



The Human Zoo: A Zoologist's Study of the Urban Animal

Desmond Morris

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This study concerns the city dweller. Morris finds remarkable similarities with captive zoo animals and looks closely at the aggressive, sexual and parental behaviour of the human species under the stresses and pressures of urban living.

The Human Zoo: A Zoologist's Study of the Urban Animal Details

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Nicholas says

You're not designed for the world you live in. Cities are like zoos in that they create pathologies stemming from overcrowding and mis-stimulation. Your mind is a carefully calibrated algorithmic system and when you put it in an incorrect environment it responds incorrectly. Most current psychological pathologies arise from this fact.

The mental states induced by this misalignment are most likely confusion and anxiety. Both seemingly without cause.

I didn't like a lot of his conclusions. The premise was fine but much of everything after that I just couldn't accept the logic.

Also there were some statements that I just don't believe. Like:

In their natural environment monkeys don't masturbate or kill each other. This just sounds like nonsense. A zoo environment would certainly exacerbate such behavior but it doesn't create it.

The stuff about maintaining tribal identity in a world that does not offer true tribes was interesting.

I thought I would like this book a lot more than I did. Some of the words out of this guy's mouth were just ridiculous. HOLY SHIT. I just got the part about the phallic symbolism. Shit this guy is crazy.
EVERYTHING IS PENISES. IT ALL SYMBOLIZES THE PATRIARCHY.

On page 66 he touches on an important idea. Dominance mimicry vs status seeking. But his coverage was pure nonsense. He said that dominant individuals flood the market with cheap mass produced imitations so as to increase the value of his own symbols. This is horseshit. "He" doesn't care about your mimicry. The people at the top or so far beyond the people at the bottom that there is no way they could be mimicked in any threatening way. This kind of shit was sprinkled throughout the book. Couldn't stand it.

The idea of cheap, mass-produced imitations of high-status goods is important though.

Quotes:

"The character of the human animal is such that we will always fight against the loss of our tribal identity. Some cities encourage this struggle. They foster imaginative local variation. Those that fail to do so will soon find that their, bland, inhuman scale will be disrupted and dismantled. The plain truth is that, if this is not done constructively, it will be done destructively. There is a special message in the gangland graffiti that city planners fail to see: acres of gray concrete do not a village make."

"With each new complexity, you will find yourself one step farther away from your natural tribal state, the state in which your ancestors existed for a million years."

"Revolutionary leaders would do well to anticipate this problem. It is not the chains of social identity that their followers will want to break, it is the chains of a particular social identity. As soon as these are

smashed, they will need new ones and will soon become dissatisfied merely with an abstract sense of 'freedom'. Such are the demands of the isolating laws."

"Many a powerful leader has survived occasional wrong decisions, made with style and forcefulness, but few have survived hesitant indecisiveness. The golden rule of leadership here, which in a rational age is an unpleasant one to accept, is that it is the manner in which you do something that really counts, rather than what you do. It is a sad truth that a leader who does the wrong things in the right way will, up to a certain point, gain greater allegiance and enjoy more success than one who does the right things in the wrong way."

"A rational solution is to do away with the powerful leader-figure, to relegate him to the ancient, tribal past where he belonged, and to replace him with a computer fed organization of interdependent, specialized experts. Something approaching such an organization already exists, of course, and in England any civil servant will tell you without hesitation that it is the civil service that really runs the country. To emphasize his point he will inform you that when parliament is in session his work is seriously hampered; only during parliamentary recesses can serious progress be made. All this is very logical, but unfortunately it is not biological, and the country he claims to be running happens to be made up of biological specimens - the super-tribesmen. True, a super-tribe needs super-control, and if it is too much for one man it might seem reasonable to solve the problem by converting a power-figure into a power-organization. This does not, however, satisfy the biological demands of the followers. They may be able to reason super-tribally, but their feelings are still tribal, and they will continue to demand a real leader in the form of an identifiable, solitary individual. It is a fundamental pattern of their species, and there is no avoiding it. Institutions and computers may be valuable servants to the masters, but they can never themselves become masters (science fiction stories notwithstanding). A diffuse organization, a faceless machine, lacks the essential properties: it cannot inspire and it cannot be deposed. The single dominant human is therefore doomed to struggle on, behaving publicly like a tribal leader, with panache and assurance, while in private he grapples laboriously with the almost impossible tasks of super-tribal control."

"The flaw in the social dropout's solution is that he does not really drop out at all: he stays put and pours scorn on the rat race that surrounds him."

