

ETHNOGRAPHY AND ETHICS: A CRITIQUE OF GREGORY BATESON (1904–1980)

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This essay about the work of a famous anthropologist is an attempt to illuminate one way that researchers could apply their findings about the behavior of people in particular groups to ethical considerations of social relations. I argue that Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) is a good example because he applied a few seminal ideas to a wide range of phenomena. The essay will chronologically detail Bateson's contributions. It is my intent that this biographical approach will show the reader how Bateson began with specific tasks and applied his ideas to wider concerns. As a young man, he stated that ethnographic research was an epistemological endeavor. As Bateson matured, he came to see his work as an effort to determine how people, including researchers, perceive truth. In his first efforts, Bateson tried to locate the logic of human behavior. As he noted that some patterns of communication engendered logical flaws, he realized that some perspectives led to disaster and others avoided it. Although he decided that science could lead civilization to its own destruction, he was a well-trained and careful scientist. He hoped that science, intelligently undertaken, could help people avoid these dilemmas, an insight worthy of JEQR readership's reflection.