



# **The Evolution of Beauty: How Darwin's Forgotten Theory of Mate Choice Shapes the Animal World - and Us**

*Richard O. Prum*

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**A major reimagining of how evolutionary forces work, revealing how mating preferences—what Darwin termed "the taste for the beautiful"—create the extraordinary range of ornament in the animal world.**

In the great halls of science, dogma holds that Darwin's theory of natural selection explains every branch on the tree of life: which species thrive, which wither away to extinction, and what features each evolves. But can adaptation by natural selection really account for everything we see in nature?

Yale University ornithologist Richard Prum—reviving Darwin's own views—thinks not. Deep in tropical jungles around the world are birds with a dizzying array of appearances and mating displays: Club-winged Manakins who sing with their wings, Great Argus Pheasants who dazzle prospective mates with a four-foot-wide cone of feathers covered in golden 3D spheres, Red-capped Manakins who moonwalk. In thirty years of fieldwork, Prum has seen numerous display traits that seem disconnected from, if not outright contrary to, selection for individual survival. To explain this, he dusts off Darwin's long-neglected theory of sexual selection in which the act of choosing a mate for purely aesthetic reasons—for the mere pleasure of it—is an independent engine of evolutionary change.

Mate choice can drive ornamental traits from the constraints of adaptive evolution, allowing them to grow ever more elaborate. It also sets the stakes for sexual conflict, in which the sexual autonomy of the female evolves in response to male sexual control. Most crucially, this framework provides important insights into the evolution of human sexuality, particularly the ways in which female preferences have changed male bodies, and even maleness itself, through evolutionary time.

*The Evolution of Beauty* presents a unique scientific vision for how nature's splendor contributes to a more complete understanding of evolution and of ourselves.

## **The Evolution of Beauty: How Darwin's Forgotten Theory of Mate Choice Shapes the Animal World - and Us Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Evolution of Beauty: How Darwin's Forgotten Theory of Mate Choice Shapes the Animal World - and Us for online ebook**

## **Tony says**

THE EVOLUTION OF BEAUTY. (2017). Richard O. Prum. \*\*\*1/2.

The author is a professor of ornithology at Yale, and uses this platform to reawaken interest in Darwin's neglected work on 'aesthetic mate choice.' Of course, being an ornithologist, he gets there through his life-long study of birds and their behavior. Sure enough, he moves from birds to mammals and then (surprise) to man. He makes many compelling analogies between man's sexual behaviors and those of his beloved birds. I was particularly shocked into awareness by his chapters, "Make Way for Duck Sex," and "The Lysistrata Effect." He manages to pose many questions and to posit many answers about the similarities between avian and human behavior dealing with self image and sexual behavior. Even if you are not a big bird fan, you will likely get a great deal from his theories.

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## **Dominika says**

This book is a well-constructed and researched answer to anyone attempting to use evolutionary biology/psychology to justify their "Red Pill" philosophy. It is truly fantastic.

What this book addresses is that a lot of Darwin's theories, as well as evolutionary biology in general, is not as straightforward as we try to make it. Birds evolve rather complex mating rituals that may pose some detriment, but leads to a continuation of the species. A lot more sexual selection is due to female choice rather than sexual selection. And beauty and pleasure just happen. A lot of what is beneficial to the passing on of genetic material may not arise from the act itself, but from the context surrounding it, such as having close social bonds maintained by sexual pleasure or by encouraging a less violent society by choosing less violent mates. This is a far different narrative than the male centric model that is often cited in popular culture, and that model keeps on being refuted time and time again.

This book is funny and controversial. There is a chapter on the genital arms race of the duck, which has a penis that is ridiculous in length and evolved to deal with the labyrinthine duck vagina. We have a discussion on the female organism, which may not have much of an overt evolutionary advantage but is certainly not an afterthought. We have a discussion on the fluidity of sexuality, and a nice little aside about how we should stop trying to find biological reasons for cultural constructs. And there's so much more. I would say the first two chapters are the most boring, but the rest of the book is golden.

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## **Socraticgadfly says**

**Great until the last two chapters, then some slippage**

This book is worth five stars for two starter reasons alone.

