

## The Animal in Pope's *Essay on Man*

MICHAEL SMITH

*Alfaisal University, Saudi Arabia*

kael.thomas.smith@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Why are there so many animals referenced in Alexander Pope's poem *Essay on Man*? Traditionally, animals were separated from man throughout history. Namely, the animal was denied logos and access to the polis. However, this article claims that neither of these traditions hold true throughout Pope's work. Rather, man is placed on a level on par with the animal in order to "vindicate the ways of God to man," Pope's explicit purpose of the poem. The article concludes that the agnostic figure of the animal, oddly, becomes the "guarantor" of God's ways in the eyes of man through its comparison with man.

KEYWORDS: animal studies; Alexander Pope; 18th century; Jacques Derrida; religion



## 1 Introduction

Alexander Pope published *Essay on Man* from 1733–1734. He states it is an effort to explain or instead “vindicate the ways of God to man” (Pope n.d.), a variation of Milton’s opening lines of *Paradise Lost* where he states he will “justify the ways of God to men” (Milton n.d.). The use of “vindicate” is rather an odd choice, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as follows:

1. trans.
  - a. To exercise in revenge. Obs. –1
  - b. To avenge or revenge (a person, cause, wrong, etc.). Obs.
  - c. To punish; to visit with punishment. Obs.
  
2. To make or set free; to deliver or rescue. Usually const. from. Obs. (common 1620–60).
  - a. To clear from censure, criticism, suspicion, or doubt, by means of demonstration; to justify or uphold by evidence or argument.

While Pope clearly intends the second definition of “clearing” God from censure, there are still elements of the former definition at work. It is not a matter of what has God done; any pain and suffering in the world can easily be assumed to fall into this category. Instead, the real question at the heart of the poem is why God has created the world with the pain and suffering it has.

Though not explicitly Christian, the *Essay* contains an implicit assumption that man is fallen, and he must seek his own salvation. The Christian Fall is center to the poem insofar as it is a “vindication” of God, despite the fact that the Fall is never explicitly stated.

For an *Essay on Man*, however, one may wonder why Pope has so many animal references in his poem. While not a favorite subject of his, Pope had written explicitly on animals in the past, including the following excerpt from his essay “Against Barbarity to Animals” published in *The Guardian*:

The more entirely the inferior creation is submitted to our power, the more answerable we should seem for our mismanagement of it; and the rather, as the very condition of nature renders these creatures incapable of receiving any recompence [sic] in another life for their ill treatment in this. It is observable of those noxious animals, which have qualities most powerful to injure us, that they naturally avoid mankind, and never hurt us unless provoked or necessitated by hunger. Man, on the other hand,

seeks out and pursues even the most inoffensive animals on purpose to persecute and destroy them – – almost as soon as we are sensible what life is ourselves, we make it our sport to take it from other creatures. (Pope 1713, 158.)

Pope, specifically, cites bear-baiting and cock-fighting as two of these sports that take life from animals (ibid). There are four points to make here as a precursor to this article. First, as was common at the time, the animal is used as a rather generic term. This usage was not always the case. Laurie Shannon notes that in early modern English, the animal was an ‘uncommon’ word:

First, animals represented no single, philosophically invested category in early modernity; they instead suggested populations. English speakers almost never grouped together all the creatures we call (nonhuman) animals under that name, preferring a more articulated list influenced by the cadences of Scripture and cognizant of plants and minerals as well. Second, their failure to group all creatures under animal evidences a different cosmology that whatever we might say about its hierarchy or rigidity, was not essentially binary in the way the modern duo of human/animal is. (Shannon 2009, 475, 477.)

While Pope does allow for a semi-gradient system of animals with his mention of levels of inferiority, he uses no particular system to differentiate animals in much of a meaningful way. Instead, non-human creatures are all grouped together, as Jacques Derrida writes: “We have to envisage the existence of ‘living creatures,’ whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality [sic] that is simply opposed to humanity” (Derrida 2008, 47). Animals are not one unit because of some classifying system; they are one entity insofar as they are *not* man. Second, one of the reasons Pope argues for the humane treatment of animals in this life because they will not receive any “recompence” in another life, implying that animals are essentially soulless. The animal (any animal) is not of any order of existence that will live on in another form once dead. It is merely a thing without a soul. Third, Pope’s call for a humane treatment of animals may be less a personal mantra and more a fashion of the times. In the literature and letters of the eighteenth century ‘sensibility’ denotes a cult of emotionalism in connecting with others, “and love of animals was a clear marker of elevated sensitivity”, as Stephen Eisenman (2013, 106) writes. Those philosophers most sympathetic to animals, including Pope, still “accepted and even trumpeted the value and necessity – – of human domination of animals” (ibid.). Finally, there exists a certain irony in using “humane” here. Etymologically, “humane” was an earlier form of “human” that only became re-

stricted to the sense of compassion in the eighteenth century, yet it is precisely the humans that take animal lives without discretion while the latter naturally avoid mankind.

