

++++ Exposé and Foreign-rights Information +++++

Born to be wild

Child development and parenting from an evolutionary perspective



Born to be Wild



++++ Inspired by nature - how evolution can help us
truly understand our children ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



Alternative title suggestions

The evolved child - how evolution can help us understand our children

Born to be wild - the new science of evolutionary parenting

Deep connections - parenting from an evolutionary perspective

The natural child - guiding children from an evolutionary perspective



At a glance

Raising children is more confusing than ever. Psychology has offered ample advice to beleaguered parents, yet the theories have often been inconsistent and not helpful for most parents.

This book uses a novel approach to explain childhood development - the science of evolutionary biology. Children follow a time honoured path in their development - a path that has developed and been honed by tens of thousands of years of evolutionary history. This heritage still guides their behaviours as they grow up in the modern world. Parents who understand this natural heritage will be able to fulfil their child's deepest needs, taking parenting beyond the latest trends.



A note to Publishers

Books on attachment parenting have been ever more successful with parents. "Kinder verstehen" provides solid underpinnings to the parenting debate by exploring childhood from an evolutionary angle: How are children shaped by nature? Why do they develop the way they do - temper tantrums included? What is the "natural" habitat for today's children?

In an extremely well written, popular text the author puts together pieces of research in the fields of cultural anthropology, human ethology, ethnopediatrics and evolutionary biology - fields represented by top US scientists like Sarah Blaffer Hrdy ("Mother nature"), James McKenna ("Sleeping with your baby"), Meredith Small ("Our babies, ourselves"), Frans de Waal ("Primates and Philosophers"), Judith Harris ("The nurture assumption", among others.

At the heart of today's parents

In the last 10 to 15 years attachment parenting has entered the mainstream. At the same time conventional approaches to raising children have been increasingly criticized, with the most recent attacks headed by authors like by Po Bronson ("Nurture Shock"), Carl Honoré ("Under pressure") and Richard Louv ("Last child in the woods"). With old concepts falling apart parents are seeking new inspiration.

This book provides a framework that has not yet been explored: evolutionary thinking. By re-telling the story of our children from an anthropological perspective it represents not just another guide book for parents - it provides a new paradigm for parenting.



New fuel for the parenting debate!

The book is highly suited for the international market. The author is a US trained pediatrician/PhD, who has raised his own 4 children in the US for seven years. With this background the author is available for questions around translating and adapting the German edition especially to the English speaking market.

The book has been hugely successful, with more than 15 000 copies of the hard cover edition sold within less than 5 months on the German speaking market.

By re-telling the story of our children from an anthropological perspective the book represents not just another guide book for parents - it provides a new paradigm for parenting.



The author

Herbert Renz-Polster MD, PhD is a paediatrician and research scientist at the Mannheim Institute for Public Health, University of Heidelberg, who has trained both in Europe and in the USA. He is an editor of an important clinical textbook for medical students in Germany and has co-authored one of Germany's most popular parent advice books on child development and child health. His research in the last 5 years has focused on understanding child behaviour from an evolutionary perspective.





A brief summary

Children frequently behave in unexpected, "irrational" ways: babies cry for "no reason", they have colic for weeks and they stubbornly refuse to fall asleep on their own. Toddlers won't eat their greens, but sweets they can find. They won't sleep through the night but tire as soon as asked to tidy their room. They throw temper tantrums out of the blue and take endless time to be toilet trained.

It has become accepted to view all this as a *deficiency*: children are *not yet* capable of making themselves understood. Their small bladders are still "immature". Their brains are still a work in progress. Or they use their behaviours to stage conflicts - with themselves, with mom or with their Super-Ego. Or they are simply "spoiled".

This book starts with a different assumption. Instead of trying to identify what a child *lacks* it unveils the *advantages* of each difficult behaviour. Why is it advantageous for a child to be the way it is, rather than the way we think it should be? In a practical vein: what benefit does a child get from NOT eating its greens? What benefit does it have from NOT clearing its plate? Which prize lurks behind a temper tantrum, what advantage does it get from crying when put to sleep alone? In short, this book assumes that children have good reasons to puzzle their parents!



