

‘THE TAMING OF SAVAGERY’: KANTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON ANIMAL  
EMBODIMENT AND HUMAN DIGNITY

by

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A mi querida madre, Maria Antonieta Villanueva

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## **ABSTRACT**

Kantian philosophy has been very influential in modern and contemporary philosophy, particularly on morality, conceptions of personhood, and their relationship with each other. In this thesis, I aim to critically explore both Immanuel Kant's philosophy and the thought of certain philosophers who work within the Kantian tradition. Specifically, I focus on the human-animal distinction within the Kantian framework. First, I provide a critical exegesis of Kant's moral philosophy as it relates to human nature, the human animal, and nonhuman animals. Second, I discuss the work of 20th century philosopher Wilfrid Sellars, whose aim was to synthesize the Kantian framework with a metaphysical naturalism. I investigate the status of animals within Sellars's philosophy, and provide a critique of his anthropocentrism. Finally, I turn to contemporary theorists of human dignity inspired by Kantian conceptions of dignity as rank. I argue that this dignitarian approach denigrates not just nonhuman animals, but humans as embodied animal subjects. I then provide a brief argument for reorienting our ethical thinking with human and animal vulnerability in mind.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the way the distinction between the human and the animal has been used to ground moral norms and principles, particularly through the concept of personhood within the Kantian tradition. The thesis critically discusses two philosophers who make explicit use of this distinction: Immanuel Kant and Wilfrid Sellars. The former treats the distinction as central to his ethical thinking, given that respect is due only to persons and never to things (1996a, p. 202). Kant argues that persons have a dignity that grants them an absolute inner worth (1996a, p. 557) and that the animal is considered only a thing, though the way in which this distinction is developed is much more complex than this binary makes it seem. The latter seeks to hold a rigorously naturalist view of the world, while at the same time safeguarding the Kantian distinction between persons and things through the proposal of two distinct images of humanity in the world: the manifest and scientific images (Sellars 1991b, p. 4-5). Finally, I investigate a resurgence in the political sphere of the concept of human dignity as inspired by Kant that serves as the key distinction between the human and the animal. Against these dignitarian accounts, I argue for a shift to the shared vulnerability between humans and nonhuman animals as our criterion for moral consideration.

In chapter two, I provide an exegesis of Kant's view of the relation between the human and the animal. I provide a summary of Kant's view of the human being as possessing a tripartite nature (1996b, p. 74), as well as Kant's characterization of human nature as 'unsociable sociability' (2007, p. 111). I then turn to the establishment of dignity within Kant's philosophy as a value beyond price (1996a, p. 84). Following this, I turn to discussing Kant's distinction between what he calls *homo phaenomenon* and *homo*

*noumenon* (1996a, p. 544), and the difficulties that Kant experiences in attempting to identify each one. Specifically, I address Kant's reliance on the practical postulates in order to establish the existence of *homo noumenon* within *homo phaenomenon*. I argue that, in doing so, Kant surreptitiously relies on the use of inner and outer sense to determine that *homo phaenomenon* has *homo noumenon* as its counterpart, despite disavowing this method for establishing the existence of *homo noumenon*. In other words, Kant dismisses the capacity for inner and outer sense to establish the existence of *homo noumenon* because both are forms of passive experience and therefore rely on the experience of phenomena (2007, p. 265), but he then makes use of phenomenal markers as evidence that certain phenomenal experiences (i.e., phenomenal experiences of human beings and experiences of one's own thinking) can establish a link with a noumenal counterpart.

Furthermore, Kant's reliance on the practical postulates is vitiated both by his openness to the existence of disembodied beings that nevertheless use reason, as well as his argument within the *Critique of Pure Reason* that we commit an error in our reasoning when we take there to be a consistent noumenal counterpart to our experience of a phenomenal self (1998, p. 423). As a consequence, I conclude that Kant is unable to rigorously maintain that there are no noumenal selves worthy of respect that serve as counterparts to phenomenal animal beings. This itself is motivated by Kant's beliefs that animals are capable of thought as well as analogues of reason and morality (1997b, p. 390-1), and that animals should be treated with kindness (1997a, p. 212). These beliefs, I contend, serve only to make Kant's disparagement of the human animal confusing for the



reader, and should instead motivate Kant to reconcile the person with the human animal in his philosophy.

Chapter three turns to the work of Sellars. Sellars, as a naturalist and a Kantian, tackles the challenge of placing the human being and human consciousness within the natural world while nevertheless arguing that we can come to know this world even if our access and experience of it is necessarily conceptually mediated (1979, p. 180). To make Sellars's aim clear, I elaborate on the nature of the manifest image and the scientific image. In particular, I highlight the importance that the manifest image places on the existence and capacities of persons (Sellars 1991b, p. 9), while the scientific image provides an explanation and ontology of the world incompatible with the ontology of the manifest image. I then discuss the place of nonhuman animals within Sellars's image schema and present Sellars's reasons for believing that animals can be fully explained from within the scientific image and denied personhood. To fully illustrate this, I recapitulate Sellars's 'Myth of Jones' argument, which ultimately holds that the semantic categories of thought, and hence the meaning of thought, are necessarily derived from the semantic categories of a public language (1968, p. 318).

As a consequence of this view, Sellars seemingly commits himself to the position that animals cannot think. Due to pressure from Roderick Chisholm and others, Sellars eventually alters his view to hold that animals are capable of proto-thought (1975, p. 304). However, I argue that this shift to proto-thought poses a serious problem for Sellars, and that the 'Myth of Jones' argument is incompatible with proto-thought's existence. Roughly, this incompatibility is the result of the lack of a restraining mechanism for the semantic categories of proto-thought, which prevents Sellars from

claiming that proto-thought is qualitatively different from linguistic thought. In order to address this problem, Sellars develops the view that the difference between proto-thought in nonhuman animals and linguistic thought in human beings lies in the use of logic (1981, p. 340); the former is incapable of using logic, but the latter is capable of logical inference due to the acquisition of language. Against this new position, I refer to contemporary research in animal cognition that calls us to seriously consider whether some nonhuman animals are capable of making logical inferences. I call particular attention to Chaser, a border collie who is seemingly able to perform disjunctive syllogisms (Pilley & Reid 2011). To close this chapter, I consider whether Sellars's reasons for maintaining the manifest image compromise his naturalism by requiring him to insist on a form of anthropocentrism despite nonhuman animals' use of logic. In other words, I consider whether animals<sup>1</sup> must necessarily be excluded from the category of personhood regardless of their capabilities in order to maintain our self-conception as persons that give, receive, and evaluate reasons.

Chapter four moves to a discussion of contemporary dignitarian thinkers influenced by the Kantian tradition. In particular, I look at recent work by Michael Rosen, George Kateb, and Jeremy Waldron. I provide an overview of their positions and elaborate on their conception of dignity as high rank. Dignity as high rank is utilized to displace notions of social hierarchy and to democratize a sense of nobility or aristocracy that is applicable to all human beings. By definition, there cannot be an aristocracy without an underclass, and these theorists are notable in that they reinforce the human-animal distinction by relegating nonhuman animals to the underclass in favor of the

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<sup>1</sup> I will be using 'nonhuman animal' and 'animal' interchangeably, unless specified or modified by an adjective, such as in the case of 'human animal.'

person. I then make use of the work of Giorgio Agamben to look critically at this dignitarian move. In particular, I look to use Agamben to recast the dignitarian democratization of aristocracy as an instance of separating *bios*, or properly political life, from *zoê*, or animal life, and elaborate on how this separation creates a third category, bare life, or life that is fully vulnerable to state violence (1998). I also use Agamben to highlight the dignitarian move as a political decision, rather than a reflection of ontological truth, given that the theorists discussed make little-to-no appeals to qualities thought to be uniquely human to establish human dignity, and indeed, many of these qualities have been shown to not be uniquely human or are fiercely contested.

I then turn to the work of Thomas Birch in order to provide the starting point for rethinking our relationship toward nonhuman animals. I elaborate on Birch's call for consideration, understood as careful contemplation of other beings and the responsibilities we may have toward them, and its conjunction with 'deontic experience,' or the kind of experience we may have that compels us to act (1993, p. 322). I then use Birch's recasting of Tom Regan's subject-of-a-life criterion (as cited in Birch 1993, p. 319) as an example of a rule for our treatment of animals, and use it to consider whether dignity should be seen as a rule or principle for our treatment of both humans and animals. Finally, I reject dignity as a rule or principle on the grounds that its reliance on transcendence carries with it the ethical and political possibility that various kinds of beings, both human and nonhuman, will fail to qualify as beings worthy of respect and moral conduct and be considered 'bare life.' In its stead, I consider whether vulnerability can instead serve as a rule or principle to abide by in our treatment of both human and nonhuman animals.

## CHAPTER 2: KANT AND ANIMAL EMBODIMENT

The ethical writings of Immanuel Kant have often been attacked for a perceived denigration of animality,<sup>2</sup> or the animal nature that we share with other animals. The charge, generally considered, is based on the Kant's distinction between rational nature and animal nature. While the two must necessarily be conceived as a dyad, Martha Nussbaum asserts that "for Kant, human dignity and our moral capacity, dignity's source, are radically separate from the natural world," and that this dual existence as "rational persons and animal dwellers in the world of nature, never ceases to influence Kant's way of thinking" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 50). This split, Nussbaum contends, leads Kant to deny the possibility of the dignity of animal nature, which is solely reserved for the rational nature of a human being (2000). Animal nature, then, holds only an instrumental value insofar as it provides the proper conditions for the exercise of our rational nature (Kant 1996a, p. 565-6).

Indeed, Kant himself seems to endorse this duality at various points in his writing. In his concluding remarks in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant refers to two things that fill him with increasing admiration: "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (Kant, 1996a, p. 269). While both serve as a source of wonder for Kant, the former is characterized as an awe-inspiring complex of "worlds upon worlds and systems of systems" that nevertheless serve to emphasize the relative unimportance of Kant's contingent existence as an animal creature (Kant, 1996a, p. 269). In a certain sense, Kant's perspective on the matter prefigures Steven Weinberg's musing that "the more the

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'animal' itself is vague, which of course affects the meaning of 'animality' and 'animal nature' as well. Given that the meaning of 'animal' has been understood in philosophy over and against the meaning of 'human,' the meaning of these terms will shift even within this thesis. Nevertheless, to orient our understanding in this chapter, we can understand 'animality' or 'animal nature' as embodied nonrational instinct.

universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless” (Weinberg, 1983, p. 149). The latter, on the other hand, exemplifies what is considered paradigmatically Kantian, in that possession and reflection upon the moral law illuminates for us “a life independent of animality and even of the sensible world” (Kant, 1996a, p. 270).

Notably, many of the claims that Kant makes about the animality of humans describe the nature of nonhuman animals as well. Given that we share this animal nature, I believe that this ultimately creates serious problems for Kant’s view of nonhuman animals. In order to elaborate what these problems, are, I will first discuss Kant’s tripartite constitution of human nature as animality, humanity, and personality (1996b, p. 74). Second, I will elaborate on Kant’s conception of, and attitude toward, human nature as ‘unsociable sociability.’ Third, I will discuss Kant’s distinction between a thing, a rational human animal, and a person as it regards to dignity. Fourth, I will cast the problem of animality and embodiment in Kant’s thought in a different light. Fifth, I will consider Kant’s claim that neither inner nor outer sense can successfully aid us in identifying *homo noumenon* and that we must rely on the practical postulates (Kant, 1996b, p. 14). Sixth, I argue that Kant’s claims in the Third Paralogism of the *Critique of Pure Reason* pose a problem for his implicit reliance on outer sense to determine if a being we encounter is actually *homo noumenon*. Seventh, and finally, I emphasize Kant’s confusing disparagement of the animality of humans, given the difficulty he encounters in the previous section, as well as the fact that Kant relies on outer sense to establish analogues of reason and morality within other animals yet still denies them moral worth.

## **2.1 ANIMALITY, HUMANITY, PERSONALITY**

In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant seeks to assign three basic predispositions to human nature: 1) the predisposition to animality; 2) the predisposition to humanity; 3) the predisposition to personality (1996b, p. 74). Animality is characterized by what Kant describes as “physical or merely mechanical self-love” (Kant, 1996b, p. 75). By this, Kant is referring to behavior or a way of being identical in quality to other nonhuman animals, constituted by a lack of rational or conscious presentation of thought to oneself. In other words, the predisposition to animality consists of pre-reflective instincts, which push us to fulfill three desires: self-preservation, procreation (and the subsequent protection of our offspring), and interaction or community with other beings, or what Kant calls the social drive (Kant, 1996b, p. 75). These three desires can serve as the vehicle for various vices or illnesses of character in human beings, but Kant is careful to note the desires themselves are not the root of these vices. Rather, the drive to carry out these pre-reflective instincts can manifest themselves in excess and “they can be named vices of the savagery of nature, and, at their greatest deviation from the natural ends, are called the bestial vices of gluttony, lust and wild lawlessness (in relation to other human beings)” (Kant, 1996b, p. 75).

The predisposition to humanity is another form of physical self-love, but one that for Kant employs the use of reason. It is from this predisposition that our unsocial sociability operates, because this predisposition allows for the possibility of comparison:

Out of this self-love originates the inclination to gain worth in the opinion of others, originally, of course, merely equal worth: not allowing anyone superiority over oneself, bound up with the constant anxiety that others might strive for

ascendancy; but from this arises gradually an unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others. (Kant, 1996b, p. 75)

What is key for this predisposition is that it allows for the human being, through the use of reason, to set ends for herself based on prudential decisions informed by comparative assessments. This on its own does not make any explicit reference to morality; in fact, Kant warns us that this predisposition leads to various cultural vices. These vices manifest themselves as jealousy, envy, ingratitude, ambition, and other character flaws that concern themselves with one's position relative to their peers (Kant 1996b, p. 75). This predisposition, however, does provide the foundation for consideration and respect of the moral law through reason.

The predisposition to personality consists in the possibility of precisely this rational consideration for the moral law, or, as Kant describes it, as “the susceptibility to respect for the moral law as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice” (Kant, 1996b, p. 76). Note, the predisposition to personality does not fully constitute personality itself; this is why Kant characterizes it as a ‘susceptibility,’ and not as actual consideration and respect for the moral law. Rather, the predisposition to personality can also be conceived as an orientation or affinity toward the moral law, which Kant argued must be thought of as “the subjective effect that the law exercises on the will, to which reason alone delivers the objective grounds” (Kant, 1996a, p. 106). Kant outlined the qualities of this predisposition in *The Metaphysics of Morals* as ‘moral endowments,’ of which there are four: “moral feeling, conscience, love of one's neighbor, and respect for oneself (self-esteem)” (Kant, 1996a, p. 528).

Taken together, Kant asserts that all three predispositions are constitutive of human nature. While animality and humanity can be misused by being set towards unworthy ends or hijacked by various kinds of vices, they cannot be separated from the human being, and the same holds true for the predisposition to personality as well. It is for this reason that Kant establishes them as necessarily constitutive of human nature, as opposed to contingent (Kant, 1996b). Indeed, this point is also reflected in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in Kant's comments of the possession of a moral feeling as a susceptibility to the moral law:

No human being is entirely without moral feeling, for were he completely lacking in receptivity to it he would be morally dead; and if (to speak in medical terms) the moral vital force could no longer excite this feeling, then humanity would dissolve (by chemical laws, as it were) into mere animality and be mixed irretrievably with the mass of other natural beings. - But we no more have a special sense for what is (morally) good and evil than for truth, although people often speak in this fashion. We have, rather, a susceptibility on the part of free choice to be moved by pure practical reason (and its law), and this is what we call moral feeling. (Kant, 1996a, p. 529)

Similar remarks are made about the possession of a conscience:

every human being, as a moral being, has a conscience within him originally. To be under obligation to have a conscience would be tantamount to having a duty to recognize duties. For, conscience is practical reason holding the human being's duty before him for his acquittal or condemnation in every case that comes under a law . . . So when it is said that a certain human being has no conscience, what is



meant is that he pays no heed to its verdict. For if he really had no conscience, he could not even conceive of the duty to have one, since he would neither impute anything to himself as conforming with duty nor reproach himself with anything as contrary to duty. (Kant, 1996a, p. 529)

It is for this reason that neither nonhuman animals, which only possess a predisposition to animality, nor the psychopath<sup>3</sup>, who possesses the predispositions to animality and humanity, can be held personally accountable for violation of what a rational agent would deem to be the moral law. The moral endowments are “natural predispositions of the mind (*praedispositio*) for being affected by concepts of duty” which neither the nonhuman animal nor psychopath possess, but “it is by virtue of them that he can be put under obligation” (Kant 1996a, p. 528). Neither the nonhuman animal nor the psychopath ‘hear the call’ of the moral law. The former is incapable of using reason. The latter may utilize her faculty of reason and make it subservient to her desires and prudential goals, but she feels neither the moral feeling nor the pull of conscience and is therefore “mixed irretrievably with the mass of other natural beings” (Kant, 1996a, p. 529).