One is the sheer depth and breadth of Prum's speculative intelligence, especially in getting back to what he rightly postulates was Darwin's original stance on sexual selection.

The second is the number of swift kicks he rightly gives Ev Psychers.

Beyond that, I think he's largely, and refreshingly, right on Darwin's take, and on how it plays out today with much more field studies not only in birds, which Darwin surely would have loved, but in other primates and ultimately in *Homo sapiens*.

That said, even iat five stars, I can quibble.

The last two chapters are speculative and the last is also somewhat politicized even beyond the intellectual judo on Ev Psychers.

First, the chapter on same-sex relationships in humans, ironically, given the rest of Prum's book, comes close to making adaptationist claims, though Prum would deny it.

Second, Prum ignores the broadness of same-sex relationships in other mammals and in birds, and acts almost as if it's *de novo* in humans, and of course he knows it's not.

Third, he doesn't ask if "gay" relationships, whether in humans, or other animals, are more common than "lesbian" ones. (It seems to be the case in humans.)

Nor does he ask if mammals', and especially humans', stumpy Y chromosome, along with womb environmental factors, doesn't contributed to gay sexuality being nonadaptive from a natural selection POV, but not so nonadaptive as to eliminate itself. (Given the reversed sex chromosomes in birds, lesbian sex studies there, especially of birds with the most decayed Y's, would be interesting indeed.)

The last chapter? I agree to a fair degree with critiques — whether about patriarchy or private property — on the rise of agriculture, etc. But, the coevolution of cultural evolution and natural selection itself is speculative enough; cultural evolution and sexual selection even more so. Plus, the pre-agricultural world wasn't all that.

All of this together? Sorry, but you lost a star.

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### **Mehrsa says**

You have to make it past the 2/3rd of the book that's about bird and duck sex to get to the part about why men have dangly penises. Not that the bird sex isn't fascinating, but obviously I'm much more curious about human sex. This book was so interesting. Aesthetic beauty as an evolutionary force. I totally buy it. I read the Red Queen and some of the adaptation arguments for gaudy bird wings seemed crazy (like it was a signaling that the bird was so healthy that he could spare the extra plumage). This book is much more convincing. The plumage is there not because it's a signal of health, but because the females like it. Read this book. Especially the penis parts

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## **Lisa Butterworth says**

I actually stopped and started this book two times before I got to the good bits. The vast majority of this book is about birds, and I like birds, but I find reading about them a bit of a yawn. But the last part of the book, where he takes all the evolutionary arguments he's been making about beauty and birds and how lady birds who like pretty man-birds to mate with, drive evolution with their preferences, and then applies these findings to human sex, that part is really great. I'm going to admit here that I often feel deeply annoyed at evolutionary psychology, so part of why I like this book so much is that Prum uses evolutionary biology, and the idea the beauty happens (it doesn't honestly signal genetic superiority, we just like beauty, and choose it for its own sake) to argue against most of the really annoying evolutionary psychology (and inevitably male-gaze-centric) arguments that I've heard. and Prum proposes some really interesting alternative theories based in far more compelling evidence. So Loved it, but you have to plow through a lot of bird stuff.

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## **Peter Tillman says**

I'm about a quarter of the way in, and I've liked his argument and some of the anecdotes. Skimming ahead, it looks like a lot of reiteration coming up, plus more bird stories. He writes well, but I just don't care that much about the mainstream view vs. Prum's revival of Darwin's female choice in mating. Likely the truth lies somewhere between the two views. 2.5 stars, maybe.

The book is coming due at the library, and I doubt I'll return to it. Caveat lector.

Here's a good critical review:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

And here's the review that led me to read it:

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/not-only...>

"Richard Prum's "The Evolution of Beauty" is a book to wrestle with. It includes plenty of well-wrought scenes—tales from the author's boyhood birdwatching days, or the story of his lab getting pilloried on Fox News for a \$385,000 study on duck genitalia. But above all it focuses on one idea: that beauty drives much of evolution. And even when the details aren't quite convincing, the argument is exhilarating."