The tool with which childhood is explored in the eighteen chapters of this book is *evolutionary theory*. Evolutionary theory, of course, was first explored by Charles Darwin in the 19th century and has since been refined by contemporary scientists such as Mayr, Hamilton, Trivers, Konner or Hrdy. It starts from the idea that all living creatures look the way they do and behave the way they do because it has helped their ancestors to better cope with life.

This also holds true for our children. Children develop the way they do - tantrums and vegetable aversions included - because it has helped them to survive and thrive in the environment in which they have lived for hundreds of thousands of years.

This suggests a radically different view on the development of our children: children do not lack anything. They may be unfinished adults - but they are a hundred percent prepared to be *children*.

The book „Born to be wild“ explores how children develop their strengths, and it demonstrates what this means for everyday parenting in today’s world. Its message is inspiring and liberating as it fosters a more positive, and more “natural” encounter between children and grown-ups.



More details...

"Kinder verstehen" is a popular science book with a practical bent. Its main audience are parents and educators. Being referenced and scientifically researched it also appeals to experts in child development such as paediatricians, psychologists and counsellors.

- First HC Edition July 2009, original language: German
- Second HC Edition December 2009
- Publisher: Kösel, Munich - a division of Random House
- Title: Kinder verstehen. Born to be wild: Wie die Evolution unsere Kinder prägt
- 512 pages, ISBN: 978-3-7913-3824-8
- 4 C print, 34 photos and reproductions
- Website: www.kinder-verstehen.de

Each chapter consists of two parts

- Part 1 deals with "practical" developmental features, questions or topics - like crying, sleeping, temper tantrums, attachment and so on
- Part 2 focuses on theoretical considerations, controversies or details - it provides "insight and outlook", and is named accordingly.

The book is written for the lay public. However, it builds on an abundance of scientific facts and publications. In order to keep the text easy to read and informative, detailed notes and references are listed in a separate section at the end of the book. References that are only relevant to the scientifically oriented reader are listed on a supplementary web site (www.kinder-verstehen.de), which is maintained by the author.



About the book ...

The book offers a comprehensive account of how children develop from an evolutionary perspective and invites parents to use this perspective to better parent their children.

As a supplement the author maintains a website both for the more scientifically oriented reader and for the media. The site contains a summary of the book, downloadable features for the press as well as an authors' portrait and sample chapters in pdf format. The reader also finds a list of roughly 400 original scientific publications, which are referenced in the book.

There is also a section that deals with relevant news concerning "evolutionary parenting" as well as a blog that invites comments and discussion.

The author is well known in Germany as he has previously edited a popular book on children's health. He has been a regular speaker for both expert and lay audiences for many years. Having lived in the US for 7 years he is fluent in English and is prepared to give talks to the media as well as to a general audience internationally.



Arguments for the book

Raising children has become an ever more daunting challenge in our modern society. Parents are increasingly seeking guidance from experts. Yet the traditional support offered from classical psychology does not seem to satisfy parents as much as it did in previous generations. Parents are now also looking at parenting concepts grounded in the biological and cognitive sciences, and they seem to rely more and more on intuitive or "natural" concepts of child rearing, as evidenced by the success of book titles like Karp's "The happiest child around the block" and the popular Sears titles.

This book combines the scientific and the "natural" approach to raising children. It uses anthropology and the evolutionary sciences to explain child development and draws conclusions from this firm, scientific basis - thus giving parents not only fresh ideas but also a solid conceptual understanding on which to base their parenting decisions.

A note for the US market. Understanding nature and its manifestations from an evolutionary perspective has not been popular in the US in recent years, as Darwinian evolution has been rejected by a solid fraction of religiously inspired citizens. This book stands firm on the evidence base of evolution, and there is no room in it for creationist thoughts or explanations whatsoever. However, with cultural attitudes again pushed into flux and with a substantial ethical and societal reorientation emerging at least in the urban US this is an asset rather than a drawback. Upfront about its message and firm in its arguments a book on childhood development from an evolutionary and anthropological perspective will be a welcome read and discussion topic in a society seeking new grounds, and possibly a new vision, of human nature.