"The vast majority of all sports, pastimes, hobbies and 'good works' have as their principle function not their specifically avowed aims, but the much more basic aim of follow-the-leader=and-beat-him-if-you-can. However, this is a description and not a criticism. In fact, the situation would be much more grave if this multitude of harmless sub-groups, or pseudo-tribes, did not exist. They funnel off a great deal of the frustrated ladder-climbing that might otherwise cause considerable havoc."

"Well-meaning authorities talk airily about 'hopes for a global society'. They see clearly the technical possibility of such a development, given the marvels of modern communication, but they stubbornly overlook the biological difficulties."

"Failures to date have largely been due to attempts to suppress the existing difference between the various groups, rather than to improve the nature of these differences by converting them into more rewarding and peaceful forms of competitive social interaction. Attempts to iron out the whole world into one great expanse of uniform monotony are doomed to disaster."

"If any small boy can, on his personal merits, eventually become the greatest of leaders, then for every one who succeeds there will be vast numbers of failures. These failures can no longer put the blame on the external fores of the wicked class system. They must place it firmly where it belongs, on their own personal shortcomings. It seems, therefore, that any large-scale, lively, progressive super-tribe must inevitably contain

a high proportion of intensely frustrated status-seekers. The dumb contentment of a rigid, stagnant society is replaced by the feverish longings and anxieties of a mobile, developing one. How do the struggling status-seekers react to this situation? The answer is that, if they cannot get to the top, they do their best to create the illusion of being less subordinate than they really are."

"It is very bewildering for our struggling super-tribesman. He has obeyed all the rules, but something has gone wrong. The super-status demands of the human zoo are cruel indeed. Either he fails and becomes disillusioned, or he succeeds and loses control of his family. Worse still, he can work so hard that he loses control of his family and still fails."

"By all the rules, the human zoo should be a screaming mad-house by now, disintegrating into complete social confusion."

"When in a threatening mood, a superior male of this species approaches close to an inferior and obtrusively erects his penis in the inferior's face." Awesome.

"We have to face the fact that, living in a human zoo, we are inevitably going to suffer from many abnormal relationships. We are bound to be exposed in unusual ways to unusual stimuli. Our nervous systems are not equipped to deal with this and our patterns of response will sometimes misfire. Like the experimental or zoo animals, we may find ourselves fixated with strange and sometimes damaging bonds, or we may suffer from serious bond confusion. It can happen to any of us, at any time. It is merely another of the hazards of existing as an inmate of a human zoo. We are all potential victims, and the most appropriate reaction, when we come across it in someone else, is sympathy rather than cold intolerance."

"Unfortunately we tend to forget that we are animals with certain specific weaknesses and certain specific strengths. We think of ourselves as blank sheets on which anything can be written. We are not. We come into the world with a set of basic instructions and we ignore or disobey them at our peril."

Van says

B?n thân t? "con ng??i" ?ã n?i l?n ???c b?n ch?t c?a ch?ng ta - s? gi?ng co gi?a ph?n "con" và ph?n "ng??i", lu?n lu?n l? nh? v?y. ?ó l? tr? ch?i ?ã và ?ang di?n ra trong su?t qu? tr?nh ph?t tri?n c?a nh?n lo?i, l? m?t tr? ch?i h?o h?ng và c?ng l? nguy hi?m nh?t. Tác gi? Desmond Morris ?ã k? cho ch?ng ta nghe c?u chuy?n ?ó kh?ng ph?i d??i kh?ia c?nh c?m x?c - l?y tr?, hay Thi?n - Ác, m? qua t?ng g?c c?nh nh? nh?t c?a ??i s?ng ?ang di?n ra s?i ??ng t?ng ng?y tr??c m?t ch?ng ta : ??a v?, t?nh d?c, chi?n tranh, s?ng t?o. N?i kh?ng qu? khi cho r?ng ?ây l? quy?n s?ch n?n t?ng cho t?t c? c?c v?n ?? c?a lo?i ng??i hi?n ??i. Qu? n?i?u ?i?u c?n ph?i ??c và suy ngh? th?m.

Minh Nh?t says

n?u v??n tr?n tr?i ch? ? m?c hay v?a ph?i thi? t?i v??n th?ng ??i th?t s? ?n t??ng, r?t ?n t??ng.

Vold Kira says

Un interesante análisis de la naturaleza biológica del ser humano, porque, aunque queramos racionalizar todo y apartarnos de nuestro lado salvaje, no somos más que animalitos en un zoo humano.

