

BOOK REVIEW

Georges Chapouthier, *Kant et le chimpanzé. Essai sur l'être humain, la morale et l'art*, Paris: Belin, 2009

This book, written by a neurobiologist who is also a philosopher, has too many ontological and epistemological significances for not being emphasised in, at least, a review.

First of all, it is about the problem of *continuity* and *discontinuity* between man and animals. If, for example, Malebranche has revealed that there are common inclinations of these two species (of love, of the good in general, of curiosity, of being and well-being) as well as some special qualities of man (of knowing, of seeming, of being recognised, of imagined social relations)¹, a contemporary scientist has to explain the basis of these both common and different appearances. And a contemporary philosopher has to interpret the latest scientific information and theories in order to arrive to *integrative* principles and comprehension.

These principles arise after the description of the *historical* representations concerning man and animals over time:

- as humanised animal and animalised man²,
- of their *continuity* through the conception of metempsychosis,

- or as sensitive and affective animals, assuming the induced feelings of hierarchy transmitted them by man, and at the same time considered as deserving respect, since they are not objects or machines;
- or as absolutely *opposed* to man just because it is the holder and bearer of culture and civilisation, while they would be objects.

All of these, but rather the last image, are the premises of the first epistemological conclusion: that the post-Cartesian tradition of *absolute discontinuity* and *opposition* between the animal-machine and the mind-owner man (we remember the mind-body Cartesian dualism, in fact *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, including *vis vitalis*, that led also/ was related to the absolute subordination of nature to the modernising interests of man) ought to be abandoned and substituted. Not with the first and sweetened idea of absolute equivalence man-animal, but with the *bio-cosmological theory of unity, in difference, of man and animal in the cosmos*.

¹ Nicolas Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité Où l'on traite de la Nature de l'Esprit de l'homme, & de l'usage qu'il en doit faire pour éviter l'erreur dans les Sciences* (1674-1675), Livre IV.

² These cultural processes consisted of the imagined transfer of man's superior faculties over animals and – the adverse position – the reduction of man's superior faculties to mechanical functions.

The problem of man and animal appurtenance and relationships is seen within the theory of *bio-complexity*, the most general and universal model of complexity. The two principles of this model are *duplication/juxtaposition* and *integration*: where the levels or parts of living systems resulted from evolution have both a relative autonomy to each other and a state of “subordination” to the end of the superior level³. This situation can be expressed through the *metaphor of the mosaic*⁴: it shows the cosmic, mineral and unanimated origin of man, far beyond the well-known theory of animal evolution.

The *evolutionary integration in mosaic* allows to surpassing the simple dichotomies in the analysis of processes through the fixation of gradual changes as “triunity”, “triadic development of the biological and terrestrial phenomena in the universe”⁵. At the same time, this *evolutionary integration in mosaic* allows

the understanding of a certain correspondence between the human *logos* and the cosmic one⁶, as well as the use of the animal ethology in the social relations of domination; briefly, the *different places of original animal data* of humans and *cultural social causes* in the picture of present behaviour of man.

Indeed, even before the conceptual thinking, the humans have developed a kind of “moral responsibility” inherited from animals and consisting in the instinctual refuse to hurt the congeners and to intrude within their field of action. The intra-species aggression and aggressiveness was obviously the result of the concrete conditions of rarity⁷ and asymmetrical position of man and his environment, but they have developed together with the constitu-

³ This is consistent with Aristotle’s *telos* and Henri Bergson’s theory of *élan vital*.

⁴ Georges Chapouthier, *L’homme, ce singe en mosaïque*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 2001 ; Georges Chapouthier, *Kant et le chimpanzé. Essai sur l’être humain, la morale et l’art*, Belin, Paris, 2009 ; Georges Chapouthier, “Mosaic structures in living beings in the light of several modern stances”, *Biocosmology – Neo-Aristotelism*, Vol. 2, No. 1-2, 2012, pp. 6-14.

⁵ Konstantin K. Khroutski, „All-embracing (triune) medicine of the individual health: a biocosmological perspective”, *J. Future Studies*,14(4), 2010, 65–84; Georges Chapouthier, “Mosaic structures in living beings in the light of several modern stances”, pp. 9-10.

It is noteworthy that Chapouthier, “Mosaic structures in living beings in the light of several modern stances”, pp. 11-12, has showed that Stéphane Lupasco, although a declared anti-Aristotelian logician, had this ‘neo-Aristotelian’ reasoning, by introducing a third state between two opposite states

of a phenomenon. (Sée Stéphane Lupasco, *Le principe d’antagonisme et la logique de l’énergie. Problèmes à une science de la contradiction*, Hermann & Co, Paris, 1951).

