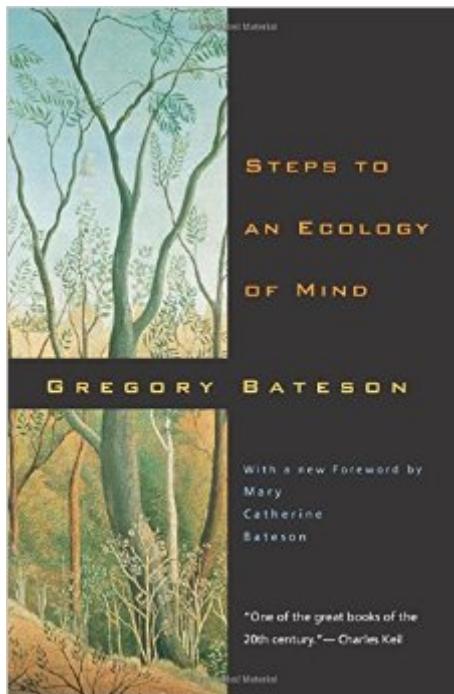


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Steps To An Ecology Of Mind: Collected Essays In Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, And Epistemology



Synopsis

Gregory Bateson was a philosopher, anthropologist, photographer, naturalist, and poet, as well as the husband and collaborator of Margaret Mead. With a new foreword by his daughter Mary Katherine Bateson, this classic anthology of his major work will continue to delight and inform generations of readers. "This collection amounts to a retrospective exhibition of a working life. . . . Bateson has come to this position during a career that carried him not only into anthropology, for which he was first trained, but into psychiatry, genetics, and communication theory. . . . He . . . examines the nature of the mind, seeing it not as a nebulous something, somehow lodged somewhere in the body of each man, but as a network of interactions relating the individual with his society and his species and with the universe at large."â "D. W. Harding, New York Review of Books "[Bateson's] view of the world, of science, of culture, and of man is vast and challenging. His efforts at synthesis are tantalizingly and cryptically suggestive. . . . This is a book we should all read and ponder."â "Roger Keesing, American Anthropologist Â

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Customer Reviews

It is unbelievable that this masterpiece has been out of print for so long. I have been looking fruitlessly for a copy for some years, having eventually had to return a loan copy. I am delighted that it is available again.Organised as a collection of relatively short essays, this has a legitimate claim to be the outstanding book of the 20th century for anyone interested in mind, change, evolution, systems thinking, ecology, epistemology, organisations, therapy and more. Be warned - it can be

very dense in places, but the effort is worth it. On the right day it's really stimulating - on a bad day, I'd read something easier! 'Form, Substance and Difference', 'Conscious Purpose versus Nature' and 'The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication' are absolutely central texts for anyone considering how we need to respond to the current world crisis. Other key papers include 'The cybernetics of "Self": A theory of alcoholism' and 'Social Planning and the Concept of Deutero Learning'. If you work in the field of Organisational Development you will probably be familiar with some of the content through the many writers who have built on Bateson's work. Fritjof Capra writes about him a great deal. The original is best though. The fact that it is back in print is tremendous. How can something this good have been out of print for so long? David Ballard

It's unfortunate that Bateson died before postmodern thought really made it over the Atlantic since it appears he was quite concerned about many of the old views held by North American philosophers. The chapters concerning contextualization and language use echo what Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida have been trying to get across except Bateson really managed to put these ideas into somewhat more accessible form. Bateson was around for the beginnings of information theory and cybernetics and again, he was probably very disappointed in their state when he died. However, if one now looks at what people like Perlovsky and Chaitin have worked on one may begin to see that science is finding more and more problems with maintaining even the idea of objectivity. In particular, if one looks at the work of Wilson ("Spikes, Decisions, and Actions") and Prigogine then the theory of objectivity within the physical world comes falling down. The only book close to giving a complete overview like Bateson managed is Jantsch's "Self-Organizing Universe", now out of print. This is well worth reading and pondering. One can only hope more people begin to realize that we have a great opportunity for advancing ourselves (instead of rushing towards annihilation) if we can just change some of present system of thought.

Forget Blink! Predictably Irrational, or Drive, or Built to Last. They're kindergarteners compared to Bateson's Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Ironically, I was suffering painter's block when my college professor suggested that I read Steps to an Ecology of Mind. I started reading this and had no clue why he suggested for me to read it. It didn't help my painter's block- but it did change my life. Very simply, Bateson taught me how to think. I just attended a high level creative workshop and Bateson's lessons shed insights on our subject areas, 38 years after reading his book. It's about patterns, structure, information and mind. In other words, it's about everything and the patterns that connect everything from schizophrenia, to dance, to animal play, to cybernetics, ecology, learning,

design and epistemology. This is not some new age mystical approach. BE WARNED; it is difficult, challenging and paradigm shifting reading- hundreds of pages worth. Have a dictionary with you when you read it. It will be worth your effort in your long term ecology of mind. And thank you to my painting professor.

Out of the hundreds of books that I was forced to read through high school and college, maybe five caught my imagination. This was one of them. Before anyone was really interested in thinking about thinking, Bateson sat down and did so. He was attempting to raise a bunch of questions that might help some to inform their search for understanding in the world, or at least for points to be curious about, which in his mind is where science has to begin if it wants to know anything. It certainly helped to inform my thinking. Not only did Bateson do a bang-up job of getting me to think in interesting or useful or maybe somewhat cleaner ways, he's actually pretty good at writing.

This is a book that has grown on me since my first exposure to it around 1980. I'll find myself thinking of a point and need to go find the book and reread the essay. One of the things that fascinates me about the book, as I come to understand some of Bateson's thinking, is when these essays were written. He and colleagues were attempting to understand an unformed (and unnamed) topic for which no adequate vocabulary yet existed. I mean, look at the title "Steps to an Ecology of Mind" -- He's trying to understand "ideas" and how they interact. He defines "idea" as "a difference that makes a difference" -- He's grappling with concepts that were ultimately (in 1947) named "information" -- and Bateson's "idea" is Shannon's "bit". He's doing it in a much broader context than computers and formal communications, but he's studying information. One essay that more obviously shows this is "A Reexamination of Bateson's Rule" where he's looking at how much information is needed to specify living forms by examining the types of failures when something goes wrong. As a computer scientist, information is the basic medium I study / manipulate, and I've spent significant time trying to understand how to create and manage complex software systems. In Bateson's terms, I've spent my career studying one small part of an Ecology of Mind.

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