

Sociobiology in Sweden– from taboo to partial acceptance

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Abstract. In a secularized country such as Sweden one could perhaps expect that sociobiology was readily accepted as another link in the big Darwinian puzzle. However, this did not generally happen. We give a brief description of the political and intellectual climate after the Second World War. In science, especially organism biology, sociobiology had an immediate intellectual and theoretical impact. However, most of these scientists did not participate in the sociobiology debate, i.e. its implications with respect to humans. In the ideologically dominant sector comprising politics, culture and the humanities sociobiology was fiercely rejected during the 1980s. However, for various reasons the 1990s have brought about a greater acceptance of biology in general and there have been fruitful trans disciplinary discussions at times. However, there is one enclave within the society that still refutes every form of biological explanation, be it ultimate or proximate, comprising feminists and gender theorists. Unfortunately, this group is both politically powerful and vociferous in the media.

INTRODUCTION

Sweden is probably one of the most secularised countries in the world. Yes, the country has a protestant state church and most people baptise their children as well as

turn to the church for all big life events, like weddings and funerals. However, a small percentage, 1.7 % attend sermons regularly, and even fewer are fundamentalist in their worldview. Thus, few believe in special creation and most people hold that Darwinian evolution is generally true. One could then think that the country was quite susceptible to sociobiology, an additional part in the big Darwinian puzzle. However, this was not the case. In fact, the ease with which sociobiology was accepted differed between the scientific and cultural community, part of the latter still rejecting all forms of biological explanations. First, we look at the intra-scientific sector. Then, we review the cultural debate, mostly on the basis of articles and books written during the 80s and 90s, but also on the basis of personal communication with workers involved in this debate. This sector involves so-called intellectuals from the humanities and social sciences but also natural scientists. In order to understand the reception of sociobiology we also give a brief description of the Swedish post war cultural and political development.

THE INTRA-SCIENTIFIC RESPONSE

In the seventies when Wilson's *Sociobiology* was published, evolutionary ecology was a growing field and ethology was well established as an academic subject, boosted, not the least by the Nobel prize in medicine being awarded to Lorenz, Tinbergen and von Frisch in 1973. For most biologists interested in whole organisms sociobiology had a great intellectual and theoretical impact. It fitted nicely into an existing paradigm, incorporating behaviour into evolutionary biology, and the book was used in graduate education at Stockholm University already the year after its publication. A colleague of one of us, Jacob Höglund, now an ecology professor in Uppsala, regarded Wilson's *Sociobiology* as an eye opener – "the sense of sensation when I realised that biological science could be fun and did not have to be applied chemistry – I will never forget" (Höglund 1989, Acknowledgements).

With respect to sociobiology as applied to humans, however, the scientists in general kept a rather low profile. Staffan Ulfstrand, the charismatic animal ecology professor in Uppsala, presented sociobiology in the yearbook of the Natural Science Research Council in 1985. After a forceful denunciation of the opponents of sociobiology in the

American debate ("ignorant and unscrupulous" p.124) he is careful to point out that the article will not deal with aspects on our own species, but that he thinks that it is very reasonable to believe that the field of human sociobiology will lead to important insights in the future. "On the other hand it is self evident that that sociobiology will neither lead to a better or a worse society. Sociobiology is not a political ideology" (p.125).

Few people in Sweden and the other Nordic countries pursue an active research on human sociobiology (e.g. Røskoft et al. 1992, Lindqvist Forsberg and Tullberg 1995, Lummaa et al 1998, Tullberg and Lummaa 2001). One reason for this is undoubtedly the pressure from the social sciences. That sociobiology is loaded with controversy was understood by everybody. First, its very ambition to 'cannibalise' the social sciences was a threat to well-established territory boundaries. Why be unnecessarily provocative when you live in a country where consensus is the name of the game? Moreover, the founding of your very research project could be jeopardised if the area of research is smeared with controversy. The most parsimonious reason as to why many biologists kept sociobiology at an arms lengths distance, we think, is not that of political or ideological resistance, but because most researchers in for example zoology are not primarily interested in humans, but in the animals that they study. Interestingly, the term "sociobiology" seems to have lost ground in the scientific community. For instance, the animal ecologists in Uppsala organised an international conference in 1990 and preferred to name it Behavioural Ecology.

