

What is Human Ethology?

Comments by Adriaan Kortlandt, University of Amsterdam

Since I began to observe and study animal behavior, almost 40 years ago, all sorts of philosophers, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, etc. occasionally phone me, or come to see me, and ask questions about animal behavior. In most cases it turns out that they want to collect animal data in order to support some theory or other on human behavior that they have fallen in love with. Since there are many, many theories of human behavior, and since there are perhaps even more data on animal behavior, there is quite a big market for this kind of "applied" ethology. Should we call this "human ethology"? I would prefer rather to call it a mild form of scientific prostitution of ethology, or, in still milder terms, a case of redirection of human philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, etc. towards an ersatz object. What is lacking in this type of applied ethology is the scientific honesty and integrity which constitutes the heart of true science.

Discarding the above category, now what is human ethology? Some esteemed colleagues place the main emphasis on methodological aspects, e.g. meticulous observation, objectivistic interpretation, etc. Such methodology has, however, been fairly current in vast fields of human psychology; e.g. in child psychology since 1882 when W. Preyer published his epoch-making *Seele des Kindes* (a book which every human ethologist should read). Using such criteria to define human ethology would lead to throwing out the baby of ethology with the bath water of psychology.

In my opinion the essential contribution of ethology to the behavioral sciences is that it is a biological science, i.e., evolutionary thinking is its central concept. Philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, etc., on the other hand, currently tend to ignore, and sometimes even deny, the evolutionary aspects of human behavior. Either they study man from the viewpoint of eternity, "sub specie aeternitatis" as the old theological philosophers coined the term, as if man were created for all eternity; or they study man from the viewpoint of a given social and cultural setting, "sub specie temporis."

Human ethology, therefore, should be defined as the study of human behavior and related phenomena, focussing on evolutionary theory as its central scientific concept and viewpoint, i.e. "sub specie evolutionis." Otherwise the term will become meaningless because it will ignore what ethology means. By accepting this criterion we will certainly cause quite a row and lose part of our following. But in this way we will shake off the intellectual burden of all those fellow travellers who have never learned to think in evolutionary concepts and who, consequently, will never understand what ethology has contributed to scientific thinking.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Change of Staff

Because the Institute with which I (DRO) am associated has decided not to continue to support my position as a human ethologist it has become necessary to

shift our base of operations elsewhere. This shift has been made easier by the following volunteers:

- 1) The newsletter will now be edited and distributed by Dr. Cheryl Travis, Department of Psychology, University of Tennessee, Austin Peay, Knoxville, TN 37916, USA. The newsletter can no longer be distributed free of charge. If you still wish to receive it please send \$2.50 (in check or money order, or the equivalent at current foreign exchange rates) to her. In some few cases where money cannot be exchanged between countries simply send her a letter to that effect and hopefully the other contributions will offset that slight deficit.

Please send comments, articles, news about meetings, new books, etc. to Dr. Travis. The newsletter is meant to be a means of furthering communication and that requires that you provide her with information.

- 2) The national (U.S. and Canada) meetings will continue to take place, at least through 1977, with the Animal Behavior Society. The human ethology/sociobiology portion of these meetings will be co-chaired by:

Dr. Joan Lockard Department of Neurological Surgery University of Washington Seattle, Washington 98195	and	Dr. Gail Zivin Annenberg School of Communication University of Pennsylvania 3620 Walnut Street C5 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19174
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To increase our representation on the governing board of ABS Joan Lockard is running as program chairman and Donald Omark is running as Member-at-Large in the forthcoming ABS elections. If you would care to apply for membership to ABS application cards are available from either Omark or

C. Richard Terman, Treasurer ABS
Department of Biology
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia 23185

- 3) Information about International meetings can be obtained from either Dr. Robert Marvin (see address below) or through the newsletter. We had hoped to hold the next meeting in 1977 but are having difficulties with a site with adequate, inexpensive dormitory facilities and meeting space. If there are any volunteers, please communicate with Dr. Marvin as soon as possible.

New Journals

- 1) The journal MAN-ENVIRONMENT SYSTEMS has created a new NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIONS SECTION which is now accepting papers in the fields of Nonverbal Communication (NVC), Human Ethology, Kinesiology, Social Biology, and other related disciplines. The NVC Section will provide a forum for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of NVC. Papers presenting a synthesis of empirical and theoretical issues from a variety of viewpoints will be given priority. In addition, each paper selected for publication will be sent for comment to other investigators actively engaged in the study of NVC (at least one of which will be from a different discipline than the author). Their comments, along with the author's reply, will be published concurrently with the original paper.

In order to submit a paper for publication, send three copies of each manuscript to M-ES, Editor, NVC Section, P.O. Box 57, Orangeburg, New York 10962. Each paper should contain an abstract of 150 words or less. We will also consider for publication Bibliographies, Book Reviews, Letters to the Editor and Smmaries of on-going research programs in the field of NVC.

