

*Chimpanzees - Bridging the Gap**

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She was too tired after their long, hot journey to set to on the delicious food, as her daughters did. She had one paralysed arm, the aftermath of a bout of polio nine years ago, and walking was something of an effort. And so, for the moment, she was content to rest and watch as her two daughters ate. One was adult now, the other still caught in the contrariness of adolescence - grown up one moment, childish the next. Minutes passed. And then her eldest, the first pangs of her hunger assuaged, glanced at the old lady, gathered food for both of them and took it to share with her mother.

The leader of the patrol, hearing the sudden sound, stopped and stared ahead. The three following froze in their tracks, alert to the danger that threatened ever more sinister as they penetrated further into neighbouring territory. Then they relaxed: it was only a large bird that had landed in a tree ahead. The leader looked back, as though seeking approval for moving on again. Without a word the patrol moved on. Ten minutes later they reached a look-out place offering a view across enemy territory. Sitting close together, silent still, they searched for sign or sound that might indicate the presence of strangers. But all was peaceful. For a whole hour the four sat there, uttering no sound. And then, still maintaining silence, the leader rose, glanced at the others and moved on.- One by one they followed him. Only the youngest, a youth still in his teens, stayed on for a few minutes by himself, reluctant, it seemed, to tear himself away from the prospect of violence. He was at that age when border skirmishes seemed exhilarating as well as challenging and dangerous. He couldn't help being fascinated, hoping for, yet fearing, a glimpse of the enemy. But clearly there would be no fighting that day and so he too followed his leader back to familiar haunts and safety.

We knew her as 'Auntie Gigi'. She had no children of her own, but two years ago she had more or less adopted two youngsters who had lost their own mother in an epidemic - pneumonia, probably. They were lucky, those two. Not that Gigi was all sweet and motherly, not at all. She was a tough old bird, somewhat mannish in many ways. But she made a perfect guardian for she stood no nonsense, not from anyone, and had high standing in her society. If anyone picked a quarrel with either of these two kids, he or she had Auntie Gigi to reckon with. Before Gigi came into the picture, one of the orphans, little Mel, had been cared for by Sam, a teenage youth. It was quite extraordinary — it wasn't even as though Sam was related to the sickly orphan. He had not even been close with Mel's mother during her life. Yet after she passed away, Sam and Mel became really close, like a loving father and child. Sam often shared his food with Mel, usually carried him when they went on long trips together, and even let the child sleep with him at night. And he did his best to keep him out of harm's way. Maybe it was because Sam's mother had got sick and died in that same epidemic. Of course, he'd not been spending much time with her then - he'd been out and about with the boys mostly. Even so, it is always a comfort if you can sneak off to Mum for a while when the going gets tough, and the big guys start picking on you. And suddenly, for Sam, his old mother wasn't there. Perhaps his closeness with that dependent little child helped to fill an empty place in his heart. Whatever the reason, Mel would almost certainly have died if Sam hadn't cared for him as he did. After a year Sam and Mel began spending less time together. And that was when Auntie Gigi took over.

Those anecdotes were recorded during our thirty-one years of observation of the chimpanzees of Gombe, in Tanzania. Yet the characters could easily be mistaken for humans. This is partly because chimpanzees do behave so much like us, and partly because I deliberately wrote as though I were describing humans, and used words like 'old lady', 'youth', and 'mannish'. And 'Sam' was really known as 'Spindle'.

* In PAOLA CAVALIERI & PETER SINGER (eds.), *The Great Ape Project* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1993), pp. 10-18.

One by one, over the years, many words once used to describe human behaviour have crept into scientific accounts of nonhuman animal behaviour. When, in the early 1960s, I brazenly used such words as 'childhood', 'adolescence', 'motivation', 'excitement', and 'mood' I was much criticised. Even worse was my crime of suggesting that chimpanzees had 'personalities'. I was ascribing human characteristics to nonhuman animals and was thus guilty of that worst of ethological sins - anthropomorphism. Certainly anthropomorphism can be misleading, but it so happens that chimpanzees, our closest living relatives in the animal kingdom, do show many human characteristics. Which, in view of the fact that our DNA differs from theirs by only just over 1 per cent, is hardly surprising.

