
Anthropomorphism and anti-anthropomorphism: A plea for synthesis

Hisashi Nakao*^{†1}

¹Nagoya University (Nagoya University) – Japan

Abstract

The validity of anthropomorphism (i.e., attributing human properties to non-human animals) has been a famous and long-lasting problem in comparative cognition research especially since the Morgan's cannon (Morgan 1894). Although many papers have pointed out that the cannon is vague and not so useful (e.g., Fitzpatrick 2008; Sober 1998, 2005), the development of cognitive ethology (e.g., Griffin 1984) and the growth of comparative cognition research (e.g., Shettleworth 2009) have still stimulated the debate on whether anthropomorphism is a decent strategy or not (e.g., Allen and Beckoff 1997; Fujita 1998; Wynne 2004, 2007). This paper offers a solution to the debate. First, I argue that anthropomorphism is a good heuristic strategy (e.g., de Waal 1999; Fitzpatrick 2008; Fujita 1998) while anti-anthropomorphism is also a useful heuristics as well (e.g., Penn et al. 2008). Moreover, both strategies are not contradictory in principle. Finally I conclude that anthropomorphism and anti-anthropomorphism as methodological heuristics should be synthesized to find similarities and differences between humans and non-human animals more efficiently.

*Speaker

[†]Corresponding author: hisashinakao@gmail.com