Enlightenment universalism, a color-blind meritocratic society, a pluralistic but integrationist society. On the other stood a large section of the population who had, in various ways, been influenced by the commitments of the New Left, participatory democracy, positive group identity, multiculturalism, postmodernism, and particularization. As it should be clear to us, this common dispute was waged on both sides of campus, and shared by scientists as well as those in the humanities.

Acknowledgements

For advice on this essay, thanks to John P. Jackson and Michael Ruse.

References

Baxter, A. K. 1974. "Women's Studies and American Studies: The Uses of the Interdisciplinary." *American Quarterly* 26(4).

Beckwith, J. 1986. "The Radical Science Movement in the United States." *Monthly Review* 38(3): 118–128.

[76] Sahlins, 1976, pp. 57, 60–61.

Beckwith, J. 2001. Email to the author, February 23.
Begley, S. 1999. "Three is Not Enough." In *The Biological Basis of Human Behavior*, 2nd edn., ed. R. Sussman, pp. 193–196. Prentice Hall.
Blair, J. G. 1978. "Structuralism, American Studies, and the Humanities." *American Quarterly* 30(3).
Carson, C. 1981. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Harvard University Press.
"Chapter Reports." 1973. *Science for the People* 5(3): 42.
Cohen, R. 1978. "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7: 379.
Croly, H. 1965 (1909). *The Promise of American Life*. Harvard University Press.
Degler, C. 1991. *In Search of Human Nature*. Oxford University Press.
Delbanco, A. 1999. "The Decline and Fall of Literature." *New York Review of Books* (November 4th): 32–38.
Evans, S. 1979. *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*. Knopf.
Forcey, C. 1961. *The Crossroads of Liberalism*. Oxford University Press.
Fox, H. 1970. "SESPA: A History." *Science for the People* 2(4): 2–3.
Gould, S. J. 1977. *Ever Since Darwin*. Norton.
—— 1985. *The Flamingo's Smile*. Norton.
—— 1987. *An Urchin in the Storm*. Norton.
—— 1996. *Full House*. Three Rivers Press.
Greeley, K. and S. Tafler. 1979. "Science for the People – CA Ten Year Retrospective." *Science for the People* 11(1): 18–25.
Haraway, D. J. 1975. "The Transformation of the Left in Science: Radical Associations in Britain in the 30s and the USA in the 60s." *Soundings* 58: 441–462.
Higham, J. 1993. "Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique." *American Quarterly* 45(2): 195–219.
Hollinger, D. 1975. "Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism and the Emergence of the American Liberal Intelligentsia." *American Quarterly* 27(2).
—— 1995. *Postethnic America*. Basic Books.
Horsman, R. 1975. "Scientific Racism and the American Indian in the Mid-Nineteenth Century." *American Quarterly* 27(2).
Jay, G. 1997. *American Literature and the Culture Wars*. Cornell University Press.
Jumonville, N. 1999. *Henry Steele Commager: Midcentury Liberalism and the History of the Present*. University of North Carolina Press.
Karcher, C. L. 1975. "Melville's 'The Gees': A Forgotten Satire on Scientific Racism." *American Quarterly* 27(4).
Kaye, H. L. 1986. *The Social Meaning of Modern Biology*. Yale University Press.
Konner, M. 1999. "Darwin's Truth, Jefferson's Vision." *American Prospect* (July–August): 30–38.
Lewontin, R. 1974a. *The Genetic Basis of Evolutionary Change*. Columbia University Press.
—— 1974b. "A New Battle in an Old War." *Science for the People* (March): 5–7.
—— 1976. "Race and Intelligence." *I.Q.: Scientific or Social Controversy?* (February): 32–38. (Special pamphlet prepared by *Science for the People*.)
—— 1982a. "Are the Races Different?" *Science for the People* (March–April): 10–14.
—— 1982b. *Human Diversity*. Scientific American Library.
—— 1991. *Biology as Ideology*. Toronto: Anansi.
Lewontin, R., S. Rose and L. Kamin. 1984. *Not in Our Genes*. Pantheon.

Linenthal, E. T. and T. Engelhardt, eds. 1996. *History Wars*. Metropolitan Books.
Magazine Coordinating Committee. 1974. "Future Directions for *Science for the People*." *Science for the People* 6(4): 37–38.
McLoughlin, W. G. 1974. "Red Indians, Black Slavery, and White Racism: America's Slaveholding Indians." *American Quarterly* 26(4).
Miller, J. 1987. *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*. Simon and Schuster.
Moore, K. 1996. "Organizing Integrity: American Science and the Creation of Public Interest Organizations, 1955–1975." *American Journal of Sociology* 101(6): 1592–1627.
Novick, P. 1988. *That Noble Dream*. Cambridge University Press.
Ruse, M. 1999. *Mystery of Mysteries*. Harvard University Press.
Sahlins, M. 1976. *The Use and Abuse of Biology*. University of Michigan Press.
Saxton, A. 1975. "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology." *American Quarterly* 27(1).
Schlesinger, A. Jr. 1992. *The Disuniting of America*. Norton.
Schwartz, B. 1986. *The Battle for Human Nature*. Norton.
Searle, J. 1990. "The Storm Over the University." *New York Review of Books* (December 6th): 34–42.
Segerstrale, U. 2000. *Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond*. Oxford University Press.
Shumsky, N. L. 1975. "Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*: Ethnic Tensions on Stage." *American Quarterly* 27(1).
Sociobiology Study Group. 1975–1980. Minutes of Bi-Weekly Meetings. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Freda Salzman Papers.
Stage, S. J. 1975. "Out of the Attic: Studies of Victorian Sexuality." *American Quarterly* 27(4).
Washburn, W. E. 1975. "American Indian Studies: A Status Report." *American Quarterly* 27(3).
Wilson, E. O. 1975. *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Harvard University Press.
—— 1978. *On Human Nature*. Harvard University Press.
—— 1994. *Naturalist*. Island Press.
—— 1998. *Consilience*. Knopf.