F.W. Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* was published in 1903. In it, he describes a worker both as an ‘intelligent gorilla’ and – unwittingly endorsing the worker-gorilla’s intelligence – as one who “deliberately plans to do as little as he safely can.” Nine years later in 1912, the Prussian Academy of Sciences opened a station on Tenerife devoted to experimentation with the ‘mental capacities’ of apes, and especially chimpanzees. Tenerife itself was the last of the Canary Islands to be conquered by the Spanish in 1496. Half the indigenous population sided with the invaders, the others in the north of the island resisted and, when finally defeated, were enslaved to work on sugarcane plantations – a laboratory for colonial capitalism. It was chosen as a location for the station because of its climate and because of its proximity to Cameroon, then a German colony, from where nine chimpanzees were captured and transported over the sea. It became famous for the ‘experiments’ of psychologist Wolfgang Köhler. He has been acclaimed as a co-founder of Gestalt theory, for offering an alternative to the behaviourism of Pavlov and Thorndike and as anti-Nazi, but he also laid some groundwork for an instrumentalized psychology of work.

The Tenerife station’s first director Eugen Teuber was interested in watching the spontaneous behaviour of the chimpanzees, their gregarious nature, their playfulness – how they would play ‘catch’; tease and then let go of lizards that got into their compound; and then with chickens at the fence – the language exhibited say, in rhythmic dance. Köhler, who took over in 1914 and remained throughout the First World War, was instead concerned with goal-oriented experiments, all described in detail and featuring the chimpanzee Sultan. They all concern getting food, which is made progressively more difficult to reach.
Props are provided and in time, Sultan solves the problem. What is going on here? J.M. Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello, in his novel of the same name, argues that Sultan is at every turn diverted from his profound question as to why this is being done to him in this ‘carefully plotted psychological regime’—what is the nature of the man and his misconceptions of me? – by the goal of reaching the out-of-reach bananas. The ‘wrong’ thought is to ask questions such as ‘the justice of the universe and the place of it in this penal colony in it,’ whereas the ‘right’ thought is: How does one use the crates to reach the bananas.\[1\]

What Coetzee’s character doesn’t elaborate is that this instrumentalized goal is about work, working for a living in ways one has no control over. Modern primatologists like Alison Jolly and the colleagues she describes are more Teuber in style, observing only, and their main ethical dilemma – where there are contradictions between saving wildlife habitats and the livelihoods of indigenous people, but the influence of cognitive psychology on the poor humans of the world, of giving the ‘right’ answer – is pervasive. The IQ test, a banal but carefully designed exercise of jumping through the hoops, has a similar force, though with a different and nasty starting point. It owes much to another chimpanzee experimenter, R.M. Yerkes of the Yale Laboratories of Primate Biology, who was both unashamedly eugenicist—“no citizen can afford to ignore the menace of race deterioration” – and behaviorist.\[2\] It is shocking that the mumbo-jumbo notion of IQ that he pushed, remains a building block for the latest ‘modern’ round of ‘scientific’ racism of Arthur Jensen, the Bell Curve and its attendant ‘underclass’ category.

What Yerkes and Koehler did have in common was goal-orientation, the primacy of the task, and that the ape was seen as a means to an end ‘namely, the solution of important problems, which may not readily be approached initially by aid of human subjects’ as Yerkes put it. Modern racism is not just ‘scientific’ but iconographic, showing dark-skinned people as apes: such images of Mrs. Obama especially are legion. It has never been ‘racially’ exclusive – or rather, ‘races’, apish and otherwise, have always been constituted by racism, their particular demographic make-up no more consistent than that of other made-up categories like ‘heretics’, ‘deserving poor’, ‘Great Men’, ‘the Elect’ In the 19th century similar caricatures of the Irish were prevalent. Above all, it is the poor — whether slaves or ‘free’ labour — who are so characterized: specifically as lazy, feckless and violent, or ‘vicious’ in the literal sense. When Koehler first arrived at the station and saw the chimpanzees at play he described them as ‘street urchins’. A few years earlier an Argentine newspaper described the local ‘underclass’ as “boys who roam through the streets, engaging in indecent games and annoying passers-by”. A hundred years later, children growing up poor in British cities are commonly called feral by their economic betters, some of whom labelled the uprising of 2011 the “Planet of the Apes” riots. In El Alto, the very poor part of Bolivia’s La Paz – as if all the specious identifications of primates and the human poor, especially those with dark skins, were real – street children often sleep in trees, sometimes tying themselves to a branch so as not to fall when sleeping. Under the original U.S. Constitution, a slave was three fifths of a human being. Not a pack mule, but a special package of physical and mental labour power, and priced differently: wonderfully valuable when properly directed but forever a menace for the same reasons.

