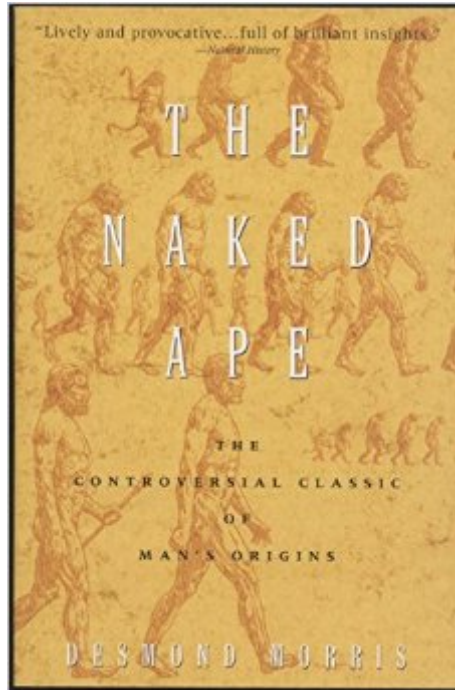


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The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study Of The Human Animal



Synopsis

This work has become a benchmark of popular anthropology and psychology. Zoologist Desmond Morris considers humans as being simply another animal species in this classic book first published in 1967. Here is the Naked Ape at his most primal in love, at work, at war. Meet man as he really is: relative to the apes, stripped of his veneer as we see him courting, making love, sleeping, socializing, grooming, playing. The Naked Ape takes its place alongside Darwin's Origin of the Species, presenting man not as a fallen angel, but as a risen ape, remarkable in his resilience, energy and imagination, yet an animal nonetheless, in danger of forgetting his origins. With its penetrating insights on man's beginnings, sex life, habits and our astonishing bonds to the animal kingdom, The Naked Ape is a landmark, at once provocative, compelling and timeless.

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Customer Reviews

Desmond Morris wrote "The Naked Ape" in the late 1960's, and it is a classic which established the field of evolutionary anthropology. His ideas were revolutionary at the time, and he clearly says so. If there is a fault in the book, it is that he covers too much ground too quickly. I think his purpose at the time, however, was simply to condition the reader to thinking of people as an animal that has been subject to the forces of biological evolution on the Savannah for 98 percent of our evolution. Our species only formed farming communities 10,000 years ago. Much of Morris's conjecture has been turned into solid research in more recent years. For example, studies have found that males are sexually attracted to females having a waist/hips ratio of 0.7. This is universal among contemporary societies including primitive societies. When shown diagrams of women having different waist/hips

ratios, male members of the primitive societies chose the 0.7 ratio and specifically indicated child bearing ability being linked to it. Females universally are attracted to males having a waist/hip ratio of 0.85. The argument between nurturing versus evolution is likely to continue. This book started the argument. It is certainly a serious argument. Some readers may prefer not to think of humans as being animals. Some readers, particularly those interested in newer cultural trends such as feminism, may find certain of Morris's arguments objectionable. The material is oriented towards understanding how biological evolution of Homo Sapiens has affected their social behavior. It is not directly related to how to get along with your lover or spouse. However, the book was as thought provoking today as when it was written. It is an excellent introduction to the field of evolutionary anthropology.

If human beings ever make contact with an intelligent species from beyond planet earth, then the observations those "people" might make about us would probably read quite a bit like the ones evolutionary zoologist Morris makes in this humorous but deadly serious study of the human animal. The very things we have come to see as mundane about ourselves are the very traits Morrison zeroes in on here. Very little escapes this careful study, although in some cases humanity might collectively wish it had. In this book the human species is anatomically, psychologically, sociologically and biologically cataloged and classified. We read a dispassionate critique of our mating habits, the ways in which we raise our young, our preferences for foods, for where we live, for how we interact with one another, and what bodily features are universally desired over others. In the end I was left both amazed and embarrassed to be among the membership in this great and crazed life form.

A common metaphor for the modern megalopolis is the concrete jungle. According to Desmond Morris this is a mistaken image. The big cities don't look anything like a jungle where we would be able to live in peace with our nature. The urban human lives more like a zoo animal separated from his/her roots and presenting all sorts of distorted behavior unnatural to the species. Human evolution took place over millions of years. During most of the time we lived in small tribes as hunters and gatherers. Civilization is new. We are not fine tuned to it yet. As the author states "In a village all the neighbors are personal friends or, at most, personal enemies; none are strangers. In a large city many people do not even know the names of their neighbors." This impersonal environment fosters all kinds of negative attitudes towards our peers such as violence or indifference as if someone who you don't know walking down the streets were from a different species, some kind of an animal, or,

what's worse, not alive at all; an object or one more number to be added to the statistics. In a gigantic community the odds of anyone becoming a dominant individual are too dim. Almost everywhere with the new political atmosphere any individual can reach a very high position in his community just based on his merits. But democratization of access to power also democratizes the frustration of not getting there. For one dominant individual on a human zoo there are millions of frustrated would be leaders lost in the rat race. And they all know that they failed because they didn't have what it takes. To alleviate the frustration we subdivide our community in intricate overlapping sub communities of the approximate size of the primeval tribes. These sub communities offer new opportunities for leadership. You can see uniformed tribes going around on their Harley Davidsons, playing golf or listening to Rap music on their boom boxes. What is important in those cases is not the sport, music or transportation but the chance to belong to a small, well defined and regulated group in which the chances of becoming a dominant individual are bigger. The human zoo is a superb book that analyses one by one the many aspects of urban life such as the paradox of solitude on an overcrowded place, dominance mimic versus status symbol, and of course the rewards of living in an exciting environment where just about everything is possible. Desmond Morris' background in zoology allows him to draw many parallels between human and other animals' behavior like the ten commandments of dominance valid for baboons and presidents or the hazard mimic used by harmless black and yellow insects that look like dangerous wasps. Desmond Morris' human behavior trilogy: *The Naked Ape*; *The Human Zoo*; and *Intimate Behavior* is a must read for anyone interested in human nature. They are all 5 star books. Leonardo Alves - January 2001

This book can rightfully be called a classic. It represents an early account of the ways in which an evolutionary perspective can illuminate human behavior. It confronts a wide range of subjects, from the signaling value of postures to the role of infant crying. The use of a carnivore model to interpret the evolution of the human family is admirable, in its attempt to link such a phenomenon with knowledge of other animals, if misleading. All this said, however, *The Naked Ape* should be read cautiously by anyone seeking a current understanding of similar subject matter. For example, Morris' claim that human behavior should best be understood in complex nations such as Britain (p. 51: "The only solution is to take average results from large samples of the most successful societies. The small, backward, and unsuccessful societies can largely be ignored.") represents an assumption since turned on its head by evolutionary psychologists. Read alone, this book will generate interest but too-often misinform; read in combination with more recent work (e.g. Pinker's *How The Mind Works*) this book can be seen as most valuable.

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