In 1990 the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded the third Crafoord prize in biology to Paul R. Ehrlich and Edward O, Wilson (after Daniel H. Janzen in 1984, and Eugene P. Odum and Howard T. Odum in 1987). Interestingly, the motivation for giving the prize to Wilson was not "Sociobiology, the new synthesis", but "the theory of island biogeography and other research on species diversity and community dynamics on islands and in other habitats with differing degrees of isolation."

Research on humans probably has to be initiated by people primarily interested in humans as research objects and it is notable that many of today's recognised sociobiologists/evolutionary psychologists have their basic training, not in biology, but in for instance psychology or anthropology. It would thus be important for

Sweden to be able to give a basic sociobiological training for students in these disciplines. However, such interdisciplinary training is rare or non-existing. This very spring a course in Human Ethology (including sociobiology) at Stockholm University was aimed at students within the humanities but brought almost exclusively students in biology. Indeed, within academia the culture gap is live and well.

THE CULTURE DISCOURSE

A Punch and Judy show

In "Defenders of the Truth" (2000) Ullica Segerstråle tells us how she pondered on what would be the proper artistic form for a presentation of the sociobiology debate in the United States and England, and decided on opera! The history of the sociobiology debate in Sweden is very different. The proper artistic metaphor would definitely not be Grand Opera, but some arctic variety of the Punch and Judy show. Mr Punch was represented by a few mavericks, who gave short, heretical speeches on sociobiology, whereupon the formidable Judy of political correctness bludgeoned them into silence. In short, the Swedish sociobiology debate in the 80s was brief and bleak, and anyone trying to make a reception analysis has to conclude that, the dominating intellectual community did not receive sociobiology as a cultural discourse.

Conformism

To understand the Swedish intellectual environment, a short retrospect might help. Since 1932 the Social Democrats have ruled the country continuously, except eight years in opposition. Their political ambition has been to transform Sweden from a poor and unequal society into a prosperous and equal welfare state - known as "Folkhemmet" (the home of the people). To achieve this semi-utopian vision, the Social Democrats have relied on radical redistribution of income and extensive social engineering. In the 1930's and -40's a number of reforms were introduced in educational, sexual and housing politics. The Social Democrats interpreted human beings almost exclusively in behavioristic terms. The reason is obvious - only if people were malleable by social conditioning and cultural influences, was their extravagant, political optimism reasonable. The end was to create brave new, egalitarian citizens; the means were fiscal and social engineering. Views that stressed

biological factors in the explanation of human behaviour were generally ignored or considered as an expression of reactionary, political bias.

Sweden was and is a corporate state with a strong predilection for consensus. Ideological debate is normally avoided except before elections, when the politicians indulge in the obligatory and empty oratory about generalities. The Swedes have a traditional horror of controversy as something unpleasant and vaguely obscene. Even if a person begins by opposing a political majority opinion he will normally adopt the opinion, once it has been formally established. Submissiveness to politically correct standards of thinking comes naturally to a people used to centuries of Lutheran orthodoxy and authoritarian rule. The Swedish welfare state after the Second World War was in many respects a success, and inspired admiration and envy in progressive circles around the world. Foreign writers came to study Sweden "the Land of the Middle way" and reported back that they had seen the future and it worked. Sweden's behaviour towards Nazi Germany had however been less than heroic. The Government propaganda tried to cover up by making neutrality a sovereign virtue and the only political attitude possible for a small and virtuous nation. Maybe to compensate for the poor show during the war Sweden became intensely moralistic towards the unregenerate world outside its boundaries. Once in the bad old days, Sweden had been a great, military power - now was the time to present itself as the saving world-conscience. In the 1970', under the Prime Minister Olof Palme Sweden was very busy condemning or extolling various foreign, political leaders. The Swedes were always ready to sign appeals or join demonstrations against wicked governments. Embargoes on Portuguese sardines, Rhodesian tobacco and South African marmalade were de rigour. This frenzy of moral indignation was very satisfying to comfortably progressive people, especially since it cost them nothing. Swedish moralising was not so much hypocritical as an expression of a provincial naïveté. Basically Swedes were incapable of understanding why the rest of the world perversely refused to be more like Sweden.