⁶ Georges Chapouthier, “Mosaic structures in living beings in the light of several modern stances”, p. 12: “If the (mosaic) structures of life, as well as their basic triune processes, are considered as models for the structures and triune processes of the entire cosmos, there is then a clear explanation of why the laws of the universe can be understood by humans, of why human (scientific) knowledge is possible. As has been seen, the most complicated organ, the human brain and the mind processes which it controls (e.g. consciousness, language and memory), fits the theory of the mosaic and triune process of life and is thus able to simulate or mimic the laws of the surrounding environment”.

⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique, I, Théorie des ensembles pratiques précédé de Questions de méthode*, Gallimard, Paris, 1960.

tion of conceptual thinking and verbal language⁸ (related to the conscious problematizing of life aspects), transforming man in its own most dangerous enemy. But, because man always adapts, until his death, while animals do this only in their phase of development⁹, he “contains” nowadays not only the older instinctual basis of the conservation of life¹⁰, but also the aggressive impulses acquired *after* the constitution of its human specific which should be known and controlled¹¹.

Setting aside this sociological connexion which is realised in the book through the concepts of *culture* and *consequences of the human historical endeavours*, and sending to the problems of inhuman social relations and attitudes towards nature, the evolutionary integration *in mosaic* is important from the standpoint of the natural laws explaining man.

Yes, the human beings are subordinated to the laws of matter (p. 33) they are part of, but at the same time, they seem to oppose them. Not because of some esoteric laws of the living beings¹², but because these ones *receive both matter and energy from their environment* (Ilya Prigogine and his school) and have *self-sustaining movement and transformation processes*. They are not closed systems¹³ and

thus *they do not attain the state of thermodynamic entropy* but, on the contrary, they are a “thermodynamic exception”, and man is once more an exception since it constructs (on the basis of the “natural” exchange of matter and energy with its environment) a new world of artefacts and immaterial significances which transcends its biological death and challenges the natural thermodynamic cosmic death¹⁴. The book explains through biological researches, including those of the author, made in a real frame of *esprit de finesse* that man is a construction *in mosaic* and this construction supports both the theory of the hazard and the “predetermination” of the path realised between *n* possibilities in the peculiarities of the fundamental bricks of life (the atoms of carbon).

Actually, Chapouthier’s theory is that of the *complexity* realised through the *integration* of “more and more complex elements accorded together and at the same time slotted each in the other... in systems in ‘storeys’” (p. 34): cells in organs, organs in organisms, organisms in colonies; specialised organs and functions, all of these keeping a certain autonomy but, at the same time, subordinated to the superior levels.

⁸ Konrad Lorenz, *L’agression. Une histoire naturelle du mal* (1963), Traduit par Vilma Fritsch, Flammarion, Paris, 1969, p. 253.

⁹ Konrad Lorenz, *Essai sur le comportement animal et humain. Les leçons de l’évolution de la théorie du comportement* (1965), Traduit par C. et P. Fredet, Seuil, Paris, 1970.

¹⁰ Konrad Lorenz, *L’agression. Une histoire naturelle du mal*, p. 258: the self-destruction of man is the misfire of this instinct.

¹¹ André Avramesco, *Comment les progressistes ont été distancés: Sur l’arriérisme dans des domaines vitaux du savoir*, 16 janvier 2014,

<http://www.mondialisation.ca/comment-les-progressistes-ont-ete-distances-sur-larrierisme-dans-des-domaines-vitaux-du-savoir/5365038>.

¹² See Mary Terrall, “*Vis Viva Revisited*”, *History of Science*, vol. 42, 2004, pp. 189-209.

¹³ Ludwig von Bertalanffy, “The Theory of Open Systems in Physics and Biology”, *Science*, 3, 1950, pp. 23-29, and Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*, Vol. 1, George Braziller, New York, 1968.

¹⁴ Georges Chapouthier, « La vie et l’art, deux réponses à la mort cosmique », *Études sur la mort*, 124, 2003, pp. 131-139.

Man's consciousness and language are constituted in the same manner¹⁵. The superior level is that of culture. The traditional European cliché was that of the absolute superiority of man over animals, including apes, because of its culture. However, and though "*the intentions we can attribute to lower animals cannot be identical with the final goals of a human person*"¹⁶, there are almost 99% common genes of man and chimpanzee¹⁷ and thus an interesting and important "proto-culture" of animals and apes (pp. 42-68) which shows just the legacy transmitted to the human culture.

