

it was achieved and how it affected his hunting and feeding behaviour.

As the battle was to be won by brain rather than brawn, some kind of dramatic evolutionary step had to be taken to greatly increase his brain-power. What happened was rather odd: the hunting ape became an infantile ape. This evolutionary trick is not unique; it has happened in a number of quite separate cases. Put very simply, it is a process called neoteny) by which certain juvenile or infantile characters are retained and prolonged into adult life. (A famous example is the axolotl, a kind of salamander that may remain a tadpole all its life and is capable of breeding in this condition.)

The way in which this process of neoteny helps the primate brain to grow and develop is best understood if we consider the unborn infant of a typical monkey. Before birth the brain of the monkey foetus increases rapidly in size and complexity. When the animal is born its brain has already attained seventy per cent of its final adult size. The remaining thirty per cent of growth is quickly completed in the first six months of life. Even a young chimpanzee completes its braingrowth within twelve months after birth. Our own species, by contrast, has at birth a brain which is only twenty-three per cent of its final adult size. Rapid growth continues for a further six years after birth, and the whole growing process is not complete until about the twenty-third year of life.

For you and me, then, brain-growth continues for about ten years after we have attained sexual maturity, but for the chimpanzee it is completed six or seven years before the animal becomes reproductively active. This explains very clearly what is meant by saying that we became infantile apes, but it is essential to qualify this statement. We (or rather, our hunting ape ancestors) became infantile in certain ways, but not in others. The rates of development of our various properties got out of phase. While our reproductive systems raced ahead, our brain-growth dawdled behind. And so it was with various other parts of our make-up, some being greatly slowed down, others a little, and still others not at all. In other words, there 30