



October 4, 1982

Dear Sir:

I would like to offer a few comments on the generally excellent "kickoff" article by Samuel Hines in your inaugural issue, as well as on some of the commentaries that accompanied it.

First, it seems to me that a footnote is in order regarding the past history of the biopolitics movement. Though I won't go into the specifics here, it should be pointed out that the decade-long effort to develop biopolitics included (besides the notable successes) many thwarted departmental initiatives, many disapproved course proposals, many unsuccessful approaches to foundations, many research proposals that were not funded, and many rejected journal articles that were not, in my view, always turned down for lack of merit. At least some of the blame for what was *not* accomplished during that decade lies, not with what the proponents of biopolitics failed to attempt, but rather with what other actors for various reasons (intellectual, ideological, political, and fiscal) blocked or prevented. Indeed, biopolitics proponents have often been the victims of a Catch 22 situation in which opponents claim there is "no evidence" for any biological contribution to, say, leadership behaviors while at the same time rejecting carefully designed, methodologically sound proposals that are intended to investigate precisely such issues.

I also wish to express some concern over what might be interpreted as an insensitivity to the necessary gulf between social science *qua* science and various philosophical and metatheoretical issues and approaches. I am not advocating that biopolitics practitioners should embrace any one developmental strategy to the exclusion of the other. Both have their uses (and limitations) in advancing human understanding. But it is important to avoid blurring the distinction between the two, and to avoid giving short shrift to the laborious, painstaking and often risky efforts to formulate and test explicit hypotheses. Whatever its shortcomings, the scientific method is still our best defense against the sometimes corrupting influences of ideological cant and political expediency. Given the history of the biopolitics movement to date, this is a matter

to which its supporters should be especially sensitive; the "case" for biopolitics is ultimately grounded in science, not in the unaided cogitations of individual gurus.

I would also like to take exception to some of the comments by William T. Bluhm. The underlying assumption that anchors evolutionary biology and, indeed, the life sciences generally is precisely that the problem of biological survival and reproduction is *the* fundamental (paradigmatic) problem for all living organisms, humans not excepted. We have ample evidence that the problem is in fact applicable to humans, and I find the continuing myopia of many traditional political theorists at once tiresome and wrong-headed—indeed, living proof of the charge that ivory-towered academicians are often cavalier in their disregard for reality (or at least our best scientifically supported version of reality). Furthermore, the survival problem is continuing, inescapable, and multifaceted; there is no such thing as "mere" survival, and if we may aspire to "higher" (or lower) things, nevertheless our actions (by and large) have important consequences for the biological *problematique*, whether we happen to be aware of the fact or not. That survival and reproduction are the basic problems for humankind (and by extension, for the human sciences) is self-evident to most life scientists, and to the masses of humankind for that matter. That it is not self-evident to many social scientists and philosophers is to their profound discredit. How can anyone who has lived through the multiple crises of the past decade—environmental, population, energy, etc.—still fail to see this point?

The inescapable reality of the survival problem is related also to some comments made by my colleague, Elliott White. I was frankly surprised to read that "overt behavior as such has no meaning and hence no theoretical interest apart from the inner motivations that impel it. The proper focus of human science, accordingly, is upon action, which embraces both behavior and its meaning, rather than upon behavior itself."

In the absence of significant qualifications, I am afraid that I am forced to disagree. The scientific world view is based on the well-tested premise that there is a physical and social reality out there apart from our perceptions and meanings, and that our actions have consequences in that

outer reality, often apart from or contrary to our personal meanings. Indeed, our meanings do not come from thin air; they are shaped by an *interaction* between the inner self and the outer reality. Any science (whether practiced informally by a newborn infant or more formally by trained scientists) is a process of attempting to adjust our inner understandings to the outer reality, so that we can adapt to, control, or change that reality if we so choose. It is a cybernetic process. Such an apparently extreme subjectivist and mentalist position is not only antiscientific, it flies in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. I know from personal communications with Professor White that he does not really hold such an extreme viewpoint. I only wish that he had been more careful to qualify his position in print.

Sincerely yours,  
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## Errata

Two errors in the first issue of *Politics and the Life Sciences* have been called to our attention. The title of Samuel Hines's article should have been "Biopolitics: The Evolution of Inquiry in Political Science," and the title of Glendon Schubert's commentary should have been "The Evolution of Inquiry in Biopolitics." The editors regret the errors.