2
Animality

While humans are free agents in making their own sociocultural history, animals are unfree in that their (natural) history is made *for* them. (Noske, 1997: 76)

Men confidently assert that Negroes have no history. (Du Bois, 2005 [1915]: 61)

THINKING ABOUT ANIMALS

The value of the anthropological study of human interactions with other animals becomes particularly salient when considered in relation to historical conceptions of 'animality' or the essence of 'animalness', and the use of this definitional tool to distinguish between humans and other nonhuman species. Perhaps more significant from an anthropological perspective however, is the recognition that notions of animality have also been used (and in many contexts still are), to categorize groups of humans themselves on the often dubious grounds of 'difference' (see for example, Marks, 2003; Mullin, 1999; Noske, 1997).

The ways in which humans perceive and organize the world around them (including other humans and animals) are often thought to be shaped by the specific cultural and historical circumstances within which they are socialized; fixed, culturally constructed meanings are attached to things and these become taken-for-granted assumptions which enable individuals to 'construct' a world view. The limitations of a strictly 'constructivist' model have been revealed by comparatively recent theoretical developments in anthropology such as the phenomenological emphasis on the fluidity of perspectives as a result of experiential immersion within the world (see chapter 10).

It is now widely recognized that individual experiences in the world, and the ways in which our physical bodies respond to these, are also fundamental in shaping perceptions, which can then come to be at odds with dominant 'cultural' norms (Ingold, 2000; Milton, 2002). For example, in contemporary upland Japan, where there is a long history of bear hunting and where bears are widely perceived as 'criminals' and threats to human safety, hunters

sometimes experience bears in ways that cause them to rethink their perceptions of, and actions towards, these animals:

> Fujiwara Chôtarô tells of how, when on a culling mission to dispatch problem bears, through his binoculars he caught sight of a family of bears on a facing mountainside. 'When I saw this innocent scene of the parents and cubs together, even I, who has made a living by killing bears, lost my hunting desire. My heart was attacked by this all too wonderful scene, which I just stood watching, forgetting myself'. (Knight, 2000b: 158–9)

Knight does not reveal how this story ends, but such experiences, which can lead individuals to go against their 'cultural' conditioning and rethink their own values and actions, are common throughout the ethnographic record and in daily social life. They can also, on occasion, result in individuals permanently changing their lifestyle, livelihood or ideology.

While a constructivist position may at times allow individual experience to be overlooked, there is still much to be gained from considering the role of 'culture' in shaping attitudes towards and perceptions of 'others' because, while we are all individuals, we nonetheless use 'cultural norms' to ground our experiences. These experiences may then confirm or lead us to reject what we have been 'taught' to think (for example, that bears are pests and need to be culled), but in every socio-cultural context there will be a certain 'dominant' world view. Even if individuals don't subscribe to it fully, they will be acutely aware of this and it will guide their own thoughts and actions to some extent. In relation to animals, ideas pertaining to what constitutes 'animality' at a societal or cultural level vary according to context. This variation provides valuable insight into how dominant ideologies have informed both collective and individual attitudes towards 'others', human and nonhuman alike.

DEFINITIONS

The most obvious point to make at the outset is that humans are themselves animals. However, most dictionary definitions of 'animal' skirt around the issue, implying that humans are elevated beyond their animal origins by virtue of their spiritual and cognitive capabilities. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'animal' as:

> 1. *Zool.* Any living organism characterised by voluntary movement, the possession of rapid response to stimuli, and the ingestion of complex organic substances. 2. any mammal, esp. except man. 3. a brutish person. 4. *Facetious*. A person or thing … 5. of, relating to, or derived from animals. 6. of, or relating to physical needs or desires; carnal; sensual.

The situation becomes even more confusing when the term 'animality' is considered and we are told that humans are, at least in part, animals; '1. the animal side of man, as opposed to the intellectual or spiritual. 2. the characteristics of an animal.'