The conventional argument is that humans are above the animal which serves to distinguish man; a great deal of the following pages will explore this more common reading. However, the reason there are so many animals in Pope's poem is precisely the opposite situation. In order to vindicate the ways of God, Pope puts man on a level on par (at least analogously) to the animal. It is a fundamental base from which his argument stems.

## 2 The Great Chain of Being

Constitutive of the 18th Century's understanding of the world was the concept of the great chain of being. In fact, Pope explicitly references said chain at the beginning of the second stanza of epistle I: "Vast chain of being, which from God began" (Pope n.d.). The human conception of the chain of being naturally placed man at the top, typically in a binary contrast to that which lies below, as Tüür (2014, 18) writes: "The human animal can thus be defined as the animal that does not want to be an animal". Similarly, David Abram (2011, 47) writes: "This way of ordering existence, which depends on an absolute distinction between matter and spirit, has done much to certify our human dominion over the rest of nature". Here, as in Pope's writing on animals above, it is only the human figure that has a spiritual dimension.

One rather remarkable philosophical text in which the animal is denied a "soul" is a writing of Emmanuel Levinas. In a prisoner-of-war camp, Camp 1942, Levinas (1990, 153) writes of a cherished dog named Bobby that looked upon the men as men: "For him – there was no doubt – we were men". However, rather than seeing Bobby as a kindred spirit, Levinas denies him the crux of his moral philosophy, the Face:

Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face. We understand the animal, the face of an animal, in accordance with Dasein – – We do not want to make an animal suffer needlessly and so on. But the prototype of this is human ethics. Vegetarianism, for example, arises from the transference to animals of the idea of suffering. The animal suffers. It is because we, as human, know what suffering is that we can have this obligation. (Levinas et al. 1988, 172.)

In his essay, Levinas cannot bring himself to thank the animal Other. Bobby cannot suffer nor can he truly have a face, as Mary Pollock writes: "The barking was a signifier

without a signified, not a choice, not a duty, but an inevitable manifestation of his lowly being” (Pollock & Rainwater 2004, 23). Pollock continues: “Instead of hearing Bobby say ‘There is still love. I still love. And we are together,’ Levinas hears the voice of an inferior reminding him that whatever happens, the starry heavens will be above him, the moral law will be within him, and he is still an end in himself” (ibid.). In his seminal *The Animal that Therefore I am*, Derrida (2008, 107) expresses his surprise at Levinas’ perception of the animal, namely his utter lack to recognize the animal as an Other worthy of consideration: “If I am responsible for the other, and before the other, and in the place of the other, on behalf of the other, isn’t the animal more other still, more radically other, if I might put it that way, than the other in whom I recognize my brother, than the other in whom I identify my fellow or my neighbor?”. The opinion expressed in this quote is a radical departure than much of classical philosophy, which not only sees the animal as below the human but goes so far as to deny it the ability to suffer.

Etymologically, the word “animal” falls within a collision between this biblical perspective and a more classical perspective, as Shannon writes:

Despite their alleged lack of a soul, animals are called by the name of anima, the Latin noun for soul, breath, or spirit. Aristotle’s widely influential *De anima* had postulated the ensouledness of all things, giving a taxonomy of souls (vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive, and intellectual). Each higher form of life in this order necessarily incorporated all the kinds of soul below it. Here, animatedness, or the possession of soul, likens all living creatures, even if a hierarchy of souls also ranks them. (Shannon 2009, 475.)

Thus, what is seen within the denial of the animal soul is actually a conscious effort by mankind to distance itself from the animal so far that the animal cannot even be considered an Other.

Further, there is an immediate privilege that man gives himself with this conception. Man describes himself above a concept (the “animal”) that he created, as if an animal can respond to a concept that is foreign to it. In fact, Keith Thomas (1984, 41) goes so far as to argue that during the late 17th and early 18th centuries “It was a comment on *human* nature that the concept of ‘animality’ was devised”. Thus, a mere dialogue on the ‘animal’ is already constituted on an implicit superiority of the human by virtue of the ‘animal’ implicitly arguing human superiority.

However, this hierarchy does not make man divine. It is commonplace to ascribe

man a divinity over animals. The King James Bible<sup>1</sup> uses the word “dominion” (Latin for “lord”) to describe man’s place over the animal: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26–28). The conception of man being a little god was not uncommon in the face of animals. However, this opinion is not one Pope possesses. Contrarily, he states:

Love all the faith, and all the allegiance then;  
For Nature knew no right divine in men (Pope n.d.).

Hannah Arendt (2007, 188) argues that at most man can do things deserving of immortality:

The greatness of man – – on which the whole question turns, is taken to consist in the human ability to do things and to speak words that are deserving of immortality – that is, worthy, of eternal remembrance – despite the fact that human beings encounter between enlightened animals and gods.

In fact, Pope questions man’s divinity with a caustic line asking:

Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,  
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee? (Pope n.d.)