## **2.2 THE KANTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN NATURE**

With the tripartite constitution of the human being in mind, we can turn to Kant’s description of human nature and what he calls its ‘unsociable sociability’. In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant characterizes human nature’s constitutive predispositions as “not only (negatively) good (they do not resist the moral law) but they are also predispositions to the good (they demand compliance with it)” (Kant, 1996b, p. 76). Given that these predispositions not only do not contradict the moral law, but are in fact amenable towards the moral law, Kant needs an explanation for the unsociable

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<sup>3</sup> As popularly conceived.

sociability that is seemingly quintessential to human nature. Kant does not locate these negative traits in our animality, for as mentioned earlier, while the drives inherent to the predisposition to animality can serve as vehicles for vices such as gluttony or lust, they themselves are not the root cause of these vices. The predisposition is not only innocent of these evils, it is actually noble, given that the drives perpetuate our survival and contribute to our sociability as a species. Instead, Kant locates the root of this unsociability within the predisposition to humanity and the affordance of reason to set ends for a human being. As Kant writes in *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*:

The first time he said to the sheep: Nature has given you the skin you wear not for you but for me, then took it off the sheep and put it on himself (Genesis 3: 21), he became aware of a prerogative that he had by his nature over all animals, which he now no longer regarded as his fellow creatures, but rather as means and instruments given over to his will for the attainment of his discretionary aims.  
(Kant, 2007, p. 167)

Kant has his former pupil Johann Gottfried von Herder in mind with his satirical retelling of the story of Genesis, but unlike Herder, Kant is a resolute supporter of The Enlightenment and its values of science, reason, and progress. Contra Herder's prelapsarian goal of amending the rift between humanity and nature (Kant 2007, p. 130), Kant aligns himself with The Enlightenment as a movement that breaks not only with tradition, but nature as well. This break, Kant writes, constitutes "the release of the human being from the mother's womb of nature, an alteration that does him honor" (Kant, 2007, p. 168). Consequently, this break from nature and emergence of humanity from animality is "the transition from the crudity of a merely animal creature into

humanity, from the go-cart of instinct to the guidance of reason - in a word, from the guardianship of nature into the condition of freedom” (Kant, 2007, p. 168). The emergence and use of reason creates a rupture in the human being that is cleaved from the rest of animal being, to which the human being cannot return without enacting a form of betrayal to her own essence as a rational creature.

As a being with the faculty of reason and hence the ability to set its own ends, Kant describes the human being as a being in possession of freedom. Together with the human being’s predisposition to personality as a susceptibility to consideration and respect for the moral law, Kant reiterates in the *Religion*:

If it is said, ‘The human being is created good,’ this can only mean nothing more than: ‘He has been created for the good and the original predisposition in him is good;’ the human being is not thereby good as such, but he brings it about that he becomes either good or evil, according as he either incorporates or does not incorporate into his maxims the incentives contained in that predisposition (and this must be left entirely to his free choice). (Kant, 1996b, p. 89)

It is here wherein the predisposition to humanity causes discord and gives rise to our unsociable sociability. The predisposition to animality provides the impetus to come together and be a part of a social community. The predisposition to humanity brings with it the capacity to set ends, or, more precisely, set ends for oneself. Herein lies the root of the problem, for the ends of any one individual can easily come into conflict with the ends of another. In order to have one’s ends met, one will have to compete and enter into antagonistic relationships with other individuals. This struggle between rational creatures in turn fosters vices, both at the level of our predisposition to animality, in the form of

gluttony or lust, and our predisposition to humanity, such as jealousy or enjoyment of the misfortune of others. Despite the predispositions being amenable to the good and to the moral law, Kant writes:

This predisposition to good, which God has placed in the human being, must be developed by the human being himself before the good can make its appearance. But since at the same time the human being has many instincts belonging to animality, and since he has to have them if he is to continue being human, the strength of his instincts will beguile him and he will abandon himself to them, and thus arises evil, or rather, when the human being begins to use his reason, he falls to foolishness. A special germ toward evil cannot be thought, but rather the first development of our reason toward the good is the origin of evil. (Kant, 1996b, p. 411)

This results in aspirations or delusions of superiority in each rational creature relative to all other rational creatures, yet it is part of animality that other human beings are necessary for our survival. Or, as Kant describes it in the fourth proposition of *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, the social conditions in which the human being finds itself leads it “to obtain for himself a rank among his fellows, whom he cannot stand, but also cannot leave alone” (Kant, 2007, p. 111).

This evil that appears as a result of our actions, however, is not unavoidable, nor is it a necessary product of our animal instincts. Rather, it is a contingent product of the employment of reason in the service of our animal instincts. Thus, to say that a human being is evil is, for Kant, to say that a human being is conscious of the moral law “yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it” (1996b, p. 79). The

eradication of evil follows from the “all-powerful development of the germ toward perfection” (Kant, 1996b, p. 411). In the *Lectures on Pedagogy*, Kant admits that individuals need to follow their nature and act upon their animal predispositions, but individuals “must furthermore reflect especially on the development of humanity, and see to it that humanity becomes not merely skillful but also moral” (Kant, 2007, p. 444). The improvement of humanity’s skill and moral aptitude is to be carried out through education, and it must emphasize the role of discipline in reining in the animal excesses. Animality, while good and noble in itself, can threaten and harm humanity, both at the individual and social level, and so “discipline is merely the taming of savagery” (Kant, 2007, p. 444). Through this education and the development of human reason, discipline “changes animal nature into human nature” (Kant, 2007, p. 437).

### **2.3 PERSONS, THINGS, AND THE RATIONAL HUMAN ANIMAL**

The Kantian anthropology presented in the previous section refers to the predisposition of humanity as good, but that this in itself does not make the human being good; the human being must, through her reason, and hence her freedom, choose to make herself good. This is achieved by aiming toward one’s perfection. Kant characterizes this aim through a teleological lens in *The Metaphysics of Morals*: “as a concept belonging to teleology, it is taken to mean the harmony of a thing’s properties with an end” (Kant, 1996a, p. 518). Teleological perfection is considered a qualitative perfection, and hence the human being can possess or be capable of various qualitative perfections. Hence, the human being, in her aim for perfection, must cultivate not just her faculties and her understanding, but her will as well, so as to better perform her duty. While possessing a predisposition to animality, the simultaneous possessions of a predisposition to humanity

and personality require the human being to perfect or realize as much as possible the capacities afforded by these predispositions: “A human being has a duty to raise himself from the crude state of his nature, from his animality (*quoad aam*), more and more toward humanity, by which he alone is capable of setting himself ends” (Kant, 1996a, p. 518).

This is not to say that the predisposition to animality need not be cultivated and directed. Kant believes that a human being has duties to maintain their own animal being. This is cashed out in various negative duties, such as a prohibition on suicide, resistance to lust and licentiousness, and abstinence from excessive food and drink, particularly in regards to alcohol (Kant 1996a, p. 545). There are also positive duties, with Kant claiming that one is even duty-bound to exercise and remain active: “the continuing and purposive invigoration of the animal in him is an end of a human being that is a duty to himself” (Kant, 1996a, p. 566). This concern for the body illustrates Kant’s acknowledgement of the importance embodiment plays for the development of the faculties, consideration of the moral law, and freedom, even if the exercise and subsequent perfection of these all begin from becoming aware of “talents in us which are elevated above mere animality” (Kant, 1996a, p. 268). We have duties to ourselves not just as moral beings, but as moral *and* animal beings. Put differently by Kant, “the human being is regarded not merely as a rational being but as an animal endowed with reason” (Kant, 1996a, p. 575).

That said, the three predispositions are not equally valuable. While the predisposition to animality serves an important function and itself is not a cause of evil, it is a predisposition that is to be nurtured only insofar as it provides support for the other

predispositions. This is why Kant's comment on the duty to maintain one's physical health through exercise is stated as a duty to oneself as a human being (for reason and the capacity to set ends belongs to humanity), despite being concerned with the animal being that is inextricably tied to the human. The human, through the use of reason, is free; the animal is empirical and bound to its instincts:

That which can be determined only by inclination (sensible impulse, stimulus) would be animal choice (*arbitrium brutum*). Human choice, however, is a choice that can indeed be affected but not determined by impulses, and is therefore of itself (apart from an acquired proficiency of reason) not pure but can still be determined to actions by pure will. Freedom of choice is this independence from being determined by sensible impulses; this is the negative concept of freedom.

(Kant, 1996a, p. 375)

The predisposition to humanity and the capacity to set ends can be influenced by animal instincts and can at times be co-extensive with animal drives, but this is only so empirically, and not a matter of the nature of the human being. Regardless of the predisposition to humanity being housed within an animal substrate, the human being

is nevertheless not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to all that reason says on its own and to use reason merely as a tool for the satisfaction of his needs as a sensible being. For, that he has reason does not at all raise him in worth above mere animality if reason is to serve him only for the sake of what instinct accomplishes for animals; reason would in that case be only a particular mode nature had used to equip the human being for the same end to which it has destined animals, without destining him to a higher end. (Kant, 1996a, p. 189-90)

Nevertheless, while the predisposition to humanity is clearly privileged and valued above the predisposition to animality, its value is only comparative. Indeed, in the *Groundwork*, Kant argues that, if we assume as principle that the constitution of creatures is such that there is no faculty possessed by a creature that is not perfectly suited for one particular task<sup>4</sup>, then the rational faculty of the human animal cannot possibly have as its task or goal the satisfaction of its needs (Kant, 1996a, p. 50-51). This is because the animal instincts are much better suited than reason could ever be for the satisfaction of such goals. The ultimate aim of reason, Kant contends, is “to produce a will that is good, not perhaps as a means to other purposes, but good in itself” (Kant 1996a, p. 52).

The production of a good will is intimately tied with the dignity of the human animal. For Kant, within the Kingdom of Ends, everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be exchanged or replaced with any other market item of equivalent worth, but that which has dignity is priceless and possesses infinite worth (Kant, 1996a, p. 84). This dignity is an inner worth, inherent to the item itself, whereas market items with a price receive their worth only through contingent means, and can lose or gain worth in the empirical realm. Hence, means can hold a value subject to fluctuations in market forces, but ends in themselves, which hold intrinsic value, can be said to have dignity (Kant, 1996a, p. 84). Accordingly, Kant claims that “morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity” (Kant, 1996a, p. 84).

The qualification given to the value of humanity is important, as it plays a key role in the dignity of personality. Recall that in the *Religion*, Kant distinguishes between

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<sup>4</sup> This teleological language may seem to push against my use of Weinberg to characterize Kant’s view of nature, but note that the text in question was alluding to differences in what we can derive from theoretical reason and practical reason.



the predisposition to personality and personality as such. In the *Groundwork*, he seems to assert that the human being with the predisposition to personality is worthy of respect and possesses dignity regardless of whether she chooses to consider and respect the moral law, for she is always free to disregard the moral law and commit evil. After all, if she is free to shirk the moral law, she is also free to overcome evil and respect the moral law (Kant, 1996b, p. 89). The issue then arises of what it means to encounter another human being who uses their reason to set ends for themselves.

## **2.4 KANTIAN CONFUSION AND ANXIETY: *HOMO PHAENOMENON* AND ANIMAL NATURE**

In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant once again discusses and distinguishes price from dignity. Price is comparative, while dignity has infinite worth (Kant, 1996a, p. 557). Kant writes that a “human being regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price” (Kant, 1996a, p. 557). A person, conceived as *homo noumenon*, “is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, that is, he possesses a dignity” (Kant, 1996a, p. 557). A human being that possesses or inhabits personality, and not merely possesses the predisposition for it, is held as an end in herself, and is therefore afforded respect and infinite worth. The rational human animal, or *homo phaenomenon*, on the other hand, does not fare as well in this realm of value:

In the system of nature, a human being (*homo phaenomenon, animal rationale*) is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of the animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value (*pretium vulgare*). Although a human being has, in his understanding, something more than they and can set himself ends, even this

gives him only an extrinsic value for his usefulness (*pretium usus*). (Kant, 1996a, p. 557)

The rational human animal possesses reason, as established by the name. Its possession of reason, according to Kant, sets it apart as “something more than they [nonhuman animals],” and grants the human animal the capacity to set its own ends (Kant, 1996a, p. 557). Given this, it seems to participate in both the predisposition to animality and the predisposition to humanity. The presence of reason and the capacity to set ends means that the rational human animal is free, despite the adjective *phaenomenon* in its Latin name (meaning, it is empirical and encountered in the natural world). Moreover, what is important to note is the tripartite constitution of the nature of human beings; the third predisposition, the predisposition to personality, is denied to the rational human animal. This cannot be explained by claiming that the rational human animal is not engaging in personality, because that alone is not enough to deny dignity to the human being. As mentioned earlier, Kant claims that, insofar as humanity is capable of morality, any human being with the predisposition to personality must be afforded dignity. Furthermore, it cannot be claimed that *homo phaenomenon*, as a human being, lacks the predisposition to personality. This is because Kant asserts that the three dispositions are constitutive of human nature, and not merely contingent and empirical. Any human being that lacks any of the three dispositions is strictly speaking *not* a human being.

There is a different but plausible reading of Kant’s thought on the distinction between *homo phaenomenon* and *homo noumenon* that can be deployed to explain Kant’s intention: by the term *homo phaenomenon*, Kant only meant to describe how the human being appears in the empirical realm, the world of appearances. Note, by the world of

appearances, Kant does not refer only to the external world. This is why the comment on *homo phaenomenon* is circumscribed to the system of nature, to the empirical and phenomenal world. Appearances are apprehended both by outer sense and inner sense: “Outer sense is where the human body is affected by physical things; inner sense, where it is affected by the mind” (Kant, 2007, p. 265). Importantly, inner sense represents oneself as one appears to oneself. That is, representations of inner sense can themselves become objects of representations, as second-order thoughts. Inner sense “presents even ourselves to consciousness only as we appear to ourselves, not as we are in ourselves, since we intuit ourselves only as we are internally affected” (Kant, 1998, p. 257). The use of the word ‘affected’ is important, as Kant reiterates the passivity of empirical self-consciousness in the *Anthropology*: “inner sense is not pure apperception, a consciousness of what the human being does, since this belongs to the faculty of thinking. Rather, it is a consciousness of what he undergoes, in so far as he is affected by the play of his own thoughts” (Kant, 2007, p. 272). Both inner sense and outer sense, as faculties whose domain is appearance, are passive. Sensations are caused, either by spatially located objects indexed by time in the case of outer sense, or by mental representations that themselves cause empirical self-consciousness to hold them as objects of representation. Neither empirical self-consciousness nor *homo phaenomenon* can provide the ground for autonomy and the use of reason because neither is free. This is due to the fact that both are phenomenal in nature, and hence are objects of theoretical reason and subject to cause and effect.

This is part of Kant’s reasoning that leads to the transcendental argument for the self and the freedom of the will. Kant avoids the problem of a causal regress in both inner

and outer sense by establishing the 'I' as formally necessary, if ontologically empty: "the subject of inherence is designated only transcendently through the I that is appended to thoughts, without noting the least property of it, or cognizing or knowing anything at all about it" (Kant, 1998, p. 419). This abstraction of the 'I' grounds subjectivity and allows oneself to experience oneself as free, rational, and self-legislating. which opens the way for morality and dignity: "The fact that the human being can have the "I" in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a person, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person - i.e., through rank and dignity an entirely different being from things" (Kant, 2007, p. 239). *Homo noumenon*, then, points to the infinite worth that one recognizes in oneself and in another human being once one engages with another human being as a free and rational being. The previous tension concerning the personality of *homo phaenomenon* disappears, but a new one arises in relation to Kant's view of animals and our empirical animal embodiment.

Kant believes that respect is due only to persons, never to things (Kant, 1996a, p. 202). Things can elicit inclination or love within us if they are animals, noting that our engagement with these creatures can give rise to a feeling of admiration within us, but none of our responses to an animal can qualify as proper respect (Kant, 1996a, p. 202). Curiously, however, Kant also asserts that one can engage another human being in very much the same way as one would an animal, and be impressed or amazed by the human being, yet the human being will "not be an object of respect. His jocular humor, his courage and strength, the power he has by his rank among others, could inspire me with feelings of this kind even though inner respect toward him is lacking" (Kant, 1996a, p.

202). Despite lacking respect for this human being, Kant immediately follows this scenario with another involving an encounter with a humble common man whose excellence of character stands as a law that commands respect. Both men are encountered in the empirical realm, yet one is seen only as *homo phaenomenon* while the other is acknowledged as *homo noumenon*; the charming and powerful man is assessed based on qualities that relate to enjoyment and happiness, while the humble common man is judged on his moral character and seen as a person. Kant claims that the humble man “holds before me a law that strikes down my self-conceit when I compare it with my conduct, and I see observance of that law and hence its practicability proved before me in fact” (Kant, 1996a, p. 202). But if all human beings, as rational animals possessing the predisposition to humanity, are deserving of respect, why does Kant find his spirit compelled to bow only before the common man? Doubtless, this quote showcases the radically egalitarian quality of Kant’s ethics, given that it finds dignity and nobility in the common man. However, I would like to use this instant of recognition as a springboard for a different question: how is it that a subject is supposed to identify *homo noumenon* from *homo phaenomenon*? Additionally, how is a subject supposed to recognize human and nonhuman persons from the merely human animal, nonhuman animals, and other kinds of beings?

## **2.5 THE FAILURE OF THE SENSES AND THE NEED FOR THE PRACTICAL POSTULATES**

*Homo phaenomenon* is encountered in the empirical realm, just as every nonhuman animal that human beings interact with. Of course, rational human animals all tend to have a roughly similar form that is easily identifiable by other human beings. This

method, however, has strict limitations, given that the empirical and contingent characteristics of another human being do not necessarily signal that they are a rational agent. For Kantians that wish to expand personhood past the human species, this is even less promising as a method for identifying an autonomous rational agent. Kant is explicit about the inability of outer sense to grant us access to a thinking being: “we can perceive through outer sense neither thinking nor willing nor the faculty of pleasure and displeasure; and we cannot imagine how the soul as a thinking being should be an object of outer sense” (Kant, 1997b, p. 83). Nor can inner sense allow us access to another thinking being, because inner sense only has as its material its own representations. This raises questions, of course, over how Kant arrives at the exclusion of nonhuman animals.

