

Only by taking a hard look at the way in which we have originated and then by studying the biological aspects of the way we behave as a species today, can we really acquire a balanced, objective understanding of our extraordinary existence.

If we accept the history of our evolution as it has been outlined here, then one fact stands out clearly: namely, that we have arisen essentially as primate predators. Amongst existing monkeys and apes, this makes us unique, but major conversions of this kind are not unknown in other groups. The giant panda, for instance, is a perfect case of the reverse process. Whereas we are vegetarians turned carnivores, the panda is a carnivore turned vegetarian, and like us it is in many ways an extraordinary and unique creature. The point is that a major switch of this sort produces an animal with a dual personality. Once over the threshold, it plunges into its new role with great evolutionary energy-so much so that it carries with it many of its old traits. Insufficient time has passed for it to throw off all its old characteristics while it is hurriedly donning the new ones. When the ancient fishes first conquered dry land, their new terrestrial qualities raced ahead while they continued to drag their old watery ones with them. It takes millions of years to perfect a dramatically new animal model, and the pioneer forms are usually very odd mixtures indeed. The naked ape is such a mixture. His whole body, his way of life, was geared to a forest existence, and then suddenly (suddenly in evolutionary terms) he was jettisoned into a world where he could survive only if he began to live like a brainy, weapon-toting wolf. We must examine now exactly how this affected not only his body, but especially his behaviour, and in what form we experience the influence of this legacy at the present day.

One way of doing this is to compare the structure and the way of life of a 'pure' fruit-picking primate with a 'pure' carnivore. Once we have cleared our minds about the essential differences that relate to their two contrasted methods of feeding, we can then re-examine the naked ape situation to see how the mixture has been worked out.