Book explores the link between evolution and criminal behavior

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Dr Jason Roach of the University of Huddersfield, along with co-author Professor Ken Pease, has published a new book addressing the controversial issue of employing evolutionary theory to analyse criminal behaviour. UK criminologists have so far shied away from this approach for fear of being linked to less credible theories such as eugenics. Dr Roach, writing alongside one of the world's most respected criminologists, hopes to readdress this balance and encourage new researchers to consider the insights evolutionary theory has to offer.

Child homicide is one example of a crime which can often be comprehended more easily if evolution is introduced into the analysis, according to Dr Roach. He explains that such crimes might be better understood when considering that an evolutionary instinct could mean that some men feel little need to invest any parental responsibility in children who are not biologically theirs – as in the tragic case of baby Peter Connolly.

An understanding of the evolutionary process – who we are as a species and where we have evolved from – can also explain how and why legal systems have developed, as a means of regulating competition between individuals. Dr Roach has also explored empathy and altruism – unique to human beings – and how they function as protective factors to mitigate anti-social behaviour.

"The default position is one of empathy, so those that do engage in anti-social behaviour should perhaps be nudged towards being more

empathic, rather than just simply punished," argues Dr Roach, who is Reader in Crime and Policing at the University of Huddersfield.

His new book, co-authored with Professor Pease, is entitled Evolution and Crime. It argues that although the received scientific wisdom is that human physique and behaviour have been shaped by the pressures of natural selection, the topic of crime is rarely touched on in textbooks on evolution and the topic of evolution is ever rarer in criminology textbooks.

There could be practical applications to his work on evolution and crime, he added. For example, most crime was committed by males aged 16-24, more likely to take risks because they feel they have nothing to lose.

"If you look at our society it is older men that wield all the power. Rich older men also attract young females, which you might say gives them a distinct advantage over their younger counterparts," said Dr Roach.

"Most young men who commit crime eventually desist by their late twenties, mainly because they 'grow up'. So we need to speed that process up and give them a sense of hope that their time will come and stop them taking all these risks."

Provided by University of Huddersfield