

# Distinguishing men from animals with culture



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“ For culture is the sociological term for learned behaviour: behaviour which in man is not given at birth, which is not determined by his germ cells as the behaviour of wasps or the social ants, but must be learned anew from grown people by each new generation. The degree to which human achievements are dependent on this kind of learned behaviour is man’s great claim to superiority over all the rest of creation; he has been properly called ‘ the culture being animal.” — Benedict

Different people may have different definition of culture. The most common definition of culture is that culture means the mode of human activities, such as human knowledge, learning and belief which are integrated in the symbolic thoughts. Culture includes ideas about identity, nature, social relationship and so on, as well as artifacts. This topic is based on several assumptions. Firstly, this essay assumes that humans are not animals and only ‘ men’ have culture while animals do not have any. I also assumed that ‘ culture’ can be definite.

In the following, I will discuss the perspective of human in the point of view for zoologists, and also the inter-specific relationships between human and animals. This might counter my argument of ‘ culture distinguishes men from animals’. Secondly, I will discuss

Zoologist accounts on the human-animal’s inter-specific relationship

To zoologists, all animals (including human beings) are equally interesting. For them, all animals undergo the inter-specific relationship which is in the food chain, i. e. prey, symbiont, competitor, parasite and predator, and human beings exist in these pair of species. According to The Naked Ape

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(1967) by British zoologist, Desmond Morris, " Any species which competes with us for food or space, or interferes with the efficient running of our lives, is ruthlessly eliminated...Large carnivores have been out other serious competitors and these too have been eliminated wherever the population density of our species has risen above a certain level." Same as in the predator relationship, we humans are involved in it. Morris (1967) stated that larger carnivores such as sharks which are the killers are accounted for more humans' deaths than any other is one cannot devour the nutritious corpses it produces.

Moreover, Morris (1967) also pointed out that the inter-specific relationship appears to human and other animals not only in the food chain, but also in other ways. For example, human beings could not resist to say ' Hi' or any other greetings to his/her own pet, such as his/her own dog. Even we all know the animals will not understand, we still could not resist the temptation. We could not explain that. The response was just triggered off inside us when we see the animal. Furthermore, Morris (1967) also pointed out that our love or hatred to the animals is also included in the human-animal relationship. Through this, we can see the inter-specific relationship between human beings and animals exist in the vast amount of cultures, or even, we carried further in these relationships than other animals. Therefore, to zoologists, humans are not unique in these respects.

Biological differences between human and other animals

However, biologist anthropologists and other biologists may argue that there is something which is different in human than in other animals, which this

will lead to human are not animals (which I assumed before). So what distinguishes us from other species on animals? Gorillas and chimpanzees are close primate relative to humans. Compare to chimpanzees, human has 98 percent of genes same as the chimps. The differences between human and chimpanzees were brought by the 2 percent difference in our genes. Biological anthropologists believe that human beings have got a familiar skeletal hallmark. The major difference is that humans are bipedalism (standing on two legs) and the adaptation of the straight, upright gaits. Humans are having particular small teeth and large braincase as well. The 2 percent difference also brought the difference of using modern language to communicate idea. Human beings also use culture, which are complex ideas to survive. These are all the anatomical character of human beings.

Human evolution in human brains: What is in the Homo sapiens mind?

According to Jerome Kagan (2004), at the end of the first year, human and chimpanzee infants are similar to each other, " Both of the species locomote, attend to unexpected or unfamiliar events, and remember where an attractive object disappeared ten seconds earlier." However, 24 months later, maturational changes occur in human brain and it brought four unique quantities for humans: (1) Children can infer varied thoughts and feelings in others; (2) Children use a symbolic language with a grammar and semantic categories for events that share no physical feature; (3) Understand for the concepts of good. Bad, right and wrong; (4) Become consciously aware of some of their intentions and feelings. Moreover, Kagan also stated that " chimpanzees are incapable of appreciating the partner intends to engage in reciprocally cooperative act has no implication for the gaining of food or

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protection...Every two-year-old child makes this simple assumption automatically." Therefore, it is believed that a pair of chimpanzees could not throw a ball back and forth between them, while a pair of humans will assume to throw the ball back.