Fue un MINDFUCK en cada apartado, haciéndome decir WOW a cada comparación humana con los animales salvajes. El sexo de status, las necesidades fisiológicas, el mimetismo de dominio... Tanta cosa que al parecer son completamente normales en nuestro día a día, pero que tienen una raíz aún más profunda y, sobre todo, antiquísima y prehistórica.

Lo único con lo que pude decir "NO" fue con el apartado donde ve a la homosexualidad como una desviación y una malgrabación. Lo entiendo, fue escrito en los 80's cuando la homosexualidad aún era vista como una enfermedad, pero ¡vamos...! ¿No podías decirlo de una forma un poco más amable? ¡Claro que hay evidencias de homosexualidad en el reino animal, y no comenzaron a verse únicamente porque fuera quitada del apartado de enfermedades mentales en los 90!

De otra forma, se le da mucha importancia al machismo y también lo entiendo, en el reino animal el macho es el "alfa" de casi todos los grupos animales, pero no era necesario que prácticamente cada sección del libro tuviera como columna vertebral la dominación masculina sobre la hembra... aunque debo admitir que me hizo pensar de forma más seria sobre el problema patriarcal que existe en nuestra sociedad por la profunda raíz biológica que nos presenta Morris en este libro.

Un libro de cajón, que definitivamente debes leer para abrir la mente y ver el origen de muchas de nuestras conductas, y, por qué no, darle una buena cachetada intelectual a aquellos que aún creen que por el simple hecho de ser humanos, estamos exentos de cualquier influencia que la madre naturaleza tiene sobre nosotros.

Srikanthan says

Can't believe this was written in the late sixties. This is one wonderful book that puts forth with all honesty why the urbanized human being is so violent as well as vulnerable. This book is really thought provoking and definitely would change the world view after reading.

Quang says

Ch??ng mà mình t?p trung nhi?u nh?t ?ó chính là ch??ng cu?i cùng, *Ch??ng 7: Ng??i tr??ng thành ngây th?*? ch??ng này, **Desmond Morris** cho th?y nh?ng quan ni?m, nh?ng so sánh r?t thú v? c?a ông v? cách th?c thích nghi, s? s?ng t?o c?a nhi?u th? con ng??i khác nhau: ? tr? con, ? ng??i l?n, ??c bi?t là ng??i tr??ng thành ngây th? (child-like adult) và ng??i tr??ng thành tr??ng thành (adult-adult). Qua ?ó, ông cho th?y nhi?u suy ngh? v? s? s?ng t?o, v? cách th?c con ng??i ch?ng ta khám phá cu?c s?ng (*khám phá ho?ng lo?n* hay *khám phá an toàn*). Morris c?n b?n ??n s? s?ng t?o và s? k?m h?m s?ng t?o trong ph??ng cách gi?o d?c c?a th?i x?a c?ng nh? hi?n nay, và ??c bi?t ông nh?n m?nh s? s?ng t?o ? nh?ng con ng??i tr?, là các sinh viên ?n?n gi?o d?c hi?n nay.

Tuy v?y nh?ng ch??ng khác c?a cu?n sách c?ng kh?ng ph?i là kh?ng có s? th? v? trong ?ó.

Ch??ng 3: Tình d?c và si?u tình d?c cho th?y nhi?u quan ?i?m c?a tác gi? v? v?n ?? "c? mà kh?ng c?" này,

và ??u t? nh?t chính là 10 lo?i tình d?c phân theo ch?c n?ng, s? phân lo?i phù h?p ??i v?i tình tr?ng siêu b?y ?àn c?a loài ng??i chúng ta. ??c ch??ng này khi?n mình bi?t và hi?u thêm ???c m?t vài ?i?u c?ng thú v?. Ch??ng 4: N?i nhóm và ngo?i nhóm c?ng là m?t ch??ng r?t hay (v?i mình là hay th? nhì sau ch??ng 7). ?ây chính là ngu?n g?c c?a nh?ng s? phân bi?t ??i x?, s? giao tranh, g?y h?n, th?m chí là n?i chi?n (nhìn trên quan ?i?m sinh h?c).

Ch??ng 6: ??u tranh và nh?n kích thích c?ng lý gi?i ???c nhi?u tình hu?ng tâm lý c?ng nh? s? c?ng th?ng v? tinh th?n mà con ng??i ph?i ch?u ??ng trong tình tr?ng siêu b?y ?àn hi?n nay.

