

# The Animal in the Man

Ullica Segerstråle, *Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond*, Oxford University Press, 2000, 493 pp., \$35.00.

## How a determined minority can thwart science.

reviewed by Thomas Jackson

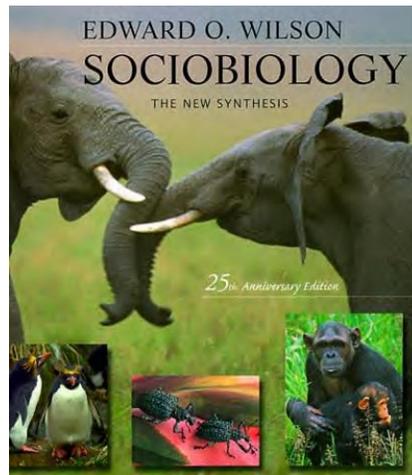
Human behavior, like individual and group differences, has a genetic basis. There is such a thing as human nature, and it has deep roots in human biology. These views were common at the turn of the century, but were more or less banned from Western intellectual discourse, beginning in the 1930s. Only within the last several decades has a genetic understanding of human behavior and human variation made an uncertain and much-resisted return to respectability.

*Defenders of the Truth*, written by a native of Finland who studied chemistry at the University of Helsinki before getting a PhD in sociology of science at Harvard, is an account of this return to respectability. Its story begins with the publication in 1975 of Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, and goes on to recount the unrelenting hostility that met both the book and the scientific school to which it gave rise. It is a long, dense book that, aside from a few obvious gaps, examines the controversy in enormous detail and from virtually every angle. It is a book for specialists, in that Prof. Segerstråle seldom bothers to explain the science about which there was so much disagreement, but it is an invaluable record of how a few well-placed, politically-motivated operators can hold back the advance of knowledge. Prof. Segerstråle, of course, is careful not to put it quite this way. She is excessively generous to the critics of sociobiology, but still describes events in a way that leaves little doubt as to who the villains are.

### The New Synthesis

Just as Arthur Jensen can take the most credit for resurrecting the study of racial differences after the World War II-era blackout, Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson can claim the most credit for reestablishing the scientific connection between genes and human

behavior. His motives for this important achievement may have been surprisingly personal. He is a Southerner who was reared as a Baptist, and was "born-again" at age 15. However, he soon fell away from the faith, and Prof. Segerstråle suggests that it was his desire to find a biological, non-theological basis for morality that drove his interest in



Currently available edition of the book that started the flap.

sociobiology. She says that for him, the chief riddle for understanding behavior in genetic terms was altruism—self-sacrifice for others—which seems contrary to the Darwinian struggle for survival. It was the Englishman William Hamilton and his theory of inclusive fitness through kin selection that gave Prof. Wilson the solution to the riddle.

(Put in the simplest terms, inclusive fitness suggests that genes for altruistic behavior can spread through a population if those who benefit from the altruist's sacrifice are closely-enough related to him to carry the same genes. A man who dies to save his kin or tribe can therefore act to ensure the continuation of his *own* genes because his relatives, who carry the same genes, will survive to reproduce. Obviously, this effect is lost when altruists act for the benefit of strangers and aliens.)

Taking a position that went directly against mainstream social science, Prof. Wilson argued not only that humans have a biological nature but that it is vital to understand it because technology may be running ahead of our natural abili-

ties to cope with it. In direct opposition to the Franz Boas-Margaret Mead-B.F. Skinner view that culture is infinitely variable, Prof. Wilson argued that the moral and cultural choices a society makes are limited by the way we have evolved. In his famous metaphor:

"The genes hold culture on a leash. The leash is very long, but inevitably values will be constrained in accordance with their effects on the human gene pool. The brain is a product of evolution. Human behavior . . . is the circuitous technique by which human genetic material has been and will be kept intact. Morality has no other demonstrable ultimate function."

