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Review of *Sociobiology and the Social Sciences* by Robert W. Bell and Nancy J. Bell

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BOOK REVIEWS

Sociobiology and the Social Sciences. Robert W. Bell and Nancy J. Bell, eds. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1989. 130 pp. \$25.00 cloth (ISBN 0-89672-161-2).

The application of evolutionary theory of inclusive fitness to understanding human social behavior has seen a recent resurgence in anthropology, psychology, and sociology. While sociobiological theory and research are still incipient in these disciplines, the perspective has received enough attention to warrant all social scientists becoming more acquainted with the theory and methods of the practicing sociobiologist. The title and modest size of this book (only 130 pages) suggest that it might serve well for this purpose. It contains seven original papers by practicing sociobiologists written for an audience not well versed in the evolutionary model. While terms are carefully defined and perspectives developed with little jargon, the scope of the papers is (with the exception of the more general paper by Lopreato) much narrower than the title would suggest. The focus is on social psychological issues related to mate selection, reproductive behavior, and child rearing. Of course, these topics are central to sociobiological models which are fundamentally concerned with the transmission of biological traits that confer a reproductive advantage.

Several of the papers do a good job of showing how research in psychology and social psychology can benefit from an evolutionary perspective. Kendrick, in his paper on sexual attraction, uses the methods of the survey and experiments to show how the effects of dominance and aggressiveness on sexual attractiveness can be separated in ways which allow testing hypotheses derived from a sociobiological perspective. Thornhill and Thornhill pose the question of why humans experience psychological pain and show how studies of the amount of distress experienced by victims of rape conform to hypotheses. The Wilson paper makes use of criminal records and demographic evidence to support predictions from sociobiological theory about spousal homicide. Daly uses a similar approach to examine the subject of parent-offspring violence. These papers appear to make sound contributions to sociobiology by testing hypotheses that can not be readily derived from social or cultural models.

Two other papers prove to be less sound methodologically and do little to convince those recently introduced to the evolutionary perspective of its predictive validity or value. Lancaster, in looking at single-parenthood, asserts that the available anthropological evidence is completely consistent with expectations from evolutionary theory. However, all of these predictions could easily be derived from a rational theory or cost-benefit economic model. For example, the increased rates of single-parenthood that arises when males must earn a living away from the local areas does not require an evolutionary explanation since simple demographics and economics can suffice to explain the pattern. Finally, the paper by Essock and McGuire on reproductive histories of depressed women is puzzling and methodologically weak. While they show that depressed women have more socially disturbed lives, less sexual partners, and fewer children than normal women, this provides little if any evidence for embracing a evolutionary model or preferring it over other equally compelling and parsimonious explanations.

In sum, the book accomplishes some of what it tries to do and some of the papers are testimony to the value of the perspective of evolutionary biology. However, this is counterbalanced by two weak papers whose methodological and conceptual weaknesses only serve to provide more fuel for the many critics of the sociobiological perspective. **David R. Johnson**, *Department of Sociology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.