If we are to base our determinations of who or what is *homo noumenon* on analogical principles, then based on empirical observation, it seems to be the case that many other nonhuman animals utilize some form of reasoning. They exhibit goal-oriented behavior, employ methods of inference, and are often sociable as well. Kant, however, wants to close off this route of argument in the *Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment*:

Yet from the fact that the human being uses reason in order to build, I cannot infer that the beaver must have the same sort of thing and call this an inference by means of the analogy. Yet from the comparison of the similar mode of operation in the animals (the ground for which we cannot immediately perceive) to that of humans (of which we are immediately aware) we can quite properly infer in accordance with the analogy that the animals also act in accordance with representations (and are not, as Descartes would have it, machines), and that in

spite of their specific difference, they are still of the same genus as human beings (as living beings). (Kant, 2000, p. 328)

While there is something that looks similar to human behavior in the behavior of the beaver, we are not justified in claiming that what I take to explain the cause of my behavior when I choose to build is the same general thing or process as what causes the observable behavior of the beaver. This on its own is a strange thought for Kant, as he ultimately disavows that such reasoning can work in the case of human beings. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he briefly considers, and ultimately rejects, an Aristotelian conception of the human being as thinking embodied being:

I can also assume that in the substance in itself, to which extension pertains in respect of our outer sense, thoughts may also be present, which may be represented with consciousness through their own inner sense. In such a way the very same thing that is called a body in one relation would at the same time be a thinking being in another, whose thoughts, of course, we could not intuit, but only their signs in appearance. Thereby the expression that only souls (as a particular species of substances) think would be dropped; and instead it would be said, as usual, that human beings think, i.e., that the same being that as outer appearance is extended is inwardly (in itself) a subject, which is not composite, but is simple and thinks. (Kant, 1998, p. 421)

We know that Kant rejects this view because it attempts to use inner and outer sense to establish the existence of things that Kant has precluded from the purview of experience, as well as evoking metaphysical substances, which he wishes to avoid in favor of transcendental arguments.

It is interesting, however, that Kant disagrees with Descartes on the status of animals as automatons<sup>5</sup>, and, given that he grants the beaver some form of representation and membership in the category of living beings, seems to possibly contradict his claim in *The Critique of Practical Reason* that animals are merely another form of thing. Granted, Kant is likely reluctant to assent to Descartes's position on the grounds that denying empirical nonhuman animals representation and thought would mean that he would have to deny representation and thought to human beings as well. Indeed, Kant argues along these lines in his Lectures on Metaphysics:

To think of animals as machines is impossible, because then one would deviate from all analogy with nature, and the proposition: that a human being is itself a machine, is utter foolishness, for we are conscious of our own representations, and all natural science rests on the proposition: that matter can have no representations. Everything mechanical is external and consists in a relation to space, our thinking refers indeed to things in space but itself is still not in space; but thoughts would have to be objects of outer intuition if they are supposed to be machines. That thinking is thus a mechanism is absurd, this would mean to make thinking in one's own consciousness into an object of the outer senses. Matter can indeed be a necessary requirement for the support of our thoughts, but thinking itself is not mechanical. (Kant, 1997b, p. 295-6)

Having precluded the use of inner and outer sense along with theoretical reason to establish a method for identifying *homo noumenon* in the world, Kant turns to practical reason for a solution, and relies on faith and the practical postulates.

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<sup>5</sup> At least, as Kant reads Descartes; there is reason to believe that Kant is uncharitable to Descartes.



The role of faith and the practical postulates are intimately tied within Kant's moral framework. Faith, or a belief based in faith, is characterized as a belief that has neither support nor detraction from the phenomenal world, nor from theoretical reason. As Kant describes it, "pure rational faith can never be transformed into knowledge by any natural data of reason and experience, because here the ground of holding true is merely subjective, namely a necessary need of reason" (Kant, 1996b, p. 14). The postulates are based on this subjective necessity of reason. In other words, despite the absence of data or experience to confirm or deny faith, we cannot fail to think its necessity, or to think otherwise. Note, the practical postulates are not like the formal necessity of freedom of the will for theoretical reason. Theoretical reason treats freedom of the will as necessary in order to avoid a causal regress (Kant 1998, p. 579). The practical postulates reach further, in that they are held to be true without proof, because morality demands that they be true. Kant claims that we need to assume the practical postulates if we want to judge about empirical matters like causes when employing theoretical reason, but practical reason demands more; not only do we need to assume the practical postulates if we want to deliberate morally and judge, we must go further and claim that they are true without proof because "we have to judge" (Kant, 1996b, p. 12). The postulates must be accepted without proof, for they serve as "the signpost[s] or compass by means of which the speculative thinker orients himself in his rational excursions into the field of supersensible objects" (Kant, 1996b, p. 14).

## **2.6 THE THIRD PARALOGISM: IS THERE A NOUMENAL SELF HERE?**

I will not elaborate further on the postulates here, but rather focus on the implications of the third postulate, the immortality of the soul. As established earlier,

neither inner nor outer sense can help us determine whether we ourselves are *homo noumenon*. Rather, it is determined to be formally necessary by theoretical reason if we wish to make sense of our experience as conscious beings. Practical reason goes past formal necessity and assents to the existence of *homo noumenon* due to the necessity to deliberate and make moral judgments. While Kant ultimately rejects the Aristotelian view of a thinking embodied being due to its metaphysical baggage, he does not deny that there seems to be some connection between the body and the mind. This is evident by his discussion on the existence of angels and other spiritual beings in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*. He believes that “we can quite easily imagine beings that have no body at all, and nevertheless can think and will,” and that even though we cannot establish their existence without doubt, “neither can anyone refute us” (Kant, 1997b, p. 88). Most importantly, he also states that experience shows us that our bodies come into play when we ourselves think. From this, it is reasonable to assume as true that, if I come to know myself as *homo phaenomenon* through my outer sense and inner sense, as well as intelligibly conceive of myself as *homo noumenon*, then other human bodies that I encounter in the empirical world can be assumed to have similar experiences, properties, and structures.

This method establishes that human beings as persons worthy of respect, but seems unable to reach past and establish personhood for any other being that does not have a physical human form. Spiritual rational beings can be assumed to exist, though not established through the aid of theoretical reason. Rational beings that don't have human form would be difficult to recognize for who they are. Nonhuman animals fare the worst within this framework for identifying beings worthy of respect. There is a way to

complicate this picture, however, by considering the Third Paralogism in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. The Paralogism is concerned with the identity of the person over time. The error that occurs in personal identity over time is based on the use of inner sense to connect and represent one's memories to establish a series that can be considered a personal identity. However, as we have established for Kant, these representations belong to the world of appearances, and do not necessarily reflect the world as it is. Kant states that "The identity of the consciousness of Myself in different times is therefore only a formal condition of my thoughts and their connection, but it does not prove at all the numerical identity of my subject" (Kant, 1998, p. 423). In other words, while a phenomenal self may perceive successive thoughts and memories and come to hold that they all belong to the same phenomenal self, this does not entail that they belong to the same noumenal self.

It is, in principle, entirely possible that each successive thought and memory that the phenomenal self perceives as part of a series is attached to a different noumenal self. If spiritual beings can exist without being coupled to a body, and phenomenal selves can be uncoupled from noumenal selves, then even though Kant has argued that animal souls only have the capacity for outer sense, it cannot be determined whether they are attached to a noumenal self and hence worthy of respect. Of course, while the practical postulates are supposed to make up for this inability to know whether one is engaging with a person through faith, at the same time, this uncertainty should foster agnosticism concerning what kind of being will compel us to bow in view of the moral law.

## **2.7 KANTIAN CONTEMPT AND THE PROBLEM OF ANIMAL BEING**

Despite what should be agnosticism on his part, Kant refuses to grant nonhuman animals consciousness and moral worth as ends in themselves. They do not truly possess reason nor morality. Instead, animals possess what he calls analogues of reason and morality, or *analagon rationis* and *analagon moralitatis*, which allows animals to perform actions without consciousness that human animals require consciousness to perform (Kant, 1997b, p. 390-1). It is likely due to these capacities that Kant asserts that, while violent and cruel treatment of animals should not be committed, the prohibition on such treatment is not for the animals, but only in regard of the effects that inflicting such treatment upon animals may have on the moral disposition of the person and its influence on her future treatment of other persons (Kant, 1996a, p. 564). Nonhuman animals, as analogues to human animals, should not be treated cruelly, “for it dulls his shared feeling of their suffering and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other people” (Kant, 1996a, p. 564).

This guidance on conduct towards nonhuman animals is not merely negative, but positive: if one needs to kill an animal, one ought to provide a quick and painless death. If one needs the labor of an animal, one should have them do work that will not cause undue stress and maintains an uncruel relationship with oneself (Kant, 1996a, p. 564). Finally, Kant advocates that the labor and loyalty of an animal should be rewarded in its old age with care and concern, once again serving as an analogue for ethical engagement with persons: “if a dog, for example, has served his master long and faithfully, that is an analogue of merit; hence I must reward it, and once the dog can serve no longer, must look after him to the end” (Kant, 1997a, p. 212).

Given Kant's concern for the treatment of nonhuman animals, and his position on the innocence of the predisposition to animality, it is surprising that he exhibits such disdain for the animality in the human being. While he admits of humanity's capacity for evil, Kant accepts this as the price to pay for freedom and the possibility of consideration and respect for the moral law. In reference to the vices that manifest themselves through the animal instincts, however, Kant is much more critical. On drunkenness, Kant asserts that "a human being who is drunk is like a mere animal, not to be treated as a human being" (Kant, 1996a, p. 551). This contempt is surprising, considering his commitment to the inextricability of the predispositions and the infinite worth that the predisposition to personality grants each and every rational human being. His attitude towards gluttony shares a similar vitriol, asserting that "gluttony is even lower than that animal enjoyment of the senses, since it only lulls the senses into a passive condition and, unlike drunkenness, does not even arouse imagination to an active play of representations; so it approaches even more closely the enjoyment of cattle" (Kant, 1996a, p. 551). Kant also takes aim at the development of habits, believing them to deprive even good actions of their moral worth and creating a detestable human being by resembling the instincts of animals:

The reason why the habits of another stimulate the arousal of disgust in us is because here the animal in the human being jumps out far too much, and because here one is led instinctively by the rule of habituation, exactly like another (non-human) nature, and so runs the risk of falling into one and the same class with the beast. (Kant, 2007, p. 261)

This general distaste is of course present throughout his writings and is reflected in Kant's attitude toward Enlightenment and the break from tradition and nature. Recall Kant's increasing admiration for the starry heavens and the moral law within himself. The characterization of himself as an insignificant animal being is based on two senses of insignificance: insignificance in the face of a large universe understood through the disenchantment of the world carried out by science, and insignificance in relation to the infinite worth of the human person, for the human being must remember that "his insignificance as a human animal may not infringe upon his consciousness of his dignity as a rational human being" (Kant, 1996a, p. 557).

Regardless of Kant's attitude toward animality, the salient issue with regards to the empirical encounter with *homo phaenomenon* is the recognition of *homo noumenon* within. Kant remarks that a person can "have no duty to any beings other than human beings; and if he thinks he has such duties, it is because of an amphiboly in his concepts of reflection" (Kant, 1996a, p. 563). By this, Kant means that we make a mistake in determining the source of our compulsion toward duty. For example, when an animal elicits in us a feeling of duty, what compels us is not the animal's will, for an animal does not possess reason and is not free, but rather the nature of the animal, as a possessor of an analogue of reason that motivates our sympathy. In the same vein, what should be brought forth by the animal in the human being should not be contempt, but concern and care, even if it serves as an indirect duty not to the animal within the human being, but the person with infinite worth that resides with its animal body.

## **CHAPTER 3: SELLARS AND THE QUESTION OF THE ANIMAL WITHIN THE IMAGES**

In the previous chapter, I discussed Kant's view of animality and the animal nature of human beings. I concluded that Kant has a complex view of animality in relation to the human, and that Kant experiences difficulties in determining who or what is a noumenal self and hence worthy of respect. In this chapter, I engage with a contemporary Kantian position put forth by Wilfrid Sellars. Sellars, despite being a resolute naturalist and eschewing Kant's idealism and the enigma of the noumenon, was at heart a Kantian, and made transcendental arguments in the Kantian spirit (Sellars 1975, p. 346). For Sellars, the Kantian transcendental project needs to engage with science and evolutionary theory in order to explain how consciousness can come to know a world that has given rise to its existence. In Sellars's words, "the question 'How did we get into the framework?' has a causal answer, a special application of evolutionary theory to the emergence of beings capable of conceptually representing the world of which they have come to be a part" (Sellars 1979, p. 180). Given Sellars's clear commitment to the importance of science and exploration of our place in the natural world, it behooves us to understand what relationship nonhuman animals have to the world, and whether this can inform our relationship with them.

First, I provide an exegesis of Sellars's orientation concerning our self-understanding through what he calls the manifest and scientific images of humanity<sup>6</sup> (1991b, p. 4-5). Second, I explore what position nonhuman animals inhabit within the

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<sup>6</sup> Sellars uses the terms 'Man' and 'Man-in-the-world' to refer to humanity as a whole. In order to avoid the erasure of persons of other genders through the use of such gendered terms, I utilize 'human,' humans,' 'humanity,' and 'humanity-in-the-world,' except in the case of direct quotes.

image schema according to Sellars's philosophy. Third, to elaborate on the previous section, I present Sellars's 'Myth of Jones' as presented in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1968) and the importance of a public language for human thought. Fourth, I discuss the implications of Sellars's 'Myth of Jones.' Specifically, I allege that the myth commits Sellars to the position that nonhuman animals are incapable of thought, and I explain why later in his career he transitions to the position that nonhuman animals possess the capacity for proto-thought.

Fifth, I argue that the 'Myth of Jones' is incompatible with proto-thought in nonhuman animals, given the importance that a public language plays in determining the semantic content of thought within Sellars's view. Sixth, in response to this incompatibility in his philosophy, I detail Sellars's eventual move toward the position that nonhuman animals possess propositional attitudes in response to the criticisms presented in the fifth section, and describe the two forms of representational systems that he proposes, as well as the differences between the two. This marks a major shift in Sellars's thought, given that it reduces the difference between humans and nonhuman animals to the use of logic within their representational systems. Seventh, and finally, I draw from contemporary research in animal cognition to trouble Sellars's assertion that nonhuman animals are only capable of material inferences and cannot use logic. Despite this research, I argue that Sellars's insistence on the indispensability of the manifest image problematically requires him to exclude nonhuman animals from the ambit of personhood in order to safeguard what he takes to be an essential human self-conception.

### **3.1 SELLARS ON THE MANIFEST AND SCIENTIFIC IMAGE**



In his 1960 lecture, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," Sellars conceives of the philosophical enterprise as an attempt "to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (Sellars 1991b, p. 1). This conception of philosophy, while admittedly vague, serves well to describe what Sellars sees as the task or aspiration of the philosopher. In contrast to other disciplines, whether they be based in scientific reasoning or in the methods of the humanities, philosophy has as its goal the ability to "know one's way around" the knowledge generated by all other disciplines (Sellars 1991b, p. 2). This is not to say that the philosopher must be a master of all disciplines, for this would be unfeasible, but rather, the philosopher must know his or her way around the questions and methods of other disciplines. For example, a historian must not only reflect on historical events, but must reflect on the nature and method of historical thinking (Sellars 1991b, p. 2). The philosopher, on the other hand, need not carry out reflection on historical events (at least not, in most cases, to the same extent as the historian), but must be competent in reflection over historical thinking and how it relates to other disciplines and methods, if he or she is to get any grasp whatsoever on how 'things' may 'hang together.' Philosophy is characterized by keeping an 'eye on the whole' with the intention of providing a picture or synoptic view of the world, a view which includes everything from Robespierre's Reign of Terror and Boyle's Law to televisions and hydrozoa (Sellars 1991b, p. 3).

It is worth noting, as Sellars himself does, that this systematic conception of philosophy is at odds with the dominant view of analytic philosophy at the time of his lecture, which conceives of philosophy as a discipline concerned with analysis and the

clarification of concepts. Sellars finds value in this approach, but ultimately resists it, viewing it as increasingly myopic and “tracing parts within parts, losing each in turn from sight as new parts come into view” (Sellars 1991b, p. 3). Nor does he accept the conception of philosophy as being a sort of lens that serves to bring a picture into focus, and denies this conception for two reasons. Sellars believes that this conception suggests that researchers and thinkers in the special disciplines are confused and do not have a grasp of their respective fields, and it also implies that philosophy has begun its calibrations on an already-complete picture (Sellars 1991b, p. 4). Here we arrive at the value of Sellars’s aside, for he contends that philosophy reckons not just with a procedurally developing image, but further deals with two real, public, and non-arbitrary images of equal complexity that it must grasp in stereoscopic fashion, in the same manner as human vision. Sellars refers to one image as the “manifest image” and the other as the “scientific image” (Sellars 1991b, p. 4).