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Chapter summaries

Chapter 1:

How children become good eaters

Parents agree on one thing: When it comes to eating, children are completely unreasonable. They prefer unhealthy food - from chocolate bars to French fries. And they do everything to keep their spaghettis from getting contaminated by veggies...

From the viewpoint of evolution this behaviour asks for an explanation. Food was certainly not abundant during 99% of human history. So shouldn't children eat whatever comes close to their mouth?

This chapter gives a clear answer: No! The strange eating behaviours of our children are inspired by nature! But what's behind it? Why do little kids dislike broccoli? How do taste preferences develop in childhood? Why do South American indigenous kids love fried spiders and grubs whereas Bavarian kids prefer white sausage and dumplings? And how do they finally realize that the veggies won't kill them - but may actually be quite tasty?

Insight and Outlook: immaturity as an advantage?

It has become popular to view children as little people who have not yet learned to be adults. This chapter suggests a different approach, grounded in evolutionary theory: If kids were indeed unable to meet the challenges of life and development, mankind would have ceased to exist a long time ago. Children are not unfinished adults – they are 100% complete babies, 100% complete toddler, and 100% complete teenagers!



Chapter 2:

Breast feeding - the most natural business?

A German who has eaten a lot may state he is „papp-satt“ - filled as if he had eaten Pap. The word “pap” denotes a gruel that has been used widely since the Middle ages as a supplemental food for babies. In some regions of middle and northern Europe “Pap” used to be fed to infants even within the first few weeks of life.

When it comes to infant food - is it natural to cut corners like this? Isn't breast milk the only infant food endorsed by nature? But why then should mother's milk contain the enzyme amylase, which is responsible for the digestion of *starch* - certainly not a component of any mammals milk? And how comes breast-feeding is so prone to failure - shouldn't a life saving process work automatically, or at least, intuitively?

A longer section will be devoted to a shattering event in the feeding career of any mammal - weaning. Is there a “right” moment for the withdrawal of the breast? Does weaning have to be a tearful event for the baby - or is there a way to make it a smooth, self-initiated transition?

Insight and Outlook:

Family conflicts - flaws in nature's master plan?

Our cherished image of the family is an image of pure harmony: beaming mother, beaming father, beaming children, all happily united in their love for each other.

With this heart warming image in mind many a family becomes exhausted pretty quickly. The happy group realizes that there ARE conflicts, that there is no magic formula to make everyone happy at the same time.

This section approaches conflicts from an evolutionary perspective: why do the interests of parents and children diverge sometimes? Why is win-win for everyone not necessarily the default setting? Where exactly could conflicts arise as a natural by-product of child development? How can they be overcome?



Chapter 3:

Introducing solids, nature's way...

Many a mother picking up her three month old baby to breastfeed starts to feel the glances of her in-laws: isn't it about time to give that poor creature something REAL to eat?

Unfortunately science isn't really strengthening mothers' position either. The American Academy of Paediatrics does make a point that the right time for supplementing is at 6 months of age. However it adds a mushy disclaimer: "Unique needs or feeding behaviours of individual infants may indicate a need for introduction of complementary foods as early as 4 months of age, whereas other infants may not be ready to accept other foods until approximately 8 months of age."

What exactly is going on? Can evolutionary biology offer some clearer guidance? What is nature's take on supplementary feeding?

Insight and Outlook:

Why children don't clear their plates

The appetite of small children lags far behind the expectations of mothers - and light years behind the hopes of grandmothers. Why is that? Children have to grow at a rapid pace and should try to secure portions as big as possible at the table, shouldn't they?



Chapter 4:

How children become good sleepers

Life with children may be paradise during daytime, but as soon as night approaches, the family trek is headed to the valley of tears... Now is the time for human drama, now is the time for parents to doubt their abilities, and now is the time to fight with a partner over the best way to teach that child how to fall asleep...

