

Generalized Bastardy: Evolutionary Science, Neoliberalism, and the Far Right

Quinn Slobodian, *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right* (Brooklyn, NY, Zone Books, 2025), 279 pp.

Surely, the least one can say today is that *something* is happening. If, for those living in America and all those subjected to its whims, it seems that, on an almost daily basis, what was previously unthinkable according to our political common sense becomes the new norm, then a certain compulsion is understandable to name the difference between what was and what is. The temptation, thus, is to *periodize*.

In the economic realm, there have been several attempts to describe Trump's displacement of what passed for consensus as the *end of neoliberalism*. The folk wisdom associating the global free market unencumbered by government regulation with the greatest good for the greatest number seems to have been supplanted by protectionism, and by nativist, racist ideals of whose privileges the border is meant to preserve. Quinn Slobodian's *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right*, intervenes in this emerging narrative by questioning this notion of epochal change. In fact, as Slobodian tirelessly documents by dredging through the speeches, pamphlets, and professional networks of the right then and now, this racist, nativist, and nationalist strain has always existed *within* neoliberalism.

In Slobodian's words, his project is to find a common root for both sides of the apparent opposition structuring our sense of historic upheaval:

Attention to [...] Hayek's bastards helps clear up some of the confused framing of politics in the last several years. Since the political surprises of the Brexit vote and Trump's victory in 2016, there has been a stubborn story that explains so-called right-wing populism as a grassroots rejection of neoliberalism, often described as market fundamentalism, or the belief that everything on the planet has a price tag, borders are obsolete, the world economy should replace nation-states, and human life is reducible to a cycle of earn, spend, borrow, die. This 'New' Right, by contrast, claims to believe in the people, national sovereignty and the importance of culture. (18)

Both this internationalism and this racial or cultural nationalism have a common source, because they are two faces of a single project, as evidenced by the continuity of the goals pursued by the supposedly 'New' Right: privatize, deregulate, cut taxes (19).

Slobodian's task, then, is to form a new genealogy and a new narrative of today's Far Right, in which it figures as a descendent—though perhaps illegitimate—a bastard offspring of the previous century's neoliberals. The grandfather or patriarch of this secret filiation is, of course, Friedrich A. Hayek, in whose writings we find the seeds of both the tendencies that now structure the 'stubborn story' of the end of neoliberalism.

Beginning in the 1970s, Hayek's writings turned to evolutionary theory to speculate about aspects of human nature or rather cultural evolution that might predispose us toward certain forms of market economy, while foreclosing other possibilities. Slobodian calls Hayek's prehistory of the evolution of the human species his 'savanna story' (27), as it located the origin of enduring human instincts in the 'tribal solidarity, cooperative hunting behavior and defense of territory' necessary to our ancestors'

survival in the ‘African savanna’ (33).¹ In small-scale or ‘tribal’ groups, instincts for in-group trust and cooperation and out-group hostility would have formed that privileged kinship ties or their proxies (racial and cultural commonality). It is only by means of cultural evolution or traditions, which unite ever larger groups of humanity by repressing the ‘tribal’ instincts, that we have advanced toward the ‘open society’, though our instinctual life remains. In Hayek’s version of the savanna story, it is not that we are genetically-instinctually hard-wired for capitalism, but that the cultural traditions that tend toward global competition in a free market economy have spread *despite* our instinctual communitarianism (by non-genetic forms of inheritance and imitation), because they allow for the survival of the greatest number—a retreat into our instinctual communities, or the attempt to universalize our cooperative egalitarianism, would be a disastrous error.²

This story transformed through several subtle revisions in Hayek’s own writings and those of his acolytes. These inheritors are, in Slobodian’s terms, Hayek’s bastards, having adopted an unfaithful reading of his evolutionary myth. For instance, Hayek described the ‘open society’ as a purely cultural accomplishment, and the ‘socialist’ inclinations that opposed it as remnants of our instinctual and ‘emotional’ life (27).³ On the other hand, many of Hayek’s bastards would deploy a superficially identical story and its account of our instinctual life to rule out *on genetic grounds* any type of socialist communitarianism. In their version, there are innate and insurmountable differences between human races or cultures, which no amount of ‘socialist’ egalitarianism could overcome. Moreover, even the cosmopolitan vision sometimes equated with ‘neoliberalism’ is an impossible ideal, which must be tempered by the reality of our innate trust of kin and animosity toward others: ‘The message of the savanna stories that neoliberals told was that the tribe will never go away. Because this is the case, homogeneity is preferable to reduce conflict’ (64). (Thus, the relationship of ‘socialist’ impulses to our instinctual life trades places: for Hayek, socialism is a direct expression of our instinctual tendency to cooperative community, for his bastard offspring, it is an impossible ideal precisely because of that instinctual inheritance, both because our cooperativity will never extend universally, and because egalitarianism attempts to make equal innately or genetically unequal races or cultures.)

Thus, as Slobodian notes, neoliberal theory has always been a theory of the *metamarket* (17). It is not simply a description of a factual or ideal economic system (let alone the reduction of everything to its value within that system), but of the conditions of possibility and impossibility that guide us toward that system, that sustain it, and that make it the best of all possible worlds. Melinda Cooper expresses this relationship of the economic and apparently extra-economic dialectically; she recognizes in Marx’s *Grundrisse* a necessary movement structuring capital, according to which it must transcend all limitations, yet must in turn posit within itself the limits it transcends.⁴ Thus, the notions of racial or cultural identity and hierarchy (as well as Cooper’s focus, the family unit) that structure neoliberal thought need not be understood *in opposition to* the neoliberal vision of a global marketplace—each is the how and why of the other.

Several ideological benefits accrue to the neoliberals who *harden* these limits. The intellectual and political lineage that Slobodian reconstructs, reaching from right-wing apocalyptic speculative fiction of the 1970s to Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein’s notorious *The Bell Curve* and the rise of the alt-right, is defined by what Slobodian calls, appropriately, the ‘three hard’ (23). Rather than opposing free market ideology to rigid particularism, theorists, popularizers, and politicians increasingly throughout this period base their vision of a neoliberal economy on ‘hardwired human nature, hard borders, and hard money [i.e., gold]’ (23). The ‘old fusionism’, which justified its libertarianism with religious and moral invocations of the Protestant work ethic and its just rewards,

is replaced by what Slobodian calls the ‘new fusionism’, justifying neoliberal policy on the grounds of ‘hard’ science (10).⁵

The bogeymen of neoliberal thought—civil rights and affirmative action, feminism, environmentalism, socialism, political correctness, and the welfare state—are thus painted as misconceptions of immutable human nature. These threats were acutely felt at the time when the new fusionism was ‘hardening’, after the Cold War, which Slobodian notes many neoliberals feared they had lost. Communism had fallen, and yet redistributive public spending, and the ‘big government’ enacting it, seemed, to these observers, more entrenched than ever—with the specter of the environmental movement looming largest. Where the moral argument justified capitalist inequality as necessary incentive and the just rewards for differing merit, the human nature argument adds to this the notion that anything else would be *impossible*.⁶ Murray Rothbard, who was foundational to the strain of Austrian economics that emphasized genetics, biology, race, and nature over nurture, invoked *hard* science as an absolute barrier to redistributive politics: ‘biology stands like a rock in the face of egalitarian fantasies’, fantasies which go against the ‘ontological structure of reality itself; against the very organization of nature’ (42). According to this view, inequality is a necessary expression of evolved differences that no amount of ‘social engineering’ could overcome.

Importantly, Slobodian has noted, in interviews about his book, that this relationship of Far Right ideology to science challenges strains of political rhetoric that purport to oppose the right:

Think about the bumper stickers and lawn signs you saw during the first Trump administration that said “Trust the science” or “I believe in scientists.” The new fusionists would agree. They just had a different idea of what the science was. Critics of the far right make it too easy for themselves if they banish that ideology into a realm of irrationality and mysticism that can be easily punctured and dismantled. Often, they are operating in the same spirit of rigorous inquiry that we are, just through a different epistemological framework and setup.⁷

The Far Right today cannot be said, in a meaningful sense, to be ‘against’ science; they are *for* particular uses and interpretations of scientific research, and seek to capture and control—politically and ideologically—techno-scientific institutions in order to steer their functioning toward their own ends. The liberal response fails because it 1) treats existing scientific institutions as neutral, rather than extensions of our economic and political systems, often complicit in the rightward lurch of these systems, and 2) treats resistance as a matter of belief or trust, and at most of maintenance of a status quo (preserving existing funding and public health practices, for example, or trusting the ‘experts’ to decide), rather than as a political struggle for control of these institutions. Given the tactics of the second Trump administration (eliminating funding for research and institutions that are not ideologically aligned), it will likely grow increasingly difficult to pretend that science is simply a natural and inevitable proponent of the liberal consensus.