One of the unique characteristic in human brains is the feeling of guilty. Human is the only animal species which will feel guilty, it is not possible even in our close primate relatives such as the chimpanzees. Kagan explained that " Guilt requires an agent to know that a voluntary act that could have been suppressed has hurt another. Guilt requires the ability to reflect on a past action that injured another in some way, to realize that the behaviour could have been inhibited, and to appreciate that the self was the cause of the ethical violation." During human evolution, human developed to be conscious and aware to other's feeling, while other animals did not. Thus, the feeling of guilty is one feature which makes human unique.

Kagan pointed out another unique quality of Homo sapiens is the consciousness of one's feelings, intentions and properties, which is called sensory awareness. According to Kagan, there is not just only one form to awareness. It is believed that all these awareness require the brain circuits. There is awareness in properties such as consciousness in one's physical features, beliefs, talents and social categories. The other form of awareness is the awareness that one is about implement or suppress an action. Neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga believes that there is another form of consciousness which is the interpretation of one's feelings and perceptions. However, these four forms of consciousness are not evolved in the same time, they evolve in different ages in the humans' early childhood. In the first

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year, there will be the appearance of the awareness of sensory. In the second year, children will smile after completing a difficult task. It is not until the third year of life that children will be aware of their intentions and that they can describe what they are doing. Finally, in the fourth year, children can regularly integrate the present moment with their recollections of the past and begin to be able to interpret other's feeling and perceptions. However, for apes, they do not possess any other forms of consciousness apart from the sensory consciousness. In terms of consciousness, human is unique.

Another unique quality in the Homo sapiens' is that they are the animal species which are willing to limit their offspring from inclusive fitness (the ability of an organism to ensure the survival of their own offspring or to see how their genes pass on). The family size in human families is thus decreasing. Meanwhile, in other species, they will reproduce the offspring as much as they can, so that their species would not extinct due to any environmental factors, such as drought, lack of food, lack of shelter, disease and so on. For example, female fish will lay their eggs as much as possible so that there will be a greater chance for the eggs being fertilized. Moreover, this will increase the survival rate as most of the eggs will be eaten by other marine animals or bigger fishes. This will ensure their species would not be extinct. The same theory to increase the chance of survival of offspring is also applied in all other animals, such as dogs, cats and turtles. Therefore, human is unique by limiting their offspring.

Human cognition

Michael Tomasello brought up the idea of ' ratchet effect' in human cultural evolution . “ The most distinctive characteristic of human cultural evolution as a process is the way that modifications to an artefact or a social practice made by one individual or group of individuals often spread within the group, and then stay in place until some future individuals make further modifications — and these then stay in place until still further modifications are made.” The major part of the ratchet effect takes place in childhood.

### Taboos

For Vezo people, what makes human different from animals is taboos. They believe that it is taboos which make us humans. Human beings practice a whole range of taboos which animals don't. Lambek (1992) noted that “ taboos are distinctive at every level of social inclusion, from humanity viewed as a whole down to the individual.” The Vezos have different taboos to show respect to animals. According to Astuti (2000), Vezos do not hunt or eat dolphins because they are generous towards human. Therefore, taboos on eating or hunting dolphins as dolphins saved people's lives by gently keeping them afloat and pushing them back to the land after their canoes had capsized.

However, children are too young to know about taboos and moral issues. They do not have taboos. If taboo is the unique quality of human beings, are children considered as animals? For me, children are considered as ' premature humans', which they do not have much experience on what is happening in the world. Even as I mentioned above, the brains undergoes human evolution and become more consciousness and awareness in their

first four years of life. They are unwise and do not understand anything. However, as they grew up, and their perspectives will be changing. For example, after they have faced the life and death of their animal pets or toys, they will understand more about human death. And as what Astuti mentioned, ' this will contribute to transform their appreciation of the boundary between animals and people" Until they understand and appreciate the boundary between animals, they will become a ' mature human'. It takes 5-12 years for a child to become a ' mature human'. Therefore, taboos may be a unique quality for Homo sapiens.