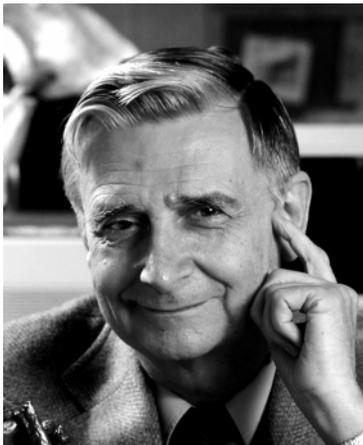
This passage, written three years after the publication of *Sociobiology* but entirely consistent with it, greatly offended spiritually-oriented people who saw in morality the spark of the divine rather than a chance mechanism to keep genes in circulation. It was not they who launched the attack on Prof. Wilson, though, but materialists of a different camp: Marxists who had to assume people were infinitely malleable if they were ever to be shaped into happy members of the classless society.

Leading the attack was biologist Richard Lewontin, who was also at Harvard and had an office in the same building as Prof. Wilson. Prof. Lewontin, an avowed Marxist, was active in forming lefty groups like Science for the People and the Committee against Racism. He was joined in the United States most notably by another avowed Marxist at Harvard, Steven Jay Gould, and in England by Steven Rose.

Although Prof. Segerstråle tries her best to make Prof. Lewontin sound reasonable, what she tells us makes him appear almost a caricature, an ideologue driven by his own politics who is convinced everyone else operates in the same way. He argued that students of IQ simply could not be motivated by genuine scientific interest, and "proved" that Arthur Jensen's research was only a reflection of racist bias. He agreed with fellow lefty and psychologist Leon Kamin that scientists "sometimes tell deliberate lies" in order to advance larger political purposes. With co-author

Richard Levins he was even capable of writing, "As working scientists in the field of evolutionary genetics and ecology, we have been attempting with some success to guide our own research by a conscious application of Marxist philosophy."

This man and people like him had pinned their view of the world on the assumption that both individual and



Edward O. Wilson

group differences in achievement were caused by deliberate oppression. As Prof. Lewontin wrote: "[I]f human social organization, including inequalities of status, wealth, and power, are a direct consequence of our biologies, then, except for some gigantic program of genetic engineering, no practice can make a significant alteration of social structure or of the position of individuals or groups within it." In other words, Marx would be wrong and Marxists dupes—an unacceptable conclusion no matter how powerful the scientific evidence.

At the outset arguments like this, which did not even deal with the biological evidence, were enough for most people. Prof. Segerstråle writes that she was a lefty herself, and was won over by strictly political arguments. (She gives something of the flavor of the times when she describes one of the earnest meetings she attended, with a group of anti-racists all sitting in a circle on the floor. Prof. Lewontin looked uncomfortable and had nothing to say when one of the women complained that it was sexist for the men to be taking over the fight against sociobiology.)

It was great sport to accuse Prof. Wilson and other sociobiologists of "racism" and other crimes. As Prof. Segerstråle points out, any investigation into the genetic causes even of *individual*

differences was "racist" because it opened the door to similar causes for group differences. The lefties were on a crusade and, as Prof. Segerstråle explains, it meant they could cut corners. Perhaps some of them even told deliberate lies. "Within the critical camp," she writes, "there appeared to exist an attitude of 'anything goes' in regard to criticism of sociobiology . . ." She goes on to note "the critics' astounding disregard for the original context of their citations," and describes an assignment she gave her students in 1984. She asked them to compare a critical commentary by S. Chorover of Prof. Wilson's writing with what Prof. Wilson actually wrote. The students—all prepared to hate sociobiology—"were shocked and angry with Chorover, whom they were originally disposed to admire."

As always, "racism" was impossible to define, much less refute: "People [being attacked] could not afford to be very technical about the 'true' definition of racism—even to discuss it would seem racist!" Likewise, people who were privately appalled by name-calling as a substitute for debate were afraid to defend Prof. Wilson and his circle: "Defend someone as not being racist and you automatically come under suspicion for racism yourself."

Prof. Segerstråle makes the interesting point that in science, if you are not able to offer solutions of your own, there is not usually much reward for pointing out the errors of others. Criticism of sociobiology was different. It offered no solutions—its purpose was pure destruction—but lefties did it because the evils it represented were so monstrous even a purely negative enterprise had great moral rewards: "One reason why the critics were so hectically construing Wilson as a racist, sexist, IQ meritocrat—*anything* maximally undesirable—was that this would increase the prize awarded the revealer of such miscreants." It is in this context that Prof. Lewontin cheerfully admits to Prof. Segerstråle that his criticism of Prof. Wilson was deliberately "nasty." He tried to strengthen flimsy scientific arguments by wrapping them in the language of contempt.