Slobodian’s sedulous and fascinating contextualization of these trends also reconstitutes an interesting aspect of the role IQ plays for these hardened new fusionists. Slobodian brings out, in the background of Murray and Herrnstein’s *The Bell Curve*—which drew upon IQ scores to seek genetic bases for inequalities of sex, race, and class—anxieties surrounding success in what was being called the ‘knowledge economy’. The declining economic status of America relative to certain East Asian economies was taken as a sign of our declining mental stature, which in turn was used to advocate for strict, racialized limits on immigration and eugenic policies at home. Moreover, this

account helps explain the place of IQ-fetishism in Silicon Valley and among technofuturists; writers such as Richard Hanania and Curtis Yarvin ('Mencius Moldbug') foresee a cognitive elite liberating themselves through their own inventiveness from any dependence on the laboring classes, and indulge in violent, eugenic fantasies about how to dispose of the now useless surplus population (defined in class and racial terms).

There are subsidiary gains from such narratives that remain implicit in Slobodian's account. While the story of 'hard' human nature justifies the status quo, it is obviously the case today that it holds an appeal not at all exclusive to those on top of this hierarchy. There are many who take their recompense from this metamarket-economy merely by means of identification, in some abstract sense, with those who reap the material rewards, and by disidentification with whoever the system casts as inherently inferior (or by pretending that their natural superiority has not translated into status because of unnatural social arrangements). Even where one's supposed superior endowment has not been enough to lift one out of poverty or subjugation, one belongs to a group that is superior in nature or statistically, and can know or imagine that someone else is suffering worse indignities because of their still greater inferiority. It is also the case that complaints of a lack of recognition or recompense still arise from those whose material rewards are not insubstantial (even from the richest men on Earth), suggesting a demand beyond need that conflates absolute power and love. Such ideologies even find ways of appealing to members of the groups they most disparage, probably because these individuals set themselves apart, mentally and socially, from their racial or cultural group, in part by their proximity to white power.

Here, IQ plays a crucial role in instituting an obvious and seemingly objective sense of rank order. Slobodian describes it as a 'reliable benchmark of value' in a world in which public markers of success (even the very value of currency) are seen as 'debauched' or 'debased', for instance when diversity is understood as subverting 'meritocracy' (169). It takes only the briefest glance at those who promulgate or cling to bedtime stories about a master race to catch the stench of mediocrity. In other words, for people who have no talents or cultural accomplishments to speak of, and lack even the sensibility to recognize artistic merit, philosophical depth, or strength of character, it takes only the most basic grasp of numbers (some are larger than others) to rank by IQ score. This substitute or prosthesis stands in for the missing stature; superior 'capacity' is reified, precisely where superiority in *act* is lacking. We can understand on these grounds both the obsession with IQ in the tech world—it serves their fantasy that their quantifications are the ultimate form of reality—and their obvious desire for revenge against anyone with aesthetic taste or talent, embodied in the current effort to eliminate all cultural creation and replace it with AI.

For Slobodian, the 'intellectual lineage' filiating the moral-religious and scientific-racial justifications of neoliberalism are responses of a single political project and economic system to changing 'material preconditions' (167). Thus, in the post-Cold War period, when the possibility of realizing aspects of their program was close at hand, there was a recognition that cold-turkey abstinence from welfare mechanisms would bring withdrawal pains to the social body they depicted as an addict (14–15). Thus, a vision of human nature was needed that explained why these were the temporary pains of a transition toward our ideal form—and this instigated a search beyond the traditional disciplines of economics and political theory, including among the natural sciences. The transition from the old to the new fusionism also implied transformations of the public sphere; the role religion once played in public discourse, constructing the sense of a shared social project, was replaced by technocratic governance and scientific explanation, a transition in which neoliberal thinkers undoubtedly played a role at the same time as they were caught up in it (10). Moreover, the changing tele-technological

mediation of the public sphere dismantled the control established media outlets held over the tenor of public debate, allowing text and subtext to trade places once their boundaries could no longer be policed.

At the same time, the impetus for Slobodian's narrative, the non-oppositionality haunting stories of the 'old' and 'new' right, complicates the notions of derivation from material conditions, temporal succession, or genealogy as such. The global-cosmopolitan neoliberalism and its racist-protectionist offshoot can share a filiation because each has always implied the other. Despite differences that may rise to the surface on particular points of policy, the most universalizing tendencies of neoliberalisms past (Slobodian reminds us that in the '80s *The Wall Street Journal* would regularly call for open borders immigration), always served as alibis for existing power structures, including those hierarchies instituted along racial fault lines (79–80). By pretending that a pure freedom or a system of reward for merit could be instituted without confronting existing power structures between and within nations, those power structures were reproduced as surely as they would be in a system that posited them as first principles or human nature. Slobodian helps us to recognize the substitutability of these apparently universalist or particularistic discourses, by showing how one filiates from the other, or how the contemporary regime fixated on the borderlines of nation, race, and gender is the continuation of the globalists' family line. (Moreover, we can understand why each side of this coin can always be viewed, and often has been, as a mere pretext for the other; cosmopolitan meritocracy as the way to win approval in polite society for the unjustifiable hierarchies it maintains—perhaps even so liberals no less invested in these hierarchies can hide their intentions from themselves—while 'race-baiting' is often understood as red meat for the masses in which the bitter pill of neoliberal austerity has been lodged.)

Whether we understand this neoliberal lovers' quarrel as forming a genealogy in which the triumphant face responds to material preconditions, or as infected by an undecidability that complicates even our notion of derivation or genealogy, Slobodian's intervention is equally important. He warns us not to be taken in by any narrative that depicts the present as a 'populist revolt' in which the right is warming up to working class demands for a redistributive economy. Slobodian mobilizes genealogy in order to make now and then recognizable as the same old same old; his story brings us up to the present day equipped with new insights into the subtext or complicities of certain dominant discourses:

Behind the abstract talk of liberties and freedoms in much of twenty-first century neoliberal and libertarian discourse lies a much grubbier story of hunting and gathering, primordial beginnings, and adamant differences. Only by realizing this can we understand the mystique of evolutionary psychology in the work of right-wing gurus like Jordan Peterson or the statistical obsessions of the so-called race realists on the radical right. Arguments about politics always rest on claims about human nature. (64)

The Pseudo of Science

Slobodian's genealogy focuses on one extreme of the intersection between evolutionary science and politics. It may be tempting to think, as we examine the pamphlets and provocations of cranks most of whom lack scientific credentials, that elsewhere a scientific institution exists independently of these political concerns, a neutral terrain from which these appropriations can be deemed false and dismissed.

Any such recourse to the scientific institution as a court of last instance depends on the same allure of science as objectivity that makes its ‘hardness’ appeal to Far Right. Unfortunately, there is no way of defining the inside of a discipline of evolutionary theory or the life sciences without recognizing that conflicts over precisely these political questions shape debates that are internal to the scientific endeavor, and thus are not merely attributable to extra-scientific misreadings. Moreover, this scientific work necessarily takes place within these systems of political power—such that flattering the donor class and their enduring notions of innate superiority is one way to advance one’s research.⁸

Slobodian’s work makes an invaluable contribution to studies of evolutionary science that approach it from this other shore. Starting from the internal debates among professional life scientists to recognize their political stakes or motives, one can unearth complicities with precisely the racial, sexual, economic, and national systems of political power that are Slobodian’s focus.⁹ Here, I hope to make explicit certain continuities between evolutionary science ‘itself’ and its apparent ‘misappropriations’, which require us to confront questions that some have called *biodeconstructive*.¹⁰ If we lack the secure anchor of proper science, from which to pass judgment on ‘pseudo’-scientific falsehoods, this will place in question even certain of the framing gestures of Slobodian’s narrative. By recognizing the undecidability or nonoppositonality of those limits, I would hope not to critique Slobodian, but to build on his project, by identifying the complicities of scientific institutions themselves with the neoliberal power structures and self-justifications that Slobodian is bringing to light. Despite a commonplace association of deconstruction with idle play, I would argue that the deconstruction set in motion by these undecidabilities has consequences for the most *serious* or practical questions raised by Slobodian’s timely book.

First: *the undecidability of science and pseudoscience*. Of course, it is more important than ever to make such distinctions today, to call out opportunistic misinformation that plays an increasingly prominent role in public health, the tech world, and the grifter economy (increasingly coterminous with the economy *tout court*). Nonetheless, there are risks associated with assuming that a simple distinction can be made between, for instance, a pseudoscience that would be guilty of every form of prejudice and motivated misunderstanding and a true science imagined to be immune to such distortions. The risk is precisely that one will allow these same prejudices, which continue to play a structuring role within scientific institutions and discourse, to escape detection or critique.

Lest one assume that this is an excessively subtle theoretical exercise pursued without regard for ethical or political practicalities, we can find the same precaution (the questioning of a clean science/pseudoscience distinction) insisted upon in work that does not at all frame itself as deconstructive. Dorothy Roberts, the author of *Fatal Invention*, a far-reaching critique of the use of race-concepts in genetic science, noted precisely this risk or error when explaining why she did not limit her critique to ‘pseudoscience’ or ‘race science’:

There is a similar problem with calling the racial science of prior eras pseudoscience. In hindsight, we see the flaws in bizarre means of measuring racial difference, such as craniometry, which anatomists used a century ago to determine intelligence by calculating skull volume, and brand these methods a ridiculous pretense at the scientific method. Scientists today can then claim that it was pseudoscience that fell victim to racial prejudice, not *real* science, which studies racial difference objectively. But what we call racial pseudoscience today was considered the vanguard of scientific progress at the time it was practiced, and those who practiced it were admired by the scientific community and the

public as pioneering geniuses. Could it be that our grandchildren will brand as pseudoscience today's racial classifications generated by computerized genome scans?¹¹

Then and now, it has been the most prominent and officially or institutionally sanctioned representatives or practitioners of science who have promulgated racist justifications of status quo inequality in the form of apparently objective science. While it may be true that Slobodian's cast of characters would almost never be considered 'the vanguard of scientific progress', it is nonetheless the case that exactly what we would hope to denounce in their work endures in the research of leading life scientists of the same time period—including the present day.¹² The risk of creating a separate category ('pseudoscience', 'race science') to contain certain undesirables of past eras or our own is of failing to recognize that the same tendencies are central to evolutionary science.

