

Book Reviews

Planet of the Apes and Philosophy: Great Apes Think Alike

JOHN HUSS, editor. Volume 74 in the *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series, edited by George A. Reisch. Chicago: Open Court, 2013. 303 p. ISBN: 978-0-812-69827-5

Perhaps only a handful of fictional works can compete with Pierre Boule's (1912-1994) novel *Planet of the Apes* (*La planète des singes*, 1963) in terms of cinematographic fecundity and longevity; the original narrative sparked a franchise comprising (so far) nine motion pictures: *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968); *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (Ted Post, 1970); *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (Don Taylor, 1971); *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (J. Lee Thompson, 1972); *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (J. Lee Thompson, 1973); *Planet of the Apes* (Tim Burton, 2001); *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (Rupert Wyatt, 2011); *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Matt Reeves, 2014); *War for the Planet of the Apes* (Matt Reeves, 2017). To the films one must add a fourteen-episode TV series also titled *Planet of the Apes* (1974) and a thirteen-episode animated series titled *Return to the Planet of the Apes* (1975). And perhaps only a handful of franchises can compete with *Planet of the Apes* when it comes to the richness and density of philosophical suggestions its installments convey about topics and questions such as the definition of human nature, the ideal organization of society, the relationship between humans and animals, and the puzzles of time travel, just to mention a few that most immediately spring to mind. It therefore comes across as no surprise that the series *Popular Culture and Philosophy* includes a volume on *Planet of the Apes and Philosophy*, edited by John Huss.

The Essays

The collection is divided into nine parts. The first section addresses mind- and language-related issues. In "It's Like He's Thinking or Something," Kristin Andrews describes how animal cognition research relies on "folk psychology," i.e., "the commonsense understanding of other minds that emerges (in part) from mindreading" (5). If we reject René Descartes's (1596-1650) or Donald Davidson's (1917-2003) idea that animals cannot think because language is required for thinking, there are several alternatives. Andrews rejects the idea according to which mind-reading is marked by the ability to attribute false beliefs (that is, guessing that another subject may have a false representation of the world, for instance, assuming that food is in a place where it actually is not). The author goes instead for a more holistic conception of communication, one according to which "Like a dance, we share our

minds through gestures, movements, facial expressions, gaze, and posture” (10). In this sense, the study of animals in a context of captivity may be misleading, since the aforementioned behavior is constrained by artificial conditions: “we need to study uncaged wild animals if we really want to know what they are thinking” (13). Andrews’ essay is sprinkled with references to the movies that serve as examples of the phenomena she is discussing. In “Just Say No to Speech,” Sara Waller explores how “language becomes a weapon in its ability to indicate thought, and its absence is easily constructed as an absence of intelligence” (15). Language, she points out, was used as a discrimination tool in America’s voting restriction laws of 1894, and standard IQ tests currently in use may lead to the attribution of a lower score to individuals who have learned English as a second language because their answers are non-standard (16-17). Other ways of testing intelligence can be based on dexterity or on executive function (e.g. problem solving), but even these tests are far from accurate; someone like Stephen Hawking (1942-2018), points out the author, would not pass the former (18). Other indicators of intelligence include mourning behavior and play: any game, remarks Waller, “takes tremendous cognitive ability” (23). Ultimately, observes the author, language is not necessarily a mark of intelligence since, especially in an oppressive society, a strategy to be smarter than one’s oppressors may consist precisely of playing stupid, staying silent, or devising a seemingly basic language. Waller concludes that watching the *Planet of the Apes* movies helps us to overcome the “urge to refuse to re-think our judgments of intelligence and what they seem to allow in terms of ‘sub-human’ treatment” (26). In “Are Apes Sneaky Enough to Be People?” Don Fallis suggests that “Boulle’s novel and the subsequent movie series directly raise the question of what it takes to be a *person*” (27, italics in the original). He observes that, according to several authors, intelligence is characterized by the ability to deceive, which in the movies is instantiated by many characters on multiple occasions—although one should not forget, as Fallis remarks, that the apes in question have “a pre-existing *human* civilization to copy” (31).

The second section deals with science-related issues. In “Science’s Crazy Dogma,” Bernard E. Rollin, writing in first person but co-signing with editor John Huss, describes how he finds the 1968 movie “an astute, telling, and devastating depiction and critique of what [he has called] ‘scientific ideology’ or ‘common sense’ of science” (41). Rollin draws upon the character of Zaius, who simultaneously serves as Minister of Science and Chief Defender of the Faith, to remark how “some propositions are so deeply embedded in the background beliefs of scientists that they become almost irrefutable” (43). Among what he considers dogmas entertained by scientists, Rollin attacks in particular the idea that science is “value-free” and the idea that animals do not feel pain. Rollin concludes by warning, “if science is to describe an objective world independent of our subjective experiences, science cannot be based on reports of experiences by scientists, these experiences being inherently *subjective*” (52, italics in the original). In “Getting a Rise out of Genetic Engineering,” Massimo Pigliucci recalls three standard ethical theories (consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics) to discuss the case of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* character Will Rodman who, while looking for a cure for Alzheimer’s disease (including experiments on his own father), unleashes events that lead both to the upheaval of intelligent apes and to the destruction of humanity through a virus. According to consequentialism, whose very name indicates a focus on the consequences, Will’s action is not good, leading to a disaster – unless one supposes that

chimp happiness in the far future will outweigh the suffering of humans. Deontological ethics, which focuses on universal rules, yields no clear answer; if one takes Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) supposedly universal rule according to which no human should be treated as a means to an end, then Will's father qualifies both as an end in himself (his son wants to cure *him*), but also as a means to an end (his son wants to find a general cure), not to mention the fact that the elderly man's consent was never asked for. According to virtue ethics, Will's actions are good, since he displays "courage, kindness, a sense of justice, compassion" (60). Will's story is taken by Pigliucci as exemplifying the issues at stake when the genetic enhancement of humans is discussed.

The third section deals with matters of equality between apes and humans. In "Who Comes First, Humans or Apes?" Travis Michael Timmerman, drawing inspiration from relevant movie episodes such as Dr. Zira helping George Taylor (in the 1968 film), explores the question whether species membership is a morally relevant factor. If such a claim is rejected (as Dr. Zira does with the astronaut), anyone interested in arguing in favor of "speciesism" should find another reasonable criterion to make a strong case for helping another living being with the same degree of commitment as Zira does. Timmerman points out that the attempts at finding such a criterion either result in relying on *morally untenable* arguments (for instance, contending that humanity is defined by cognitive capacity leaves out infants and mentally disabled subjects, which is conducive to morally repugnant decisions and practices) or on *circular* ones ("humanity" should be assigned on the basis of species membership, beyond one's actual capacities), or on *theological* ones (e.g. "God wants so": such arguments are for Timmerman either untenably arbitrary and self-serving, or reducible to the previous ones). Ultimately, if one considers criteria like the capacity to feel pain, then also non-human animals are entitled to humane treatment: "If the *Planet of the Apes* movie successfully motivates the idea that species membership is not a morally relevant factor and we are to act in accordance with our moral views, then most people will need to radically alter the way they think of non-human animals" (68). In "Of Apes and Men," Jonas-Sébastien Beaudry argues that "a moderate speciesism simply recognizes that certain within-species relationships are valuable for distinctive and justifiable reasons" (84) rather than simply being convinced that one's species is intrinsically better based on the identification of specific capacities or properties. Partiality towards our own species, Beaudry argues, is sometimes morally justified without being necessarily conducive to the idea that one can mistreat others.

The fourth section discusses philosophical issues of spacetime. In "We Came from Your Future," David L. Morgan explores different models of time, allowing for different interpretations of time travelling as represented in the movies. In one version, relying on the concept of "closed causal loops," time travelers cannot change the past but can be the cause of past events; in this sense, they do not *change* the past. According to another model of time travel, changing the past results into creating a new timeline independent from that which the very time travelers come (the standard cinematographic example of this being offered by Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future*); this model also seems to agree with the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics and "if this picture of time travel is correct, a time traveler is as much a traveler between universes as they are a traveler between times" (108).

In “Escape from the Paradox of the Apes,” Ralph Shain reflects on the different kinds of time travel represented in the original novel as well as in the movies: into the future, of forward, and into the past, or backward. Shain summarizes and discusses the implication for time travel of three general philosophical views on time: *presentism*, according to which only what is occurring now has reality, *possibilism*, according to which only the present and the past are real, and *eternalism*, which ascribes reality to past, present, and future alike. Shain argues that the image of time as like a freeway, explained by establishment scientist Dr. Otto Hasslein in *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, is suggestive of parallel universes; and “moving from one to another is no time travel at all” (120). Since time travel is conceptually possible forward but not backward, Shain points out, we can well understand why *Escape from Planet of the Apes* is a comedy, whereas the 1968 movie is a serious drama (118-119).