Each chimpanzee has a unique personality and each has his or her own individual life history. We can speak of the history of a chimpanzee community, where major events - an epidemic, a kind of primitive 'war', a 'baby boom' — have marked the 'reigns' of the five top-ranking or alpha males we have known. And we find that individual chimpanzees can make a difference to the course of chimpanzee history, as is the case with humans. I wish there was space to describe here some of these characters and events, but the information, for those interested, can be found in my most recent book, *Through a Window*.¹

Chimpanzees can live more than fifty years. Infants suckle and are carried by their mothers for five years. And then, even when the next infant is born, the elder child travels with his or her mother for another three or four years and continues to spend a good deal of time with her thereafter. The ties between family members are close, affectionate and supportive, and typically endure throughout life. Learning is important in the individual life cycle. Chimpanzees, like humans, can learn by observation and imitation, which means that if a new adaptive pattern is 'invented' by a particular individual, it can be passed on to the next generation. Thus we find that while the various chimpanzee groups that have been studied in different parts of Africa have many behaviours in common, they also have their own distinctive traditions. This is particularly well documented with respect to tool-using and tool-making behaviours. Chimpanzees use more objects as tools for a greater variety of purposes than any creature except ourselves and each population has its own tool-using cultures. For example, the Gombe chimpanzees use long, straight sticks from which the bark has been peeled to extract army ants from their nests; 100 miles to the south, in the Mahale Mountains, there are plenty of the same ants, but they are not eaten by the chimpanzees. The Mahale chimpanzees use small twigs to extract carpenter ants from their nests in tree branches; these ants, though present, are not eaten at Gombe. And no East African chimpanzee has been seen to open hard-shelled fruits with the hammer and anvil technique that is part of the culture of chimpanzee groups in West Africa.

The postures and gestures with which chimpanzees communicate — such as kissing, embracing, holding hands, patting one another on the back, swaggering, punching, hair-pulling, tickling - are not only uncannily like many of our own, but are used in similar contexts and clearly have similar meanings. Two friends may greet with an embrace and a fearful individual may be calmed by a touch, whether they be chimpanzees or humans. Chimpanzees are capable of sophisticated co-operation and complex social manipulation. Like us, they have a dark side to their nature: they can be brutal, they are aggressively territorial, sometimes they even engage in a primitive type of warfare. But they also show a variety of helping and care-giving behaviours and are capable of true altruism.

The structure of the chimpanzee brain and central nervous system is extraordinarily like ours. And this appears to have led to similar emotions and intellectual abilities in our two species. Of course, it is difficult to study emotion even when the subjects are human — I can only guess, when you *say* you are sad and *look* sad, that you *feel* rather as I do when I am sad. I cannot know. And when the subject is a member of another species, the task is that much harder. If

¹ J. Goodall, *Through a Window: My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1990).

we ascribe human emotion to nonhuman animals we are, of course, accused of anthropomorphism. But given the similarities in the anatomy and wiring of the chimpanzee and human brains, is it not logical to assume that there will be similarities also in the feelings, emotions and moods of the two species? Certainly all of us who have worked closely with chimpanzees over extended periods of time have no hesitation in asserting that chimpanzees, like humans, show emotions similar to - sometimes probably identical to - those which we label joy, sadness, fear, despair and so on.

Our own success as a species (if we measure success by the extent to which we have spread across the world and altered the environment to suit our immediate purposes) has been due entirely to the explosive development of the human brain. Our intellectual abilities are so much more sophisticated than those of even the most gifted chimpanzees that early attempts made by scientists to describe the similarity of mental process in humans and chimpanzees were largely met with ridicule or outrage. Gradually, however, evidence for sophisticated mental performances in the apes has become ever more convincing. There is proof that they can solve simple problems through process of reasoning and insight. They can plan for the immediate future. The language acquisition experiments have demonstrated that they have powers of generalisation, abstraction and concept-forming along with the ability to understand and use abstract symbols in communication. And they clearly have some kind of self-concept. It is all a little humbling, for these cognitive abilities used to be considered unique to humans: we are not, after all, quite as different from the rest of the animal kingdom as we used to think. The line dividing 'man' from 'beast' has become increasingly blurred. The chimpanzees, and the other great apes, form a living bridge between 'us' and 'them', and this knowledge forces us to re-evaluate our relationship with the rest of the animal kingdom, particularly with the great apes. In what terms should we think of these beings, nonhuman yet possessing so very many human-like characteristics? How should we treat them?

Surely we should treat them with the same consideration and kind-ness as we show to other humans; and as we recognise human rights, so too should we recognise the rights of the great apes? Yes – but unfortunately huge segments of the human population are *not* treated with consideration and kindness, and our newspapers inform us daily of horrific violations of human rights in many countries around the world.