Swedish media, press, radio and television is remarkably homogenous. There is seldom any questioning of ideological and political fundamentals. All the media seems to be of one mind, advocating the same consensus and voicing the same slogans. This "*Gleichschaltung*" is further aided by the existence of schools of

journalism. Journalists as a group are much more in sympathy with leftwing politics than the average voter. In a small country the leading national, daily newspaper - Dagens Nyheter - can form and change public opinion rather easily. It is a common observation that "in Sweden there is room for only one idea at the time." At any given time there are perhaps fifty well-known intellectuals who preach the correct opinion on the question of the day. They all profess more or less the same message within the range of tolerated opinion and woe betide whoever departs from it. Dissenters are ostracised or worse. With a handful of exceptions, the whole cultural and intellectual establishment is on the left. For this reason there is seldom any real debate in Sweden. Instead there is a competition for putting the same viewpoint with the greatest fervour and castigating the few who do not agree. The resulting uniformity of opinion makes Sweden's intellectual life pretty boring.

The Dressed Ape

When Folin's book "The Dressed Ape - a Polemical Introduction to Sociobiology" appeared early in 1983, very little had been written about sociobiology in Sweden. International best sellers like Dawkins' "The Selfish Gene" (1976) and Wilson's "On Human Nature" (1978) were not yet translated into Swedish. Some newspapers had reported from the violent debate at Harvard, but they regarded it as a typical American thing, like the earlier brouhaha surrounding Jensen's IQ-research. As a result of the Vietnam War Swedish intellectuals were extremely leftwing and preferred Mao's China to U.S.A. which they regarded as rife with racism, imperialism and social Darwinism. Another factor that contributed to the Swedish indifference towards sociobiology was a lack of tradition of writing and publishing good, popular science. Most practising scientists held popular science in low regard and lacked the writing skill to practise it successfully. The self-proclaimed intelligentsia, who moulds public opinion, have an academic background in humanities or social sciences, and in regard to the natural sciences they are generally illiterate. Scientific topics are rarely discussed on the cultural pages, and when it is written about the tone is generally alarmist.

Folin's book was not easily accessible. It was written in a mordant style, many English quotations were not translated and the bibliography numbered 600 titles. The first half of the book described the evolution of biological thinking since Darwin, with

special attention to recent developments i.e. Williams, Hamilton, Trivers, Wilson and Dawkins. The second part was an attack on the logic and practice of the social sciences, with special focus on their environmental fundamentalism. Very unkind remarks were scattered on a long row of shamans reaching from Plato to Claude Lévi-Strauss. An academic biologist would probably have written a more pedagogical and less provocative text, but Folin was extremely fed up with the rhetoric as well as the substance of the humanities and social sciences, having "wasted" decades in mastering it. "The Ape" was reviewed in 30 newspapers. With one exception (Svenska Dagbladet, where Folin was a regular contributor) the leading papers were hostile. Dagens Nyheter, Sweden's most influential, daily paper used the headline "Quarrelsome and Trivial". The reviewer, the biophysicist Gunnar von Heijne, ridiculed the idea that "lesbian coupling in seagulls and prostitution in humming birds" could shed any light on the immense sophistication and Proustian complexity of human behaviour (needless to say - Folin had proposed no such thing). The leading paper in the South of Sweden, Sydsvenska Dagbladet was even more upset. Under the banner "Sociobiological Brutality" a professor in the history of ideas, who was completely ignorant of biology, suffered from an attack of acute, moral panic. Reading Folin's book, he had immediately uncovered the hidden agenda of sociobiology, viz. "The purpose as far as I can see it, is to give moral sanction to exploitation and repression, to justify the already powerful and rich in their oppression of the poor and downtrodden." In a subsequent article the professor emphasised that sociobiology was not a science but "A Dangerous Ideology." Other captions in the same genre were "The Dressed Ape - a figure for the age of Reagan" and "Hard to take sociobiology seriously when the political message is so reactionary". To be fair to Swedish media, several of the provincial papers were more enthusiastic and appreciated that sociobiology might be an interesting and potentially revolutionary, new, scientific discipline. They enjoyed the "Ape's" irreverent style, but complained that the book was too highbrow and esoteric. Before the end of 1983 the first and most fervent sociobiology debate petered out. In enlightened circles Folin was hereby branded as a sinister and intellectually disreputable character.