Koehler was not exactly an overseer, but it’s no accident that he worked with apes, not rats or dogs. Even assuming the anthropoid ape behaves intelligently in the sense in which the word is applied to man, there is from the start no doubt that, in this respect, he remains far behind man, becoming perplexed and making mistakes in relatively simple situations; but it is precisely for this reason that we may, under the simplest conditions, gain knowledge of the nature of intelligent acts.\[3\] Life on the alleged animal-human threshold – and how to make it work – had long preoccupied industrializing, colonizing powers. During the final century or so of mass chattel slavery – as it gave way to likewise massified ‘free’ labour and each took on characteristics of the other – management solutions were frantically sought for barely human labourers, the ones equipped with cognition but incapable of Higher Virtues, who added value but at the same time threatened with mayhem.

Can insightful apes (whether hairy or ‘naked’) be trained to train themselves? Experts have never stopped asking the question. In today’s Human Resources management, ‘showing initiative’ and
‘problem solving’ means correctly pre-empting commands. For mental patients, ‘insight’ means surrendering to your keepers. The insightful ape or ape-like human is inclined to idleness and waste, sullen silence or riotous assembly, but her or his capacity for mentored self-management still makes for a higher-yielding investment than an organism that must always be whipped to work or arrives at the right Life Choices only when subjected to electroshock.

The goal-oriented world and the necessity of work is that of Paradise Lost and its twin, Original Sin. The theological legend “tells us,” Marx writes, “certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals that there are people to whom this is by no means essential.” Those, that is, who have the power to present themselves as intelligent, diligent and frugal, in contrast to those who must work: the “lazy rascals spending their substance and more”, in need of discipline and often, in the post-Columbian world, portrayed as an ape. The Eden we could imagine from the bare biblical facts would have not been that of hunter-gatherers – hunting described as an essential, goal-oriented part of human development, though other species hunt ‘tactically’ – but one of gatherers. It was presented as such by Thomas Aquinas.

In a state of innocence, humans did not have any bodily need for animals; nor for clothing, since they were naked and not ashamed, there being no notions of inordinate concupiscence; not for food, since they fed on the trees of Paradise; not for means of transport, their bodies being strong enough for that purpose. Yet, they needed them in order to draw from them their nature in experimental knowledge. This is signified by the fact that God led the animals before man, that he might give them a name that designated their nature. Adam and Eve could have been doing Koehler-like experiments if they had the wherewithal, and defined themselves as superior in the process. In “Adam naming the Animals”, the frontispiece of an English bestiary, he is showing off this power of naming, armed with a scroll. But the ape, as in many other images of Gothic art, is eating an apple.

The link to the power of sensual appetite and to Eve is made clear in a series of works. In the Bible Historiée published by Antoine Vérard around 1499, Eve appears seduced by the apple-eating ape, then, in The Fall of Man by Jan Gossaert, Eve shows an untouched apple to Adam while an ape has already taken some big bites out of another. The link to the woman as a prisoner of appetites hovers over these pictures, and throughout the Middle Ages apes are given a feminine gender. Historian Nancy Leys Stepan describes how the racist, analogy-based science of the 19th century generated data to match metaphors implying that women and the ‘lower races’ were closer to apes and to each other than to ‘fully human’ males. Crucially, before Eve supposedly ruins everything, Adam and Eve, did not have to work for a living – the trees of Paradise supplied that. The bible, however, reflected the development of elites and hierarchies, and the creation of scarcity in insisting that Man should earn his bread from the sweat of his brow; for this, the story of the Apple and the Fall was essential.

Such an easily acquired diet as had existed in fabled Eden was anathema when it was there for the taking by real-life humans. The Victorian polymath Thomas Carlyle’s hatred of the pumpkin got straight to the point: “Where a black man, by working about half an hour a day ... can supply himself by aid of sun and soil with as much pumpkin as will suffice, he is likely to be a little stiff to raise into hard work.” The poet Coleridge arrived at the same attitude after initial enthusiasm for the breadfruit of Tahiti (now a ‘super-food’) and the thought of living in abundance. When he began to see the island’s sexual liberation as abhorrent however, the breadfruit became a fruit of sensuality. He proposed a scheme to uproot the
plant; when that proved impractical, he supported the Christianization of the Polynesian 'savages'. Later in the century, the sinister scientific servants of European colonialism – first English, then German – took it a step further, justifying the genocide of ‘primitive’ peoples, which had already happened in Tasmania, as ‘inevitable’ on the grounds of a lack of productive efficiency in land use, an ‘efficiency’ equated with civilization. An early English rationale, On the Negro’s Place in Nature laid emphasis on the Negro’s close relationship with the ape.\[8\] Writer Paul Rohrbach’s later, popular German version in German World Policies (1915) made it unequivocal: “Existencies, be they of peoples or individuals who do not produce anything of value, cannot make any claim to the right to exist.”\[9\] In the Polynesian case, as in the newly tumbled-upon Americas, the term ‘savage’, with its implication of animality and a lack of ‘civilization’ was not aimed at the black-skinned people of Africa. But it was to them that it came to be almost exclusively applied, along with the use of superimposed ape imagery. From the image-makers' point of view it was easy: black-skinned people and black-haired apes living on the same continent, ‘a wild place of wild animals and wild beings’\[10\] as Donna Haraway describes.

