

and society," but that "Of a far greater significance is the basic instinct common to all species to identify only with one's like group; to in-breed and to shun out-breeding. In human society this instinct is *racial*, and it - above all else - operates to ensure genetic survival." ¹⁵

The fundamental issue behind the sociobiology debate and the concept of biopolitics is whether this is the use of biological theory or the biological metaphor. A metaphorical attribution differs from a literal attribution by virtue of a certain tension between the subject and the modifier. In the comparison theory of metaphor, a metaphor is an elliptical simile, a collapsed comparison from which "like" or "as" has been omitted, for convenience or for heightened interest. This theoretical approach accounts for the intelligibility, but not the tension of metaphor in the service of an argumentative claim. ¹⁶ This essay is a case-study of the rise of contemporary biopolitics as a result of the emergence of sociobiology, designed to examine how both sides of this debate approach the question of metaphoric tension in establishing and refuting argumentative claims. My specific thesis, developed from Michael Osborn's elaboration of the degree of dialectic between literal and metaphoric meaning is that a distinction is to be made in terms of the remoteness of comparisons to account for a metaphoric tension in comparison theory. The potential ramifications of the biological metaphor as theory, and/or of biological theory as metaphor on political behavior provides the requisite intelligibility of the attribution for considering the factor of tension. ¹⁷

I will contend that the sociobiologists' claim of a concise biological theory for understanding individual and social behavior is founded upon the perspective that the relationship between human beings and animals is *homologous*, rather than analogous or metaphorical. Consequently, sociobiologists view themselves as presenting valid scientific arguments, oblivious to the rhetorical construction of scientific knowledge and of the considerations of argument

from authority on the non-scientific audience of political beings. ¹⁸ I will argue further that those opposed to the tenets and implications of sociobiology are addressing the question of *catachresis* on two levels: first, protesting the incorrect use of biology, as a misapplication of terminology, and the definition of man as animal, as a strained metaphor, to explain social behavior; and second, as the potential threat of a change in the meaning of these words resulting from the misunderstanding of their etymologies, if these misappropriations are not corrected. Consequently, this essay will examine: (1) the construction of the sociobiologists' argument that human beings are genetically homologous with mammalian and primate species; (2) the imputed catachresis of the biological metaphor in the realms of political and social behavior; (3) the ramifications of sociobiology for biopolitics; and (4) the implications of this case study for resolving the limitations of the current comparison theory of metaphors regarding metaphoric tension.

Homology and the Paramorphosis of Metaphor

The issue of the relationship between human beings and animals, a relationship labeled homologous by the sociobiologists and called an analogical metaphor by their opponents, is central to the sociobiology debate. Homology, generally defined as a homologous correspondence or relationship of animal organs or chemical compounds, is more explicitly defined by Wilson as: "A similarity between anatomical structures, physiological processes, or behavioral patterns in two or more species due to the possession of a common ancestor and hence the possession of at least some genes that are identical by common descent. ¹⁹ Wilson cites field studies of chimpanzees by Jane Goodall and Jorge Sabater-Pi to arrive at "the heart of the genetic hypothesis," the proposition, "derived in a straight line from neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, that the traits of human nature were adaptive during the time that the human species evolved and

that genes consequently spread through the population that predisposed their carriers to develop those traits." 20

"This account of the life of the chimpanzee is meant to establish what I regard as a fundamental point about the human condition: that by conventional evolutionary measures and the principle of psychology we are not alone, we have a little-brother species. The points of similarity between human and chimpanzee social behavior, when joined with the compelling anatomical and biochemical traces of relatively recent genetic divergence, form a body of evidence too strong to be dismissed as coincidence. I now believe that they are based at least in part on possession of identical genes. If this proposition contains any truth, it makes even more urgent the conservation and closer future study of these and other great apes, as well as the Old World monkeys and the lower primates. A more thorough knowledge of these animal species might well provide us with a clear picture of the step-by-step genetic changes that led to the level of evolution uniquely occupied by human beings.