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## **Yun says**

*The Evolution of Beauty* is utterly fascinating. It puts forth the notion that evolution is not all due to natural selection, where every mating display is an honest signal of genetic superiority. Rather, there is a separate force at work--aesthetic evolution of mate choice--which created a lot of the ornaments and behaviors we see in the animal world today.

Prum makes his arguments via interesting narratives about birds, ducks, and humans. I found it useful to look up bird displays as he talks about them so I can see and hear for myself the complex shows that they put on. Going in, I thought I would be learning about an abstract concept, so I was surprised by how much of what I'm reading applies to our lives today, including sexual coercion, females' right to make reproductive choices, and sexual conflict between the sexes.

For such a technical topic, I found the book mostly readable and digestible. The initial two chapters were a bit slow as Prum talks about the history of evolutionary science and puts forth his views. But if you can tough it out through those, then you get to the meat of it with chapter three, and it's completely mesmerizing from there on out.

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## Rossdavidh says

I am a little conflicted about this book.

Popular science books may be usefully divided into those with One Big Idea, and those with Many Small Ideas. Both are useful, but I typically judge them differently. If it's a "Many Small Ideas" book (e.g. a collection of essays), I am likely to judge it primarily on the writing style, as that is what is in common across the entire book (typically). Whereas, if it is a One Big Idea book, I am likely to judge it on the quality of that idea. Prum's writing style is, incidentally, very good.

This book's One Big Idea is, by the author's own admission, not one that originated with him. That's ok, though, because it is true to say that it has been a controversial, often neglected, and sometimes nearly suppressed idea. It is, I think, both important and contains a great deal of truth. So, you would think I would like this book, and by and large that is the case, I do like it.

However, I did get the impression at times, that Richard Prum was a little afraid to face the full implications of the idea he was writing about.

The idea in question, as far as I know first publicly raised in a serious way by Charles Darwin, is that of sexual selection as a driver for evolution. That is, the idea that evolution is not only driven by survival of the fittest, but also by survival of the most attractive. This may not seem so revolutionary, but in many ways it is just as explosive as the idea that markets price things not only owing to their relative merit, but that prices are also driven by irrational exuberance and fiscal bubbles.

Thus, for example, when looking at the extravagant plumage of the peacock, there are broadly speaking two theories:

1) the peacock that is otherwise fittest, can afford to produce the most extravagant tail feathers, so really the female is selecting for good genes for acquiring food and avoiding predators, and fancy tail feathers is just how she measures that.

2) the peahen just likes the peacock with the flashy feathers because she does, no real reason, but if she instead were to be the one peahen to pick the drab fellow who was a good father, her sons would never be able to reproduce, and thus peahens who go for impressive tail feathers get selected for because...well, no reason really. "Beauty". Not everything is about survival of the fittest. If you go for plain when the rest of your species does not, you will not have many grandkids.

Prum does a pretty efficient job of demolishing hypothesis (1), which I think it is fair to say is the more broadly supported theory. He asks, if peacocks just have big tail to show off that they can survive even with such a handicap, why don't they gnaw one leg off? That would be an even more impressive display of handicapping, if you manage to continue to survive, but we don't see that in nature, and if we did peahens would not respond favorably to it. There are all kinds of things that could be handicaps, and therefore evidence of how great you are to survive with such a handicap: pulling your plumage out, injuring yourself, etc. etc. But, we don't see just any kind of handicaps working, it has to be the specific kind of handicap that

females in that species like (in the case of peafowl, showy tail feathers).

The problem with this is that, as with classical economics wanting to make everything about people optimizing for money, some evolutionary scientists want everything to be about natural selection (by survival of the fittest). Once you introduce a truly independent, second driver, you go from a linear system to a non-linear one, and you can get crazy results. Just as you can get economies stuck in sub-optimal states, or cycling through debt-fueled booms and busts, you could get species stuck in sub-optimal states, or cycling through long-term cycles of fashion in appearance and even courtship behavior, that don't particularly have anything to do with fitness.

After having established that Darwin's more complex ideas on evolution (not shared by Wallace, by the way) were correct, though, Prum shies away from the harsher possibilities. For example, when we look at the impact of people buying homes, not to live in, but as something to sell again later, it is clear that it can drive your economy into some bad places. There is no particular reason (that Prum explains, anyway) why sexual selection could not have the same issues for a species.