Chapouthier has demonstrated with the latest biological researches what philosophy, and, concretely, phenomenology, has suggested and even emphasized: 1) the multi-stratum constitution of the human being (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty) and the common experiences possibly shared by man and animals (for example, perception of things), 2) as well as the meanings, "intentions" and "subject" in the animal behaviour (Buytendijk¹⁸): all of these show that the unique specific of man, of a *person* having a *world of significances*, thus a world that is not shared with animals (Heidegger),

neither excludes the "interspecific intersubjectivity" leading to a relatively shared world by man and animals (Husserl¹⁹) nor it is foreign to the common features generated by life: *reactions* and *learning* and *adaptation*. Actually, the *ontological gap* between humans and animals is understood only if we grasp both the gradual constitution of this gap (the animal-man continuity and discontinuity) and the formation of new qualities (in animals and man).

Describing the *perception* of this gap, it appears that: *man* has a "very developed accession to the symbolic thinking" (p. 42); that its spirit consists of the "capacity to conceive the other as thinking 'as we do'" (p. 56), the capacity of distancing from the perceived elements²⁰, the capacity of explaining the aims and thinking of the other, the capacity to apply causal hypotheses to the world (p. 60). But, as in the case of man, neither the animal behaviour can be explained as absolute dichotomy of being-in-itself and being-for-itself (Merleau-Ponty), and if man can see the objects through different points of view and even concomitantly and even (the same object) in past, present and future, and even the difference between

¹⁵ At philosophical level, we can remind Aristotle's fourth cause, the *telos*: of organism/ the living being or individual. And the more this individual is biologically superior – and the more the human individual has stronger reasons of its ends – the more this *telos* exceeds the simple biological *conatus*. For man, this *conatus* should be human, realized in a *human* manner.

¹⁶ Walter Kofler, "Epistemological and ontological tools for extended view of a human person as a social being and its environment. *Part 1*: Considerations about ontological and epistemological options and restrictions", *Biocosmology – Neo-Aristotelism*, Vol.2, No.4, Autumn 2012, pp. 279-298 (here, 291).

¹⁷ See also Jared Diamond, *The rise and fall of the third chimpanzee*, Random, Radius, London, 1991.

As well as the discussion at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimpanzee> (retrieved October 24, 2014).

¹⁸ Herbert Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*, Northwestern University Press, 1972, esp. pp. 290-292.

¹⁹ Christiane Bailey, « Le partage du monde: Husserl et la constitution des animaux comme 'autres moi' », *Chiasmi International*, 15, 2013, pp. 219-249.

²⁰ See also Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, Gallimard, Paris, 1943, p. 120: the being of consciousness consists in being at a distance from the self..."

their clear-cut “definitions” and their ambiguous meanings and intertwining within the world, this is so not because it would be “only culture and spirit”. In both man and animals, nature/body *mixes* with culture/spirit in every attitude and result.

In both man and animals, the superior processing of information from the environment passes through the sensory receptors, and the quality of processing is depending on body and its sensory receptors.

This mixture of *bodily/natural/material basis* and *culture arisen in the experience of relations within and with the world* is the first ontological datum of the community of man and animals. Farther on, this ontological community is emphasized by the theory of two types of consciousness: the “access consciousness”, which is *functional*, allowing the use of representations, and the “phenomenological consciousness”, “an internal testimony near to the ‘qualities’ of the living (called in philosophy ‘qualia’)” (p. 61), *both types being present in both genres of animals*. But: *at different levels*. It is obvious that the apex of conscious-

ness – “the fact to possess a developed ‘theory of the spirit’” (ibid.) – lies in man²¹, but there are drafts of spirit (theory of the spirit) in animals, including the “proto-morals” and “aesthetic choices” (pp. 62-67). The principle of the *unity of the living*, as well as the methodological principle of the *unity of continuity* of unanimated matter and living beings with the *discontinuity* at every level of existence and, obviously and especially, between animals and man, are fundamental in Chapouthier’s approach.

Now if until now it seemed that the goal would have been the animal-man *continuity* and the reason of the analysis of animals through the *human metaphor*, the last two chapters of the book expressly insist on the *discontinuity* of the human being. Actually, just this is the topic of the book: “essay on the human being”, and only because this being has an animal part it was necessary to deconstruct the myths and clichés about this part. But already the title of the penultimate chapter warns: “Man is not (only) an animal”.