To summarize the argument to this point: the general traits of human nature appear limited and idiosyncratic when placed against the great backdrop of all other living species. Additional evidence suggests that the more stereotypical forms of human behavior are mammalian and even more specifically primate in character, as predicted on the basis of general evolutionary theory. Chimpanzees are close enough to ourselves in the details of their social life and mental properties to rank as nearly human in certain domains where it was once considered inappropriate to make comparisons to all. These facts are in accord with the hypothesis that human social behavior rests on a genetic foundation, that human behavior is, to be more precise, organized by some genes that are shared with closely related species and others that are unique to the human species. The same facts are unfavorable for the competing hypothesis which has dominated the social sciences for

generations, that mankind has escaped its own genes to the extent of being entirely culture-bound. 21

Michael Osborn, in his consideration of the tension between literal and metaphorical meaning, has constructed a geometric progression of the degrees of dialectical tension: At "0-degrees," the literal and metaphorical meanings are equivalencies, forming a linguistic tautology; "45-degrees" denotes a weak metaphor which serves as a novelty to enliven the subject; "90-degrees" constitutes a strong metaphor for the purpose of adding new meanings and characteristics to the subject, without destroying any of the established meanings and characteristics; "135-degrees" creates a radical metaphor to destroy meaning and to replace the original meaning of the modifying metaphor; and, at "180-degrees" the metaphor results in a paradox, wherein meaning is lost in the language of mysticism. Sociobiologists, in advancing a homologous relationship between human beings and chimpanzees, argue that such a relationship is not a metaphor but an equivalency of literal meanings. The opponents of sociobiology, as I shall develop further in the next section, contend that the principles of sociobiology are based upon a radical metaphor destroying the conventional meaning of biology, if not a paradox of mystical confusion servicable to the designs of the neo-fascist right wing of American politics.

The attacks on sociobiology focus on Wilson as the father of the field, and essentially argue that while Wilson is a distinguished scientist in the field of entomology, he has overweening fault of "biologism," the "conviction that since humans are animals who have evolved in much the same ways as other animals they must be explicable in much the same way." 22 Wilson declares that, "The role of sociobiology, with reference to human beings, then, is to place the social sciences within a biological framework, a framework constructed from a synthesis of evolutionary studies, genetics, population, biology, ec-

ology, animal behavior, psychology and anthropology.” 23

Montague finds this view to be “topsy-turvy”: “Contrary to Wilson, I would place all the sciences relating to humans within an anthropological framework, where, surely, they naturally belong and make sociobiology an intrinsic part of that framework. A sound sociobiology has a genuinely useful role to play in the explication of the social behavior of animals. In studying and comparing the societies of different kinds of animals and of humans it is probable that some light may be thrown on the evolutionary forms of social behavior. The aim, says Wilson, is to construct and test theories about the underlying hereditary basis of social behavior. That surely, is an endeavor which should receive nothing but encouragement. The danger, however, in such an endeavor arises from the attempts to prove rather than to disprove the assumptions generally made that behavior, social behavior, has a certain underlying hereditary basis.” 24

In addition to this observation bias, Wilson’s genetics, in which selection acts on single genes, and genes are viewed as discrete units which vary only in quantum mutational jumps, is criticized for being outdated. 25 But essentially the critiques have centered on Wilson’s conclusion that human nature does not merely make individual and social behavior possible, but in fact causes it. 26

Accepting this perspective on sociobiology, Wilson proposes a radical metaphor beneath the guise of a literal equivalency; humans are animals. Rather than propose an analogy with an appropriate degree of metaphoric tension, Wilson attempts to create a definitional equivalency where none had previously existed. This attempt at argumentative paramorphosis specifically refers in this instance to the equivalency of human beings and animals, whereby we contemplate the former from the perspective and characteristic of the latter, a situation formally manifested in the notion that black slaves were literally animals, and therefore also property. Whereas in the scientific

sphere paramorphosis denotes the change of physical character (molecular structure), without altering chemical composition, paramorphosis is herein used to signify the transformation of “animal” from a modifier to a characteristic of humans, an alteration of animal’s “physical character,” while retaining its inherent composition of meaning as the justification for sociobiological principles. Rejection of this paramorphosis by the majority of the scientific community returns animal to its previous status as a biological metaphor, and raises the issue of catachresis. 27

