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## Letters

### Support for kin support

As science is a self-regulating discipline and errors are corrected by peer review, evaluation and future reformulation of the held tenets, it is highly appropriate that readers question what appear to be improbable interpretations of data. Obviously it is mandatory that the most valid and probable interpretations be given. Thus, when reader Edlin (SN: 9/18/82, p.179) discusses "giving the finger" and "claptrap" as better interpretations of the data on kin support and grandparenting (SN: 8/21/82, p.123) I tried to find interpretations of these two concepts in my scientific dictionary—needless to say one was not found.

It is perfectly appropriate for individuals to question new findings and interpretations. Paradigm shifts never take place without a lot of argument. However, it behooves the discussants to use concepts that are thought to be valid—whether discussing the intellectual shift

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Cover: Whether ranchers should be permitted to use a poison called Compound 1080 against coyotes in order to protect their livestock from the preying canines is a question the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency now must answer. (Photo by Dick Randall of Defenders of Wildlife)



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from the anthropocentric to heliocentric view of the solar system, the concepts of socio-biology, human evolution or creationism.

John A. Ross  
Canton, N.Y.

Two brief but oh, so important clarifications of sociobiological theory are in order. First, according to the theory, behaviors that maximize total genetic fitness will be propagated, but the *mechanism* of intergenerational transmission need not be genetic; the point of controversy is definitely not simply the clichéd "nature vs. nurture" as implied by the letter writer. Indeed, it would be patently absurd to assert that a member of a social species reared in isolation would exhibit all appropriate social behaviors. However, those behaviors may be cultivated ontogenetically in the service of genetic survival.

Second, only self-serving abuses of sociobiological theory lead to moral evaluations of social phenomena (i.e., their "rightness" or "wrongness"); understanding or ex-

plaining *why* something occurs does not speak to the issue of whether it *should* have occurred. I, for one, would greatly regret the stifling of any exciting, fruitful scientific theory for fear of "finger-pointing" distortions by a naive readership. It is *their* responsibility to become informed proponents or critics before voicing an opinion.

Since it is likely that you will publish articles relevant to the evolutionary/sociobiological issue in the future, it is important to obviate misunderstandings of the theories such that they may be intelligently evaluated.

Nancy K. Dess-Beech  
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Please limit letters to 250 words.

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