Nowadays, ‘Savage’ reappears in sloppy scare journalism that connects HIV/AIDS, Ebola and ‘bushmeat’ – that of wild animals. Very soon after stumbling on the ‘New Wor;d’ however, it wasn’t just an easy link to make, but essential when the enslaving and exploitation of Africans became necessary to the take-off of capitalist accumulation. Back in the 1780s, the notorious and exemplary slavery-abettor Captain Bligh, of Mutiny on the Bounty fame, was exporting the breadfruit of Tahiti to the slave owners of the West Indies so as to feed their slaves on the cheap – an almost paradigmatic assault on the natural abundance of one place to increase profits elsewhere, except that the slaves of the West Indies refused to eat it.

Sinners and Slaves

Long before the theory of evolution, before entering equatorial Africa and after stumbling across the Americas, Europeans had a whole iconography of monstrous beings. They would have seen Barbary apes (macaques) from the North African coast and Gibraltar, who became familiar in West European cities as chained performers. In the Eastern Church’s Physiologus of the 11th-12th centuries – a basis for bestiaries – white skins were identified with angels and apes with the devil. “Now the ape, not having a tail, is without species, and his rear without a tail is vile, like the devil, he does not have a good end.”\[11\] The ape was also connected to a hatred of Egyptian paganism, itself identified with persecution of the Jews of the Old Testament; when its temples and idols were destroyed in the Alexandria of 391 AD, Bishop Theophilus ordered the preservation of the statue of an ape as a monument to human depravity. In the Stuttgart Psalter, a version of the Psalms from the 9th century, the ape and the satyr both stand in for Egyptian oppression.\[12\] Moreover, the absence of a tail was an indication of hubris, of the animal’s desire to ‘rise above his station’, to be like human beings in this respect. There is then a shift from the ape as devil to the ape as sinner in the Romanesque period, with the iconography of the Fall, as described above, being prevalent.

This hubris was also presented as insolence. Thus Bartholomew of England in his De proprietatibus rerum (1240) has the ape as unruly and malicious: it should be forcibly tamed, its insolence repressed with beatings and chains. From the 15th century, the fettered ape, which would have been a known sight in European towns, is a favoured image both in Germany and England. European experience of Africa upped the stakes from the 16th century
Onwards. Black-skinned people were commonly associated with apes (chimpanzees until 1847, when gorillas were first found) – as childish, savage and over-sexualized. Travelers described the Hottentots as a tribe of people more primitive than had ever been seen before. Biblical stories of Jacob’s hairy and stupid brother Esau, or Noah and his sons, were added to those of the Fall, identifying black people with the cursed Canaanites and descendents of Ham.

The biblical myth persisted into the 19th century and beyond, but scientific race theory started to supplant it in the late 17th century with the crisis and subsequent triumph of the Atlantic slave economy. This intersected with a crisis in literal biblical belief, specifically where Adam as universal human ancestor was concerned. The conjunction of these crises at the birth of capital is the reason racism will never go away while its economic basis prevails. Already by the late 1640s, the planters of the Caribbean and the Chesapeake colonies had productivity problems with a mixed workforce of convicted or indentured Europeans, African slaves and a few ‘natives’. A multinational rabble that shared techniques of lewdness and indiscipline, and might have wiped out the proprietors of Barbados overnight in 1649, had an informer not betrayed them at the last moment. The panic peaked in Virginia with ‘Bacon’s Second Rebellion’ (1676), when a self-elected army of black slaves and white ‘servants’ burned Jamestown, proclaimed indenture and slavery abolished, and looted the opulent estates.

