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I do agree with the authors, however, when they conclude that steps must be taken to avoid the threats they see triggered by the genetic revolution. Rather than leave the genetic future to the “unplanned interaction of social forces, we need to use the political process to increase the chances that our genetic future will be democratic and harmonious” (p. 109). While I agree that the appropriate use of governmental power is needed to respond to the challenge (see Blank, 1981), I remain unconvinced by the authors’ analysis in Chapter 8 that a genetic lottery would meet this challenge. Instead, it seems that a more basic debate is essential, one that the authors do not discuss. For while Mehlman and Botkin have much to say about the insurance-based health care system and the problems of distributing resources fairly, nowhere do they suggest that the real threat to democracy is already with us: the great discrepancy in wealth in U.S. society. I would argue that the existing stratification of the population by wealth itself, not genetic technology, represents the most profound challenge to notions of social equality ever encountered. To the extent that future applications of genetic technology reinforce or exaggerate this stratification, the themes of this book are a valuable reminder of the problems inherent in a society where a vast maldistribution of resources is taken as a given.

References


Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism

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This book concerns the development of an evolutionary theory for the origin and prevalence of anti-Semitism throughout history. It represents a sequel to MacDonald’s first book (1994) of a projected trilogy, in which he develops the corresponding theory for Judaism itself as an evolved adaptive strategy. This sequel continues the argument begun in the first book by supposing that if Judaism can be conceptualized as a strategy for collective survival and intergroup competition, then anti-Semitism should logically be viewed as a set of strategies evolved by other ethnic groups for counteracting and neutralizing any competitive advantages conferred by Judaism upon its practitioners.

There are three major questions that this book immediately raises, and we deal with each of these in turn. The first is whether this book is itself anti-Semitic. It is reasonable to expect that this concern will represent a highly charged emotional issue for many people, whether Jewish or Gentile, and MacDonald anticipates this question in the preface. His own theory predicts such an alarmed reaction, but with the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust barely a half-century behind us, it takes no specialized knowledge to imagine the justifiable sensitivity that many will experience to this issue. The second question is whether this is a valid application of evolutionary theory. For this, we will have to examine the critical assumptions behind MacDonald’s thesis, because the far-reaching implications may generalize beyond the specific case of Judaism. The third question is whether MacDonald has his history correct, and it is this latter issue which I personally find most daunting. MacDonald has collected a wealth of historical data that I cannot hope to check up on in its entirety. Being an evolutionary psychologist and not a historian, I have chosen to concentrate on a subset of these historical facts that are more familiar to me due to an interest in my own background, as a descendant of Spanish Conversos. I hope that this choice will not bias my treatment, but will instead serve as a representative sample for what would otherwise be a mountain of evidence beyond my own ability to verify.

The question of anti-Semitism is not an easy one to answer...
because it may be framed to refer to the author’s intent, which is not easy to determine. Having heard MacDonald hold forth on this subject on various occasions, my subjective impression is that his expressed affective response to Judaism is one of almost glowing admiration. Other than that, I cannot read minds. Objectively speaking, I can only judge whether the content of the book is inherently anti-Semitic, and my understanding of this theory is that it is not. MacDonald is very careful not to accuse Judaism of any particularly heinous or unusually pernicious practices in interethic competition. He credits Jewish people with exactly the same instincts for survival and reproduction as the rest of the human race. The only reason he expects a strong negative response to Judaism on the part of rival ethnic groups is the relative success of that strategy in achieving what are otherwise universal human aspirations.

What might offend some readers is his matter-of-fact description of anti-Semitism as a set of evolved countermeasures to this otherwise highly successful strategy. There is no more a tone of moral condemnation or outrage than in his treatment of the competitive strategies (not all of them pleasant) historically associated with Judaism itself. MacDonald’s tone is equally calm and descriptive throughout. He genuinely appears to be trying to figure out why people do the things they do to each other, for good or ill, and proceeds as if emotionalism might get in the way. It is hard to argue with that stance. I have personally had to assume such a detached attitude in studying the evolutionary psychology of wife-batterers, child-abusers, and rapists, and have had to hold my own revulsion at least temporarily at bay for purposes of scientific understanding.

The question of whether this is a valid application of evolutionary theory is a more complex one. At the risk of appearing pedantic, I must first quibble with MacDonald’s terminology in proposing an “evolutionary” strategy, rather than an “evolved” one. Calling a product of natural selection an “evolutionary” strategy carries the connotation that its function is to promote evolution itself rather than survival, which is surely not what is intended. (I am reminded of the Gary Larson cartoon of animals reading a book entitled How to Avoid Natural Selection!)

Although he refers to Judaism as a “group” evolutionary strategy, MacDonald insists that his entire model for Judaism as an adaptive strategy can be derived from the completely orthodox principles of individual (gene) selection, although he does not completely discount modern (gene-centered) mechanisms of group selection playing a contributory role. In MacDonald’s model, social controls against individual defection are both theoretically necessary and evidently in place. He does not see Judaism as a monolithic entity, but instead as a collection of diverse adaptive strategies that are often at odds with each other. MacDonald recognizes that individuals may adhere or not to group norms based on self-interest, and posits a specific psychological mechanism for making this computation in both Jews and non-Jews. Thus, for Judaism to work as a group strategy, it must recruit the cooperation of individuals by manipulating this monitoring mechanism such that the interests of each group member are sufficiently confluent with those of the collective. Although this can never work perfectly, due to the inevitability of some within-group competition, a successful group strategy is one that stacks things in its favor by arranging the social contingencies of individual reinforcement to maximize within-group cooperation within the limits of the possible. In this formulation, MacDonald proposes sophisticated psychological and social-control mechanisms that may be generalizable beyond the specific case of Judaism. Indeed, a coherent group anti-Semitic strategy must also operate within these same parameters.