To be clear, my contention is not that one should never use such terms, nor that we should avoid invoking any parallel distinctions between the merit or rigor of given scientific positions. It is only that what it means to be scientific is part of what is in question, and we are necessarily engaged in a fight over what principles it furthers or represents, rather than being able to treat it as an originary ground from which the incontrovertible emerges unscathed.

Thus, it is understandable why Slobodian sometimes relies on this sort of shorthand, given that most of the prominent characters in his narrative are transparently motivated in their appropriations and float free of any structural attachments to scientific institutions. Nonetheless, the same risks attend casting these theories of evolution as 'race science' (49), 'pseudoscience' (41), or 'junk science yarns' (61) and opposing them to, for example, 'the actual science of physical anthropology' (63), 'mainstream social science' (99), or simply 'the science' (127). In more than one place where Slobodian invokes scientific consensus to dismiss neoliberal scientism, a further exploration of the scientific context reveals more complicity and continuity than we might hope to find.

For instance, certain of Hayek's bastards such as Rothbard and Hans-Hermann Hoppe relied on the research of psychologist J. Philippe Rushton, whose work Slobodian describes, aptly, as 'unapologetically racist [...] psychometric studies linking cranial size, race, climate, and intelligence [...] published at the fringes and often beyond the fringes of [his] own profession' (56). Rushton was sanctioned by his university for his racism and research practices, and had trouble publishing some (though not all) of his research in academic journals, so this description of his liminal position, at or beyond the fringe of his profession, is certainly accurate.

Nonetheless, a more complicated picture emerges as we move toward a certain center of evolutionary biology. E. O. Wilson was the author of *Sociobiology* (1975), one of the most influential works of evolutionary theory of its generation both among professional scientists and among the broader public.¹³ Despite being a lengthy, technical work published with a university press, it reached a surprisingly large readership, and was followed by numerous works some in academic and some in popular style, including one novel. He is often fondly remembered today for these contributions as well as his focus on conservation and his environmentalist streak.¹⁴ Nonetheless, his theories grounding human behavior in genetics were always controversial, for reasons that could be understood at one and the same time as biological and political.

In 2022, a noteworthy contribution to debates over his legacy was published in *Science for the People* (a revived version of a journal of leftist science that originally ran from 1969–89). Biologist Stacy Farina and co-author Matthew Gibbons found that Wilson had used his position and influence to

advocate for Rushton and his race science throughout their careers.¹⁵ Wilson's papers, held at the National Archives, contained four boxes of correspondence with or about Rushton. Wilson twice interceded for Rushton when the latter was at risk of losing his job because of his racism and sub-par research practices. (A salient example: he once cited a letter from *Penthouse Forum*, disguised as a citation to a nonexistent academic journal, as evidence of the relative size of white and black men's penises.)¹⁶ Moreover, Wilson helped Rushton to publish an article in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (PNAS), one of the most prestigious science journals. Publication in PNAS requires sponsorship from a member of the National Academy of Sciences, for which Wilson volunteered. The sponsor also acts as handling editor, which meant that Wilson was free to seek 'friendly' peer reviewers and despite that to publish the article apparently over the objections of one reviewer. While this article did not explicitly deal with racial difference, and Wilson cautioned it would be 'counterproductive for both of us' to try to publish on race in PNAS, he wrote favorable peer reviews for other articles by Rushton explicitly dealing with the subject.¹⁷

At the height of the controversy over Rushton's work, Wilson wrote the following in a letter to a professor in Rushton's department: 'To be sure, you and Professor Cain have found fault with Professor Rushton's writings on race, but some noted specialists in human genetics and cognitive psychology have judged them to be sound and significant'. As evidence that Rushton's ideas are anything but marginal in the profession, Wilson notes a poll that 'found that a large minority of specialists of human genetics and testing believe in a partial hereditary basis for black-white average IQ differences'.¹⁸ How are we, then, to draw the dividing lines between center, fringe, and beyond for this scientific field? It seems as if the center (represented by, but not at all limited to, Wilson) holds its tongue in public in order the better to maintain an authority that can be used to welcome in certain voices from at or beyond the fringes. (Moreover, this silent 'large minority' understands that the work they do builds theoretical foundations that legitimate work such as Rushton's.) Wilson even considered the pressure that silenced him and his colleagues to be a form of censorship and repression, which he thought Rushton's work would ultimately overcome—in one letter, he writes that critics will ultimately 'rue the day they joined this leftward revival of McCarthyism'. It seems, then, as though no less than E. O. Wilson considered J. Philippe Rushton to be a certain vanguard of scientific progress.

To recognize the continuities between neoliberal evolutionism and evolutionary science 'proper', I'll follow the guiding thread of just one instance where Slobodian invokes scientific consensus to marginalize the evolutionism of Hayek and his bastards: 'Part of what made Hayek's theory resemble social Darwinism was his preoccupation with the group rather than the individual—which the average economist (*and indeed the average population scientist*) would be expected to prefer' (29; emphasis added).¹⁹ Can we undercut Hayek's ideas by showing them to be out of step with contemporary science?²⁰

Slobodian tells us in passing, and certainly correctly for the time period in question—roughly the 1970s—that most biologists were not *group* selectionists.²¹ What is sometimes identified as a paradigm shift occurred around this time that made 'kin selection' a dominant viewpoint within evolutionary science (it traced its roots to work from the 1960s by W. D. Hamilton, John Maynard Smith, and George C. Williams). Both group and kin selection were meant to account for the possibility of apparently 'altruistic' behavior among organisms. If it is taken as a first principle of evolutionary science that selection furthers the ends of survival and reproduction, how can it bring about a result in which an individual apparently risks or sacrifices its own reproduction for the sake of another's? The group selection response was that selection happened at levels other than that of

the individual organism or its genes. So, a trait could evolve ‘for the good of the population’, if a population with members bearing that trait survived in greater numbers, even if certain individuals within that population who carry the trait might reproduce less as a result. Kin selectionists ruled out such explanations, arguing instead that apparent altruism could emerge only where it worked in the service of *kin*, of individuals who were likely to share the same genetic differences as the altruist. (Kin selection was compatible as well with theories of *reciprocal altruism*, which allowed for altruistic behavior so long as the altruist could count on reciprocity—so long, that is, as altruism formed a system of economic exchange. Indeed, these phenomena were explained with formulas borrowed from economics.)²² Thus, the ultimate explanation rested not on the good of the species but on the ‘selfishness’ of the individual gene, giving rise to tendencies that privilege kinship relations, with diminishing returns from more distant relatives. W. D. Hamilton, whose work laid the foundations for the theory of kin selection, summarized it thus: ‘To express the matter more vividly, in the world of our model organisms, whose behaviour is determined strictly by genotype, we expect to find that no one is prepared to sacrifice his life for any single person but that everyone will sacrifice it when he can thereby save more than two brothers, or four half-brothers, or eight first cousins’.²³

Slobodian invokes this consensus against group selection in order to dismiss Hayek’s evolutionary speculations, to argue that the latter has failed to keep pace with the science, and thus, that his neoliberal justifications are based on faulty premises. It is undoubtedly noteworthy, then, that precisely this paradigm of kin selection was the subject of attacks from other contemporary biologists precisely for instantiating neoliberal logic and providing exactly the sort of justifications for racial, sexual, national, and class hierarchies sought by Hayek and his ilk. Steven Rose, who was part of a generation of Marxist biologists whose work I’ll describe in a moment, drew this connection between kin selection and neoliberalism most forcefully. Even if, as he noted, evolutionary theorists were not writing speeches for Thatcher—‘The coincidence of fashionable theory with political events is messier than that’—nonetheless,

I do believe [...] that when the history of the move to the right of the late 1970s comes to be written, from law and order to monetarism and to the (more contradictory) attack on statism, then the switch in scientific fashion, if only from group to kin selection models in evolutionary theory, will come to be seen as part of the tide which has rolled the Thatcherites and their concept of a fixed, 19th century competitive and xenophobic human nature into power.²⁴

Group selection, with its concept of self-sacrifice for the greater good, was replaced by a theory in which individual ‘selfishness’ (in the words of Richard Dawkins) and its focus on *family values* was imagined to give rise to the greatest good for the greatest number (Rose also noted, in 1980, that British neo-Nazis The National Front found their worldview reflected in this evolutionary science).²⁵

Should we set such a theory or such theorists up as arbiters over our political debates? For that matter, should we let them arbitrate over biology? If our task is not simply to win an argument against the right (an aim that self-styled liberals such as Dawkins were perfectly complacent with), but to uproot it and wrest power from it, that may require even militating against this scientific consensus and the authority that attaches to the institutions that maintain it.