### 3.1.1 The Manifest Image

The first and primary image, the manifest image, provides the framework in terms of which humanity comes to know of itself as humanity-in-the-world (Sellars 1991b, p. 6). Despite the impression that the name of the scientific image might convey, the manifest image is not, Sellars argues, an image of humanity-in-the-world that is pre-scientific or uncritical. Rather, the manifest image makes use of sound reasoning and what Sellars refers to as “correlational induction,” or the methods of reasoning involved in building theories and generalizations based on experience and perceived correlations between events in the past (Sellars 1991b, p. 7). What the manifest image does not contain, Sellars contends, is the postulation of imperceptible entities and theories that

seek to explicate how these imperceptible entities influence or constitute perceptible entities (Sellars 1991b, p. 7). In effect, we see in the manifest image the basis for what has been termed ‘rationalism’ and ‘empiricism’ in the history of philosophy, but also Continental and Analytic philosophy (Sellars 1991b, p. 8).

As mentioned previously, the manifest image not only has methods of inquiry and knowledge-acquisition, but also an ontology, or a set of categories of existing perceptible entities to which it is committed. The manifest image itself has an ontology influenced by lower categories of the Great Chain of Being.<sup>7</sup> Sellars asserts that, among categories of animals, inanimate objects, and persons, it is the category of persons which is held as primary within the image (Sellars 1991b, p. 9). Sellars further speculates that the origin of the image lies in animistic practices and worldviews, wherein all objects housed or potentially housed animating spirits. The distinguishing aspect of the manifest image, in comparison to animistic worldviews, has been a trajectory and practice of de-personalization; whereas once it was the case that to be a tree or mountain was a way of being a spirit (or more precisely, a person)<sup>8</sup>, the manifest image has been characterized by a historical occlusion or denial of personhood to entities in the world, signifying not just a change in the beliefs of humanity, but a change in categories and ontology<sup>9</sup> (Sellars 1991b, p. 10).

It is this delimiting of persons that serves as the fulcrum for the tension between the manifest image and the scientific image, for Sellars states that the manifest image

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<sup>7</sup> The Great Chain of Being has had various iterations in Western philosophy, but has been generally understood as a hierarchy of beings or kinds of beings. Nevertheless, what is important for our purposes is that these iterations have been greatly influenced by the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Christian traditions, which themselves have been highly influential in the folk ontologies of the Western tradition.

<sup>8</sup> Since these were ways of being a person, they do not contradict Sellars’s claim that the Manifest does not postulate imperceptible entities.

<sup>9</sup> This, of course, resembles claims about the increased civilization of certain parts of the world, which perhaps serves to further highlight Sellars’s ethnocentrism.

identifies persons as agents that possess autonomy, for “only a being capable of deliberation can be properly said to act” (Sellars 1991b, p. 11). Only beings that possess autonomy are capable of acting based on reasons. If beings such as mountain spirits or tree spirits are denied personhood, then they’ve lost the assumed status of being able to act based on reasons. Consequently, they are excluded from the community of persons and denied moral consideration, for Sellars claims that to think of a being as a person “is to think of it as a being with which one is bound up in a network of rights and duties” (Sellars 1991b, p. 39). Hence, an increasingly de-personalized world results in a decrease of autonomous entities and a narrowing of the moral community of persons. De-personalized entities, whether animals or inanimate objects, are understood to possess and be determined by a nature; persons, on the other hand, are understood to possess a character. Predictions of behavior can still be made based on habits in the sense that a person’s actions can be ‘in character’ or characteristic of that particular person, but they can surprise the observer and occasionally deviate from expected behaviors; de-personalized entities do not possess such capacities (Sellars 1991b, p. 13).

At this point, it would be beneficial to return to a previous comment on the nature of the images. Specifically, the public and non-arbitrary nature of the images becomes salient; the images transcend all individual thinkers and are real, “and are as much a part and parcel of the world as . . . the Constitution of the United States” (Sellars 1991b, p. 5). The public nature of the images serves to provide standards for correctness and conduct. Consequently, there is a meaningful sense of truth (and error) in portrayal and discussion of the images, even if it is ultimately determined that the images are fundamentally false (Sellars 1991b, p. 14). The manifest image, in its determination of certain entities as

persons possessing autonomy, provides the “framework in which we think of one another as sharing the community intentions which provide the ambience of principles and standards (above all, those which make meaningful discourse and rationality itself possible) within which we live our own individual lives” (Sellars 1991b, p. 40). The real value of the manifest image is not in its ontological determinations, but in its normative principles. By identifying who or what counts as a person, the manifest image demarcates the community of intentional, rational agents and allows us to “make sense of ourselves as rational agents engaged in pursuing various purposes in the world” (Brassier 2007, p. 6). Sellars goes so far as to assert that, “to the extent that the manifest does not survive [...], to that extent man would not survive” (Sellars 1991b, p. 18).

### 3.1.2 The Scientific Image

Having provided a brief overview of Sellars’s notion of the manifest image, we can now turn to the characteristics of the scientific image. As might be surmised from the preceding discussion, the concept of an image of humanity-in-the-world is for Sellars, in some sense, real yet an idealization. There exist incongruences and patchwork regions among the images, particularly in the scientific image<sup>10</sup>; not only is the scientific image still being developed, but it is composed of an amalgamation of images, of knowledge collected by various scientific disciplines. These various images have slowly created a naturalist view of humanity-in-the-world. The evolutionary theory of biology is perhaps the best example of this process, with evidence from genetics, geography, physiology, paleontology, embryology, and many other fields and their accompanying subfields forming a particular picture of humans and other organisms. Humanity under the

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that the manifest image is uniform; Sellars notes in the text that the images are idealizations (1991b, p. 5).

scientific image is a concatenation of various minor images: a bundle of physical particles and forces in physics, a vessel for gene transmission in some conceptions of biology, and an organic machine under the frame of biomechanics (Sellars 1991b, p. 20). Recall, however, that the de-personalization of the world within the manifest image is concomitant with a determination of characters and natures, or predictable behaviors and causal forces. Combined with its methods of reasoning and community standards for truth and conduct, the manifest image provides the ground for the scientific image to appear. The scientific image is in fact methodologically dependent on the manifest, but this is not to say that the manifest enjoys a substantive primacy over the scientific (Sellars 1991b, p. 20). The scientific image, while arising out of the manifest, cannot be reduced to it, but rather develops into a rival image in its own right. Science cannot be instrumentalized and seen as derivative of our phenomenological or practical, pre-scientific engagement with the world, as evidenced by the difficulty in reducing scientific theories concerning quarks and other sub-atomic particles to our everyday usage of tools (Brassier 2007, p. 8).

Herein lies the problem between the two images: the manifest asserts that humans exist as “rule-bound rational agent[s] participating in but not governed by the realm of physical law,” while the scientific conceives of the human “as a ‘complex physical system’ whose capacity for agency can ultimately be accounted for in terms of concatenations of spatio-temporal causation” (Brassier 2011, p. 8). Sellars claims that we require parity between the two images, but also maintains that the scientific image holds ontological priority between the two (1981, p. 326). This seems inconsistent, but can be maintained if one recalls that the function of the manifest image as a public image is to

circumscribe a community of rational agents and provide a space of reasons for agents, while the scientific image functions to describe and explain the world at the ontological level. The manifest is normative, and the scientific descriptive and explanatory. In other words, the manifest provides the conditions for the pursuit of science, which in turn leads to the development of the scientific image and the description of the world at a more fundamental, ontological level. It is precisely due to their functioning in different registers that Sellars maintains that the manifest image is indispensable, because it provides the ground for normative commitments, deliberation, persuasion, and correction between agents. The scientific image arises out of the manifest image, which provides the norms and standards of correctness necessary to have science function as a self-correcting enterprise (Brassier 2011, p. 9). Accordingly, for Sellars, the scientific image cannot lead us to jettison the manifest image, for doing so means jettisoning the very underpinnings of the scientific image which provide the imperatives for revision and correction and the normative commitments involved in trying to understand the world.

### **3.2 THE QUESTION OF THE ANIMAL WITHIN THE IMAGES**

Given that Sellars believes that we need a stereoscopic view of the manifest and scientific images, what is the status of the nonhuman animal in Sellars's project? Human beings, which conceive of themselves as persons that give and receive reasons within the context of a community, must, according to Sellars, be considered stereoscopically. Nonhuman animals, on the other hand, do not enjoy the same status. While commenting that behaviorism's ability to explain the behavior of animals has been exaggerated and its claims pre-mature, Sellars says that this is "primarily because until recently little was known in neurophysiology which was suited to throw much light on correlations at the

large-scale level of behaviouristics” (Sellars 1991b, p. 24). Behaviorism does not suffice to explain the behavior of human beings, however, and it relates to a previous distinction that Sellars makes between nature and character. The animal is condemned to the expression of a nature, but the human being possesses a character. Sellars believes that any example of human behavior cannot be explained solely through the lens of behaviorism because any successive events of observable behavior involve extremely complex ‘iffy’ facts. By ‘iffy,’ Sellars refers to the hypothetical possible responses that an organism can have to a particular stimulus; if a particular stimulus were to occur, then a certain response would be made or elicited from the organism (Sellars 1991b, p. 24). The ‘iffy’ facts about what a human being “would have said or done at each intervening moment if he had been asked certain questions” are numerous and complex (Sellars 1991b, p. 24). Given our background knowledge and the complexity of our behavior, Sellars believes that it is reasonable to suppose that the complexity of our ‘iffy’ facts is due to there being an inner cognitive process going on within our heads (1991b, p. 24). What is key, however, is that Sellars believes that these inner cognitive processes are in important ways analogous to overt verbal behavior, and that each event or process would or could have a correlative event in overt speech. This analogous structure between thought and language will become salient soon.

This postulation of inner cognitive processes is unnecessary for nonhuman animals, because, Sellars believes, we gain nothing from it. With humans, it is beneficial to do so because postulating inner cognitive processes “can be connected to a sufficient diversity of large-scale behavioural variables to enable the prediction of new correlations” (Sellars 1991b, p. 24). Sellars is aware that we often do this with nonhuman



animals as well, but notes that our explanations of this behavior and reference to inner cognitive episodes is often qualified. In correspondence between Sellars and Roderick Chisholm, Chisholm remarks that the relationship between language and thought seems to be like the relationship between lunar light and solar light: just as lunar light is a reflection of solar light, language reflects the meaning of our mental episodes. But it would be a mistake, Chisholm believes, to think that lunar light is necessary for solar light. The moon could very well disappear instantaneously, yet we would not assert that the sun no longer radiates light at night. Similarly, Chisholm asserts that it would be wrong to believe that the absence of language means the absence of thought. and writes that “surely it would be unfounded psychological dogma to say that infants, mutes, and animals cannot have beliefs and desires until they are able to use language” (Chisholm 1967, p. 524).

In response, Sellars clarifies that he does not define thoughts in terms of overt verbal behavior, and he believes that you can clearly have thoughts without verbal behavior (1967, p. 527). This means that there is no contradiction in Sellars’s framework in the idea of a being which has thoughts yet does not have language to express these thoughts. This, then, would seem to accommodate the belief that infants, mutes, and animals can have thoughts, despite not having language. However, Sellars still holds to behaviorist explanations of animals, remarking that:

Not only do the subtle adjustments which animals make to their environment tempt us to say that they do what they do because they believe this, desire that, expect such and such, etc.; we are able to explain their behavior by ascribing to them these beliefs, desires, expectations, etc., But, and this is a key point, we

invariably find ourselves qualifying these explanations in terms which would amount, in the case of a human subject, to the admission that he wasn't really thinking, believing, desiring, etc. For in the explanation of animal behavior the mentalistic framework is used as a model or analogy which is modified and restricted to fit the phenomena to be explained. It is as though we started out to explain the behavior of macroscopic objects, in particular, gases, by saying that they are made up of minute bouncing billiard balls, and found ourselves forced to add, "but, of course . . ." (Sellars 1967, p. 527)

Sellars then refers to research done in behavioral psychology, noting that, while the field is still relatively new, its findings make clear that "discrimination is a far more elementary phenomenon than classification" (Sellars 1967, p. 527). This point on discrimination and classification is important, because Sellars writes to Chisholm that to have thoughts entails the ability to classify and make inferences. An animal is not classifying when it reacts to a set of similar objects in the same way and differently to a different set of objects, but instead only discriminates. Sellars concludes that, while he does not want to deny that there is something like thought that might go on, some form of proto-thought, he believes that it is only with the acquisition of language that a being is capable of full-blown thought (1967, p. 528). To fully understand Sellars's position on the matter, and to try to push back against it, we need to understand his writing in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind'.

### **3.3 EMPIRICISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND: THE MYTH OF JONES**

Sellars's highly influential essay is known for its identification of what he calls 'the Myth of the Given,' and the various forms of the myth that he argues can be found in

philosophy. For our purposes, however, we are interested in a myth of Sellars's own creation: Sellars asks us to imagine a primordial community of human beings as our ancestors. These ancestors of ours have acquired language, but their language does not include any conception of any mental states or inner thought episodes that our current language possesses and that we take members in our community to have today. Instead, when explaining the behavior of other members of the community, these people used dispositional terms that were operationally defined based on observable responses to various observable stimuli. In other words, our 'Rylean'<sup>11</sup> ancestors possessed a sophisticated behaviorist language (Sellars 1968, p. 309). To give an example, to explain a behavior such as anger, the community might use the dispositional term 'ill-tempered,' and operationally defined the term based on observations of behavior, such as scowling, yelling or door-slamming. Note, it is not the case that our ancestors subscribe to a behaviorist theory to explain the language of other human beings. Rather, they merely possess a sophisticated behaviorist language that makes use of elementary logical operations (Sellars 1968, p. 309). To emphasize this point, Sellars recalls a distinction made in philosophy of science between the language of theory and the language of observation. To construct a theory, Sellars explains, is to postulate a domain of entities which behave in certain ways that accord with principles established by the theory, and to then correlate these theoretical entities or events with particular non-theoretical objects or events - in short, with objects or events that are observable facts or can be in principle described in observational terms (Sellars 1968, p. 312). The language of our Rylean ancestors does not move from observed behavior to theoretical entities, and hence is not built upon any particular theory.

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<sup>11</sup> Described as such by Sellars in reference to Gilbert Ryle.

With the myth's setting and details established, Sellars introduces Jones. Jones, a member of this Rylean community and a genius of sorts, takes note that the other members of his community behave in an intelligent manner not just when their conduct is paired with any overt verbal happenings, but when they abstain from uttering any words at all. To explain these observed behaviors, Jones develops a theory: overt verbal happenings are the product of a process involving mental episodes, or propositional attitudes,<sup>12</sup> which are modeled after the overt verbal happenings themselves. Accordingly, the theory holds that overt verbal happenings are the result of an inner mental process characterized as inner speech. Additionally, because the model is based on overt verbal happenings, which utilize semantic categories, so too do the inner speech episodes; if overt verbal happenings mean this and that, then inner speech episodes also mean this and that (Sellars 1968, p. 318).

It is important to note that Jones's postulation of inner speech episodes is a methodological or functional claim, and not an ontological claim. It is in this respect that it has much in common with the manifest image. Indeed, Jones's theory and the manifest image are ultimately one and the same, as we shall see soon. Jones has postulated these episodes and christened these theoretical entities "thoughts." Sellars takes care to emphasize that "thoughts," for Jones, are unobserved, non-empirical, and 'inner' (Sellars 1968, p. 319). 'Inner' is important here, as thoughts are 'in' human beings in the way that molecules are 'in' gases, and not as 'ghosts' are in 'machines' (Sellars 1968, p. 319). In other words, the status of thoughts in relation to overt verbal happenings should be understood as analogous to the relation between molecules and the observable behavior

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<sup>12</sup> Understood as a mental state held by a thinking being toward or concerned with a proposition. For example, we can take the proposition, 'black coffee is good,' and a thinking being can have a propositional attitude about it, e.g., 'Greg believes that black coffee is good.'

of gases in space; gases are constituted, not caused, by molecules, and similarly, Sellars argues that overt verbal happenings are constituted, but not caused (at least initially), by inner speech episodes. This is so because Jones's theory is compatible with the belief that the ability to have inner speech episodes is acquired in the process of acquiring the ability for overt verbal happenings and it is only in the establishment of the latter that the former is possible without the latter's accompaniment. In other words, it is only after acquiring language that it is possible to have thoughts without verbally expressing them. Hence, Sellars warns us of thinking that the relationship between overt verbal happenings and inner speech episodes is analogous to the relationship between voluntary movements and motives or intentions (1968, p. 319).

Of course, gas molecules and gases differ in certain ways from inner speech episodes and overt verbal happenings. The behavior of gas molecules is explained by Newtonian dynamics, which in turn states that gas molecules have certain empirical characteristics, and so it can be taken as making some form of ontological claim or assumption concerning the gas molecules, which is not the case for Jones's inner speech episodes. Sellars underscores the functional role of Jones's postulation by stating that there is no need to postulate a more substantial character for inner speech episodes, like in the Cartesian view, "according to which this 'inner speech' is a function of a separate substance" (Sellars 1968, p. 318). Still, the fact that Jones postulates inner speech episodes for methodological purposes does not preclude the possibility that, in the future, it may indeed be the case that there is an ontological grounding for inner speech episodes (and again, here we find an allusion to the possible content of the scientific image).

Finally, there is another key feature to Jones's postulated theory: it not only enables the members of Jones's community to interpret the behavior of other members, but it also allows for self-description. In Sellars's words, "once our fictitious ancestor, Jones, has developed the theory that overt verbal behavior is the expression of thoughts, and taught his compatriots to make use of the theory in interpreting each other's behavior, it is but a short step to the use of this language in self-description" (Sellars 1968, p. 320). For example, if I observe Erika reaching into the branches of an apple tree to pick an apple, I have behavioral evidence that warrants my turning to Jones and uttering "Erika wants an apple." Moreover, Erika herself, referring to the same behavioral evidence that I have referred to, can utter "I want an apple." The theory's explanatory move, then, is to describe the behavior of others, and ourselves, through the ascription of propositional attitudes. Once Erika has become a competent user of the language of Jones's theory, we can easily imagine her to make reliable self-descriptions without her having to make reference to any of her overt behavior.

