



No Laughing Matter

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Associate Professor Lori Gruen sits below a portrait of Sarah, a chimpanzee formerly involved in cognition studies, and reminds us that humans are also Great Apes.

Associate Professor of Philosophy LORI GRUEN argues the time has come for humans to reconsider our relationship with chimpanzees.

Among this year's most popular SuperBowl ads was the latest installment in CareerBuilder.com's "monkeys" campaign, starring a horde of rowdy chimps with corporate jobs.

In the ad, chimpanzees in ties and trench coats crash-park their jalopies in the company lot, then scramble over the wreckage of a human co-worker's once shiny wheels. The ad has been viewed on YouTube nearly 750,000 times.

But Associate Professor of Philosophy Lori Gruen isn't laughing. She's thought too much about the chimpanzees' lives off-camera.

Captured as infants and sold away from their mothers, entertainment industry chimps in the United States typically spend their early years in training camps—learning to behave like people. By adolescence they are too strong for safe work with humans, and their Hollywood careers rarely last beyond age 10.

This presents the sort of problem that Gruen thinks about: dilemmas. What do you do with the chimps once they're no longer useful?

There's no sending them back to their natural habitat—socialized from infancy for human interaction, they're unprepared for survival in the wild. Returning them to the forest would be a death sentence.

Yet there's evidence that chimpanzees don't enjoy captivity.

"They know where the locks are—they point to them. They want to get out," says Gruen, whose recent work examines the ethical implications of human interactions with nature. "There is a special wrong that is done when holding someone in captivity

who has done nothing to deserve the loss of his or her freedom."

In the United States, captive chimpanzees, who can easily live to age 50, typically spend most of their lives in wildlife sanctuaries. Former Careerbuilders.com chimps live at the Center for Great Apes in Florida.

Gruen, a pioneer in the relatively young field of animal studies, understands the human fascination with other Great Apes and the urge to study them up close. Strikingly similar to us, and yet obviously different, we learn about ourselves by measuring the differences.

But Gruen says our nearest evolutionary relatives deserve better.

In her new book, *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction*, and in a class she teaches at Wesleyan, Philosophy 215, "Humans, Animals and Nature," she argues that our profound similarities imply an ethical responsibility to chimpanzees akin to our ethical responsibility to fellow humans.

"There is no compelling reason to limit our moral attention only to those who are members of our own species. Other animals, like chimpanzees, form friendships, laugh, and can be tender and nurturing. They also suffer and apparently grieve. We should extend our moral community to include others whose lives matter," she says.

Gruen admits she's "all about the chimps." When a colleague suggested she write about chimpanzee researchers, Gruen thought, "I'd rather write about the chimpanzees."

The new book, published this year by Cambridge University Press, contextualizes

human exploitation of chimpanzees and other animals, and explores the complex questions she poses to her students. To what degree are chimpanzees self-aware? Can they recognize the moral imperatives of others? Whose? And what do answers to these questions imply about how humans ought to treat them?

The first scientific primate laboratory in the United States was founded in 1925 in New Haven by Yale University psychologist Robert Yerkes, who studied chimpanzees' behavior, intelligence and personality. By 1930 he had opened the first captive experimental breeding colony, in Orange Park, Fla.

Breeding made it easier for other researchers to acquire primates for studies in psychology and biomedical research. Today an estimated 980 chimpanzees are employed in U.S. lab research, out of a total domestic captive chimp population of about 2,000. One of Gruen's Web sites—first100chimps.wesleyan.edu—includes a hyperlinked list of the first 100 chimps used in research here, starting with Bill (#1) and ending with Flora (#100).

With a ready source of chimpanzees, psychologists embarked in the mid-20th century on a variety of experiments intended to determine the great apes' intellectual capabilities and potential. Could they be trained to understand human speech? To speak? To what extent? Could they learn to communicate using other types of symbols or innate grammar?

In the 1940s psychologists Keith and Cathy Hayes acquired a two-day-old Yerkes chimp, Viki, and attempted to "cross-foster" her—or raise her as a human child, working hard to teach her to speak.

They largely failed, teaching her to say only "up," "pop," and "cup," and only by manipulating her mouth. (Scientists later determined that humans are the only ape capable of articulation, thanks to our larynx.)

