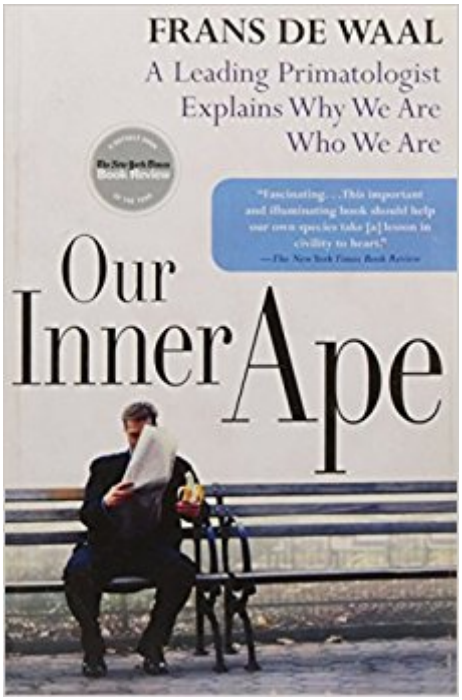
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Our Inner Ape: A Leading Primatologist Explains Why We Are Who We Are



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Synopsis

Visit the author’s Web site at www.ourinnerape.comItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s no secret that humans and apes share a host of traits, from the tribal communities we form to our irrepressible curiosity. We have a common ancestor, scientists tell us, so itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s natural that we act alike. But not all of these parallels are so appealing: the chimpanzee, for example, can be as vicious and manipulative as any human.Yet thereÃ¢â ¬â„¢s more to our shared primate heritage than just our violent streak. In Our Inner Ape, Frans de Waal, one of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s great primatologists and a renowned expert on social behavior in apes, presents the provocative idea that our noblest qualities—generosity, kindness, altruism—are as much a part of our nature as are our baser instincts. After all, we share them with another primate: the lesser-known bonobo. As genetically similar to man as the chimpanzee, the bonobo has a temperament and a lifestyle vastly different from those of its genetic cousin. Where chimps are aggressive, territorial, and hierarchical, bonobos are gentle, loving, and erotic (sex for bonobos is as much about pleasure and social bonding as it is about reproduction).While the parallels between chimp brutality and human brutality are easy to see, de Waal suggests that the conciliatory bonobo is just as legitimate a model to study when we explore our primate heritage. He even connects humanityÃ¢â ¬â„¢s desire for fairness and its morality with primate behavior, offering a view of society that contrasts markedly with the caricature people have of Darwinian evolution. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s plain that our finest qualities run deeper in our DNA than experts have previously thought.Frans de Waal has spent the last two decades studying our closest primate relations, and his observations of each species in Our Inner Ape encompass the spectrum of human behavior. This is an audacious book, an engrossing discourse that proposes thought-provoking and sometimes shocking connections among chimps, bonobos, and those most paradoxical of apes, human beings.

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Customer Reviews

Power, sex, violence and kindness: these four broad-spectrum categories encompass much of human behavior, so it’s only fitting that they’re also the primary subject material for Frans de Waal’s (The Ape and The Sushi Master) book Our Inner Ape. The few (but deeply detailed) chapters are a mesmerizing read that spans biology, child psychology, postmodern theorists and fundamental morality, using tales of stern chimps, and sexy bonobos to examine humans’ place between them. In the process, he examines why we need to know our place in the world, how our body language communicates feelings, and where the roots of empathy lie in mammalian life. De Waal’s respect for both his readers and his research subjects come shining through in the simple clarity he uses when describing both the endless sex of bonobo apes and the heartrending violence occasionally present in chimp hierarchal structure. By illustrating his points with a mixture of straight-from-research experiences and jokes at the expense of modern politicians, he keeps his ideas compelling for anyone with a basic understanding of evolutionary science without drifting towards the academic drone that could be expected of by a researcher of his experience. You won’t find specific conclusions concerning human nature, but instead a gentle, almost rambling look at two primate species with vastly different social networks and how, perhaps, humanity can learn from each to our benefit. A few of de Waal’s lovely duotone photos (My Family Album: 30 Years of Primate Photography grace the end of the book, featuring close-up shots of the folks he’s been writing about--chimps like Yeroen, Nikkie and Mama, and bonobo Kuif and adopted daughter Roosje are downright thrilling to see after reading such interesting stories about their lives. Jill Lightner --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review. Noted primatologist de Waal (Chimpanzee Politics) thinks human behavior cannot be fully explained by selfish genes and Darwinian competition. Drawing on his own primate research on chimpanzees and bonobosÃ¢â ¬â •our closest animal relativesÃ¢â ¬â •he shows how much we can learn from them about ourselves: our qualities of "fellow feeling and empathy" as well as our power-obsessed, violent side. We are "bipolar apes," de Waal says, as much like bonobos as like chimps. The latter are known for their viciousness and "red in tooth and claw" social politics, but