It is in this way that we can then begin speaking of having privileged access to our own thoughts, in the sense that Erika will generally be in the best position to accurately report on her own behavior and overt verbal happenings. Due to this, Sellars concludes that "what began as a language with a purely theoretical use has gained a reporting role" (Sellars 1968, p. 320). In effect, the myth of Jones enables us to hold the ostensibly incompatible view that the concepts pertaining to thoughts as inner speech episodes are primarily and essentially intersubjective and that these episodes are still private. Language is intersubjective and learned within an intersubjective context, but once we have learned language, we can use the concepts afforded to us by language to make

reliable self-reports without having to make reference to any behavioral evidence. The myth also provides the ground for the manifest image, given that, through the use of Jones's theoretical language, we have come to make reports about ourselves and to understand ourselves through intersubjectively acquired language, and, crucially, to evaluate our claims and the claims of others through the use of the language.

### **3.4 SELLARS, ANIMAL MINDS, AND THE SHIFT TO PROTO-THOUGHT**

Having described Sellars's position as put forth in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," I would like to return to his correspondence with Chisholm. In his comments concerning the explanation of animal behavior based on a behaviorist framework, Sellars refers to this approach as a 'from the bottom up' approach. However, by the time of "Philosophy and the scientific image of Man," Sellars believes the new 'bottom' is the neurophysiological rather than the behavioral. This approach is in contrast to the mentalistic framework of explanation, which he characterized as a "top down" approach. If we began from the bottom, Sellars maintains that we would not need to go past the behavioral level with nonhuman animals, as the postulation of thoughts was unnecessary to fully explain their behavior. This position is increasingly untenable today. Due to a shift in the discussion of animal minds that reflects a shift in the animal behavioral sciences, philosophy is increasingly more open to the idea that animals have inner lives, and that a proper philosophical and scientific explanation of animal behavior will require the belief that some animals have some form of thought, though the exact nature of these thoughts is still a matter of debate.

However, Sellars's philosophy is not wholly outdated in regards to animals for a few reasons. For one, Sellars's belief that it is unnecessary to postulate inner thought

episodes for animals is an empirical claim. Should it be the case that an adequate explanation of animal behavior cannot be purely behavioral and requires the postulation of thoughts or other cognitive states, then Sellars would maintain that we should switch theories. He supports this claim in "Phenomenalism," stating that we ought to switch to such a theory and hold its postulated entities to be ontologically real until, if ever, we arrive at a better theory which holds that they are not ontologically real (Sellars 1991a, p. 95-96). Second, Sellars is very much aware that we tend to use the mentalistic framework of explanation within common sense discourse concerning the behavior of animals, and tend to believe that, if animals act in such a way that is relevantly similar to human beings, it is because they are in a relevantly similar internal state to these human beings. Third, it is clear from Sellars's correspondence with Chisholm that, even if he does not want to grant that some animals' capacity for thought is equal to the capacity of some human beings, he does grant that animals have some form of proto-thought which fails to qualify as full-blown thought but remains a form of thought nonetheless.

Sellars maintains his view that nonhuman animals are only capable of proto-thought and asserts it once again in 'The Structure of Knowledge,' more than fifteen years after his correspondence with Chisholm. In the lecture, Sellars once again puts forth his well-known position concerning the myth of the given and claims that, rather than contrast perceiving with thinking, to conceive of perceiving as necessarily involving a form of thinking (Sellars 1975, p. 303). In other words, perception necessarily deploys concepts. Hence, we should be careful of thinking that sensing something is equivalent to sensing it *as* something. For example, we should be careful not to confuse the experience of sensing a red ball with the experience of sensing a red ball *as* a red ball. Since, for



Sellars, perceiving necessarily involves a form of thinking, then perceiving necessarily involves the deployment of concepts, in this case of redness and ball-hood<sup>13</sup>. The key point, however, is that this thinking takes the form of sentences in the mind modeled after a public language, which provides the concepts deployed in perception. This position seemingly excludes nonhuman animals, infants, and nonlinguistic human beings.

This is of course the whole basis for much of the correspondence between Sellars and Chisholm, but Sellars hastens to make some clarificatory remarks “lest the animal lovers among us take them as libel and calumny” (Sellars 1975, p. 303). Sellars is keen to state that he believes there is a legitimate sense in which animals are capable of some form of thought. In response to his critics, Sellars claims that

The most that can be claimed is that what might be called 'conceptual thinking' is essentially tied to language, and that, for obvious reasons, the central or core concept of what thinking is pertains to conceptual thinking. Thus, our common-sense understanding of what sub-conceptual thinking -- e.g., that of babies and animals -- consists in, involves viewing them as engaged in 'rudimentary' forms of conceptual thinking. We interpret their behavior using conceptual thinking as a model but qualify this model in ad hoc and unsystematic ways which really amount to the introduction of a new notion which is nevertheless labeled 'thinking'. Such analogical extensions of concepts, when supported by experience, are by no means illegitimate. Indeed, it is essential to science. (Sellars 1975, 304)

Thus, Sellars moves away from the earlier position expressed to Chisholm that we assume cognitive processes in nonhuman animals but then qualify our statements by

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<sup>13</sup> Though, of course, to stay true to Sellars's Kantianism, this involves a unity of experience; it is not the case that sensing a red ball involves having an experience of redness and an experience of ballhood, but a unity of both.

attributing them to ease of speech. Instead, he now discusses sub-conceptual thinking. Sellars cashes out sub-conceptual thinking as a level of cognition unmediated by concepts that involves a ‘direct apprehension’ of facts (1975, p. 338).<sup>14</sup> From this, it is clear that Sellars thinks not only that animals, infants, and nonlinguistic human beings have some form of proto-thought, even if it is nonconceptual, but that it is also in some way similar to the full-blown thought available to linguistically-competent human beings. Indeed, Sellars may not have any way to believe that language is necessary for all thought, otherwise he runs into serious problems explaining how it is possible for children to be able to acquire language and become competent speakers at all if they do not possess this form of nonlinguistic proto-thought. This line of inquiry quickly leads to “‘innate grammatical theories’” or language of thought, which he wishes to avoid (Sellars 1975, p. 303). However, Sellars's assertion that nonhuman animals have proto-thought that is in some way similar to full-blown thought runs into its own set of issues.

### **3.5 LANGUAGE, THOUGHT AND PROTO-THOUGHT**

Now, what is the basis for the supposed similarity between proto-thought in nonhuman animals and full-blown thought in human beings? With the Myth of Jones, Sellars has given us an explanation for how a Rylean community came to use language to talk about internal states and self-report and, in conjunction with his realism about theories, allows him to make ontological claims about the existence of inner speech episodes. Returning to a previous example, when I watch Erika reach into the branches of an apple tree to try and grasp an apple, I attribute to her a desire for an apple, and can utter “Erika wants an apple.” Erika can learn the theoretical language and learn to self-report about her own internal states and can utter “I want an apple.” The theory’s

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<sup>14</sup> Sellars later characterizes sub-conceptual thinking as ‘cognitive mapping,’ in “Mental Events” (1981).

postulation of thoughts allows us to make use of the mentalistic framework of explanation. Due to the wild success of Jones's theoretical language, we can then begin to speak of internal states that occur in infants, nonlinguistic humans, and other nonhuman animals through extrapolation of the theory. For example, we may by chance observe a bear standing on its hind legs and reaching into the branches of a tree, swatting at low-hanging apples. We might find ourselves attributing a particular internal state to the bear, and we might also utter "the bear wants an apple." Of course, the bear itself cannot use Jones's theoretical language to self-report on its desire for apples, but the problem lies elsewhere.

In the Myth of Jones, our pioneering genius made the decision to postulate inner states to explain the behavior of other members of the community. Recall, however, that the community already possessed a sophisticated behaviorist language to explain the behavior of members. Jones's innovation was to postulate inner speech episodes modeled after overt verbal happenings. Crucially, what these inner speech episodes share with overt verbal happenings are not sounds or spelling or the specific language itself (inner speech "is not the wagging of a hidden tongue, nor are any sounds produced by this 'inner speech'") (Sellars 1968, p. 318). Rather, what they share is semantic categories, which are established in the public language and mirrored by the inner speech episodes and intelligent behavior that is not accompanied by verbal behavior. Accordingly, since the capacity for inner speech episodes is not present until the being in question has picked up the public language, then the semantic content of these inner speech episodes is constrained by the semantic content of the public language. To illustrate: we could attribute thoughts about Newtonian mechanics to Kant, but we could not attribute to him

thoughts about generative-adversarial networks, because the concept of a ‘perceptron’ or a ‘neural network’ did not exist at the time in the public language of which Kant was a speaker.

The key point to consider here, then, is what this means for some nonhuman animals, infants, and nonlinguistic human beings, if they possess proto-thought. Earlier, we saw Sellars make the argument that public language places constraints on the semantic content of the inner speech episodes of community members. But if a being can possess proto-thought without a public language, then the being in question has no semantic constraints placed on the content of their proto-thoughts. Allowing for proto-thought in nonhuman animals poses serious problems for Sellars: if Sellars allows for nonhuman animals to have proto-thought, then an interlocutor can claim that when an animal acts in a such a way that is similar to a human being, it is because the animal was in a mental state sufficiently similar to the mental state of the human being. This seems to work *prima facie* in the case of Erika reaching into the branches of a tree for an apple and the bear trying to swat apples off the branches of a tree. In Erika’s case, she can in principle report on her behavior and make her inner speech episode public. The bear is, of course, incapable of doing so. But the semantic content of Erika’s inner speech episode has been modeled after the semantic categories of her public language and is consequently intelligible to other members of her community. The bear’s mental state lacks these constraints, which seems to make it impossible to determine how, in any sense, its mental state is similar to Erika’s. Despite granting nonhuman animals the capacity for proto-thought, Sellars’s theory concerning the semantic content of our thoughts prevents us from ever understanding the bear’s mental state because we cannot

ascribe to the bear a propositional attitude concerning its desire for an apple. In response to these difficulties, we find that Sellars moves away from this position later in his career.

### **3.6 PROPOSITIONAL FORM, LOGICAL FORM, AND ANIMAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEMS**

The principal failure of Sellars's Myth of Jones consisted of suturing the propositional to the linguistic; given that the explanatory success of Jones's theory relied on attributing propositional attitudes to members of the community through public language, Sellars had no way of maintaining that animals could have propositional attitudes without having to attribute to them some form of linguistic capacity or structure like a language of thought. This was impossible due to the claim that "the true cause of intelligent nonhabitual behavior is 'inner speech,'" and not any overt verbal happening (Sellars 1968, p. 318). In order to get around this, Sellars addresses the issue in "Mental Events," and, as we shall see, this signals a key shift in his thought concerning nonhuman animals, as the claim that only humans are capable of real, full-blown thought is abandoned in favor of characterizing it as a subspecies of thought.

Beginning with the issue of the role that language plays in relation to thought, he orients the reader by referring to the manifest and scientific images. Recalling the manifest image and its objects, Sellars asserts that the objects of the image, such as tables, chairs, trees, are prior in the order of knowing. By this, he means that humans come to know these objects in the world around them prior to coming to know of any of the postulated theoretical entities of the scientific image. The theoretical entities of the scientific image, while subsequent in the order of knowing to the objects of the manifest, are nevertheless prior in the order of being; molecules, atoms, protons and quarks as

objects are ontologically prior to tables, chairs, and trees, even if we only come to know of them long after familiarizing ourselves with tables, chairs, and trees (Sellars 1981, p. 326). Similarly, Sellars claims, while mental activity exists prior to and without language, “in the domain of the mental, language is primary in the order of knowing” (Sellars 1981, p. 325). What is prior in the order of being is then characterized as an animal representation system.

In response to criticisms of the kind expressed above, Sellars eventually moves toward Chisholm’s view and away from the view in ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.’ In his new and updated position, thoughts derive their semantic categories from a public language, and Sellars readily admits that there are thoughts that do not have the form of inner speech, even if they are syntactically and semantically analogous to linguistic thought (Sellars 1981, p. 326). These thoughts occur within animal representation systems. Language, however, still plays an interesting role: for Sellars, linguistic activity is not just a means for communication, but at a more basic level serves as a representational system that human beings think with (Sellars 1981, p. 327). Consequently, the concept of thought as inner speech episodes semantically and syntactically modeled after overt verbal happenings serves as our primary concept of what thinking is. This in turn serves to establish our orientation for thinking and knowing about thought in the first place and makes clear why Sellars asserts that, with respect to the mental, language is primary in the order of knowing. It is only after having acquired linguistic thought as a representational system that we can begin to know about both linguistic and nonlinguistic thought.

Sellars notes that some philosophers have held that the key distinction between linguistic (propositional) and nonlinguistic (pre- or sub-propositional) representational systems is the presence of the subject-predicate distinction (Sellars 1981, p. 339). Through a long process of argumentation that I will not reconstruct here, Sellars arrives at the conclusion that there is nothing of significance between representational systems that possess the subject-predicate distinction and those that do not. This does not, however, mean that Sellars believes there is no distinction between animal representational systems and linguistic representational systems. Instead, he argues that the distinction made between representational systems should be based on whether the representational systems make or do not make use of logic. Linguistic representational systems make use of logic, while animal representation systems do not, though their functioning could be described by using logical operations (Sellars 1981, p. 340). For Sellars, logical operators are linguistic in nature, which means that only beings who participate in a public language can make use of them. Sellars does concede, however, that it is often difficult in practice to make the distinction between logic-using representational systems and logic-described representational systems. The former are referred to as 'Humean' representational systems, while the latter are coined 'Aristotelian' representational systems (Sellars 1981, p. 342). A Humean representational system is characterized by associative inferences. For example, a Humean representational system that represents 'smoke here,' may also represent 'fire nearby,' as a matter of association between the two representations. An Aristotelian representational system, however, is characterized by the use of logical vocabulary, such as in the conditional "if smoke anywhere, then fire nearby there." Sellars also notes that an

Aristotelian representational system is capable of making both Aristotelian and Humean inferences. In other words, beings with linguistic thought as a representational system can still make nonlinguistic inferences which, by being nonlinguistic, do not utilize any logical vocabulary (Sellars 1981, p. 342).

To sum up: Sellars has shifted to a view that characterizes linguistic representational systems as logic-using systems, since he believes that logical operators are linguistic in nature. Nonlinguistic representational systems, in turn, can perform associative inferences, but cannot make use of logic. Crucially, an animal that possesses the first kind of representational system can still perform Humean inferences. In other words, an animal that possesses a linguistic representational system can act upon a general principle of inference, such as modus ponens, but can also make inferences based on association, like nonlinguistic animals. Nonlinguistic animals, however, are limited to associative inferences. Undoubtedly, due to their cognitive capacities, nonlinguistic animals can very much act in such a way that appears to employ the same kind of representing performed by linguistic animals. This, however, is only a superficial appearance, akin to what Kant refers to in the previous chapter as an analogue of reason (Kant, 1997b, p. 390-1). In the following section, I discuss whether Sellars's view is empirically accurate, and ultimately, whether the empirical accuracy of Sellars's position is secondary to his concern for maintaining a particular anthropocentric conception of the moral community.

### **3.7 LOGIC IN ANIMALS: CHASER, PERSONS, AND THE MANIFEST IMAGE**

Lingua-centric positions such as Sellars's have received much scrutiny in contemporary research. The view that nonhuman animals are capable of making general



inferences is increasingly discussed, and is supported by a growing literature on the reasoning abilities of a variety of animals. Much of this research concerns the capacity to perform inferential reasoning by exclusion, which some researchers speculate could constitute an instance of performing disjunctive syllogisms. Current research has found that animals as varied as great apes, dogs, lemurs, and African gray parrots are capable of performing inferential reasoning by exclusion on the tasks that they are presented with, and may indeed be performing disjunctive syllogisms (Hill, Collier-Baker, & Suddendorf 2011; Erdőhegyi, Topál, Virányi, & Miklósi 2007; Maille & Roeder 2012; Pepperberg, Koepke, Livingston, Girard, & Hartsfield 2013). One particularly compelling case involves a border collie by the name of Chaser (Pilley & Reid 2011). Through consistent and careful training, Chaser was taught to respond to the proper names of more than 1,000 objects (Pilley & Reid 2011, p. 185). Chaser was also trained to respond to common nouns, and can both accurately retrieve or move toward the correct object when given a name, as well as retrieve or move toward any object of a particular category designated by a common noun (e.g., if Chaser was commanded to retrieve a ‘toy,’ Chaser would retrieve any of the hundreds of toys of which she knew the proper names for, and she would successfully perform the task for the categories ‘sock’ and ‘Frisbee’ as well) (Pilley & Reid 2011, p. 190). Additionally, Chaser was also trained to correctly respond to the difference between commands and references, and was able to perform different actions with different objects based on varying combinations of commands and common or proper nouns ((Pilley & Reid 2011, p. 189).