It is in MacDonald’s treatment of Jewish responses to anti-Semitism that the diversity of Jewish behavior is highlighted. Although persecution may serve to reinforce the necessity for collective self-defense (cf. Dawidowicz, 1986), and thus promote group cohesion, it also provides certain incentives for defection. Furthermore, it may split the group along the lines of choosing different strategies for coping with the external threat. These divisions can also appear when a pattern of chronic persecution is suddenly relaxed and traditional incentives for cohesion disappear (cf. Wertheimer, 1993).

To fully evaluate MacDonald’s treatment of this last point, it will be necessary to move on to the third major question—that of historical accuracy. As mentioned above, I will limit myself to his discussion of the Spanish Inquisition for verification. In preparing for this review, I have read several major works on the subject (Cervantes, 1994; Gerber, 1992; Gitlitz, 1996; Kamen, 1997; Netanyahu, 1995), mostly by Jewish authors, and can attest to a very high degree of agreement with MacDonald’s presentation of the facts. The major contradiction exists in the case of Netanyahu (1995), who categorically denies the widespread prevalence of Crypto-Judaism among the Spanish Conversos (Jewish converts to Catholicism, whether forced or voluntary). Several other authors (Gerber, 1992; Gitlitz, 1996; Kamen, 1997), however, admit the existence of a certain degree of residual Crypto-Judaism in the Conversos, much of it due to insufficient religious instruction in Catholicism following the forced conversions of 1391. The “big picture” we are presented with seems to be that of a very broad spectrum of Jewish responses to conversionist pressure, ranging from sincere assimilationism to complete, if covert, defiance.

The interesting point for MacDonald’s theory is that the controversy surrounds the formal religious beliefs of the Spanish Conversos, and not the continued identification with a separate ethnicity and way of life. To MacDonald, the essence of Judaism is not its theology, but its reproductively relevant cultural practices, and all the authors are in agreement that the Spanish Conversos retained a fundamentally Jewish cultural orientation and social ecology. Much of the “Crypto-Judaism” was in the preservation of traditional customs and folkways, rather than of specific articles of faith (Gitlitz, 1996). Indeed, Netanyahu’s (1995) theory of
Environmental Politics: Domestic and Global Dimensions

Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer with Gary Bryner


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Environmental Politics serves as a solid overview of the environmental policymaking framework. Originally intended as merely a "complement to other works" (p. viii), this second edition may stand instead as a primary textbook for undergraduate courses on U.S. domestic environmental policy. An update of Switzer's 1994 edition, this text written with Gary Bryner is more compact and manageable for introductory courses. Lost in this overhaul, though, is the previously equal treatment allotted to the global dimension. Despite its continued presence in the subtitle, global considerations do not remain on par with those of the domestic variety.

Other than this critique, organization of the textbook deserves high praise for its well-constructed format, with the first four chapters establishing the context, relevant actors, and policymaking process itself. The chapter on participants is particularly effective, outlining those involved in the process while traversing a vast amount of material in a limited space. Subsequent chapters then tackle specific issues, such as waste disposal, energy, water resources, air quality, the global commons, biodiversity, and population growth. The

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anti-Semitism and its extension to anti-Converso sentiment is remarkably similar to MacDonald's theory. The list of Jewish/Converso characteristics identified as having been found objectionable by Gentile society is virtually identical. Netanyahu traces the origins of these controversial Jewish sociopolitical and economic strategies to the fifth century B.C.E. (specifically, the Jewish role in the Persian domination of Egypt). Ben Zion Netanyahu is the father of the former prime minister of the State of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, and also of the hero of the daring Israeli antiterrorist raid on Entebbe, Jonathan Netanyahu, so any suspicion of latent anti-Semitism there is definitely misplaced.

Nevertheless, I think MacDonald overestimates the confluence of interests between the remaining unconverted Sephardic Jews (prior to the expulsion of 1492) and the Spanish Conversos. My understanding is that the many altruistic social bonds between these groups were mainly attributable to genetic family ties between converted and unconverted blood relations and not due to some spectacular ability of Judaism as a group strategy to continue to capitalize on the efforts of those who had defected from its ranks. My principal criticism is that MacDonald narrowly focuses his consideration of reproductive interests exclusively on those who remain nominally "Jewish," whereas I am more inclined to "follow the genes"! From a purely Darwinian perspective, Jewish reproductive success is not limited to descendants who retain their religious fidelity. The Spanish Conversos have their own interesting story of adaptation and survival.

In summary, although this book raises many troubling issues for both Jews and Gentiles, it is definitely worth reading because it is important for all of us to take a good hard look at ourselves. It is not pleasant to have one's elaborate self-serving self-deceptions closely scrutinized, especially by others, but it is arguably necessary to our continued coexistence and survival on this planet.