He answers his (quasi-rhetorical) question by calling out man’s pride:

Ask for what end the heav’nly bodies shine,  
Earth for whose use? Pride answers, “ ‘Tis for mine:  
For me kind Nature wakes her genial pow’r,  
Suckles each herb, and spreads out ev’ry flow’r; – – (Pope n.d.).

However, this world described is no Eden. The world around man is here not one that was built solely for him. It is not his dominion insofar as he is not the sole beneficiary.

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1 The King James Bible is an English translation of the Christian Bible for the Church of England, commissioned in 1604 and completed and published in 1611 under the sponsorship of James I and VI.

### 3 Reason and Instinct

In the 18th Century conception of the Great Chain of Being, man was not placed atop the chain in terms of consumption (i.e. this chain is not a food chain) nor his physical traits. In fact, Pope seems to taunt man's conception of his superiority over the animal in Epistle I:

Presumptuous man! the reason wouldst thou find,  
Why form'd so weak, so little, and so blind? (Pope n.d.)

Rather, what man uses to justify his top position is his reason, as Gary Weiner (2000, 15) writes: "Man is a rational animal. No horse is rational". This conception is directly linked to Cartesian philosophy, namely the *cogito ergo sum*. For Descartes, the ability to think is the essential precondition for a human being. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno observe, Cartesian "reason, mercilessly advancing, belongs to man. The animal, from which he draws his blood conclusion, knows only irrational terror and the urge to make an escape from which he is cut off". (Horkheimer & Adorno 1988, 245.) Similarly, Derrida reflects upon the Cartesian origin of much of our thoughts on animals. While we conventionally recognize a self-hood of animals, we do not recognize any kind of *self-reference* within the animal:

No one denies the animal auto-affection or auto-motion, hence the self of that relation to the self. But what is in dispute – and it is here that the functioning and the structure of the "I" count so much, even where the word I is lacking – is the power to make reference to the self in deictic or autodeictic terms, the capability at least virtually to turn a finger toward oneself in order to say "this is I". (Derrida 2008, 94)

For Derrida, it is *this* self-reference which philosophy has conventionally taken as a precondition for thinking itself: "The 'I think' that must accompany every representation is this auto-reference as condition for thinking, as thinking itself; that is precisely what is proper to the human, of which the animal would be deprived" (ibid). The consequences of this deprivation are vast, and they include man's self-ascribed soul, as Peter S. Groff (2004, 28) writes: "We consider him [man] the strongest animal because he is the most cunning: his spirituality is a consequence of this". Ultimately, it is man's reason that acts as the cornerstone of not only placing man on the top of the Great Chain of Being but as constituting his very being.

In line with these arguments on the superiority of man's reason, Pope ultimately answers his own question in claiming that reason is not only superior to anything the animal has but is a combination of all "animal powers" in one:

Compar'd, half-reas'ning elephant, with thine:  
'Twixt that, and reason, what a nice barrier;  
For ever sep'rate, yet for ever near!  
Remembrance and reflection how allied;  
What thin partitions sense from thought divide:  
And middle natures, how they long to join,  
Yet never pass th' insuperable line!  
Without this just gradation, could they be  
Subjected, these to those, or all to thee?  
The pow'rs of all subdu'd by thee alone,  
Is not thy reason all these pow'rs in one? (Pope n.d.)

Pope's rhetorical question here provides an answer as to why man can (and should) believe in his superiority.

However, this statement is not to denigrate the animal. On the contrary, a duality was typically envisioned between reason and instinct – the latter being the realm of the animal. Pope conceives of instinct as fulfilling the position of the animal:

Whether with reason, or with instinct blest,  
Know, all enjoy that power which suits them best (Pope n.d.).

In fact, Pope goes much farther than conceiving instinct as merely appropriate for the animal. He praises it in many ways. While man's reason can subsume all animal powers within it, it does so by *learning from* animal instinct:

See him from Nature rising slow to art!  
To copy instinct then was reason's part;  
Thus then to man the voice of Nature spake –  
"Go, from the creatures thy instructions take:  
Learn from the birds what food the thickets yield;  
Learn from the beasts the physic of the field;  
Thy arts of building from the bee receive;  
Learn of the mole to plough, the worm to weave;  
Learn of the little nautilus to sail,  
Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale. (Pope n.d.)



Instinct is not merely a subpar entity to what man can do. Rather, it is man's teacher, serving as various models that reason should strive to imitate. In his essay on Nietzsche, Groff focuses on the connection between the ape and *mimesis*: "In which case the apishness of imitation appears to be the chief target of Nietzsche's derision." Groff thereby relates the transformation of imitation – which is how 'the human being is more ape than any ape' in Nietzsche's view – to the playfulness of the child in the final stage (Acampora & Acampora 2004, xxiv). Thus, here in Pope's writing is something more progressive than Nietzsche's allegedly forward-thinking conception of the Natural Order. Pope does not denigrate imitation as something animalistic. Instead, imitation is a tool of *reason* in which man betters himself – and betters himself by learning from the instincts of animals. In fact, Pope goes so far as to not only praise instinct's abilities (with phrases like "honest instinct") while describing the vast range of those instincts but even seems to place it *above* reason:

But honest instinct comes a volunteer,  
Sure never to o'er-shoot, but just to hit;  
While still too wide or short is human wit;  
Sure by quick nature happiness to gain,  
Which heavier reason labours at in vain – – (Pope n.d.).

Overall, these sentiments praising instinct were far ahead of their time. In *Insect Media*, Jussi Parikka writes extensively on how the 19th Century viewed the instinct inherent in animals (particularly insects) as a higher form of creation than man's own. Insects provided inspiration for everything from flying machines to cameras. (Parikka 2010, xvi, 235.)

However, despite this radical praise of animality, Pope still retains a fundamental view of man's superiority. For all the compliments paid to animal instinct, it is man that is the center of the poem insofar as this praise is only given in conjunction with speaking of man's abilities (even if, at times, they fall short of animal powers). Returning to Derrida's writing on self-identification, it is precisely this power over the animal that is the essence of man:

Power over the animal is the essence of the "I" or the "person," the essence of the human (this conforms, moreover, to the divine injunction that, from Genesis on, assigned to man such a destination, that of marking his authority over living creatures, which can be effected only through the infinitely elevated power of presenting himself as an "I," of presenting himself and just that, of presenting himself to himself, by means of

a form of presence to himself that accompanies every presentation and representation) (Derrida 2008, 93).

Here, a partial answer as to why there are so many animals in Pope's poem is provided: the "I" of humanity, of man, ultimately rests upon his dominion over the animal. In other words, without the animal, man loses his place both in the physical and spiritual world.

#### 4 The Polis

As Pope clarifies, man did not always dwell apart from the animal:

Nor think, in Nature's state they blindly trod;  
The state of nature was the reign of God:  
Self-love and social at her birth began,  
Union the bond of all things, and of man.  
Pride then was not; nor arts, that pride to aid;  
Man walked with beast, joint tenant of the shade;  
The same his table, and the same his bed;  
No murder clothed him, and no murder fed.  
In the same temple, the resounding wood,  
All vocal beings hymned their equal God:  
The shrine with gore unstained, with gold undressed,  
Unbribed, unbloody, stood the blameless priest:  
Heaven's attribute was universal care,  
And man's prerogative to rule, but spare. (Pope n.d.)

What exactly separated man from the animal then? It was a combination of man's Fall and the formation of the *polis*. These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, as Derrida (2008, 45) writes: "What is proper to man, his subjugating superiority over the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a nonfinite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from [his] originary fault. In essence, it was man's fall that lead to the formation of civilization, and it was the formation of civilization that lead to the denigration of the animal.

In fact, the animal existed not only prior to the Fall but prior to man himself in Genesis, as Derrida (2008, 96) points out:

To begin with, by pointing out that animality (*Thierheit*) still remains in its manifestations prior (*früher*) to pure humanity as well as more powerful

(*mächtiger*), all the way to the formation of the republic, into every civil constitution (*bürgerliche Verfassung*), namely, into what represents the highest degree of the good tendencies of humankind with respect to its final end and destination (*Bestimmung*).

More so, Derrida's quote ascribes a type of superior power to what is animal prior to the republic and into civil constitutions specifically. This statement is reminiscent to both Pope's writing on animals being pure insofar as they "naturally avoid mankind, and never hurt us" as well as his praise of animal instinct being a model for man. What caused the animal's "fall" from this powerfulness is precisely the growth of civilization and the domestication of the animal:

Thus there exists this priority, this being-before (*früher*) of the animal (another way of saying that man is *after* the animal), and this superiority of powerfulness also. That priority and superiority are reversed only when a weakening (*Schwächung*) on the part of the animal makes it submit to man and to the domestication that renders it more useful to humans than the wild beast. The socialization of human culture goes hand in hand with this weakening, with the domestication of the tamed beast: it is nothing other than the becoming-livestock. (Derrida 2008, 96.)

Much as man could only ascribe himself superiority via reason through deriding animal instinct, he can only use this reason to construct civilization via the domestication of the animal, as Randy Malamud (2003, 4) writes: "Civilization is the privileged term here, with nature and animals relegated to the status of the subaltern". Jean Baudrillard (1994, 133) also relates the rise of humanist civilization to inhumane treatment of animals: "Animals were only demoted to the status of inhumanity as reason and humanism progressed". Similarly, Alan Bleakley (2000, 30) suggests that not only were animals "othered" by the rise of civilization, but also that "the more civilized the society the worse are its attitudes towards animals". Society is ultimately the tool that pushes animals to some space further "outside."