What is most interesting for our purposes, however, is Chaser’s ability to perform inferential reasoning by exclusion. In one experiment, Chaser’s ability to do this was

tested by requesting that she retrieve a particular item. The researchers placed eight items in an adjacent room, with seven being familiar to Chaser, and the eighth being a novel item (Pilley & Reid 2011, p. 193). Chaser was asked for the first two trials to retrieve an item which she was familiar with. For the third trial, she was asked to retrieve the novel item. Chaser was provided with a name or word she had never heard before for an item that was new to her. Not only was Chaser able to distinguish between the command given to her and the name of the novel item, but she successfully retrieved the novel item<sup>15</sup>.

*Prima facie*, this seems to constitute an instance of a nonhuman animal performing a disjunctive syllogism. In other words, Chaser serves as a case for considering if nonhuman animals can perform Aristotelian inferences, and not just Humean inferences.

Setting aside Chaser and the wider possibility for animals to engage in logical inferences, Sellars's position in "Mental Events" is of course considerably different from the view he presented in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." The most obvious difference is the drift away from the position that language is needed for thought and hence nonlinguistic beings cannot think, to the position that there is nonlinguistic thought, and that linguistic thought comes after the nonlinguistic but enables us to know about thought. Couched in terms of the manifest image, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* saw humans as beings that are capable of having propositional attitudes, and hence having beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on. Consequently, they are considered persons. Nonlinguistic animals cannot be conceived as having these propositional attitudes within that framework, and as a result are considered things, ruled by their nature. With the move to representational systems, though, this picture becomes more complicated.

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<sup>15</sup> She was then told "Good dog" (Pilley & Reid 2011, p. 193).

Animal representation systems are indeed nonlinguistic for Sellars, but animals are not therefore bereft of thought. Though Sellars holds linguistic thought to be the “paradigm case” of thought that we should proceed from in our theorizing, this is only because he believes it is the most familiar and enabling form of thought for the philosopher (Sellars 1981, p. 325).<sup>16</sup> Nonlinguistic thought is not a primitive or deficient form of thought compared to linguistic thought, but rather a subspecies of thought. This is further supported by the fact that Sellars himself admits that human beings, despite primarily utilizing a linguistic representational system, can still make Humean inferences, meaning that nonlinguistic thought still occurs in human beings. In the presence of smoke, Sellars writes that a being with an Aristotelian representational system can arrive at the conclusion that there is fire nearby “either directly, by the Humean route, or indirectly, by what I shall call the syllogistic route, i.e. the route which involves . . . ‘If smoke anywhere, then fire nearby there’” (Sellars 1981, p. 342). Regardless, the fact that Sellars grants the capacity for propositional attitudes to nonhuman animals places him in a predicament. To reiterate: in his earlier position, the capacity for propositional attitudes meant that any being who possessed the capacity ought to be considered a person. In his later view, the difference between human beings and nonhuman animals consists of their representational systems utilizing logic and nothing else. Due to the presence of propositional attitudes and the difference being only a difference in subspecies of thought, this may not constitute a good reason for denying nonhuman animals the status of persons. Sellars’s only recourse then, is to retreat to the normative force of the manifest image.

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<sup>16</sup> Once again, we may note Sellars’s eurocentrism; philosophers in other parts of the world, particularly within some of the traditions in South Asia, have been historically comfortable with nonconceptual thought.

This retreat has its own serious issues, however. To illustrate, we can once again refer to the scientific image, and in particular consider the position of Eliminative Materialists. Contra Sellars, proponents of Eliminative Materialism such as Paul Churchland maintain that the manifest image must itself be subject to the critical and corrective gaze of the scientific image.<sup>17</sup> By its own lights, the manifest image would arguably call for an investigation into its own material basis to maintain its integrity. The manifest image and its folk psychology are, according to Churchland, destined to be supplanted, whether by a reduction of the mind to the brain, by a functionalist account, some form of dualism, or outright eliminated from discourse (Churchland 1998, p. 7). The last option signifies Churchland's goal, for it is Churchland's conviction that folk psychology "constitutes a radically false theory, a theory so fundamentally defective that both the principles and the ontology of that theory will eventually be displaced, rather than smoothly reduced, by completed neuroscience" (Churchland 1992, p. 1). In Churchland's view, folk psychology has failed to keep pace with the explanatory power of the natural sciences, and has conspicuously failed to provide any adequate explanation for mental phenomena in general, and should be replaced. Accordingly, an elimination of folk psychology will result in the elimination of the central category of beings within the manifest image: persons.

Sellars cannot abide this move, however, because of the normative importance he places on the manifest image. The theoretical language given to us by Jones allows us to

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<sup>17</sup> Some readers may resist the comparison between the manifest image and folk psychology. I believe this comparison is warranted for a few reasons. While Churchland, in the texts I'm referring to, does not refer to the manifest image, we can identify key similarities between it and folk psychology; namely, they both hold persons as central. Additionally, the folk psychology that Churchland is concerned with is transparently the theoretical achievement of Sellars's mythical Jones. Finally, Churchland was a student of Sellars, so it is not unreasonable to think that Churchland also had the manifest image in mind when developing his attack on folk psychology.

report on the behavior of others, but also to report on our own mental states without reference to overt behavior, and these reports can be evaluated, challenged, and accepted within a community of speakers. The capacity for propositional attitudes allows us to give and receive reasons within a community, for Sellars writes that “in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says” (Sellars 1968, p. 298-9). To cast away the manifest image amounts to throwing away the very self-conception we have of ourselves as persons that give and receive reasons. Since, for Sellars, the manifest image itself grounds the methodology of the scientific image, ridding ourselves of the manifest image would rob us of our ability to continue critical rational inquiry. We must preserve the manifest, even if it is, strictly speaking, false. Sellars is very much willing to admit the ontological falsity of the manifest image and its proposed objects, including persons: “speaking as a philosopher, I am quite prepared to say that the common-sense world of physical objects in Space and Time is unreal-- that is, that there are no such things” (Sellars 1968, p. 303).

## CHAPTER 4: HUMAN DIGNITY AND ANIMAL VULNERABILITY

In the first chapter, I provided an exposition of Kant's complicated view of the relation between humanity and its own animal being. While Kant is not quite the ogre that he so often appears to be toward animals given the cursory glances he receives in ethics courses, we are still left with a complex picture: animals, though they are merely things to Kant, should not be treated as we would a stone, and indeed, in cases where an animal faithfully works alongside a human being for many years, should be rewarded and treated with care, afforded with a home and sustenance in his or her retirement (1997a, p. 212). In turn, the animal being of the human, its predisposition to animality, is noble because it provides the human being with the impetus to survive and perpetuate itself. Yet this on its own is only of relative worth, and only the predisposition to humanity and its use of reason to set ends grants the human being infinite worth, and is established "through rank and dignity an entirely different being from things" (Kant, 2007, p. 239). *Homo noumenon*, and not *homo phaenomenon*, is the being with dignity, and in order to achieve this, one must discipline one's own animal being, for "discipline is merely the taming of savagery" (Kant, 2007, p. 444). Discipline of the animal within the human being "changes animal nature into human nature" (Kant, 2007, p. 437).

In the previous chapter, I discussed Wilfrid Sellars's philosophy and his attempt to think critically about the status of the human being within the natural world. Despite being a committed naturalist, Sellars was also a card-carrying Kantian and dedicated much of his career to reconcile the two. Sellars confirms as much when remarking on his own philosophical work, noting that "it wasn't until much later that I came to see that the solution of the puzzle lay in correctly locating the conceptual order in the causal order

and correctly interpreting the causality involved” (Sellars 1975). Sellars’s naturalism, however, did not motivate him to include nonhuman animals within the ambit of personhood, despite eventually arguing that the only distinction between the inner life of a nonhuman animal and a human being was a grasp of language that enables humans to use logic. Nonhuman animals possess propositional attitudes just as human beings do, but in the end, the facts concerning the mental activity of nonhuman animals and their relation to personhood are irrelevant; the determination of personhood in Sellars’s thought is primarily concerned with safeguarding a conception of human agency. Both animal representational systems and linguistic representational systems can make material inferences, but only linguistic thought, which is to say, characteristically human thought, is elevated from being a subspecies of thought to the paradigm example of thought in order to maintain the normative force of a particular self-conception of the human being. Indeed, despite stating that he believes that all objects of the manifest image, including persons, are ultimately false, he cautions us against doing away with it, claiming that “in any sense in which this image, in so far as it pertains to man, is a ‘false’ image, this falsity threatens man himself, inasmuch as he is, in an important sense, the being which has this image of himself” (Sellars 1991b, p. 18). For Sellars, personhood and its normative importance must be prioritized regardless of the empirical or ontological accuracy of the category itself, but it must also exclude nonhuman animals in order to maintain human exceptionalism.

Why does the inclusion of nonhuman animals within the domain of personhood threaten the very concept of personhood, though? Why does the ability to perform a disjunctive syllogism or to generalize a rule matter? The chimpanzee (or the elephant or

cetacean) and his or her capacities for the same behavior does not infringe on the ability for the human being to engage in the same behavior. It does, however, hold certain implications for the human community that sees itself through the lens of the Manifest Image and holds itself to abide by standards of reasoning and morality. Sellars traces the Manifest Image, and the perennial philosophy which refines it, through most of the history of Western philosophy, from the pre-Socratics to Kant, Mill, and Wittgenstein. These philosophers were responsible for the creation and refinement of the ethical theories that Western philosophy concerns itself with, from virtue ethics to utilitarianism and Kantian deontology. These theories, in turn, hold particular positions on what kinds of subject the theory extends to; in other words, these theories have particular ontological commitments concerning who or what deserves moral consideration.

At this juncture, the problem posed by chimpanzees and various other species of animals is most salient. These and other similar theories, which Matthew Calarco has identified as the “Identity” approach to ethics, begin by an examination of the human and through reasoning and argument arrive at what they hold to be the aim of ethics and the qualities of the human being that aid in achieving this aim (Calarco 2015, p. 6). This is then extended to all beings which possess these qualities and hence can be considered moral agents and patients. Indeed, this is the approach taken by utilitarians such as Peter Singer, who follow this general principle and work to elaborate their arguments for the moral standing of animals with the same spirit in mind in order “to extend to other species the basic principle of equality that most of us recognize should be extended to all members of our own species” (Singer 1981, p. 120). Similarly, Kantian ethics, as explained within the first chapter, extends moral standing to all beings that possess the



capacity to use reason and set ends for themselves, regardless of whether the beings in question are human beings or of a different kind, such as intelligent extraterrestrials. It is this focus away from human beings alone to the inclusion of all rational beings (in the Kantian sense) that lead philosophers like Allen Wood to defend Kantian ethics from charges of anthropocentrism, instead identifying the theory as logocentric (Wood 1998). In any case, utilitarianism holds that if a being is sentient and so can experience pain and pleasure, then it ought to be given moral consideration, and Kantian ethics holds the same for the use of reason. Yet there has been much hand-wringing over extending this consideration toward living creatures<sup>18</sup> besides human beings, and significant consternation over what doing so would imply for human beliefs and practices that affect nonhuman animals. Despite Sellars's naturalism, he does not arrive at the exclusion of nonhuman animals through empirical research. Instead, it serves as a declaration that humans count and the nonhuman does not because it is important for the former that the latter do not count.

It is these motivating ideas that lead to the focus of this chapter. Philosophy and political science have in recent years experienced a resurgence in interest and argument for human dignity. These dignitarian accounts, put forth and supported by thinkers such as Michael Rosen (2012), George Kateb (2011), and Jeremy Waldron (2012), posit that human beings have a worth derived from dignity that places them over and above all other beings. Specifically, while they, like Immanuel Kant, acknowledge that human beings are indeed animals, they argue that the moral worth of human beings transcends

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<sup>18</sup> And nonliving beings, as well; the ethics concerning our treatment of AI is likely to receive increased attention in the future.

the mere animal body that comprises part of the human. This transcendence<sup>19</sup> is understood as a dignity unique to human beings. In this chapter, I argue that this iteration of human dignity found in the positions of these theorists constitutes not just a form of speciesism, but a particular form of anthropocentrism that Diego Rossello refers to as ‘species aristocracy’ (Rossello 2016). Second, I use the work of Giorgio Agamben to recast the democratization of aristocracy as a political decision that separates properly political life, *bios*, from mere animal life, *zoē*. This, in turn, creates a third category of beings that are left fully vulnerable to state violence, called ‘bare life.’ I emphasize that this is a political decision by calling to attention both the explicit claims of the aforementioned dignitarian theorists, as well as their sparse use of empirical evidence concerning the capabilities of nonhuman animals. Third, I refer to the work of Thomas Birch and his concepts of ‘deontic experience’ and ‘universal consideration’ to set a conceptual framework for rethinking our moral responsibilities toward nonhuman animals. Fourth, and finally, I follow Birch’s method of conceiving of current moral criteria of considerability as rules for conduct, and use it to consider whether dignity can be conceived as a rule to guide our moral practices toward human and nonhuman others. Ultimately, I reject the use of dignity as a rule, on the grounds that its reliance on transcendence creates conceptual, ethical, and political space for beings to become ‘bare life.’ As an alternative, I consider a concern for vulnerability in place of dignity as a rule or guiding principle for our moral conduct toward other beings.

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<sup>19</sup> We can think of ‘transcendence’ as the quality of being apart from or beyond, in this case apart from or beyond our animal bodies. This is admittedly not very illuminating, but this is a problem shared by the dignitarian account as well, in that it relies on a transcendent value within all human beings to establish their worth. Ultimately, while not directly discussed, this conceptual vagueness also serves as a reason for the turn toward immanence in this chapter.

## **4.1 KANTIAN DIGNITY AS SPECIES ARISTOCRACY IN ROSEN, KATEB, AND WALDRON**

In order to grasp the dignitarian conception of dignity as rank, we can revisit a quote from Kant used to describe what should be our admiration of the moral law within the common man. What I'd like to call attention to in the quote is the juxtaposition that Kant presents between the man who holds rank among others and the common man with no rank. While this exemplifies his egalitarianism, it does so in a specific way: rather than bringing the man with rank – an aristocrat, if you will – down to the level of the common man, it raises the common man to the level of the aristocrat and compels Kant's spirit to bow. The very notion of bowing is important here. Put simply, the gesture made here is one in which nobility and aristocracy is extended to all human beings regardless of social rank.

This is a particular perspective that Michael Rosen is willing to adopt in his work. While Rosen traces the concept of human dignity throughout Western philosophy and finds important advocates such as Cicero, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Jacques Maritain, he believes that we find its clearest expression in the work of Kant, due to the latter's extension of dignity to all who embody humanity (Rosen 2012, p. 24). Now, to be clear, Rosen does not uncritically adhere to the concept of dignity or accept it wholesale, despite believing that respect for human dignity is paramount. He expresses certain reservations about absolutist attitudes toward social acts that may be considered undignified and he opposes the codification of human dignity into law in certain cases. For example, Rosen jokes that placing too much emphasis on the notion of human dignity might result in overly harsh judgments toward people for their behavior in the streets

after a night at a bar or a club (Rosen 2012, p. 68). Additionally, Rosen discusses *Manuel Wackenheim v. France*, the prominent legal case concerning a dwarf consenting or entering into a contract to be tossed for money, and ultimately decides that, even if this is a violation of human dignity, it should not be made illegal. However, Rosen is keen to elaborate on his conception of what it means to be a dignified person, and indeed asks us to imagine in our mind's eye what a dignified person looks like. Remarking:

When I ask you to think of someone as “dignified,” what sort of an image comes to mind? My guess is that it is someone older (rather than younger), quite probably grey-haired, tall (rather than short), soberly dressed—perhaps in a robe (not, like Laocoön, in a loincloth), slow-moving, powerful (rather than agile), and, almost certainly, male. And if I were to ask you to give me an example of someone who was “worthy,” I think that you might (particularly if you are a British native speaker of English) think of an old-style “civic dignitary”—an alderman, perhaps. (Rosen 2012, p. 71)

There are many interesting things in this quote, some revolving around the particular qualities that Rosen believes we are likely to imagine. Note, however, that Rosen, like Kant, evokes a person with rank by referring to an alderman. Rosen continues his characterization of human dignity later in his work by contrasting human behavior with animal behavior, finding dignity only in the former, claiming that:

human dignity is expressed by behavior that marks the distinction between human beings and animals---for example, in upright gait, through the wearing of clothes, in eating subject to a code of table manners, defecating and copulating in private . . . respect for humanity requires us to mark the value of human beings even (or,

indeed, especially) when the gross material facts of our animal existence are inescapable. (Rosen 2012, p. 159-60)

One important thing to take from this quote is that there is no dignity in our animal being. To be a dignified human is to resist our animal bodies and animal impulses. Rosen here is in a certain way more extreme than Kant; in the second chapter, I discussed Kant's belief that the predisposition to animality found within the human being is a good predisposition, given that it is "not only (negatively) good (it does not resist the moral law) but it is also a predisposition to the good (it demands compliance with it)" (1996b, p. 76). The predisposition to animality and the pre-reflective drives that constitute it are actually good, given that the drives perpetuate our survival and contribute to our sociability as a species. But here Rosen pays short shrift to our animal being.

We should not miss another aspect of Rosen's quote, however, and that is the examples of human behavior that express dignity and set us apart from animal beings: upright gait, wearing clothing, table manners, and other behaviors. Despite Rosen claiming that human dignity must be upheld even when a human being's inability to perform these behaviors leads to indignity, both his characterization of what a dignified human being looks like and what a dignified human being does raises a worry about human beings who do not or cannot meet these characterizations and fulfill these behaviors, or even whether any one should have to. In effect, Rosen's example elicits a picture of human dignity that is ableist and sexist.