The fifth section discusses topics related to political theory. In “Banana Republic,” Greg Littmann explores and discusses the strong analogies between Ape City and the society described in Plato’s (ca. 428–348 BCE) *Republic*. Apes are divided in three classes distinguished by their respective appearances. Each class performs different tasks. Orangutans guard and manage power; gorillas serve as warriors; chimpanzees perform all other kinds of work (including scientific research). This seems to mirror Plato’s tripartition among rulers, warriors, and craftsmen. However, in Ape City, one belongs to a class based on the species one is born into rather than on personal qualities emerging in the process of education, which entails a certain amount of deception and manipulation kept in place by the orangutans. Plato, remarks Littmann, was critical of the emergence of democracy (still in its infancy) and was wary of a system in which rulers are ignorant of matters related to government; the Greek philosopher did not see, according to Littmann, that democracy includes a mechanism for removing incompetent people from office without resorting to violence. However, he adds, “democracy has *still* not shown whether it will ultimately be a force for good” (142, italics in the original). Politicians, he emphasizes, do not constitute a separate class, unlike *Planet of the Apes’* orangutans and Platonic rulers, but stem from wealthy families and “appetitive souls” hungry for wealth. In this sense, according to Littmann, it is *chimpanzees* who are in charge in *our* world, and the prospects are grim. In “From Twilight Zone to Forbidden Zone,” Leslie Dale Feldman explores the analogies between society as depicted in the *Planet of the Apes* movies and Thomas Hobbes’s (1588-1679) state of nature. Other analogies are pointed out as to Alexis de Tocqueville’s (1805-1859) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1712-1778) political theory. Such depiction, points out the author, relies on a series of narrative and visual elements that screenwriter Rod Serling (1924-1975) used as well in *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), which suggest Serling’s oscillation between a pessimistic and an optimistic view of human destiny. In “The Primate Who Knew Too Much,” Michael Ruse touches upon some questions raised by the movie, such as the contested issue of whether evolution will always push upwards (154) and whether there exists knowledge that should be banned or not explored, especially if we have good reasons to think that it may be conducive to self-destruction. Ruse considers the suppression of knowledge not only to be practically unfeasible, but also morally wrong, since the philosophical impact of a discovery cannot be taken for granted or may not be univocal: for instance, the actual discovery of a “gay gene” may prompt people who regard homosexuality as undesirable to argue in favor of selective abortion, but it could also be used to support the

notion of homosexuality as a deliberate decision. Ruse also considers *Planet of the Apes* to be a cautionary tale about human civilization's (or any other species evolving to a point comparable to the one humanity currently finds itself at) ability to engage in self-destruction, a possibility that Ruse thinks quite likely: "[evolutionary] success carries the seeds of imitation" and social evolution is functional to biological evolution, but neither is it absolute (162). In fact, points out Ruse, "in a universe big enough" (163), self-destruction on behalf of a species may be a tale that repeats itself time and again.

The sixth part discusses issues related to ape ethics. In "Captive Kin," Lori Gruen discusses ape captivity, addressing the question whether "there is something beyond physical and psychological suffering that is wrong with [it]" (169). Gruen argues that autonomy, or "making choices about your actions, planning and then deciding to endorse the action you engage in" (172), is not an exclusive characteristic of human beings or of genetically enhanced ones (like Caesar) but it is present in animals, too, that "follow their own wants and desires, interests and dreams, and not simply those that are imposed from the outside or are 'hard-wired' by instinct" (173). Gruen, however, concludes her essay pointing out a dilemma: "it's wrong to deny [apes] the freedom to control their own lives, but to release them would probably be a death sentence. So it looks like the best we can do is to ensure that they receive the highest level of captive care" (176). In "Rise of the Planet of the Planet of the Altruists," John S. Wilkins challenges the view known as the Great Chain of Being, according to which "reason is the zenith of the living world [and]...only humans occupy that zenith, both as moral agents and as rational agents" (179). If one follows Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) original indications, points out Wilkins, one should not think in terms of "lower" or "higher," and "the view that there is one superior species and below it a chain of lesser links no longer flies" (182). Furthermore, observes Wilkins, behavioral traits like morality are modulated by nature (genes) and nurture (culture) alike. *Planet of the Apes* movies represent how humans seemingly embody the pinnacle of evolution (and morality) just to devolve due to their mistakes and be replaced by other species who in their turn commit similar mistakes; in this sense, the cinematic experience, according to Wilkins, "helps us understand ourselves better" (189).

