The Tables Turned

"Brunnengrotte mit zwei Wassergottheiten" was exhibited close to his death in 1896 a marble of "an unfortunate young woman" (monkey viewing or contemplating a skull), in 1893 at the Große Berliner Kunstaustellung, the "Affe mit Schädel" was a featured bronze in the catalog of the Gladenbeck foundry (set up by Carl Gustav Hermann Gladenbeck in 1851), and that was shown through its quirkily original (Thomas Henry Huxley would die 2 years later, but in 1893 he still found it necessary to preach persuasive Darwinism to the Royal Society even though "On the Origin of Species..." had been in print for 34 years). What inspired Rheinhold in making his sculpture is unknown, although it has obvious parallels with August Rodin’s "The Thinker". It is quite unlike his later, better known works that include a group of reading monkeys ("Losende Monche"), a tribute to Alfred Nobel ("Dynamite in the Service of Mankind"), a bust of socialist leader August Bebel and his most famous piece "Am Wege" (1896) a marble of "an unfortunate young woman with a child at her breast". Rheinhold was protective of his Jewish heritage being a strong influence in the Deutsch-Israelitischer Gemeindebund (an association of Jewish corporations) and sculpture: "Die Kämpfer" ("The Warriors") in protest against burgeoning anti-Semitism. Rheinhold's last work of serpentine deities in a fountain ("Brunnengrotte mit zwei Wassergottheiten") was exhibited close to his 1900.

Consciousness Unexplained

When a human is depicted holding a skull it is usually a comment on mortality and the inevitability of death. Famousy, Hamlet bereaves Yorick in one instance ("Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him...") but is soon reputed by this macabre souvenir as it brings him face-to-face with all it’s grim destiny. But, for Rheinhold’s monkey it is something quite different. The monkey is engaged in assessment and measurement (confirmed by the callipers also held). The countenance is not one of sorrow through personal loss nor is it melancholic through encountering with such a physical embodiment of quietus. It is studious indifference in the gaze, or has a whimsical contemplation led to a pensive parenthesis? Has the ape chanced upon the measure of man? Indeed, that we should even consider this level of intelligence in another species is a bold examination of our ignorance through the disproportionate leverage historically awarded humankind. Is not the whole relationship and divide between man and animal conjured up in this single image? So, Darwinian reasoning places us further up the diverging evolutionary tree than our closest genetic companions. Yet, thanks to completion of the Human Genome Project, we now know that the chimpanzee featured in the statue shares 99.5% of our genome, nevertheless, in spite of our morphological similarities and like physiology, there is an essential 'something' more that prescribes our special difference. That additional ingredient is our consciousness, albeit strange that "conscious" and "conscience" are intrinsically separated more than their homophonic distance might suggest.

Thus we should be assured in our evolutionarily appointed position of superior intelligence, yet the possession of a consciousness that can only be explained in terms of unconscious events (as concluded by Daniel C. Dennett in Consciousness Explained, Penguin Books, 1996) barely ratifies us as an extraordinary organism. If we are unable to explain this faculty, then, by applying Occam's Razor, we are probably left with not much more than Descartes’ "I think therefore I am", such that human supremacy over the animal kingdom is balanced on this knife-edge of reason. In that case we perhaps should be wary of our confidence. Our precarious position atop the intellectual food pile is continually buffeted by the winds of dissent from a flourishing field of studies in animal sentiment (e.g., Compassion in World Farming Trust, From Darwin to Dawkins, Conference, London, 17-18 March 2005). Additionally, a recent claim reclassifies the chimpanzees with us hominids (as Homo troglodytes) on the basis of shared genetic history (and an alternative estimate of 99.4% shared DNA, Willman D.E., Udinn M., Liu G., Grossman L.I. & Goodall J. M. 2003. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 100, 7181–7188). Then perhaps our summit is shrinking, and in future we may find it difficult to defend an ossified premise fossilized through presumption.

A higher position? Are we sure of that? Apes studying Darwin? Calm! Relax now. The statue is not really suggesting a Planet Of The Apes-like notion of human superiority by another species (preserved in our panarama by Pierre Boule’s & Monkey Planet, John Wyndham’s The Day of the Triffids, H.G. Wells’ War of the Worlds, etc.). Mitigation of our control over the rest of the animal kingdom might be assumed for one version of the statue ("The Tables Turned" attributed to Randolph Caldecott), however, even this reference is not one of any Dostoevsky scenario depicting human slavery at the paws of super-intelligent primates. Thus, William Wordsworth poem actually speaks more of animal rights under vivisection &co.

"Darwin’s Ape". Other versions less faithful to the original mutate the chimp's pensive contemplation to head-scratching bewilderment, or sacrifice metallic lustre by substitution of cheaper materials (e.g., clay), and often undermine the sculpture’s poise with careless positioning of a plastic skull. Prices currently range from $10 to $4,500.

