

Department of Biology, Room 56-423

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Professor Hans A. Krebs
Metabolic Research Laboratory
Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine
University of Oxford
Oxford, England

Dear Professor Krebs,

In the Summer issue of Perspectives in Biology and Medicine I found your article entitled "Some Facts of Life -- Biology and Politics." It is an interesting coincidence that a book of mine now in press has the tentative (not final) title of "Some Facts of Life."

I hope you will forgive my writing you to express my deep concern about some of the positions you take in your article, especially on the relation between biology and society. I also wish to state at the outset that I agree with many of your proposals for action, especially as they concern community service and increased emphasis on quality performance.

I am sure you are aware that most of the statements you present on human biology are either anecdotic or the product of writers who can hardly be considered as scientifically grounded. Suffice it to mention Wilfred Trotter's book, Instinct of the Herd in Peace and War. I would consider Desmond Morris's books in the same category. I hardly see the value of quoting Plato or Ovid or Schiller. As for Konrad Lorenz, it is sufficient to look at a passage quoted by Leon Eisenberg (Science 176: 123, 1972) (copy enclosed) to judge the extremes of support for Nazism and the Nazi approach to the Jewish question to which Lorenz's ideas on human aggression inevitably led him.

More serious I find your discussion of "the beast in man." Apart from a series of irrelevant anecdotes, such as criminologists have long since learned not to use as evidence but which yellow journalists use systematically, you bring in the story of the XYY individuals which is anything but well established. Let me point out that to find a high incidence of a certain genotype in American prisons usually indicates, not a correlation with criminality but a correlation with black skin.

From your discussion, especially in the section entitled "A Biological Approach to Social Problems," I derive the impression that you are somewhat critical of the social sciences and optimistic about the biological approach. I believe it is unfair to give the impression that biology today has anything to offer that is relevant to the

serious problems which you so thoughtfully discuss. The social sciences, for all their shortcomings, have at least the merit of having purged the air of a spurious biologizing, which had led to the assumption of the existence of congenital criminals in a society that creates by its workings a mass of socially and economically deprived.

I hope you will consider this letter, however critical, as a contribution to a useful dialogue. I would appreciate it if in your reply you would tell me whether you have any objection to my sending my letter to the Perspectives. Possibly, my letter and your reply could be published together.

Respectfully yours,

sel/na

S. E. Luria