But, and here is my main issue with this book, Prum has conflated in his mind the idea that females of many species exercise choice, and the idea that human females should have choices in mate choice. He never says it so plainly, but you can get a clear sense in his writing that he just likes sexual selection better than conventionally understood natural selection, because it's about female choice and not about predation. I got the strong impression that he would have a visceral negative response to the idea that this could ever result in anything bad happening to the species, or that anything good could result for those species where females do not have as much choice.

It seems a fairly good example of the problem with having academia that is so overwhelmingly from one part of the political spectrum. Just as Victorian biologists (aside from Darwin) choked on the idea that sex and female mate choice could be an important driver of evolution, so Prum appears to be choking on the idea that those species where female mate choice is the main driver of evolution, could ever have anything bad result from that.

It doesn't have to be this way, not least because the way that human females choose their mates is not much like peahens; they often take into account aspects of the fellow's brain, such as personality and responsibility and whether he can hold down a good job. They don't all go for the fellow with the nice tail feathers (though of course some do). So, if mate choice as a driver of evolution is problematic for species fitness in, say, the Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock (a real bird species name, btw), that does not mean that female freedom of choice is not to be desired in humans. Because, while there are a lot of interesting parallels between birds and humans, there are also some nontrivial differences.

More fundamentally, whether or not an idea is comforting or reassuring is not a proper factor in influencing whether we explore the possibility that it is true. Prum has obviously done a lot of good work in demonstrating that evolution, and mate choice, is not just about fitness, traditionally defined. The book is well written, with many beautiful pictures and drawings, and more than a few fascinating discussions of different species courtship and mating habits (the chapter on ducks was equally amusing and disturbing, for example). It gave me a lot to think about, and for that reason alone it is worth reading. Even if I have the sneaking suspicion that Richard Prum's opponents are not the only ones that are uncomfortable with the possible consequences of his ideas.

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## Alexander says

It's often forgotten that Darwin was not, strictly speaking, the bloke who discovered evolution. What he did discover was arguably far more important: the *mechanism* through which evolution takes place - natural selection. It's natural selection which answers the 'how' of evolution, the means by which life 'descends with modification'. Or at least, that's the standard story generally told about Darwin's place in the evolutionary pantheon. What's even further forgotten in this already simplified tale is that Darwin didn't postulate just one, but in fact *two* mechanisms of evolution, the second being the selective pressure of mate choice, or rather, sexual selection. Not just survival, but the distinct ability to find and impress a mate stand guard at the doorway of evolutionary success. Natural selection and sexual selection, the twin pillars of evolutionary biology, the dual principles underlying the evolution of all life on Earth.

Right? Well, depends on who you ask. Even from the get-go, the independent footing of sexual selection was never easily admitted, with Darwin's famous contemporary, Alfred Russel Wallace, dismissing sexual selection as a mere offshoot of the more primary mechanism of natural selection. Not only was the idea of animals making aesthetic choices - choices on the basis of beauty alone - deemed absurd, but granting that such choices had the power of shaping the biosphere was simply beyond the pale (especially given that, for the most part, these choices were made by - shock horror - females!). Such was the ferocity of these critiques that ever since, sexual selection has long lived in the half-light of natural selection, with mate choice largely understood to be, at best, a matter of selecting for the 'fittest' partner (with beauty being nothing other than a cipher or sign-post for fitness).

Against such widely held 'sign-post' theories of sexual selection however, stands Richard Prum's *The Evolution of Beauty*, which aims to do nothing less than reinstate the rank of sexual selection to its original place as a fully-fledged mechanism of evolution in its own right. More than just an academic reminder to 'get Darwin right' though, Prum, a Yale ornithologist, marshals evidence from all across the avian world - from the nests of Bowerbirds to the sexual anatomy of Ducks, the tail feathers of the Great Argus to the 'dances' of Manakin birds - to establish once and for all the irreducible role of beauty as a driver of evolution. So much so in fact, that, contrary to 'adaptationist' approaches in which evolution can only ever be steered by increasing chances of survival, sexual selection can and in fact has, worked *against* natural selection, making animals *less* fit, or rather less-than-optimal when it comes to survival.