Heidegger provides some definition of what might constitute this outside in *Parmenides*, claiming the *polis* is defined by the conflict between concealedness [*Verborgenheit*] and unconcealedness [*Unverborgenheit*] (Heidegger 1998, 14-17). Giorgio Agamben (2004, 75) identifies the animal's place in this conception, noting that "Heidegger was perhaps the last philosopher to believe in good faith that the place of the polis (the polos [pole] where the conflict between concealedness and unconcealedness, between the animalitas and the humanitas of man, reigns) was still practicable,

and that it was still possible for men, for a people – holding themselves in that risky place – to find their own proper historical destiny”. This statement is relatable to Pope’s assertion that man not only learns from the animal but can use the animal as a model from which to build the polis itself. However, Agamben emphasizes to a greater extent how Heidegger’s conception of the polis allows man to find himself. Once again, it is *through* the animal that man finds himself as it were and in finding himself reifies his superiority:

The polis is the place, gathered into itself, of the unconcealedness of beings. If now, however, as the word indicates, *aletheia* possesses a conflictual essence, and if this conflictuality appears also in the relation of opposition to distortion and oblivion, then in the polis as the essential place of man there has to hold sway every extreme opposition, and therein every in-essence, to the unconcealed and to beings, i.e., non-beings in the multiplicity of their counter-essences. (Heidegger 1998, 90.)

Man holds a type of ultimate sway in the polis, even to the point of holding sway over the unconcealed. However, this does not mean that there is a complete conflation of the inside and outside realms. On the contrary, as Agamben (2004, 57) writes, man always remains separate from the outside: “While man always has the world before him – always only stands ‘facing opposite’ (*gegenüber*) and never enters the ‘pure space’ of the outside – the animal instead moves in the open, in a ‘nowhere without the no.’” This ‘pure space’ outside the polis is either godly or animal life for Agamben.

The separation of humans and animals has profound implications. First, should humans and animals be separated in a system of exclusion revolving around the polis, it is unclear where and how they meet. We might ask in what ways man may meet the animal in the structure of the polis. This meeting is profound in Derrida’s writing, for example. The entirety of *The Animal that Therefore I am* stems from a soul-shaking “exposure” Derrida experienced in front of his cat, as Una Chaudhuri (2009, 521) says “Derrida’s insistence on the specificity and singularity of the encounter with the animal highlights another concept that is also central to performance: event”. This event offered the kind of “interruptive encounter” that Matthew Calarco (2008, 118) identifies as the very proto-ethical foundation of Derrida’s thinking about animals. This example speaks to the importance of fleshing out this concept of the event, which may either happen with man crossing into Agamben’s outside or the animal crossing over into the polis inside, even if it is a domesticated animal that does so.

Returning to the *Essay on Man*, Pope seems to take something closer to the lat-

ter route. He ultimately gives the animal its *own* polis:

Here too all forms of social union find,  
And hence let reason, late, instruct mankind:  
Here subterranean works and cities see;  
There towns aërial on the waving tree.  
Learn each small people's genius, policies,  
The ant's republic, and the realm of bees;  
How those in common all their wealth bestow,  
And anarchy without confusion know;  
And these for ever, though a monarch reign,  
Their separate cells and properties maintain.  
Mark what unvaried laws preserve each state,  
Laws wise as nature, and as fixed as fate. (Pope n.d.)

Here, Pope ascribes – even if metaphorically – the fundamental elements of the polis to the animal (including cities, policies, monarchs, states, and even laws). If the animal has all the elements of the *polis*, then it essentially has a polis. It may not be the same as man's, and Pope does not exactly conflate the human polis with the animal outside. However, in first claiming that man can structure his civilization upon the instincts of the animals and then ascribing all the elements of a polis to the animal, he is at least conflating (even if he isn't collapsing) the dichotomy.

## 5 Language Against the Hierarchy

If Pope conflates the human polis with the exterior world of the animal, *and* he states that man can even (only?) build his polis from animal blueprints in the first place, then might the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being also be questionable in Pope's writing? There are several passages that challenge man's apex on the Chain in one way or another.

First, even if man were to have a certain domain (or even dominion) over animals, this is not to say that the Earth and all its fruits were created solely for man:

And just as short of reason he must fall,  
Who thinks all made for one, not one for all. (Pope n.d.)

Whatever plan lies behind divine creation, it provided for the animal as man. More so, Pope explicitly states that the animal, contrary to Genesis, was not itself created solely

for man nor does the animal function solely for man's benefit:

Joy tunes his voice, joy elevates his wings.  
Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat?  
Loves of his own and raptures swell the note.  
The bounding steed you pompously bestride,  
Shares with his lord the pleasure and the pride. (Pope n.d.)

The linnet does not only sing for man's benefit just as the steed shares in a feeling of pride. In this passage alone, Pope claims animals act for each other and enjoy each other independent as man as well as ascribing "human" emotions (e.g. pride) to an animal. Both of these statements ascribe autonomy to the animal and implicitly question whether or not it may have an "I." Further, not only does man *not* have dominion over the animal, the animal can even defy man's will with its own:

The hog, that ploughs not nor obeys thy call,  
Lives on the labours of this lord of all. (Pope n.d.)