So 'man' has an animal side, the side which needs to be kept in check and overcome. As the philosopher Mary Midgley notes (1994b: 192), human behaviours which are regarded as socially undesirable are labelled animalistic and this label can be applied to achieve both moral and political ends:

> when human beings behave really badly, they are said to behave 'like animals', however unlike their acts may be to those that any other species could perform. This is a way of disowning the motives concerned and distancing them from the rest of us.

This goes some way towards explaining why human characteristics and actions such as rape and murder at one end of the spectrum, and sexual promiscuity or bad table manners at the other, are often labelled as animalistic. By using 'animal categories and verbal abuse' (Leach, 1964) humans chastise and censure those others who are thought incapable of controlling that which 'society' deems inappropriate or unacceptable. Conversely this 'animal side of man [sic]' can also be a fallback position, to exonerate minor transgressions which might occur when we let our 'cultural' guard down (under the influence of alcohol or drugs for example).

Anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests that humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) are a species of animal, but humanity exists in 'a state of transcendence over animality' (1994b: xxi). In many contexts animality is constructed in opposition to humanity. Again, Ingold puts it well, stating, in relation to dominant post-domestic ideologies: 'every attribute that it is claimed we [humans] uniquely have, the animal is consequently supposed to lack; thus the generic concept of "animal" is negatively constituted by the sum of these deficiencies' (1994b: 3).

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

European thought on the human–animal divide owes much to the thinking of 17th-century philosopher René Descartes. Descartes (2007 [1649]) argued that consciousness was an exclusively human preserve, and most accounts dealing with historical attitudes towards animals frequently start here. For Descartes, animals lacked consciousness and, as a result, were nothing more than animated machines – their cries as he dissected them alive were involuntary and reminiscent of the springs and cogs in, say, a clock. This mechanistic approach to nonhuman life has been hugely influential in the development of 'scientific' ideas about animals vis-a-vis humans. Yet Descartes' arguments did not go unchallenged and 18th-century responses from, for example, Voltaire and Hume demonstrate further that, as a result of their individual experiences or ways of being in the world, many of Descartes' near contemporaries found his arguments unconvincing:

> Next to the ridicule of denying an evident truth, is taking such pains to defend it; and no truth appears to me more evident than that beasts are endowed with thought and reason as well as man. (Hume, 1826: 232)

and:

> Is it because I speak to you, that you judge that I have feeling, memory, ideas? Well, I do not speak to you; you see me going home looking disconsolate, seeking a paper anxiously, opening the desk where I remember having shut it, finding it, reading it joyfully. You judge that I have experienced the feeling of distress and that of pleasure, that I have memory and understanding. Bring the same judgement to bear on this dog which has lost its master, which has sought him on every road with sorrowful cries, which enters the house agitated, uneasy, which goes down the stairs, up the stairs, from room to room, which at last finds in his study the master it loves, and which shows him its joy by its cries of delight, by its leaps, by its caresses. Barbarians seize this dog, which in friendship surpasses man so prodigiously; they nail it on a table, and they dissect it alive in order to show the mesenteric veins. You discover in it all the same organs of feeling that are in yourself. Answer me, machinist, has nature arranged all the means of feeling in this animal, so that it may not feel? Has it

> nerves in order to be impassable? Do not suppose this impertinent contradiction in nature. (Voltaire, 2010 [1764]: 'Animals')

So, for mechanists such as Descartes, animals were machines, while others who experienced animals in a different manner were able to recognize in them behaviours and emotions which they too shared. Such opposing perceptions of other animals can be found much further back in the historical record, in the philosophical writings of the Ancient Greeks such as Pythagoras and Aristotle.