There was considerable irony in attacking Prof. Wilson as a politically-motivated lackey of the ruling class. First of all, it should have been an empirical question as to what sort of politics he and other sociobiologists pur-

sued, but the critics had no interest in this. Driven as they were by ideological frenzy, they could not imagine any other motive. Another irony is that the Marxists, who were so obviously wearing political blinders, thought Marxism freed them from political bias and gave them a unique tool with which to detect the biases of others.

In fact, Prof. Wilson and Richard Dawkins, a British sociobiologist whom the Marxists attacked with equal vigor, are committed liberals. In *Sociobiology*, Prof. Wilson downplayed IQ and even took an early lead in promoting the view that race is not a biologically valid concept. He referred to William Shockley as "the notorious racist." He claimed that even if there were genetic predispositions for unfashionable behavior, genetic knowledge would help us combat it:

"If there is a possible hereditary tendency to acquire xenophobia and nationalist feelings, it is a *non sequitur* to interpret such a hypothesis as an argument in favor of racist ideology. It is more reasonable to assume that a knowledge of such a hereditary basis can lead to circumvention of destructive behavior such as racism . . ."

It is, of course, a *non sequitur* for Prof. Wilson to jump from hereditary xenophobia to whatever he means by "racist ideology," but nothing Prof. Wilson himself said could possibly shield him from obloquy. At the same time, Prof. Segerstråle makes a strong case for the view that Prof. Wilson had no idea how much shrieking would greet his views. He certainly appears to have had no personal zeal for defending patriarchy, propping up capitalism, or any of the political sins with which he was charged. Not surprisingly, during the 1980s he went back to studying ants, his true love—though he once more turned to humans in his 1998 book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*.

In the mean time, there was so much power in the genetic and evolutionary explanations of human behavior that the left, try as it might, could not strangle the infant science in its crib. It made such a stink over the name sociobiology, though, that people following in Prof. Wilson's footsteps tried to take cover under different names: evolutionary psychology, behavior genetics, behavioral ecology.

As the field gained momentum, the critics were forced to attack it not just on political but scientific grounds. Prof.

Segerstråle describes some of these battles but shows that many critics were never able to separate politics from science. People like Professor Lewontin and Stephen Jay Gould have insisted on impossibly high scientific standards exclusively for genetic explanations of behavior. Prof. Lewontin has even argued that such explanations cannot be considered valid or even plausible unless there is proof “at the molecular level.” Such proof will eventually come, thanks to human genome research, but it is pure obscurantism to insist until then that behavior genetics must be false. As Prof. Segerstråle delicately puts it: “[S]o perhaps might we interpret the critics’ unusually strict criteria for ‘good science’ as an attempt to hold back potentially undesirable results.”

It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that the most hysterical critics were simply afraid of the truth. Like media operatives who consistently downplay any news that doesn’t fit their politics, Marxists are like the famous early critic of evolution who said, “I pray that it not be true; and I pray that if it be true it never become widely known.” Prof. Wilson was of the traditionalist school that believes knowledge is always better than ignorance, and that truth should be pursued no matter where it leads. This is an essentially democratic view: “I trust the common man,” he once said. “These ideologues, even if they talk about fighting for the masses—they don’t trust *anybody*. They don’t trust democracy, they don’t trust the judgment of educated citizens—they really are *elitists*.”

So, what is the status of the controversy today? Prof. Segerstråle, again delicately, writes about “a relative vindication of the sociobiologists unfairly accused at the beginning of the controversy.” She even quotes Max Planck’s famous 1949 dictum: “New scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”

However, her excessively evenhanded approach is reflected in the title of her book, *Defenders of the Truth*. “The characters in my story,” she writes, “are all defenders of the truth—it is just that they have different conceptions of where the truth lies.” This is not only unscientific, it is just plain silly. She does it as gently as possible, but Prof.

