

Obituary

Hiram Caton:

16 August 1936 – 13 December 2010

By **Wulf Schiefenhövel**

At present: President, *ISHE*; Fellow, *Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg* (Institute of Advanced Study), Delmenhorst, Northern Germany

It was an exceptional winter in the Alps about twenty years ago. A group of colleagues had been invited to a post-conference excursion by Irenäus (Renki) Eibl-Eibesfeldt to his "*Hütte*" above the village of Brixen in Northern Tyrol. It took more than an hour to make space for the cars. The snow was about a meter deep. Hiram Caton dragged his heavy suitcase up the steep track to the cabin. Strong words were uttered in that unmistakable English. Aussies from Queensland don't usually have to fight with arctic conditions. Near the fire place the trying effort was soon forgotten and a lively, sometimes heated discussion went on, as was customary in this man's company.

Hiram Caton died on 13 December 2010, at the age of 74. He was one of the really active members of our society.

He received an earned Doctor of Letters (D. Litt.) degree from famous Yale University for his work as scholar specialized in modern history. And this area of research remained one pillar of his work also in later life. But he was not confined to this field. It must be rare for a historian to be elected (in 1994) Fellow of the well renowned Australian Institute of Biology. Hiram, Inaugural Professor of Humanities at Griffith University Brisbane and later Professor for Politics and History at that University, was knowledgeable in various fields. He co-founded, in 1980, the international and interdisciplinary Association for Politics and Life Sciences. A courageous step then as and

now building bridges between fields often enough at war with each other is a risky thing. Hiram did not shy away from difficulties of this kind. He liked challenges and often took stands opposite to the mainstream. Most notable was his conviction, held also by a few leading virologists, that the AIDS epidemic took place in the minds and labs of researchers, the discussions of politicians and the decisions of the medical people rather than in the bodies of patients.

Very influential was his book "The Politics of Progress. The Origins and Development of the Commercial Republic" which dug down deep into European and American history and went against the grain of the largely accepted Weberian view that capitalism and the victory of science and technology have their origins in Protestant ethics. This book was widely discussed and reviewed in more than 20 professional journals. It was obvious that its author had touched upon a critical issue and successfully attacked one of the sacred paradigms. Hiram Caton was interested in how modern science came about, how its innovative ideas can be traced back in history, and how science works and is administered in the political arena. Yet, more than institutions it was the human individual on which his research focused.

One of the most influential paradigm-deconstructions of our time was that of Margret Mead as ethnographer in Samoa and anthropologist portraying an alternative scenario of the *conditio humana*. Derek Freeman, in painstaking classic fieldwork, showed that she had violated almost all the rules of the trade which had been established by a long row of ethnologists before her, e.g. Bronislaw Malinowski who learned *Kilivila*, the language of Trobriand Islanders, spent so many hours carefully interviewing his informants and then writing it all up in detailed accounts. They can still be checked today and most findings (except the ones about child sexuality and

ignorance of biological paternity) turn out to still be true. This is the way ethnology, a soft science especially in the days before audiotapes, 16 mm film and video, must present its data. Derek Freeman made the world recognize that the Empress had no clothes on and thereby did science an invaluable service. Hiram Caton, who was always intrigued by cult leaders and their groupies, wrote a book (*The Exalted Self: Derek Freeman's Quest for the Perfect Identity*) about his colleague and coworker Freeman, based on careful archival research and personal knowledge. He sees a narcissistic-personality disorder as the basis of Freeman's dedication to show how Samoan life really was and to prove Mead wrong. This may well be true. Many a scientist in pursuit of what she or he perceives to be a fundamental issue might be placed by others into the group of somewhat queer people. But like Ekkehart Malotki's devastating blow, also based on years of careful fieldwork, to the Whorfian claim of Hopi "timelessness", Derek Freeman will always be remembered as the one who showed that alternative human worlds are not so very likely, not even on a far-away island in the Pacific.