ANCIENT DISAGREEMENTS

Pre-Socratic philosopher Pythagoras (570–500 BCE) was, so it is commonly thought, a vegetarian at a time when daily blood sacrifice and the conspicuous consumption of animal flesh was the cultural norm (Burkert, 1983). As Cartledge notes 'If there was one religious ritual that made a Greek conventionally and normatively "Greek", it was eligibility to participate in a bloody animal sacrifice, which constituted an act of communion in the strict sense' (1997: 177). Pythagoras' followers boycotted such sacrifices and philosophized on the moral and health benefits of a vegetarian diet. Plutarch, writing some 500 years after Pythagoras' death commented:

> Can you really ask what reason Pythagoras had for abstaining from flesh? For my part I rather wonder both by what accident and in what state of soul or mind the first man did so, touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature, he who set forth tables of dead, stale bodies and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived. How could his eyes endure the slaughter when throats were slit and hides flayed and limbs torn from limb? How could his nose endure the stench? How was it that the pollution did not turn away his taste, which made contact with the sores of others and sucked juices and serums from mortal wounds? (Plutarch, 2004: 385).

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) openly accepted that humans were *zoön* (animals), but animals of a particular kind. It could be argued that 'Western' 'speciesism' began with Aristotle (Ryder, 2000) and his continuum of living things, which saw humans at one end of a spectrum, the 'perfection' which for all other animals was unattainable. Yet not all humans were accorded the same standing

for Aristotle and many of his contemporaries. It was Greeks, or, more specifically, free, Greek, adult men, who represented the ideal. This category of perfect individuals was defined in relation to the 'others' on the spectrum by way of a series of binary oppositions. So, for example, Greek men were associated with light, intelligence, culture, rationality and good, while their converse, women, non-Greeks, slaves, animals were dark, ignorant, uncultured (thus 'natural'), irrational and 'bad' (see Cartledge, 1997). It was on the basis of such polarized thought that Aristotle constructed the argument for one of his most controversial (from a contemporary perspective at least) treatise – his 'justification' for slavery.

Because only free Greek men possessed the capacity for reason it was thus 'natural' for those privileged few to be served by lower beings who were 'naturally' subservient; women, non-Greeks ('barbarians') and, of course, animals: 'Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man' (Aristotle, 2005, Book I, ll. 3–13: 7). However, while Aristotle talked of dualisms and hierarchy, and his treatise on the 'naturalness' of slavery was unreflexive (as a privileged citizen of one of the ancient world's slave-based societies, he understandably had a particular axe to grind), elsewhere he discussed difference by degree. For example, in his *History of animals*:

> In most of the other animals, there are traces of the qualities of soul that are more evidently differentiated in human beings. For there are both gentleness and savagery, mildness and harshness, courage and timidity, fear and confidence, spiritedness and trickery, and, with respect to intelligence [*dianoia*], something like judgment [*sunesis*], similar in many ways, just as we have spoken of the parts of the body. For some of these qualities differ only more or less with reference to human beings, and so is man in reference to many things of animals. Some of these qualities are greater in man, others are greater in other animals, but in others they differ by analogy. (2004: 588a, 18–31)

ARISTOTLE'S LEGACY

Some of Aristotle's teachings retained currency long after his death and the decline of the Greek world. Indeed, some of the defining characteristics of a contemporary Euro-American way of life can be traced to the influence of Aristotle and other prominent Greek

thinkers. As the poet Shelley remarked: 'We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece' (2008: 336). So, while Aristotle's perspectives have formed the basis of many of the dualistic positions, both theoretical and spiritual, which followed, he was not a mechanist. The following passage from *The Politics* reveals that, unlike his later followers, he did not advocate 'abuse' of 'lower' beings:

> The abuse of [the master's] authority is injurious to both [master and slave]; for the interests of part and whole, of body and soul, are the same, and the slave is a part of the master, a living but separated part of his bodily frame. Hence, where the relation of master and slave between them is natural they are friends and have a common interest, but where it rests merely on law and force the reverse is true. (2005, I.6: 1255b, 12–15)