Additionally, the Great Chain of being is not one directional. In other words, every point of the chain serves every other point:

Nothing is foreign: parts relate to whole;  
One all-extending, all-preserving soul  
Connects each being, greatest with the least;  
Made beast in aid of man, and man of beast;  
All served, all serving: nothing stands alone;  
The chain holds on, and where it ends, unknown. (Pope n.d.)

Serve is a particularly loaded term here as serve is typically associated with domination. If *all* are both served and serving, then the superiority of man over the animals is again brought into question. If there is a type of superiority it is in part reciprocal, and this fact begs the question of whether this can even be considered superiority.

Finally, Pope doubles down on his statement that man *serves* the animal as well:

Say, will the falcon, stooping from above,  
Smit with her varying plumage, spare the dove?  
Admires the jay the insect's gilded wings?  
Or hears the hawk when Philomela sings?  
Man cares for all – -. (Pope n.d.)

Man cares for all animals, which could be argued places him in a position of superiority by another name. Even if this function is the case, it still blurs the staunch hierarchization that separates man and animal completely.

Contemporary animal studies scholarship often refutes the common binary established between humans and animals. For instance, Dominic Pettman (2011, 199) argues that the most decisive “human error” may be the impulse to understand ourselves through a contrast to our animals: “we are the anthro-machine, and our error is to disavow the machinic [sic] part of ourselves as well as the animal aspect”. Even in the contemporary scientific perspective, animal taxonomies have been consistently revised in the 21st Century, as Myers et al. (2013) write: “According to a document prepared by the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, nearly all taxonomies (systems of nomenclature) based on evolutionary relationships among organisms are being revised, sometimes radically so”. Many of these revisions are attributed to new DNA evidence, but Elizabeth Grosz (2004, 24) adds that Darwinian classification is necessarily dynamic: what evolves are not species or individuals, but oscillations of difference. These oscillations can even transgress the most basic taxonomical boundaries, leading, for instance, for organisms to be classifiable as both plant and animal.

Despite popular belief, it is not only contemporary theory that challenges or goes against the conventional conception of the Great Chain of Being. The horse is a good example to illustrate this fact. In the Middle Ages, horses were endowed with privileged social associations, personal agency, and even the ability to reason and speak (Boehrer 2010). It is hard to emphasize how radical this situation is compared to the 18th Century. Further, it was *explicitly* acknowledged that these animals served not only as sources of labor and companionship, but that they helped to form an understanding of personhood (ibid.). It was not until the Renaissance that horses lost their special place on the field of battle and distinctive status in the world of heroic chivalry, an event that coincided with a new emphasis on human character in European literature (Boehrer 2010).

However, even the 18th Century is not without challenges to the human/animal and reason/instinct dichotomy outside of Pope either. In Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, this binary hierarchization is turned on its head where the humanoid Yahoo is dumb and the horse-like Houyhnhnm (albeit meant to be pronounced like human) is smart and logical, as Philip Armstrong points out:

The Yahoo–Gulliver–Houyhnhnm relation thus occurs as a culmination of Swift’s critique of the opposition and hierarchy put in place by the Carte-

sian view of the relationship between reasoning mind and sensual body. But it must also be considered in the light of a related challenge that targets the Cartesian distinction between human and animal on the basis of the former's unique possession of rationality. (Armstrong 2008, 9–10.)

Hence, while not explicitly philosophical, Swift provides one 18th Century example of a challenge to the human-animal dichotomy conventionally understood to be prominent at the time. Such a satire as Swift somewhat anticipates later arguments that language itself is directly tied to animality.

There are two immediate objections that can be raised at this point from the viewpoint of conventional views of animality. The first is that language as a whole is conventionally understood as a privilege of man, already much discussed. The second is that the *use* of language was often used in the 18th Century to further divide man and animal. Congruent to the above discussion on the horse, this usage was not always the case. Medieval and classical thinkers were well aware of the ambiguities between man and animal. Citations in the Middle English Dictionary attest that “Beast” was used both as an alternative to man and as its superordinate category (s.v. best(e), definition 1), as Susan Crane writes: “Even when taken as binary opposites, neither category is uniform. Both collapse pluralities into deceptive unities”. (Crane 2013, 2.) However, upon the beginning of the Renaissance, language began to be a primary tool to denigrate the animal. DeMello (2012, 285) reminds us language is never neutral – it shapes behavior; an array of terms referring to animals or elements of animality (breaking stock, meat, research tool) emerged to “serve as absent referents, hiding the animal underneath the term”. Similarly, language is a tool to “de-soul” the animal as it were. An array of euphemisms are often used to describe the putting to death of an animal indiscriminate to the animal or the situation, as Jill Jepson writes:

Like euthanize, destroy, and put to sleep are used for many types of killing. They carry little or no information about the patient (whether the animal is sick, is dangerous, is being killed for food); the motivations for the killing; or the speaker's attitudes or emotions about the killing. These terms, unlike those for killing humans, are interchangeable. (Jepson 2008, 139.)

