“Your Critique of Sociobiology Makes No Sense”

Perhaps I have severely misunderstood your critique on sociobiology, but as I interpreted it, it makes no sense. From the sociobiologist proposition that all human nature and behavior is shaped solely by evolutional necessity (and what promotes reproduction and survival), it does not follow, as you have asserted, that any significant hope and meaning in life is precluded. I don’t know what kind of a faculty member you were talking to, but the question you posed (“What difference does it make if I’ve reproduced once I’m dead?”) is an easy one to answer. The goal of humanity, as believed by sociobiologists, is to pass on its genetic legacy. No single organism is particularly important, but only the collaborative propagation of a species of its genes. Therefore, the difference of whether or not one has reproduced by the time of death is a crucial one. One who dies and leaves no offspring does not pass on any genetic legacy, and is truly, in an evolutionary sense, dead. Those who do leave offspring and die are able to, in an evolutionary sense, live on vicariously through the genes that they pass on to their young, and the genetic legacy continues.

In response to the philospher’s division of life purpose into ‘small letters’ (survival/reproduction) and ‘capital letters’ (ultimate meaning and significance, whatever that means), the sociobiological assertion is that survival and reproduction is the ultimate meaning and significance of life. I think one of your crucial errors is that you assume that knowledge of the cause and origins of human nature actually change the validity of human nature itself, and somehow make our ambitions less “lofty. Well, our nature is what it is and we do what we do. We love our children and spouses with all our hearts, and if we do so only for the sake of evolutionary efficacy, than so

be it, but our feelings do not therefore become false and invalid. We at times act selflessly and help others at the expense of ourselves. But if this behavior is ultimately 'genetically selfish,' ostensibly helping others while really benefiting ourselves, than so be it, but these feelings are nevertheless meaningful. A principal proposition of sociobiology is that we have motives to act of which we are not always consciously aware. That does not mean they do not exist, and if they do exist, then following them does not make our lives inherently worthless.

Perhaps the sociobiological argument is not particularly aesthetically pleasing (which I think is really your main objection), but this is not by any means grounds for a scientific rebuttal.

Sincerely and respectfully,

_____, Ph.D.
I believe you are the first to question my critique along these lines. I will attempt to answer your objections in the body of your initial message.

> *Perhaps I have severely misunderstood your critique on sociobiology, but as I interpreted it, it makes no sense. From the sociobiologist proposition that all human nature and behavior is shaped solely by evolutional necessity (and what promotes reproduction and survival), it does not follow, as you have asserted, that any significant hope and meaning in life is precluded. I don't know what kind of a faculty member you were talking to,*

He was the head of the department of ecology and evolution.

> *but the question you posed ("what difference does it make if I've reproduced once I'm dead?") is an easy one to answer.*

To be clear, my question was "Once I am dead and in the ground

(implying that in a naturalistic worldview since there is no afterlife, my life is absolutely over), what difference does it make to me NOW?”

> *The goal of humanity, as believed by sociobiologists, is to pass on its genetic legacy. No single organism is particularly important,*

Precisely why I made my question very personal.

> *but only the collaborative propagation of a species of its genes. Therefore, the difference of whether or not one has reproduced by the time of death is a crucial one.*

Not to the species but to me, but I no longer exist.

> *One who dies and leaves no offspring does not pass on any genetic legacy, and is truly, in an evolutionary sense, dead.*

So what? My genes are not me, they are just molecules. If, as E. O. Wilson summarized in *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, The organism is just DNA’s way of making more DNA, then I don’t really matter anyway. And once I am dead and no longer exist (organism), nothing makes any difference to me since I do not exist. That is why the professor said that “ultimately” it doesn’t really matter. He got the gist of my question.

> *Those who do leave offspring and die are able to, in an evolutionary sense, live on vicariously through the genes that they pass on to their young, and the genetic legacy continues.*

I don’t live vicariously in my genes. They are now part of a new unique creature that combines my genes with a woman’s genes in a new and totally unique combination. Even a clone would not be exactly “me” since mutations and recombinations would have occurred, erasing my genetic identity.

> *In response to the philospher's division of life purpose into 'small letters' (survival/reproduction) and 'capital letters' (ultimate meaning and significance, whatever that means),*

Some meaning for existence beyond the mere physical.

> *the sociobiological assertion is that survival and reproduction is the ultimate meaning and significance of life.*

But as I state in the article, without some meaning for life that arises outside of ourselves, there is no meaning in small letters. If we are just molecules, then that's it! We are just molecules, nothing more can be said about us. How those molecules get arranged or persist or are annihilated is totally irrelevant to the ongoing history of the universe. Nothing cares and nothing therefore matters.

> *I think one of your crucial errors is that you assume that knowledge of the cause and origins of human nature actually change the validity of human nature itself, and somehow make our ambitions less "lofty."*

How can this not be so? From Darwin to today, evolution is said to be without direction and without purpose and we are mere accidents of history. This is not a conclusion of evidence, but of philosophy. For many it is a specific attempt to remove any form of God from the equation of who we are and where we came from. Once that is done we are free to make our own rules. When Richard Dawkins writes that Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist, he means it, at least partially, for the purpose of the freedom from any kind of imposed morality. Dawkin's watchmaker is not only blind, but totally without sympathy to whatever outcome comes about through natural selection. Specifically as to whether I reproduce or not.

> *Well, our nature is what it is and we do what we do. We love our children and spouses with all our hearts, and if we do so only for the sake of evolutionary efficacy, than so be it, but our feelings do not therefore become false and invalid.*

Certainly it becomes false and invalid, because I am only being manipulated by my genes which have been formed by thousands of generations. I am not really choosing, just reacting according the program established by natural selection.

> *We at times act selflessly and help others at the expense of ourselves. But if this behavior is ultimately 'genetically selfish,' ostensibly helping others while really benefiting ourselves, than so be it, but these feelings are nevertheless meaningful.*

How can they be "meaningful" if they are ultimately selfish and not altruistic at all? That's why Trivers adds the word "reciprocal" in front of the word because simple altruism no longer exists in a sociobiological world.

> *A principal proposition of sociobiology is that we have motives to act of which we are not always consciously aware. That does not mean they do not exist, and if they do exist, then following them does not make our lives inherently worthless.*

Certainly they exist, but their source is crucially important. If I pull the string on a Chatty Cathy doll and she says, "I love you," does she really love me? Of course not. But we are no different according to sociobiology. We are both complex arrangements of molecules uttering responses based on an internal program conditioned to respond to outside stimuli (pulling a string or gazing at our newborn's cute and cuddly face).

> *Perhaps the sociobiological argument is not particularly aesthetically pleasing (which I think is really your main objection), but this is not by any means grounds for a scientific rebuttal.*

Indeed, it is not aesthetically pleasing, but sometimes truth is hard to take, agreed. But that is not my problem. There is no purpose beyond survival and reproduction which is merely an illusion perpetrated on us by our brains which has been constructed by natural selection to simply aid survival and reproduction, not to recognize truth. And our entire body doesn't really matter, just our genes which are simply reproducing themselves because that's just what DNA does. But DNA is just a mindless molecule with no purpose or goal or direction. How then can we have any?

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries