

co-operativeness, specialised grooming of this kind was to be the starting point of a vast technology of mutual physical aid. The medical world today has reached a condition of such complexity that it has become, in social terms, the major expression of our animal comfort behaviour. From coping with minor discomforts it has expanded to deal with major diseases and gross bodily damage. As a biological phenomenon its achievements are unique, but in becoming rational, its irrational elements have been somewhat overlooked. In order to understand this, it is essential to distinguish between serious and trivial cases of 'indisposition'. As with any other species, a naked ape can break a leg or become infected with a vicious parasite on a purely accidental or chance basis. But in the case of trivial ailments, all is not what it seems. Minor infections and sicknesses are usually treated rationally, as if they are simply mild versions of serious illnesses, but there is strong evidence to suggest that they are in reality much more related to primitive 'grooming demands'. The medical symptoms reflect a behavioural problem that has taken a physical form, rather than a true physical problem.

Common examples of 'grooming invitation ailments', as we can call them, include coughs, colds, influenza, backache, headache, stomach upsets, skin rashes, sore throats, biliousness, tonsillitis and laryngitis. The condition of the sufferer is not serious, but sufficiently unhealthy to justify increased attention from social companions. The symptoms act in the same way as grooming invitation signals, releasing comfort behaviour from doctors, nurses, chemists, relations and friends. The groomee provokes friendly sympathy and care and this alone is usually enough to cure the illness. The administering of pills and medicines replaces the ancient grooming actions and provides an occupational ritual that sustains the groomee-groomer relationship through this special phase of social interaction. The exact nature of the chemicals prescribed is almost irrelevant and there is little difference at this level between the practices of modern medicine and those of ancient witch-doctoring.

The objection to this interpretation of minor 183