Still, Gruen says, an important discovery came of the Hayes' work. "(Viki) responded to verbal commands—understood spoken English more than she could speak. She did use the sounds to convey meaning."

Another chimpanzee, Washoe, was taught sign language and developed a 200-word sign vocabulary that she, in turn, taught to other chimpanzees. The chimps would sign to each other even when no humans were around.

A DAY AT CHIMP HAVEN

In a different sort of experiment, Yerkes collaborators David and Ann Premack (who later moved to the University of Pennsylvania) explored the extent to which chimpanzees are conscious of themselves as individuals within a group.

The Premacks found that a chimp named Sarah could communicate either “Give Sarah banana” or “Give Gus banana” with magnetic symbols on a board, and also understand that using the “Sarah” symbol in this series would reward her and the using the “Gus” symbol would reward a fellow lab chimp.

Gruen explains the significance of this work to her class: “It was Premack’s work with Sarah that led him to the formation of a key question in psychology: Do animals have a ‘theory of mind?’ Do they understand others as intentional, separate beings, with beliefs, desires, and intentions distinct from his or her own?”

Chimpanzees appear to, reinforcing Gruen’s view that humans owe them moral consideration.

later, one chimp recognized him and signed, essentially, “Get me out of here,” Gruen says. “It was remarkable, and very sad.”

New types of experimentation also raised new questions of ethics. Researchers discovered that the progression of HIV to AIDS, while common in humans, is rare in chimps, exposing the limits of their utility as study subjects.

Says Gruen, “Millions of tax dollars were spent creating these chimps to use for research that returned virtually no interesting or helpful results.”

Gruen puts the hard questions to her students.

“I asked you several weeks ago how many of you would kill a chimpanzee to save a 5-year-old child, and most of you said you wouldn’t,” she says at a meeting of Philosophy 215. “Does that answer change if it becomes the more abstract question of possibly finding a cure for, say, Hepatitis C?”

“Only possibly finding a cure?” one student asks. “With a surer outcome, I would be more inclined to sacrifice that chimp.”

ty deserves a lesser quality of life—defined as the opportunity to pursue an enjoyable life—than anyone else. If chimpanzees belong to our community of equals they should be treated ethically.

Gruen asks her students: “What are some counterarguments?”

“If ethics is a contract,” one student ventures, “we can only enter into it with other moral agents, not with moral patients, who can’t bear the equal responsibility of providing us with a high quality of life.”

Gruen has a retort: What about humans born with severe cognitive impairments? “No one would say that they are not in the community of equals,” she says. “So it’s problematic to require that moral obligations exist only to other agents. Imagine the society that would result.”

Chimpanzees might or might not be moral agents, capable of appreciating the moral claims of other individuals. All the same, Gruen says, their similarities to humans warrant giving them the benefit of the doubt.

biomedical research on apes in the U.S., the Great Ape Protection Act, has been stalled in the House of Representatives since 2008. It would stop federal funding for research and require the permanent retirement of all federally owned great apes.

For now, research on apes proceeds, as many scientists say it should, given potential benefits for humans. The use of trained apes as actors also continues, despite the advertising industry’s growing discomfort with the practice, evidenced by the promise of 10 major ad firms to stop and an *Advertising Age* editorial praising the pledge.

When the National Institutes of Health last year approved a request by hepatitis researchers in Texas for the recall of a small group of semi-retired chimps, the incident attracted media attention. *The Washington Post* sought Gruen’s assessment.

“Because chimpanzees are so sophisticated,” she told the paper for a story published in March 2011, “there has been a long-standing discussion worldwide about the justification of using them.”

With her new book, she continues the debate.

“When we could prevent that treatment and we don’t, we cause harm that’s not necessary,” she says. This “puts our own moral agency in doubt.”

A philosopher and animal ethicist, Professor Lori Gruen finds that regular visits to Chimp Haven, the national chimpanzee sanctuary in Louisiana, inform her scholarly work.

On a recent visit, Gruen was delighted that Emma, a 10-year-old chimpanzee of whom she is especially fond, recognized her. “She was looking and looking at me,” Gruen recalls. “Then, she started flapping her arms, she was so excited. It’s quite remarkable and so rewarding; I hadn’t been there for months.”

