

Excerpted Comments on *Mother Nature: A history of natural selection, mothers and infants*

Advance praise for *Mother Nature*

"a superb book . . . It establishes more convincingly than any other work with which I am familiar the relevance of the study of (other) primates and of human evolution, to urgent current issues of public policy involving women, children, and the family."

—Richard Posner, Chief Judge, US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, author of *Sex and Reason*.

"a brilliant, liberating book on a profoundly important subject . . . (by) one of the best stylists now writing on any subject in science."

—E.O. Wilson, Harvard University, author of *Sociobiology, Consilience*.

"This is a deep and brilliant work, a masterful account of mother nature and the nature of motherhood, with a superb selection of photos, built on a powerful logic by someone who easily and clearly sees life both from the inside and the outside."

—Robert Trivers, author of *Social Evolution*.

"A magnificent synthesis . . . brimming with warmth, wisdom, and wit. It is not easy in a polarised academic world to keep a foot in the feminist camp and another in evolutionary psychology, nor to bridge the arts and sciences so effortlessly . . ."

—Matt Ridley, author of *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation*.

"a book to treasure and to study . . ."

—Susan Brownmiller, author of *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*.

"a stunning achievement . . . Hrdy expertly uses the comparative method to illustrate her points by contrasting biology and behavior across species and orders, and by making full use of human variation both through evolutionary and historical time and across space and cultures."

—Jane B. Lancaster, Editor of *Human Nature*.

"demonstrates once and for all the power of a Darwinian approach, when combined with an appreciation of cultural differences . . . it also faces a crucial problem for many women today—the clash between career and motherhood."

—Robert Hinde, Royal Society Research Professor, Cambridge University, author of *Individuals, Relationships and Culture*.

"a truly monumental work, as elegant as it is insightful . . . This is by no means the usual psychobabble or hodgepodge of animal behavior that other authors so often use to define us—here is a clear and telling examination of a hitherto almost unknown organism—the human female. Any woman wanting to know who she really is will find out in the pages of this tremendously important work . . ."

—Elizabeth Marshall Thomas author of *The Harmless People; The Hidden Life of Dogs*.

Reviews of *Mother Nature*

"An extraordinary body of scholarship that is as much a social and psychological history of women as child-bearers—and more—as a review of male and female biology and behavior across many species . . . Family values camps will be shocked, ardent feminists irritated, and psychoanalysts dismissive. For the open-minded, however, this is a breathtaking feat of scholarship that will have enduring value as an encyclopedic source of hard data and inspired speculation . . ."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, October 1999.

"Mother Nature should be required reading for anyone who happens to be a human being. In it, Hrdy reveals the motivations behind some of our most primal and hotly contested behavioral patterns—those concerning gender roles, mate choice, sex, reproduction, and parenting—and the ideas and institutions that have grown up around them . . . Hrdy's passion for this material is evident, and she is deeply aware of the personal stake she has here as a woman, a mother, and a professional . . . Despite the exhaustive documentation given to her conclusions . . . the book unfolds in an exceptionally lucid, readable and often humorous manner. It is a truly compelling read, highly recommended."

—Katherine Ferguson for Amazon.com.

"Hrdy's writing is graceful and clear, making even complicated issues accessible to the layperson . . . Anyone interested in . . . parenthood, reproductive options, 'the war between the sexes' or the nature versus nurture debate will enjoy this book. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy has done a remarkable job of illuminating an area normally characterized by vast amounts of heat and pitifully little light . . ."

—*The San Diego Union Tribune*, October 10, 1999.

"a feminist classic with a unique perspective that rests somewhere between the 'social constructionists, who believe that a mother's attachment to her child is learned, and the essentialists who believe females are genetically programmed to be nurturing' . . . Essential for anthropology, education, psychology, sociology and women studies collections."

—*Library Journal*, October 15, 1999, Starred Review.

"This book is a major contribution to the evolutionary biology of our species. By including some of her own intellectual and personal biography and attending to the history of ideas, Hrdy makes it also a contribution to the history and sociology of science. Anyone who thinks that working mothers and variable family arrangements are an unnatural recent novelty should read this book. Anyone interested in the causes (and consequences) of variation in women's behaviour, human sexuality or human evolution must read this book. It is superb human behavioral ecology."

—Kristen Hawkes, *Nature*, November 11, 1999.

"The skillful prose of virtuosos like Richard Dawkins and Stephen Jay Gould belies the difficulty of the art. For the most part Hrdy succeeds admirably. Her style is engaging and entertaining . . . This is not just a book for mothers but one that will challenge and stimulate anyone interested in the relationship between parents and children."

—*New York Times Book Review*, January 23, 2000.

"Beautifully and accessibly written, it is the product of a woman who before going into science, had considered becoming a novelist . . ."

—Natalie Angier, *New York Times*, February 8, 2000.

"this is a splendidly thought-provoking book which will undoubtedly establish its author as the alpha-female of evolutionary thinkers. With one great stride Blaffer Hrdy has carried the debate about parenting to a higher stage of adaptation. It should be required reading for parents, feminists and evolutionary thinkers alike."

—Daniel Britten, *The Independent* (London), November 14, 1999.

"Hrdy's magisterial survey of childbearing through the ages, "Mother Nature", sets a new standard for the graceful blending of scholarship, field research and personal experience. As meticulously documented as the book is, it never loses the human touch. It wams the heart to witness the fierce loyalty this sophisticated feminist professor of anthropology . . . bears towards her paleolithic sisters."

—Theodore Roszak, *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 27, 2000.

"Hrdy's book resides in that rare space between academic disciplines" and "enables her to combine the best of Darwinian evolutionary biology with feminist cultural theory, without falling into the political entrapments of either camp . . . magnificent . . ."

—Kathleen O'Grady, *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Canada), January 22, 2000:1-4.

"Hrdy does not look at humans in isolation, but at the wider sweep of evolutionary processes. She does not look at women in isolation, but at the co-operations and conflicts, the adjustments and compromises, that all humans must make, and at the evolutionary pressures that they bring to bear on each other . . . the range of her scholarship is both impressive and meticulous. She has emphasized a neglected area of evolutionary theorizing . . ."

—Pamela Wells, *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 17, 2000: 1-4.

"Pure pleasure to read. Buy it. Assign it. Give it to your congressman. This is a book that can make a difference."

—Elizabeth Cashdan, *Evolution and Human Behavior*, May 2000:215-16.

"a brilliantly humane theory-of everything kind of book . . . inspiring to read."

—Cath Kenneally, *Sydney Morning Herald*.

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