Of all the books appearing in the field of biology in the past decade, the one that has stimulated the most widespread controversy is Edward O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, published in 1975.¹ The main focus of the popular debate surrounding Wilson’s book, and concerning the new field of sociobiology generally, is the idea that various aspects of human social behavior, like much of the social behavior of animals, may be genetic rather than cultural in origin. Central as this idea has been to the public’s interest in sociobiology, however, most of the professional biologists and comparative psychologists who had the opportunity to review Wilson’s book when it first appeared did not object strongly to the discussion of human behaviour that Wilson provided in the book’s last chapter. Instead, what stuck in their craws more than anything else was the prediction Wilson offered in the beginning of the book regarding the future roles of the various special fields that had been contributing to the study of animal behavior.² “The conventional wisdom,” said Wilson, , “...speaks of ethology, which is the naturalistic study of whole patterns of animal behavior, and its companion enterprise, comparative psychology, as the central, unifying field of behavioral biology. They are not; both are destined to be cannibalized by neurophysiology and sensory physiology from one end and sociobiology and behavioral ecology from the other.”³

No investigator likes to be told that his field of study has had its day and is about to be swallowed up. It is therefore hardly surprising that the proponents of the two fields that Wilson was relegating to the past – the ethologists and the comparative psychologists – were less than enchanted by Wilson’s prediction. Having only recently sorted out some of the major differences between their own two approaches to animal behavior study, they were not prepared to cede their subjects to the representatives of other specialties. In responding to Wilson’s


² For the purposes of this paper, I will refer simply to the collection of professional assessments of Wilson’s book presented as a “Multiple review of Wilson’s Sociobiology,” *Animal Behaviour*, 24 (1976), 698–718. Seven of the fourteen reviewers who contributed to this multiple review expressed unhappiness with Wilson’s prediction about sociobiology’s role in the cannibalization of other fields. Six of the reviewers indicated some dissatisfaction with the quality of Wilson’s chapter on man, but only two of these, Jerry Hirsch and Ethel Tobach, charged Wilson with promoting the idea of genetic determinism.

³ Wilson, *Sociobiology*, p. 6.