- 2) BEHAVIORAL ECOLOGY and SOCIOBIOLOGY will publish original contributions and short communications dealing with quantitative studies and with the experimental analysis of animal [including human] behavior on the level of the individual and the population. Special emphasis will be given to the functions, mechanisms and evolution of ecological adaptations of behavior. Purely descriptive material is not acceptable for publication unless it is concerned with the analysis of behavioral mechanisms or with new theory. [Papers on humans involving culture, language, and other more typically human behaviors are not acceptable]. Managing editor is Hubert Markl. For further information, instructions to authors, and a sample copy contact Springer-Verlag, Promotion Department, Heidelberger Platz 3, D-1000 Berlin 33, West Germany.
- 3) BEHAVIORAL PROCESSES, an international journal of comparative and physiological ethology, whose purpose "is to provide additional space for publication in the field of ethology, in particular to bring together studies from diverse scientific disciplines, which are relevant to the understanding of fundamental behavioral processes in organisms ranging from single-celled bodies right through to primates, including man." Editor-in-chief is G. Thines and publisher is Elsevier. For further information, instructions to authors, and a specimen copy, contact Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, P.O. Box 211, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. (from ABS Newsletter).
- 4) BIOLOGY OF BEHAVIOUR (Biologie du Comportement) is widely open to all aspects of behavior such as: descriptive analysis of behavior, development and behavior, influence of environmental factors, role of sensory information, physiological, sensory and nervous, endocrine and biochemical mechanisms, temporal organization of activities, genetics and evolution of behavior, functional significance of behavior. BIOLOGY OF BEHAVIOUR deals with all animal species, from the invertebrates to the primates, including man. Editor is J. P. Signoret, and a free copy, instructions to authors, etc. can be obtained by writing to: MASSON, 120 boulevard Saint-Germain, F 75280 Paris cedex06, France, or MASSON Publishing USA, 111 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Newsletters

Information about the Society for Cross-Cultural Research and their newsletter can be obtained by writing to: Ronald P. Rohner, Editor, SCCR Newsletter, Boys Town Center, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20064, USA.

The Non-Verbal Communication Newsletter edited by Mary Ritchie Key will no longer be published. We had found it very informative and are sorry to see it stop.

Human Ethology Abstracts

Over the past two years many of you have sent us articles which we said we would abstract and print in the newsletter. We apologize for never having completed this task. Dr. Cheryl Travis and her students volunteered to do this and we gratefully sent her a very large box of papers. Man-Environment Systems has agreed to publish the now completed set. Further information about how to obtain the abstracts will appear in the next newsletter.

Dr. Travis will prepare a second issue (to appear about June 1977) and she is requesting contributions. NOTE: authors should provide their own abstracts; they should be concise (approx. 150 words) and informative. Copies of the papers are also requested. Also note that M-ES has an earlier set of human ethology abstracts produced by Tony Pfeiffer.

New Society

Information about the American Society of Veterinary Ethology can be obtained from Dr. Bonnie Beaver, Department of Veterinary Anatomy, Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas 77840.

Loss of a Colleague

Ray Larsen, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S., Canada recently passed away. Ray was a clear, succinct thinker who provided behavioral insights important for both anthropologists and human ethologists. He recently co-edited a book with Michael Chance, The Social Structure of Attention, and was to have co-chaired the forthcoming AAA symposium on Sociobiology: Ethological Approaches. His wit and wisdom will be missed by all who knew him.

Forthcoming Papers

Four symposia of interest to Human Ethologist/Sociobiologists will be presented at the American Anthropology Association meeting, November 17-21, 1976. The papers from two of the symposia appear below and those of the other two will be in the next newsletter.

- 1) Sociobiology: the new synthesis. Edward O. Wilson, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 02138.
- 2) A biological theory of the family. Robert L. Trivers, Department of Anthropology, Harvard.
- 3) Infanticide as a primate reproductive strategy. Sarah B. Hrdy, Anthropology, Harvard.
- 4) Aggression, competition and social dominance theory. Joseph L. Popp, Anthropology, Harvard.
- 5) Social organization and pair-bonding in vertebrates. Irven DeVore, Anthropology, Harvard.

- 6) Is a human ethogram possible? Ronald C. Simons, Anthropology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich. 48824.
- 7) Conceptual and methodological confusions about cross cultural studies of facial expression. Paul Ekman, School of Psychiatry University of California, S.F., 401 Parnassus, San Francisco, CA. 94143
- 8) Communication in an evolutionary perspective. Louis A. Fourcher, Department of Psychiatry, University of Illinois, 912 South Wood Street, Chicago, IL 60612.
- 9) The Mind/Body problem from an ethological perspective. Donald R. Omark (see below).
- 10) Neuroscience and biosocial anthropology. Horst D. Steklis, Anthropology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.
- 11) Infancy, culture and biology. Daniel G. Freedman, Div. of Human Development, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637.

Donald R. Omark
Institute for Child Behavior and
Development
University of Illinois
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, IL 61820

Robert S. Marvin
Department of Psychology
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA 22901