observational studies in which the behaviour and movements of infants and children were painstakingly filmed, described, and recorded. He set norms for behaviour in the laboratory against which an individual could be assessed and in doing so laid the foundations of the developmental assessment techniques that are in use today the world over. It is therefore fitting that when the MacKeith Press launched a series of Classics in Developmental Medicine under the series editorship of Ross Mitchell they included among the first volumes a book by Gesell. Interestingly, they chose one of his later more theoretical and speculative books rather than one of the earliest ‘atlases’ of behaviour. The Embryology of Behaviour, subtitled The Beginnings of the Human Mind, was first published in 1945 and describes the development of behaviour in the fetus and infant. It draws on Gesell’s own films of infants and the work of human developmental neurologists such as Wilhelm Preyer and Davenport Hooker as well as the galaxy of embryologists who were active in that period—such names as D’Archi Thompson, Barcroft, Kuo, Carmichael, Coghill, and Needham.

To the contemporary developmentalist, it is perhaps surprising to see how familiar the thinking is despite limitations of knowledge and techniques. For instance at that time direct studies of human fetal behaviour were limited to Davenport Hooker’s films of dying embryos and it would be another 50 years before Heinz Prechtl would give us the chance to watch ultrasound films of babies in utero, yet Gesell understood the rudiments of fetal behaviour. Likewise, he discusses gene expression though it was his belief, like his contemporaries, that the genetic material was a protein. We also cannot fail to be impressed by the way this book moves so easily through the fields of biology, embryology, physiology, and psychology in a way that would indeed be rare today.

Perhaps for a neonatologist the most interesting thing about the book is that it gives an accurate picture of the knowledge and understanding of the fetus and newborn at exactly the point when neonatology was born. Indeed, it is reasonable to claim Gesell as one of the founders of neonatal paediatrics as his work was very important in drawing attention to the particular problems of the small and sick newborns.

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