

Preface

As I look over the table of contents of this book, with its short chapters at the beginning and end and its long ones in the middle, I am reminded of the drawing of the boa in Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince*. Having swallowed an elephant, it was slender of head and tail and grossly swollen in between. I have sometimes felt that in taking on the nature-nurture complex, I was doing something at least as unlikely to end gracefully as that encounter between elephant and serpent.

My interest in the various meanings of the biological can be traced back to an adolescent preoccupation with determinism. This early concern was fed by an undergraduate major in psychology, which ensured exposure to the full range of questions about nature and nurture in development, psychopathology, personality and animal studies. Graduate studies in psycholinguistics raised the issue of innate language structures, and more recently I have watched many of these topics resurface in the wake of the sociobiology furor. The persistence of nature-nurture oppositions and the variety of forms they take have continued to fascinate me – hence, to make a tortuous path straight, this extended inquiry into our ways of thinking about constancy, ordered change and variability.

Many readers, even sympathetic ones, will read this and look for an edifice to replace the nature-nurture complex, preferably on the same site. The demand for an alternative is legitimate, but unrealistic expectations are not, especially when they are conditioned by the very assumptions that led us astray in the past. I believe the outlines of the alternative are indeed to be found in the following pages, but I do not think they will be clearly visible to those who are searching for another grand scheme to replace the ones we have already embraced in our attempts to come to terms with life processes.

The reader who is open to a more modest approach to understanding, however, may find much here that is congenial and familiar. I hope, though, that the person whose first reaction is "Of course" will linger long enough

to see whether I have provided any novel insights into a way of thinking that may not seem new at all; much of my material is drawn from the great store of things everyone "knows." But there are many ways of knowing and of using and misusing what one knows.

I think it is instructive that the two most common reactions to my work are quite opposed in their implications. Some fear I am destroying the very basis for inquiry, and that they will be without direction if they really give up the assumptions under criticism. Others, the ones who react with "Of course," feel these issues were settled long ago. Certainly the first fear is mistaken, and this is proved by the work done by the minority of people in the second group who have not only adopted a new vocabulary but have actually implemented, in their research and interpretation, the integrated approach to development and evolution being advocated here. Though it may seem an unkind task, one of the things I try to do in this book is show that many of the people who would unhesitatingly place themselves in that last small category still cling to the very ideas they claim to have left behind.

To those who fear losing their bearings, I would say, "Take heart; there is much to be learned." To those who use an interactionist vocabulary of sorts but who have not yet fully integrated the conceptual changes required by a truly interactionist approach, my message is, "Don't stop now; the best is yet to come." And to those stalwart few who have done it all, what can I say but "Bless you"?

It has long been my perverse dream to write a book, take credit for its every virtue and blame its flaws on the miscreants who had misadvised me. Unfortunately, this is not that book. I am aware of its shortcomings and the responsibility I bear for them; I am also aware of how much I have benefited from the criticisms and help of many people.

First I would like to thank Peter Klopfer and Pat Bateson, who broke into the autistic frenzy of my sabbatical scribbling and suggested that I think of publishing. During the past few years, they have helped me find my way through a world that was new and sometimes bewildering. They have encouraged me, read my work with care and given me new opportunities to learn. Don Symons, my most faithful source of "Yes, buts," increased my awareness of a number of issues; that I have surely not met his challenges satisfactorily vexes me, and I am grateful that he continued our correspondence even when we seemed to write past each other more often than not. He was generous with time and praise when it helped, pointed in his criticisms when it counted. Colin Beer also offered many useful suggestions.

Conversations with a number of people helped me during the time I was

thrashing out some of the issues that are discussed in this book (and some that are not); among them were Richard Burian, Margaret Clarke, Russell Gray, Howard Gruber and Philip Silverman. These people were also valuable sources of reprints and suggestions for reading. Others were gracious enough to answer me when I asked them peculiar questions without warning, sometimes in person and sometimes by mail. I hope they are not displeased if they find traces of their thoughts in these pages, and I apologize if I have not made good use of them.

Finally I want to thank those who sustained me through these two long years of writing and thinking: friends who didn't give up on me during my extended periods of seclusion; my parents (who years ago endured life circumstances that would have undone lesser souls, and from them fashioned a warm, safe and rich developmental system for their offspring); Mark Singleton, who was always willing to talk, to listen, to help and to comfort, and who showed me one needn't live alone to have a room of one's own; and, of course, my children, Marina and Stefano, who have raised me with more loving permissiveness and tolerance than any parent has a right to expect.