Locations

Other than our own statue here at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh, other original (Rheinhold-attributed) bronzes of the statue can be found at Aberdeen’s Medico-Chirurgical Society, the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, the Boston Medical Library and the Medical Library of Queen's University, Kingston, Canada, and also in Calgary, Colorado, Arkansas, Munnekeburen, Oskville, Osaka, Oxford, Salem am Bodensee, Stevens Point, Vienna, and famously on Lenin’s desk in the Kremlin. One was even salvaged from a WWII Junkers 88 at the bottom of Lake Attersee (Austria).

Contact

If you have any further information about the statue or are interested in obtaining your own copy of the "Affe mit Schädel" statue please contact the author of this pamphlet: J.F. Derry, Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh, (+44 (0) 131 651 3631 
derry@ed.ac.uk).

Further information

There is an archive of statue variaties @ http://www.angelfire.com/apes2/rpm/archive/
Axel Schmetzke (University of Wisconsin) has the most comprehensive page about Hugo Rheinhold and the "Affe mit Schädel" statue @ http://library.upw.edu/auchmoot/Rheinholds/Monkey/Rheinholds.Monkey.Page.htm
Axel Schmetzke, Jochen Richter and Julian Derry are currently preparing various articles and a book related to the statue.

Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh.


The Tables Turned

"Up! Up! my friend, and quit your books;

Up, up! my friend, and face the want;

Why all this toil and trouble?

To earn a bed of straw, and rags, and squalor?

A freshening luster mellow

In the bosom of your home;

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!

And how the evening bower doth please!

But we are sick and weak, and tired with tasks;

And what has been the early plan of things?

The sun, above the mountain's head,

A burning, maturing sun,

Is it your want to study science?

Then, man, what business have you here?

Your books and lectures may be very fine;

But how do you propose to be a surgeon?

"Tis all a dull and endless strife,

Toil, toil, toil! what will you do with life?

There's none of wisdom in your head.

Surely, in the low which Nature brings,

We are unable to explain this faculty, then, by applying Occam's Razor, we are probably left with not much more than Descartes’ "I think therefore I am", such that our consciousness over the animal kingdom is balanced on this knife-edge of reason. This in case we perhaps be wary of our confidence. Our precarious position atop the intellectual food pile is continually buffeted by the winds of dissent from a flourishing field of studies in animal sentiment (e.g., Compassion in World Farming Trust, From Darwin to Dawkins, Conference, London, 17-18 March 2005). Additionally, a recent claim reclassifies the chimpanzees with us hominids (as Homo troglodytes) on the basis of shared genetic history (and an alternative estimate of 99.4% shared DNA, Willman D.E., Udinn M., Liu G., Grossman L.I. & Goodall J. M. 2003. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 100, 7181–7188). Then perhaps our summit is shrinking, and in future we may find it difficult to defend an ossified premise fossilized through presumption.

A higher position? Are we sure of that? Apes studying Darwin? Calm! Relax now. The statue is not really suggesting a Planet Of The Apes-like notion of human superiority by another species (preserved in our panarama by Pierre Boule’s & Monkey Planet, John Wyndham’s The Day of the Triffids, H.G. Wells’ War of the Worlds, etc.). Mitigation of our control over the rest of the animal kingdom might be assumed for one version of the statue ("The Tables Turned" attributed to Randolph Caldecott), however, even this reference is not one of any Dostoevsky scenario depicting human slavery at the paws of super-intelligent primates. Thus, William Wordsworth poem actually speaks more of animal rights under vivisection &co.

"Darwin’s Ape". Other versions less faithful to the original mutate the chimp’s pensive contemplation to head-scratching bewilderment, or sacrifice metallic lustre by substitution of cheaper materials (e.g., clay), and often undermine the sculpture’s poise with careless positioning of a plastic skull. Prices currently range from $10 to $4,500.

Locations

Other than our own statue here at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh, other original (Rheinhold-attributed) bronzes of the statue can be found at Aberdeen’s Medico-Chirurgical Society, the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, the Boston Medical Library and the Medical Library of Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada, and also in Calgary, Colorado, Arkansas, Munnekeburen, Oskville, Osaka, Oxford, Salem am Bodensee, Stevens Point, Vienna, and famously on Lenin’s desk in the Kremlin. One was even salvaged from a WWII Junkers 88 at the bottom of Lake Attersee (Austria).

Contact

If you have any further information about the statue or are interested in obtaining your own copy of the "Affe mit Schädel" statue please contact the author of this pamphlet: J.F. Derry, Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh, (+44 (0) 131 651 3631 
derry@ed.ac.uk).

Further information

There is an archive of statue variaties @ http://www.angelfire.com/apes2/rpm/archive/
Axel Schmetzke (University of Wisconsin) has the most comprehensive page about Hugo Rheinhold and the "Affe mit Schädel" statue @ http://library.upw.edu/auchmoot/Rheinholds/Monkey/Rheinholds.Monkey.Page.htm
Axel Schmetzke, Jochen Richter and Julian Derry are currently preparing various articles and a book related to the statue.

Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh.


Axel Schmetzke, Jochen Richter and Julian Derry are currently preparing various articles and a book related to the statue.