Dawkins’s *The Selfish Gene* (1976) was a devout and influential representation of the kin selection paradigm. Moreover, the theory’s most nakedly neoliberal commitments appear in his writings. For instance, one prominent example of a group selection-type explanation came from Wynne-Edwards,

who argued that certain birds limited their clutch size in times of overpopulation, in order not to overtax the resources needed by the whole population (the good of the group is invoked as an aim, making this a group selection argument).²⁶ For Dawkins, because the mechanism of all evolution is understood to be the transmission of genes to immediate offspring—that is, family inheritance—only a cause that acts directly on individual gene transmission can be entertained. Thus,

Individuals who have too many children are penalized, not because the whole population goes extinct, but simply because fewer of their children survive. Genes for having too many children are just not passed on to the next generation in large numbers, because few of the children bearing these genes reach adulthood. What has happened in modern civilized man is that family sizes are no longer limited by the finite resources that the individual parents can provide. If a husband and wife have more children than they can feed, the state, which means the rest of the population, simply steps in and keeps the surplus children alive and healthy. There is, in fact, nothing to stop a couple with no material resources at all having and rearing precisely as many children as the woman can physically bear. But the welfare state is a very unnatural thing. In nature, parents who have more children than they can support do not have many grandchildren, and their genes are not passed on to future generations. There is no need for altruistic restraint in the birth rate, because there is no welfare state in nature. Any gene for over-indulgence is promptly punished: the children containing that gene starve. Since we humans do not want to return to the old selfish ways where we let the children of too-large families starve to death, we have abolished the family as a unit of economic self-sufficiency, and substituted the state. But the privilege of guaranteed support for children should not be abused.²⁷

It goes without saying that Dawkins's imagination is framed by a moralistic neoliberalism (belonging at once to what Slobodian describes as the old and new fusionisms—uniting moralism with naturalism in a single apologue). He critiques the welfare state as an unnatural exploitation of the economy's hard workers—let's call them WASPs, in keeping with the animal-theme—supplanting a role that is properly filled by the natural family. (Once again, we meet with the themes of Melinda Cooper's work.) It would be too easy to dismiss this overt political messaging as symptoms of Dawkins's popular or popularizing writing style, and imagine that somewhere else, a pure science remained unmarked by this stain.

Dawkins himself, whenever such passages—of which there are many in his work—were read back to him, insisted that he was practicing or communicating a politically neutral science for science's sake, from which these illustrative asides could be stricken without consequence. Yet, it is precisely by the 'purity' of an apparently innocent and autonomous science of nature that one harnesses the greatest possible force of justification for the political and economic realities science pretends not to have suspected or anticipated. Dawkins can be understood as merely communicating what was present or implicit in the work of certain evolutionary scientists, who carry water for the status quo all the better the more they obscure their umbilical ties to it.

Indeed, other leftist biologists of this generation such as Stephen Jay Gould noted that the very foundations of their science depended on the application of political economy to nature, in order to pretend to derive economic justifications from that vision of nature. Darwin's theory of natural selection (individual competition producing the purposive arrangement of the whole) has been referred to as Adam Smith's invisible hand applied to the 'economy of nature'.²⁸

It is beginning to seem as though evolutionary biology were a bastard of free market or laissez faire economic theory.²⁹ If evolutionary science itself, from its birth, is an expression of dominant economic doctrines (both of liberal and neoliberal political economy), it certainly cannot be relied upon as the arbiter that will dismiss economic ‘appropriations’ of its results. In fact, these economists are merely calling due a loan they once made to the biologists. As a result, rather than invoking science to critique politically motivated ‘pseudoscience’, it is necessary to fight on an all too political terrain to determine what will count as science in the first place. Indeed, if pseudoscience is defined by its lack of authentic (or *legitimate*) connection to the scientific institution and its sanctioned methods, that institution is in turn only an appropriation of an appropriation, lacking the type of self-founding authority that would be the only thing that could ultimately distinguish science from pseudoscience.

It was the 1970s–80s generation of life scientists themselves who made this point most forcefully and undertook to transform both the theory and practice of science to counter its political agenda. They did not claim that a neutral science would neutralize political commitments, but that only a science consciously pursuing leftist political objectives could counter the rightward trajectory of science and society. Undoubtedly, the relative clarity around these points that emerged at this time, among ‘dialectical biologists’ and Science for the People, was in part a function of this historical moment, the tail end of the labor movement’s strength and self-awareness, which will only regain its stature if we make it so.

In 1985, ecologist Richard Levins and evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin published *The Dialectical Biologist*, a landmark work of Marxist science.³⁰ They understood the view of life and nature constitutive of evolutionary biology to be a reflection of social relations: ‘a bourgeois ideology of society has been writ large in a bourgeois ideology of nature’.³¹ From Darwin to contemporary geneticists, the essence of an organism was sought within the individual, treated in abstraction from its environmental context. The dialectical view, in contrast, understood the organism as subject and object of evolution—organisms are not merely passively selected by an arbitrary environment, but create and transform the environments in which they live and evolve. To paraphrase Marx: *the organism creates its own environment, but it does not do so just as it pleases. It does not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.* According to this view, it was nonsensical to seek the cause for an organism’s adaptation to a particular niche in its genes, because a gene ‘for’ this or that way of life could only come to be within an environment that first had to be mutually constructed. Overcoming what Levins and Lewontin referred to as the *alienation* of organism and environment would allow life science to overcome its own alienation from society:

The Cartesian social analysis of science, like the Cartesian analysis in science, alienates science from society, making scientific fact and method ‘objective’ and beyond social influence. Our view is different. We believe that science, in all its senses, is a social process that both causes and is caused by social organization. To do science is to be a social actor engaged, whether one likes it or not, in political activity. The denial of the interpenetration of the scientific and the social is itself a political act, giving support to social structures that hide behind scientific objectivity to perpetuate dependency, exploitation, racism, elitism, colonialism. Nor do absurd examples diminish the truth of this necessary engagement. Of course the speed of light is the same under socialism and capitalism, and the apple that was said to have fallen on the Master of the Mint in 1664 would have struck his Labor Party successor three-hundred years later with equal force. But whether the cause of tuberculosis is

said to be a bacillus or the capitalist exploitation of workers, whether the death rate from cancer is best reduced by studying oncogenes or by seizing control of factories—these questions can be decided objectively only within the framework of certain sociopolitical assumptions.³²

The dialectical biologists saw their task not just as transforming the political and economic conditions in which their scientific labor took place, nor just as changing how their science studied the human organism, but as thoroughly transforming nature, in theory and practice.

Slobodian frequently depicts his subjects as untethered from evolutionary science and thus as illegitimate speculators. For example, ‘A consequence of Hayek’s shift from genes to culture was to grant his followers a blank check for their own interpretations. What standards of veracity or empirical rigor might govern it were unclear. They had created a new subfield by analogy—a sandbox where they made their own rules’ (28). Yet, this type of hermeneutic freedom was exactly what leftist biologists recognized within their own discipline—a methodology consisting of ‘just-so stories’ capable of transmuting any given into the best of all possible worlds.³³ This accusation was leveled not just against sociobiological explanations of human societies, but against the application of such adaptationism to nonhuman evolution as well. Rather than understanding economic evolutionism to be justified (or not) by a tether connecting it to the natural sciences, those natural sciences may be better understood as tethered to the same political and economic motives that are more nakedly observable in the work of neoliberal economists.

I’ve entertained the hypothesis of a certain reversal: where Hayek can be understood as a bastardized form of evolutionary theory, his doubly bastardized inheritors can be read as closest to the politico-economic source of evolutionary theory—science would be the bastard of its own bastards-twice-removed. Nonetheless, it is necessary to retain the hypothetical or conditional framing around this filiation, because no necessity determines any of the links in its chain (I am not attempting a sociology of scientific knowledge). Then, the furthest removed from anything like a natural source, the pretenders to this lineage, would themselves be most revelatory or closest to the making explicit the implicit grounds or impetus for this science. More precisely, it is not simply their naked worship of power that makes the doubly bastardized bear the family line most clearly, but their manifest incoherence, being the illicit or illegitimate borrowing of an illegitimate borrowing, uprooted from any possible sense of origin, objectivity, or innateness.

In other words, far from trying to dismiss or critique Slobodian’s work on these grounds, I would say that it doubles as a far-reaching indictment of a biological science, a science that continues to operate (undoubtedly with renascent pockets of internal resistance) on the basis of and in the service of these neoliberal ideals.

Second Undecidability: Nature and Culture

The concepts of nature and culture play a crucial role in the genealogy Slobodian is reconstructing. Hayek’s ‘savanna story’ is a theory of what is sometimes called *cultural evolution*, in that it grants an independent existence to cultural traditions, which can spread by mechanisms such as imitation that do not depend on providing immediate genetic advantages. The inheritors that Slobodian calls Hayek’s bastards are *Hayek’s* because they turn to evolutionary sciences to justify neoliberal principles, but are *bastards* because they ground our evolutionary propensity for neoliberalism in nature (genetics, race, the innate, as opposed to nurture) rather than culture. If it turns out that these

concepts do not form a stable opposition, that every theory of culture is already a theory of nature and vice versa, then both this particular genealogy—and genealogy as such—will need to be rethought.

