

THE ORIGINS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

by
Bernard Rourke



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Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.
12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507
Houston TX 77065
www.sbpra.com

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Foreword

The medical profession has made such progress during the last century that we are now healthier and live longer. They have been pro-active in educating the public on health matters and raising awareness of the steps that can be taken to remain healthy. Television has been a medium they have used well. We can be satisfied that the physical well-being of *Homo sapiens* is in good hands.

The same cannot be said for the professionals in the *mental* health community. There has been a distinct lack of effort to raise public awareness of mental health issues, even allowing for the fact that explaining the mind and human behaviour is more problematic than describing body organs. Critics could claim that the public knows as little about human behaviour and mental disorders today as it did when Queen Victoria died.

Is this ignorance because the public does not wish to understand such matters? Are mental health disorders still a taboo subject or, even worse, do the professionals feel they have nothing worthwhile to tell us?

The outcome is that the public receives no encouragement, incentive, direction, or reading material to decide whether or

not they *are* interested in learning more about the workings of the mind and associated behaviour.

This book has been written to provide comments, opinions, and theories in plain English on this subject. It covers aspects of human behaviour, the mind and mental health disorders. In short, it sets out to find the **origins of human behaviour**. It is written in the hope that ordinary people will discover whether or not they are interested in the subject. If they are, they will require more readable books and watchable television programmes, and the professionals will have to be raising public awareness of the current state of mental health. At the moment, we have no reason to feel confident that our mental health is “in good hands.”

The mental health professionals will be the first to point out that I am not a trained psychologist or psychiatrist. (If I were, would I be writing this book in plain English?)

I am confident I have a message to relay to those wishing to hear it, and let the professionals mock and criticise if they so wish.

At one stage, I did wonder whether I was trying to be too clever (or stupid), so I contacted a practising psychiatrist to ask for her professional opinion as to the “believability” of some of my conclusions. She told me she found them “interesting.”

“I never came across such ideas when I was studying but, if you ever write a book, I will be one of the first to buy a copy.”

Introduction

Many psychologists and psychiatrists would have us believe that, because our minds are empty vessels at birth, it is life's experiences filling them with emotions and memories that serve as the foundation of all we become as human beings. They claim **external factors** strongly influence the development of our character and behaviour, so it was inevitable and convenient for them to identify traumatic experiences as the **main cause** of many mental health illnesses and behavioural problems.

I consider this to be a blinkered approach. I believe our minds are far from "empty" at birth. In fact, I am convinced that what we inherit serves as the cornerstone of who we are and the person we become. Life's experiences may impact on our development, but our ability to handle them will be strongly influenced by what I will term our *genetic core*.

So, one side claims that life's experiences are the major factor moulding us (*environmentalism*), and the other that genetic influences provide the core of who we are (**heredity**). This is known as the **Nature versus Nurture** argument.

Whichever side is right, it has a great deal to answer for. *Homo sapiens* have shown themselves to be the cruellest, most

self-centred and mentally fragile species on earth. How could we, the so-called pride of evolution, contain so many flaws?

Fortunately, we are a relatively young species and still evolving. Medical advances have certainly helped our physical development. Perhaps now is the time to take steps to reassure ourselves that similar progress can be made in mental health.

To continue claiming environmental factors to be the main cause of criminal behaviour is misleading. More consideration should be given to raising the level of public interest and awareness of other influential factors.

The media regularly offer information on new techniques and improved survival rates in important physical diseases. The mental health professionals offer no such information. The public does not even know whether there are any. If there are major disagreements within the mental health profession, the public should be made aware of them, especially if they may be inhibiting essential progress. It would be better for the public who, at the moment, are in mental health limbo land.

The attitude of the professionals should be more along the lines of *“Awareness and prevention can be better than a cure.”*

We don't understand human behaviour. We are touched by the humanity of some people and weep at the inhumanity of others. Which factors direct us to behave as we do? Surely we deserve better explanations than the proverbial offerings of *“bad homes and bad parents.”*

The aim of this book is not to criticise psychologists and psychiatrists. It is to offer ideas and explanations to the public as to which factors are, or could be, decisive in our behavioural development. It provides some information on mental and behavioural matters with the aim of encouraging the public to want to learn more about the subject. Finally, it is to ask the professionals to consider ways in which they could promote

greater awareness of mental health issues. The image of mental illness desperately needs to be improved and updated.