²¹ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (1944), Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1972, p. 223: “it is well-known that many actions deployed in the animal societies are not only equal but, in some ways are even superior to human actions. One has often showed that, constructing their cells, the bees act as a perfect geometer, realizing the highest precision and accuracy. Such an activity requires a very complex system of coordination and collaboration. But in all these animal realizations, we do not find any individual differentiation. They all are produced in the same manner and according to the same invariable rules. No freedom of action remains for the choice or individual skill. Only when we arrive at the superior levels of animal life, we do meet the

first features of a certain individualization... for the general structure of the animal life all of these are irrelevant. This structure is determined by the general biological law according to which the acquired characteristics are not susceptible of hereditary transmission.

Not even man is an exception of this general biological rule. But man has discovered a new way to stabilize and propagate his works. The different manners of this expression constitute a new sphere. They have their own life, a kind of eternity through which they survive to the individual and ephemeral existence of man. In all the human activities we find a fundamental polarity that may be described in different ways. We can speak about a tension between stability and evolution...”

First of all, science has shown that man has forged its original cultural range by constituting the use of *discrete* units and by transmitting them. This use and transmission has generated the formation of *abstract* thinking, within which both the reasonable and the imagination in their intertwining have constituted *meta-representations*. This basis was the result and, at the same time, led to the “external” instruments which have allowed the survival: clothes, tools, communication tools (pp. 69-73). OK, here man is. But how can we treat this special being? It is, obviously, *moral*: it has *values* and goals transcending the simple biological survival.

At the same time, this biological survival is *sine qua non* for any superior culture. If so, a philosophy supported by biological sciences needs to provide the epistemological frame of the study of the morals of the human animal. A main concept is that of *the natural*, or more correctly, the natural character of man or the natural basis of the human morals. It is, obviously, an ambiguous concept, but if we resort abusively to it, we do not understand man adequately. The natural basis of the human morals consist in the following of the *neotenic* (see Lorenz) aptitudes of the human embryo to adapt to *everything* – including in adapting the brain to copy nature in order to create tools (p. 79) and to articulate language, developing both remembrance and imagination – just because in the vertebrates giving the *homo* a more and more big part of the adaptation process of *species* was abandoned to *the individual* (p. 76), and this basis is intertwined with culture in such a way that there is no such thing as “natural morals”.

On the contrary, and not forgetting that the abusive resorting to culture and tradition is as harmful as the abusive resorting to nature,

the human nature was constituted through the development of some characteristics originated in the marriage of nature and culture/society: both the tendency to *reciprocity* (an essential element of the “proto-social” – “proto-moral” behaviour, p. 81) and the “selfish assertive behaviour”. Actually, the individual *creativity* has developed in the *interdependence* of the proto-humans and their *collective creation* of social norms and structures.

By explaining the ability of *symbolic* thinking of man, whose “hardware” is the systematic manipulation of *discrete* and *abstract* units, able to constitute an “analytic and thought-out ethics in the most conscious and discursive sense of the term” (p. 82), and by passing through the historical theories opposing nature to culture, the book aims at demonstrating the *unitary* conception where *culture is the logical extension of nature*.

This demonstration is made on the territories of morals and art. The problems raised –

- the moral sense, emphasising a dynamical representation of what is innate;
- the esthetical sense, flowing from the technical ability of constructing necessary artefacts and practices and only later from the creativity of the artist, and arising from the art as copy of nature and near to art-sanship (as at the ancient Greeks²²) or from the modern realm of culture and showing the freedom and autonomy of man;
- the esthetical sense related to the *human* senses, and not to the animals’ ones, as well as the difference towards the “sketches of esthetical choices made by animals”;
- the biological reasons to conceive of aesthetics as a way to morality;
- the biological origin of aesthetics, not only as intra-species sensitivity but also as sensitivity towards nature as a whole;

²² For this reason, for example, an old saying was:
I like Phidias, but I want not be Phidias.

- the cultural aptitude of art to contradict nature;
- art without its beauty? a “natural” criterion of the aesthetic;
- art as the alibi of morals;
- the aesthetical beauty as more than pleasure of our senses (and in this way as more than a harmonious manifestation of things, including the natural ones according to their functions and nature): as analytical reflection;
- the option for beauty as option for morals (or: beauty as responsibility);
- art as anti-destiny: as affirmation of the human being towards its detachment from its reasonable destiny of material system (pp. 81-101),

intend both a cultural message (interesting and new information from neurology etc.) and a moral one.