Later scholars were selective in their adoption of Aristotle's ideas, accepting the notion of 'natural slavery' but ignoring difference by degree. Indeed, many aspects of Aristotle's teachings were expanded upon by the 13th-century theologian Thomas Aquinas, for whom animals were purely instinctual beings and, as Christianity spread, so the place of animals as resources for humans to utilize became firmly entrenched. While there are, and always have been, individuals who perceive animals as sentient beings, the widespread failure (or refusal?) to perceive the sentience of other animals provided powerful justifications for their treatment at human hands: 'So far as animals are concerned we have no duties. Animals are not self-conscious, and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man' (Kant, 1930: 239). Given the innumerable ways in which humans are reliant upon the exploitation of other animals, it is perhaps unsurprising that these views have become so widely accepted.

MONSTROUS OTHERS

Another ancient writer, Herodotus, is important in considering the history of 'animality' in 'Western' thought. Herodotus is considered by many to have been one of the first anthropologists (for example, Eriksen, 2001), as in his book *The Histories* he provides detailed accounts of the socio-cultural institutions of different human societies based, allegedly, on his own observations. Herodotus was a Carian by birth (from Halicarnassus on what is now the coast

of modern Turkey), although by his time, in the 5th century BC Halicarnassus was a Greek city subject to Persian rule. The Persians and Greeks had been enemies for generations and their hostilities culminated in the Persian Wars (480–479 BC) which saw the Persians defeated by an alliance of Greek city states.

Herodotus went into exile, first to the Greek island of Samos and then to Athens, where he began to write a history of Greece and the other known countries and peoples surrounding the Greek world. At that time Greece was not a unified country and the individual states (*poleis*) were constantly at war with each other. In spite of this, the Greeks as a people had a certain number of characteristics in common which differentiated them from, and united them against, non-Greeks – what Herodotus refers to as '*to Hellenikon*' or 'the Greek thing'. These included shared culture, language, history, religious belief and ancestry.

Herodotus' *Histories* are regarded by some Classicists (for example, Hartog, 1988) as his attempt to show allegiance to Greece, his adopted homeland. By revealing the animalistic characteristics of non-Greeks or 'barbarians' Herodotus was demonstrating the superiority of the Greek peoples. Herodotus gives the following account of Scythian sacrifices for example:

> the victim has its front feet tied together, and the person who is performing the ceremony gives a pull on the rope from behind and throws the animal down, calling, as he does so, upon the name of the appropriate god; then he slips a noose round the victim's neck, pushes a short stick under the cord and twists it until the creature is choked. *No fire is lighted; there is no offering of first fruits, and no libation*. (2003: Book 4, 60–61, emphasis added)

Such omissions were clear markers of an 'uncivilized' people.

What is particularly noteworthy about Herodotus' *Histories* for the current purpose, however, are his numerous accounts of what later (under the Linnaean system of classification) came to be referred to as *Homo monstrosus*, in other words, monstrous humans or human–animal hybrids. For example:

> eastern Libya is low-lying and sandy as far as the river Triton, whereas the agricultural region to the west is very hilly, and abounds with forest and animal life. It is here that the huge snakes are found – and lions, elephants, bears, asps, and horned asses, not to mention dog-headed men, headless men with eyes in their

> chests … wild men and wild women, and a great many other creatures by no means of a fabulous kind. (2003: Book 4, 191–2)

Later, other writers also reported the existence of animalistic, monstrous humans reminiscent of those thought to surround the Greek world. In the 4th century BC, Ktesias, a former doctor from the Persian royal court, described the many wondrous tribes living in India, including the Sciapods, who used their one foot as an umbrella or sunshade and who could hop faster than normal men could run, and the Blemmyae, who were headless but had a face in between their shoulders (de Malefijt, 1968: 112). Rather than being feared, these animalistic humans were supposed to represent important Christian virtues (for example, dog-headed people were meek).

