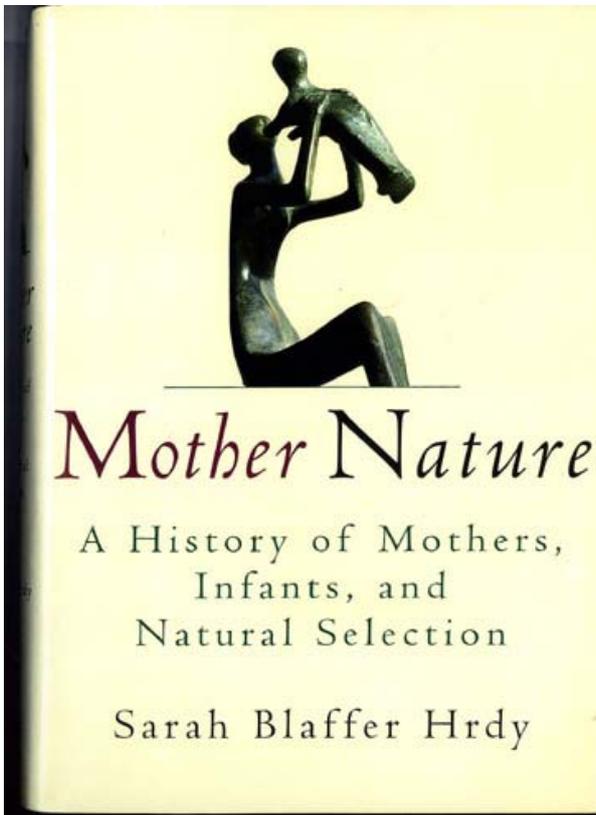


Book of The Century



Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (1999). *Mother Nature. A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection*. Pantheon Books. New York. 723 pp

"I have spent my entire adult life engaged in a quest to understand not just *who* I am but *how* creatures like me came to be. That human evolved at all is a fluke. My own existence, like that of any other person's, is more than a fluke—it is a miracle. Out of the seven million or so egg cells my mother was born with, it was mine that ripened to be fertilized by my father. Against the usual odds, that fetus survived the vagaries of gestation to be born. And what about this creature, this person I would become? What does it mean to be born a mammal, with an emotional legacy that makes me capable of caring for others, breeding with the ovaries of a primate, possessing the mind of a human being

Additional Commentary

"Like many humans today, I was reared quite differently from the primates I observed in the field. Unlike the mothers in every other ape species, my own mother had no interest in carrying me everywhere

she went. Indeed, in the particular tribe of elite Texas into which I was born, the custom of mothers nurturing their own infants had been lost generations before. My mother delegated the care of her infants to others, just as both my grandmothers had done." (p.xii).

"Along with several recent revisions to "attachment theory", Bowlby's ideas well stand among the greatest contributions made by evolutionary-minded psychologists to human well-being. But Bowlby's insights also produce a series of new—often seemingly irreconcilable—dilemmas for mothers who want to rear emotionally healthy, self-confident children, but who also want lives or careers of their own" (p.xiii).

"Yet, at that point, I had no idea how inextricably linked sexual and maternal emotions have been in the course of primate evolution" (p.xiii).

"The availability of breast pumps and freezers means that more women can both breast-feed and spend hours separated from their babies".(p.3).

"One week, newspaper headlines ask, "Is day care ruining our kids?" or decry "A dangerous experiment in child-rearing." Another week, headlines in the same paper will declare, "Infant bonding is a bogus notion" or call for businesses to provide more daycare" (p.4)

"Great Ape mothers carry their infants wherever they go. Fathers, by comparison, are rarely in direct contact with babies" (p.205). And "It was the mother who continuously carried the infant in skin-to-skin contact—stomach to stomach, chest to breast. Soothed by her heartbeat, nestled in the heat of her body, rocked by her movements, the infant's entire world was its mother. (p. 98).

"...no wild monkey or ape mother has ever been observed to deliberately harm her own baby"(p.179). Emphasis added.

What has happened along the evolutionary trail where human maternal violence against her offspring has suddenly emerged without any history of such behavior in the primate evolutionary record? How this great unanswered question is answered will determine the future of humanity.

It is clear to this reviewer that if the fruits of the new bio-cultural evolution of *homo sapiens* are to be realized, it will be necessary to dismantle the tyranny of the theistic/patristic cultures of the world. The neglect of this topic by Hrdy is the major flaw in her monumental and important work on Mother Nature.

After all is said and done, what is Professor Hrdy's final position on Mother Nature, as a scientist, feminist and mother--an impossible balancing act in my view. In her own words:

" After the first weeks of living with a baby girl who mostly slept or quietly nursed through seminars, it became increasingly apparent that in the world I lived in, caring for a baby was incompatible with concentrated work. A new baby's terrifying vulnerability, the magnitude of the responsibility, and the insatiable demands that kept me on-call twenty-four hours a day, came as a shock. Yet, as a primatologist in the post-Bowlby era, what could I do but turn my life over to her? "(p. xiv). See Review at <http://www.violence.de/prescott/reviews/hrdy.html>