The seventh section discusses aesthetic and cultural issues related to *Planet of the Apes* as a movie. In "Serkis Act," John Huss discusses the cognitive and cultural issues raised by the question whether Andy Serkis's performance-capture as Caesar in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* qualified for an Academy Award. One should take into account "that film is the art of creating believable illusions" without "falling prey to the philosophical sin of reductionism, reducing acting performance to the image of the character on screen" (198). In "It's a Madhouse! It's a Madhouse!" Tom McBride discusses, along the lines of Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889-1951) *On Certainty* (1969), the linkage between certainty, sanity, and insanity conjured up by the vicissitudes of Commander Taylor in *Planet of the Apes*, as well as by episodes of Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone*. Taylor's story illustrates, according to McBride, how a "life form" relies on "language games" (i.e. social conventions) in which some propositions are beyond doubt, and those who do question them are deemed insane. This holds valid both for the human being's belief that he is on a planet other than Earth, and for apes thinking that humans are a completely different species (and cannot speak). McBride

suggests that the 1968 movie represents a distinct, “new type of fiction in which certainty is overturned without necessarily driving us insane” (209). In “Inside the Underscore for *Planet of the Apes*,” William L. McGinney offers a punctual analysis of how the musical score of the 1968 movie, while being highly unconventional, added to the movie’s atmosphere – all this against the background of the philosophical question whether music without words can carry meanings. However, points out McGinney, “the modernist style that the score draws on has lost much of its cultural weight,” turning into “something of a commodity,” a turning point being the 1977 release of *Star Wars* that, while marking the rise of “less critical and more escapist” science fiction movies, “made little use of modernist music” (227). In this sense, he remarks, “We have to use of our own imaginations to reconstruct the associations [such score] could have carried at the time of the movie’s release” (*Ibid.*).

The eighth section discusses the concept and construction of identity. In “Caesar’s Identity Crisis,” Chad Timm explores Caesar’s story through a Lacanian lens, as an example of how identity is developed in relation to the surrounding world and to language. Caesar’s development illustrates how we, following Jacques Lacan’s (1901-1981) theory, develop a sense of self by seeing our image for the first time and how we keep throughout our existence an “ideal-I” that is constantly compared with the image that others reflect back to us. The self, points out Timm, is heavily influenced by language, although there always remain bits of reality including the self for which we literally have no words, a “gap” that, following Slavoj Žižek (b. 1949), is filled in ways dictated by dominant ideology; however, as the very story of Caesar confronting his identity crisis suggests, such conditioning can be challenged by constructing a new self, free from ideological control. “He embraces the void and the absence of a universal self and cuts ties with the symbolic order and its oppressive ideological rules of conformity” by positioning himself in “a space in between chimpanzee and human being” (243). In “Aping Race, Racing Apes,” Jason Davis elaborates on the suggestions that *Planet of the Apes* contains concerning racial issues; according to a famous anecdote, upon being congratulated on having created a movie about US black-white relations, the producer and the associate producer of the 1968 movie appeared clueless. Davis observes that the relations represented in the movie “reveal what Planet Hollywood could never say directly—not even to themselves apparently—about the lived reality of black America”; that is to say, the film “illustrates how white privilege depends upon a self-sustaining blindness to racism, suffering, and white domination” (245). Davis discusses the relationship between, and the different philosophical takes on, imposed racial identification based on visible physical traits, actual genetic makeup, and racial identification on behalf of individuals who positively embrace it as part of their identity. In “Rise of Being-in-the-World,” Shaun May focuses on the process through which Caesar, the central character of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, becomes “human.” Such process, according to May, can be well understood through Martin Heidegger’s (1889-1976) conceptualization of human existence as being characterized by “the huge array of project, equipment, and skills that underpin everything we do” (256) and by the fact that humans have a special way of understanding themselves as being rooted in the past and projected into the future. Once they decide to be, so to speak, the writers of their own stories, points out May, they start living what Heidegger called an “authentic life.”