EXPLORATION AND ENCOUNTER

The belief that the strange peoples encountered in the east were benevolent tied in with the economic links that European merchants had established to bring spices, tea, silk and other precious commodities into Europe from the Orient. Given the Socratic legacy of polarity in 'Western' thought (Aristotle was not the only ancient philosopher to use oppositions – it was a device common to the pre-Socratic and Socratic thinkers, and Aristotle belonged to the latter school), it stood to reason that if evidence of God was to be found in the east in the form of fabulous devout beings and rich benign kings with whom to engage in trade, then in the other direction, to the west of Europe, lay the dark and sinister lands which were to become the 'New World' of the Americas. Indeed, the binary distinction between 'them and us' assumed greater significance as the reaches of the 'Western' world extended rapidly during the overseas exploration and conquest of the medieval period and beyond.

In 1493 Christopher Columbus ventured west and 'discovered' first the Bahamas, and later the Americas. On his return to Spain, Columbus entertained the Spanish royal court with tales of demonic peoples who practised Satanism (Adams, 1892). The Castilian monarchy eventually provided Columbus with the funding he needed to make further voyages of discovery. However, the accounts given by Columbus and the belief that the Americas were populated by barbaric savages who were 'animals', not humans, served purposes other than the affirmation of the dominant cosmology of medieval Europe. At the time of Columbus' voyages, Spain was

over-populated by nobles and there was also great competition between European mercantile nations to secure nautical trade routes with the east.

South America presented a solution to many domestic problems in Spain, such as over-population, providing prime land for colonization. Indeed, as Pieterse notes, 'the formation of images of non-Europeans [was and] is conditioned by internal European concerns' (1992: 31). More to the point, if the continent was inhabited by 'savages' then the conquistadors could take their land by force and without remorse, which they did, declaring war on the indigenous inhabitants. The following declaration, read by Rodrigo de Bastidas on landing on the coast of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in 1514, home of the indigenous Tairona, reveals the strength of European opinion:

> I assure you that with the help of God I will enter powerfully against you, and I will make war on you in every place and in every way that I can, and I will subject you to the yoke and obedience of the church and their highnesses, and I will take your persons and your women and your children, and I will make them slaves, and as such I will sell them, and dispose of them as their highnesses command: I will take your goods, and I will do you all the evils and harms which I can, just as to vassals who do not obey and do not want to receive their lord, resist him and contradict him. And I declare that the deaths and harms which arise from this will be your fault, and not that of their highnesses, nor mine, nor of the gentlemen who have come with me here.

HUMAN ANIMALS

Over time, and as more Europeans came into contact with the indigenous inhabitants of what became the colonies, stories of animalistic behaviours began to take the place of dog-headed men and one-eyed giants. The Tairona were accused of institutionalized homosexuality for example, because of their gendered living arrangements (separate communal houses for men and women); this was sufficient to warrant their annihilation. Yet the most 'animalistic' behaviour of all as far as Europeans at the time were concerned, and one which has subsequently attracted considerable anthropological interest and debate, was cannibalism. Indeed, if they were cannibals indigenous peoples could legitimately be captured and sold as slaves by Europeans, their land colonized and

its natural resources (for example, gold) exploited for European gain. As Midgley points out, these:

> human outsiders were ruled not to be really human at all. They could thus be placed, along with the animals, outside the species-barrier, at a distance which – it was hoped – would prevent their troubling anybody's conscience ever again. And in this way unnumbered atrocities have been justified. (1994b: 193)

This is not to say that all Europeans at the time regarded the actions of the conquistadors as appropriate or justifiable (for example, Pagden, 1982), but dominant ideology, informed by religious cosmology and a history of binary thought made colonial expansion politic, rational and acceptable as far as those in power were concerned.