If there is to be significant mental development during our evolutionary process, there is a need for better understanding (by all of us) of the human mind and its impact on behaviour. We are still in the age where descriptive words like *nutters* and *crackers* and *loony bins* are used. We have plenty of empathy for people suffering from cancer or broken bones, but still want to tell people who are severely depressed to “snap out of it.”

You may be wondering what placed this bee under my bonnet—what got me so worked up about people, their character, and behaviour?

My fascination started in my teens because of my four brothers (I was the next to youngest). We were such different individuals, I mean *really* different, in so many ways, I could not believe we came from the same parents, and frequently thought the other four must have been adopted. “*How could five sons from a stable home be so dramatically different?*” I kept asking myself.

As I got older and became more aware of the world we live in, I realised my family was merely a microcosm of humanity, because behaviour generally is complicated, multi-faceted, and very confusing. My personal interest then developed into a search for answers about human behaviour in general. We all wonder how some people can be so selfless, while the rest of us are utterly selfish.

Can we really blame life’s experiences for our individual blessings and failings, or is there much more to it than that?

What makes us behave as we do? Which factors contribute to making us the person we become? Could we have more input into our own development or do we all just “*evolve*” in our own *little bubble*?

These are difficult questions admittedly, but the medical profession's interest in helping us understand our body made me somewhat resentful of what I considered to be inertia in the "mental" health profession.

For decades, we have feasted on brilliant television programmes explaining animal behaviour, and there are constant medical programmes explaining the causes and new treatment of physical ailments. The mind and its ailments, or series on human behaviour, have been glaringly absent from our screens. Is there some kind of reluctance to discuss the subject openly? If so, why? There must be a market for it.

Enormous amounts of research have been carried out on the subject, and there are innumerable opinions floating about, so it cannot be that they have nothing to say. Unfortunately for those of us who would like to read such information, publication of this kind of research faces two major problems.

Firstly, professionals experience difficulty in producing research material that can be proven and validated to the high standards required by the scientific community. As a consequence, too much research concludes with, "*The results are inconclusive and further research is needed.*"

Secondly, the material they do publish is written in jargon language, way beyond the ordinary reader's grasp. You know what I mean—after every two words, your hand reaches for the dictionary. Eventually, frustration and boredom set in.

The outcome of all this is that ordinary, interested people are without encouragement, direction, or accessible reading material.

As a layman, I am not encumbered by restrictions. I am able to express my opinions and conclusions without fearing professional criticism. Quite the opposite, I would welcome it.

My qualifications for writing this book are *Certificates* for decades of observation and reading, *Diplomas* for wanting to understand and learn about human behaviour, and *Satisfaction* from believing I have something worth saying. I cannot claim to be right, but if others claim my conclusions are wrong, I would expect them to provide better, more believable explanations.

Perhaps the real claim that this book will be worth reading is it is a **starting point** for the interested, but uninformed, reader. It questions whether we should blame the world we live in for all our faults or if we are more capable than we think of influencing who we are and how we behave.

After all, the society we live in does its best to turn us into good children, good teenagers, good adults, good parents, and good citizens. As it goes wrong for so many of us, does that mean society failed us, or did we contribute to our own successes and failures?

You may agree with some or all of my findings, or you may not. But at least you will be exposed to ideas, theories, and opinions to consider and reject. This is a beginning.

Disagreeing with a point of view can be just as valuable as agreeing with it. It proves you are developing your own. You may well go on to search the Internet to expand your knowledge.

Human behaviour is controlled and directed by the brain. We all know how complex that is. Offering finite explanations on its workings is more than difficult. Perhaps that is why the scientific community appears to be frightened of exposing themselves to the public. Their world is closed to the rest of us by a wall of specialist terminology. It is either that, or they also think we are not interested in learning more about ourselves. If this is so, then we must accept some blame.

Their public silence could almost be considered an admission that mental illness should **not** be spoken about, or even worse, they have nothing worth saying.

The only time I hear any of their opinions on behaviour is when they are claiming in court that some criminals acted as they did because they came from a broken home, lived in a slum area, or some other negative influences. I never hear them saying that social workers, nurses, and teachers do what they do because they came from a broken home in a slum area, as many of them do!

