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Letters

Thinking animals: A new paradigm

Although my paper on mating success in baboons never used the phrase "discourage inbreeding," I did suggest that the decline in success may have an evolutionary consequence ("Sex and friendship among baboons," SN: 4/22/89, p.251). At this level of explanation we may use words such as "discourage" and "encourage" without sounding mentalistic. However, I strongly disagree with the point of Irwin Taylor's letter to the editor (SN: 6/3/89, p.339).

For more than 50 years, most scientists studying animals have been excruciatingly cautious about attributing "motivations, attitudes and needs" or "mind" to them, as Mr. Taylor puts it. There is a growing realization, based on extensive research, that such a scientific framework is both inaccurate and biased. Even within this new paradigm, we will have the problem of what words to use. Some words have such specific human con-

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Cover: This West German stand of old Norway spruce, initially weakened by severe magnesium deficiency, eventually succumbed to bark beetles. What happened here typifies the rapid and severe forest decline that has ravaged European timberlands since 1980. Many foresters now see signs of the same plague developing in high-elevation woodlands of the eastern United States. To understand what's responsible, researchers are investigating the evolving chemistry of acidifying soils. (Photo: Karl Peters, Research Center Jülich, West Germany)



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notations that it may be dangerous to use them for other animals. But one point is clear: It is anthropocentric to believe that humans are the only creatures with motivations, attitudes, needs and mind.

Shirley C. Strum
Professor of Anthropology
University of California, San Diego
La Jolla, Calif.

Rifkin: Who, what, why

I cannot understand why Jeremy Rifkin of the strangely named Foundation on Economic Trends ("Gene-Transfer Trial Begins in Humans," SN: 5/27/89, p.324) receives so much exposure in SCIENCE NEWS. What is the Foundation on Economic Trends, who funds it and what are Mr. Rifkin's qualifications?

Larry Bartley
Kailua, Hawaii

The Foundation on Economic Trends is a nonprofit corporation founded by Jeremy Rifkin, a longtime activist in the areas of poverty, work-

ers' rights and the environment. Funding comes primarily from environmental foundations and Rifkin's speaking engagements, he says. More than any other single group, this small organization has forced careful reviews of experiments involving genetically engineered cells and organisms, thus slowing or preventing their approval by regulatory agencies. Whether or not one agrees with his motives or tactics (he relies mostly on lawsuits based on environmental statutes), Rifkin has been remarkably successful in his efforts and is widely recognized as a major player, for better or worse, in the application of the ongoing revolution in molecular biology.
— the editors

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