

Book reviews

***Why Sex Matters. A Darwinian Look at Human Behavior* by Bobbi S. Low. Princeton University Press, 2000, 412 pp. ISBN 0691028958**

This book is not primarily about sex but about the deeper repercussions of sex differences on the human condition. When writing or reviewing a book the first question that comes into mind is who the intended reader is. The answer is to be found in the preface: 'I would like to reach scholars in the traditional human disciplines with concepts that may be new and tantalizing to them'. The author believes that such cross-scientific insights may be important for solving familiar problems, and the problems that need solution are not foremost scientific, but those of the world: overpopulation, resource consumption and depletion.

Thus arises the feeling throughout the book of a double agenda — to inform about the evolutionary background to human behaviour and to highlight why evolved behaviour may be in conflict with long-term persistence. For instance, an interesting section of the book deals with altruism and sorts out the 'group selection muddle' which is an intellectual endeavour in its own right. However, for Low this is not enough: 'There is a distinct and disturbing possibility that policy suggestions will be based on unrealistic assumptions that we all regulate our personal behavior for the group's good'.

Ranging from explanations of who got branded as a witch in the Middle Ages to why men (and why almost always exclusively men) behave as they do in war, this book aims to explain a great deal of human behavior. As it is researched with both breadth and depth of scholarship, it achieves this aim quite well.

However, and this is the main criticism of the book, it uses induction to convince the reader of why biology can explain a large part of human behavior. It does not matter how many examples are cited that support this thesis, you are still left with a feeling that something is missing. As has been pointed out by quite a few philosophers of science, a more convincing case would be made if it was shown why other explanations would not do the job just as well. For instance, where are the hypotheses of the social sciences and where is the data to refute them?

The book starts out with a somewhat abridged account of evolutionary theory and explains what this paradigm would lead us to expect concerning human behavior, if humans are a polygynous species. Darwin noted that while females generally seek a secure environment to raise their offspring, the primary focus of many males is how to gain reproductive access to females. One obvious solution to this male problem is to somehow take control of the secure environment or any other resource that females need.

But in species where the reproductive interests of males and females converge, cooperation between the sexes to acquire and defend resources can evolve. In such species differences between the sexes are expected to be minute. Conversely, in species where the male can, for example, monopolize resources sufficient for several females, the result is commonly a conflict of interest over reproduction between males and females, and sexual differences will evolve over time.

A note for fellow feminists: as Low points out, all you need to accept at this point is that males and females have gametes of different sizes, i.e.

sperm and eggs, and all the rest follows logically. The crux of the matter is not the theory itself, but to show that humans have a reproductive conflict of interest between males and females. *Why Sex Matters* functions as a catalogue of studies, many of them conducted by the author, showing that males and females really do have conflicts of interest and that this has consequences for many aspects of human behavior and society. As the main thrust of the book unfolds, you find yourself immersed in a plethora of studies ranging from co-operation to war in societies as diverse as ancient Rome and the Yanomamö of the Amazon. The variation of human societies seems without limit, and yet on closer inspection striking similarities unfold, which reflect general biological patterns as well as our species-specific evolutionary past.

The book is thus a well-written case-in-point for evolutionary explanations of human behavior, and perhaps it is best viewed as a summary of a research field and a reference work for anyone the least bit interested in the rationales for human actions. As such, the book does great service.

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***Agriculture and world trade liberalisation. Socio-environmental perspectives on the common agricultural policy*, Edited by M.R. Redclift, J.N. Lekakis and G.P. Zaniias, CABI Publishing, Wallingford, UK, 1999, 269 pp. ISBN 0-85199-297-8**

Agriculture in the EU is facing a formidable set of challenges. At the same time as it has to adapt to the liberalisation of world trade called for by the major exporting countries, and to the enlargement of the union to the East, domestically the environmental impact of intensive agriculture and the preservation of the landscape is being high-

lighted. Add to this the uncertainties related to the new biotechnologies, such as genetically modified crops, as well as to the future development of world demand for food, and you can imagine the difficulties faced by the CAP-reformers. For each farmer these pressures are creating a bifurcation between the role of a specialised producer for distant markets and the role of a local environmental manager. Trade liberalisation pushes him towards one role, while public concerns and willingness to pay subsidies drive him in another direction.

The contributions to *Agriculture and World Trade Liberalisation* elucidate the problems, but are themselves as schizophrenic. There is rough division between a liberalisation camp, which seems to have only minor worries about the environmental challenges, and a camp of environmentalists who fear that liberalisation could undermine that biodiversity linked to agricultural activities, which has developed in Europe, but not in North America. The 'free traders' — mostly represented by the American contributors — argue that both the environment and efficiency would gain from a less regulated and protected European agriculture. The 'environmentalists', represented by, e.g. two administrators from the European Commission, problematise the 'double dividend' thesis and are afraid that biologically valuable marginal lands would be abandoned and that the remaining agricultural lands could be used even more intensively if the European agriculture was opened up to free global competition.

The book can be used as a guide to several import issues. Karl W. Steininger treats the current trade framework and the discussions within the WTO on trade and environment, and Fiona Smith presents the impact of the WTO agreement on the CAP from a legal point of view. David E. Ervin and Clive Potter describe the ongoing agricultural policy liberalisation in the US and in the EU. Nikos Alexandratos and Jelle Bruinsma analyse the world requirements of food to 2030. The articles by Michael R. Redclift and Terry Marsden discourse on a more fundamental level on the role of agricultural policies in achieving 'ecological modernisation' or 'sustainable modernisation'.