Anti-sociobiology

Although the number sociobiological protagonists in Sweden was extremely small, some intellectuals still worried about a possible contagion from abroad i.e. USA.

After the Second World War the Swedish populace was notoriously susceptible to American fads. The intellectuals who became increasingly anti-American regarded it as their duty to protect the ignorant masses from malign ideological imports from the centre of world capitalism. In August 1984 *Dagens Nyheter* published a big and alarmist article about “Mankind on the threshold of the genetic decade”, on the front-page the headline was “Eugenics in new clothes”. The author, Gunnar von Heijne, and one of the few scientists to engage in the debate, was very distressed about the rapid progress in molecular genetics and the impending possibilities of genetic screening, prenatal diagnosis and genetic engineering. Among other things he disapproved of a genetic study that had indicated differences in mathematical ability between boys and girls. He warned that sociobiology was likely to be used to give legitimacy to various nefarious schemes in eugenic experimentation. Von Heijne didn't hesitate to trace the ideological roots of sociobiology back to Nazi race-politics, capitalistic social Darwinism and Galtonian eugenics. He ridiculed the idea that biology could shed any light on human nature; the mere idea of a “human nature” was politically suspect. He also co-authored an anti-sociobiological book “Lord of Creation or Slave of the Genes? - A critical examination of sociobiology” (1985) together with Joachim Israel, a sociology professor at Lund university. The title alludes to gene technology and to sociobiology and the basic message is that biology can be used for ideological purposes with frequent references to Sahlins (1977), Lewontin et al (1984) and Gould (1981) etc. Thus, classical topics such as IQ tests, race biology from the 1900th century and Social Darwinism were all brought up and discussed. In fact, most of the short epilogue dealt with the dangers of the combination of social Darwinism (“let the strongest survive”) and modern gene technology into a new form of eugenics.

Then, what was the critique against sociobiology promised in the subtitle? Here the two authors departed in their views. Thus, Israel wrote: “We attack sociobiology for its ideological roots. However, the central and main critique aims at its scientific theories, its ambition within the social sciences and the argumentation by its representatives” (p. 91). In the text that follows we can read about genetic determinism, i.e. that humans and their societies are more than their genes, and reductionism, including a critique of the concept of natural selection inspired by a molecular geneticist colleague. Von Heijne, on the other hand, before giving a short

but a succinct description of sociobiology as science, writes: "Before scrutinising the view of man and society that sociobiology stands for, we must state that Wilson is legitimate in his claims as an interpreter of a lesser revolution within evolutionary biology during the 70es, a kind of return back to Darwin setting deep traces in evolutionary theory and ecology" (p.58). So, here the attack on sociobiology is not for its science per se, but for its simplifications and ambitions, where authors like Barash represent "mass culture and the unabashed simplifications", and Wilson, in books like "On Human Nature" is criticised for his ambition to contribute to moral philosophy.

In conversation with Gunnar von Heijne (May 2001) he points out that he has never been critical of the scientific content of sociobiology but that his aim was to report on "biologism" – to seek support for an ideology within biology. He came in contact with the US debate in the late 1970es mainly through his colleague John Beckwith of Harvard who used to send him papers published by Science for the People. In the early 1980s von Heijne worked for the Swedish radio, where he had the opportunity to interview persons such as Wilson, Gould and Lewontin. When asking von Heijne why there was such a strong correlation between a Marxist view and the tendency to attack sociobiology, he thinks that it depends on that "we (the left) were the ones who stood for all kinds of criticism of society". Today he does not find the misuse of gene determinism worse than a misuse of any other determinism, and, after some discussion, he agrees that an ideology based on seeking utopia may be at least as dangerous as one being based on biology. He holds, though, that much of the mass culture gives a much too simplistic view of gene action. As a director of the Department for Bioinformatics, we were interested to hear what he thought about reductionism to which he answered that concerning the human genome, reduction has now proceeded as far as is possible, and that now is the time for synthesis. He was however doubtful whether the synthesis could go as far as to sociobiology, i.e. the explanation of the whole organism: "It is too complex..."