There are hints of this already in some of the more tangled branches of the family tree sketched out by Slobodian. He demarcates two subspecies that branch off from Hayek's paternity, the 'racialist Austrians' and the 'cultural Austrians'. Nonetheless, theorists from the 'racialist' lineage still invoke cultural tradition as part of their superior patrimony, and the present-day Far Right whose origin this genealogy is meant to help us understand ultimately, 'does not choose sides but combines the insights of the racialist and cultural Austrians' (61).

If the concepts of nature and culture are in themselves non-oppositional, then this helps us to understand why the branches of this genealogy are so tangled. Once again, it is not because we are occupied with careless thinkers or non-scientist appropriators that the ideal of pure filiation breaks down—or rather, that actual filiation is much more inventive or unanticipatable than could be imagined on the basis of the purity of conceptual thought.

We can turn to work that is often considered internal to the evolutionary sciences to recognize a similar pattern. Here, I'll focus on anthropologist Robert Boyd and biologist Peter Richerson, who have created a framework for the application of evolutionary science to human culture that has become widely influential, both within the life sciences and beyond.³⁴ This school of thought is sometimes distinguished under the heading of 'dual inheritance theory' or 'gene-culture co-evolution'.³⁵ In essence, it argues that the capacity for imitation or social learning unique (in quantity if not quality) to the human species, allows for a separate mode of transmission not immediately beholden to genetic inheritance. These cultural traditions can even create the context in which selection on genes occurs, giving rise to a kind of feedback loop.

Nonetheless, it is understood that we form cultural traditions because of capabilities (the aforementioned imitation or social learning) that Boyd and Richerson assume to have evolved by a purely genetic process of natural selection. Thus, still today, every chain of transmission constituting what we would call our culture is understood to be guided by *natural* (genetic) *instincts* for certain kinds or quantities of imitation that were originally adaptive.

A crucial component of Boyd and Richerson's science, then, resembles the just-so stories of sociobiologists, evolutionary psychologists, or Hayek and his bastards. Indeed, Boyd and Richerson institute a new science or subsience by analogy, a 'sandbox' with its own speculative rules, just as Slobodian noted in Hayek's case. These instincts for imitation are understood to have evolved during the late Pleistocene, so speculative stories are told about the styles of life under which they became fixed (because they were originally conducive toward the ends of survival and reproduction), and our own culture is a sort of ghostly re-appearance of these lifestyles.³⁶ It would not be a stretch in the least to say: first as tragedy, then as farce. We remain like our forebears who strove toward conformism, or toward imitating the most successful of their tribe, etc.—for them, as a survival strategy pursued in the face of the cold indifference of god-or-nature (as in a tragedy, obsessed with succession), for us, as play-actors reenacting a script without the world that once gave it meaning.

Boyd and Richerson, then, are pulled in two directions at once. On the one hand, they attribute a certain 'independence' to culture: 'Culture is on a leash, all right, but the dog on the end is big, smart, and independent. On any given walk, it is hard to tell who is leading who'.³⁷ On the other

hand, their aim is to ground this capacity-for-breaking-free-of-nature in nature itself, in genetics: ‘Culture is part of human biology. The capacities that allow us to acquire culture are evolved components of human psychology’.³⁸

It would be possible to speculate in several directions about the impetus leading them to exactly this formulation—the desire to distinguish themselves from others in their field (sociobiologists or evolutionary psychologists), both to make a name for themselves and possibly to avoid certain controversies, etc. I am most interested, at this juncture, simply to point out something that in no way depends on the particular arrangement of Boyd and Richerson’s texts. It is not at all contingent there that the *independence* of culture *depends* on nature. In order to declare anything proper to culture, even at the opposite extreme, those strains of cultural studies sometimes called ‘social constructionist’, the purest autonomy attributed to culture requires knowing the absolute limits of nature. Any theory of culture implies an absolute science of nature, and the rupture supposed to pass between them necessarily functions as a *hinge*.

Though their work is often focused on preliminary questions that do not explicitly involve neoliberal economics or other political position-taking, Boyd and Richerson’s version of ‘cultural evolution’ is laden with echoes of Hayek. Culture is granted a somewhat independent role relative to genetic instincts, and those instincts are understood to have been formed in ‘small-scale’ societies, thus producing maladaptive risks in the ‘open’ or ‘free enterprise’ societies of modern times. On occasion, they will speculate that our existing economic and political institutions provide the best possible conditions to satisfy our instinctual demands within this transformed context: ‘The free enterprise system that dominates the world economy today has deep evolutionary roots even though it has a shallow history’.³⁹

Or, in greater detail:

In small-scale egalitarian societies, individuals have substantial autonomy, considerable voice in community affairs, and can enforce fair, responsive—even self-effacing—behavior and treatment from leaders. At their most functional, symbolic institutions, a regime of tolerably fair laws and customs, effective leadership, and smooth articulation of social segments can roughly simulate these conditions in complex societies. Rationally administered bureaucracies, lively markets, the protection of socially beneficial property rights, widespread participation in public affairs, and the like provide public and private goods efficiently, along with a considerable amount of individual autonomy. [...]

Legitimate institutions, however, and trust of them, are the result of an evolutionary history and are neither easy to manage or engineer. [...]

The democratic form of the state, pioneered by Western Europeans in the last couple of centuries, is a powerful means of creating generally legitimate institutions. Success attracts imitation all around the world.⁴⁰

Several failings are legible in this account, failings which are often pointed out as endemic to theories of human evolution.⁴¹ First, its *circularity*: it takes institutions and concepts from the present day (and more specifically, from the academic disciplines of economics and political science—rational agents, free markets, legitimacy, etc.), and posits them as immemorial instincts, in order to pretend to discover a derivation of those same institutions. Second, its individualistic and instinctual account (what dialectical biologists would call its bourgeois atomism) ignores any role for *power* or even just *structure*: thus, the global economic and political system is understood to have extended its reach

through the instinctual willingness of all participants, their drive to ‘imitate-the-successful’, as opposed to being imposed on most of them by naked imperial force. The function of such an explanation, as a status quo justification, is obvious.

In fact, Boyd participated in one of the conferences of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS).⁴² The MPS, which figures in most histories of neoliberalism, including Slobodian’s, was founded in 1947 by Hayek, and has continued to function as a sort of neoliberal think tank. Slobodian notes that in 2013, they held a conference in the Galapagos, on the theme of ‘Evolution, the Human Sciences, and Liberty’.⁴³ Evolutionary psychologists Leda Cosmides and John Tooby were there, together with Charles Murray, co-author of the aforementioned *Bell Curve*. Stuart Kauffman also presented, an evolutionary biologist who, like Hayek, was focused on theories of self-organizing systems—and Robert Boyd presented on ‘How culture transformed human evolution’.

Larry Arnhart, a University-of-Chicago-trained political scientist who maintains a blog called ‘Darwinian Conservatism’, not only gave a paper at the conference, but blogged on several of the presentations, including Boyd’s. His reaction to Boyd’s work is curious:

It’s surprising that Richerson and Boyd seem to be unaware of Hayek’s studies of Darwinian cultural evolution, which show the influence of people like Donald Campbell, suggesting that Richerson and Boyd belong to the same intellectual tradition as Hayek (see, for example, Hayek’s ‘Three Sources of Human Values’ in *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*). Boyd’s lecture at the MPS conference would have been an appropriate occasion for him to reflect on the connections between his work on Darwinian cultural evolution and Hayek’s. But Boyd chose not to do that.⁴⁴

Arnhart went on to note, when recounting fundamental tenets of dual inheritance theory, that ‘(This is a Hayekian theme!)’. His frustration is evident, and he raised the question to Boyd of why this Hayekian legacy, and its explicit advocacy for neoliberal economics, was not part of Boyd’s presentation or a (more common) theme of Boyd’s work. Boyd’s response, as recounted by Arnhart, is that he is a scientist, and thus must maintain a rigid fact/value dichotomy, independent of political position-taking.

We can summarize, in a word, what Arnhart noted with exasperation, and what we have already observed in Boyd and Richerson’s writing: they too are Hayek’s bastards. If anything, Boyd’s response reveals a canniness that Arnhart’s credulity and incredulity lacks. It is precisely by pretending to remain independent of this politico-economic tradition, in a neutral domain of facts-not-values, and yet to arrive at the same endpoint, as if by chance, that Boyd gathers the greatest potential energy for neoliberal advocacy. The more he pretends not to recognize his father, not to owe anything to Hayek, the better he performs exactly the task Hayek undertook, the transmutation of neoliberal economics into an evolutionary science.

