Tools of our making

R. I. M. Dunbar

Chimpanzee Material Culture: Implications for Human Evolution. By W. C. McGrew. Cambridge University Press: 1992. Pp. 277. £40, \$79.95 (hbk); £16.95, \$27.95 (pbk).

CHIMPANZEES have long held a particular fascination for humans. Not only do they look more like us than does any other species of living animal, but research continues to uncover more and more behavioural and genetic similarities. McGrew's book focuses on just one feature of chimpanzee behaviour, namely those aspects of tool use that relate most closely to the only kinds of evidence that we have for the behaviour of our own direct ancestors.

The old definitions of 'Man the Tool-User' and 'Man the Tool-Maker' that served to distinguish us from brute nature were, of course, demolished two decades ago by evidence from wild populations: many animals (including sea otters and Egyptian geese) were found to use tools, and Jane Goodall's detailed studies of the chimpanzees at Gombe in Tanzania revealed that they also manufacture them. Further evidence of tool manufacture emerged from other long-term studies of chimpanzees in East and West Africa. Man's technological skills, it seems, were not unique.

Field biologists have always insisted that here was evidence for what in humans would be called culture. The suggestion has been greeted with less than enthusiasm by social scientists (and in particular anthropologists) who have tried to defend the uniqueness of humans, if necessary by moving the goal posts.

McGrew has sought to confront the issue directly by using the criteria that social anthropologists themselves use to identify culture. Chimpanzees make use of the same medicinal herbs that indigenous peoples do; they hunt in co-ordinated forays; and they show regional variations in diet that bear no relationship to the local ecology but that seem, instead, to be local traditions.

He uses Oswalt's taxonomy of tools to compare the chimpanzee's toolkit with those of the native Tasmanians (who until their extinction had the most primitive toolkit of all living humans) and other living hunter-gatherers, as well as with the 'fossil' toolkits left behind by our extinct early ancestors. They are not so different in the number or the complexity of the tools. "Some artefacts", he

observes, "would be unattributable to species [that is, human or chimpanzee] if they lost their museum labels."

One important point to emerge from this analysis is that many of the tools in the toolkit of living hunter-gatherers are made from vegetable matter: such tools will not be fossilized. Our hominid ancestors are therefore likely to have made and used tools for millennia before the appearance of the first stone tools at around 2.5 million years ago. Archaeologists have had an all but total fixation with stone tools, using their appearance as the benchmark against which to measure the cognitive progression of the hominid lineage.

Only with respect to two items do the toolkits of chimpanzees and humans differ. One is the use that humans make of containers and nets for transporting and storing food and of 'untended facilities' such as traps and snares. For the rest, there are, of course, differences but they are differences of quantity not kind.

The gap between chimpanzees and humans is decidedly bridgeable. It would not take an enormous intellectual step by some chimpanzee Einstein, for example, to extend this species' natural preparation of foods to cooking.

This book is an important contribution both to our understanding of chimpanzee behaviour (it provides the first detailed critical synthesis of a widely scattered literature of very variable quality) and to our understanding of the processes of hominization. It will be particularly valuable if it persuades social scientists to take the work of primatologists and other animal biologists more seriously. □

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■ Oxford University Press have just published *Biology, Rearing, and Care of Young Primates* by J. K. Kirkwood and K. Stathatos. £40, \$75.

Undescribed experiences

Olivia Cox-Fill

The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause. By Germaine Greer. Hamish Hamilton/Knopf: 1991/1992. Pp. 472. £15.99, \$24. (Also published in paperback by Penguin in the United Kingdom, £6.99.)

THIS masterly book examines the social, physical and emotional factors surrounding the menopause. In a voice that is at once humane, angry, witty and totally uncompromising, Greer tirelessly explains the upheavals that come with the cessation of ovarian function. It is an intensely personal work, yet scholarly in its attempt to diagnose the climacteric and the best treatment of its painful symptoms.

Greer reminds us that the climacteric syndrome is ill-defined: 'experts' don't know exactly what happens or why or when it happens, and they cannot even yet convincingly disentangle the symptoms from ageing. She is thus frustrated by the smoke-screen of ignorance raised by those with interests to protect, and angry at the resulting trivialization of women's lives — the sense of helplessness and powerlessness that they are forced to buy into at the hands of those she calls the Masters of Menopause. Indeed, a multi-million-dollar industry has been established to treat what is in effect "an undescribed experience".

Officially, the medical establishment has one treatment for the climacteric, and that is hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Endocrines have been used

to treat menopausal distress ever since natural oestrogens were first isolated in the 1920s. Although these substances had dubious biochemical action, they did develop some entrepreneurial activity. Greer traces the history of the menopause industry and mercilessly lambasts the multinational pharmaceutical companies for their sham in relentlessly developing and marketing "hormone cocktails". She questions the premise of their research and is highly critical of the results. Nonetheless, her discussion of the costs, benefits and risks of HRT is balanced and fair, and her examination of the possible harmful physical effects of progestones, which are usually administered to oppose the effect of the oestrogens on the lining of the womb, is important reading. The crux of the matter is that research into the menopause has been lackadaisical because 'the change' is not a life-threatening condition.

The medical profession has also contributed its share of ignorance, through its female as well as male practitioners, whose contradictory claims Greer exposes. She also describes her exhaustive search of scientific papers and of transcripts of meetings organized to establish the international market for HRT. The aim of many of them, she complains, was to secure government funding "to spread the gospel of HRT into every hovel on the planet", not on the basis of the therapy's benign effect on menopause, but because of its alleged beneficial effect on osteoporosis and the