It can't be because they think we are incapable of understanding. Why? Because if we are incapable of understanding **before** we become mentally ill, what chance would there be of understanding **after** we are ill and receiving treatment? I wish they would just come out and say what they believe, so there can be some kind of public debate on the subject. Today, the best medium would be television.

I realised my journey for answers had started when watching television programmes on animal behaviour. They seemed to be suggesting paths for me to follow, ideas worthy of investigation.

Decades later, I eventually reached the point where my searching had resolved a large number of the issues that had long baffled me. In a satisfying way, I feel closer to my brothers, even though now I am the only one still alive. It was a journey I was glad I had undertaken.

It then occurred to me that there must be many as mystified as I by the behaviour of themselves and others, who might appreciate having some readable material on the subject. After all, you won't know whether you are interested unless you can read something about it first. This is your chance.

The beauty of this book is that I am not trying to persuade you that I am a great scientist with brilliant conclusions and

ideas. I chose the title *The Origins of Human Behaviour*, not because I consider myself to be another Charles Darwin, but because that was what I set out to find. Over the years, I have had wonderful discussions (and arguments) around the dinner table with family and friends. I hope you will, too. You might move on to seek more information before making up your own mind on the various issues and hopefully develop better theories.

If you disagree—brilliant! If the scientific community dismisses my ideas—excellent, so long as their criticism is followed by better explanations. Theories cannot be dismissed as incorrect unless they are replaced by theories that are more believable. And at that point, we would finally have a public debate on human behaviour and the workings of the mind. **Success!**

I want discussions on behaviour to be informative, thought provoking, interesting, believable and available for all who express an interest in learning about it. But the process will not come about unless the public decides they will benefit from exposure to ideas on human behaviour, and want more information and material to be made available to them. Only the general public calling for a better understanding of the mind, mental illness, and related matters will prompt the professionals to adopt a more pro-active approach, along the lines taken by the medical profession.

Such a development will also promote a greater awareness and sympathy for people with mental disorders.

Although my original goal was to understand more about *human* behaviour, I soon accepted that my journey must begin by looking at other species in the animal kingdom.

We, *Homo sapiens*, are the latest members of that kingdom. If the laws of evolution are to be believed, much of what existed

before carries on into later species. Much of what we possess as a species has evolved, been tested and improved over millions of years by countless successful species. What was successful survived, and all that success was then carried forward into later species.

We are the latest recipient of the hundreds of millions of years of trial and error, chance, and accidents and, most of all, evolutionary development. Our brains are the best, our dexterity the greatest, our mental potential is unbelievable, and our behaviour is the most infuriatingly complex of all the animals on earth.

If, while reading this book, you say, “*I never thought of it that way,*” or you should feel it was not a mistake to start reading it, I shall be more than satisfied.

Part 1 looks at interesting aspects of animal behaviour and considers their origin and effectiveness (because what works for them might be working for us).

Part 2 examines interesting behavioural traits in humans and tries to ascertain whether they are the result of natural (**inherited**) factors or have been mainly developed and nurtured by life’s experiences since birth (**environmental**).

Part 3 discusses certain external issues, embraced by millions of people worldwide, which influence their thinking and behaviour.

Part 4 discusses the possible benefits for us of having a greater understanding of the **origins** of behaviour.

Enjoy the journey.

PART ONE – ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

A look at instinctive behaviour and other inherited features in the non-human animal kingdom to ascertain whether they offer any clues for a realistic insight into human behaviour

An Itsy-Bitsy Spider 1

Many years ago, I was watching a spider making its web between the ceiling and door of an outside toilet at home. I remember it so clearly. Industrious little thing it was, constructing one of those dartboard webs. So clever. Skilful. A work of art. A silky piece of architecture. Even though I was only in my early teens, I could appreciate the artistry involved, and it was not long before I was smiling as I imagined the mother spider lining up all her baby spiders on a branch to instruct them in the technique and importance of making such a web:

“If you make it properly and place it in a good location, you will catch plenty of insects and have a long and interesting life. A poorly made web will catch very little, and you will starve. Do you understand? Well, watch me once more, and then go off and practise until you get it perfect.”

