

PDF - THE PRIMATE ORIGINS OF HUMAN NATURE - researchcub.info This book represents a most welcome and most scholarly examination of the origins and evolution of human nature. The breadth of Carel van Schaik's approach to this subject is quite amazing. He covers everything from the basics of evolutionary and behavioural biology, the fossil evidence of human evolution, behavioural ecology, the origins of technology, the evolution of sexuality, social organization, cognitive capacities and language. There are even chapters dealing with the origins of aesthetic expression, as well as warfare, morality and religion. As a result of his efforts, van Schaik has achieved a valuable synthesis and guide for undergraduate students as well as for those postgraduates who wish to widen their knowledge of comparative primatology, human behaviour and evolution. Teachers in a number of disciplines (anthropology, psychology and the biological sciences) should find that this book provides a valuable resource. The work is carefully structured, with chapters organized under 8 section headings: Evolution, Behavior and Culture; The History of Humans; Subsistence and Technology; Sex and Sexual Selection; Life's Changes; Social Life; Cooperation; The Cognitive Animal. Each section commences with a clearly written introduction, so that students can address basic concepts, before progressing to the more detailed material in the ensuing chapters. As a textbook, this one succeeds admirably. Inevitably, some topics are discussed only briefly. As an example, in chapter 4, *Homo floresiensis* merits just 4 lines in the text. However, given that 12 years after their discovery, scholars are still hotly debating the affinities of the Flores fossils, van Schaik was wise to avoid exploring this particular controversy. Of greater concern to me, as somebody who specializes in researching the evolution of sexuality, are some shortcomings in section IV (Sex and Sexual Selection). For example, van Schaik states that 'despite the great variability of sexual behavior in different species, its function, apart from fertilization, is the same: the avoidance of infanticide'. My own view is that infanticidal behaviour is most unlikely to have played such a pervasive role in primate (including human) evolution [Dixson, 2012, 2015]. Setting this aside, *The Primate Origins of Human Nature* promises to fulfil the prediction made by the editors of the *Foundations of Human Biology* series, namely that it represents a 'landmark work that will help to bring about reintegration of anthropology's scattered parts'. Here, the editors refer to the unfortunate intellectual schism which has separated biological anthropology from cultural and social anthropology in many universities. Hopefully, this artificial division is already beginning to break down, and van Schaik's superb book will help to hasten that process.

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