bonobos offer a radically different social model, one of peace and hedonistic orgies; de Waal offers vivid, often delightful stories of politics, sex, violence and kindness in the ape communities he has studied to illustrate such questions as why we are irreverent toward the powerful and whether men or women are better at conflict resolution. Readers might be surprised at how much these apes and their stories resonate with their own lives, and may well be left with an urge to spend a few hours watching primates themselves at the local zoo. Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is more a comment following reading this remarkable book than a thorough review, I don’t have much to add to the other positive reviews of this remarkable book, often invaluable insights, clearly and accessibly written, often funny, perhaps the most constructive book so far this century. Hard to find fault but I think I may have one, he focuses on the polarity between our "nice" peaceful, egalitarian, cooperative, sharing side & our "nasty" violent, competitive, hierarchical, selfish side, advocating wisely the happy medium or a hybrid of the two is best and most realistic.But he doesn’t say much at all about another major player in human affairs, which is neither "evil" nor "good": plain stupidity. His book was published in 2005, far as I know no one has taken his excellent advice, why? Could be stupidity. He spends so much time trying to point out how apes are as clever as us in many ways it probably wouldn’t have worked if he’d also argued man is the stupidest animal ever "the only animal that can’t tell fantasy from reality" as the bestselling shrink Dr Al Bernstein put it (he also states, again somewhat humorously, we are likely to oppose or dismiss evidence, no matter how strong, that we might not be perfect unless we are depressed, a bit of a problem for the truth, it’s interesting many (most?) of the great philosophers suffered depression) .So what is human stupidity? Not sure, probably partly the need for males to be rather oblivious/attracted to danger in order to hunt, explore etc in early societies which he talks about. It’s not clear being rather indifferent to your and others welfare is still beneficial in modern society. This indifference is probably achieved at least partly through an ability to focus exclusively on one small aspect of a situation (such as "the kill" in a hunt) a stereotyped male trait (women "multi-taskers"), marked feature of autism (much more common in males as De Waal notes) and a hallmark of industrial society with it’s hyper-specialization.The reason this makes us the stupidest animal is we have magnified our powers to that of gods, through countless innovations and inventions (at least industrial scientific man has, which is virtually everyone now) but by comparison are only slightly smarter than other apes and still unconsciously act on much the same instincts and tendencies (as