The human *unity between nature and culture* has its natural basis in the *dialectic* of the *cerebral hemispheres*. There is their *dichotomy*, as we know, reflecting their different functions (the left one – analytical thinking of the discrete, of facts, of mathematics and rational concepts/intentional use of language, of voluntary gestures, of classifying; the right one – synthetic thinking, global treatment of images and forms). But the real dissociation between *facts and values*, or between the *descriptive* and the *evaluative* is historically and culturally constituted, as well as the very interesting neurological researches about the geographical/cultural differences related to this dissociation. At the same time, there is about a *complementary* manifestation of the two hemispheres: their dichotomy is *integrated* within the harmonious functioning of the ensemble.

The cultural activity of humans is based on both dichotomy and unity.

Therefore, man appears as a “bridge between two ways to be”. It is both nature and culture, and the extreme theories (man as animal, or man as absolutely different from the animal) towards the integrative one defended by the book are but historical images of the constitution of the dialectic approach. Indeed and with the help of a negative formulation, man is both animal and *non-animal*, both nature and *opposed to nature*, “balancing within culture, even in the anti-nature” (p. 111). This bivalence means also that there is inseparability between these two natures of man, the *res cogitans* is not autonomous from the *res extensa*, nor the latter from the former.

First, the entire complex meanings and intertwining of body and spirit / the *animalitas* and *humanitas* of man, as well as the metaphysical animal origin of man and the continuity between them, besides their discontinuity, surpass the inherent simplifications made in the history of thinking. And it is worth to note again the tradition of Cartesian reduction of animals to machines, thus absolutely opposed to the humans having souls. As a result, animals would have no feelings. Malebranche was a Cartesian, but he “demonstrated” the lack of sensitivity of animals – as not feeling the pain – on the basis of a theological presumption (since they do not sin, it would not be right they suffer in a world led by God); and if they do not suffer, they are but machines²³.

Secondly, the body itself, including, as we saw, the cerebral apparatus, is the result of the cultural action over it²⁴, and the whole human complex matter-spirit was and is transformed in a historical process of intertwining

²³ Frederic Alquié, *Le cartésianisme de Malebranche*, J. Vrin, Paris, 1974, p. 50.

²⁴ See Ana Bazac, “The beauty of the body as cultural engineering”, *Noëma*, X, 2011, pp. 255-272.

nature and culture. This intertwining is *social*, and the main social processes, that of taming and of the discourse about taming as ameliorating, are and reflect *power relations*; and if society could be described as a relationship between those who tame/ameliorate and those who are tamed/ameliorated²⁵, it is obvious that not the sweetened discourses are the solutions to understanding and developing the human being.

By pointing the aspect of the possible poisoned influences of culture over the never finished man²⁶, Georges Chapouthier signals the reverse process of animalization of man, including through the *reduction* of man to functionalities and to the sensitivity towards functionality, without grasping and having the instruments to grasp the complex *significances* of the existence²⁷.

The book ends with a few sub-chapters about how to treat animals and the environment. Discussing about the moral gradualism and the “anti-speciesism”, the book resumes again the above-mentioned aspect. And if the

entire analysis has emphasised that it is not about a choice between Kant and the chimpanzee, because every man is both of them, the open question remains: *what will man do from its superb singularity, from its exceptional aptitudes to perceive the beautiful and the good?* Indeed, man’s unique intellectual capacity “does not guarantee an excellent quality of its everyday practical morals” (p. 129). It is a “gifted animal”, but will it convert its gifts in other directions than wars, crimes, atrocities? However, can we conclude, as man is not only given (once for all) but always *forthcoming* (*à venir*, let’s remember Derrida), as its future is forthcoming/is to be constructed (*à construire*). But if it does not challenge and change the *values* it has followed (and in a bitterest way in the late modernity), it may stop this forthcoming and enter “an age of Endarkenment”²⁸.

Ana BAZAC

Division of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science, Romanian Academy

²⁵ See Peter Sloterdijk’s excellent “Rules for the Human Zoo: a response to the *Letter on Humanism*” (1999), Translated by Mary Varney Rorty, Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics, Stanford School of Medicine, Palo Alto, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2009, volume 27, pp. 12 -28.

²⁶ This aspect does not mean the rejection of culture in the name of both tradition and nature.

²⁷ See Giorgio Agamben’s beautiful *The Open: Man and Animal*, translated by Kevin Attell (*L’aperto:*

l’uomo e l’animale, 2002), Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA., 2004.

²⁸ See the present message of the Club of Rome; for example, Graeme Maxton, *The End of Progress and the Start of the Age of Endarkenment*, <http://www.clubofrome.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ValuesQuest-Graeme-Maxton-The-Age-of-Endarkenment.pdf>.