When such euphemisms are used, they tend to lend a connotation of compassion and mercy to the killing of an animal regardless of the context (ibid, 127). Hence, the animal is furthered into a realm of a soulless creature whose death is a moot point. One extreme example of this perception comes from Heidegger, who claims that animals



cannot die. It is somewhat ironic then that he also claims humans compulsively deny their own deaths and should instead open themselves up to the certainty of our own annihilation, taking on “the condition of Being-towards-Death”. (Rule 2010, 552.)

Further, Joan Dunayer (2001, 17) even notes that when animal pejoratives are used to denigrate categories of people (woman and minorities in particular) they also denigrate animals as well. Christopher Peterson (2012, 17) notes that “the construction of the racial other as animal worked to deny human animality by translating racial differences into species difference”. Much like Nietzsche’s ape represented base mimicry, various animals have traditionally been associated with alleged negative traits of a race or gender. A contemporary example in the 18th Century is Thomas Taylor’s 1792 work entitled “Vindication of the Rights of Brutes,” an attempt to undermine and mock the work carried out by Mary Wollstonecraft by associating women with animals, both thought lesser than man (Simons 2002). Ultimately, it should not be forgotten that these pejoratives highlight negative traits of various animals.

Finally, with language, the animal is brought into the realm of the symbolic, often in negative ways in which they were further othered. For instance, Debra Hassig (1999, xiv) notes that following the Middle Ages, “animals were eventually invested with emblematic value as signs of specific sins”. Lion and goat imagery in particular did this. Steve Baker (2001, 138) argues that the implicit function of this is to negate the animal’s overall existence for these symbols have nothing to do with actual animals: “Ruling out one whole area of potential meanings by assuming that whatever else they may have to do with, the meanings prompted by these representations are not to do with animals”. Baker is not protesting allegorical readings of animal representations. He is not claiming that animal representations have nothing to say about humans. On the contrary, he seeks to open up the field of interpretation to a wider array of meanings that resist reading the animal as a ‘transparent signifier’ of the human *because* it erases the animal itself as an entity worthy of consideration (ibid, 136). Hence, the animal is not only denied language, but it is precisely language (and the symbolic realm as a whole) that becomes a primary tool to further separate the animal.

However, despite this general schema active in the 18th Century, the opposite is seen in the *Essay on Man*. I argue that for Pope it is precisely language that brings the human and the animal together. First, contemporary animal studies not only allow for poetry to bridge the human-animal divide, but promotes the idea, as Elizabeth A. Lawrence writes:

Because of its unparalleled ability to move the human heart in terms that it best understands, poetry can play a forceful role in that awakening process. Poems not only celebrate the bonds people have with the domestic animals who serve as our cherished companions, but they embrace as well our relatedness to all of nature, including the wild realm beyond our reach. (Lawrence 1994, 53.)

Another route of speaking to the importance of writing to empathy comes from Adam Smith, who claims that animals need a “narrative life” in order for us to care about them. He states that sympathy requires one to be able to inhabit the other’s suffering as an event, which is possible via a narrative. (Smith 2002, 53-56) Similarly, Mark Payne claims that we do not imagine a lobster’s suffering while being cooked because there is no narrative connection enabling us to empathize with the lobster:

It is not that lobster eaters do not imagine the animals experiencing pain – they do so with such ease that lobster vendors try to convince them that this pain is purely imaginary. It is rather that lobster eaters do not imagine this pain as an event in a life story, even when it ends in death, right before their eyes. (Payne 2010, 19.)

Hence, literature in all forms – poetry to prose – can be said to connect man to the animal.

Some theorists, such as Arthur G. Neal (1985, 16) argue that even pejorative representations and/or the use of animal insults to denote a person’s behavior is unacceptable all serve to connect us to animals rather than to make a clear distinction by the mere use of analogy (despite the insulting content).

In order to argue this, one must connect poetry, prose and language in general to animalistic gestures, taking it out of the purely human domain. Merleau-Ponty insisted early in his career that “the only Logos that pre-exists is the world itself;” thus, human language and aesthetic behaviors emerge from our animality (Westling 2014, 3). This argument is not man constituting himself on a concept of the animal (a concept he created no less). Nor is it man using the animal as inspiration for his higher feats. Instead, Merleau-Ponty argues that human language *is* a trait of animality itself, from instinct perhaps (2012, 195).