The ninth and final section deals with planet-related issues. In “The Last Man,” Norva Y. S. Lo and Andrew Brennan discuss Taylor’s decision to destroy the Earth at the end of *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, in the light of a philosophical discussion initiated by Richard Routley (later known as Richard Sylvan, 1935-1996): is the destruction of the world brought about by a hypothetical “last man” on earth permissible, given that he harms no people? Sylvan argued that it is so on the basis of human-centered thinking, but that it is not so on environmental grounds. Lo and Brennan point out that the discussion and the dilemma can be generalized shifting from the imaginary last man “to the industrial society as a whole, which continues to increase output and productivity with benefits to people at a terrible environmental cost” (269). Furthermore, the authors see *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* as a good illustration of a related point, namely that “the project of improving human health and welfare is carried out at the cost of immense cruelty and suffering to animals used in biomedical research” (272). The overall lesson of the movies, according to Lo and Brennan, is that “the promise of the planet is easily lost, squandered through human greed and self-interest” (277). In “Planet of the Degenerate Monkeys,” Eugene Halton draws upon the unflattering depiction of humans advanced by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) as a “degenerate monkey with a paranoiac talent for self-satisfaction [...] [with an] unhappy faculty [...] for going wrong in a hundred ways before he is driven, willy-nilly, into the right one” (282). Such depiction, according to Halton, is well exemplified in the *Planet of the Apes* movies, especially by the mutants who worship the atomic bomb in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, whose telepathic powers are compensated by their dramatic loss of empathy. Halton, however, ends his essay on a moderately hopeful note, asking: “What if we could redirect [current civilization] toward an idea that the further creation and pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty involves a re-attunement to all-surrounding life, not isolation from it?” (292).

Evaluation

The exploration of John Huss’s edited volume left me with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I did realize that the twenty-two essays were instrumental for me to unlock the conceptual potential of the oldest movies, that I had otherwise only enjoyed aesthetically without thinking through the multiple philosophical suggestions they contain; the collection also prompted me to watch the more recent films, while enjoying, once again, the food for thought that they offer alongside what in my opinion is great entertainment. Additionally, some pieces in the collection undoubtedly were quite brilliant. On the other hand, though, I could not help feeling a sense of imperfection and unevenness running through the whole volume. I was uncertain whether such feeling was triggered by faults that had to be ascribed to the volume editor’s responsibility or, on the contrary, if such faults simply and sadly depended on a concentration of factors and constraints that the editor himself had been suffering from, such as space limits, pressing deadlines, contributors’ personalities and clashes thereof, and so forth. In the interest of scholarly criticism, but also of compassion and generosity, I shall try to detail the flaws I perceived, while leaving somewhat open the question whether they were avoidable or not, and on whose behalf.

For starters, *Planet of the Apes and Philosophy* is a rather heterogeneous volume, in the sense that the contributions vary considerably in terms of quality, and engagement with the films (and the novel). Some of them (for instance, those of Littman and Timm) examine one or more movies or movie episodes very closely, while developing with clarity and consistency the philosophical topic they set out to explore: they briefly and clearly reconstruct a philosophical authority's take on such topic, they show how it is conjured up by the narrative, and they offer a personal conclusion. Other ones (for instance, Andrews' essay) read more like fairly well-structured discussions (and digressions) on topics that fall under their authors' expertise, and that are expanded upon while only punctuating the discussion with references to *Planet of the Apes*. Additionally, some essays overlap to the point of creating an impression of repetitiveness (also across sections), so that one ends up also questioning the nine-fold division of the volume. At the same time, one perceives the attempt at creating some *formal* (that is, superficial) homogeneity across all the essays through stylistic devices, such as puns and crispy chapter titles, but the overall impression is one artificiality and even of repetitiveness. I did smile at the subtle "Great Apes think alike" in the subtitle, but what about the rather unsuccessful "I have no ape in this race" in Huss's own essay (195), and the incessant ape-related, often far-fetched wordplay that the contributors beat us on the head with page after page, in the section titles, in the chapter ones, in the subtitles, and in the text? These attempts made me think of someone who tries to conceal the fact that a village is composed by very different buildings, including both luxurious and destitute ones, by painting all of them in the same gaudy colors. On the same track, I feel the need to criticize the style of most of the essays, too. To be sure, informal and ironic language are, in my opinion, a plus of philosophical communication, be it directed at beginners or experts; however, in this volume one feels that ironic digressions and informal talk are, in many passages, excessive, including some inappropriate and distracting jokes like Wilkins' cringe-inducing remark, "Caesar's ability to reason makes him what some would call a *Kantian exemplar* (this has nothing to do with the Knights Templar, even though it rhymes)" (178, italics in the original). Again, one reads in the same essay "I recall (but I can't find it now) a science fiction short story from the 1940s in which the protagonist traveled faster than light" (181), and "It was once pointed out to me that..." (186). After exhausting all options, the failure in locating a source, while being perfectly acceptable, can be indicated in a note. But why such a remark in the main text? And why complement the reference to a philosophical idea by specifying that it "was pointed out to them"? Here *informality* seems to be leaning towards *untidiness*.

