

COMMENT: On Alexander's Response.

by L.B. Slobodkin

I believe there is no serious dispute as to the theoretical validity of such concepts as kin selection nor any serious argument as to the mechanisms of population genetics that underlie human, as well as all other, evolution. The contrast that is now made apparent between my views, Alexander's views, and Wilson's views indicates that the deep breakthroughs that Alexander refers to have resulted in neither unanimity of opinion nor complete clarification of the old vexed problems of human evolution. I am very pleased that Alexander has clarified my misunderstanding of his position.

I am heartened to realize that I was not alone in my consideration that the work of Alexander might be interpreted to imply a genetic determinism. As Alexander states, I was careful to cite the relevant references so that the reader can judge for himself. One of the central purposes of my article was to demonstrate on biological grounds that no one can speak monolithically for all evolutionary biologists. I chose to discuss Alexander's papers since, by their relative brevity, they would be easier to read for those readers that wanted to check my assertions. The very thickness of Wilson's book--which contributes to the seriousness with which his viewpoints are taken--makes it difficult for readers to pin down his ideas precisely. Alexander has now shown that not only are evolutionary biologists not united tightly about the opinion of E.O. Wilson, but that even within the group that studies social biology, opinion is sharply divided--at least on the practical level.

I have focused in my paper on certain aspects of biology which Alexander takes for granted. The precise mechanism by which different genes differ in how they relate to the environment is of great importance to the body of my argument. The distinction between aggression as a personal act between two individuals and aggression as a political act between two groups I find of great importance.

I am concerned with the evolutionary problem posed by the capacity to have designs and purpose, while Alexander simply assumes this capacity, and we both agree that it is this capacity which frees mankind from genetic determinism.

I do not believe that the term "genetic determinism" necessarily implies a 100% type of determinism. Alexander notes that E.O. Wilson seems to be a 10-15% determinist (whatever that might mean).

It is most important that Alexander states that genetic determinism is not in any sense a necessary concomitant of a concern with human or behavioral evolution.

There are technical points on which I could ask for clarification and others with which I may have slight arguments, but I am certainly not going to touch them all. This is meant to be a coda, not a cadenza.