The owners’ response to such outbreaks was total economic overhaul and the ‘top-down’ invention of colour-coded racism. White servants were effectively abolished as a class: henceforth only blacks would do the back-breaking work. Servants not re-deported elsewhere were nudged upwards into quasi-overseer roles, encouraged to retaliate violently against slaves starved into stealing from them. The recent English takeover of the triangular slave trade meant 100,000 Africans could be imported over 50 years into the Chesapeake, where there had only been a couple of thousand in 1670. Between about that time and the mid-18th century, the vastly expanded scale of Atlantic slavery, the intensification of its proto-industrial organization and its turn to an exclusive, legally codified racial basis formed the social conjunction which made possible and which demanded complete scientific theories of racial hierarchy. The other important factor, itself also a product of 17th century material upheaval, is the early Enlightenment biblical criticism, both textual and historical, that called into question the literal descriptive function of Scripture and of Genesis in particular. In Isaac La Peyrère’s Pre-Adamitae (1655), a work hounded energetically enough by churches to assure its fame, the radical philologist lists biblical evidence of human life before Adam. In doing so, he frees future racists from the obligation to admit their own shared Adamic origins with indigenous Americans, Africans or other lost, degraded Tribes.

Without unwitting encouragement from La Peyrère, Sir William Petty might not have written The Scale of Creatures in 1677, the year after the second Bacon revolt. Petty was an Anglo-Irish land speculator and a founder of modern political economy, celebrated by Marx among others for his cheerful bluntness about the violence involved in managing a capitalistic system. Hanging thieves instead of condemning them to perpetual forced labour, he once wrote, was a gross waste of resources. It’s little surprise that this least euphemistic of political economists should also be a founder of the scientific race theory supporting the expanded Atlantic slave system that in turn underpinned later capitalist development. The Scale classifies as many creature-types as Petty can think of in the style of Adam in Paradise, when The Lord God formed every animal and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever he called each living creature, that was its name.

Having ditched Adam as sole ancestor of all men, Petty has the power to do the same. For him, ‘man’ is paramount among flesh-and-blood beings, but for the first time he subdivided into races that stand in the same sort of relation to one another as dogs do to serpents, or horses to fishes. Of man itself there seems to be several species, To say nothing of Gyants & Pygmies or of that sort of small men who have little speech … For of these sorts of men, I venture to say nothing, but that ‘tis very possible there may be Races and generations of such”… “there be others more considerable, that is, between the Guiny Negroes & the Middle Europeans; & of Negroes between those of Guiny and those who live about the Cape of Good Hope, which last are the Most beastlike of all the Souls of...
Men with whom our Travellers are well acquainted. I say that the Europeans do not only differ from the aforementioned Africans in Colouro... but also... in Naturall Manners, & in the internall Qualities of their Minds. “The internall Qualities of their minds” matter. As a political economist, Petty is less concerned with outward anatomy than with the difference between pure beastly mindlessness – minds fitted only for work – and Souls equipped for management (or philosophy). Next in his ranking below the lowest, blackest men come not apes, but elephants and parrots – for their respective abilities to understand commands and to reproduce speech – and bees, for their disciplined, work-centred, "pollicy or Art of Government".

The ascendancy of the Atlantic slave system and the early capitalist globalization that developed from it are characterized by legislated racial stratification and world-scale economic rationalization, each of which gets the science it needs. Petty personifies the inseparability of the two types of science. His 18th and 19th century successors finished the job, placing the vanishing point between ape and savage at the centre of their racist political economy. Anatomical knowledge of humans and animals was accumulated along with slave-generated capital through the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1699, Edward Tyson published his Orang-Outang, suve Homus Sylvestrus: or, the Anatomy of a Pygmie compared with that of a Monkey, and Ape and a Man. Despite confusions of nomenclature – Tyson's 'pygmie' is in fact a chimpanzee, the orangutan not being described until 1779 – the tract introduces the notion of the 'Missing Link'. “In this Chain of Creation, as an intermediate link between an ape and a Man, I would place our Pygmie”, wrote Tyson, although his 'ape' remains a mysterious being. Some 70 years later the taxonomy of Linnaeus with its category homo sapiens was more disturbing: the naturalist claimed to hardly know "a single distinguishing mark which separates man from apes, save that the latter have an empty space between their canines and their other teeth". Such indistinction between man and ape would be intolerable unless asset-owning, savant 'man' could be properly distanced from the apish human organism whose work he lived off. And so it was that during the age of the 'three fifths of a man' U.S. Constitution and the 12-year Haitian slave revolution, the Missing Link – or as its self-proclaimed discoverer Ernst Haeckel called it, der sprachlose Urmensch (the speechless primitive man) – became the fixation of scientific racism.[15]

