

# INTRODUCTION

## *Where are the Dads?*

*“Any man can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a dad” – Wade Boggs<sup>1</sup>*

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As a professional nature guide, I love exploring the bush with my kids, not only because of their contagious enthusiasm but also the privileged opportunity to see the world through their eyes. On any game drive with them I will be bombarded with insightful questions ranging from why the sky is blue to why baboons don't talk like us. Nature guides prize questions – they are the barometer by which we measure our guests' interest and enthusiasm and I have to confess, children often ask the best questions. In fact, this whole book is my attempt at answering a single, innocent, yet profound question posed by my son and daughter.

On a recent outing, while enjoying a special sighting of a rhino mother and calf, Kayla and Josua wanted to know where the rhino calf's dad was. Soon after, on the very same drive, we were fortunate enough to come across an elephant herd containing a small calf and later a cheetah mother with cubs, and each time my two curious children were disconcerted by the fact that the fathers of the cheetah cubs and the elephant calves were nowhere to be seen.

I realised that this was a perfectly reasonable question coming from two kids fortunate enough to have a devoted father who loves them more than life itself. There are, of course, easy proximate explanations to their quandary, yet, the ultimate answer to this seemingly simple, though deeply reflective, query encapsulates so much of evolutionary behaviour. And so, as one question led to another, I soon realised that a comprehensive explanation in a single discussion would never suffice.

Later that evening, once the children were snug in bed, I decided to write down my uncondensed, uncensored answers to the day's far-reaching questions, which inadvertently evolved into this book. I have always had an unusual interest in both animal and human behaviour and as a nature guide, my career has offered me the opportunity to indulge in both for the past twenty-nine years. Ever since I was a child, I have intuitively recognised a kinship, an undeniable shared ancestry, with other animals and as a consequence, I have always drawn comparisons between animal and human behaviour in my quest to discover those precursors that shaped human nature. That said, I also readily acknowledge that there is something different about human behaviour that seems more challenging to explain, even when compared to our closest primate relatives.

There are, of course, countless books on animal behaviour, of which I have an extensive collection, and I would never be so impudent as to try and better any of the comprehensive literature already available, nor so naive as to try and augment it. However, I grew up in an era before the omniscience of Google and the internet, when acquired knowledge was laboriously governed by one's finite access to relevant books. How often have I, as a youngster, wished for a book that addresses all of nature's biggest behavioural mysteries, written in layman's language in a single volume – one book, covering all my favourite subjects, including evolutionary biology, evolutionary behaviour, evolutionary psychology as well as moral philosophy.

Like Kayla and Josua, all of us sooner or later, try to find meaning. We question who we are, and why we are the way we are, and we try to make sense of the world around us. To me, the most satisfactory explanations for some of the greatest mysteries in the world have thus far been derived from the theory of evolution. In parts 1 and 2 of this book, I will attempt to answer some of these very questions, that is, *why* we are the way we

are, or, in other words, why we humans evolved to behave the way we do. Admittedly, some of the theories presented in this book are merely speculative and some still need to be tested and substantiated. That said, I endeavoured at all times to validate ideas with existing knowledge built on testable explanations and predictions, particularly from the fields of evolutionary biology, ethology, anthropology and evolutionary psychology. Writing this book thus not only afforded me the opportunity to share some of the most fascinating theories on the evolution of behaviour with a new audience, but it also allowed me to give credit and tribute to some of my venerated intellectual heroes, those questioning, analytical giants who allowed us all to share in the feats of their genius.

Since I am repeatedly amazed by how similar my children's inquiries are to those that I pondered as a child, I furthermore ventured to answer some anticipated questions, not yet asked, which they, like me, presumably would contemplate later in life. Therefore, in Part 3 of the book, I will dabble into the normative, rather than the descriptive, and contemplate 'ought' as opposed to 'is'. Since I respectfully disagree with the great Stephen Hawking's claim that philosophy (which in Greek quite literally means "the love of wisdom") is dead, I will trustfully turn to ethics, the branch of philosophy that examines the nature of morality, in an attempt to answer questions regarding how we, in our modern, artificial world, should strive to live our lives in relation to others, a subject that all of us, especially parents, inevitably contemplate.<sup>2</sup> Part 3 will thus be dedicated to evolutionary ethics as well as moral theories.

Some readers might be surprised that I included moral philosophy in a book that mostly deals with the evolution of animal behaviour. However, since the underlying theme throughout the whole book revolves around the evolution of one of nature's greatest mysteries, altruism, and since most of us consider moral behaviour, at the most general level, to be motivated by the desire to promote, not only our welfare but the welfare of others, I find it quite reasonable to assume that any person who has ever contemplated the evolution of altruism, to inadvertently have contemplated the evolution of our moral sentiments. The very term 'altruism', derived from the Latin word *alter*, meaning 'other', was coined in the 19th century by the French philosopher Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism, who considered altruism the highest feat in morality.

This book is first and foremost dedicated to my two immensely inquisitive and inquiring children. For this purpose, I intended this book to be comprehensible to them and therefore plead tolerance from the well-informed reader, should I unnecessarily have expanded on my attempted explanations. In the end, I sincerely hope that my reflective cogitations might elucidate the curious and, where lacking, at the very least, entertain and amuse. Still and all, it is my firm belief that each of us, in our incessant pursuit of purpose, meaning, happiness and well-being needs to understand ourselves, which is to say, where we come from, who we are and where we're going, which, in essence, is the objective of this book.