

Apes with language or the divine animal? Human identity and the origin of language

Since Seneca argued that 'Man is a reasoning animal', the emphasis was very much on the idea that man is, essentially, an animal even if rational and with a language. Nonetheless, in 17th century, the French philosopher René Descartes separated the human identity from that of animals reasoning on the peculiarity of human language: the man is not an animal specifically because of the rationality of his language.

In our meeting we intend to debate the peculiarity of human language in relation to that of other primates and hominids focusing on the "origins" of language in the light of recent genetic studies about *human accelerated regions* and the finding of Neanderthal paintings. Are we just apes with language, as argued by linguists as Stuart Shanker? Is our language evolving in a non-referential sense as that of species that are bred in captivity, as affirmed by Roger W. Wescott? Or, possibly, language, brain and body had reciprocally influenced their evolution, as Darwin suggested? If so, what is the relation between the evolution of the hand, writing and speaking? Is it possible writing preceded spoken language?