That was a ridiculous idea and even I guessed it didn't happen. Then it dawned on me that my spider was not just clever and skilful, it must be brilliant! It had to be, constructing this beautifully, efficient, dartboard web without being taught how to do it. Incredible!

I asked my mother about it and she casually attributed it to

“*instinct*,” explaining that all animals have instinctive abilities that enable them to do things without being taught—things that help them to “survive in their harsh world.”

I was impressed and went to the dictionary immediately to learn a little more about “*instinct*.” I discovered such words as “*innate*” and “*inborn abilities*.” Certain animal behaviour was simply described as “*instinctive*” (unthinking).

When I watched nature programmes on TV, they regularly referred to *instinct* and *instinctive behaviour* as if everyone understood exactly what that meant:

“*Salmon travel thousands of miles to return to their river of origin to spawn. This amazing behaviour is driven by instinct.*”

“*The newly hatched turtles push their way up through the sand and automatically head for the safety of the sea. This is instinctive behaviour.*”

After mentioning the “*i*” word, the commentator would always move on as if nothing else needed to be added. *Instinct*. Ah, yes. Everyone knows what that is. No explanation needed.

I realised that others could not be as massively impressed as I was. Well, perhaps they were impressed, but not as curious about it. Certain animal behaviour may have been incredible, but it was soon obvious to me that *instinct* was being used as a convenient all-inclusive word for what was considered as merely unthinking, involuntary, automatic, knee jerk, reflex behaviour, like your leg jerking forward after a tap below the knee—an instinctive response that did not need thinking about. No big deal.

I cannot recall anyone in the nature programmes ever trying to explain what instinct was apart from “*something they are born with*.”

The dictionary definitions irritated me for a long time. Eventually, I realised that a better word for “*innate*” and “*inborn*”

was “*inherited*” (although this word was not used in any of the dictionaries I first consulted). It made sense to me. They were born with certain abilities, which had been passed on to them at birth, which they had “inherited.” So, why not say it!

One definition of “inherit” is “*to possess (a characteristic) through genetic transmission.*” To me, that seemed to apply perfectly to instinct. Human beings “inherit” diseases, but animals never “inherited” instincts, yet both are inborn and genetically transmitted.

The point I am making is that, quite early on, I felt that animal “instinct” was almost being downgraded. These majestic and magical gifts were all being dismissed with a single word. If it had been human behaviour, everyone would have been ecstatic but, because it involved insects or other animal life, it was no big deal.

As soon as I started thinking of “instinctive behaviour” as being “*inherited behaviour*” it made more sense to me. My spider had been born with the ability to construct a web that would catch food for it. No instruction or training was needed. Its tiny brain contained *at birth* all the knowledge and skill it needed to help it to survive. It was a means of assisting its survival.

This was amazing. The animal kingdom had evolved or been given (depending on your upbringing) innate, inborn, inherited, instinctive abilities (call them what you will) to help them survive. That realisation changed the way I have looked at my family, others, and myself for over sixty years. It excited me.

Then years later, I was really blown away when, in a TV nature programme, I first heard about the *Monarch* butterfly in North America. Each year, this species undertakes a **five month** migration of about three thousand miles from the Great Lakes to Mexico and back (using the same stop-over points annually),

during which they mate and produce and eventually die along the way.

Each generation on this journey lives for only four to five weeks yet, no matter at which point during the *five-month* migration a Monarch butterfly is born, it not only inherits the information it needs to continue the next phase of its journey, but it inherits all the information required to pass on details of the *whole journey* to the next generation—even though none of them would live long enough to travel through those parts of the journey.

Information passed on covers route, resting places, and specific type of leaves on which to lay the eggs—the full itinerary!

I felt that to dismiss this feat merely as “instinctive” (which happened when I first saw it on television) was criminal. At the time, I thought it was one of the wonders of the world! It amazed me that a butterfly (albeit a biggish one) has the urge and the guts to undertake the journey, inherits the knowledge of the whole route (even regular rest-over points), and later passes on the same gift of knowledge to its next generation. Yet because it was a mere insect, this feat, this outstanding achievement, was explained, justified, and dismissed in a word—*Instinct*.