Boyd and Richerson might seem to be even closer to Hayek or to legitimate paternity than Hayek’s other bastards, because Boyd and Richerson understand cultural inheritance to play a unique and irreducible role in mediating our instinctual life. But precisely what I am arguing, in the vicinity of this second undecidability, of nature and culture, is that such distinctions never congeal into stable oppositions. This is manifest both in the equivocal ‘independence’ of culture in their system, which grants them the license still to see culture as the expression of effectively immutable natural instincts, and in the substitutability of their cultural self-justifications with the racial ones that are so prevalent

today, among those Slobodian calls Hayek's bastards. (One area of overlap is undoubtedly significant: Richerson and Boyd's *Not by Genes Alone* gives ample space to reflection on the basic tenets of replacement theory.)⁴⁵

The textbook example of gene-culture co-evolution is that of the evolution of adult lactose tolerance in dairy-farming populations. A chain of cultural transmission that established this practice among certain populations ultimately transformed the selection pressures operating on their genes, allowing for the fixation of a mutation that helped these populations to digest this prevalent food source. Richerson and Boyd recount this story themselves:

In the early 1970s, geographer Fredrick Simoons suggested that the ability to digest lactose evolved in response to a history of dairying. The people of northwest Europe have long kept cows and consumed fresh milk. Dairying was carried to India by 'Aryan' invaders, and has been practiced by pastoralists in western Asia and Africa for millennia.⁴⁶

They are not the only ones who have thought to view milk drinking as part of an 'Aryan' heritage. Most prominently during Trump's first term, white supremacists adopted milk-chugging as an emblem of white pride.⁴⁷ Were they celebrating their biological or their cultural heritage? Does it make a difference? As Slobodian notes, 'Whiteness was both a biological and a cultural patrimony' (55).

If we would resist everything today associated with the Far Right that mobilizes racism and eugenics, it is important to recognize that its more genteel or academic culturalist strains *are no less racist and racist*. Any justification or absolutization of the status quo of a society structured by racialized hierarchy functions the same, and may be all the more effective at winning safe passage for its racism by slipping past certain censors among those who still uphold such norms. This undecidability of nature and culture asks us to think differently about the possibilities of filiation among the positions it leaves open.

3rd Undecidability: Legitimacy and Illegitimacy (Generalized Bastardy)

I am a bastard too, I love bastards. I am bastard begot, bastard instructed, bastard in mind, bastard in valor, in everything illegitimate. One bear will not bite another, and wherefore should one bastard?
--Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*

The undecidabilities of science and pseudoscience, nature and culture, compromise filiation even while making it possible. The uprootedness that affects the most true or legitimate science, as well as anything we would designate pseudoscientific, makes pure derivation from the font of nature impossible, while making it necessary to consider lateral transfers between seemingly remote inquiries, such as neoliberal economics (or economy) and evolutionary science. Similarly, the undecidability of apparently foundational concepts such as nature and culture means that any idea or position can filiate from or with any other. What does this generalized undecidability, which begins to resemble a generalized bastardy, do to our concepts of legitimate origins or legitimate birth—and to the genealogical task of the historian?

Evolutionary biology ought to be the science of true and proper, natural, origins. As natural science, it should tell us what natural reproduction and natural family is, of which our own systems of kinship, our family trees and contractual concepts of legitimate birth would only be the imitation or

derivative. (This derivative is meant to secure not only the knowledge but even the possibility of the pure bloodline it derives from—it has in every sense the value of supplement.) Yet, time and again, we find that all-too-cultural concepts of family values play a constitutive role in that science. What are we to do if our concept of origin has no proper origin, and our concept of legitimacy is illegitimate?

The effects of this uprootedness rise to the surface on several occasions in Slobodian's text. Concepts from evolutionary science, the very science that Slobodian at times seems to leave at arm's length, as the arbiter of the truth of origins—the origin of truth—lacking among the bastards, these concepts play a constitutive role in the very narrativity of his historical account. His search for true paternity requires the recognition that 'pedigrees hide mutations from generation to generation' (17), or that an intellectual offspring may nonetheless be a 'mutant strain' of its forebear (19). Other figures from evolutionary science, such as the 'missing link' and the 'hybrid' (167), figure in this genealogy: "To borrow a metaphor from his own field of evolutionary science, [Richard] Lynn was the *missing link* between the world of racial intelligence research and free market think tank advocacy' (113; emphasis added). Such passing references may function as no more than a winking aside, but they point to something that does not in any way depend on the 'rhetoric' of a given text.

Just as natural history figures within cultural or intellectual histories, the marks of culture, contract, and convention are legible within evolutionary science. No concept is too human or cultural not to find itself mirrored in evolutionary science; indeed, many biologists believe they discover 'monogamy' or 'philandering' in nature, and thus the concept of 'bastardy' is not absent.⁴⁸ One could cast such figures of positive or family law and the marriage covenant as projections of individual scientists onto nature, which in a sense they are, but we should not take that to mean that non-projection is possible.

It is obvious that *Hayek's Bastards* is a genealogical project. This would be the case even if it did not describe its task as the tracing of a 'lineage' or 'genealogy' (100, 167), and even if it did not place itself in its entirety under the heading of the concept of illegitimacy or the bastard. Like many histories, it reconstitutes an origin story for its chosen phenomenon, with the conviction that this origin tells us something about the why and wither of its offspring. In Slobodian's words, "the question that animates this book' is 'Where does the resurgence of the Far Right *come from*?' (69; emphasis added). Thus, without simply equating them or conflating their political tendencies, we can recognize this commonality between Slobodian and the bastards or bastardy he takes as his theme: both are indebted in some unevenly conscious and unconscious way to a science of true origins.

Genealogy stands on both sides of this text, as what is narrated and as what does the narrating—and there is nothing contingent in that. It is not because we are dealing with a special, cultural and artificial realm, that inheritances are uniquely negotiated and secured (or not) by positive law, but life is in this position from the beginning, an uprootedness or illegitimacy I have tried to demonstrate within natural science, the science of heredity, itself. For just this reason, because every text is a metagenealogy, no text is a metagenealogy. Nothing has the status of science that could tell us, as if from outside, what genealogy *is* or what descent from a predecessor means—we are only ever inheriting these terms from parts unknown. Yet, nothing could ever step outside of the demand to re-launch a search for origins. The gesture of placing science off to one side is an attempt to let it occupy this foundational role. But there has never been a science that was not, first and foremost (or in its origin), a conflict over the origin, and thus there is no way to appropriate that science without deciding upon that conflict or intervening in it. Even if one would like to do no more than to leave it

to one side, to say one lacks the expertise or desire to go there, one must necessarily decide where one draws such a limit.

Bastardy is a strange concept. This strangeness may pull certain of the strings that set Slobodian's narrative in motion. He uses it to refer to what is at once genealogical rupture and continuity, contravening the nature of its predecessor while nonetheless descending from it.

The first sense, rupture and corruption, resembles how we speak of a product being 'bastardized', infected or laced with what it is not (bastard has even been a term used in taxonomy, to refer to *hybrid* species). Thus, Hayek's bastards distort his theories, bastardizing a theory of cultural evolution by mixing in natural origins, and in the process distorting certain traces of their filiation.

Nonetheless, that filiation remains legible, and here we perhaps meet with the opposite sense of bastardy or illegitimacy. For a bastard is *more natural* than any 'legitimate' offspring. Legitimacy, even if it is meant to preserve the intelligibility of pedigrees and thus to mimic and even secure naturality, is the product of an all too cultural invention and convention, the symbolic contract or covenant of marriage and family law. One could argue that both legitimate and illegitimate children were equally natural, equal by nature, or even that *only* illegitimate children have this birthright, the birthright of nature. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare places this conclusion in the voice of Edmund:

Thou, Nature, art my goddess. To thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? why "bastard"? Wherefore "base,"
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous and my shape as true
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With "base," with "baseness," "bastardy," "base," "base,"
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed
Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops
Got 'tween asleep and wake?⁴⁹

The cultural convention and legality that confirms legitimacy brings with it the risks of something like inauthenticity, copulation pursued in a pro forma fashion, out of duty and obligation, just going through the motions, somnambulist: 'within a dull, stale, tired bed [...] Got 'tween asleep and wake'. Then, *only* a bastard would be marked by conception 'in the lusty stealth of nature'—a *love child* and *natural son*.

(One might treat the whole scene of neoliberal self-justification as similarly formalistic: only a superficial import, then, would attach to the trappings of Hayek's and others' argumentations that pretend to take the side of culture or nature; they share a passion in relation to which all this is mere ceremony.)

The concept of illegitimacy is an illegitimate concept. What becomes natural, true, or original takes its bearings from what is supposed to be its derivative, the cultural convention of legitimacy. Nothing is more natural than illegitimacy, and nothing more illegitimate than nature; it is never simply original. Legitimacy or nature ‘itself’ is the shadow cast by illegitimacy, by cultural contrivance. The space this opens is one of *generalized bastardy*, in which everything falls short of the origin, because it *is* the origin of that origin.

Every genealogy betrays this mark, its secret origin or secret illegitimacy. It is the offspring that elects or selects the parent or progenitor. In the case of Slobodian’s narrative, it is because what we call the Far Right takes the shape it does today that certain predecessors and certain of their traits appear as ancestral, as the originators of a legacy.