Still, things have got better in some Western-style democracies. During the past 100 years we have seen the abolition of enforced child and female labour, slavery, the exhibiting of deformed humans in circuses and fairs and many other such horrors. We no longer gather to gloat over suffering and death at public hangings. We have welfare states so that (theoretically) no one needs to starve or freeze to death and everyone can expect some help when they are sick or unemployed. Of course there are still a myriad of social injustices and abuses, but at least they are not publicly condoned by the government and, once public sympathy has been aroused, they are gradually addressed. We are trying, for example, to abolish the last traces of the old sadism in mental institutions.

Finally, there is a growing concern for the plight of nonhuman animals in our society. But those who are trying to raise levels of awareness regarding the abuse of companion animals, animals raised for food, zoo and circus performers, laboratory victims and so on, and lobbying for new and improved legislation to protect them, are constantly asked how they can devote time and energy, and divert public monies, to 'animals' when there is so much need among human beings. Indeed, in many parts of the world humans suffer mightily. We are anguished when we read of the millions of starving and homeless people, of police tortures, of children whose limbs are deliberately deformed so that they can make a living from begging, and those whose parents force them – even sell them – into lives of prostitution. We long for the day when conditions improve worldwide - we may work for that cause. But we should not delude ourselves into believing that, so long as there is human suffering, it is morally acceptable to turn a blind eye to nonhuman suffering. Who are we to say that the suffering of a human being

is more terrible than the suffering of a nonhuman being, or that it matters more?

It is not so long ago, in historical perspective, that we abolished the slave trade. Slaves were taken from 'savage' tribes that inhabited remote corners of the earth. Probably it was not too difficult for slave traders and owners to distance themselves, psychologically, from these prisoners, so unlike any people their 'masters' had known before. And although they must have realised that their slaves were capable of feeling pain and suffering, why should that matter? Those strange, dark, heathen people were so *different* – not really like human beings at all. And so their anguish could be ignored. Today we know that the DNA of all ethnic groups of humans is virtually the same, that we are all -yellow, brown, black and white - brothers and sisters around the globe. From our superior knowledge we are appalled to think back to the intelligent and normally compassionate people who condoned slavery and all that it entailed. Fortunately, thanks to the perceptions, high moral principles and determination of a small band of people, human slaves were freed. And they were freed *not* because of sophisticated analysis of their DNA, but because they so obviously showed the same emotions, the same intellectual abilities, the same capacity for suffering and joy, as their white owners.

Now, for a moment, let us imagine beings who, although they differ genetically from *Homo sapiens* by about 1 per cent and lack speech, nevertheless behave similarly to ourselves, can feel pain, share our emotions and have sophisticated intellectual abilities. Would we, today, condone the use of those beings as slaves? Tolerate their capture and export from Africa? Laugh at degrading performances, taught through cruelty, shown on our television screens? Turn a blind eye to their imprisonment, in tiny barren cells, often in solitary confinement, even though they had committed no crimes? Buy products tested on them at the cost of their mental or physical torture?

Those beings exist and we *do* condone their abuse. They are called chimpanzees. They are imprisoned in zoos, sold to anyone who cares to buy them as 'pets', and dressed up and taught to smoke or ride bicycles for our entertainment. They are incarcerated and often tortured, psychologically and even physically, in medical laboratories in the name of science. And this is condoned by governments and by large numbers of the general public. There was a time when the victims in the labs would have been human; but thanks to a dedicated few who stood up to the establishment and who gradually informed the general public of the horrors being perpetrated behind closed doors, the insane and other unfortunates are now safe from the white-coated gods. The time has come when we must take the next step and protect our closest living relatives from exploitation. How can we do this?

If we could simply argue that it is morally wrong to abuse, physically or psychologically, any rational, thinking being with the capacity to suffer and feel pain, to know fear and despair, it would be easy - we have already demonstrated the existence of these abilities in chimpanzees and the other great apes. But this, it seems, is not enough. We come up, again and again, against that non-existent barrier that is, for so many, so real - the barrier between 'man' and 'beast'. It was erected in ignorance, as a result of the arrogant assumption, unfortunately shared by vast numbers of people, that humans are superior to nonhumans in every way. Even if nonhuman beings are rational and *can* suffer and feel pain and despair it does not matter how we treat them provided it is for the good of humanity - which apparently includes our own pleasure. They are not members of that exclusive club that opens its doors only to bona fide *Homo sapiens*.