Swedish attempts to discredit sociobiology relied heavily on "Not in our Genes"(1984) and Gould's "The Mismeasure of Man"(1981). The latter became a potent talisman against the evil influences of rampant "biologism". Gould was regarded as the world's foremost authority on evolutionary theory and if he said that sociobiology was reactionary nonsense that was good enough for the Swedish

intelligentsia. Dagens Nyheter's crusade against sociobiology sometimes bordered on outright censorship. The editor in chief for the cultural department, Arne Ruth, who was one of the most powerful journalists in the country, refused to publish articles that defended sociobiology. When a famous and otherwise impeccably radical professor wrote a positive review of Richard Dawkins' "The Extended Phenotype" it was rejected with the comment that "We" don't regard Dawkins as a serious scientist and that the review anyhow was unsuitably enthusiastic. When the publishing house Tiden belatedly translated "The Selfish Gene" into Swedish (1984), Ruth regarded it as particularly inappropriate that Tiden which was owned by the Social Democrats should become associated with the abominable Dawkins- prophet of the selfish gene.

Most critics didn't bother about the scientific standing of sociobiology. Inoculated by various strains of Marxism they were experts on "false consciousness" and knew the enemy when they saw him. Although they were very keen on historical and environmental determinism they deplored any suggestion of genetic influences on behaviour. A typical attack in the left-wing press had the following headline "Freedom from Responsibility – dangerous sociobiology an ideological weapon"(Arbetet, Oct 1984). The author concluded:" Thus biological models of explanation becomes a handy way to disarm revolutions and political demands from oppressed groups. Sociobiology in the 70's was an answer to all the demands from militant groups; women, blacks, immigrants, prisoners, lunatics, children and the old that in tougher economic climate could no longer be recognised."

The social scientists that had been the main target for Folin's viscous attacks in "The Dressed Ape" did not respond to the challenge in any way. Folin pointed to the blatant lack of progress in the social and behavioural sciences. In one century they had not been able to generate one single generally accepted theory, method or even terminology. Originally prone to excesses of pre-paradigmatic empiricism embellished with spurious mathematical cosmetics, the new fashion in the social sciences seemed to be various modern mythologies like structuralism, post-structuralism, hermeneutics etc. Their common denominator was the idea that reality ultimately was a linguistic phenomenon, that the world is a **text**, and that human behaviour was best analysed in terms of symbol manipulation. The social sciences had capsized, oscillating between mindless triviality and nebulous mystification.

According to Folin this pathetic state of affairs was caused by the idea that **Culture** was an omnipotent quasi-mystical entity that had terminally separated man from his biological roots. He also advocated an evolutionary epistemology against hopelessly outdated Cartesianism and 1800 century English empiricism. The response from the attacked disciplines was a resounding silence.

Towards a new decade

At the end of the 1980s there was still a widespread scepticism against sociobiology, a term that by now was loaded with political/ideological implications, and evolutionary explanations for human behaviour in general. Tullberg found this situation highly unsatisfactory and wrote a note in the Swedish leading popular science magazine, *Forskning och Framsteg*, with the title "Man and natural selection" (FoF 4/1988), where she asked why humans should be exempted from evolutionary explanations; why culture or language should have the inherent power to exempt an animal from natural selection. Examples were given from the literature (mostly Daly and Wilson's *Homicide*) where data had been analysed to test evolutionary hypotheses. Finally, the postulated dichotomy between facts and values was questioned. Rather than sticking to this dichotomy Tullberg suggested that the possible connections between these two entities would be an interesting research area in the future. The term "sociobiology" was not used in this brief note, let us say, for political reasons.