Bastard is also an oath.⁵⁰ It accuses its target of being self-interested, cruel, and uncaring, and thus is the archetype of the neoliberal, who treats self-interest as the highest good. Everyone involved in this genealogy is cruel to be cruel, and finds a way of justifying it by pretending they are cruel to be kind. Moreover, *bastard* as an oath is almost always applied to men—in this, it follows the tradition in which, in certain times and places, ‘Bastard’ referred only to the *sons* of kings or noblemen. Given that it was the sons who uniquely bore the lineage and inheritance, they were uniquely disinherited by the status of bastardy. Most, though certainly not all, of Hayek’s bastards are men, but whether they are women or men today, we can observe a general obsession with the status of paternity, patriarchy, and masculinity, and a desperate grasping for the most insecure and abusive father figures. All of this can be read as overcompensation for a feeling of fatherlessness.

We can compare this illegitimacy of genealogy to the work of the con artist or speculator—not because what they derive value from *in truth* or *by nature* has none, but rather because they profit from the ungrounded or contextual status of all value. The bastards of Slobodian’s narrative are often practicing both cons at once—practicing the speculative fiction of filiation *as a means of* economic speculation. They search for their ‘racial’ or ‘cultural’ roots and by extension their political kin past and present, those who are mobilized by this sense of shared origin, as a means of selling overpriced assets (gold, survivalist toys, or more recently crypto) to these same willing dupes. The speculative aspect of these filiations makes genealogies possible and necessary—it is never programmatic or worn on the sleeve of reality what filiates from what—yet, for the same reason, they make such narratives impossible and equivocal, because anything may come from anything else.

The Far Right has demonstrated, time and again, that they can take advantage of this undecidability, by turning every apparently contradictory and incompatible notion toward their own ends. It may not be possible to subject such willfulness to scientific critique without turning such critique on science ‘itself’.

One consequence of the speculativeness of filiation shows up as the illegitimacy within the science of genealogy itself: evolutionary biology. That it gives rise to monsters is both its power and its undoing.

¹ Quoted in Slobodian, from Pedro Schwartz’s description of Hayek’s evolutionary story.

² Much like stories that paint capitalist relations as hard-wired instincts, Hayek has designed his narrative to explain why this system *cannot* be changed. The tradition that forms our cultural inheritance is not based on conscious or deliberate construction, but functions like the grammar of a language, allowing the average speaker to navigate and understand the world without fully grasping

the principles on which they do so. Society has self-organized, in the sense invoked by systems theorists, meaning that any attempt to consciously intervene in its functioning—to institute a planned economy—would have unforeseeable and almost certainly disastrous consequences.

³ Cf. Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (London, Routledge, 1998), 497.

⁴ Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Brooklyn, NY, Zone Books, 2017), 16–17, 322n25.

⁵ Slobodian adopts the term ‘new fusionism’ from Thomas Fleming and Lew Rockwell (50).

⁶ Slobodian quotes political theorist Kenneth Minogue on this point: ‘Rather than try to persuade others of your version of the good life, the tendency of Hayek’s mode “is not to argue against competing ways of arranging society, but actually to rule them out of court as misunderstandings of reality”’ (31).

⁷ Nick Serpe, “Blood-and-Soil Neoliberalism: An Interview with Quinn Slobodian,” *Dissent Magazine*, April 29, 2025, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/blood-and-soil-neoliberalism/.

⁸ To give one salient example, several prominent evolutionary biologists and evolutionary psychologists at Harvard and MIT received research and sabbatical funding from Jeffrey Epstein, who they flattered both in their social exchanges and with their theories. See Alexandra Walling, “Why Jeffrey Epstein Loved Evolutionary Psychology,” *The Outline*, accessed March 9, 2022, <https://theoutline.com/post/7956/jeffrey-epstein-evolutionary-psychology>.

⁹ This has been the focus of my own research. I have recently published a book on deconstruction and the life sciences; Jonathan Basile, *Virality Vitality* (Albany, NY, SUNY Press, 2025). Another, forthcoming project deals more directly with the themes of Slobodian’s work and this essay, focused on contemporary theories of ‘cultural evolution’ and their political valences; Jonathan Basile, *Natural Lesson: Cultures of Evolution* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

¹⁰ Research on deconstruction and the life sciences has blossomed especially since the publication of Derrida’s *Life Death* seminar; Jacques Derrida, *Life Death*, edited by Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2020). The term was introduced in Francesco Vitale, *Biodeconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, translated by Mauro Senatore (Albany, NY, SUNY Press, 2018). See also Vicki Kirby, Astrid Schrader, and Eszter Timár, “How Do We Do Biodeconstruction?,” *Postmodern Culture* 28:3 (2018), doi:10.1353/pmc.2018.0021; Armando M. Mastrogiorganni, “Biosignature, Technosignature, Event: Deconstruction, Astrobiology, and the Search for a Wholly Other Origin,” *Derrida Today* 16:2 (Nov. 1, 2023), 114–28, doi:10.3366/drt.2023.0312; Adam Rosenthal, *Prosthetic Immortalities: Biology, Transhumanism, and the Search for Indefinite Life* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2024).

¹¹ Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-first Century* (New York, The New Press, 2011), 27–28.

¹² For recent examples, see Jonathan Kahn et al., “Opinion: How Not To Talk About Race And Genetics,” *BuzzFeed News*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/bfopinion/race-genetics-david-reich>; Nathaniel Comfort, “Genetic Determinism Rides Again,” *Nature* 561 (September 25, 2018), 461–63; Anne O’Connor et al., “Why DNA Is No Key to Social Equality: On Kathryn Paige Harden’s ‘The Genetic Lottery,’” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, September 21, 2021, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/why-dna-is-no-key-to-social-equality-on-kathryn-paige-hardens-the-genetic-lottery>.

¹³ E.O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Carl Zimmer, “E.O. Wilson, a Pioneer of Evolutionary Biology, Dies at 92,” *The New York Times*, December 27, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/27/science/eo-wilson-dead.html>; Razib Khan, “Setting the Record Straight: Open Letter on E.O. Wilson’s Legacy,” *Unsupervised Learning*, January 19, 2022, <https://www.razibkhan.com/p/setting-the-record-straight-open>.

¹⁵ Stacy Farina and Matthew Gibbons, “The Last Refuge of Scoundrels,” *Science for the People Magazine*, February 1, 2022, <https://magazine.scienceforthepeople.org/online/the-last-refuge-of-scoundrels/>.

¹⁶ Neil Vidmar, “Letter to the Editor,” *Western News*, February 22, 1990, 4.

¹⁷ Farina and Gibbons, “Last Refuge”. Wilson encouraged Rushton to seek another sponsor for PNAS, only declining himself because ‘I have a couple of colleagues here, Gould and Lewontin, who would use any excuse to raise the charge [of racism] again’. I will say more about these critics of Wilson below.

¹⁸ Farina and Gibbons, “Last Refuge”.

¹⁹ The filiation Slobodian forges here between Hayek and Social Darwinism functions similarly to his other acts of circumscription. Social Darwinism is typically considered to have been a false appropriation of Darwinian science, just as Slobodian would like to paint Hayekian thought as a misappropriation of contemporary evolutionary theory. Nonetheless, if this filiation is accomplished by means of a shared allegiance to group selection (defined below), there is just as much reason to anchor our genealogy in the work of Darwin himself, whose *Descent of Man* also made use of a theory of group selection to claim that a genocide of all other races by their European superiors was inevitable: ‘At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes [...], will no doubt be exterminated. The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as now between the negro or Australian and the gorilla’. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 183.

²⁰ To give one additional example, Slobodian concludes the chapter of his book on IQ by reassuring readers, against Charles Murray and Denis Dutton, that ‘The science does not point in the direction they claim. [...] The conclusion of actual geneticists (reaffirmed now by genomics) that there is more variation within so-called racial populations than between them is glossed over for the sake of the polemical point’ (127). It is certainly true that since geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky’s work, a dominant strain of evolutionary science has argued that race is a social or political category rather than a biological one, and taken as primary evidence this fact, that the degree of genetic difference within self-identified races is greater than that between racial groupings. Nonetheless, attributing this consensus to ‘the science’ or ‘actual geneticists’ effaces the troubling and ever-present detail that there are those within the scientific profession itself who continue to work on or advocate for work on differences between racial populations or their proxies (‘ancestry’ groups). Such work is certainly controversial, but could not by any means be described as marginal in the scientific community; to give one example, geneticist David Reich, who has advocated for the return of this type of scientific inquiry, has a position at Harvard. On Reich’s work and views, see Angela Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 115–25.

Moreover, when one relies on genetic quantifications to debunk the category of race, one grants an unmerited authority to scientific knowledge. Biology is placed in the position of passing judgment over the ultimate truth or falsehood of these categories; yet, our critique or deconstruction of racial categories ought to recognize that even if a scientific consensus were to form around their utility in biology, they would still not be, first and foremost, biological categories. Like any other concept, they are ungrounded, finding their way to biology by means of borrowing or displacement. No biological discourse *could* fix the limits of these categories, determine how and why they have functioned in human history, or guarantee the future prospects of those so categorized. It is important to remember this—not to rely too rigidly on scientific self-critique or consensus but to place scientific authority itself in question—because the scientific consensus may always change. The

shifting headwinds determining the politicization of scientific funding may increasingly raise the profile of biological ‘race realists’ in the near future, while other biological factors may overtake genetics in biologists’ understanding of hereditary agency—factors such as epigenetics or the developmental context, which change much more rapidly than the genome.

²¹ David Sloan Wilson, “The Group Selection Controversy: History and Current Status,” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 14 (1983), 159–87.