Science at your Service

By the end of the 18th century the ex-slaves of Haiti had defeated France, Britain and Spain in military combat and held the USA to a standstill; the similarly beastly sans-culottes had overrun Paris for a moment, forcing a vote to free the slaves, and the language of biblical man was monopolised by pious white abolitionists. More urgently than ever, surviving owners needed to anathematise these affronts to natural order, to knock the monsters back to their station with a science of human differences. It had been done before by Petty, Buffon, Long and Kant among others, but in 1799, Royal Society luminary Charles White obliged with visual charts in his Different Animals and Vegetables.[16] Here, no political beehive or interpretive elephant stands between the worst men and the apes. "In whatever respect the African differs from the European", wrote White, "the particularity brings him nearer to the ape". That is, any divergence from the European ideal – the chain, of course, has no better-than-white links – tends towards the apish. The Missing Link is a flexible category, engulfing anyone who can't disprove the taint. Actual apes and 'savages' of all kinds – from the 1790s the term often extended to the lower European depths – share more with each other than either does with proper men, a type as far removed as the invertebrates at the opposite end of the chain. White emphasised the point by making his apes as 'human' as his non-whites were apish, at the same time feminizing the apes lest anyone doubt the degree of humanity intended.

The flexibility built into his mesh of missing links would serve well over the centuries to follow, when all kinds of notionally free low-life would need to be assimilated to the apish race without discouraging race war between components of the simian class. The 19th century brought ever-intensifying slave revolts, militant abolitionism (not necessarily non-racist) and a series of slow, self-serving 'abolition' gestures by colonial powers and Latin American republics. At the same time the Great Powers relied ever more on de facto servitude where their colonial networks pushed into sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, while industrial
organization methods pioneered on the big plantations spread in 'core' factories employing lighter-skinned (in America, often immigrant) Missing Link labour. 'Emancipation' was not supposed to raise the ex-slave any higher on the Chain of Being, it was more like a pre-emptive policy to preserve a racialized social structure that could hardly be managed any more on the old terms. Hence the premium throughout the century, and into the next, on scientific backing for a racial Chain, one flexible enough either to bestialize white and black workers together or to set one against the other as the case required.

Given the contradictions of this second wave of capitalist globalization, only the most prodigious flexibility would do. The disciplinary machinery, quota systems and rational division of labour developed on the plantations were first taken up in the unregulated factories of the 19th century, then applied more systematically in the 'scientific management' of F.W.-'intelligent gorillas'-Taylor early in the 20th. Yet as historian C. L. R. James has shown, the biggest, most modern American and Caribbean export production sites were effectively run by the slaves. 'Cognitive labour' is not just for European 'creatives': enslaved ‘technical specialists’ kept the plantation self-sufficient and managed its supply chain. "Slave blacksmiths ... coopers ... shoemakers, tanners, dyers and weavers", river pilots and seamen – sometimes hired out by their owners in an early sort of outsourcing – kept it working. The complex co-operative techniques the slaves developed on the plantations were turned against the planters and their military proxies, first in Haïti, then in the defeat of the Confederacy. Yet after emancipation, these technicians were cut off from socialized production, reduced to medieval-style sharecropping on extortionate terms. The desperate poverty resulting served as evidence of the ex-slaves' apish incompetence and eventually forced many to move north to do the worst jobs invented by Taylorist industrial de-skilling. In a further grotesque twist, the German colony of Togoland, via the racist intellectuals of the Verein für Sozialpolitik, invited Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in 1901 to send Afro-American graduates to teach indigenous cotton growers how to work. The graduates' obsession with the merits of the plough in the name of civilization and efficiency ensured ghastly failure; when the tsetse fly killed the draft animals, the Togolese 'students' were put under harness instead.

The calculating power of Missing Link science expanded along with its ideological task in the years leading up to the Koehler experiments – the decades of the Paris Commune, the Berlin Conference colonies, mass migration from Europe and militant factory women. New data ploughed into the ape-African analogy needed to encompass other ill-evolved humans without abstracting the basic racial element away. Micro-measurement of ape and human heads served up a rich supply of social metaphor. In Turin, criminologist Cesare Lombroso made a Polizeiwissenschaft out of circus sideshow phrenology with his mugshot and skull-statistics database, and a corresponding theory of criminal (i.e. negroid, apish) types. Today, cranial evidence as such is at last out of forensic favour, but Lombroso's first premise – that crime resides in the person rather than the act – enjoys higher legal standing than ever. Callipers, cephalometers and craniometers were applied to women as enthusiastically as fresh hysteria treatments, as if modern metrics could establish Eve's guilt for the Fall. Nancy Leys Stepan describes how jaw-measurement innovations at the Paris École d'Anthropologie 'proved' the long-fancied thesis that white women were closer biologically to black men and apes than to the heads of their own households. The great sexual reformer Havelock Ellis agreed, though he found white women's apish jaws more "charming" than those of male "negroes".

The analogical bond between white women and apes has proved less durable over the last 150 years than those making apes of black women, black men or any colour 'underclass'. Skull and jaw contour has given way to neurological, cognitive-behavioural and genetic means of naturalizing social station. Yet the allied quantitative superstition called IQ is taken as seriously today as it was at Ellis Island or Yerkes National Primate Research Centre and the U.S. Draft Board Ellis advised in the 1910s. Jensen, Charles Murray and their followers feel no need to defend its validity: it's a self-evident premise in their routines of racist question-begging. With official respect for anthropometrics at an all-time high, the old method of the primato-eugenicist Robert Yerkes slips smoothly into brand-new data models, serving a Social Darwinism that never went away.
Guilt by Association

The chain of analogy that integrates apes, non-whites, women, and workers into a common image of monstrosity has outlasted every 'scientific paradigm' that ever authorized it. This 'cultural' survival of scientific race-gender-class fantasies is not surprising, because biological data is always grafted onto social life using analogy's cultural forceps. Cause-effect explanation gives way to intuitive metaphor when scientists pronounce on the historical time that also constitutes their own lives and language. Analogies approved as science need not always be untrue, but whenever physical measure is upgraded to social metaphor, it forfeits one kind of claim to truth in pursuit of another. The lab result is respected for its modesty, its cautious quantification of one circumscribed thing, whereas imaginative comment on the social world knows no such bounds because its 'object' is indivisible. Its truth is tested only by what happens next. Analogy that speaks of social life while claiming scientific privilege abuses its position: it becomes a charter for a human zoo. Actual human zoos, exhibiting non-white humans for spectators' amusement, have existed since at least the 16th century.

In 1533, Montaigne witnessed one in Rouen which recreated a 'native village' of the Brazilian Tupinambás. The model was repeated at numerous World Fairs and in the Bronx Zoo at the turn of the 20th century. In 1958, visitors to a Belgian zoo for black Africans were encouraged to feed the inmates bananas. African tribesmen went on show in Augsburg Zoo as recently as 2005. A bestseller called The Human Zoo appeared in 1969. London Zoo’s Curator of Mammals, ape-art impresario and TV personality Desmond Morris wrote it as a follow-up to his likewise bestselling The Naked Ape, the foundational airport novel of modern sociobiology.

Pioneering eco-Malthusian Morris was horrified not by the public exhibition of caged human ‘primitives’ but by the high-rise, high-density urban lifestyle of the 20th century. When human animals get all the food and shelter they need for next to nothing, they are duly degraded by their life of abundance. Under normal conditions, in their natural habitats, wild animals do not mutilate themselves, masturbate, attack their offspring, develop stomach ulcers, become fetishists, suffer from obesity, form homosexual pair-bonds, or commit murder. Among human city dwellers, needless to say, all of these things occur. Morris doesn’t discriminate biologically between races in the manner of his colleague, biologist E.O. Wilson, but like all sociobiologists he sees an evolutionary drama played out daily in a cut-throat social competition, where some types are fit for while other self-destructive specimens are not. The class of successful apes is doomed to manage the others. "The politicians, the administrators and the other super-tribal leaders... must become good biologists... because somewhere in all that mass of wires, cables, plastics, concrete, bricks, metal and glass which they control is an animal, a human animal, a primitive tribal hunter, masquerading as a civilized, super-tribal citizen and desperately struggling to match his ancient inherited qualities with his extraordinary new situation. If he is given the chance he may yet contrive to turn his human zoo into a magnificent game-park. If he is not, it may proliferate into a gigantic lunatic asylum, like one of the hideously cramped animal menageries of the last century."

Ape-class humans may or may not fear a lunatic asylum more than a magnificent game park toured by white hunters. The 'choice' between coercive help and outright punishment – or the desperate attempt to fend both off as far as possible by playing one against the other – is an everyday matter for today's class of Cain. The stakes of early ape experiments are unchanged in the various strains of sociobiology, now sometimes known as 'behavioural ecology'. Koehler demonstrated 'abstract thinking' in his problem-solving chimpanzees, defining 'cognition' in apes and other labourers as one biological function among others, wasteful and riotous if allowed to run wild, but susceptible to training – and as such potentially
productive, just as Bartholomew of England saw it centuries earlier. Morris, Wilson and their successors observe the most complex, historically overdetermined social phenomena and see only the apish behavioural patterns they ascribe to genetic programming.

‘Aggression’, ‘xenophobia’, ‘competitiveness’, and sexual proprietorship, are concepts applied as though timeless, despite being many millennia newer than the genetic presets they’re supposed to represent. Like the ‘types’ of Personality psychology – another discipline with much to say about apes – these unmistakably 20th century categories are eternalized by circular reasoning: genetic programming changes more slowly than human history; tribalism and possessiveness are the currently favoured names for certain effects of such programming; therefore these names belong not to the historical time of their coinage but to the epochal time of the genetic code. Centuries of historical and linguistic mediation disappear thanks to this trick, letting it seem that everything done by the specimen (or the largest admissible unit, the specimen ‘tribe’) reflects genetic data directly, and that individual specimen psychology – being genetic and therefore generic – explains the collective life of the species.

