

The Reception of the “New Synthesis” in Portugal: Germano da Fonseca Sacarrão on the Sociobiology Debate¹

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ABSTRACT: *The object of study of the present is the critical reception of sociobiology and reflections on the sociobiology debate by one of Portugal’s most notorious evolutionary thinkers, Germano da Fonseca Sacarrão (1914-1992). Our work starts with an extensive analysis of the vast literature concerning the emergence of sociobiology, the main criticisms it received, and the intense discussions (in and out of the academic circle) surrounding the new discipline’s premises, framework, methodology, and ambitions, that took place in the years following the publication of Edward O. Wilson’s book Sociobiology: The New Synthesis in 1975, Germano da Fonseca Sacarrão addressed the emergence of sociobiology and the debate surrounding the new discipline in his writings as early as 1977, and once again in 1980. But in 1982, the Professor of Zoology and Anthropology at the University of Lisbon would devote an entire book to the issue: “A Biologia do Egoísmo – herança biológica de que o homem seria prisioneiro” (Biology of Selfishness. Biological inheritance that man would be a prisoner to). Sacarrão took the side of the critics, joining his voice to all of the main objections raised against sociobiology. Himself ideologically tuned to the left, he believed that the implications could extend much further, they could easily be used by extreme-right politicians to justify many of their views, for example, by contributing to legitimize certain practices such as male domination, warfare, xenophobia or racism.*

KEYWORDS: *biology, racism, Sacarrão, selfishness, sociobiology*

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