Is sleep a matter of LEARNING? Shouldn't kids be able, from the beginning, to find that button to close their eyes and drift off to slumber land?

It is striking that sleep problems run rampant mainly in western cultures. Have parents here and today become more demanding because for them a sleeping child offers nothing less than the key to the pursuit of happiness? After all, parents do want to lead some private lives apart from diaper changes and lullabies! Or have they just forgotten the ancient secrets of how to put a child to sleep? Or is the baby's night time protest directed against one of the core furnishings of modern living arrangements: the baby's own crib?

Insight and Outlook: Why sleep?

Virtually all higher animals regularly become unconscious – some at night time, others during daylight, some switch off only one hemisphere of their brain, others their whole brain, some stay on their feet, others lay down. The “costs” of this behaviour are substantial: who sleeps can neither graze nor hunt - nor defend itself... So why do we sleep? And why do children sleep so much longer?



Chapter 5:

The co-sleeping controversy

Different as human cultures around the globe appear - they do agree on one thing: small children belong close to their parents at night time. With ONE exception: the modern western world, which assumes that babies should sleep in their own cribs, if not in their own rooms. How else should they learn to be independent and self-reliant? And how else could they be safe in the first place? Is co-sleeping a health hazard? A developmental hazard? Or both? Or none of it?

Insight and Outlook:

Early Independence - valid goal or fetish?

Modern parents are stuck in a dilemma: On one hand they want to give their baby warmth, closeness and affection. They want to be present when baby needs them. They want to respond reliably to his or her needs. On the other hand they fear that in doing so they could “spoil“ their baby and harm the developing personality. A certain severity, they assume, helps the child learn to rely on itself and become a self-confident adult.

This section looks at self-reliance from an evolutionary perspective: What are nature’s ways to independence? Are there shortcuts? What are the main ingredients for successful maturation of “independence“?



Chapter 6:

Crying - part of growing up?

When a baby cries listeners receive virtual electric shocks: women more than men, parents more than childless adults - not to mention the parents of the crying child who receive the full dose... There is a good reason why a crying baby touches our heart: the signal is important for his or her survival. No wonder that the shock receiver starts to take care of things and sets out to investigate: is the baby safe? Is it hungry? Is it hurt? Is it frightened?

There begins the quarrel: could he or she just cry like that? Let's say because he is bored or because she just wants to "act out" or play a scene? And if we respond to THAT - wouldn't this teach her the wrong lesson, i.e., that by crying she will eventually get every little thing she wants?

Cats or hamsters don't have that problem. Babies growing up in dens or nests only cry when they sense their mother nearby - the danger of being detected by predators would just not be worth it. Nature seems to factor in the costs when it comes to crying. Could a glance at the evolutionary balance sheet help in the human case to understand our crying offspring better?

Insight and Outlook: Can tears tell lies?

It became official in 1926: parents should not give in to the crying of their babies, otherwise the child would learn, "that crying will get him what he wants". The US Department of Labour, Children's Bureau, which gave this advice, sunk the nail with another blow. By responding, parents would foster "a household tyrant whose continual demands make a slave of the mother."

Today we are more inclined to believe babies and respond to their cries. But a nagging fear remains: Maybe the tears are some sorts of magic that manipulates parents to shell out more than the baby needs?



Chapter 7:

Temper tantrums - worth the effort?

There comes a time when distractions no longer works („look over there, what a lovely birdie!“). The fight is now fought to the last teardrop. The terrible twos - which may well include the threes or even the fours - keep many parents breathless and make them ask: what the heck is going on here?

Temper tantrums are observed in all cultures and around the globe they start at about the same age. Apes also throw temper tantrums, and they do not look much different in chimpanzees than they do in humans. The readiness to oppose seems to be a developmental constant.

But then again: why do the sweet children suddenly throw themselves into the ring and fight their parents? Shouldn't they know that charm works better on parents than anger? But does it?

Insight and Outlook:

Children's needs - the right gauge for parenting?

Children's needs are frequently presented as a long list. The job of the parents seems easy: tick off the list one by one and your kids will do fine! Just like you would take care of an aquarium when house-sitting.