Such are the stakes involved here, which, more than just being another pleasing tale of the evolution of 'this' or 'that', aim to rebound upon our very understanding of what evolution really is, and how, exactly, it really works. While I've skipped over a great deal of the book's nitty gritty, trust me when I say that Prum is a storyteller of almost magical ability, weaving personal anecdote with the scientific cutting-edge, a love of birds with a love of science, all of which make for a read as gorgeously written as it is intellectually mind-opening. While some have quibbled with Prum's disciplinary polemics and (liberal) politics, both pinned fairly prominently throughout the book, in truth, I have nothing but admiration for Prum's resolute affirmation of - wait for it - the feminist implications of his research (*in nuce*: sexual selection means that female choice matters: female autonomy literally shapes life), along with the 'post-human aesthetic philosophy' upon which he calls to be incipit in its wake. A marvellous, paradigm altering book.

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## Ken-ichi says

This book's title \*and\* subtitle are not enticing enough. It should simply be called "Sextastic Sexiness"

Sexplains Everything (Not Just Sex)." Not only would it sum up the main point of the book, but it also explains why it's as much a page-turner as it is a head-scratcher, and not (just) a confounding recap of whenever you first learned about evolution by natural selection.

Speaking of recap, a quick recap: most of the features we see in living things today we try to explain via natural selection, e.g. if a bunch of animals have big noses, it's probably because big noses allowed the ancestors of that bunch of animals to have more kids than their peers who had smaller noses. Maybe big noses let them find food more efficiently, and the small noses starved to death before they could have many kids. This was the key insight of a dude named Charles Darwin. It revolutionized all of biology, and today we generally call this kind of thinking Darwinism.

BUT, Darwin had another great idea to explain why organisms change over the generations and why we see so much diversity today. If animals have sex, and can choose who they have sex with, their own preferences could drive change. Maybe big noses don't help with finding food at all, but ladies love them, so guys with big noses have more sex with more partners and have more kids, while the poor small noses get bred out of existence.

It sounds kind of simple, but one of Prum's main arguments in this book is that it is anything but simple, and anything but accepted in evolutionary biology, and he goes so far as to suggest that it has affected everything from feminism to human penis size to art. I'm guessing at least one of those things is of interest to almost every human, and thus I suggest that you will probably find this book as interesting as I did.

I, of course, had some problems, because problems are just the kinds of things I have.

- 1) Way too obsessed with Darwin. Chuck was a great guy, don't get me wrong, but Prum's repeated insistence that we be "authentically Darwinian" began to sound like idolization after a while. Just because Darwin thought something was true doesn't prove it true. Experimentation proves things are true. Usually. I understand the desire to reclaim the meaning of the word "Darwinian," but I think it was a bit overplayed
- 2) Not everyone has sex. This book convinced me of the importance of mate choice... in organisms that mate and can perceive and choose mates, which kind of ignores all plants, fungi, bacteria, asexual animals, etc., so is mate choice really that fundamental a part of evolution? Adaptation doesn't explain everything, as Prum argues again and again here, and I was actually on board with that before even starting (since reading Gould and Lewontin's *Spandrels of San Marco* in college), but I also agree with Daniel Dennett that adaption is probably the strongest and most common evolutionary force, and it's hard to overlook the fact that mate choice doesn't seem possible for the vast majority of the Tree of Life. That said, plants and fungi \*do\* mate, and even some bacteria and archaea engage in lateral gene transfer. If Prum could have shown that some of these organisms have preferences and that those preferences seem arbitrary that would have been amazing.
- 3) Why is mate choice a better null model than adaptation? Totally agree that a null model should be falsifiable, but wouldn't the best null model always be that nothing special is happening and a trait arose by chance, e.g. there used to be folks with small noses but it just so happened almost all of them got killed in an avalanche?
- 4) Human stuff: this is where Prum gets super speculative. It's fascinating and a great call to action for future research, but I feel like evolutionary theories about anything human are always hampered by the fact that we only have one species of human to look at and the fossil record can only tell us so much. It's not like manakins and bowerbirds where we have dozens to compare and make trees with. Even if you expand your thinking to the great apes as Prum does, you only get four more data points. This kind of makes arguments

like the one about testicle size decreasing in the human lineage because of decreased need for sperm competition ring a bit hollow. I mean, maybe? Comparing testicle size and mating behavior among the other great apes is interesting but... there are so few of them. If there were 50 great apes, it would be a stronger argument.