A few essays caught my attention because of particular challenges. Bernard Rollin offers a strongly opinionated piece, which is not necessarily a flaw, yet it would have warranted the presence of a parallel piece offering divergent views on the same topic (as it is the case with the essays on speciesism). Rollin's essay is also a quite self-referential chapter, if occasionally self-deprecating (take the first sentence: "In 1968, the year that *Planet of the Apes* was released, I was insufferable," p. 41). And yet, despite being written in the first person and in such an egocentric vein, the piece is mysteriously co-signed with volume editor John Huss. No explanations are offered (nor is Huss thanked by Rollin in the acknowledgements, p. 52, footnote 1!). As a reader, I felt puzzled and somewhat tricked. Furthermore, Rollin's essay

seems to be thematically “zigzagging” for a few pages before actually covering what the reader understands to be the author’s main concern. In other words, claiming that science is inherently subjective should not be delivered as a (final) punch line but rather an initial claim to be developed and backed up from the beginning of an essay. (Pigliucci’s essay displays a similar lack of focus: perhaps the ethical discussion of Will’s narrative would have sufficed to make it interesting, and there was no need to also take on board the issue of human enhancement.) McGinney’s chapter seems out of place: in this case, to be sure, we do have a finely written and informative piece; however, it reads more like an aesthetic commentary on an (undoubtedly important) aspect of the movie than a philosophical reflection inspired by it, or the introduction to a philosophical debate suggested by the movie narrative. In other words, I am not questioning the scholarly quality or style of McGinney’s chapter, but I am unsure as to its place in this collection. Feldman’s essay can be partially attributed the same shortcomings, since it starts off as a philosophical comparison of notable socio-political theories conjured up by *Planet of the Apes* but then evolves into a commentary on Serling’s imagery.

I do understand that this volume was not meant as a *guide* to *Planet of the Apes*, but perhaps it would have benefited from the inclusion of a quick overview of plots and characters (in a preface, in a chapter, or as an Appendix). I missed, as well, an all-encompassing text, either in the form of an articulated general introduction acting as overture, or of a concluding essay working as grand finale. The editor’s opening piece (“Great Ape Revolution,” ix-xi) consists of little more than two pages, in which he hints at some of the philosophical topics conjured up by the franchise, devoting a couple of paragraphs to a confused reference to *Planet of the Apes* made by the Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi (1951-2019), one that the editor himself, admittedly, did not “fully understand” while agreeing with it (x).

The result of such heterogeneity, lack of balance, and missing signposting, is that one can hardly identify and define the ideal reader of this collection: A *Planet of the Apes* aficionado who is a beginner in things philosophical? Or rather a philosophy connoisseur who wants to approach *Planet of the Apes*—either for the first time *tout court*, or for the first time from a philosophical angle? The former may find that some essays touch upon too specialized topics or advanced authors, while taking plenty of prior knowledge for granted. The latter may spot notable absences or feel disappointed over the superficiality or philosophical irrelevance of some contributions, while at the same time being left unassisted when it comes to the exploration of the saga. Additionally, if one assumes the viewpoint of a philosophy instructor who may wish to assign single essays to their students, the fact that the bibliography is only reported at the end of the volume makes it somewhat unwieldy.

One does not want to be unfair and ungenerous, but scholarly works, be they books or articles, more often than not receive indications of major revisions for similar shortcomings or even lesser ones, so it is somewhat of a surprise that the book has not undergone more vigorous revision. In sum, *Planet of the Apes and Philosophy* makes for a bumpy ride and it is recommended on condition that readers complement this work with other ones discussing similar topics.

On a final, constructive note, I would like to encourage other scholars interested in the philosophical interpretation of *Planet of the Apes* to explore Boule's original book as well as the TV series and the animated one, which, in this volume, are touched upon only a few times and not examined in detail. Reading the films and the novel in the light of philosophers and theories underrepresented in *Planet of the Apes and Philosophy* may prove fruitful as well. For instance, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), with his critique of civilization: the 1968 movie shows not only a scenario that is reminiscent of Plato's *Republic* (as examined in Littmann's fine essay) but one in which humanity's self-destruction is a proven reality and science has replaced/overlaps with religion, a situation that definitely warrants analysis through the categories deployed by the father of psychoanalysis in his 1930 essay *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is only conjured up by a quote in Halton's essay (p. 283). His philosophy of the *overhuman* may also offer an interesting perspective through which to understand the multiple narratives of transition (including *evolution* and *involution*, both *individual* and *collective*) evoked in the saga.

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