The problem starts when you try to translate the glossy list into everyday life. Suddenly the child's needs conflict with other people's needs - let's say the parents' needs. And what about school? Can school really be about meeting the needs of children? Where on that list is the need to learn maths? And where are we dealing with needs, and where with wishes? And could there possibly be some items on the list, which may not serve the child well? Welcome to the fuzzy world of evolutionarily created needs.



Chapter 8:

Nature's view on toilet training

Over the last 30 years the chapters in parenting books devoted to toilet training have shrunk considerably. One reason is that washing machines and disposable diapers have taken some urgency from the topic. But it was mainly psychology that ushered in a new era: had earlier psychologists equated sphincter control with self-control and therefore spoken out for rigorous, early training they now view the anus as what it is: the end of the intestines.

But let's not forget the medical profession: paediatricians have shown in large studies that early toilet training does not work. Children don't master their eliminations sooner if they are put on the potty earlier. The grass doesn't seem to grow faster if you pull at it ... so should we scratch toilet training from the parenting list altogether?

Insight and Outlook:

Diaper free?

Even little babies don't just get rid of their eliminations, they sort of celebrate it with grimaces, movements and vocal signals – which enables parents around the world to pick that bundle from the back and hold it over a bush, for instance. As a matter of fact millions of women in traditional cultures carry their children on their backs all day long without getting soiled. No wonder that more and more parents in the western world ask about „intuitive potty training“ or „elimination communication“. Can baby's subtle signals be used to raise children without diapers even in the modern world?



Interlude:

Understanding evolution

The first part of this book was devoted to important ingredients in the development of children - like breastfeeding, supplementary feeding, eating, sleeping and so on. We asked how these behaviours may have formed during evolution, and how they may have looked in their “original” version. We came across many examples where the original developmental repertoire seems to be at odds with modern living arrangements - clearly, if kids were designed for the modern world they would not sport that sweet tooth and their awkward sleeping habits!

Time to come to know evolution a little better. What exactly IS evolution and how does it work? We will meet Darwin, of course, but we will also meet scientists who have taken the evolutionary idea a step further and who have clarified that evolution is a powerful tool to understand human nature and certainly not a threat to our quest for dignity, cultural advancement and humanity.

- Darwin’s radical idea
- Evolution in everyday life
- „Egoistic“ genes?
- The time frame of evolution
- Is our life still subject to evolution?
- What is the species-typical environment for humans?
- Does evolution have a goal?
- Evolution and the human cause



Chapter 10:

A new view of attachment

Parenting is not for the feeble: a mother or father bird has to shove an insect down the gaping throats of their young every minute or so. And human parents have to change 4000 diapers before the little creature makes his first appearance on the potty throne. How does nature motivate parents to sacrifice themselves?

The answer is attachment. Attachment is the secret force that makes parents forget their own priorities and start to care for their offspring. Unconditionally.

Unconditionally? Nature seems to have a different view. Swallow parents first serve the gaping beaks with the most intense orange coloration - the carotene in the mucous membranes is a marker for health and viability.

There seems to be fine print even with humans. The attachment between mother and child varies in depth and intensity, and sometimes it fails altogether. What is the reason? What ingredients are needed to make attachment work? A happy pregnancy? The maternal hormones? The magic first hour after birth? But why then can parents be attached deeply and reliably to adopted children?

Insight and Outlook: Why are babies so fat?

Newborns pose riddles to their parents. Even scientists find many a nut hard to crack when it comes to newborns. One such nut is the riddle of infant plumpness: why are babies so fat?

When babies enter the world one sixth of their body is nothing but fat. None of the 200 primate species – which, after all, are our closest relatives - carries that much fat with it. This is why monkey babies appear so scrawny to us.

What adds to the riddle is the fact that human babies could make good use of a leaner body - after all they have to squeeze through the narrowest birth canal of all the primates. So why does nature equip human babies with additional layers of fat, which make the journey even harder?



Chapter 11:

Fear of strangers - what strangers?