Sociobiology and the Twin Treats of Catachresis

One of the most intriguing uses of metaphor to create knowledge appears in Midgley’s critique of Wilson and the sociobiologists: “Wilson is a prophet, and he isn’t going to lack acolytes. If we take the Wilson who appears most of the time in *Sociobiology* as the Dr. Jekyll of the movement, Hyde lurks in a few sections of it, emerges further in *On Human Nature*, and is fully unveiled in the cheap, crude, b-feature fatalism of Richard Dawkins’s book *The Selfish Gene*.” 28 Metaphorical allusions to the prototype mad-scientist aside, the opponents of sociobiology have repeatedly expressed their concern that Wilson and his “acolytes” have not taken the trouble to repudiate the misuse of their ideas by neo-fascist political organizations. 29 In developing the attempt by sociobiologists to paramorphosize a radical metaphor into a homologous equivalency, the previous section reflected the concern of the first definition of catachresis, the incorrect use of a word or words. The opponents of sociobiology have contested not only the argumentative paramorphosis of the modifier animal, but the predominance of the biological metaphor in critiquing human behavior. These reservations are supported by Nisbet’s warning against mistaking attributes of analogy for attributes of reality, and embodied in the second definition of catachresis, wherein a change in the form of

a word results from the misunderstanding of the word etymology.

The question of catachresis confronts the issue of whether the pro-sociobiology argument is based upon biological theory or biological metaphor. Wilson's argument has been for the former, contending that "the biological principles which now appear to be working reasonably well for animals in general can be extended profitably to the social sciences."³⁰ Marshall Sahlins, writing on *The Use and Abuse of Biology*, states that: "Culture is properly understood as an intervention in nature, rather than the self-mediation of the latter through symbols. The biological givens, such as human mating behavior, come into play as instruments of the cultural project, not as its imperatives."³¹ The most catachrestical denunciation of sociobiology's reliance on the biological metaphor comes from Michael A. Simon: "Biologically inspired claims concerning human social behavior, though lacking empirical validation, do nevertheless draw upon knowledge of what has been scientifically demonstrated. They are in that respect not unlike science fiction, wherein plausibility is conferred upon speculative propositions through showing them to be consistent with, but not entailed by, an established body of scientific theory. Unlike most science fiction, however, ethologically inspired propositions concerning humans commonly have a moral or political thrust, one that is all the more effective because of the illusion that these propositions have scientific backing. So far as biologists pretend to have shown that human behavior and human societies are constrained by biology to fall within the limits that make it impossible, except through organic evolution, for human social patterns and social arrangements ever to be very different from what they are now, the only way to interpret the project of attempting to use biology to understand human social phenomena is a way of rationalizing or defending the status quo. When a science is alleged to set forth for us what we can and can not do because of our inherent nature, its pronouncements

amount to either sound counsel or ideological preaching, depending on how well grounded in evidence the advice is. In the case of biology and human social behavior, it is both a scientific and a philosophical error to believe that the evidence warrants any conclusions either of a normative or descriptive kind concerning biological determinism of either the form or the content of human social life. It is not by studying animals that we shall gain understanding of why people do as they do."³²

Simon's indictment examines both of the considerations of catachresis. The biological metaphor is not to be confused with biological theory, the scientific data available does not warrant such a characterization; and the misapplication of biology in sociobiology constitutes "Ideological preaching" that threatens to alter the meaning of concepts by association with its tenets and principles. Thus, for example, the question of the nature of the political man, hinged upon at least two dimensions of human nature: 1) whether humans are inherently good or evil; and 2) whether they are political "by nature" or become so via a process of socialization, would be answered by the sociobiologists. Yet, as Peterson and Somit have pointed out, at this juncture, sociobiology can be drawn on to support specific tenets by almost all of the ideological schools as well as individual thinkers.³³

The formidable conceptual problems as yet unresolved in sociobiology present limitations on the contributions which sociobiology can make to the study of politics. Even if the tendency to underestimate the role of culture was not the case, and the importance of our genetic legacy was granted to the sociobiologists, the question of measuring the relative influence upon human behavior of biological and nonbiological factors remains.³⁴ This question reopens a controversy that has raged for decades, nature versus nurture, learned versus innate. The emergence of sociobiology would seem to indicate that this dispute is far from being resolved.³⁵

Biopolitics and the Dangerous Metaphor

Peterson and Somit, in their study of the rise of contemporary biopolitics, report that as the life sciences moved rapidly forward some social scientists began, by the mid-1960s, to speculate about the implications of biology and ethology for human behavior in general, and political behavior in particular. It was the writings of the latter that marked the emergence of what is now called biopolitics.³⁶ Peterson and Somit divided the vast corpus of literature on biopolitics into four broad categories:

1. The case for a more biologically oriented political science, made up of attempts to argue, or demonstrate, in a general manner, that a more biologically oriented political science is desirable and would prove profitable to the discipline.³⁷

2. Ethological and evolutionary aspects of behavior, seeking to utilize ethological or evolutionary conceptions such as aggression, attention structure, territoriality, personal space, male bonding, etc., to account for human political behavior and even for political structures.³⁸

3. Physiological and pharmacological aspects of political behavior, representing efforts to relate physiological factors to political behavior. Peterson and Somit report an increasing interest in conducting empirical studies within this area, which they perceive as an encouraging trend since such studies are more likely to persuade the data oriented practitioner of the soundness of such an approach.³⁹

4. Issues of public policy advanced by those who suggest that recent advances in biology and the life sciences have important public policy implications for such topics as somatarchy, psychosurgery, environmental issues, genetic engineering, and mind control.⁴⁰

The ramifications of sociobiology for biopolitics focuses upon the distinction between the indispensable nature of the biological metaphor and the dangerous implications of the biological metaphor disguised as firm biological theory. Peter-

son and Somit noted that, "Since sociobiology is concerned, perhaps above all, with the mechanisms and consequences of adaptive evolution, it may sensitize students of politics to the fact that political institutions, no less than living organisms, must be capable of adjusting to changing environmental conditions (using the term in its broadest sense) and to the consequences and institutions alike of the ability to adapt as circumstances require."⁴¹ Thus, within the realm of the indispensable biological metaphor, is the consideration of sociopolitical institutions and structures as evolving through a process analogous to natural selection, explicating in terms of concepts derived from evolutionary theory.⁴²

The threat of Nisbet's dangerous metaphor, however, remains prominent in the implications of sociobiology for political science in general. Not only is the biological metaphor used as an argumentative justification for social differences, class stratification, sexual status and racism when construed as biological theory, it also serves as a partial explanation for deviant, anti-social behavior due to the "improbability" that man's genetic nature as evolved at the same pace as the massive changes in social, political and economic institutions. Currently a middle ground exists whereon etological concepts have been used in considerations of the persistent nature of bureaucratic rivalries, the persistent appearance of political factions and cliques, and the process technically known as political socialization, as possibly being at least analogous to what the ethologist call, respectively, ground bounding, territorial behavior, and imprinting.⁴³ The question remains as to whether or not the impetus exists for these considerations to eventually be used in support of a biological theory, rather than a "strong metaphor" adding, but not destroying meaning. Peterson and Somit conclude: "In summary, sociobiology can be useful for political inquiry if we remain modest about its present value and understand both its capabilities and what it cannot yet, if ever, do. The difficulties of testing political

hypotheses by utilizing concepts and techniques drawn from sociobiology are formidable. Nonetheless, this new field will eventually compel political scientists to take into consideration the biological factors which may influence our political behavior; and there is good reason to believe, it may in the future contribute significantly to the ability of the political scientist to understand and explain, if not predict and control, the phenomena and problems which are his professional province.⁴⁴

Even in this warning of the limitations of sociobiology in the realm of political science, the hypnotic lure of a biological theory sufficient to support a biopolitics of practical application beckons seductively.

Homology, Catachresis, and Metaphoric Tension

The reservations posited by critics of the comparison theory of metaphor, have focused on the theory's ability to account for the intelligibility of a metaphor, but failure to account for the tension between literal and metaphoric meaning. Although this case study was unable to fully utilize Osborn's elaboration of the degrees of dialectic tension for considering metaphors in the service of argumentative claims, it may still be possible to propose just how this scheme resolves this deficiency in comparison theory. By constructing a simple characterization of the five potential relationships between literal and metaphoric meaning, Osborn presents a conceptual orientation and appropriate vocabulary for ascertaining the distinction between close and remote comparisons, thereby explaining the tension in terms of the remoteness.

Furthermore, this consideration of homology and catachresis in the context of the sociobiology debate provides additional insights into Osborn's scheme. It can be argued that under the principle of catachresis, even the usage of an unstrained or unmixed metaphor proposes an alternation in the meaning of a word through a conscious misapplication of its etymology for the purpose of creating force in an

argument. Consequently, the proposal of a strong metaphor, through the passage of time and continual use, will eventually find that the tension between literal and metaphoric meaning is being reduced as the process of paramorphosis converts the modifier into a weak metaphor, and ultimately a linguistic equivalency. Thus, for example, the political arena has appropriated a multitude of miscellaneous metaphors from the fields of military battles and athletic encounters. This prescribes a sort of retroactive homology to the former set of subject and modifier, as they develop a correspondent character. Over time, the degree of metaphoricalness is measured by the inverse of relative frequency, as in Information Theory.

