

Review of Jeremy Griffith's ***FREEDOM: The End Of The Human Condition***

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Scott D. Churchill, PhD
Professor and Founding Graduate Program Director
Psychology Department, University of Dallas

In his captivating new book, Jeremy Griffith gives us an illuminating perspective from which to consider the facts of human evolution, and points us in a direction – that is well within our reach – for addressing social problems that threaten our very existence as a species. However, this important book provides more than a grand synthesis of existing knowledge; it is a plea to all of us to listen to our hearts and to heed, before it is too late, Jeremy Griffith's call to humanity to rescue ourselves and our planet from the destructive forces that we have allowed to dominate in the world today.

Griffith adopts a more humanistic (and certainly more creative) approach to his reflection upon the evidence concerning human evolution, starting with the pro-social behavior of non-human apes, with a tremendous emphasis upon the data that have emerged in recent decades of observations of bonobos based on the observations of world famous primatologists as well as zookeepers who have spent their lives working with and observing the interactions among bonobos. He draws upon the opinions of authorities like Konrad Lorenz, Ashley Montagu, Dian Fossey, Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and even psychologists like R.D. Laing in presenting his own grand synthesis.

He offers us an articulate, passionate, and thoroughgoing dismantling of E.O. Wilson's highly reductive account of both primate and human evolution, while offering a view of primate and human child rearing that appeals to our common sense – as well as to our common experiences as children being raised by our mothers.

Griffith's ideas have been criticized for not presenting the field of science with “new data” and “testable hypotheses.” But such a complaint is disingenuous since evolutionary processes are not subjectable to the same kind of “hypothesis testing” that one finds in the other sciences. An hypothesis is a “smaller, more compact thesis” that is “deduced” from a larger idea or thesis in such a way that one can test that larger idea piece by piece. Whereas, the kind of synthesis offered in Griffith's book is presented both conceptually and metaphorically with an aim to tie together existing data, while correcting and expanding upon the more limited existing interpretations of those data.

Experimental “hypothesis testing” of evolutionary processes might require cross-generational study of “experimental groups” and “control groups” of primates and humans, where one lineage would be given a “treatment” – in this case: loving,

empathy-generating mothering – and the “control” lineage would be withheld such “treatment”; even if one could find an ethical way of conducting such research – which is doubtable – one cannot imagine how one might otherwise “prove” *anyone’s* theses concerning human evolution.

These kinds of theories are ultimately subjected to a scientific “common sense” – and in the world of science as we know it today, holistic and teleological theses are the most difficult to “prove” since we must consider not only the “causalities” that drive evolution but the (ultimately unmeasurable) “intentionalities” as well.

Insofar as his ideas amount to an overarching “thesis” about human evolution, the work of hypothesis testing would be up to a next generation of anthropologists – just as psychologist Edward Thorndike’s major thesis put forth in 1898, known as the “law of effect”, was later subjected to a lifetime of “hypothesis testing” on the part of psychologists like B.F. Skinner.

Nothing Dr. Prosen has said about the immense importance of this book is an exaggeration. This *is* the book that all humans need to read for our collective wellbeing. Griffith’s central thesis is that what we call “love” – a topic that has been explored scientifically by John Bowlby and Harry Harlow, among others – is the outcome of the maternal-infant bond, in bonobos as well as in humans; and, furthermore, that empathy is the counterforce to aggression in human (and perhaps all primate) evolution.

Such a perspective comes to us not as a simple opinion of one man, but rather as an *inductive* conclusion drawn from sifting through volumes of data representing what scientists have discovered about various primate behaviors. The “data” are there in the history of science, and documented in the archives of our predecessors’ observations and discoveries. Griffith’s own discovery – through a careful process of review and reflection upon the existing data – has provided us with a thesis well worth considering in the years to come.

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