

INTRODUCTION

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My relation with philosophy has always been somewhat ambiguous. Not because I believe science doesn't need philosophy, as some prominent scientists have recently argued. The love-hate relationship between empirical science and philosophy has never affected me. I have freely borrowed philosophical concepts to connect my primate observations with human behavior.

Instead, the ambiguity stems from the fact that I am no philosopher. My knowledge of philosophical texts, even those I have cited, remains limited. It doesn't reach the depth that real philosophers derive from extensive reading and a background in sorting out conflicting views. I am fully aware of this shortcoming, but can't resist philosophy anyway.

The habit to quote philosophers started with my work on the power struggles among chimpanzees, which I interpreted along Machiavellian lines. Even if many philosophers don't like to be associated with his ideas, Niccolò Machiavelli was a political philosopher. His impact was felt when my first book, *Chimpanzee Politics* (1982), which introduced the Florentine to primatology, led to (over)use of the term "Machiavellian Intelligence" to describe animal social cognition in general.

The philosophers who influenced me most, however, had little to say about political strategizing. My interests shifted around the 1980s when theoretical biologists began to depict the natural world as a dog-eat-dog place of combat, selfish genes, and devoid of kind intentions, as in Michael Ghiselin's oft-quoted line: "Scratch an 'altruist,' and watch a 'hypocrite' bleed." Genuine altruism couldn't exist. Moreover, animal cognition and emotion were never part of the discourse, nor was the love and attachment common in many social animals. Some of these writers sounded

utterly Cartesian, depicting animals as automatons (i.e. vehicles carrying out DNA programs). They presented these ideas to their readers as Darwinian even though Charles Darwin himself held very different views, and never classified animals as automatons. After all, Darwin wrote a whole book about animal and human emotions.

I found this whole cynical literature so depressing, and so contrary to the reality of observable animal and human behavior, that I read with great approval the works of philosophers such as Mary Midgley's, *Beast and Man* (1979), and Robert Richards' *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior* (1987). Both books presented a radically different view of nature, and sharply criticized the above writings by theoretical biologists. They also got me thinking about the origins of morality.

The connection with human morality came in handy when I got more and more involved in the study of animal empathy, reciprocity, and cooperation. My research automatically led me to explore what it was about human morality that made it radically different from animal behavior, as was often claimed. In the end, my conclusion was that the differences were overblown, and that it was better to adopt the Humean view that we are born with moral sentiments. Believing that these sentiments relate back to primate behavioral tendencies, I labeled them "building blocks" of morality. I never claimed, however, that a chimpanzee is a moral being in the same way that humans are. Instead, I advocated a connection between the way other primates behave and what in humans we call moral tendencies. These ideas were first explained in *Good Natured* (1996), and repeated and elaborated in subsequent books.

When we discovered a sense of fairness in monkeys, another moral building block could be added to the list (Brosnan & de Waal, 2003). Our discovery put a dent in *A Theory of Justice*, a famous treatise on this topic by American moral philosopher John Rawls (1972). In the grand Kantian tradition, Rawls tried to circumnavigate the emotions: "...for reasons of both simplicity and moral theory, I have assumed an absence of envy." Since when can we simply drop emotions from a discourse about human behavior? I find this baffling. The irony is that if there were zero envy in the world, no one would even care about fairness, because we'd never see a meaningful reaction to its absence. Rawls may call envy a "vice," but his whole treatise makes no sense without it. The enormous emotional investment humans make in rectifying unfairness and injustice -- the screaming protests, the marches, the violence, the endurance of police beatings -- are a forceful reminder that we aren't dealing with some bloodless mental

construct. Injustice shakes us to the core, something that no amount of abstract reasoning, such as that by Rawls, will ever accomplish.

And so I kept engaging with philosophical writing, either borrowing concepts or countering ideas I felt were divorced from reality. The latest such excursion was my writing about “normativity” (de Waal, 2014). There is a tendency to claim that human behavior is guided by social norms and expectations, whereas animal behavior just is. It’s the old Humean distinction between “is” and “ought.” There exists no agreement on this topic, which is why it remains a perennial of philosophical debate. Some have gone so far, however, as to wield “Hume’s guillotine” to kill off any and all attempts to apply evolutionary logic or neuroscience to human morality. Science can’t help us understand human morality, it is argued (Black, 1970).

In contrast, I believe that if capuchin monkeys reject a reward that they normally eat with gusto, only because their neighbor gets a much better reward for the same task, we are dealing with normativity. The monkey has an idea how rewards ought to be distributed. Chimpanzees go even further in that they may refuse the more preferred reward until their neighbor gets one, too. We found that chimpanzees play the Ultimatum Game in the same way as children, including a negative reaction to unfair outcomes. A child may shout “That’s unfair!” whereas a chimpanzee may spit water in the face of the one making an unacceptable proposal (Proctor *et al.*, 2013).

There are other examples of social normativity in animal behavior. If we take a broader view, normativity is everywhere. If I disturb a spider web, for example, the spider immediately works on repairing her web, which means that she has a model of what a web ought to look like. This counts as normativity, too, even if it isn’t concerned with social behavior. I feel that the topic of natural normativity deserves a much more extensive exploration than the one I provided.

The present volume takes a big leap in connecting philosophy with what we have learned about the behavior of our closest relatives. Instead of a biologist inspired by philosophy, the direction of contact is now the other way around. This is bound to lead to more dialogue. I notice, for example, how not every author agrees with my views and tries to salvage the age-old human-animal distinction that I have tried to undermine. A volume like this will also stimulate philosophers to pay more attention to the recent surge in animal cognition studies. This surge isn’t limited to the primates, but includes all sorts of species, also invertebrates. The sentience of all animals is now up for debate, and interaction between biologists and

philosophers will be crucial to resolve this issue (e.g. de Waal & Andrews, 2022).

I commend the editors for putting a volume like this together, and feel honored how it gives my life's work a central place.

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