

Preface

This book expresses my fascination with certain persistent Western ways of thinking about the relationship between biology and culture. Work that began as an excursion into contemporary nature/nurture controversies soon linked itself to my ethnographic and historical research in Spain and grew into an analysis of the nature/nurture debate as an element in Western culture.

Much is at stake in this controversy. The persistence of the nature/nurture debate, apparently overcoming centuries of scientific attempts to break out of its constraints, tells us much about the ways key cultural notions persist where political and moral ideologies are involved. It also shows how complex the relationship between biological science and culture truly is. We are biocultural animals trying to understand how biology and culture interact and we are consistently derailed by the persistence of certain cultural construals of these relationships.

The project began in 1976, when Cornell University introduced a major called Biology and Society and I was asked to devise a core course on biocultural perspectives for upper-level students with strong

backgrounds in the biological sciences. These efforts showed me that there is a small set of recipes for biocultural arguments. The particular branch of biological science involved in the debate matters very little because political and moral issues form the real though often hidden centerpiece. I learned that if one enters this territory on the terms of the combatants, the resulting argument, whether biological determinist or cultural determinist, is both predictable and unrelated to the lessons of evolutionary biology.

Determinist and antideterminist positions also share many more features than would initially seem possible. Concepts of nature and human nature are used in strategically similar ways and the legitimating force of science is appealed to by both sides.

The conjunction of these points suggests a larger issue. In many respects, it appears that the pro- and antideterminist views are not two separate cultural systems in conflict; rather the debate itself is one single cultural system whose central feature is the nature/culture controversy. Scientifically, politically, and morally, these views depend on one another to such an extent that without the loyal opposition, each view dissolves into incoherence. Nature without culture or culture without nature cannot be conceived.

In this work I make extensive use of textual materials interspersed with commentary and analysis. Part I provides a general contrast between pre-evolutionary and evolutionary views of the world through a juxtaposition of humoral theories with the theories found in some of Darwin's major works. Darwin's writings serve as a point of contrast with the pre-evolutionary views and as a set of standards to be applied to contemporary views.

Though one would not think so, this kind of perspective on Darwin is not easy to come by. Darwin suffers from his own celebrity. For most audiences, his ideas are so famous that his works are rarely read. For others, Darwin's worth is measured historically. He provided the first coherent formulation of the theory of evolution that was able to convince a large audience. But "first" also implies "now out of date." Population and molecular biology, ethology, evolutionary ecology, and sociobiology have taken us so far beyond Darwin on so many points that those who view the development of science as a progressive process can see no reason to read his works. Darwin takes his place be-

side the other great heroes of modern science in a pantheon that is worshiped rather than studied.

Darwin deserves to be reread now, not because he was right about the details of many aspects of the evolutionary process or because he was free of social and moral bias, but because his basic presentation of the structure and requirements of a genuinely evolutionary view of nature has never been bettered. Darwin moved the audiences of his time not simply by his patient accumulation of evidence but by his construction of a view of the world that was capable of overturning much of what was thought before. By comparison, many contemporary statements on evolution, though quite exact about DNA and RNA, are primitive as statements of the evolutionary view.

Part II brings together a diverse set of texts dealing with the question of race, constitutional types, and ethnic and national character. These materials show that pre-evolutionary conceptualizations of the relationship between nature and culture persist in some areas with no modification whatever. This form of persistence is referred to as "simple continuity."

Part III examines two pre-evolutionary views of the natural basis of social order and two contemporary attempts at biocultural synthesis. The first texts center on the idea that social order reflects purity of blood. Others portray an egalitarian social order based on Christian equality before God. These texts are compared with the works of E. O. Wilson and Marvin Harris.

The juxtaposition of Wilson's and Harris' work with the pre-evolutionary texts and those of Darwin provides clear evidence that these contemporary thinkers construct nature and culture in ways that have more in common with the pre-evolutionary texts than with anything in evolutionary theory. Despite my belief in the sincerity of the intentions of both authors, I argue that the claimed evolutionism in their work is an illusion based on the adoption of a few evolutionary terms rather than on the acceptance of the full implications of an evolutionary view of the world. I call this form of persistence "complex continuity."

To make this point, I could have included any of hundreds of works, since these controversies have raged for centuries. I have chosen to examine Wilson's human sociobiology and Harris' cultural material-

ism because their views have generated such wide interest. Analysis of the works of Ashley Montagu, Robert Ardrey, Konrad Lorenz, Desmond Morris, Anthony Storr, Jacob Bronowski, Arthur Jensen, and many others might have served as well. It was tempting to include the most recent debate in this arena, that between Margaret Mead's supporters and Derek Freeman (Mead 1928, Freeman 1982), but there will always be yet another of these debates to deal with unless the very terms in which they are cast are challenged. I hope to provide such a challenge.

Textual analysis has intrinsic limitations. Texts must be selected from an immense inventory. Assumptions about context and authorial intention are unavoidable. Multiple readings are possible, even necessary. Texts are not determinate phenomena amenable to some transparent technology of interpretation. My analyses of these sets of texts are simply my analyses, to be accepted or rejected on the basis of other readings and juxtapositions with other texts.

Finally, the argument of this work is historical, but only in a limited sense. The comparison of the three major sets of texts is intentionally chronological in order to emphasize the persistence of nonevolutionary ideas in the works of contemporary scholars. A narrative history of these developments would take quite a different form and would be a contribution to the standard genre of the history of science. The obligations implied in the writing of narrative history would distract attention from the points to be made in the comparison of the texts. Should the analysis prove convincing, the narrative history would then have to be written with these points in mind.

Bringing this book to press has been difficult. Because it is sharply critical of both sides of the nature/nurture debate, it appeals to few active participants. I criticize both scholars whose political and moral stances I find objectionable and those whose stances I applaud. Despite the risks, we cannot permit the suspension of intellectual standards simply because the participants believe the issues to be so important that "winning is the only thing." In fact, I believe they are so crucial that we can no longer afford the frivolity of repeating nature/nurture homilies to ourselves.

Pilar Fernández-Cañadas de Greenwood has seen me through this effort with her enthusiasm for intellectual debate, collaboration in

research, and detailed editorial suggestions. My son, Alex, understands and supports my passion for these issues.

Walter Lippincott, Jr., director of Cornell University Press, believes that some academic books should be published because they can promote intellectual debate. In an area where peer reviews often yield contradictory advice, he judged that mine is an argument that deserves a public hearing. An author cannot ask for more.

Successive generations of Cornell students in Biology and Society 301: The Biocultural Perspective have had these ideas arrayed before them. Both their enthusiasm and their questions have enabled me to clarify the issues.

Barbara Salazar's expert editing of the manuscript has eased the reader's task. Coraleen Rooney's word-processing skill made my work much simpler.

Many colleagues have been involved with parts of this project. Among those who have offered stimulation and advice are James Boon, William Durham, Sander Gilman, David Holmberg, Edmund Leach, Eric Smith, Bruce Winterhalder, and Aram Yengoyan.

The teachings and friendship of Julio Caro Baroja, to whom this book is dedicated, have been an inspiration to me always.

DAVYDD J. GREENWOOD

Ithaca, New York