Hiram Caton used the magnifying glass of his sharp mind to screen an even bigger icon: Charles Darwin, again, sympathizing with this great man. I remember well the discussions I had with Hiram about the somewhat enigmatic, almost crippling disease Darwin so very badly suffered from after his return from the voyage with the *Beagle*. It was one of those happenstances which occur in our lives: The number of great figures ancestral for a field and its interesting topics is limited and influenced by the *Zeitgeist*. "Great minds think alike" is how we try to explain those incidences. I had been able to stroll through the Down House before the rest of the visitors (mostly school children) were let in and was deeply touched by the atmosphere in this refuge of the great man where he took shelter from life outside, so often troubling him. I saw the curtain in the

corner of the study and learned that there was a kind of toilet where the giant of evolutionary thought could pacify, as much as possible, his rebellious intestines. "Lactose intolerance" flashed through my mind, in milk-prone England perhaps a possibility. I knew that the accepted hypothesis is that Darwin was bitten by a *vinchuca* bug (*Benchuca* in Darwin's diary) of the *Triatominae* subfamily and thereby contracted Chagas disease, a common consequence of infection with *Trypanosoma cruzi*. Intestinal complications of this tropical zoonosis are less common than cardiac and cerebral ones, so I thought I had a point for my distant diagnosis. Hiram was, in our dispute, decidedly of a different opinion. In addition to the Chagas disease interpretation, plus Darwin's known anguish connected to becoming a rebel against God and society with possible psychosomatic effects plus the view of Ralph Colp, Jr., a psychiatrist who had found signs of a extremely labile parasympathetic nervous system in Darwin, Hiram had another hypothesis: The great man suffered from Avoidant-Personality Disorder with extreme shyness, fear of being rejected, self-deprecation, striving for acceptance and psychosomatic symptoms. Hiram himself saw the discrepancy of his diagnosis to some of the known traits of Darwin's personality: a very balanced man, successfully working, from time to time, as peace judge for the local community, liked by everyone, and loved by his children, almost a tiger when he needed to be, e.g. after Alfred Russel Wallace's letter to him. "It's like a miracle" Hiram himself stated on his webpage.

In all his writings on a wide array of topics, Hiram Caton was concerned with the human being. Being open to psychology, biology and evolutionary science made him the pioneer of human ethology in Australia, again against the trend prevailing in the academia of those days, particularly in Australia: post-modern science, constructivism, cultural relativism, fight against "biological reductionism" and the belief that humans are shaped by their socio-economic

environment, echoing the Marxian dictum "*Das Sein bestimmt das Bewußtsein*". To be convinced that an important part of our history is phylogeny and that our ancestors have been shaped by mutations and the forces of selection and to defend that position demands a strong person. In two books, Hiram Caton criticized radical feminism and other political movements for trying to undermine the family as the basic unit of society and its crucial role for successful early ontogeny.

Hiram was courageous in the choice of his research topics and in making his findings public. In contrast to many members of the older (my) generation, he really came to grips with computer technology and all the new options it facilitates. Hiram served as ISHE Information Officer from 2005 to 2008, and we on the board of ISHE benefitted from his drive and knowledge. He urged us to have a better relationship with the scientific press and the academic world. Yet, we still don't have a "press room" where new findings from ISHE colleagues would be presented, in a professional way, to those who mediate them to the interested public. Other scientific societies and especially big scientific institutions (e.g. the *Senckenberg Gesellschaft für Naturforschung* in Germany) have gone this way by now. We in the board of ISHE will have to see how we will position ourselves, a relatively small international society, in the shark tank out there.

I thank Hiram for his role in a crucial time of ISHE and we will miss his company, his Australian humor, his provocative ideas, and the talks around a fireplace.

Wulf Schiefenhövel, Ph.D., co-founded ethnomedicine in Germany, performing field studies in New Guinea on traditional medical beliefs and practices. Since then, he has done continuous fieldwork in ethnomedicine, anthropology, and human ethology, mainly in Melanesia and Indonesia, authoring 300 papers, either authoring, coauthoring, or coediting 24 books, and publishing scientific films.

Theoretical Articles

Understanding Sex Differences in Human Mortality Rates through Tinbergen's Four Questions

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Abstract

Sex differences in human mortality rates emerge from a complex interaction of genetic heritage and developmental environment. Although mortality is not in itself a behavior, it is an indirect product of behavior and physiology and thus responsive to life history variation in resource allocation, behavioral tendencies, and relevant environmental conditions. The explanatory framework of Tinbergen's Four Questions is sufficiently powerful in generalization to promote understanding of this phenomenon. Excess male mortality is a result of a trade-off between competitiveness and longevity. Male life history gives greater emphasis to reproductive effort at the expense of somatic effort, and mating effort at the expense of longevity compared to female life history. Men exhibit riskier behavioral patterns and greater physiological susceptibility, dying at higher rates from behavioral and most non-behavioral causes across the lifespan. The magnitude of the sex difference in mortality in developed nations peaks when males sexually mature and enter