

9.20 MIT

Classes #29: Cultural determinism and sociobiology

Friday Nov 18, 2005

Reading:

- John Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology* (Oxford 2001), ch 7, pp 129-147.

Study questions: Alcock ch 7

1. What is the error of the false dichotomy that has often been used by persons arguing against the relevance of biology to an understanding of human behavior? (Such arguments have been common in writings of sociologists, cultural anthropologists, some feminists, and also some educators.) p 130
2. Summarize Derek Freeman's critique of the writing of Margaret Mead, the cultural anthropologist whose ideas presented in her 1928 book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, became so popular in the 20th century. p 132-133
3. Contrast the "blank slate" view of human nature with sociobiological views. p 134 - 136
4. Attributes that determine men's attraction to young women (on the average) have shown considerable consistency, even across cultures. ("Beauty" is not a myth or a politically determined creation, as claimed by Naomi Wolf.) What is the major, general signal value of these attributes, fitting the expectations of sociobiologists? p 137-139
5. Give a sociobiological interpretation of the finding that Yomybato men tend to prefer females with a figure that is heavier and with a larger waist-to-hip ratio than preferred by most men in more advanced cultures. p 141-142
6. Humans everywhere have a strong tendency to stay and act within groups, and these groups may compete with each other, sometimes violently. Try to specify a list of evolutionary fitness benefits of "groupism" feelings. p 143-147
7. See Appendix, ch 7, Q3
8. See Appendix, ch 7, Q2

(Hopefully you can deal with statements of the sort quoted in Q1 by now.)