?i?m tr? c?a cu?n sách này v?i mình ?6 là s? thi?u ?i m?t l?i k?t ??p. L?i gi?i thi?u c?ng nh? l?i t?a c?a tác gi? ? ??u sách r?t g?n g?i, t?a nh? tác gi? ?ang d?t mình ?i t?m hi?u nh?ng cái hay, cái ??p n?i v??n thú. Nh?ng r?i v?a m?i nói d?t nguy?n m?t ch??ng hay ho th? b? ?i m?t ti?u. H?t h?ng.

Paz Montenegro Urbina says

Este libro parte su hipótesis bajo premisas falsas, como que no existen naturalmente conductas como la masturbación (Bonobos lo hacen, incluso con herramientas), homosexualidad (observada en estado natural en varias especies), atacar a la propia prole (madres lo hacen con sus cachorros machos cuando alcanzan la madurez sexual, expulsándolos de la manada, como los elefantes) y un largo etc que me parece que más que un análisis psicobiológico, el autor trata de justificar conductas supuestamente "aberrantes" del ser humano que según él no ocurrirían si no viviéramos en la ciudad, indicándolas como no naturales en los animales libres. Todo argumento expuesto es inválido frente a una hipótesis basada en lo que pareciera ser un juicio moral disfrazado de análisis científico

Kali says

Setting the standard for evolutionary psychology "just so" stories, Morris demonstrates that at least in this case evolutionary psychologists tell us more about their own biases than the human past. In Morris's analysis, the cause and effect of human evolution are crystal clear and all happen to mesh neatly with his own biases, including his sexism and homophobia. His "ten commandments of dominance," upon which he claims human relationships are based, are often absurd, such as the commandment, " You must suppress squabbles that break out between your subordinates." This of course ignores the many situations in which power is maintained by dividing subordinate groups so that they can't organize against those in power. Observations are at this level of inanity throughout the book.

Nick Arkesteyn says

What happens when you take people who are biologically programmed to live in groups of less than 200 and cram them into large dense cities? This book describes the interesting behavior patterns that play out from politics to sex.

There are so so so many levels to this book. It is worth many reads.

Every human should read this book!

Nick Arkesteyn

Nandkishore Varma says

In scholarly circles, I understand that Desmond Morris is not taken very seriously nowadays. His anthropological observations of the human race are seen as too simplistic. However, I have always found his analysis to be relevant and highly enjoyable.

Here, the human animal is observed in urban surroundings - according to the author, this is equivalent to the limited surroundings of a zoo. Animals exhibit many "deviant" behaviours under captivity: Morris illustrates, in highly entertaining fashion, how the same is applicable to the city dweller. Rather than being a concrete jungle, the city is a "human zoo".

Extremely readable and engaging.

Philip Aarons says

1969 and a real forward thinker. While in 2012 the views have been updated and put within the context of today's cultural norms, this was and is a ground breaking book. Accessible, informative and a reflection on behaviour patterns. His contemporaries, such as Lyall Watson step out the shadows of this great author and command great books and acclaim themselves. Recommended reading and follow with his own students books.

Maria says

Javier says

I read this book shortly after reading the naked ape. I thought it was a great book. The human animal acts just like the animals it claims to be "superior to". In SuperFreakaeconomics the economist started using money on the monkeys once they learned the coins had value, the female monkeys, prostituted themselves, sex for money this is no small discovery. When I was in Saudi Arabia, two female soldiers were court martialed because they were prostituting.

Their defense, initially they were giving it away but then all the men kept coming back for more so they began to charge the men didnt liked it so they accused the female soldiers of prostitution. The women were court martialed, a felony offense, they loose their voting privileges, their right to carry a gun, or even bullets, they cant hold certain jobs, they are disgraced in the community, they are fined, demoted, jailed and finally released with nothing.

If this had been my sister, daughter, mother, or any relation to me, I would have shot the bastards. Interesting that you can sell your body and be a surrogate, but dont you dare sell your privates! ... Thats just wrong. Ah religious fanaticism. Anyway this should inspire some of you to poetry, or to stop reading some of those romance novels.

When the monkeys discovered the value of a dollar, they stole the coins.

KamRun says

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khashayar says

The human zoo is a continuation of Morris' earlier book, the naked ape. Unfortunately, I could not get my hands on the former and I had to get myself acquainted with Morris by reading the latter, which I was lucky to find. Inasmuch as I can understand, the animal behavior is employed as a kind of looking glass to examine the human behaviour. In this fashion, the human society is examined and shown to be like the zoo, where animals are living in unnatural habitat. The crux of Morris argumentation lies in his premise that human species are not biologically ready to live in a giant metropolis. Despite the critics, I believe the book is readable and if is not completely sceintific, at least gives us a new lens to look differently at life matters.