5) Liberal bias. I suspect I'm about as politically liberal as Prum is, but a lot of the stuff about feminism, art, and homosexuality had my too-good-to-be-true alarms going off. The chapter about duck sex was dark, super dark, like rape as a species-defining act dark, and I feel like Prum eschewed some of the maladaptive potential of toxic masculinity in humans in an effort to look on the bright side in the absence of the kind of great data he and his colleagues collected about ducks. But who knows, maybe future research will support him. I hope it does.

P.S. Did I mention there are a lot of awesome facts about birds in here? I didn't? There are. If you like facts and you like birds, you will like this book. If you like ducks and want to continue liking ducks, though, maybe give it a pass.

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### **Carl Zimmer says**

Over the years, I've interviewed Prum several times for various articles about birds--from the way some birds can sing with their wing feathers to the baroque sexual anatomy of ducks. In those interviews, the conversation would sometimes take us into short digressions about his big ideas about beauty. Finally, when Prum published this book, I could take them in as one long--and fascinating--argument. Here's the blurb I gave it:

"Life isn't just a dreary slog of survival. It brims with exuberance--from extravagant plumage to strange courtship rituals. In *The Evolution of Beauty*, Richard Prum takes into this universe of delights to discover a fascinating idea: that beauty is central to the history of life."

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### **Anthony Matijas says**

Prum clearly has a grudge against the field of evolutionary biology and its focus on Darwin's evolutionary principle of Survival of the Fittest at the expense of Darwin's lesser appreciated evolutionary principle of sexual selection. His arguments seem cogent, his evidence sound, but this a book written for the laymen, and as somebody who has only ever read one book on evolutionary biology (this one) it's hard for me to evaluate his argument without a better background in the field.

That said, Prum is far more assertive in his critique of his colleagues than he is in putting forward his own theories. When he's speculating, he says so, when evidence is lacking to support his claims, he calls for more research. In other words he acts like a scientist.

To the non-scientist, there is something very attractive in his idea that subjective mate choice is a far more significant driver of evolution than it is given credit for. From the peculiar mating rituals of the bird species he derives his own evolutionary expertise, he crafts a model for evolution that allows for competing drivers of evolutionary change. From strange world of duck sex, he posits an evolutionary battle of the sexes where male coercion must contend with female defensive strategies, and he demonstrates that the females are not

always losing; that female agency and mate selection can have a profound impact not only upon how a species mates, but what kind of creatures will develop; how the behaviours of males can become less violent and coercive when females develop the capacity to choose with whom they mate.

The social implications of his theory (which is really Darwin's theory, he'd be the first to admit), go beyond a genuinely objective feminist revision of evolution. The ideas of Social Darwinists and evolutionary psychologists who always seem to desire to reduce humanity to its basest urges and never identify with our highest virtues would have little to say if they proceeded from intellectually bankrupt assumptions.

There is also something poetic in Prum's view of aesthetic evolution. The idea that not only are humans not the only creatures to find beauty in one another, that in fact it is life's generalized appreciation for beauty which allows beauty to perpetuate and differentiate, and for life to multiply in both number and variety, is aesthetically pleasing in its own way.

tldr: The book presents interesting ideas and is filled with intriguing facts about how animals all over this blue earth get together and make babies. It may be difficult to judge the veracity of his ideas to the laymen, but that is not a fault in the book, rather it's just a motivation to read more.

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### **Gustavo says**

Adorei o livro. A essência do livro é o argumento de que seleção sexual não é necessariamente diretamente relacionada à seleção natural, ocorrendo simplesmente porque animais gostam de coisas bonitas e preferem parceiros que representem seu conceito de beleza, não necessariamente porque essa beleza representa um alto fitness biológico.

