

On Genetic Interests: Family, Ethny and Humanity in an Age of Mass Migration

Frank Salter

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Thomas Huxley, a man adroit with words, penned that memorable promotion of Darwin's *Origin* by chiding his stupidity for not having thought of natural selection himself. I find myself in like circumstances in recommending Frank Salter's new book. A brief historical reference will place things in perspective.

Three decades ago, a band of plucky malcontents established the Politics and Life Sciences Association to assist patching the findings of the biological sciences, especially evolutionary science, into the analysis and interpretation of politics. The catchcry was "forward to human nature", in contrast to the culture-only fashion. The Association slowly caught on and its journal, *Politics and Life Sciences*, climbed the ladder to professional respectability. Sociobiology, the new kid on the block in those days, was examined for its possible contribution to our efforts. It was used to help elucidate, inter alia, nepotism and nationalism, but none believed that a set of principles for "biopolitics" could be extracted from it. Salter thinks otherwise. His response to objections about what cannot be done is to just do it. He has constructed a model biopolitical science using William Hamilton's inclusive fitness theory, supplemented by contributions of Richard Alexander, E. O. Wilson, D. S. Wilson and others. Given this unexpected development, it would be apposite for *Politics and Life Sciences* to organize a full dress summary article and peer commentary of Salter's book. Alas the journal's new management rejects all content deemed to be "unnecessarily controversial", and the genetics of ethnicity falls afoul of that prohibition. Thus, it transpires that the one academic journal dedicated to the promotion

of biopolitical science is unlikely to take serious notice of the first offering with a credible claim to have achieved that goal.

In mitigation of the unkind epithet that I have applied to myself and to old colleagues, let it be said that Salter's innovation depends on recent developments unavailable at the initial evaluation of sociobiology. The first is the genetic assay data compiled by Luigi Cavalli-Sforza and collaborators over a period of decades, together with recent amendments by Bryan Sykes. These data establish a fine-grained empirical warrant for the perceptions of ethnic groups that their differences are not arbitrary preferences. Since ethnic boundaries often intergrade, these data are essential to establish the natural reality of ethnies. The second factor is the emergence of ethnic/nationality differences on the collapse of the Soviet Union. In its heyday, the Soviet Union appeared to vindicate the melting pot idea together with its lesson that ethnic differences are merely accumulated cultural preferences that may be displaced by fervent socialism. Although Soviet specialists knew that the reality did not quite match propaganda, even they were surprised by the sudden vigor and assertiveness of ethnic identities once 70 years of enforced melting pot persuasion fell away. Former Yugoslavia, where it was taboo to mention the words "Serb" and "Croatian", provided yet another illustration of the life-and-death significance of ethny. If the collapse of socialism was a practical proof that social identity is insufficient to create a harmonious nation-centered multiculturalism, it was also indirect evidence that political identity may be sustainable only on the basis of a dominant ethny. That this is indeed

the case is a key premise of Salter's biopolitics.

Sociobiology holds that the driving force of organisms is the optimal reproduction of each. This ultimate goal sets the parameters for proximal mechanisms of mating, nurturing, foraging, social structure and so on, construed as adaptations promoting optimal reproduction, or fitness. Adaptations emerge and are fine-tuned by natural selection operating on a population of phenotypes. From this premise set Salter extracts his controlling normative principle that the ultimate interest (or "good", in moral idiom) of individuals is the continuity of their genes in successive generations; in street-wise idiom, parenthood, not personal fulfilment, is the ultimate good. Parental altruism is expanded to the extended family by the addition of inclusive fitness to individual fitness. How far does the expansion extend? The classic expression of the rate of diminishing altruism is J. B. S. Haldane's quip that it is adaptive to give one's life for two sibs or eight cousins, but not fewer. This suggests that in a nation of cousins, the relatedness of two randomly chosen individuals is vanishingly small. Nevertheless, nations of cousins have repeatedly engaged like nations in wars of extirpation, which suggests that high amplitude ethnocentric response, bearing no real relationship to actual kinship, is driven by culturally magnified tribal instincts adaptive for small kin groups. If so, the key discipline for understanding ethny is ethology rather than sociobiology. Salter responds to this challenge by developing a method for estimating the degree of relatedness of randomly chosen individuals even in large populations. This is done by translating

