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Instinct in the ' 50s: The British Reception of Konrad Lorenz' s Theory of Instinctive Behavior

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Abstract

In 1950 most students of animal behavior in Britain saw the instinct concept developed by Konrad Lorenz in the 1930s as the central theoretical construct of the new ethology. In the early 1950s J.B.S Haldane made substantial efforts to undermine Lorenz' s status, challenging his priority on key ethological concepts. Haldane was also critical of Lorenz' s sharp distinction between instinctive and learnt behavior, which was inconsistent with Haldane' s own account of the evolution of language. Haldane' s account of transitions between learning and instinct drew on a view of the genotype-phenotype relationship common amongst his contemporaries and which may have ' preadapted' some British biologists to respond positively to Daniel S. Lehrman' s 1953 critique of Lorenz' s instinct concept. By the 1960s Lorenz drew a clear distinction between his own views and those of the ' English-speaking ethologists' .

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