I can still recall how incensed I was that I had been left hanging in the air at the end of the programme. There I was, mouth open at the wonder of everything that contributed to such a journey, with so many questions about it that I wanted answered, and it had ended. To me, the programme had only just begun! Yet a single word had answered and dismissed any potential questions about the incredible journey of the Monarch butterfly. It was like having “The End” shown in the cinema when you felt you were just getting into a good story.

It was at that point that I began to think seriously about instinct in the animal kingdom and its possible significance for humans. We belong to that kingdom. We are on the same tree of life. If the infinitesimal brains of a spider and butterfly could inherit such gifts of knowledge, where did that leave Man? Our brains are gargantuan by comparison. What gifts could our species inherit?

You will note I have been using such words as *abilities*, *knowledge*, and *gifts* as being inherited. To me, it is inconceivable that the Monarch butterfly travels long journeys *without thinking* about what it is doing, or that spiders construct and repair their webs “*in a dream-like state.*” Yet people seem to dismiss it as *unthinkingly* instinctive, as if all animals are robotic zombies.

Many people consider instinct to be an “automatic pilot” thing with no thought involved. Just do it. Instinct dictates how a particular species of bird builds an intricate hanging nest, so when it is time to construct one (without any previous instruction or experience), the bird doesn’t even have to press an instinct button. It just builds one like an automaton. “Unthinking behaviour.” Poppycock!

We are told that some female spiders are likely to eat the smaller male after mating. Whichever part of the mating procedure is considered “instinctive,” no-one will convince me that the male spider is not thinking himself silly as to how he is going to get out of there without being eaten before or after mating. If it was an unthinking, instinctive urge leading him to mate with a bigger spider-eating female, he certainly wasn’t going through an unthinking process as he worked out how to escape her clutches after the desperate deed was done. This leads me to another essential conclusion during my early journey.

A spider may have inherited the ability to build a web, but it needs a thought process and decision-making ability to determine where to build it and how to repair it. They must have active minds to help them survive on their own during their lifetime. Nature has endowed them with the gifts of ability and knowledge to help them survive. They inherit knowledge and abilities. It is the same knowledge retained in the memory bank of its parents, to be called upon and passed on as and when needed.

That was when I concluded that a more accurate description of *instinct* would be *inherited memories!*

Knowledge is not a physical entity. It is information stored in the brain that is gifted to future generations at the time of conception. We have come to call these inherited memories “*instinct*” because they resulted in a behaviour passed down in the species. A clearer definition of instinct would therefore be “*genetically transmitted knowledge that leads to behaviour common to a particular species.*”

We have been told that animals can be trained to give a conditioned response to certain stimuli. A famous example was *Pavlov* and his dogs. In his experiments, he repeatedly exposed dogs to a certain stimulus (e.g., ringing a bell) and their reward would be food. The dogs eventually became so conditioned with this treatment that when a bell rang, they began to salivate in anticipation of a reward. I remember being told about this in school. Apparently, the world was agog at this achievement in 1901. The implication was that it was an immediate, unthinking, *conditioned*, instinctive response to the bell without any input by the individual dog. I am not so sure.

If I were placed in a room with doors in it and each time a bell was rung, a beautiful, semi-clad maiden opened one of them and beckoned me invitingly, I know that, no matter how

backward I was when younger, it would not have taken me long to salivate *with anticipation* at the ringing of the bell.

Conditioned response maybe, but never in this world would it have been an “unthinking response.” I would have been rushing to the door shouting “Hallelujah! Here I come.”

I do not have the qualifications, nor would I wish, to criticise a person like *Pavlov* who, after all, received a Nobel Prize (but not for the dogs experiments), but I do feel that his research contributed to the “*unthinking, instinctive, conditioned behaviour in animals*” mentality.

Having convinced myself of the transfer of memories (knowledge) at birth, I felt it opened all possibilities for the human brain. But a closer inspection of the type of memories being gifted was necessary. Web building was distinctly different from inheriting route maps for a five-month butterfly migration or the salmon’s desperate need to cross the oceans to return to a specific river to spawn.

Instinct is rampant in the animal kingdom. I needed to learn about other types of memories in the animal kingdom that *might* tell us more about ourselves.

I kept thinking, “*If the tiny brains of insects could do so much for them, what could our minds do for us?*” My mind was doing cartwheels.