Kateb expresses similar sentiments to Rosen concerning animality and animal beings, as he boldly claims without reservation in his work that "The core idea of human dignity is that on earth, humanity is the greatest type of being" (Kateb 2011, p. 3). Kateb

clearly intends to be polemical; he sees in Thomas Hobbes, evolutionary psychology, and neuroscience an attempt to lower human beings down to the rest of nature, and that their strategy is to “picture humanity as just another animal species among other animal species, with some particularities, even uniqueness, but none so commendable as to elevate humanity above the rest” (Kateb 2011, p. 128). Indeed, Kateb makes no effort to be coy about the aim of his work, writing that “the notion of human stature is directed in part against these reductions, in the name of human dignity” (Kateb 2011, p. 128). In a way that is evocative of both Kant and Sellars, Kateb makes a sharp distinction even between human beings and chimpanzees, our closest living relatives on the evolutionary tree, and aims to separate us, at least partly, from our animal nature. Addressing the striking similarities between us and them, Kateb remarks that

a chimpanzee is more like an earthworm than a human being, despite the close biological relation of chimpanzees to human beings. The small genetic difference between humanity and its closest relatives is actually a difference in capacity and potentiality that is indefinitely large, which actually means that it can never be fully measured. Only the human species is, in the most important existential respects, a break with nature and significantly not natural. It is unique among species in not being only natural. (Kateb 2011, p. 17)

Despite these strong claims, Kateb insists on a particular claim that at first may seem incredible: that he is not advocating any form of human narcissism. Put simply, Kateb claims to possess no species snobbery, or at least tries not to (Kateb 2011, p. 178). Yet if we are charitable<sup>20</sup> and take his use of the word snobbery seriously, then his claim

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<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, it must be conceded that a comparison with worms is rhetorically meant to be denigrating, and some readers may find this extension of charity unwarranted.

becomes more readily acceptable. If we take snobbery to mean an exaggerated disinterest or contempt toward a subject, culture, or group, then Kateb is not advocating snobbery. Rather, he argues that humans should resist any inclinations toward snobbery by practicing the virtue of magnanimity toward other beings, and moreover should see themselves as stewards of nature (Kateb 2011, p. 142). Rossello helpfully points out Kateb's use of the word 'magnanimity': the word itself refers to the practice of generosity or forgiveness, in particular to those who are below the giver (Rossello 2016, p. 12). Hence, we have once again a reference to hierarchy and aristocracy, albeit an obscure one.

Jeremy Waldron makes this connection between the concept of dignity and aristocracy and rank. In his Tanner Lectures, Waldron remarks that:

Dignity, we are told, was once tied up with rank: the dignity of a king was not the same as the dignity of bishop and neither of them was the same as the dignity of a professor. If our modern conception of human dignity retains any scintilla of its ancient and historical connection with rank—and I think it does: I think it expresses the idea of the high and equal rank of every human person. (Waldron 2009, p. 210)

Human dignity is explicitly argued to mean high rank, and Waldron directly addresses and dismisses a particular way of reading Kant's position on dignity: in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant notes that within the kingdom of ends, everything has either a relative or absolute worth. Dignity is presented as an inner worth inherent to the item itself, and hence not subject to market forces that may lower or raise the value of other items, whose worth is dependent on circumstances. Hence Waldron sees this

reading of Kant as positing dignity to be something whose value is beyond any price (Waldron 2012, p. 24).

While there is something to this reading, Waldron believes it provides an incomplete picture in that it does not take into consideration both Kant's political philosophy, in which he refers to nobility as dignity, as well as Kant's prescription of behavior for a human being with dignity (Waldron 2012, p. 25). Instead, Waldron turns to work by Elizabeth Anderson in order to bridge the gap between dignity as value beyond price and dignity as high rank, through her concept of 'commanding value,' which is understood as a value that can place categorical restraints on the motives of others (Anderson 2008, p. 139). Anderson's essay is incisive in its analysis of the importance of honor to Kant's moral system, and argues that Kant's ethical system requires there to be a hierarchy, otherwise Kant's notion of respect, and its important counterpart, contempt, lack any ground. The radical egalitarian move in Kant mentioned earlier is achieved, Anderson argues, by displacing rankings of respect from a social hierarchy and instead shifting it to the natural world, achieving equality among all human beings by ranking all of humanity above animal beings (Anderson 2008, p. 139). Waldron concludes much the same, stating that the modern notion of human dignity "involves an upwards equalization of rank, so that we now try to accord to every human being something of the dignity, rank, and expectation of respect that was formerly accorded to nobility" (Waldron 2009, p. 229).

And, to be clear, Waldron does make reference to the status and treatment of animals: in a world where legal systems show respect for human dignity, while these systems maintain the legitimate use of force and sometimes employ it, people should not



be treated like animals. More precisely, they should not be “herded like cattle, broken like horses, beaten like dumb animals, or reduced to a quivering mass of ‘bestial desperate terror’” (Waldron 2009, p. 249). Waldron closes his second lecture by returning to this democratization of nobility in reference to the dismay of Edmund Burke concerning the treatment of the French queen during the French Revolution. Waldron remarks that “...reactionaries always say: if we abolish distinctions of rank, we will end up treating everyone like an animal . . . but the ethos of human dignity reminds us that there is an alternative: we can flatten out the scale of status and rank and leave Marie Antoinette more or less where she is” (Waldron 2009, p. 253).

#### **4.2 AGAMBEN, ANTHROPOGENESIS, AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL MACHINE**

With these dignitarian accounts presented, we can turn to Agamben. Before delving into Agamben's project, I want to make clear that Agamben here is a resource, and not an ally; Agamben has no actual interest in animals nor their wellbeing, at least not within his philosophy, and is not a friend to animal ethics nor critical animal studies. Agamben's analysis of anthropocentrism is not undertaken with the interests of animals in mind, nor even the relationships that humans might have with animals. Rather, Agamben's interest in animals stems from his concern over the effects that the human/animal distinction can have on human beings (2004, p. 16). Notwithstanding his own particular goals, I believe that we can wrest important insights on the moral and political status and treatment of animals from his work.

While most of the analysis presented here takes its cues from his book *The Open*, it is important to situate the insights of that work within Agamben's larger project. Pared down to the basics, Agamben seeks to make three interlinked gestures. 1) He wants to

develop a critical analysis of how we understand ourselves as human beings in the dominant forms of Western thought and practice (2004, p. 16), and here we can recall the Sellarsian explanation of humanity's self-conception in the Manifest Image, informed by the perennial philosophy. 2) Agamben wants to develop a positive, alternative ontology of the human (1993). 3) Finally, Agamben also aims to develop a positive, alternative view of what constitutes a community, specifically a community constituted by the aforementioned alternative notion of the human (1993). Note, once again, there is no mention of alternative conceptions of nonhuman animals. His analysis, however does relate to animals, as he has a particular target in mind: the criteria on which the human/animal distinction functions. Agamben calls the cultural, political, and philosophical processes that separate humans from animals the “anthropological machine” (Agamben 2004, p. 29).

Agamben takes Aristotle to be one of the most important philosophers to theorize the human/animal distinction, and sees aspects of his work as an iteration of the anthropological machine. In *De Anima*, Aristotle explains the hierarchy of life: Plants only possess a nutritive soul, whose essence involves a minimal vitalism. Animals and humans also possess the qualities of a nutritive soul, and both possess perception, but only humans have rationality (Aristotle 2011, p. 51). In the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that, as sole possessors of rationality and capable of rational discourse, only humans could be properly political animals. This is because rational discourse allows humans to express “what is beneficial or harmful, and hence also what is just or unjust” (Aristotle 1995, p. 3). Aristotle then adds, that “by contrast with the other animals man has this peculiarity: he alone has sense of good and evil, just and unjust, etc. An association in these matters

makes a household and a state” (Aristotle 1995, p. 3). Humans, in turn, hold dominion over animals and plants, who cannot have proper political status on account of the absence of rationality (Aristotle 1995, p. 11). This move by Aristotle separates properly political life (*bios*), which is granted to full citizens of the polis, from mere animal life (*zoê*), which, importantly, is common to both animals and humans.

Agamben argues, contra Aristotle, that this distinction is not reflective of any ontological truth; it is not the case that humans by their very nature are properly political animals, nor is it the case that no animals are by their nature incapable of being a member of a political community. Instead, he believes that it is a determination, a decision, carried out by the sovereign, whether that be the polis, a tyrant, a nation-state, or any other form of sovereign. The aim of the distinction between *bios* and *zoê* is to decide who or what properly belongs within the purview of the state and its laws, and who or what is excluded (Agamben 1998, p. 8). Here we can see a similarity between Aristotle and Sellars; Sellars’s exclusion of nonhuman animals from personhood and the Manifest Image mirror’s Aristotle’s determination of *bios*, and indeed, Sellars believes Aristotle to be “*the philosopher of the Manifest Image*” (Sellars 1975, p. 303). We can also see how the dignitarian account of dignity as high rank functions in much the same way, by categorizing human beings that possess dignity as *bios*, and all other nonhuman beings that lack dignity are deemed *zoê*.

Now, it is Agamben's contention that when a decision is enacted by the sovereign that determines what belongs within the purview of the State and its laws, the sovereign effectively achieves the creation of a third category, which he calls 'bare life.' While discourse may continue to refer to *bios* and *zoê*, what the *tertium quid* does is delimit a

population that is outside of the state, who lack citizenship and possess no tractable identity, and, paradoxically, falls within the power of the state. In other words, bare life is life that is considered not properly political by the state but is still caught up within the state's machinations. A human being without an attachment to the State can be imprisoned or killed with impunity by the state, and hence is entirely within its purview. Agamben calls this human being *homo sacer* (1998, p. 71). Notable examples of this are enemy combatants held by the United States in Guantanamo Bay.

Agamben ultimately calls this process of decision that separates *bios* from *zoê* and creates bare life the 'anthropological machine' (Agamben 2004, p. 37). As mentioned earlier, the separation of *bios* and *zoê* is not a reflection of ontological truth, but a political decision. We can see evidence of this by the fact that neither Rosen nor Waldron are concerned with establishing key ontological differences between human beings and nonhuman animals by reference to research that effectively distinguishes them. Kateb, on the other hand, does offer characteristics that he believes are distinctly human, but does not scrutinize them with the level of care that Sellars did before him; Kateb lists language, thought, self-awareness, creativity and unpredictability (Kateb 2011, p. 133). The uniqueness of some of these characteristics is currently a matter of fierce debate, and others have been definitively established as shared among many species. This long history of failure in persuasively establishing human exceptionalism has led Agamben to conclude that the center of the anthropological machine is "in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew" (Agamben 2004, p. 38). We are all potentially bare life or *homo sacer*.

Whether we are bare life or *homo sacer* all depends on how the anthropological machine churns, how the logic of sovereignty is applied. In other words, the ever-changing criteria which the anthropological machine employs to articulate the distinction between humans and other animals leaves open the possibility that human beings who are currently considered properly political life can find themselves becoming bare life or *homo sacer*.

*The Open* effectively serves as a genealogy of the attempts to draw these lines. Agamben discusses attempts to cleave the human from the animal and other human beings, as well as the anxieties experienced by important historical figures due to their inability to keep the animal at bay. This work leads Agamben to quote a remark by Linnaeus concerning Descartes and his denial of consciousness to animals: “Surely Descartes never saw an ape” (cited in Agamben 2004, p. 23). The aim of this genealogy is to underscore that the anthropological machine is and always has been a performative project, and not a representation of reality. “Ontology,” Agamben claims, “is not an innocuous academic discipline, but in every sense the fundamental operation in which anthropogenesis, the becoming human of the living being, is realized,” and this project “is not an event that has been completed once and for all,” but is reiterated over and over (Agamben 2004, p. 79). Whatever iteration of the machine you have, Agamben claims that the task is not to figure out what configuration of the machine is “better or more effective—or, rather, less lethal and bloody—as it is of understanding how they work so that we might, eventually, be able to stop them” (Agamben 2004, p. 38). The key to doing this, he thinks, is to determine a way to stop differentiating *bios* from the *zoê* within ourselves (Agamben 2004, p. 92), a move that human dignity is all too eager to make.

Human exceptionalism is in a precarious position, as the markers for human uniqueness are repeatedly assailed from many angles. One of the biggest threats to human exceptionalism has been the rise of science, which has significantly blurred the lines between the properly human and all other beings, despite Kateb's claims about an indefinitely large gap between chimpanzees and human beings. Agamben calls attention to these blurred lines himself in his discussion of Linnaeus, noting that Linnaeus found great difficulty in distinguishing humans taxonomically from all other apes, and determines that "man has no specific identity other than the ability to recognize himself," hence the name, *Homo Sapiens* (Agamben 2004, p. 26). From this space of increasing indistinction, we might expect Agamben to put forth a different ontology and a different ethics, ones that do not separate the human from the animal, but he leaves this project "to be invented" (Agamben 1998, p. 11). Due to this lacuna in his work, I believe we can turn to the work of Thomas Birch to begin reconceptualizing an ontology and an ethics.

#### **4.3 BIRCH: UNIVERSAL CONSIDERATION AND DEONTIC EXPERIENCE**

In his 1993 article, "Moral Considerability and Universal Consideration," Birch seeks to question, and ultimately reject, an assumption that he believes lies behind much of Western ethical theory. Birch believes that there is an assumption in ethical theory that, in order to achieve recognition for nonhuman beings as entities worthy of moral consideration and respect, "we must justify changing our criterion of moral considerability" in such a way as to be inclusive of said entities (Birch 1993, p. 313-4). In particular, ethical theorists presuppose that there should and could be such criterion. This criterion would enable us to know what kinds of entities we have duties and responsibilities towards, as well as to know what kinds of entities we possess no such

duties towards. In a manner similar to Agamben, Birch takes this presupposition to support the view that “when it comes to moral considerability, there are, and ought to be, insiders and outsiders, citizens and non-citizens (for example, slaves, barbarians, and women), ‘members of the club’ of consideranda versus the rest” (Birch 1993, p. 315). Once these ‘members of the club’ have been determined in a rational and objective manner, then we can work out how exactly we must go about fulfilling our responsibilities toward them. As a consequence, however, those entities left outside of the realm of moral consideration receive no protections, and can be used, moved, destroyed or killed (Birch 1993, p. 315). There may be rules or norms of conduct that regulate our interactions with these beings, but these norms would be in the service of the moral community, and not concerned with the excluded beings themselves. The task for philosophers who believe that a criterion for considerability must be established has then been to discover the necessary and sufficient conditions for membership.

Birch wishes to resist this move by philosophers for various reasons. First, Birch is concerned with the potential for violence and domination that this approach necessarily contains. Here, we can recall Waldron’s use of Anderson’s insight into the role of respect and contempt within Kant’s work. Kant’s criterion of considerability is the presence of the faculty of reason to set ends, and this bestows upon possessors of reason a dignity and an infinite worth. Those beings that do not possess reason, however, are merely things. Without rehashing Kant’s position in its entirety, the norms of conduct involved in the treatment of nonhuman animals exist for the benefit of the other members of the moral community. Insofar as the kind treatment of nonhuman animals softens the heart of human beings toward other members of the species, then we ought to treat them kindly.

However, should it be unnecessary to treat them well, and with no consequence on the psyche or moral compass of the human being, nonhuman animals can be considered bare life and subject to any use or violence we wish to visit upon them. Thinking that we have any moral duties to them would be a result of an amphiboly in our moral reasoning (Kant 1996a, p. 563).

Now, it is true that, barring certain holdouts or revivalists of extreme anthropocentric views (such as the dignitarian theorists discussed earlier), a number of philosophers and ethically engaged individuals have moved some distance away from the view that the proper and attentive care for animals is or should ultimately be for our own sake. Birch finds something important in this development: when philosophers and individuals look at their positions in the past, some find discomfort and disdain with what they considered to be a moral error. Birch writes that “when we look at the history of our criterion for considerability, we see that whenever we have closed off the question with the institution of some practical criterion, we have later found ourselves in error, and have had to open the question up again to reform our practices in a further attempt to make them ethical” (Birch 1993, p. 321). What should be gleaned from this repeated reopening of the question, Birch believes, is that we should abandon the belief that we can ever get the criterion of considerability correct, that there is a final criterion to discover. Instead, what we ought to do is to practice what Birch calls ‘universal consideration’ (1993, p. 314).

To develop this concept, Birch first provides a definition for moral consideration, which he defines as such: “To give moral consideration to X is to consider X (to attend to, to look at, to think about, where appropriate to sympathize or empathize with X, etc.)



with the goal of discovering what, if any, direct ethical obligations one has to X” (Birch 1993, p. 315). Birch adds that this definition of moral consideration rehabilitates or re-emphasizes a typically disregarded meaning of consideration; when theorists or ethically engaged individuals hold something in consideration, it is understood as holding it in regard or perceiving value within the object. Birch does not dismiss this understanding of consideration, but calls us to also emphasize consideration as attentive contemplation (1993, p. 327). This in itself is not particularly controversial. What is radical in this position, is that this moral consideration needs to be universalized. By universalizing moral consideration, Birch calls for consideration to be present at the root, or what he calls ‘deontic experience.’

Deontic experience is defined as “the experience, in response to something or someone, that one must do something, that one is called upon to do something (Birch 1993, p. 322). Birch makes use of the work of Bernard Williams in order to connect deontic experience to some of the insights within *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, in which Williams writes that when, through our deliberation we have reached a conclusion, the conclusion “may take a special form and become the conclusion not merely that one should do a certain thing, but that one must, and that one cannot do anything else” (Williams 2006, p. 187-8). Both Birch and Williams refer to this as ‘practical necessity’ (Birch 1993, p. 326; Williams 2006, p. 188). Williams notes that practical necessity might arise within matters of prudence or self-defense, but what is peculiar to practical necessity is that it represents “a conclusion in terms of what we must do, or equally of what we cannot do, [and] differs from a conclusion expressed merely in terms of what we

have most reason to do; in particular, how it can be stronger, as it seems to be” (Williams 2006, p. 188).