host population, the latter are on course to become the ethnic minority in their own territory. In the initial phase of large-scale migrant labor, the status of these persons was that of temporary resident, to which no citizen entitlements attached. These restrictions were slowly replaced by status enhancements and recognition of permanent residence. Another category of migrant, those entitled to entry in virtue of their nation's membership in a post-colonial commonwealth, also significantly changed the demographics of the UK and France, and added the important component of citizen status and entitlements. This mix of circumstances resulted in the multiculturalist resolution of ethnic problem dominant in Western nations. This theme needs more detailed treatment than it receives in his book because, it seems to me, that detailed probing suggests that multiculturalism is still a largely cosmetic fix on ethnic national substance. Most nations have not assimilated domestic policy to multicultural norms. Japan, with the largest homogenous population in the world, prohibits immigration and strictly controls foreign ownership and residence. Malaysian law privileges Malays vis-à-vis economically potent ethnic minorities. Likewise Indonesia, where a half million Chinese were eliminated in an ethnic cleansing some decades ago. The list could be extended indefinitely. Such nations are nevertheless signatories to numerous declarations of human rights that they have neither the will nor the ability to enforce. They are also not enforceable by the "international community". Salter does not persuade this reader that the guarantees of minority rights included in his new agenda of "universal nationalism" have any greater prospect of enforcement.

Evolutionists and economists agree that universal altruism has no staying power: free riders dissipate it in the "tragedy of the commons". Inclusive fitness theory must give a convincing account of legislated and voluntary altruism to qualify as significant political theory. An adequate discussion of this theme would take us beyond the scope of this review. It would also take us beyond the present volume, for *On Genetic Interests* comes with two

Cavalli-Sforza's comprehensive data on genetic distance into measures of genetic relatedness. The outcome of this theoretical innovation is a metric that reveals the degree of relatedness of endogamous groups and the genetic distances between such groups; the metric predicts degrees of within-group cohesion and between-group conflict. The substantive outcomes are that (a) the ethnic bond is indispensable to durable human association; (b) ethnic-based competition for territory and dominance are incident to the human condition; (c) the attempt to downsize ethnicity to culturally-manageable historical preferences (multiculturalism) influences relative competitive advantages of ethnies, but does not eliminate them as fundamental social givens.

At this point, the road branches according to value choices. One path opts for revitalizing the ethnic state along lines enabling ethnic majorities to preserve their competitive advantage while respecting the rights of minorities and preserving international cooperation. This is Salter's option, which he styles "universal nationalism". The alternative is to study the genetic logic and social data of Salter's ethnic argument in order to devise better ways to undercut the ethnic impulse and, in the best case, eliminate it, contrary to his prediction. The content of these two positions overlap considerably, for the revitalization of ethny requires Salter to pay close attention to the policy prescriptions and circumstances that have blunted its effectiveness and dismissed it as a legitimating principle.

The phenomena of primary concern cluster in the past half century. During this period the movement for equality of women, together with the long trend toward smaller families, converged in a downgrading of family values, the entry of many women into the workforce and the decline of the birth rate well below replacement value in most European countries. Concurrently, permissive immigration law, together with the recruitment of workers from poorer and ethnically distant nations, built up large ethnic minorities in Europe's populous nations. Since the birth rates of the minorities are higher than that of the

companion edited volumes in which the altruism theme is elaborated in persuasive empirical detail (Salter, 2002, 2004). Let me then conclude this review with a brief evaluation.

Does Salter's proposed biopolitics meet the objections put in the original assessment of the political limitations of sociobiology? I think probably not. His theory interprets states as group strategies for the promotion of ethnic genetic interests. But data on state formation today and in the past shows that uncontrolled nepotism must be eliminated if the state is not to stagnate as a luxuriant personal despotism. The pitfall is avoided by creating structures of social differentiation and rule-governed selection that thwart nepotism and greatly expanded cooperation. States also create national patriotism transcending specific ethnies. Describing the evolved mechanisms at the basis of state formation remains a task for the future. Nevertheless, he has made a significant contribution by detailing, for the first time, just what the sociobiological contribution to politics may be. He has also drawn forceful attention to the potency of ethnic allegiance in domestic and international politics. This is a message we would prefer not to hear because it reminds us that the multicultural dispensation, and its chant of universal altruism, is more faith than reality. But considering the awesome futures at stake, those concerned with policy are well advised to give Salter's achievement serious attention.

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References

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