



The Ant and the Peacock: Altruism and Sexual Selection from Darwin to Today

By Helena Cronin

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The "ant" and the "peacock" stand for two puzzles in Darwinism--altruism and sexual selection. How can natural selection favor those, such as the worker ant, that renounce tooth and claw in favor of the public-spirited ways of the commune? And how can "peacocks"--flamboyant, ornamental and apparently useless--be tolerated by the grimly economical Darwinian reaper? Helena Cronin has a deep understanding of today's answers to these riddles and their roots in the nineteenth century; the analysis is new and exciting and the explanations lucid and compelling.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1311668 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Cambridge University Press
- Published on: 1993-09-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.03" h x 1.14" w x 6.26" l, 1.66 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 508 pages

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Review

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"The Ant and the Peacock is a beautiful book, fascinating to scientists and historians alike, and elegantly written. I had forgotten what a pleasure it is to find an academically serious and important book that is genuinely gripping, so that you feel compelled to go on reading as if it were a good novel." Richard Dawkins

"In her racy and provocative way, Dr. Cronin tells a story that sums up the essence of neo-Darwinism....Part detective story and part philosophical enquiry, The Ant and the Peacock offers a paradox in every paragraph." J.G. Ballard, Weekend Telegraph

"This is a book about the evolution of beauty, goodness and intelligence, three things that especially puzzled Charles Darwin. It is part history, part science-reporting, part philosophy, and though it is footnoted like an academic book it reads much too well to be left to the professionals. Nobody with an interest in how the human mind has come to work the way it does can fail to be gripped by it." The Economist

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"Cronin's book is a mixture of careful, perceptive history and enthusiastic advocacy....she succeeds in keeping the past and present separate when she needs to and in illuminating past controversies by introducing current thoughts on the subject. In her exposition, the light of understanding shines in both directions." David L. Hull, Nature

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