

The Emotional Imperative: How Emotions Rule Our Lives

D.M. Miller

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Plato argued that inherited knowledge determines human behavior, while Aristotle believed that people come into the world with minds as blank slates. In 1874, Francis Galton, whose cousin was Charles Darwin, used the words “nature” and “nurture” to describe the two sides of this unresolved debate. Noting that these words merely provided him with convenient categories in which to list the myriad variations within species, neither he nor anyone since has definitively answered the question of which of these influences is greater.

D.M. Miller has published three previous books about evolution. At the age of eighty-seven, he has written *The Emotional Imperative: How Emotions Rule Our Lives*, proposing that human behavior is largely driven by gene-inspired emotions. He discusses the efficacy of natural selection and how behavioral traits have evolved to meet human needs in response to constantly changing environmental challenges. The author uses normal distribution or bell-shaped curves to accurately plot the progression of human development through shifting epochs. He cites changes in behavior necessitated by the progression of hunter-gatherer societies into agrarian communities as populations increased and climatic conditions altered physical surroundings.

Miller received a Ph.D. from McGill University and undertook postdoctoral work at the National Research Council of Canada. After a career with the Agricultural Research Institute at the University of Western Ontario, he has continued researching, writing, and lecturing on biophysical subjects.

People perceive their surroundings to be limited to three dimensions because the human mind cannot comprehend the idea of the continuous movement of molecules in what appear to be stationary objects. Miller explains, “We are compelled to function in a world that appears to have no boundaries—where all things grade into other things as the side of the valley grades into the side of the hill.”

Children grow up absorbing the beliefs learned from their extended ethnic families. “Such individuals are duped by their genes into the belief that it is their intellect, rather than their emotions, that presents them with ‘reality’ or ‘The Truth,’” he writes. Fear of the consequences of not believing in their group’s ideas motivates them to conform.

Persistent occurrences of war have prevailed throughout mankind’s history. Miller says, “Once again we see that humans are defined by their emotions—emotions that drive them to perform inhumane acts with the self-righteous conviction...that such acts are justified.” The strong succeed in conquering the weak, and discrimination against an “out group” continues to this day.

The author’s writing style successfully engages the reader, despite the scope and complexity of his subject matter. However, inconsistent punctuation occurs throughout the book, particularly placement of ending quotation marks before a comma or period. Formatting errors and overuse of exclamation marks and dashes detract from the book’s thoughtful content.

Miller advocates for the genetic side of the continuing debate about the influences of nature and nurture. Even though all may not agree, readers who have pondered the question in classrooms, in their own minds, or as they raised children and progressed through life will find value in this book.

MARGARET CULLISON (June 27, 2011)

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