



The Ape And The Sushi Master Reflections Of A Primatologist

Frans De Waal

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What if apes had their own culture rather than one their human observers imposed on them? What if they reacted to situations with behavior learned through observation of their elders (culture) rather than with pure genetically coded instinct (nature)? Contemplating such a possibility is bound to shake centuries-old cultural convictions. In answering these questions, *The Ape and the Sushi Master*, by the eminent primatologist Frans de Waal, corrects our arrogant assumption that humans are the only form of intelligent life to have made the leap from the natural to the cultural domain. The book's title derives from an analogy de Waal draws between the way behavior is transmitted in ape society and the way sushi-making skills are passed down from sushi master to apprentice. Like the apprentice, young apes watch their group mates at close range, absorbing the methods and lessons of each of their elders' actions. Responses long thought to be instinctive are actually learned behavior, de Waal argues, and constitute ape culture. A delightful, partly autobiographical mix of anecdotes, rigorous research, and fascinating speculation, *The Ape and the Sushi Master* challenges our most basic assumptions about who we are and how we differ from other animals. Apes are holding a new mirror up to us in which they are not human caricatures but members of our extended family with their own resourcefulness and dignity. For over a century, UFO spotters have told us that we are not alone. In *The Ape and the Sushi Master*, Frans de Waal makes the equally startling claim that, biologically speaking, we never were.

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