

Book reviews

Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature. By Richard C. Lewontin, Steven Rose & Leon J. Kamin. New York Pantheon Books. 1984. xi–322 pp.

This concise and well written book is a critical account of sociobiology and its ideological implications. The authors of the book are, respectively, a geneticist, a neurobiologist, and a psychologist. Each of them has been engaged in activities against sociobiology over the past decade. The present volume is the result of these activities; it is, above all, an attempt to refute sociobiology and, on the other hand, to establish an alternative, a 'liberatory' science of man going beyond sociobiology and genetic determinism.

During the last ten years or so a large number of books and papers has been published against the sociobiologists' claim that human social and cultural behavior is fixed by genetic laws; but this book, I should say, is more provocative than anything else written in opposition to genetic determinism and its ideological interpretation. It is provocative because the authors identify sociobiology with the New Right and, thus, look at sociobiology through an ideological screen. Lewontin *et al.* argue that sociobiology is just a kind of biological determinism which is to be characterized as 'bad science' – or, at least, 'backward science' – and which stem from the bourgeois society and its ideology.

Not in Our Genes is more than a critique of sociobiology. It is an attempt to reconstruct the political (ideological) background of biological determinism and to show that sociobiology is an outcome of European feudalism which – in the authors' opinion – has dominated (Western) society since the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the authors advance the argument that this ideology has been 'both a reflection onto the natural world of the social order that was being built and a legitimizing political philosophy by which the new [bourgeois] order could be seen as following from eternal principles' (p. 42). Finally, today's sociobiological theory, according to Lewontin *et al.*, is nothing else but an undertaking to find such principles or, where they actually cannot be found, simply to maintain that they exist in our genes. Hence sociobiology is said to be a manifesto of the New Right all along the line.

In detail, the authors try to demonstrate that there is an inter-relation between the New Right's movement (particularly, in the United States and in Great Britain) and the sociobiological way of looking at human nature, and that, then, sociobiology is used in order to legitimize a conservative ideology: this is to say to legitimize racism, inequality, patriarchy, and authoritarianism. The authors of *Not in our Genes* are convinced – and try to convince the reader – that 'the general appeal of sociobiology is in its legitimation of the status quo' (p. 236) and that, moreover, its academic as well as popular appeal 'flows directly from its simple reductionist program and its claim that human society as we know it is both inevitable and the result of an adaptive process' (p. 236). These are striking contentions, which, I suspect, will impress many readers.

The book contains ten chapters. A great deal of the book is devoted to analyzing and criticizing bourgeois society and the emergence of conservative ideology. Some background information is provided on the use and abuse of IQ testing – the ‘measurement of inequality’ and its ideological implications – and on theories and therapy of mental illness (in particular, schizophrenia). Chapter nine is a biting critique of contemporary sociobiology and its hero, Edward O. Wilson. However, much is said about sociobiology in the other chapters, too. Finally, the authors try to substantiate their own view of man and human society and to offer an alternative view in contrast to biological determinism.

This is not to say that Lewontin *et al.* dismiss biology and biological contributions to understanding human nature; one should keep in mind that Lewontin himself is a biologist and that he has done important research work particularly in population genetics and evolutionary biology. However, what the authors want to say is that man is not just a ‘genetic machine’ but that he is, too, a creature showing cultural and mental activities beyond biological determinants. The message of *Not in Our Genes*, finally, is that – for the very reason that man in fact is a living being – human nature has preserved the accessibility to freedom: ‘Our biology has made us into creatures who are constantly re-creating our own psychic and material environments, and whose individual lives are the outcomes of an extraordinary multiplicity of intersecting causal pathways. Thus, it is our biology that makes us free’ (p. 290). Undoubtedly, many readers will enjoy such conclusions.

Although I agree with many explanations to be found in this book and despite my own objections to any kind of determinism, I cannot resist at least one critical remark. My critique concerns ideologizing sociobiology.

It may be true that sociobiology is reductionistic; and it may be also true that at least some proponents of sociobiology (particularly, Richard Dawkins in his *The Selfish Gene*, 1976) advocate a deterministic view of life; but I cannot see sociobiology as a mere ideological program. One should remember that sociobiology, above all, is a scientific discipline; it is the attempt to study the social behavior of organisms (man included) with resort to ethology, physiology, genetics, and evolutionary theory. That it might be, and that it has been, abused ideologically, is another story. In *Not in Our Genes*, unfortunately, only the ideological aspects of sociobiology are discussed. But a scientific discipline should not be dismissed just for ideological reasons.

Not in Our Genes serves well for the critical reader – and it should be read and discussed extensively! –, but those who are not yet familiar with the scientific background of sociobiology, when reading the book, will get the impression that sociobiology is nothing but a dangerous pseudoscientific ideology. Michael Ruse in his elucidatory *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense?* (1979) pleaded that sociobiology should be given a chance to prove its worth as a scientific discipline. However, during the last five or six years the sociobiology debate has suffered from ideologizing biological concepts. How about discussing sociobiology apart from ideological claims?

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From Darwin to Behaviourism: Psychology and the Minds of Animals. By Robert Boakes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 279 pp. \$69.50 hardcover; \$19.95 paperback.

With the growth of research in human cognition over the last 20 years, studies of animal thought have once again become respectable. This resurgence in the study of