This is why we find double standards in the legislation regarding medical research. Thus while it is illegal to perform medical experiments on a brain-dead human being who can neither speak nor feel, it is legally acceptable to perform them on an alert, feeling and highly intelligent chimpanzee. Conversely, while it is legally permitted to imprison an innocent chimpanzee, for life, in a steel-barred, barren laboratory cell measuring five foot by five foot by seven foot, a psychopathic mass murderer must be more spaciouly confined. And these

double standards exist only because the brain-dead patient and the mass murderer are *human*. They have souls and we cannot, of course, prove that chimpanzees have souls. The fact we cannot prove that *we* have souls, or that chimps do not, is, apparently, beside the point.

So how can we hope to procure improved legal standing for the great apes? By trying to prove that we are 'merely' apes, and that what goes for us, therefore, should go for them also? I see no point in altering our status as humans by constantly stressing that we differ from the apes *only* in that our brains are bigger and better. Admittedly at our worst we can outdo the Devil in wickedness, but at our best we are close to the angels: certain human lives and accomplishments vividly illustrate the human potential. As we plod from cradle to grave we need all the encouragement and inspiration we can get and it helps, sometimes, to know that wings and halos *can* be won. Nor do I think it useful to suggest reclassifying the great apes as *human*. Our task is hard enough without the waving of red flags.

Fortunately there are some heavy-duty people (like the editors of this book) out there fighting for the rights of the great apes, along with those fighting for the rights of humans. If only we could march under one banner, working for apes and humans alike, and with our combined intelligence and compassion — our humanity — strive to make ever more people understand. To understand that we should respect the individual ape just as we should respect the individual human; that we should recognise the right of each ape to live a life unmolested by humans, if necessary helped by humans, in the same way as we should recognise these rights for individual human beings; and that the same ethical and moral attitudes should apply to ape beings and human beings alike. Then, as the thesis of this book proposes, we shall be ready to welcome them, these ape beings, into a 'moral community' of which we humans are also a part.

Let me end with a combined message from two very special members of this moral community. The first is a chimpanzee being named Old Man. He was rescued from a lab when he was about twelve years old and went to Lion Country Safaris in Florida. There he was put, with three females, on an artificial island. All four had been abused. A young man, Marc Gusano, was employed to care for them. He was told not to get too close - the chimps hated people and were vicious. He should throw food to the island from his little boat. As the days went by Marc became increasingly fascinated by the human-like behaviour of the chimps. How could he care for them if he did not have some kind of relationship with them? He began going closer and closer. One day he held out a banana - Old Man took it from his hand. A few weeks later Marc dared step on to the island. And then, on a never to be forgotten occasion, Old Man allowed Marc to groom him. They had become friends. Some time later, as Marc was clearing the island, he slipped, fell and scared the infant who had been born to one of the females. The infant screamed, the mother, instinctively, leapt to defend her child and bit Marc's neck. The other two females quickly ran to help their friend; one bit his wrist, the other his leg. And then Old Man came charging towards the scene - and that, thought Marc, was the end. But Old Man pulled each of those females off Marc and hurled them away, then kept them at bay while Marc, badly wounded, dragged himself to safety.

'There's no doubt about it,' Marc told me later, 'Old Man saved my life'.

The second hero is a human being named Rick Swope. He visits the Detroit zoo once a year with his family. One day, as he watched the chimpanzees in their big new enclosure, a fight broke out between two adult males. Jojo, who had been at the zoo for years, was challenged by a younger and stronger newcomer - and Jojo lost. In his fear he fled into the moat: it was brand new and Jojo did not understand water. He had got over the barrier erected to prevent the chimpanzees from falling in -for they cannot swim - and the group of visitors and staff that happened to be there stood and watched in horror as Jojo began to drown. He went under once, twice, three times. And then Rick Swope could bear it no longer. He jumped in to try to save the chimp. He jumped in despite the onlookers yelling at him about the danger. He managed to get Jojo's dead weight over his shoulder, and then he crossed the barrier and

pushed Jojo on to the bank of the island. He held him there (because the bank was too steep and when he let go Jojo slid back to the water) even when the other chimps charged towards him, screaming in excitement. He held him until Jojo raised his head, took a few staggering steps, and collapsed on more level ground.

The director of the institute called Rick. 'That was a brave thing you did. You must have known how dangerous it was. What made you do it?'

'Well, I looked into his eyes. And it was like looking into the eyes of a man. And the message was, "Won't *anybody* help me?"'

Old Man, a chimpanzee who had been abused by humans, reached across the supposed species barrier to help a human friend in need. Rick Swope risked his life to save a chimpanzee, a nonhuman being who sent a message that a human could understand. Now it is up to the rest of us to join in too.