“Fear of strangers“ is a developmental feature observed in all cultures, and around the globe it begins at the same age, no matter if the child is born to a forager or to a lawyer.

But what does this fear protect from? Evidently, from strangers. But what strangers? Children show more fear of strange males than of strange females, and with strange children they keep their cool. What is wrong with strange males?

Insight and Outlook:

Day-care - natural or unnatural?

In some quarters of society there is still a notion that only a mother who cares for her children herself is a good mother. Real love and closeness can only be provided by the parents, within a warm family.

The anthropological record however is full of alternative models. In some traditional societies babies will be nursed by several mothers, in other societies older siblings will provide a lot of direct care, in other still it is the maternal grandmother who picks up the slack while the mother goes about her work.

What model do children “expect”? Is there a species typical model by which children should be cared for?



Chapter 12:

Caring for babies - is there a natural standard?

No book title could have been a better fit: “In Search of Happiness Lost”. When the young American adventurer Jean Liedloff reached the Amazon basin in the company of diamond prospectors she believed she had discovered paradise. In a bestselling book she gave a moving account of how indulgently the members of the South American Yequana tribe cared for their infants and toddlers.

Jean Liedloff couldn't have presented a more contrasting picture to the parents on the other side of the globe who at the time were busy sterilizing baby bottles and selecting baby furniture for baby's own room... The indian infants were carried in slings, had free access to mother's breast, were nursed even as toddlers, had plenty of skin contact, slept close to their parents and were never ever alone. And if they cried at all they were responded to immediately. Was this a Rousseauian flashback of a flower-power-kid? Or did Ms. Liedloff happen across a life style endorsed by nature - even the species typical family life perhaps?

Insight and Outlook: Can children be spoiled?

A spoiled child is “an unbearable creature“, as Anna Wahlgren, a well-known European parenting expert puts it. The family counsellor Jesper Juul knows what lies behind the problem: spoiled children get “too much of what they like and too little of what they need“.

But what exactly do they need? Couldn't some of their wishes be actual needs? And shouldn't kids by nature request more than they eventually receive? So how should parents gauge their attention? What amount of indulgence is the right amount?



Chapter 13:

How children become personalities

There comes a moment for any parent to realize that his or her baby has become a real “personality“. Indeed, long before babies utter their first word they already show how they will approach the world: some grab life by its horns, others lose their bearing as soon as a little obstacle appears. What lies behind these differences? Are kids born so different? Or do the differences represent learned behaviour? What makes Kevin a little tornado and Susan such a wallflower?

Insight and Outlook:

The child group - nature's own day-care?

Up to the middle of their second year kids don't bother much about other kids. When they play they put one little log upon another little log or they push Lego cars across the floor. And beware if another child tries to join! In the second year kids will slowly take over social roles - they bake a “cake” or build a “house”, but still every child would like to be the master cook or master builder. Only in their third year kids will put their heads together and play productively as a group.

There is a lot of evidence from the evolutionary perspective that development of children hinges on group experiences. But what group? The famous peer group or the traditional mixed age child group, in which younger kids and older kids live in different - and flexible - social niches?



Chapter 14:

Competent parenting - why love is not enough

There is no better way to score points at a party than to suggest a “parenting permit”: even to drive a moped you need a licence, but for raising kids you need nothing but to know how to get an ovum and some sperm together?

But can parenting really be LEARNED, much as you learn a profession or how to drive a car? Doesn't successful parenting mainly rely on one thing: a lot of love? And how should you learn THAT in a curriculum? On the contrary, wouldn't parents be better off forgetting all those rules, all that conflicting advice and simply rely on their heart and intuitive knowledge? After all parenting should be in our blood, how else could mankind have survived? But why then do so many people nod in agreement when the talk turns to the “parenting permit”?

Insight and Outlook:
An evolutionary view of parents

Many parents are convinced that evolution is one big mistake: if it really was about making creatures survive better - where ARE the four hands that you need to take care of an infant?