This brief note was fiercely attacked in radio (*Vetandets värld*, P1, June 1988) where, again, Gunnar von Heijne appeared as an expert. Much of the, by now, classical criticism of sociobiology was repeated, and the journal was criticised for accepting a contribution with such a controversial content. In an ensuing debate the editor of *Forskning och Framsteg* criticised Gunnar von Heijne of for being ideologically biased in his supposedly objective criticism, whereas the editors of *Vetandets Värld* pointed out that it was important to inform the innocent readers of *Forskning och Framsteg* of all the controversy that surrounded sociobiology (FoF 6, 8/1988).

Tullberg was then invited by *Forskning och Framsteg* to write a longer article about human sociobiology which focussed on reproductive strategies, presenting ideas that are uncontroversial within the field of sociobiology (FoF 1/1990). This time the

ideological criticism failed to appear. However, according to the editor of the journal, the article broke the record with regard to correspondence from the readers, some of which were upset but most of which showed a genuine interest in the subject. Some of this correspondence was later published together with a response from the author (FoF 4/1990).

The difference in reaction to these two articles may indicate a shift in the treatment of sociobiology as applied to humans. At least, it is our feeling that most of the 80s was characterised by a type of taboo criticism, where it was extremely easy to dismiss sociobiology on ideological ground. Such taboo reactions appeared during the 90s too, but they were not as frequent, and to some extent it had become possible to discuss content without disturbing ideological overtones.

Natural Ethics

In 1994 Jan and Birgitta Tullberg published a book named *Natural Ethics – a Confrontation with Altruism*. The aim of this book was to link moral philosophy to sociobiology, specifically to draw normative conclusions from an understanding of the evolutionary background to social behaviour. In order to reach a wider audience basic sociobiological theory had to be presented, and thus the book functioned as an introduction to sociobiology for the uninformed reader. However, it departed from the mainstream literature in regarding group egoism as a separate behavioural category, besides self-interest, kin selection and reciprocity. It departed in yet another way, namely in regarding altruism in the strict sense as a real behavioural category of human behaviour. For instance, Richard Alexander in *The Biology of Moral Systems* (1987) and Edward O. Wilson in *On Human Nature* (1978) tend to regard seemingly altruistic behaviours as either based on reciprocity or off-shoots thereof or as rare mistakes (also see Trivers, 1971).

Natural Ethics openly broke the philosophical rule of keeping an 'ought' separate from an 'is', something which most people do only tacitly. The book concluded that altruism, caused by social and cultural manipulation, often has negative effects, including hypocrisy, and it promoted an ethical system that is based on reciprocity and self-interest instead of altruism. Humans show a strong tendency for conformism

with a group egoistic rationale. “One for all, all for one” is an effective strategy in competition with other groups. Altruistic agitation demanding sacrifices rather than limiting them, often increase the intensity of conflict.

The response to this book started off within the scientific community, where a philosopher criticised the Swedish National Science Research Council for giving support to this book without the acceptance from extra reviewers from the humanities. The argumentation started in the internal Research Council journal (Rådslaget 6/1994) and continued in other media. It is important to note that the critique did not aim at denouncing sociobiology per se. However, it was an attempt to defend a taboo of sorts, namely that of transgressing established discipline boundaries. For instance the philosopher in question used the term ”science chauvinism” to describe the view that science is somehow above the humanities and social sciences and argued that ”it is important that researchers respect each others disciplines”. On the other hand, we think that the main reason for the fervour with which this philosopher attacked Natural Ethics was because of its sharp criticism of mainstream normative ethics and for its non-conventional conclusions (Svenska Dagbladet December 10 1994, December 24 1994; Vetenskapsradion September 24, December 10 1994, Bibliotekstjänst 1994). The attack on altruism was another taboo broken.

