**DOGS, DINGOES, AND FRIENDLINESS**

Hare and Woods spend much of their book talking about their dog, Oreo, who has, in Hare’s words, his own type of “genius,” reading Hare’s hand-gestures, and – quite possibly – his mind. Throughout *Survival of the Friendliest*, we learn that Hare is so fond of his dog because he truly loves him, and that he sees Oreo as a member of his family. This is a characteristic of someone who has a pretty low SDO, or Social Dominance Orientation – a measure of belief in group hierarchy.

What does it mean to be egalitarian? To believe that all people are equal? To believe that all beings are equal? After all, we do share a common ancestor with our canine best friends, though they are not our first cousins. It turns out that those who believe that dogs don’t have the capacity to feel are also more likely to dehumanize other groups of people. Hare shows us the intelligence of his dog, and touches on how semi-wild dingoes in the Australian Outback care for their human counterparts. Why are dogs and dingoes able to connect with us on such a level? Why is dehumanization so rampant in our human family?

Hare guides us through the complicated evolution of our brain, explaining how certain regions, known as the theory of mind network, are associated with our capacity to be... friendly. What is friendliness? For one, animals that are friendlier have decreased levels of hormones associated with fear and aggression (cortisol, testosterone). However, before we run down the path of explaining everything with neurochemistry, Hare points out that environmental factors and incentives play a huge role in how friendly we are.

Whether we are working on a group project at school, peacefully protesting, or scavenging for food scraps, we – not just humans, but beings – have the capacity to achieve our highest potential by working together.

**DOMESTICATING WOLVES, FOXES, AND OURSELVES**

Many of us have been told that ‘humans domesticated wolves, which we then bred into dogs.’ Hare corrects this misconception by delving into *self-domestication theory*. This theory poses that evolution favored domestication for certain species, and that domestication happened gradually over many generations.

Wolves were, and are, wild animals. Self-domestication theory suggests that while wolves were wild, they probably scavenged our ancestors’ camps for bones, food scraps, and... poop. The friendlier wolves could stick around, as they didn’t bother us. Wolves that were too fearful were too afraid of us to come near. Those who were too aggressive were run off by *Homo sapiens* that didn’t want to deal with pests. Over the course of hundreds of generations, Hare argues, genes that are associated with fear (cortisol) and aggression (testosterone) were less expressed in populations that became more domesticated over time, while genes associated with increased levels of serotonin, making individuals more friendly, were passed on to future generations.

Genes that led to domestication, however, did not simply turn up the friendliness crank – they also had effects on physiology and morphology. Foxes that were selected to breed based only on friendliness towards humans by Dmitri Belyaev were indeed friendlier. However, they also underwent many physical changes, getting floppier ears, changed coloration, and even some changes in skull shape. This is known...
as domestication syndrome.

Of course, we know that wolves underwent domestication syndrome so drastically that they became a different thing entirely: a dog. One of the most fascinating parts of Survival of the Friendliest is when Hare suggests that humans self-domesticated gradually up until about 50,000 years ago, the moment in human history at which we start seeing serious signs of technological advancement. Self-domestication theory predicts that we will see both selection for “friendliness” and changes in our morphology, physiology, and cognition resembling the domestication syndrome seen in other animals. Shockingly, the fossil record supports the self-domestication hypothesis. A study of over one thousand human skulls ranging from over 200,000 years ago to 50,000 years ago showed that our skulls significantly changed over this time period. The average male face length decreased by 10 percent and brow ridge projection decreased by 40 percent. It has been shown that more access to testosterone during puberty increases brow ridge projection and face length: testosterone is also associated with aggression! Additionally, brain size decreased over this time period, which is associated with an increased availability of serotonin, a hormone associated with friendliness. So, Hare elegantly illustrates how both the friendliness (decreased aggression) and physiology boxes have been checked for human self-domestication.

**BONOBOS V. CHIMPS**

Another consistent discussion throughout the book is the fascinating contrast between chimpanzees and bonobos, to whom we are equally related. Bonobos are generally known as friendly creatures. They are easy-going, less perturbed by their peers and much more willing to share with strangers. Chimps, on the other hand, are much more aggressive and much less friendly. In controlled experiments where apes were given a chance to collaborate in order to earn a food prize, chimps often ended up fighting over the food, often at the expense of getting any food at all. Bonobos were much more collaborative, even sharing when they did not necessarily need to in order to complete the task.

The contrast between chimps and bonobos is instructive because it can teach us about ourselves. We share a common ancestor with both bonobos and chimps, and thus have qualities in ourselves reminiscent of both species’ behavior. At our best, we are able to align incentives and collaborate with each other. A famous scene from the Old Testament is Abraham welcoming a stranger into his tent. While we have the ‘bonobo’ side of us, we also have a tendency to be hostile towards one another, and display chimp-like behavior...

**OUR DARK SIDE**

Though it would be nice, we can’t just “turn on” a friendly gene like we sort of did in foxes - there are thousands upon thousands of genes that will contribute to different aspects of the loaded term “friendliness.” For example, female bonobos are extremely aggressive towards males that seem to threaten their children. Mice and other animals have been shown to be even more aggressive when “friendlier” if they feel threatened. This is explained by several studies that link an increased availability of oxytocin to increased aggression when threatened. So, in a world where we crank up genes associated with certain aspects of friendliness, we might also strengthen aspects of our darker side – leading us to dehumanize our fellow humans.

We have consistently proven our ability to dehumanize and “other” people by dividing ourselves into in-groups and out-groups, like chimps do with their clans. We are most hostile towards others when there is a perceived threat or understanding of wrongdoing. Hare and Woods even cite a Nazi general who touted national leaders’ ability to convince populations that certain groups have harmed them in order to rally a nation behind dehumanizing another group. We have seen this time and time again with too many genocides. To overcome our dark side, Hare argues, we will need to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us.
CLOSE CONTACT & EYE CONTACT

Closely interacting with a diversity of people is the best way to mitigate our potential for dehumanization, whether it is being in the same classroom as someone, sitting in the same coffee shop, or passing by the same person over and over again in your neighborhood. White Americans who had black neighbors were far less likely to dehumanize black Americans, and white college students who were randomly assigned roommates of color were more open to dating – and more often dated – non-white partners.

We need to see the humanity in others in order to overcome our dark side, and Hare suggests that the whites of our eyes – our sclerae – could be that humanity. Eyes are very powerful, whether they are watchful, empathetic, or longing. They have a way of communicating intention, allow us to identify other fellow humans, and probably helped us survive. When a baby looks into the eyes of its mother, the mother feels a release of oxytocin. When goodwill payment jars have a note with watchful eyes, people are more likely to pay up than when there are no eyes. We are so fine-tuned to recognize eyes that we can almost subconsciously sense when someone is looking at us in our peripheral vision. Our eyes are – at least now – unique to us. Note that no other animal currently on earth has white sclerae... it is debated whether other hominins had white sclerae in the past.

Eye contact, which is hard to come by these days, will help us see the humanity in others. Close contact with people who look different or act differently will help us see the similarities we have. When we look into the eyes of our neighbors, we are better positioned to work together.