Os primeiros capítulos são focados em aves, já que o autor é um ornitólogo. Ele usa vários exemplos pra reviver as hipóteses de Darwin sobre seleção sexual. Ele então introduz suas hipóteses sobre seleção sexual na evolução humana, questionando várias hipóteses vigentes sobre evolução do comportamento sexual humano, como homossexualidade, orgasmo feminino, formato do pênis humano, agressividade e estética de ambos os sexos. Gostei MUITO dessas hipóteses, que são contrapontos às vezes até mais persuasivos que boa parte das hipóteses mais conhecidas dessa área.

Livro excelente e recomendado a qualquer um que goste de estudar evolução, especialmente biólogos em formação.

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### **Atila Iamarino says**

Um livro um tanto controverso perto de outros que costumo ler. Prum trabalhou com preferência sexual em aves e trás uma perspectiva bem diferente para o tema. Primeiro por sugerir algo que acho bem razoável, que a hipótese nula em seleção sexual deveria ser assumir que as fêmeas preferem algo simplesmente por preferirem, sem nenhum julgamento além do estético. E que deveríamos provar quando ela está selecionando genes mais saudáveis ao fazer isso. Ao invés do contrário, que muitos fazem hoje, de assumir que qualquer escolha estética envolve bons genes por trás, a não ser que provemos o contrário.

Segundo Prum, Darwin propôs que a seleção sexual seria diferente da seleção natural, por depender bem mais de critérios estéticos por parte das fêmeas. E Wallace e outros teriam questionado como fêmeas poderiam ter algum critério (e liberdade) de escolha. E em pouco tempo o campo da evolução assumiu essa

equivalência entre seleção natural e seleção sexual, considerando que qualquer escolha de uma característica envolve escolher genes mais saudáveis por trás, o que seria seleção natural pura.

Compro muito essa ideia de que ainda temos um olhar muito finalista para seleção sexual, o que o Fischer já tinha questionado há bastante tempo e foi meio que deixado de lado por bastante gente. Fico um pouco reticente com as próximas ideias que ele coloca no livro em seguida, propondo que a consequência da seleção estética pelas fêmeas de aves é dar mais controle reprodutivo e sujeitá-las menos à estupro. Para depois propor que o mesmo pode ter acontecido em humanos, que seleção sexual poderia ter ajudado na nossa domesticação, reduzindo tamanho de presas, diferença de tamanho entre os sexos e outras características que geram mais opressão reprodutiva das fêmeas. São ideias interessantes, mas que até agora nunca tinha lido, para as quais gostaria muito de ler contrapontos.

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### **Lindsey says**

Animal behavior, sexual evolution, and feminism. "This book has taken the concept of beauty from the humanities and applied it to the sciences by defining beauty as the result of a coevolutionary dance between desire and display." In the concluding chapter of his book, this sentence beautifully sums up the educational journey Richard O. Prum has just taken the reader on. Animal behavior/behavioral evolution is my absolute favorite area of study, one which I have had a minuscule access to since graduating college. This book (and the renowned scientist who authors it) draws incredible connections using scientific studies between current ideas of animal (and human) behavior, the origins of these ideas, and where (due to largely human bias) they quite possibly have been going wrong. He uses both his own studies and those of well-established/respected peers to take another look at Darwin's second idea, an idea as Prum coins it "aesthetic beauty." Beauty for the sake of beauty or, more scientifically, beauty which serves not to benefit genetics and ability of a species to survive/reproduce, but because Beauty Happens and is selected for (often by the female of the species) not necessarily because it conveys anything important but because it tagged along with other indicative traits and ended up being favored by the choosing sex (again, often females). Prum doesn't simply stop there, but goes on to suggest that Beauty Happens often because of inherent female sexual autonomy and links this to human concepts of feminism and our own ideas of sexual autonomy as the human species. I can't remember the last time I was so thrilled by an academic texts. I was genuinely excited by this book with every turn of the page and highly recommend to lovers of behavioral science, feminism, and anyone who just wants to know why daddy duck really abandons mommy after she lays her eggs.

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