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RAYMOND CORBEY

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NEGOTIATING THE
APE-HUMAN BOUNDARY

Between 1650 and 1780, about 650 mostly young men were convicted of bestiality and executed in Sweden, together with hundreds of cows, mares, and other animals (Liliequist 1990). What today would be regarded as relatively harmless experiments with youthful sexuality in the context of a rural adolescent subculture was in those days perceived as a capital offense: a sin against the natural, sacred order of God's creation, a demonic transgression of the sacrosanct human-animal boundary. When Carolus Linnaeus, the eighteenth-century Swedish naturalist, classified humans together with apes in the same anatomical order, that of the Anthropomorpha or Primates, and included a nonhuman primate in the genus *Homo*, he did something similar. Other naturalists took offense at the unprecedented rapprochement of human and beast in the various editions of *Systema naturae*, even though Linnaeus repeatedly stressed that, notwithstanding all morphological similarities, their invisible, reasonable soul put humans high above animals.

Apes are the most prominent inhabitants of the borderland between human and beast in Western imagination. They are the animals perceived to be closest to humans. In ancient times it was because of their general human-like appearance; since the seventeenth century it was because of specific anatomical similarities to humans; in the eighteenth century, as well as in recent decades, it has been because of their presumed linguistic capacities (Wokler 1995). Since the nineteenth century, it has been because of evolutionary reasons. Recently discovered biochemical similarities, as well as the understanding that nonhuman primates are also tool-makers and capable of deceiving others, have strengthened the perception of affinity (e.g., Corbey 1996).

This chapter explores some episodes of the complex and fascinating struggle

concerning the status of human and nonhuman primates that has taken place since Linnaeus, in various sciences as well as in Western cultural imagination in general, thus providing some historical and intellectual background to recent discussions on the moral status of the great apes (Cavelieri and Singer 1994). The history of scientific approaches to primates since the eighteenth century is characterized by an enormous increase in empirical knowledge pertaining to their systematics, evolution, genetics, ecology, behavior, and cognition. But at the same time it is, as we shall see, a permanent struggle with the most significant, most heavily tabooed dividing line within nature; an enduring activity of negotiating—drawing, denying, policing, bridging, displacing—the metaphysical, religious, and moral boundary between humans and their closest relatives in nature. Indeed, an alternation of humanizing and bestializing moves with respect to both apes and humans.

THE APE'S ESSENCE

In the mid-eighteenth century, Linnaeus was the first to rank humans emphatically with other primates in the many editions of his authoritative *Systema naturae*. The reactions provoked by that act reveal the preoccupation, and its basis, of most of his contemporaries with human distinctiveness and dignity. Johan Georg Gmelin from Petersburg, for one, immediately challenged the inclusion of human among the Anthropomorpha, pointing to Genesis 1:26ff: Humans are *imago Dei*, the only living being created in the image of God (Gmelin 1746/1976). Gmelin, Wallerius, Klein, Haller, and Pennant all disagreed with Linnaeus. In his *Histoire Naturelle de l'Homme*, Buffon in Paris pointed to the divine breath that penetrates the human body and, following Descartes, conceived of humans as *H. duplex*: consisting of a body that is similar to that of the brute apes but also consisting of mind, which is a unique feature, connected with the faculty of speech (Leclerc de Buffon 1749). To confuse a human with a beast, one must be as poorly enlightened as a beast, he sneered, probably also against Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among others, who saw anthropoid apes as some sort of natural man, as humans in their “natural state,” in principle capable of speech (Rousseau 1755).

Blumenbach in Göttingen, Germany, then split the order of the Primates established by Linnaeus into two, getting rid of the uncomfortable closeness of human and ape. Humans belonged in the separate biological order of two-handed *Bimanus*, not in that of the four-handed *Quadrumana*, he claimed (Blumenbach 1776). This had to do with a new approach to classification, taking not only morphology but also functions, corresponding to the Creator's intentions, into account: Our grasping hands and upright gait set humans apart; we were designed to stand and walk upright. The preoccupation with human uniqueness was a guid-

ing principle of Blumenbach's natural history of humans, which, as he wrote in a letter to Haller in 1775, set out "to defend the rights of mankind and to contest the ridiculous association with the true ape" (Dougherty 1984, 64–66).

Despite this criticism, Linnaeus's natural history was, if anything, Christian science; a *scientia divina*. Linnaeus was an orthodox Lutheran and almost certainly agreed when Haller in 1746, in a review of Linnaeus's *Fauna Suecica*, called him a second Adam naming the animals, even though that was meant sarcastically (von Haller 1787/1971). Linnaeus saw nature as God's creation, a strictly ordered, immensely diverse hierarchy or scale of beings, with humans on top, and it was his sacred mission, he believed, to reconstruct and codify that order.

In the Christian cosmology that was constitutive for much of eighteenth-century natural history, humans were seen as *imago Dei*, the only creature created in God's own image: As *H. dominator*, it is immediately added in Genesis 1:28, humans have dominion over the rest of nature, including animals and apes. The then-predominant view of apes was still close to the medieval icon of *simia figura diaboli*—the hideous, frivolous monkey as the image of the devil. The Christian view of the world, taking the ontologies of Plato and Aristotle into account, explains structure and change in nature in terms of eternal, immutable essences, called *souls* in the case of living beings. Only humans have rational souls, and that constitutes their essence (*essentia*) and "essential" difference from apes. The influence of this Christian metaphysics of apes on eighteenth-century natural history converged with that of seventeenth-century rationalist, Cartesian philosophy, which held humans to be the only being possessing reason, thus keeping up the human–animal boundary.

There was yet another source of unfavorable views of animals in general and nonhuman primates in particular, in addition to Judeo-Christian cosmology, Greek ontology, and modern rationalism. Modern European citizens looked on themselves as "civilized" persons and acted as such, behaving, dressing, eating, defecating, making love, and so on, in a proper, "civilized" manner. In this context, animals and their "uncontrolled," "beastly" behavior provided models of how not to behave and were associated by citizens with their own "beastly" bodies and bodily functions, which a "civilized" person was to keep under control. Europeans thus articulated their own identity in terms of the exemplary otherness of uncivilized animals: We are not like them. Monkeys especially, because of their ambiguous, uncanny similarity to humans, provided a prominent model of undesirable otherness in European culture (see Corbey 1994).

These various backgrounds converged, as they still do today, to a strictly drawn theoretical, moral, and practical human–animal boundary. Given these backgrounds, we begin to understand why eighteenth-century Europeans reacted so

severely to rural youngsters playing sexual games with cattle or even to natural historians associating humans closely with other primates.

APE ANCESTRY

The replacement of the idea of eternally fixed essences of species by that of transmutation by random variation and selective retention implied that humans descended from apelike ancestors. Indeed, as in the preceding centuries the great apes were gradually discovered and ultimately distinguished from one another in the context of worldwide trade and the expansion of European nation states, so from the mid-nineteenth century onward a long series of early hominids were discovered: Neanderthals in Europe and *H. erectus* in Indonesia, followed by several species of australopithecines and *H. habilis* in Africa, among others. How did these discoveries affect how Europeans saw themselves, apes, and the rest of nature?

Again, human and ape were brought in painfully close association, closer even than in Linnaeus's time, because of a postulated genealogical link. Just as in the case of Linnaeus, Charles Darwin himself was the first to worry about this new challenge to traditional European cosmology, threatening to turn it upside down. A remark jotted in his notebooks in 1838, "The Devil under form of baboon is our Grandfather" (Barrett and Gautrey 1987, 128), reminds of the medieval *simia figura diaboli* icon, and in a letter to Joseph Hooker, Darwin referred to the evolutionist view of nature as that of "a Devil's Chaplain" (Desmond and Moore 1992, 449). His concern for human dignity and fear for his own reputation as a God-fearing and law-abiding citizen made him postpone dealing explicitly with human descent until 1871, when he published *The Descent of Man*.

How intensely Darwin wrestled with the problem of human's place in nature, not just biologically but also in a metaphysical and moral sense, is evident from many ambiguous as well as ambivalent passages in that book. "Man may be excused," he wrote at the end, "from feeling some pride at having risen . . . to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future." Despite his "god-like intellect" (the *imago Dei* idea again) and other noble qualities, "man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin" (Darwin 1877, 619). In a similar vein, Thomas Huxley, one of Darwin's close supporters, stipulated that our "reverence for the nobility of manhood will not be lessened by the knowledge that man is, in substance and structure, one with the brutes" (Huxley 1863, 112). Because of that structural, evolutionary unity with brute animals Huxley reinstated the Linnaean primate order that had been split by Blumenbach.

Like Linnaeus in another context, the evolutionists were confronted with contemporaries who, like themselves, perceived the threat to human dignity posed by the “grim and grotesque procession” of ape ancestors, in the Duke of Argyll’s words (Argyll 1868), but dealt differently with that menace in the context of their interpretations of biological data. One of those contemporaries was the anatomist, Richard Owen, well-versed in German holistic and teleological *Naturphilosophie*, for whom not just the spiritual but also the morphological separation of human and ape was a moral and metaphysical imperative during the whole of his career. In search of an anatomical feature that would permit a classification with humans apart, not just in a different order but in a different subclass at the head of creation, Owen (1857) proclaimed the hippocampus minor, a lobe of the brain, to be such a feature, unique to humans; Huxley, however, proved him wrong (Huxley 1861).

Impending apes and apemen were successfully kept at a distance by casting the newly discovered evolutionary process as a progress toward humanness, epitomized by European middle-class civilization, as its apex and natural goal—a widespread conviction toward the end of the nineteenth century. In this temporalized form, the traditional idea of a moral hierarchy of creatures with humans on top lingered. The question posed by Benjamin Disraeli in a speech in Oxford in 1864, “Is man an ape or an angel?”, answered by him with, “My Lord, I am on the side of the angels” (quoted in Monypenny and Buckle 1929) now came to be generally decided in favor of apes. That “yes” to apes, however, was a “yes, but . . .,” because apish ancestors were kept at arm’s length, together with apes and apish “contemporary ancestors,” by situating them only at the beginning of the ascent *toward* humanness.

Apish, monstrous others loom large in many scientific, literary, and political writings from around the turn of the twentieth century. Early hominids, great apes, humans from prestate societies, or indeed one’s political opponents were quite consistently depicted as unable to restrain their beastly impulses, as prone to violence, rape, incest, and cannibalism, again epitomizing uncivilized otherness. The Darwinian perception of nature as red in tooth and claw, a struggle for life in a quite literal sense, supported the image of primeval, wild, apish otherness, to be subdued by civilized control.

THE BEAST WITHIN

Not much later, an unrestrained animal other surfaced in one of the most influential views of human behavior, psychology, and culture of the twentieth century: psychoanalysis. As a Lamarckian, and under the influence of Ernst Haeckel’s “bio-

genetic law” or “principle of recapitulation,” Sigmund Freud held the harsh experiences of primeval humans to be constitutive of present-day human souls. Among those experiences, according to him, were primal patricides and incestuous sexual desire, giving rise to, among other things, the Oedipus complex, neurosis, religious behavior, and the characteristic behavior of crowds. “Incest, cannibalism and the lust for killing,” he wrote in *The Future of an Illusion*, are “born afresh with every child” (Freud 1961; cf. Corbey 1991). Neurosis especially was a so-called atavism, a regression, not just ontogenetically but also phylogenetically, and Freud believed the behavior of neurotics, early humans, contemporary “primitives,” and modern children to be comparable with respect to the role of “primitive” impulsiveness and a deficient sense of reality.

Civilization, in this view, is possible only by taming human’s dark, ineradicable animal nature, by domesticating the beast within. Human behavior is the outcome of a struggle between civilized control, exercised by society through the child’s real or internalized parents, and wild primeval impulses. Freud, an avid reader of the evolutionist anthropology of his day, concluded his 1915 discussion of the phenomenon of war with the statement that “[in] this respect, as in many others, the man of prehistoric times survives unchanged in our unconscious” (Freud 1957, 296). In the psychoanalytic conception of human nature, one of the clearest examples of an articulation of human identity in terms of animal otherness, the human–animal boundary is drawn within ourselves; the encroaching primeval beast within has to be controlled and humanized.

The “beast-in-man,” usually depicted as apelike and to some extent an avatar of earlier, Platonic, Pauline, and Protestant dualistic views of human nature, is a forceful, omnipresent metaphor in the twentieth century, depicting human nature before, or deprived of, culture. King Kong in the 1933 film classic is close to what this beastly other was imagined to look like, and similar apelike monsters popped up in fascist anti-Communist propaganda and Communist antifascist propaganda. Many pictorial or literary descriptions of early hominids and great apes during the first half of the twentieth century presented the same image and were inspired by the same master narrative of an ascent toward humanness.

FROM IGNOBLE TO NOBLE?

Since the 1960s, the rapid expansion of research on many aspects of nonhuman primates, not least their social life and cognition, did much to change the predominantly negative image of the generalized apish other in Western imagination, a change that parallels that from a Hobbesian to a Rousseauesque perception of the “natural state” of humankind two centuries earlier. The well-known photograph where young Jane Goodall and a chimpanzee reach their pointing fingers

toward each other, repeated by Dian Fossey and by actress Sigourney Weaver playing her in a successful film on Fossey's research among mountain gorillas (*Gorillas in the Mist*), sums it up neatly: This was a highly symbolic gesture, explicitly aimed at bridging the human–animal boundary. These apes were cast as happy rather than brutish beasts, living in relative harmony with their kin in an East African Eden instead of having to survive in the harsh jungle. The regular occurrence of violence among chimpanzees, discovered more recently, was a crack in that particular mirror for Western humans.

The well-known work of primatologist Frans de Waal revealed the complexity of social and political behavior among nonhuman primates and its close similarity to that of humans with respect to aggression, reciprocal altruism, and mechanisms of conflict control (de Waal 1982). It helped to combat the widespread inclination of seeing our bad habits as exclusively animal and our good ones as exclusively human. De Waal increasingly stressed that apes are basically *Good Natured* (de Waal 1996), as the title of his 1996 book has it, both on a technical, scientific, and philosophical level. His interpretations of *Peace-Making among Primates* (de Waal 1989) in terms of concepts normally used for humans, such as politics, friendship, empathy, and forgiveness, have not gone uncriticized, although at least some of the reproach of anthropomorphism would seem to be another expression of the anthropocentric concern with human uniqueness that has accompanied the study of nonhuman primates since Linnaeus.

Harvard primatologist Richard Wrangham's Hobbesian approach to primates is diametrically opposed to de Waal's stress on peacemaking. His 1996 book on *Demonic Males*, written for a large audience in cooperation with Dale Peterson, emphasizes male violence and aggression as pivotal survival strategies: Males are selected by females for exploitive and aggressive behaviors, leading to competitive success. "We are cursed," Wrangham and Peterson wrote, "with a demonic male temperament and a Machiavellian capacity to express it," a "5-million years stain of our ape past" (Wrangham and Petersen 1996, 258). It should be added, however, that both Wrangham and Peterson's *Demonic Males* and de Waal's *Good Natured* have been received with mixed feelings by primatologists and anthropologists.

Although since the 1960s there has been a shift toward generally more positive views of nonhuman primates, small-scale non-Western peoples, and early hominids, the total picture is more complex. A Hobbesian perception of human and primate nature persisted in certain tendencies in the work of ethologists and sociobiologists, and, in a sense, in Richard Dawkins's "selfish genes" metaphor, explaining altruism as a form of selfishness on a more basic level. Feminist paleoanthropologists and primatologists, on the other hand, counterbalanced the "man the aggressive hunter" approach with a new, "woman the peaceful gatherer" re-

search paradigm in the 1970s. This added to a tendency appearing at about the same time to depict early hominids as happy families in peaceful East African landscapes, replacing the monstrous primeval apemen of earlier generations, armed with clubs and struggling violently for survival.

Remarkably, violence and peacefulness as interpretive viewpoints, in scientific research as well as on the level of popular imagination, have an analogous role to play in ethnography. Traditionally, violence has been one of the main ascribed characteristics of non-Western humans, often perceived as apish “lower races” or “contemporary ancestors,” and nonhuman primates alike. Both categories were seen as primitive, brute, and unrestrained and associated with the savage beginnings of humankind’s progress to civilization. The shifting balance of negative and positive views of primates in recent decades is quite parallel to characterizations, during that same period, of certain peoples as explicitly aggressive and fierce or, alternatively, unambiguously gentle and peaceful.

Combining insights from sociobiology with cultural materialist ones, the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon, for example, in his research on the Amazonia Yanomami, stresses the inclusive fitness of male warriors in the complex interrelationship between individuals, groups, and their natural environment: The more women they have access to, the better the proliferation of their genes (Chagnon 1997). This picture of the Yanomami as vengeful aggressors, beating up women and warring constantly, has been criticized as at least one-sided, and the Chewong and Semai Senoi from Malaysia, as well as the Sakkudei from Indonesia, have been thrown in the balance as decisively peaceful peoples (e.g., Howell and Willis 1989).

Comparable shifts took place in views of the Kalahari Desert !Kung. Although they used to be regarded as one of the most primitive and lamentable races of humankind, slotted between Caucasian humans and the “lowly” apes, they came to be hailed as gentle and harmless “noble savages,” who, unlike Western humans, lived in close harmony with one another and with nature. Here too a crack appeared in the mirror, just like in the case of the chimpanzees, when their high homicide rates were pointed out by biologically orientated authors. Something similar happened to Margaret Mead’s 1928 idyllic portrayal of *Coming of Age in Samoa*: Her underestimation of the role of jealousy, abuse, rape, and violence in the life of adolescents in Samoa was criticized as a culturalist bias by, again, a biologically orientated anthropologist (Freeman 1983).

ENCROACHING APES

Although speech has traditionally been seen as the outward appearance of mind, a faculty unique to humans, research on the linguistic abilities of bonobos and

other apes has undermined the idea of *H. loquens*, humans as the only animal capable of language, closely linked with two other pervasive human self-definitions, that of *H. symbolicus* and that of *H. sapiens*. Self-recognition of their reflections by chimpanzees and dolphins also suggested similarity to the mind of humans, as did studies on tactical deception by nonhuman primates (e.g., Parker, Mitchell, and Bocca 1994).

The notion of a chasm between symbolic human culture and the rest of the living world is another instance of the human–animal boundary. In the eyes of many, if not most, anthropologists, that notion lies at the foundation of cultural anthropology as a discipline, serving to legitimize its autonomy with regard to the biological sciences, including physical anthropology. Learned, arbitrary, and variable symbolic meaning imposed on the environment was, and still is, held to set humans apart, and therefore requires a special methodology and indeed special *human sciences*. “Believing . . . that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he has himself spun,” wrote an influential cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, giving voice to this conviction, “I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz 1973, 5).

Sociobiology and behavioral ecology, on the other hand, start from an assumption that is diametrically opposed to the *H. symbolicus* view of anthropologists: the uniformity of all behaving organisms, including humans. The attempts of these disciplines to deal with complex human behavior in the same way as with that of other primates and other animals met with furious resistance from cultural anthropologists. In their introduction to the volume they edited on *Understanding Behavior: What Primate Studies Tell Us about Human Behavior* (1991), James Loy and Calvin Peters complained about the fundamental reluctance of the human sciences to give serious attention to behavioral data from animals, or to take an evolutionary approach, a reluctance that is a direct corollary of their disciplinary identity. Everybody who has worked in an anthropology department will in some way have experienced the divergence between (physical) anthropologists who do and (cultural) anthropologists who do not think primate studies can tell us much about human behavior and culture.

Homo faber, “human as toolmaker,” was a widespread human self-definition. When in the early 1960s archaeologist Louis Leakey heard that his pupil Jane Goodall had discovered tool use among chimpanzees in Tanzania, he reportedly remarked that now the notion of tool had to be redefined, or that of human, or else chimpanzees had to be accepted as human (Cole 1975). In an influential 1969 article titled, “Culture: A *Human Domain*,” anthropologist Ralph Holloway claimed the imposition of arbitrary form on the environment to be “specific and

unique to human behavior” and to be identifiable by the appearance of stone tools in the archaeological record (Holloway 1969). Paleoanthropologist Ian Tattersall complained as recently as 1994 about the “power of toolmaking to mesmerize paleoanthropologists into classifying the makers of any stone tools, however crude, in the genus *Homo*” (Tattersall 1994). However, much has been discovered on tool use and cultural traditions in nonhuman species since the 1960s, and *Pan* the toolmaker now stands side by side with *Homo* toolmakers.

REBUTTED AGAIN

For some, such discoveries pertaining to the linguistic, cognitive, and technological abilities of animals, especially nonhuman primates, have further problematized the human–animal boundary as it was traditionally drawn, whereas for others it has necessitated fortifying that boundary by redefining it. Chimpanzees may use symbols, the latter group say, but we should not just look for symbols but for syntactically ordered symbols; and even if they have syntax, do they use it to be reflexive about language, like we do? They may use tools, they say, but we should not just look for tools but for tools made *with* tools; they may have cultural traditions in the sense of intergenerationally transmitted, learned solutions to problems, but should we not look for the transmission of *symbolic* meaning?

Matt Cartmill, a physical anthropologist himself, has sharply criticized the persistent anthropological focus on human uniqueness as the phenomenon to be explained. Such supposedly unique human features as large brains, language, conceptual thinking, and upright bipedalism, he wrote,

are uniquely human by definition rather than as a matter of empirical fact. Much scientific effort and ingenuity has gone into redefining such characteristics whenever discoveries about other animals have posed a threat to human uniqueness. (Cartmill 1990, 173)

Cartmill elaborated on a string of examples from his own field, physical anthropology. The uniquely large human brain, by anthropocentric definition, for example, came under attack several times. The much larger brains of elephants and whales were dealt with by shifting the criterion to brain size relative to body size. Unfortunately, according to that criterion, humans are surpassed by squirrels and other small animals, so a new one was proposed that was corrected for allometry. That move brought porpoises uncomfortably close, a threat to human uniqueness that again was neutralized by taking metabolic rates into account (Cartmill 1990).

The fallacy is assuming that the human form of a particular characteristic is its defining feature and the privileged standard against which to judge all species. The

same fallacy is shown by Barbara King to be present in much work on the evolution of intergenerational information transmission and language, where, as she shows, language precursors are typically sought in a human-oriented way (King 1994, especially chap. 6). Such strategies, once again, keep apes at a comfortable distance, even in recent scientific research.

APES AND METAPHYSICS

There is more than one sense in which one can speak of the metaphysics of apes. Primarily they are important characters, exemplary others, in the grand metaphysical narratives and articulations of human identity in Western tradition. Over the past few decades, philosophy of science has become very aware of the fact that metaphysical or ontological assumptions are to be found in the very core of theoretical approaches in natural sciences as well as human sciences. Such usually implicit but very basic conceptual presuppositions are germane not only to disciplinary identity but also to concrete interpretations of data. When interpreting data in primatology, human origin studies, or research on the evolution of language and cognition, for example, much depends on how we conceive of *language*, *species*, or *intention*.