The sociobiology debate, and the implications of the biological metaphor for such fields as biopolitics, provides a consideration of the usage of a master metaphor as an argumentative warrant for various claims and data. A future explication of the relevance of Osborn's geometric progression of metaphoric tensions would suggest an examination of argumentation utilizing most, if not all, of his categories in a comprehensive explication of their potential breadth and depth in the service of argumentative claims.

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Larry's Lashes

Humor in Debate: A Case Against the Grim Argumentation

Do you recognize the titles of these great modern novels: *The World Is Full of Ugly People*, *Chill Penury Repressed Not His Noble Rage*, and *Love, Liars and Lunacy*? You don't? Perhaps it is because I haven't written them yet.

Have you read my master's thesis, *A Study of the Wit and Sarcasm in the Rhetoric of Thaddeus Stevens*, and in my doctoral dissertation, *A Study to Help Determine the Value of Humor in Competitive Interscholastic Debate*? No? Well I did a lot of research on the former and actually conducted the experiment for the latter -- control groups, experimental groups, the works. But pedagogical pragmatism prompted me to take a predictable path, and these studies remain unpublished, forever.

In 1970, I was discussing my dissertation designs with the late Eugene Moulton, author of several debate text books and architect of the nationally respected debate program at Redlands University. "Prof" -- that is what many of his former students still call him -- "Prof" said to me, "I've always thought that most debaters were too grim. I've always enjoyed a little humor in a debate round."

One of my earliest impressions of competitive debate was that the best debaters were witty, clever people capable of biting satire and sarcasm of the ridiculous. My unpublished study was an attempt to test the validity of this impression.

Fourteen years have crawled achingly by. I've listened to a thousand rounds of competitive debate and another six-hundred

practice debates in the time since I conducted that experiment. The experiment concluded that humor did significantly help a debater's speaker rating. (Provided that the humor was *reductio-ad-absurdum* of an opponent's argument and not tasteless personal attack) But that humor had less effect upon the judges' win-loss vote.

I'm not lashing out in old age because some very prestigious journals didn't publish my study of fourteen years ago. The inspiration for this belated voice crying the ashes of bygone years comes from the debates I hear today. I listen longingly with thirsty ears for a truly *funny* debate round. I don't hear them in practice rounds either.

Where are the Dennis Winstons of USC quoting from the *Book of Mormon* to carry an argument against BYU? Oh, how I enjoyed the humor of a team from Macalester College beating affirmative fiat with DA's of the abuse of power given to two "undergraduates" from Harvard; and Mr. Stroud of Arizona was hilarious explaining, IN GREAT DETAIL, all the plan objections he could NOT run because Mr. Dye of Whittier College had forgotten to answer his plan questions. I even remember a couple of debaters named Ed Sosa and Steve Thursby who used to be funny in practice rounds.

If Gene Moulton thought the debaters of the 60's and early 70's were too grim, what would he think of the interscholastic arguers of today?

Watch for my novels yet to come. My scholarly efforts on Mr. Stevens and debate humor seem destined never to be published.

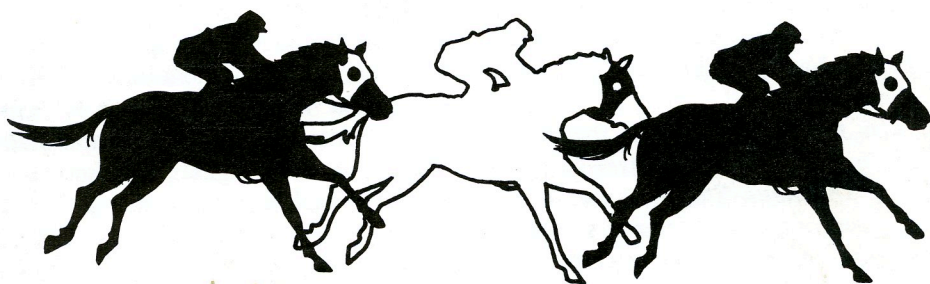
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