our economy/environment becomes more desire/addiction based (Thompson. The Fix 2012) we may actually be getting even dumber than other apes in the sense of being more impulsive, despite the rising I.Q. (attributed to increased problem-solving, having more problems is not exactly a clear indication your house is in order)). We bite off far more than we can possibly chew (create problems too big & complicated to be solved with our intelligence & presumably instincts (usually because of narrow focus we think everything's super)) this is unique in the animal kingdom as far as I know, although I understand it is not unusual for a species to be responsible for it's own extinction in other ways. I don't know if there's a solution, the smaller scale, simpler, community units he advocates at the end (modest scale & complexity for our modest intelligence) might help but can we get there from here? Can Humpty be put back together again?Another variant of stupidity seem to stem from ego, again I seem to have noticed more in us males. Big egos get over confident and think they can do no wrong, result :stupidity. Scientists who invariably want to "change the world" for no absolutely no reason other than to become the alpha male, with reckless, basically autistic (a scientific finding), disregard for the likelihood their invention will just be another nail in the coffin of the planet is just one example (e.g., advances that increase the human population, such as the sacred goal of "a cure for cancer" may contribute to the extinction of our and other species through overpopulation. Or Einstein would be the stupidest person in history so far, as he either didn't realize or didn't care his means of achieving primate dominance would be responsible for the atom bomb) I think this is hierarchy related, a big ego seem to result from thinking you're at the top, might be the rich list, might be delusions about attractiveness, coolness, moral &/or racial superiority.Also insecurity at being toward the bottom of a hierarchy produces panic which leads to stupid 'thinking' in my opinion. I don't recall if de Waal writes about this, but another primate writer, Mazur, does (Biosociology of Dominance and Deference) noting those low in primate hierarchies are anxious, those higher up are usually calm. In my opinion there is a epidemic of insecurity in modern society, perhaps because the inequality is astronomical with globalism, I think this afflicts us males more as we need to display dominance to attract a mate, a female merely needs to mate with an "alpha" being lower in the hierarchy usually makes a female more attractive..Balancing hierarchy with more egalitarian institutions as de Waal suggests might go a long way to healing this painful affliction, but it's not clear to me we are smart enough to do anything of the sort & most insecure men probably wouldn't be interested, better to play or watch some game where they can fantasize about being dominant.I'm not suggesting we are completely stupid at all, just that's a player in our make-up that just could get the last word.....maybe the book has depressed me because it's so balanced, we're as good (depending on your perspective) as we are evil (according to whatever that perspective

happens to be) so why care either way about the fate of humanity? I suppose if you really don't care either way you won't have to suffer depression, you'll be emotionally neutral, like the neutral face people usually wear in public places.

I read this book while doing research for a work of fiction about Chimpanzees. This was just one of several scientific and popular books that I read, but it was the most engaging and enlightening because it did not just discuss chimpanzee behavior or bonobo behavior, but compared and contrasted three distinctly different species of ape, including humans as the third species. The new thing that this book brings to the reader is not just how alike humans are to other apes. I think many people are beginning to understand that other apes also lie, cheat, steal, wage war, and go on organized hunting expeditions. But where the book breaks really new ground is in its discussion of sex, child-rearing and politics in the three ape worlds. Reading this, one realizes that bonobos are not chimpanzees, and neither are we, but it raises very valid questions about who and what we really are. This book demonstrates the effects of culture on basic patterns of behavior and asks what is actual normal behavior for any of us from a genetic and evolutionary perspective.This book caused me to discard the extensive work I had already done on a new novel and totally rethink what I had to say.

"Our Inner Ape" is a popular science book by leading primatologist Frans de Waal. It attempts to uncover human nature by taking a closer look at chimpanzees and bonobos, our closest living relatives. The book contains chapters on power, sex, violence and kindness.De Waal's book is interesting and well worth reading. Sometimes, it's even entertaining. The author often mentions his own encounters with apes...and with humans who were perhaps acting out their inner ape just a little bit too much!Many popularized books on human evolution portray us as "killer apes". They emphasize our violent, manipulative and hierarchical streaks. Naturally, they then connect this behaviour to that of apes and monkeys, usually the chimpanzee. Indeed, chimpanzees can be extremely violent. In the wild, they have been observed to attack, kill and even eat members of their own species. The conclusion: we are descended from murderous, aggressive beasts and cannot be counted on to ever mend our ways. Some literature of this type is anti-feminist and regards male dominance over females as a good thing.De Waal doesn't deny the darker sides of humans, but his book is nevertheless unusual in its emphasis on the positive traits of our nature. He points out that these, too, have parallels among the apes.Chimpanzees may be fiercely hierarchic, but their hierarchies are nevertheless unstable. Coalitions of subordinates can overthrow the alpha male if he