In that second sense, “metaphysics of apes” refers to ontological assumptions that structure our scientific approaches to human and nonhuman primates, their evolution, behavior, communication, and minds (see Corbey 1998). Such assumptions are predicated on the metaphysics of apes in the first sense: the way in which traditional Western religion and philosophy, Aristotelian, Cartesian, Kantian, phenomenological, hermeneutic, and so on, conceived of nonhuman primates. A third sense of the phrase, finally, that is relevant in this context is “metaphysics” in the sense of the views apes themselves have of the world, of morals, of us, of themselves.

Although ontological assumptions have a role to play in all scientific approaches, be it Linnean systematics, linguistics, or behavioral ecology, we should, in my opinion, be careful not to judge the history of our scientific dealings with nonhuman primates too quickly and simplistically in terms of a progress from, as one well-known anthropologist once put it, a data-poor and nonsense-rich era to a more sophisticated, data-rich era. The foregoing anthology from that history shows no such unequivocal progress, but, if anything, the persistence of metaphysics in the core of scientific theories. There are now, as there always have been, enormous differences “in the preconceptions, assumptions, and biases that different workers [bring] to bear on the resolution of problems that, on the surface at least, were thought to be held in common,” as the editors of a volume on such preconcep-

tions in the field of human origins studies say (Clark and Willermet 1997, 1; cf. Corbey and Roebroeks 2001). Such differences can at times be so vast as to preclude any common basis for discussion.

Analogously, there is no easy way of disqualifying scientific approaches that keep apes at a distance as somehow less scientific than those that stress continuities. Much of the scientific resistance against the idea of linguistic competence in apes, for example, is very sophisticated methodologically. Defenders of the idea of ape language, on the other hand, adhere to approaches that are as refined but take a different, often more hermeneutic or interpretive, view of what language is.

MOVING BEYOND

We have seen how the sacrosanct traditional markers of humanness, as an ontological and as a moral category, were compromised and redefined time and again, not only by rural Swedish youngsters but also, showing that science is also culture and metaphysics, by natural historians, by human scientists, and by linguists. Human identity was at stake and was defended against apes and apishness. Categorizing the living world was a means of keeping other animals at a distance and functioned as an ideological justification of human behaviors toward them (Corbey 1997). Such categorizations were, and still are, embedded in grand metaphysical narratives that install moral hierarchies or the still forceful remnants of such narratives: that of God and His creation, or, alternatively, that of the ascent of humans, or at least certain humans, beyond the animality of their apish ancestors toward “civilization” and true humanness.

The very idea of *essential* difference, although abandoned by twentieth-century biology, still pervades much of Western thought, laws (see chapter 15, this volume) and practices, inextricably connected with the traditional metaphysical view that species have eternal, immutable, discrete essences that form a moral hierarchy. Next to a growing awareness of our intimate connections with other apes, the preoccupation with an unambiguous, pure human identity persists, as does the rebuttal of whatever may contaminate that purity. Essentialism and anthropocentrism as avatars of the Western metaphysical tradition are reinforced by our commonsense habit of perceiving the world in terms of a moral order of clear-cut natural kinds, the integrity of which is not to be tinkered with by, for example, gene transfer or organ transplantation between animals and humans, cloning organisms, or indeed classifying nonhuman and human primates too closely together.

It may be time to move from drawing to bridging the boundary between humans and the rest of nature more definitely, by thinking against the grain of most of Western tradition and cultural attitudes, not necessarily as a definitive persua-

sion but as a move our era calls for, a morally relevant gesture of solidarity toward fellow beings who may thus play a new role: that of missing links between humans and the rest of nature. A sharp insight into the traditional, anthropocentric metaphysics of apes that still inspires much of human dealings with them, in society and in science, is indispensable in that context.

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