Segerstråle makes it clear that one side of the controversy was not only wrong, but underhanded, mean-spirited, and politically driven. To talk of “different conceptions of where the truth lies” is spineless.

Prof. Segerstråle offers a half-hearted defense of the critics’ political and moral criticisms by saying that a moral perspective is always useful and that criticism helped sharpen the sociological argument. This completely ignores the incalculable damage caused by years of intellectual bomb-throwing. There is probably no better way to silence or terrify an opponent than to accuse him of “racism,” or “Nazism,” which was done freely and recklessly by the opponents of sociobiology. Prof. Segerstråle makes it clear that these accusations caused much suffering, but the people who made them were “defenders of the truth,” after all, and it would be wrong to hold them to account.

Prof. Segerstråle attended the famous 1978 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at which Edward Wilson was to speak:

“Just as Wilson is about to begin, about ten people rush up on the speaker podium shouting various epithets and chanting: ‘Racist Wilson you can’t hide, we charge you with genocide!’ While some take over the microphone and denounce sociobiology, a couple of them rush up behind Wilson (who is sitting in his place) and pour a jug of ice-water over his head, shouting ‘Wilson, you are all wet.’”

How many people kept their “racist” opinions to themselves for fear of similar treatment? How much science did *not* happen because so many people—just as Prof. Segerstråle admits happened to her—were convinced by name-calling alone that sociobiology was bad science? How much nurturist nonsense is still circulating because of the incendiary tactics of its promoters? Scientists, like everyone else, want quiet lives and may trim their views and shift their research in order to get them. This hobbles science in terrible ways but Prof. Segerstråle doesn’t seem to recognize this.

Another defect in Prof. Segerstråle’s analysis is that despite an otherwise exhaustive account of the controversy that attempts to examine it from every perspective, she ignores the ethnic one. Is it pure coincidence that the most vocal opponents of sociobiology—Richard

Lewontin, Stephen Gould, Steven Rose, Leon Kamin—were Jews? She notes it was common to claim that any recognition that humans were not completely free actors but constrained by human nature could be used as an exoneration of the Nazis, who had to be held fully accountable for their acts. Who would have come up with this labored argument? Prof. Segerstråle mentions that Steven Rose was worried sociobiology could lead to a “repetition of the tragedies of the 1930s,” but might Jews have a particular interest in wishing that they not be repeated? For a book that seeks to explore every ramification and implication, this one must have been deliberately omitted.

Finally, Prof. Segerstråle lets the Marxists off too easily. What, in Heaven’s name, would a Marxist science of the kind Profs. Lewontin and Levins wanted look like? How could it be anything but a blinkered, blundering waste of time? Marxists believe in the labor theory of value, the inevitable triumph of the proletariat, *scientific* socialism, the withering away of the state, and all sorts of other goofiness. Lysenkoism is the perfect example of Marxist science. Given what we now know about the direction in which genetic research has progressed, as well as the total wrong-headedness of all of Marx’ predictions and the failure of everything built in his name, it takes a curiously simple mind not to express some doubt about the in-



Ullica Segerstråle

tellectual foundations of biologists who continue to call themselves Marxists.

This said, *Defenders of the Truth* is an extremely valuable book. It is a pity it tries so hard to excuse villainy, but Prof. Segerstråle gives us so many facts her occasional lapses in judgment need not obscure our view. The war against science is far from over, and this is a live dispatch from a battle that, at long last, is verging on victory. 

# The Color of Death

## What the double standards tell us.

by Jared Taylor

Double standards on race are so commonplace it is almost tedious to point them out, but some are impossible to ignore. Violent death takes on a different coloring, shall we say, depending on the races of the actors, as two recent incidents demonstrate.

On June 16, a black 17-year-old named Raynard Johnson hanged himself from a tree in front of his house in Kokomo, in southern Mississippi. His father came home while the body was still warm and rushed him to the hospital but doctors could not revive him. Just half an hour earlier, he had been watching television inside the house with a cousin. His body showed no signs of a struggle, and two separate autopsies concluded the death was entirely consistent with suicide.