What Morris’s hackneyed ‘urban jungle’ evokes above all is the sociobiologist’s hatred of the poor, something shared with countless earlier users of ape imagery. In 1857, the race ‘scientist’ George Glidden proclaimed in his ‘Indigenous Races of the Earth’ that “the most superior kind of Monkeys are found to be indigenous exactly where we encounter races of the most inferior types of Men”. Guilt by association. The reality is that apes live almost exclusively in countries that are predominantly poor. The smug Puritan notion that poverty is a sign of defective individual character – of sin – is common sense today. A routinely racialized slur, but unpredictably so because ‘race’ means nothing outside its racist application. In the mid-19th century, the Irish were portrayed with ape-like features – the outthrust mouth, sloping forehead, and wide flat nose of the standard Irish caricature – and as poor, primitive, drunk and lazy. Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton backed the demeaning caricature: “Visitors to Ireland after the potato famine generally remarked that the Irish type of face seemed to have become more prognathous (ape-like), that is, more like the negro in the protrusion of the lower jaw”.

But whether it be indigenous Peruvians, English weavers of the mid-18th century or the dispossessed Scottish Highlanders of the 19th, the master’s verdict is always the same: ‘congenital laziness’, ‘debauchery’, ‘insolence’. Professor Myles Glidden proclaimed early 20th century US cotton mill workers and decided that although "improvident" and "lacking in ingenuity, foresight and ambition, they were however adaptable to factory life". By then, F.W. Taylor’s behavioural authoritarianism was in full swing. In the present day, the East Asian worker is held up less as a model than as a warning to the decadent. Terry Gou, CEO of the Foxconn conglomerate – the Apple Mac manufacturer notorious for its worker suicides and relentless workrate – said: “Hon Hai [Foxconn] has a workforce of over one million worldwide, and as human beings are also animals, to manage one million animals gives me a headache”.

Western competitors’ response to this generic East Asian worker (alleged to have ‘a greater threshold of pain’ by a long time ruler of Singapore) involves the creation of a ‘cognitive class’, but this is not the ‘creative' entrepreneurial class it’s often thought to be. Instead, coercive Gestalt (as in ‘shaping’), cognitive-behavioural training and penalties for guessing the wrong questions are overwhelmingly visited on the class that has always been called apish, and therefore also on the usual ‘races’. Most cognitive labour is done by the supposedly lazy and unskilled, or by those whose most painfully acquired ‘skills’ are not the ones they get a wage for. To the extent that the ‘intelligent gorillas’ of Europe, Africa, Asia, and America survive by means of their own ingenious ‘problem-solving’, local capital is relieved of that burden and becomes more ‘competitive’. This happens in at least two ways. First, when the ‘lazy’ accomplish the logistical feat of staying alive, and maybe even raising children, on an income that amounts to a permanent insult and that makes access to all necessities uncertain – while ‘rational economic choices’ (‘grey markets’, border-crossing, ‘informal’ employment, welfare optimization) carry criminal penalties. Constant cognitive work is added onto the job itself – if there is one – in exchange for the privilege of being able to keep working. Second, the performance of personal skills – ‘communication’, ‘flexibility’, ‘engagement’, ‘positive attitude’ – is expected as a free gift on top
of any hours worked and paid for.

Management theorists lifted those criteria long ago from cognitive and behavioural psychology so that their clients would have a free hand in appraising white-collar subordinates, but such potent meaninglessness could hardly be ignored by handlers of the lower grades. The first and second types of cognitive work merge where the labour market, welfare system and police state meet, as in the U.K. for example. Receipt of benefits exposes the claimant to surveillance that overlaps with criminal justice and mental health machinery: attitude assessment to catch ‘despondency’ and send it to cognitive-behavioural therapy; ‘sanctions’ ranging from non-payment to prison for over-claiming or failing to attend kindergarten-style ‘work-readiness’ training. As with the apes, it’s a matter of discipline. Koehler showed with his apes how Tough Love sometimes out-coerces Pavlovian shock. The acutest of the ape-trainers was the one who got the ‘subjects’ to teach themselves the lesson freely, who hid the food where nothing less than flexible engagement would find it: the one who made the monkey signify itself. In a story by Janosch, der Kriminalaffe (Criminal Ape) sees through this particular stitch-up. Employment as a puppet in a puppet theatre has given the Kriminalaffe cause to reflect on forced self-impersonation. “There is a tiny fault with me. It’s like this ... in a complicated show I am not myself but someone else, because there is someone else inside me, the puppeteer with his hand. I can only move when he moves me and I must do everything he wants me to, so that from the outside I am myself but from the inside I am someone else.”