Not all greeted her fondly. “Cody knows me much less well—he’s only been in the group a couple of years but he’s trying to be the alpha male. He stood bipedally and threw poop at me.”

Gruen was prepared for his display of chimpanzee dominance: “I did chimp submission—you hunch over, present your wrist, and you keep your eyes down.”

Chimp Haven, which opened its doors to the first chimpanzees in 2005, is an independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide lifetime care for unwanted chimpanzees—those who had been used in medical research, the entertainment industry, or kept as pets. Currently it houses more than 100 of

these great apes on a spacious, wooded area, providing the residents with indoor bedroom areas, large forested tracts for foraging, and smaller enclosed courtyards.

In one of these areas, chimps and professor groomed each other, using wooden spoons to scratch and comb, through the mesh that surrounds the courtyard. Chimps would normally use their fingers, but the separation keeps humans safe from chimpanzee strength and unpredictability.

Later, with the chimpanzees safely in another area, Gruen placed a few treat boxes inside their mesh enclosure. The boxes were labeled with Gruen’s address stickers: cartoons of herself and her dogs, Fuzzy and Maggie.

“When the chimps saw the packages, they were really excited—a lot of hooting. Food is really important to them. They know that they are under the control of humans and we feed them, so it’s not surprising that they are even more food-oriented than they would be in the wild.” They are able to forage for leaves and vegetation at Chimp Haven, she adds, but everyone likes a box of treats.

“Then Emma came over with a label. I started doing match-to-sample quizzes with her.

“I told her which picture is me, which is Maggie, and which is Fuzzy, and then I asked her, ‘Where’s Fuzzy?’—and she pointed to Fuzzy.

“It suggested to me that, because she did this type of cognitive work early on, this matters to her. It seems gratifying—we have communicated.

“This group trades for treats, so I can get them to help clean their enclosure by picking up pieces of litter in exchange for treats. Sheba, though, will take a box and tear off little pieces. She’ll want a treat for each piece.”

Gruen notes that she has learned to time her departures with day’s end, when the chimpanzees are going off to their bedrooms.

“I think they do know when I’m not coming back the next day,” she says. “Emma was quiet as I was saying goodbye.”

“My dreams are filled with them when I’m there—and when I’m away, my dreams are filled with them in a different way,” Gruen says, adding “That’s more about my bond to them than theirs to me. I think they loom much larger in my world than I do in theirs.”



Sheba smiles for the camera at her sanctuary home, Chimp Haven. Gruen knows her as a wily trader for treats.

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“We’ve found that these chimps are highly sensitive, intellectually sophisticated, cognitively complex, psychologically rich beings with very unique interests,” she says. “But in finding all that out, we now have chimps that we’ve taken from a natural environment—and who are stuck with us. In the process of finding out what our moral obligations are, we’ve violated them.”

As money for behavioral research ran out in the 1980s, many captive chimps, including some who had lived in human households, were acquired by biomedical labs. The advent of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s stimulated new demand for primate research subjects, and breeding continued.

The television show *20/20* once recorded the visit of a psychologist to a medical research lab that was experimenting on his former sign-language subjects. “More than a decade

Gruen presses on.

“Guaranteed a cure, would you kill 50 chimps to save everyone from Hepatitis C?” she asks. “Doing the greatest good for the greatest number—from that ethical perspective it would be justified. But if you were to perform the experiment in a non-speciesist way, you would also be justified in using human subjects.”

Speciesism elevates the interests of one’s own species above all others, she says, challenging the assumption that this is not merely a natural practice, but a just one.

Philosophers and scientists have argued in the *Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, a text that Gruen teaches, that within a community of equals, each member is entitled to the right to live, the protection of individual liberty, and freedom from torture. No one within the communi-

ty says: “Our own moral agency is brought into question when we are engaged in systematic, institutionalized use of these highly sensitive and cognitive beings who have meaningful lives of their own to lead.”

In recent years there have been efforts to impose tighter regulation on the use of apes in the U.S., the only developed nation still using them for biomedical research, according to Gruen.

In 2000, President Clinton signed the Chimpanzee Health, Improvement, and Maintenance Plan (CHIMP) Act, establishing a system of sanctuaries for apes used in research supported by the federal government, after the animals are “no longer needed.” A 2007 amendment partially closed a loophole allowing them to be recalled for further research.

A more sweeping bill that would end all