The anthropologist Hillard Kaplan estimates that under Palaeolithic conditions a child had to be provisioned with about 13 million kilocalories to make it successfully into adulthood. Where did all those calories come from? From the mother alone? From both - happily married - parents? Or are there maybe other helpers foreseen in the evolutionary plan? Does it perhaps even take an entire village to raise a child as an African proverb goes? And where is that village in the modern world?



Chapter 15:

Nourishing children - an evolutionary approach

As we saw in the chapter on toilet training, “grass doesn’t grow faster if you pull it,” and children develop at to their own pace.

But everyone knows that is not always the case, many parents have observed the exact opposite with their own children: kids virtually take off when their talents are fostered! They thrive when they put themselves to a task - training and nourishing really make a difference!

So what is the scoop? Does development happen from within or from the outside? Do children unfold like a flower or do they have to craft their possibilities, piece by piece? And what role do parents play in all this?

Insight and Outlook:
Nature or nurture?

Intelligent parents often have intelligent children. And “difficult” parents frequently have difficult children. Folk wisdom concludes: the apple doesn’t drop far from the tree. But then the controversy sets in: what eventually will sprout from the seeds - will it depend more on the seed itself or on the soil on which it drops? Is it nature or is it nurture that sets one child apart from another child in its abilities? If a child gravitates to marihuana instead of maths: is it the genes fault or is it the result of parenting and education?



Chapter 16:

How fairness develops

The prominent psychologist Steven Pinker from Harvard University calls it the “religious theory of the source of values”. According to this theory we are all born egoists, moral values therefore have to be instilled into us. For our moral advancement we have to pull ourselves out of the mud of nature so to speak ...

Maybe we can learn something about the “religious theory” from the capuchin monkeys. They seem to have emerged already from the mud. Given the choice if they want to eat a reward themselves or share it with other members of the clan, they mostly opt for the latter. And beware if they feel they are being treated unfairly! A capuchin monkey who is offered a piece of cucumber while his fellow monkey in the adjacent cage is given a grape - grapes are the M&Ms of the monkey world - will reject the cucumber and may even throw it at the keeper!

What about children? Are they born with a similar sense of fairness or are they born egomaniacs who have to learn fairness by the sweat of their brow?

Insight and Outlook:
Morality - a contradiction to evolution?

Man seems to sport a dual nature. On the one hand he is part of the evolutionary matrix - you would have to close your eyes in order not to realize how eagerly he sniffs after the carrots that dangle in front of his nose – the pleasant feelings that he gets through love, sex, status, power and mastery of his abilities.

With one leg however he seems to stand outside the evolutionary laws: humans adopt genetically unrelated children, they live celibate or ascetically, they devote their life to an idea, sacrifice themselves for strangers, send cheques to tsunami victims in countries whose names they can't even pronounce ... Isn't this a contradiction to evolution? Doesn't evolution make every living being pursue its *own* advantage?



Chapter 17:

Learning from other cultures?

A glance around the globe can leave you puzzled. All kids have the same needs, whether they live in Madison or in Manila. And all parents want the best for their children. And yet parenting looks different wherever you look. Some parenting methods make us smile - like if an infant is renamed to give her more stamina. Other methods appear repulsive to us - like if parents rub ground bone powder from baboons into the lanced skin of newborns to make them as strong and resilient as a baboon. Again other traditions stir our heart and appear so right and „natural“ that we consider them a part of our happiness lost...

So what IS natural in parenting? Couldn't we just compare all approaches in different cultures to find a universal standard? The best method to raise well adjusted, happy children?

The childhood puzzle. Why do humans have to be children first?

All mammals are dependent on their mother at the start of their lives - after all she provides them with the magic potion of all mammals, milk. How long the offspring suckles varies widely - small rodents will only benefit from the breast for a few days, apes will suckle for many years. But all mammal species stick to the rule: once the offspring is weaned the little ones have learned all the skills to provide themselves with food, shelter and protection.

Not so the human offspring. When the human baby is weaned it is still a helpless child and will need to be provisioned by others for another two decades. Why such a uniquely costly and dangerous career?



Enjoy the read!