But while he explains this, the Kriminalaffe is locked in a box in a car boot on the way to the next circus. The physical and spiritual gymnastics prescribed for the ape class are heroically evaded or turned upside-down in thousands of cases every day; yet, even as this sabotage shaves basis points off profit, it’s still a kind of cognitive labour that someone has to do for reasons of survival. The animal, wrote the young Marx, “is immediately one with its life activity” indistinguishable from what it has to do to survive. Whether or not ‘wild’ life was ever really so abject, it’s towards this condition that capital would drive its human herd. Introspective insight is animality itself, once it becomes productive: there’s far more intellect involved in setting fire to a looted store.

**The Purloined Key**

Those scientists with an interventionist approach to primates – ones they will have under their control – are obsessed, however ‘sympathetic’ they may be, with the apes doing something. Training is invariably involved. J.M. Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello looks at it rather from the viewpoint of Koehler’s prize specimen: “In his deepest being, Sultan is not interested in the banana problem. Only the experimenter’s single-minded regimentation forces him to concentrate on it. The question that truly occupies him ... is: Where is home, and how do I get there?” In modern times, there have been numerous cases of gorillas, gibbons, chimpanzees and orang-outans escaping from the cages and compounds of zoos and parks. The response, by whatever method they are returned to their barred, fenced or walled spaces, is one of All’s Well That Ends Well.

There is often a touch of pride in the ingenuity of the escapees, but only when matched with the smug tone that goes with the inevitability of their ultimate failure. Now and then, this smugness of the captors has been punctured – as when the gorilla Jabari, who escaped from Dallas Zoo in 2004, was not returned but shot dead, just as had happened to another in Paris, 1931. Evelyn, a recidivist chimpanzee in Los Angeles Zoo, managed to pull out the tranquilizer dart she was hit with and threw it back at her pursuers, but in the conventional narrative was ‘happily’ subdued by the drug. In other instances, as at Kansas City Zoo, there have been ‘ringleader’ chimpanzees leading mass breakouts, using all the ingenuity of Sultan in fashioning ladders. “One of our chimpanzees was able to break roughly a six foot tree limb that was then used as a ladder to climb on top of the outdoor enclosure wall,” Julie Neemeyer wrote in an email to the Daily News. “That chimp then enticed six other chimps to join the first chimp.” The escapees, these included,
have never got very far; indeed, in some narratives they were pleased to be back in captivity but the element of pride within the parameters of inevitable re-capture is almost competitive. The headline “Sneaky ape makes great escape from San Antonio Zoo” was almost a challenge to Congo’s Virunga National Park, which retorted with “Our Intelligent Gorillas and Their Daring Escape”. The Virunga keepers detail how the gorillas had worked out that the voltage of the surrounding electric fence was not strong enough, but conclude by calling the whole thing the gorillas’ ‘little adventure’.  

The most celebrated escapee and real Kriminalaffe was an orang-outang given the name Fu Manchu, “a late resident of Omaha Zoo” who “frequently would be found outside his exhibit when his keepers arrived in the morning.” His escape involved climbing into air vents and following them to a dry moat surrounding his enclosure, where he would unlock a door used by employees. The lock, it transpired, was picked with a piece of wire which Fu Manchu kept hidden in his mouth during the day. It was the criminal mind, necessary in such situations at work, but the escape was necessarily limited. How to get from Omaha back to Borneo, given the logistics – money, disguise, maps and transport – that would require? Thus the Zoo’s smug pride in him – in the end it was safe. They did not, it is true, discover how he learned to pick locks, but discovered the rest by use of CCTV surveillance.  

It is this aspect of the story that most fits with the state-backed neoliberal narrative of inevitability. Thus, many of the London rioters of 2011 – so readily described as apes – would be caught not in the act, but in the end because of the pervasive CCTV coverage of the city. It may be that the economic inevitability of ‘the markets’ is now being challenged, but there have always been modes of refusal by apes, and by humans living by the sweat of their brow: silence, work-avoidance techniques and the dumb insolence of paying only lip service to the dictates of training. The secret of Fu Manchu’s lock-picking dies with him; the art for both species has been to keep, hidden if needs be, the space to ask the profound question, Why Are Things As They Are?

REFERENCES


[9] Paul Rohrbach, German Thought in the World, http://archive.org/stream/germanworldpolic00rohr/germanworldpolic00rohr_djvu.txt

continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/view/214
[10] Donna Haraway cited in Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism, Patricia Hill Collins on p 100


[24] See for example the Viringa National Park website; The Daily Mail online, 16th July