Like the native peoples of South America before them (see Arens, 1979: 22–40), the indigenous inhabitants of Africa, the Caribbean, Polynesia and Melanesia were also regarded by Europeans as cannibals. Missionaries, colonists and slave traders who came into contact with these 'savage' indigenous populations sent horrific reports back to Europe of bizarre rituals involving sacrifices, human body parts, and feasts where the main course was human flesh. By regarding indigenous populations as cannibals, their European masters could deny their humanity – in the eyes of Europeans, only animals would eat their own kind. Such a view was not necessarily shared by those indigenous peoples who have themselves identified with a cannibalistic past however.

CANNIBALISM

In her review of accounts of cannibalism in what was the Belgian Congo, Ekholm-Friedman (1991) provides an insightful counter-argument to the perceived immorality of eating human flesh. Ekholm-Friedman comments on the 'ethnocentricity' of the 'Western' view that cannibalism is revolting, reprehensible and degrading. One of the reasons cannibalism was and is so troubling to many outsiders is that it reduces humans to mere foodstuffs (see also chapters 7 and 8), an act which flies in the face of human exceptionalism (see also chapter 16). Ekholm-Friedman demonstrates that this is an oversimplification and misunderstanding of what cannibalism means to those people for whom it is or rather was a cultural tradition.

In many of the areas documented by Ekholm-Friedman human meat was desirable because of similar (if inverted) beliefs in the

primacy of humans; human meat was 'special' because humans had names, were intelligent and so on. To consume the flesh of, for example, a vanquished foe, was an act of incorporation which superseded the ingestion of mere 'meat' (see also chapter 7). While these differences of opinion are interesting, of particular relevance in relation to the current chapter is the apparent double standards of the 'Europeans' and the colonialists in particular. As Ekholm-Friedman asserts, viewing cannibalism as barbaric 'is, to be sure, a remarkable opinion in a culture that has been capable of the most extreme cruelty and destructive behaviour, both at home and in other parts of the world' (1991: 220).

Many of the people whose land was 'appropriated' by colonizers were also captured and sold into slavery. Turner's famous painting *The Slave Ship/Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On* was first exhibited in 1840 and depicts the fate of slaves aboard an 18th-century slave ship called the *Zong*. As Warner recounts (1994: 65–79), the *Zong*'s captain decided to take advantage of an impending storm and throw overboard 122 dead and dying slaves who had been taken ill during the voyage. His motivation was purely financial, as the ship's insurance policy did not provide cover for death from illness. The slave owners and the ship's captain were eventually found guilty of fraud when they made a claim for the death of the slaves by drowning. However, Warner notes that no further criminal charges were brought against them, which highlights the way that slaves were regarded at that time; they were chattels or livestock, to be bought, sold and used without regard for their rights or welfare.

The painting itself depicts pink fish and sea monsters, representative of the European merchants who made their fortunes buying and selling African slaves. They are moving in to consume the human bodies in the water, and the image raises the question: who is the more barbaric? The alleged cannibalistic savages, who at least waited until their victims were dead before they cooked and ate them? Or the European slave traders who thrived on live meat, that is, the exploitation of these human 'animals'?

THE NOBLE SAVAGE AND THE MISSING LINK

While the land-hungry colonizers found animalistic savages in the colonies, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution the European bourgeoisie saw in the native people of newly discovered natural paradises an attractive metaphor and comparison for all that was

wrong with industrial Europe – the 'noble savage' who lived in harmony with the environment (see also chapter 4). However, this positive imagery was both condescending (in the sense that it was influenced by an evolutionary perspective) and short-lived. With the advent of Victorian colonialism, the idea of the 'noble savage' was once again usurped by derogatory representations of, and attitudes towards native peoples, as described above; imperialist expansion, missionary activity and the cultural 'improvement' of the 'primitives', predominantly against their will, constituted the 'white man's burden' (Kipling, 1899).