His father insisted the boy had been lynched by whites angry about his reported friendship with two white girls. He claims to believe that during the half hour Raynard was outside, a lynch mob strung up the boy so skillfully and so noiselessly they left no mark, and the cousin never heard a sound. There was, in short, *no* evidence of murder; only accusations.

This was enough for Janet Reno, who has met with the parents, and set the FBI on the trail of the racists. It was enough for Jesse Jackson, who charged around town leading demonstrations, accusing whites of murder, and claiming local authorities could not possibly investigate the death fairly. It was enough for black congressmen like John Conyers of Michigan and Maxine Waters of California who also met the family and have considered calling for a congressional investigation. And it was enough for the *Washington Post*, which printed a worried cover story about the possible lynching as well as a long, page-three followup. It was almost enough for Al Sharpton, who was supposed to come to Kokomo but changed his plans.

It required no less a personage than Mississippi Governor Ronnie Musgrove finally to hold a press conference on July 26 and announce that the official conclusion was suicide. Col. L. M. Claiborne, commander of the Mississippi Highway Patrol and himself black, said the state had, "exhausted all rumors and exhausted all leads," and pronounced the case closed. Along the way, it turned out that two hours before the boy killed himself, his black girlfriend told him she was in love with someone else. Jesse Jackson still thinks it was murder, and says the investigation must continue, but there is probably not much mileage for him left in this story.

It is impossible not to notice the contrast with the murder of a 10-year-old white boy, Kevin Shifflett, which we mentioned in the previous issue's "O Tempora" section. On April 19, a black man walked up to Kevin as he played at his great-grandparents' home in a quiet residential area of Alexandria, Virginia, and slit his throat. Witnesses told police he said something about hating whites as he killed the third-grader, but investigators did not release this information to the public and actually told the press they thought race had nothing to do with the killing.

After an extensive manhunt police now think 29-year-old Gregory Devon Murphy is the killer. Among his possessions when he was arrested on a different charge, was a note including the words "kill them raccess whiate kidd's anyway." Until just 12 days before the attack on Kevin, Mr. Murphy had been in jail, where he spent several years for calling a stranger "whitey" and attacking him with a hammer.

The Kevin Shifflett case has all the makings of the purest form of racial hate crime. Mr. Murphy did not know Kevin; he appears only to have wanted to "kill them raccess whiate kidd's." The murder of a child is particularly loathsome, and the entire neighborhood was horrified. But for some reason Janet Reno has not met Kevin's parents. There is no FBI hate-crime investigation, and the *Washington Post* covered the story

only because it is local news. Needless to say, there have been no demonstrations by angry whites demanding death for the killer or denouncing his motive.

Why are the cases so different? The press reaction reflects a media routine that is now so old even "conservatives" take it for granted: Play up white mischief but play down black mischief. This is supposed to be good for America because our country is full of bigoted whites looking for an excuse to vent their prejudices and mistreat blacks. Therefore, if at all possible whites must never hear or see anything that could justify a low opinion of blacks. To publicize black crime, especially anti-white black crime, might provoke whites to all manner of mayhem and is like letting children play with dynamite.

At the same time, whites must be reminded over and over just how racist they are, so they will feel guilty and stop being racist. This is why it is a public service to turn a black teen-ager's suicide into one more reason to hector whites about their wickedness. As Samuel Francis pointed out in a July 18 column about these two cases, "if the right hate crimes don't exist, the newspapers will have to invent them."

Let us be charitable and assume that editors and bureaucrats who distort the news are merely stupid. They sincerely believe that blacks are so noble and long-suffering they could not possibly be provoked to anti-white violence no matter how often they are told how bad whites are. Whites, on the other hand, are more volatile, which is why the dynamite must be kept from the baby. There is no telling what whites might get up to if they hear bad news about blacks, but blacks can hear endless dirt about whites and still love and forgive.

Of course, public reaction shows how wrong this is. It is blacks who are hair-triggered, bellowing about "racism" on the flimsiest grounds and demanding investigations, punishment, reparations, and apologies. Jesse Jackson had no trouble rounding up 1,000 demonstrators—in Mississippi in the blazing heat—demanding "justice" for the imaginary killers of Raynard Johnson. Whites *never* do this. Not even the most gruesome, obviously hate-driven outrage