In spite of this early attempt to dismiss Natural Ethics, the book attracted further interest, and its content was discussed in the media, often involving the authors (e.g. Vetenskapsradion September 24 1994, December 10 1994; Kulturkvarten February 23 1995; Svenska Dagbladet December 18 1994). Philosopher Ingemar Nordin argued for the merits of the book and also for the need rid to the discussion from politically correct conformism. Dagens Nyheter, previously emphatic in denouncing sociobiology, expressed support for the idea in the book that reciprocity is most essential for ethics (editorial, January 8 1995). Natural ethics was also discussed with the Swedish chairperson for Amnesty International in a talk show in the television youth channel (September 18 1996). In addition, the book was discussed in more academic journals (e.g. Norsk Statsvittenskapelig Tidsskrift 11/1995; Svensk filosofisk tidskrift 1/1996, 2/1997)

Perhaps surprisingly there was a genuine interest shown by the churches. The Catholic Church in Sweden has a theoretical journal, *Signum* that criticised the book in an editorial (7/1994), which was followed up by a discussion between the authors and the editor Anders Piltz (1/1995). At a graduate seminar in anthropology and sociology at Lund University the discussion continued between Piltz and the Tullbergs. The Lutheran weekly 'Kyrkans tidning' accepted an article criticising the ethics of Jesus (14/1995), which was riposted by philosophy professor Göran Bexell Lund University (18/1995). Generally, there was disagreement, but a clear openness for discussion.

There is no doubt a political dimension in the reaction. Liberal media like the journal of taxpayers' *Sunt Förnuft* (5/ 1996), the libertarian journal paper *Nyliberalen* (1/1996) and 'Humanisten' (1/1995), the journal of the Swedish Human-Ethical Society, gave positive reviews, while 'Ord & Bild', a leftwing magazine, gave a negative review in a special issue dedicated to criticising 'biologism' (1/1996).

In conclusion, although the taboo/condemnation line initiated the discussion it did not prevail. The major line seems to be that sociobiology makes some sense and has important implications for humans. At a yearly meeting at Krapperup between scientist and journalists, the reception of *Naturalistic Ethics* was discussed in 1999 as a case of media handling of controversial themes.

The 90's

Other proponents of Darwinism have put less emphasis than Folin and the Tullbergs on the radical message in sociobiology and seen more common ground between biology and other disciplines. Nils Uddenberg, a former psychiatrist, now a professor at The Royal Swedish Academy of Science, did not become interested in sociobiology until 1989-90 when he happened to read Robert Trivers' *Social Evolution* (1985). A main theme in his writing has been to try to bridge the culture gap, linking biology to theology/philosophy and the history of science, and two of his books are especially focussed on sociobiology ("An Animal Among Others?" 1993; "Original virtue" 1998). His writing is ecumenical in style, which undoubtedly is appealing to many readers. Uddenberg also initiated a meeting on 'Human behaviour and Evolutionary

Biology' in Stockholm 1996, where several internationally renowned researchers were invited. In conversation with Uddenberg (May 2001) he confirms that he abhors controversy, and when asking him about the sociobiology debate in the 70's and 80's he thought it was simplistic and was not much interested to participate. On the other hand, as a practising psychiatrist up to 1985 he had for a long time felt that the then prevailing explanatory framework for human behaviour was insufficient. It is his firm belief that it is impossible to investigate human behaviour without incorporating biology, and that nature and nurture are not each other's opposites. To make people realise that biology is compatible with ideas within the social sciences has been very important to him.

As we have seen, the interest in and willingness to discuss evolution and human sociobiology has increased during the 1990s. There are several likely and interacting factors behind this change in attitude. First, the acceptance of genes as a basis for behaviour has been facilitated, no doubt, by the ongoing Human Genome Project. The progress of science in general and biological sciences in particular has probably been helpful in convincing some people that biology is of interest when it comes to understanding human nature. And the continuous bombardment of new biological discoveries has probably broken down the resistance in others. The culture discourse is not completely uninfluenced from the popular culture. In television nature programs, the 'Bambi' identification has been replaced by a Darwinian view with a place for predators and competition. And women magazines feature articles about hormones, PMS and biological clocks. One message comes across – biology matters.

But reasons for the changing attitude is also to be found within politics, where the dogmatic far left has lost power to the establishment left. This does not mean that the homogeneity of opinion in the Swedish culture is threatened, rather that the fading communist challenge has strengthened a social democratic hegemony and moved it rightwards. This moderated left is less hostile to sociobiology than the Marxists. Interestingly, this does not imply an exchange of people involved in the official debate, because the same people that were hostile anti-capitalists and anti-sociobiologists in the 70's and 80's are often found among the established left, now with a much less dogmatic attitude.

