

## *A Declaration on Great Apes*

We demand the extension of the community of equals to include all great apes: human beings, chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans.

'The community of equals' is the moral community within which we accept certain basic moral principles or rights as governing our relations with each other and enforceable at law. Among these principles or rights are the following:

### **1 The Right to Life**

The lives of members of the community of equals are to be protected. Members of the community of equals may not be killed except in very strictly defined circumstances, for example, self-defence.

### **2 The Protection of Individual Liberty**

Members of the community of equals are not to be arbitrarily deprived of their liberty; if they should be imprisoned without due legal process, they have the right to immediate release. The detention of those who have not been convicted of any crime, or of those who are not criminally able, should be allowed only where it can be shown to be for their own good, or necessary to protect the public from a member of the community who would clearly be a danger to others if at liberty. In such cases, members of the community of equals must have the right to appeal, either directly or, if they lack the relevant capacity, through an advocate, to a judicial tribunal.

### **3 The Prohibition of Torture**

The deliberate infliction of severe pain on a member of the community of equals, either wantonly or for an alleged benefit to others, is regarded as torture, and is wrong.

At present, only members of the species *Homo sapiens* are regarded as members of the community of equals. The inclusion, for the first time, of nonhuman animals into this community is an ambitious project. The chimpanzee (including in this term both *Pan troglodytes* and the pygmy chimpanzee, *Pan paniscus*), the gorilla, *Gorilla gorilla*, and the orangutan, *Pongo pygmaeus*, are the closest relatives of our species. They also have mental capacities and an emotional life sufficient to justify inclusion within the community of equals. To the objection that chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans will be unable to defend their own claims within the community, we respond that human guardians should safeguard their interests and rights, in the same ways as the interests of young or intellectually disabled members of our own species are safeguarded.

Our request comes at a special moment in history. Never before has our dominion over other animals been so pervasive and systematic. Yet this is also the moment when, within that very Western civilisation that has so inexorably extended this dominion, a rational ethic has emerged challenging the moral significance of membership of our own species. This challenge seeks equal consideration for the interests of all animals, human and nonhuman. It has given rise to a political movement, still fluid but growing. The slow but steady widening of the scope of the golden rule – 'treat others as you would have them treat you' – has now resumed its course. The notion of 'us' as opposed to 'the other', which, like a more and more abstract silhouette, assumed in the course of centuries the contours of the boundaries of the tribe, of the nation, of the race, of the human species, and which for a time the species barrier had congealed and stiffened, has again become something alive, ready for further change.

The Great Ape Project aims at taking just one step in this process of extending the community of equals. We shall provide ethical argument, based on scientific evidence about the capacities of chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans, for taking this step. Whether this step should also be

the first of many others is not for The Great Ape Project to say. No doubt some of us, speaking individually, would want to extend the community of equals to many other animals as well; others may consider that extending the community to include all great apes is as far as we should go at present. We leave the consideration of that question for another occasion.

We have not forgotten that we live in a world in which, for at least three-quarters of the human population, the idea of human rights is no more than rhetoric, and not a reality in everyday life. In such a world, the idea of equality for nonhuman animals, even for those disquieting doubles of ours, the other great apes, may not be received with much favour. We recognise, and deplore, the fact that all over the world human beings are living without basic rights or even the means for a decent subsistence. The denial of the basic rights of particular other species will not, however, assist the world's poor and oppressed to win their just struggles. Nor is it reasonable to ask that the members of these other species should wait until all humans have achieved their rights first. That suggestion itself assumes that beings belonging to other species are of lesser moral significance than human beings. Moreover, on present indications, the suggested delay might well be an extremely long one.

Another basis for opposition to our demand may arise from the fact that the great apes - especially chimpanzees - are considered to be extremely valuable laboratory tools. Of course, since the main object of research is to learn about human beings, the ideal subject of study would be the human being. Harmful research on non-consenting human beings is, however, rightly regarded as unethical. Because harmful research on non-consenting chimpanzees, gorillas or orang-utans is not seen in the same light, researchers are permitted to do things to these great apes that would be considered utterly abhorrent if done to human beings. Indeed, the value of the great apes as research tools lies precisely in the combination of two conflicting factors: on the one hand, the fact that, both physically and psychologically, they very closely resemble our own species; and on the other, the fact that they are denied the ethical and legal protection that we give to our own species.

Those who wish to defend the present routine treatment of the nonhuman great apes in laboratories and in other circumstances - disturbing details of which we present in this book - must now bear the burden of proof in refuting the case we make in these pages for including all great apes within the community of equals. If our arguments cannot be refuted, the way in which great apes other than humans are now treated will be shown to be an arbitrary and unjustifiable form of discrimination. For this, there will no longer be any excuse.

The resolution of a moral dispute is often just the beginning, not the end, of a social question. We know that, even if we can prove our view to be sound, we will still be far away from the moment when the dispersed members of the chimpanzee, gorilla and orang-utan species can be liberated and lead their different lives as equals in their own special territories in our countries, or free in the equatorial forests to which they once belonged. As normally happens when ethical progress runs its course, the obstacles will be many, and opposition from those whose interests are threatened will be strong. Is success possible? Unlike some oppressed groups that have achieved equality, chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans are unable to fight for themselves. Will we find the social forces prepared to fight on their behalf to bring about their inclusion within the community of equals? We believe that success is possible. While some oppressed humans have achieved victory through their own struggles, others have been as powerless as chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans are today. History shows us that there has always been, within our own species, that saving factor: a squad of determined people willing to overcome the selfishness of their own group in order to advance another's cause.