gets to overbearing. Is this the origin of our democracy? And while chimpanzees can be aggressive, they have also evolved methods of peace-keeping and reconciliation. De Waal describes how one old female played the role of arbiter in disputes among dominant males in a flock at the Arnhem zoo in the Netherlands. As for male dominance, chimpanzees are "patriarchal" in the wild, but flocks kept in captivity have a more even balance of power between the sexes, since the females can build more effective coalitions among themselves.De Waal also believes that aggression among primates is to a large extent a learned behaviour. He reports an intriguing experiment with rhesus monkeys, which are usually aggressive. After spending months in the same cage with the larger but less aggressive stumptail macaques, the rhesus monkeys developed more reconciliation skills and became less aggressive themselves. This continued even after the two species had been separated again. De Waal also reports a curious case in Africa, where a flock of olive baboons became more peaceful and even "matriarchal" after the aggressive and dominant males had all died of poisoned food. A decade later, the flock was still relatively peaceful. Somehow, the females had managed to "indoctrinate" new males who had joined the flock into accepting the new norms.The author further believes that human morality also comes from our primate ancestors. Apes have developed empathic skills, even towards members of other species. De Waal's favourite example is a bonobo in a zoo, which tried to help a wounded bird, and even defended it against other bonobos in the flock. Monkeys don't have empathy, but they can show tolerance towards handicapped members of their flocks. Human morality is a kind of highly evolved ape empathy or monkey tolerance. Or at least that's De Waal's take on it.Another obvious difference between "Our Inner Ape" and most other books on this subject, is the author's emphasis on the bonobo. The bonobo is as closely related to humans as the chimpanzee, yet it's often left out of discussions about human evolution. Why? Obviously because it doesn't fit the picture of patriarchal, aggressive "killer apes". Bonobos are much less aggressive than common chimpanzees, they live in flocks dominated by females, and they frequently resolve disputes by having sex! When two flocks of chimpanzees meet in the jungle, violent confrontation is the rule. When two flock of bonobos meet, they socialize with each other at the boundaries of their respective territories, and then depart in peace. But what really bugs most people is the "matriarchy" of the bonobos. For instance, bonobo males must beg for food from the females, and they lack effective coalitions among themselves. De Waal tells a funny anecdote about a man at a lecture who essentially snapped when De Waal told him about bonobos, shouting: "What on earth is wrong with these males?!". Since bonobos are promiscuous and have casual sex all day long, one cannot help wondering whether the males of this "hippie ape" aren't actually better off than most...Despite all these positives, I nevertheless found myself in frequent disagreement with

De Waal. There is still too much emphasis on violence, power and hierarchy among humans. Perhaps subliminally, the author still sees this as the "natural" state. Both anthropology and archaeology suggests otherwise. Egalitarian, peaceful and non-patriarchal societies have existed. At least one advanced high culture, the Indus Valley Civilization, had curious egalitarian traits. Another, the Minoan culture, was probably hierarchic but seems to have been peaceful and had a religion centred on goddesses. De Waal further believes that the nuclear family and monogamy are somehow "natural" to our species, at least as an "ideal". This is unconvincing, especially since De Waal himself references studies of polyandrous cultures which lack our concept of "fathers". Of course, he mentions polygyny as well.The cross-cultural (and individual) variation among humans makes all comparisons between humans and apes problematic, especially since chimpanzees and bonobos are so vastly different from each other. Which human is being compared to which ape? In an unguarded moment, De Waal admits that our ancestors may have been very different from the great apes (surely a trivial observation outside the ivory tower of biology), but his entire book is based on the idea that you can get real insights by comparing us with chimps, although we have evolved along different lines for at least six million years. It seems you cannot take the ape out of the biologist!If there is any insight to be gained by comparing humans to other primates, it's that the flexibility and intelligence typical of humans exist in some form already among apes and monkeys. This is why I found De Waal's experiments with rhesus monkeys so fascinating, not to mention his observations on "girl power" among usually "patriarchal" chimpanzees and olive baboons. The real lesson from our primate relatives is that a certain evolutionary lineage developed more and more intelligence, flexibility and empathy. A larger part of their behaviour became acquired through learning than through instinct. Finally, this lead to the emergence of Homo sapiens, the only species that can socially construct its reality, leading to the immense cultural variation within our species.Perhaps De Waal would agree with this, as far as it goes. However, I still think he's too "biologist", although it's a more good natured biologism than orthodox sociobiology, since it takes into account the "flower power" bonobos alongside common chimpanzees.That being said, I nevertheless recommend this and other books by Frans de Waal. They are interesting, relatively well written, and give much food for thought.

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