From the above one might easily draw the conclusion that sociobiology is well established and integrated into the Swedish culture discourse. But unfortunately this is not so, because there is still a strong ideological bastion left.

Gender - the last bastion

In 1997 Nils Uddenberg initiated a meeting with feminist researchers from several disciplines, with the ultimate ambition to integrate biology with disciplines studying cultural gender differences. Surely the time must be ripe for such a project? B. Tullberg was invited to talk about evolutionary theories about sex and sex differences, but there was such strong resistance against any form of biological interpretations of human sex differences that the whole project had to be given up. The atmosphere at this meeting was, to say the least, not friendly, and one of the rude remarks was 'conceited biologist', which fits into a larger picture of natural science being felt as a threat against the social sciences. When asking Nils Uddenberg about this incident he shudders and says that he has totally given up building bridges involving these feminists.

In Sweden feminism is not classified as a controversial political ideology but as something so evidently true that no reasonable person can disagree with its basic beliefs and claims. The political leaders compete about who is the most genuine feminist. A woman who resists the feminist label is seen as either stupid or a traitor. Most men in public positions are very eager to affirm that they of course are feminists too. The minister of equality is presently pioneering study-groups in feminism among 10 years old schoolchildren. In short, feminism is firmly entrenched in the view of life of the Swedish establishment.

One of the basic premises of feminism is that biological factors have little or no influence on perceived differences between men and women and according to the prevalent gender-theory, differences are the result of social construction. The business of the gender-theorists is to deconstruct these oppressive and arbitrary constructions and liberate womankind.

The fact that the division of organisms into two sexes is fundamental to biological thinking is taken lightly. Feminists ignore biology on principle and when biologists claim that research has revealed various biological differences between the sexes, they are not studied but rejected. All biological findings that disagree with feminist dogmas are routinely labelled “biologism”, a very nasty word with guilt by association connotations of fascism, Nazism and racism. The indomitable minister of equality – Margareta Winberg is very clear on this point. Under the headline “Biologism –monkey-shit or genetic facts?”(Aftonbladet May 19 1999) she declared “I firmly reject biologism. The different experiences that can be related to the sexes are due to traditions not to genes. The only difference that exist is that women can breed children and lactate”.

And the state has brought both resources and authority to feminist gender theorists. The Institute for Gender Studies was set up in 1997 with the authority to ”analyse the need for”, and ”promote gender research in all scientific disciplines”(SFS, Svenska författningssamlingen, 1997:61). Moreover, the three new research councils established during 2000 (for environment and agriculture, social sciences and the workplace, and, science, respectively) all have in their instructions to ”promote a gender perspective in research” (SFS 2000:1210; 1198; 1199). These policies do not only express a non-Darwinian view of sex differences, but also a different view of the relationship between politics and science. Directing the content of science is a remarkable intrusion by the politicians.

The guardians of feminist orthodoxy are very vigilant and extremely intolerant. A few brave women has publicly declared (men wouldn't dare) that they still believe that males and females are quite different in evolutionary, glandular, neurological and other aspects, but the feminist sisterhood has immediately brought them to task and more or less mobbed the renegades. A spectacular example was when the Institute for the Peoples Health (Folkhälsoinstitutet) commissioned a book on social and sexual relations named “Living Together” (Leva Tillsammans) from a renowned female psychotherapist. The purpose was that every pupil graduating from high school should receive a copy and 100 000 copies were printed. The text was commonsensical but not politically adjusted. The author who had a wide experience of adolescents wrote for instance that teenage boys were more obsessed with sex than girls. The feminist

reaction was furious, especially from the powerful National Institute for Gender Research, which declared the book anathema. In an atmosphere of biophobic hysteria the book was withdrawn and destroyed – a macabre instance of a feminist auto-da-fé. Pupils who had already received the dangerous book were warned by the Institute for the Peoples Health - not to read it.

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