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# Review of I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt's Human Ethology (1989)

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Review of I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt's

**Human Ethology.**

New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1989. £50. ISBN 0-202-020304.

pp. xv + 848. By Iremus Eibl-Eibesfeldt.

Reviewed by Bradley Jesness.

I commend and congratulate Professor Dr. Eibl-Eibesfeldt on what seems to be another great work. It is in many ways an appropriate sequel and extension of his other great work, *Ethology, the Biology of Behavior*. The new text promises to be a classic, invaluable text on human social behaviors and adaptations. But, as is true among psychologists, there seem to be those with interests in social behavior and those interested in cognitive processes and cognitive development and these seem to be fundamentally different (or at least separate) perspectives on Man. E-E is the master of human social ethology, in my view. He is a great classical ethologist, but he (like American psychologists) is only of one of the two fundamental persuasions. I, in contrast, take the other basic perspective.

Of course humans, while most highly social, must still understand things and function by an large for themselves. True, our social relationships allow us to specialize and do just one type of work or another, but with that we have our own separate representations of the world and our own thoughts. These, like social behaviors, are rooted in, innate action patterns. Cognitive processes, moreover, no doubt accrue more and more rooted in and based on further (emerging) innate perceptual/response biases during ontogeny. It is likely for this reason most cognitive developmental psychologists can see stages (during development) as real, and do not view them as arbitrarily specified for convenience. As I have indicated in my papers (e.g. "An Ethological Conceptualization of Learning .....", in the Newsletter, Sept. 1987), this outlook on stages fits well with the growing understanding of human memory. This brings me to my point. Those doing basic research, like those investigating memory (work largely done by "information-processing" researchers now) and those looking for signs of cognitive developments and trying to define the nature of such things would profit greatly from using a classical ethological approach. Unfortunately this is not encouraged as much as it should be by E-E's text. The great professor seems to pretend his book is more than it is. With the title, his introduction, and the beginning chapters he indicates his text is a comprehensive introduction to human ethology. I see it as very skewed. Those doing basic research in developmental psychology, noted above, are likely to continue in the same way they have and the progress of these groups is likely to slow due to an over-emphasis on a hypothetic-deductive (vs an inductive) approach (as is common in psychology in general).

Unfortunately, an understanding of the essentials of ethology is very, very rare indeed among psychologists (in my experience, non-existent). Those who claim to understand this science do little different in the way they define factors or variables of interest, showing with that no real understanding. Ethology, when truly applied to human behavior, results in such a fundamental shift in methods and defining variables that it

amounts to a scientific revolution (what Kuhn has called a paradigm shift). E-E is a major figure in this revolution. He and some others have shed much light on social behaviors and emotion and their work promises more and more. Unfortunately, little is available in way of a transiation (or transposition) of the terms of classical ethology for the purposes of investigating cognitive developments and few ideas on how ethology might specifically be applied to this area Now, with the way E-E begins his new text and then with an examination of the contents of the chapters that follow, we get the idea that ethology is largely for understanding babies, social life, and social phenomenon. I would have entitled the new text *Human Ethology, Volume 1: Social Adaptation*. Volume 2, on the ontogeny of basic capacities would, hopefully, still be forthcoming. Central in this would be the development of representation, basic cognitive ethology. This gives a basis for more refmed social relations and adaptation as the organism matures and generally would show how the biological unit takes care of itself. Needless to say, I do not think E-E's tiny section on behavioral development (ontogeny) suffices.

At least in U.S., I know of no ethologist who is also a cognitive developmental psychologist. It seems psychologists are not ethologists *and* as far as much major basic research is concerned ethologists are not psychologists. Among those most notable doing basic developmental research are the cognitive developmentalists. Arguably, the richest data and most basic, detailed yet central fmdings are associated with the work of Jean Piaget and those who followed him. These are both the most robust and general findings in all developmental psychology and have many implications. *With ethology* this approach would provide endless opportunities for the advancement of our knowledge of the basics of development and the myriad ramifications. Already modern neo-Piagetians have embraced the findings on short-term memory and long-term memory and have examined the nature of "working memory." (These findings may well be the other major set of robust, significant central data in developmental psychology.) For rapid, sustained and continuous progress, I am confident that all that is needed in basic cognitive developmental research is ethology. In my view it is absolutely necessary to have a merging of the two perspectives. I wish professor Eibl-Eibesfeldt had done much more to encourage this. I believe that while encouraging classical, ethological research in some major areas of psychology, progress in understanding all aspects of human behavior will be slower *than it might have been*, if E-E was clearer about the extent of hIS work and more mindful of psychology in general. Many view questions about human representation and cognition as central and see the need for the highest quality research in this area.