²² R. C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature*, 2nd Edition (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2017), 59–60.

²³ W.D. Hamilton, “The Genetical Evolution of Social Behaviour. I,” *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7:1 (July 1, 1964), 16.

²⁴ Steven Rose, “The Thatcher View of Human Nature,” *New Scientist* 82:1155 (May 17, 1979), 575.

²⁵ Steven Rose and Hilary Rose, “The Rise of Radical Science,” *New Scientist* 85:1188 (January 3, 1980), 29. In 1981, Steven Rose called on Dawkins and other evolutionary biologists to publicly distance themselves from the National Front, after its supporters published literature claiming these evolutionary theories proved that human nature required ethnostates. The National Front journal Rose quotes from equates *kinship* (as in kin selection) with race: ‘What the evolutionary theoreticians have shown us is that, with the system of genetic inheritance shared by all vertebrates, the only type of social organization which can evolve, let alone work, is one based upon kinship, upon the ties of blood and of race’; qtd. in Steven Rose, “Genes and Race,” *Nature* 289:5795 (January 22, 1981), 335. This provoked an aggravated response from Richard Dawkins: ‘It is annoying to find this elegant and important theory [of kin selection] being dragged down to the ephemeral level of human politics, and parochial British politics at that. It seems that the National Front are not alone responsible for this’ (he meant to implicate Rose, not himself, with this rejoinder). Richard Dawkins, “Selfish Genes in Race or Politics,” *Nature* 289:5798 (February 1, 1981), 528, doi:10.1038/289528a0.

²⁶ V. C. Wynne-Edwards, *Animal Dispersion in Relation to Social Behavior* (Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1962).

²⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 30th Anniversary Ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 117.

²⁸ Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1992), 12; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002), 121–25. On Darwin’s readings in political economy, see Silvan S. Schweber, “Darwin and the Political Economists: Divergence of Character,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 13:2 (September 1, 1980), 195–289, doi:10.1007/BF00125744.

²⁹ If we listen to certain of his critics, Darwin was not simply Smithian but a bastard of Smith. Chernyshevskii, a Russian populist thinker and Lamarckian, made this critique in letters from the 1870s: ‘Poor Darwin reads Malthus, or some Malthusian pamphlet, and animated by the brilliant idea of the ‘beneficial results’ of hunger and illness, discovers his America: ‘organisms are improved by the struggle for life’...What is the essence of Darwin’s error, and that of his followers? A specialized science, political economy, has undergone such great development (through Ricardo and others, not through Malthus) that it seems capable of providing mathematical truths to science. Darwin noticed this. And made use of what he understood. And did he guess that if you want to use a specialized science for your own work you should study it? No, it seems never to have occurred to him. And the result was the same as if Adam Smith had taken it upon himself to write a course in zoology’; qtd. in Daniel P. Todes, *Darwin without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), 37.

³⁰ Richard Levins and Richard C. Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

³¹ Levins and Lewontin, 1.

³² Levins and Lewontin, 4–5.

³³ Stephen J. Gould, “Sociobiology: The Art of Storytelling,” *New Scientist* 80 (1978), 530–33; Stephen Jay Gould and Richard C. Lewontin, “The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme,” *Proc. R. Soc. Lond. B* 205:1161 (September 21, 1979), 581–98, doi:10.1098/rspb.1979.0086.

³⁴ Of course, there is no way to evaluate the influence of a thinker or their work without resurfacing all of the questions about genealogy that I am posing here. Boyd and Richerson’s work is widely cited, not just among biologists and anthropologists (sometimes distinguished as ‘biocultural’), cognitive science and psychology, but throughout disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, where one frequently encounters varied attempts to innovate ‘evolutionary’ methods of study (they have also been cited a few times by think tanks, policy papers, and court briefings). Nonetheless, Boyd and Richerson were themselves indebted to earlier work by Donald Campbell and Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman, and every self-styled inheritor of their thought is necessarily unfaithful or illegitimate for reasons that are not circumstantial to any work or any particular author. See Donald T. Campbell, “Variation and Selective Retention in Socio-Cultural Evolution,” in *Social Change in Developing Areas: A Reinterpretation of Evolutionary Theory*, ed. H. R. Barringer, G. I. Blanksten, and R. W. Mack (Schenkman Publishing Company, 1965), 19–49; L.L. Cavalli-Sforza and M.W. Feldman, *Cultural Transmission and Evolution: A Quantitative Approach* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, *Culture and the Evolutionary Process* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

³⁵ ‘Dual Inheritance theory’ was Boyd and Richerson’s coinage. E. O. Wilson, together with Charles Lumsden, introduced the term ‘gene-culture co-evolution’, though the two terms are often used interchangeably today. Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, “A Simple Dual Inheritance Model of the Conflict Between Social and Biological Evolution,” *Zygon* 11, no. 3 (September 1, 1976): 254–62, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9744.1976.tb00285.x; Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, “A Dual Inheritance Model of the Human Evolutionary Process I: Basic Postulates and a Simple Model,” *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 1, no. 2 (April 1, 1978): 127–54, doi:10.1016/S0140-1750(78)80002-5; Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, *Genes, Mind, and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981).

³⁶ For critiques of this form of speculative prehistory, see Tim Ingold, “Prospect,” in *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*, ed. Tim Ingold and Gisli Palsson (Cambridge UP, 2013), 1–21; David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

³⁷ Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, *The Origin and Evolution of Cultures* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 194. Cf. Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, *Genes, Mind, and Culture* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981), 13.

³⁸ Boyd and Richerson, *Origin*, 4.

³⁹ Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, “The Evolution of Free Enterprise Values,” in *Moral Markets: The Critical Role of Values in the Economy*, ed. Paul J. Zak (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), 107.

⁴⁰ Robert Boyd, Peter J. Richerson, and Joseph Henrich, “Cultural Evolution of Human Cooperation,” in *The Origin and Evolution of Cultures* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 269–70.

⁴¹ See Joseph Fracchia and R. C. Lewontin, “Does Culture Evolve?,” *History and Theory* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 1999): 52–78, doi:10.1111/0018-2656.00104; Ingold, “Prospect.”

⁴² There is another Robert Boyd who has been heavily involved in the world of neoliberal think tanks and institutes as a donor and board member. It is clear that the anthropologist and evolutionary theorist Robert Boyd was the one who participated in the MPS conference, especially given Arnhart’s summary of his talk, but he should not be confused with the Robert Boyd who works in finance.

⁴³ “The Mont Pelerin Society Special Meeting June 22 to 29, 2013,” *Universidad San Francisco de Quito*, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220705010618/https://www.usfq.edu.ec/en/events/mont-pelerin-society-special-meeting-june-22-29-2013/>.

⁴⁴ Larry Arnhart, “The MPS in the Galapagos (2): Human Cultural Evolution,” *Darwinian Conservatism by Larry Arnhart*, July 15, 2013, <http://darwinianconservatism.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-mps-in-galapagos-2-human-cultural.html>.

⁴⁵ Richerson and Boyd, *Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005), 169–87.

⁴⁶ Richerson and Boyd, *Not By Genes*, 191–92.

⁴⁷ The New York Times has reported on this phenomenon; Amy Harmon, “Why White Supremacists Are Chugging Milk (and Why Geneticists Are Alarmed),” *The New York Times*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/17/us/white-supremacists-science-dna.html>. This article demonstrates an eagerness to declare that the scientific research being selectively cited by white supremacists is neutral or opposed to these ‘appropriations’, which may not always be the case. See also Iselin Gambert and Tobias Linné, “How the Alt-Right Uses Milk to Promote White Supremacy,” *The Conversation*, April 26, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/how-the-alt-right-uses-milk-to-promote-white-supremacy-94854>; Vasile Stănescu, “‘White Power Milk’: Milk, Dietary Racism, and the ‘Alt-Right,’” *Animal Studies Journal* 7 (2018): 103–28.

⁴⁸ The biological literature on ‘promiscuity’, at least since Darwin, has imposed or discovered family law in what we call nature. Darwin once wrote of his domesticated pigeons: ‘when a male does break his marriage-vow, he does not permanently desert his mate’; qtd. in T. R. Birkhead, “How Stupid Not to Have Thought of That: Post-Copulatory Sexual Selection,” *Journal of Zoology* 281:2 (June 1, 2010), 78–93, doi:10.1111/j.1469-7998.2010.00701.x. As Birkhead argues, this type of discourse becomes more widespread with the rise of gene selectionism and parental investment theory, from the 1970s onwards.

⁴⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin, Second Edition (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), I.ii.1-15.

⁵⁰ On the bastard, see David Farrell Krell, *The Purest of Bastards: Works of Mourning, Art, and Affirmation in the Thought of Jacques Derrida* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Jeremy Stewart, I, *Daniel: An Illegitimate Reading of Jacques Derrida’s “Envois”* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2025). Krell recounts the following story: ‘I once asked Giorgio Agamben at the Collegium Phaenomenologicum in Perugia (the year was 1987) whether the bastard reasoning of Plato’s *Timaeus*, which he was addressing in his seminar, might be more accessible to “a real bastard” than to a poet or thinker of *Gelassenheit*. Derrida turned to me and interjected: “But that is the problem, isn’t it? What is a *real* or *true* bastard?”’ (205).