Another means to argue this point is via mimesis. Aristotle famously claimed that mimesis was the origin of poetry. Many theorists resituate this mimesis to the gesture (of the animal), as Aaron M. Moe does: “The gesture is not a minor event in animal ways-of-being, nor is it on the periphery of poetry and poetics. And when, in many

cases, a poet discovers new gestures through his or her engagement with animals, the process of *poiesis* becomes a multi-species event". (Moe 2013, 8.) This "bodily poiesis" may not be symbolic language as traditionally understood, but it is enough to challenge the traditional divide between humans and animals on the basis a material concept of logos. Anat Pick, for example, reimagines a poetics that begins with the vulnerability of bodies, *not* thought. Her focus is on the shared embodiedness of all living beings: "embodiment undermines institutionalized speciesism in two ways: first, it provides a critical space for thinking of the human outside Cartesian abstractionism – – Second, embodiment makes for a different sort of aesthetics and ethics". (Pick 2011, 5.) A *poi-esis* based on the body (or embodiment) that moves outside of the Cartesian, then opens the door to reconsider the question of agency itself. In recounting an experience reading Wordsworth's poem "Nutting" for an English course, Susan McHugh states she thought it was about the squirrel's thoughts. However, her professor said that was crazy and summarily dismissed the comment. However, McHugh argues that such a question as this is relevant as the very question of who is speaking and whether it matters if the poet or the squirrel is the speaker, "conceptualizes agency as more than simply a property of the human subject form". (McHugh 2011, 10.) Hence, recognizing gestures as a communicative method opens the door to the very question of agency itself. The animal *may* have an "I" if we were to ascribe any of the above to it.

## 6 Conclusion

At this point, the central question becomes: does Pope ascribe language to the animal, even gestural? Not precisely, what he does instead is remove divinity from man's language. This claim will require some extensive explanation. First, Derrida (2008, 132) provides a strong theoretical base with which to question any discourse of man's superiority over the animal in the name of God: "It is so difficult to utter a discourse of mastery or of transcendence with regard to the animal and simultaneously to claim to do it in the name of God". Much of Derrida's reasoning for this relies on Gödel's writings that the world and all its beings compose one entity entirely separate from God, echoing much of Pope's sentiments above that the world was created for man *and* animal in a relation of mutual support. God exists outside of this living sphere. Specifically, Gödel says in "On the Essence of Ground":

On that path, which begins with the Greek cosmos, the Christian conception of world is particularly important: The most familiar aspect of

the problem reveals itself in the distinction between God and world. The world is the totality of beings outside of and other than God [hence creature, the totality of the created]. (Quoted in Derrida 2008, 152.)

Yet again, Pope echoes something of this sentiment in framing man as some lesser (if not satirical) lord bound in endless error:

Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled. (Pope n.d.)

As discussed, Pope has established that the animal must frame man. That is, man essentially builds his identity upon the animal. In other words, while the animal is typically relegated to some ambiguous status “below” man, it (via sin) grants or at least serves as the structure on which man builds his attributes (knowledge, *techne*, etc.). But man is no God: he is bound in sin and error and God does not need man to define Himself.

With this in mind, Pope places the animal in an analogous relation to man as man is in a relation to God solely *on the level of suffering*. Man can take the life of the animal for purposes the animal cannot understand much as God can make Man suffer for purposes he does not understand:

Destroy all creatures for thy sport or gust,  
Yet cry, if man's unhappy, God's unjust; --. (Pope n.d.)

Once again with a fairly caustic tone, Pope calls out man's hypocrisy. If man kills the animal for sport, he has no right to complain to God for killing him for sport (or doing anything). This is how the animal is used to vindicate God: by putting man more on par with the animal in terms of pain.

One cannot help to recall Bentham's question: does the animal suffer? It was one of the (if not *the*) core question for Derrida to begin his ruminations on the animal. Here, not only does the animal suffer, but it is precisely the animal's suffering that oddly vindicates God's ways to man, as was the poem's stated intention. In this sense, the poem is oddly what we might call progressive in even the 21st Century.

More so, Pope does *not* only vindicate God to man by comparing man with the animal. He compares man with the animal by taking away the very thing that man used for so long to elevate himself above the animal: his *logos* (language and reason). It is not that man does not know why God chooses certain things to happen, it's that he *cannot* know. This impossibility is highlighted in the following passage:

When the proud steed shall know why man restrains  
His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains:  
When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod,  
Is now a victim, and now Egypt's God:  
Then shall man's pride and dullness comprehend  
His actions', passions', being's, use and end;  
Why doing, suff'ring, check'd, impell'd; and why  
This hour a slave, the next a deity. (Pope n.d.)

Man's great reason - the very thing that places him above the animal - is the very things that fails him before God.

Thus, the animal serves as a foil for man in order to reveal man's subservient position (to God). Paradoxically then, the animal is fundamentally the agnostic figure that acts as an "insurer" of religion insofar as God *needs* to be vindicated to man, or we might even say insofar as man might *question* God's ways. Thus, Pope concludes the *Essay on Man* not with a praise of man, but with the ultimate blending of all things to one aim: "That reason, passion, answer one great aim" (Pope n.d.). God is vindicated to man through the animal.

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