During the height of late 19th- and early 20th-century European colonization some indigenous peoples were explicitly likened to animals. Because of the economic and political importance of Africa as a source of labour and vast reserves of natural commodities, the continent's indigenous peoples were targeted in particular (Pieterse, 1992: 36; see also Mullin, 1999: 203). Africans were incorrectly viewed by European colonialists as having no history or culture (like animals). Because they had 'nature in abundance' they were thought to be more akin to animals than the 'civilized', 'cultured' Europeans. Indeed, in accordance with the contemporaneous dominance of socio-cultural evolution as a way of accounting for 'difference', and advocating 'progress' as human societies 'evolved' from the most 'basic' or 'primitive' states through various stages of social and technological development to the most 'complex' or 'civilized' (epitomized by 19th-century Europeans), these 'primitive' people were regarded as the 'contemporary ancestors' of Europeans. Along with other 'less evolved' animals, they were thought to function largely on instinct, lacking the capacity for rational thought; they possessed what came to be referred to by anthropologists such as Lévy-Bruhl (1923) as a 'primitive mentality'.

These comparisons were 'justified' in scientific terms, as for some evolutionists African peoples such as the !Kung San represented the 'missing link' between apes and humans. Africans were therefore discussed and depicted in animal terms, with comparative photographs and portraits of African children and young nonhuman primates presented as 'proof' (see Pieterse, 1992). As Weiner's observations of Malinowski illustrate, the attitudes of anthropologists towards their subjects of study at this time resembled conventional 'Western' attitudes towards animals; 'Malinowski's strongest arguments were levelled against those who drew a picture of "primitives" as mechanical beings without individual

personalities, who, as a group, merely followed the same customs without change' (Weiner, 1988: 7).

REFLEXIVITY

While this chapter has focused almost exclusively on the thoughts and actions of 'Europeans' through history, it is important to acknowledge that accusations of inhuman acts and the mistreatment of captives have also been common features of human social relations in many other parts of the world. However, the Occidental focus here is important for two reasons. First, anthropology has had a not altogether unjust reputation as the 'handmaiden of colonialism'. The link between anthropology and colonialism has undeniably played a role in shaping the ways in which practitioners of the discipline think (or thought) about their ethnographic subjects. Prior to the reflexive turn, non-Western others were 'primitives', but in the postcolonial period, when anthropologists are at pains to distance themselves from the abuses of (some of) their disciplinary ancestors, many have shied away from thinking about animal 'others' and human–animal continuity for fear of re-opening old wounds.

Thinking about animality has traditionally meant thinking about both differences between humans and similarities between 'some' humans and animals. While the reflexive turn awoke anthropologists to the fact that dominant ideologies resulted in the perpetuation of certain biases, to the extent that formerly 'muted groups' (Ardener, 1975) – women, children and the elderly for example – were largely excluded from the ethnographic record, animals have remained on the periphery. The second reason for the focus on the history of dominant European thought is to aid understanding of why, when the perspectives of 'other' peoples are discussed in subsequent chapters, they appear to be so at odds with mainstream Euro-American world views.

One final point to consider is how all of this comes together to make anthropologists particularly well placed to investigate human relationships with other animals. Humans habitually engage in 'othering' in their day-to-day interactions. This process of objectifying fellow humans in instances of war, genocide, rape, slave labour or violence and abuse of any kind is still regularly observed by anthropologists in a wide range of ethnographic situations. In the process, these 'others' are relegated to the status of lesser beings, typified in many contexts by animals. Thus the objectification of 'others' – human or nonhuman – in the past and

in the contemporary world, justifies their treatment in the eyes and minds of the 'abusers'. The reason that 'animality' has been such a useful definitional tool for many boils down to a 'chicken and egg' conundrum; we might draw on the longevity of dualistic thought, which allows for objectification and the exploitation of others based on perceived 'difference', but it might also be the case that human exploitation of 'others' leads to the development of a system of dualistic thought based on difference. Through an exploration of different ways of being in the world experienced by members of particular cultures at particular points in history, anthropologists can attempt to shed light on contradictory and seemingly incompatible practices and the processes which led to them. Such an approach can in turn reveal important information about what it means to be human, or indeed animal at any given point in space and time.

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