Deontic experience, when taken together with universal consideration, requires us to be attentive and contemplative toward entities that elicit these experiences. The open-endedness and refusal to delineate a class of beings or events, of course, requires us to be open to the possibility that anything can cause a deontic experience, whether it be another human being, an animal, a book, or an ecosystem. Birch’s definition of moral consideration mentions that part of this consideration involves determining what, if any, our obligations might be. On this particular front, he believes that good work that tries to determine what our obligations are has already been done. In reference to Tom Regan, Birch notes that in *The Case for Animal Rights*, Regan offers his ‘subject-of-a-life’ criterion for the moral considerability as a sufficient criterion, and not a necessary one. Regan’s work is important because of the gesture that Birch believes is made: Regan’s ‘subject-of-a-life’ criterion as sufficient for moral considerability, and other criteria proposed by various ethicists, should not actually be seen as criterion for considerability, but as “various reasons for practicing moral consideration in various ways in ethically responsive and responsible relationships with various sorts of other entities” (Birch 1993, p. 320). In other words, what Regan has provided with his criterion for moral considerability is not really a criterion, but instead a rule for morally attending to nonhuman animals. Therefore, the framework of animal rights and the conception of some animals as subjects-of-a-life have important practical applications and can be deployed in order to help guide us when compelled by practical necessity. Key to this approach, however, is the emphasis on the status of these criteria as sufficient for moral

considerability; entities that do not meet these criteria for moral considerability may nevertheless meet other criteria, and are not categorically excluded from moral consideration. The task then, is to utilize current conceptual frameworks that we believe help us to attend to our obligations to other beings, but with the background belief that the rules should be carefully scrutinized and revised. These rules of moral conduct should always be informed by our deontic experience, and “[i]f our deontic experience fails to confirm, or more commonly falsifies, what we have taken to be an obligation, it is time to question and reconsider that now putative obligation” (Birch 1993, p. 323).

#### **4.4 DIGNITY AND TRANSCENDENCE, VULNERABILITY AND IMMANENCE**

Considering what I have discussed as valuable within Birch’s work, the question might arise: ‘if Regan’s subject-of-a-life’ criterion can be reconceptualized as a sufficient rule for the treatment of animals, then can we do the same for human dignity and dignitarian accounts of dignity as high rank?’ I answer this question in the negative. To give one reason, I will once again refer to Birch’s work. In the essay discussed in the previous section, Birch’s reference to criteria proposed by other ethical theorists as rules to guide our behavior are meant to be employed as part of our daily practices of consideration, in contrast to the deep aspect of consideration that calls us to be attentive to our deontic experience (Birch 1993, p. 329). It is clear that, when it comes to our deontic experience concerning animals, the disregard and contempt that these dignitarian accounts hold for them is incompatible with the experiences of many, theorists and laypeople alike. Dignity as high rank fails to attend properly to both our daily practices and the deep aspect of consideration.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the latter fails in a pernicious

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<sup>21</sup> The discourse concerning dignity is more complicated than this chapter presents it. While the focus has been on a particular conception of human dignity, this does not mean that there are no theorists who argue

manner. As philosophers, we strive to provide arguments and give good reasons for our positions and beliefs. Lovers of animals, or even just supporters of animals, are often dismissed as sentimental or emotional, but philosophers pride themselves in providing strong reasons and evidence to accept or dismiss a position. Remarking on this, Andrew Brennan writes:

It might be objected that genuine concern for the continued existence, or maintenance, of an item is no evidence that such an item is morally considerable . . . But suppose my concern shows all the seriousness that is sometimes taken as the hallmark of the moral: my deliberations and actions are constrained in an especially compelling way by concern that the item in question be preserved, be left undisturbed or be maintained in a certain condition. Argument is now needed to show that my concern here is not moral, that the item is not receiving moral consideration from me and that the item does not therefore possess moral value.  
(cited in Birch 1993, p. 317)

To this, I believe we can reasonably add: *ceteris paribus*, if we are to assert that a class of beings has an inherent value over and above all other classes of beings, then argument is needed to dismiss dissent. The dignitarian accounts discussed in this chapter have not succeeded in presenting an argument for higher worth of the human being as conceived through high rank, nor have they provided a successful argument for the denigration of nonhuman animals, the nonhuman world, and the animal nature of human beings.

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for a conception of animal dignity, and indeed, given the depictions of lions, eagles, and other ‘powerful’ or ‘noble’ animals on coats of arms, there is a sense of dignity perceived in at least some animals in history and contemporary culture (typically, but not always, limited to charismatic megafauna). Additionally, there is often a difficulty in expressing the harm or wrongness of what we do to animals as a group or species without references to integrity or dignity, (e.g., the intentional breeding of turkeys for size, which has resulted in their inability to successfully breed without human assistance or even walk). Regardless, I believe the criticisms presented in this chapter of dignity as rank hold weight.

There is another worry I have about these dignitarian accounts. I believe there is a danger and a conceptual dead-end in the kind of moral scheme proposed by Kant, Rosen, Kateb, and Waldron that is present in all theories of transcendence. In my introduction to this chapter, I stated that a key characteristic shared by all of the dignitarian theorists I have discussed is the commitment to the claim that the moral worth of a being, in this case human beings, transcends its material or organic substrate, and can indeed be conceptually separated. Hence the fact that all of these theorists readily assert that the human being is a particular species of animal that nevertheless stands out in a morally significant sense over and above its animal body. Kant exemplifies this well when remarking upon the two things that fill his mind with increasing awe and wonder: the starry sky above him and the moral law within him (Kant, 1996a, p. 269). Elaborating on the former, Kant writes that the vastness and complexity of the world annihilates his self-conceit and places him as one entity among many, but that the latter provides him with an infinite value beyond even the sensible, which is to say, a value that transcends the mechanistic body and world that he inhabits (1996a, p. 269-70). This transcendence carries with it particular dangers however, and has been elaborated in different ways and from different perspectives, but here I will limit myself to comments by Will Kymlicka and Emmanuel Levinas.

In “Human Rights without Human Supremacism,” Kymlicka expresses concern over a political danger present in dignitarian accounts. Accounts that insist on a high rank or supremacy for human beings at the expense of animal beings, rather than safeguarding the dignity and wellbeing of human beings, can lead to their denigration. Dignitarian conceptions of human worth open conceptual, ethical and political space for human

beings to be animalized and denied the transcendence that is central to the dignitarian accounts; in short, these human beings are seen as bare life. Kymlicka notes:

Tying rights to the recognition of valued humanity . . . is to double down on the very judgements of (de)humanization that cause the problem in the first place.

The sanctification of humanness naturally leads people to ask why humans are owed this sanctification, and people spontaneously fill in the answer with values such as intelligence, rationality, self-discipline, and then use these metrics of humanity to dehumanize outgroups. (Kymlicka 2017, p. 14 fn. 29)

Narratives that rely on this created space are of course well-known, given that they were historically deployed to legitimize the oppression of various peoples. Similarly, in his essay ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism,’ Levinas comments on Nazi ideology and its insistence on the biologicism of the understanding of humanity. By biologicism, Levinas refers to the primary understanding of humanity through the lens of biology and the science of eugenics favored by Nazi ideology (1990, p. 69). Mirroring the Kantian denial of consciousness to animals and their relegation to mere instinct, Levinas identifies in Nazi ideology a denial of transcendence of the spirit from the body and an obsession with the inherent nature and destiny of peoples. For Nazism, “[t]he biological, with the notion of inevitability it entails, becomes more than an object of spiritual life. It becomes its heart. The mysterious urgings of the blood, the appeals of heredity and the past for which the body serves as an enigmatic vehicle, lose the character of being problems that are subject to a solution put forward by a sovereignly free Self” (Levinas 1990, p. 69).

Now, I’ve elaborated on the danger, but what is the dead end that I perceive in this approach? I believe it is a mistake to theorize a connection between morality and

transcendence. In this respect, despite his criticisms, even Levinas is problematic, given that he believes both humans and nonhuman animals largely live their lives in the state of nature driven by biological impulses (1988, p. 172). Speaking on the possibility of ethics within the animal kingdom, he remarks that “[t]he being of animals is a struggle for life. A struggle for life without ethics” (Levinas 1988, p. 172). For Levinas, the very possibility for ethics and the human is a kind of miracle, wherein the human suspends its biological drive and causes a rupture in the order of being. In other words, ethics is a transcendence from the human animal into the properly human (Levinas 1988, p. 172). Levinas is wrong on two accounts here: he is wrong in thinking that humans are the only animals that can engage in ethics, and he is wrong in believing that ethics requires transcendence. One could grant that animals engage in ethics yet insist that they must in some sense transcend in order to do so. But important work has been done to make the case that ethics and ethical behavior, or at least their building blocks, are resolutely immanent (Rachels 1990; de Waal 1996; Bekoff & Pierce 2009). Furthermore, it is evident that, intelligent design proponents notwithstanding, biology in the wake of Darwinism places human beings within a continuum and marks species differences as being differences of degree and not differences in kind. From such a perspective, the idea of inherent human dignity that, according to Kateb, sets humanity apart from all other life, is untenable.

What are we left with then, if we deny both dignity and transcendence? I believe that we ought to care not for the dignity of other beings, but rather care for the vulnerability of beings and their bodies. Indeed, several important theorists have developed this notion of vulnerability, such as Judith Butler, Cora Diamond, Matthew

Calarco, and others (Butler 2004; Diamond 2003; Calarco 2014). Contra Rosen, who asserts that human dignity must be maintained even when our animal bodies force upon us certain indignities, we can reorient our thinking in response to our deontic experience to see vulnerability as basic.

To better understand how we might deeply consider our relationship to animals and form new daily practices, it may be helpful to instead turn to fiction and literature. Some philosophers have drawn from the work of J.M. Coetzee to think through bodies and their vulnerability. Diamond specifically pulls from Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, but I would instead like to draw from Coetzee's *Disgrace*, because I believe that this novel in particular provides a powerful counter to the dignitarian narrative previously discussed. *Disgrace* focuses on the character David Lurie. Lurie is a well-educated, well-positioned white male in post-apartheid South Africa. He works as a university professor, within an institution that gives him social rank and prestige (Coetzee 2000, p. 3). He treats the world (human and nonhuman) as his oyster and lives a bourgeois lifestyle. He has "solved" the problem of sex (Coetzee 2000, p. 1). He knows with certainty what constitutes the boundaries of human and masculine propriety and he has firmly inhabited this privileged space. In many respects, he is what one might imagine when asked by Rosen to picture a dignified person.

Yet his life throughout the novel changes quickly, and these markers of dignity and status begin to slip away or be taken from him. As he ages, he finds that women pay less and less attention to him, and begins to wonder if the prostitutes he sleeps with will eventually gossip to each other about him; in particular, he wonders whether they will one day shudder when speaking of his aging body, "as one shudders at a cockroach in a



washbasin in the middle of the night” (Coetzee 2000, p. 8). The women in his life are pushing back and resisting him in various ways. His students clearly show disinterest in his field of expertise, and the university itself is changing and eventually expels him. His finances are a mess and he loses financial security, and he eventually finds himself in a territory where he is the outsider (Coetzee 2000, p. 59). Throughout the novel, we see Lurie’s beliefs about animals begin to change, and as he suffers various forms of disgrace, his anxieties toward animals intensify and he comes more and more to identify with them. He finds himself volunteering at a clinic where there are simply too many animals to care for, and helps in euthanizing many of them. Finding this shared space of indistinction and vulnerability, Lurie slowly begins to invert his view about the status of animals and finds himself providing reverential care for the bodies of these animals, thinking to himself that “he has become a dog-man: a dog undertaker . . . curious that a man as selfish as he should be offering himself to the service of dead dogs . . . he saves the honour of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it” (Coetzee 2000, p. 146).

The mention of honor here might sound as if there is some sort of dignity alluded to, a dignity to the corpses of these dogs. It is clear from the novel and from Lurie’s own thoughts, however, that he never saw these animals as having a dignity, hence the stupidity of what he is doing. Rather, he sees their vulnerability, and begins to see his own vulnerability and the vulnerability of others. In conversation with his daughter Lucy after a particularly harrowing event, Lucy tells him: “Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. with nothing. not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.” “Like a dog,” David replies

(Coetzee 2000, p. 205). This response, which is of course far from unique and often used to express the lack of dignity in labor or treatment, tells us that David is beginning to see himself and his daughter as being just as vulnerable as these animals. Slowly transforming, David begins to see himself not as a human being with dignity over and above animals and other beings, but identifies more and more with their bodies and with the possibility of an ethical engagement with these undignified bodies and cares for them as only someone who has lost their dignity can. He begins to care and work for them, like a dog.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 have discussed at length and critiqued the treatment of nonhuman animals and personhood within the Kantian tradition. In doing so, my ultimate aim has been to try and foster a suspicion and rejection of the Kantian view that ethics should be concerned with, and only with, the person conceived as an autonomous and dignified being. To emphasize this, I will briefly reconstruct the argument and aim of each chapter.

Chapter two sought to provide a clear and rigorous understanding of Kant's views concerning the relationship between the human being, nonhuman animals, and the animal embodiment of human beings. I achieved this by thoroughly expounding on Kant's claim that the nature of the human being is tripartite in nature. One of these aspects is the predisposition to animality, which is characterized by drives and impulses that human beings share with nonhuman animals. Following this, I traced Kant's reasoning in order to show that human beings possess dignity despite their animal embodiment, due to their faculty of reason and their ability to set ends through its exercise. I then elaborated on Kant's argument that neither inner sense nor outer sense can succeed in establishing the existence of a noumenal self, or *homo noumenon*, but can only succeed in establishing the existence of a phenomenal self, or *homo phaenomenon*.

I then presented a critique of Kant's position, given Kant's reliance on the practical postulates for establishing the presence of *homo noumenon*. Specifically, I argued that Kant illegitimately reinstates the use of experience derived from inner and outer sense in conjunction with the postulates to tie *homo noumenon* exclusively to experiences of the self and experiences of other human beings. In particular, I reasoned

that this move is unwarranted, given that Kant argues elsewhere that the use of reason cannot establish a link between a phenomenal self and a noumenal counterpart, as well as the fact that he remains open to the existence of disembodied rational beings, like God. I conclude this chapter by arguing that Kant's difficulty in clearly identifying *homo noumenon* ought to result both in a greater openness to noumenal selves among nonhuman others and a more critical and ameliorative relationship with human beings' animal embodiment.

In chapter three, I looked to critically engage with the work of Sellars, who strove to fuse a Kantian philosophical framework with scientific and naturalist commitments. In order to make Sellars's position on nonhuman animals clear, I presented his view of two different pictures of humanity in the world: the manifest image, in which humans are conceived as persons, and the scientific image, in which humans are conceived through various scientific lenses that do not recognize personhood. I then elaborated on why Sellars believes that nonhuman animals can be relegated to being described solely by the scientific image. To make this clear, I recounted Sellars's 'Myth of Jones,' which arrives at the conclusion that nonhuman animals cannot think because they do not possess a public language. In response to this, I brought attention to Sellars's correspondence with Chisholm on the possibility of nonhuman thought, and detail Sellars's shift in position to the claim that nonhuman animals have nonlinguistic proto-thought. However, I criticized Sellars on this shift, arguing that his position on proto-thought in nonhuman animals is wholly incompatible with the Myth of Jones, given that he cannot provide restraints for the semantic content of proto-thought. I then traced the development of Sellars's thought on the matter, and presented his later view that some nonhuman animals do indeed

possess thought and propositional attitudes. They are, however, incapable of utilizing logic, in contrast with the representational systems of some human beings. Against this assertion, I referred to contemporary research in animal cognition, and in particular, I discussed a border collie named Chaser, who performs inferential reasoning by exclusion. Finally, I critically considered whether Sellars's philosophy can accommodate Chaser and other nonhuman animals that can use logic and allow them to possess personhood. I argued that Sellars cannot grant them personhood, given that his insistence on maintaining the manifest image commits him to a problematic anthropocentrism.

Chapter four turned to a discussion of contemporary accounts of human dignity within political philosophy. Inspired by the Kantian tradition, I provided a brief exposition of Rosen, Kateb, and Waldron, and emphasized their conception of dignity as high rank, and the expansion of dignity to all humans signifying a democratization of nobility or aristocracy. All theorists shared the general position that humans are exceptional among all other beings, for they alone stand out in various ways from the natural world. Furthermore, I brought attention to their belief that the human being is an animal whose own animality must be resisted, in a manner similar to Kant's own view of our animal embodiment. I then used Agamben to recast the dignitarian accounts as engaged in a political decision. This decision in turn serves to cleave the human from his or her own animality and creates a distinction between properly political life and mere animal life. I used Agamben to argue that Rosen, Kateb, and Waldron are not making reference to any empirical or ontological truth about human beings, but instead asserting a particular political position that, in relation to many nonhuman animals, must ignore

key characteristics of nonhuman animals in order to assert human specificity and dominance.

I then turned to Birch's work on the concepts of universal consideration and deontic experience. I explained how the two concepts must work in tandem, resulting in a careful attentiveness to all beings, and maintaining a critical perspective on claims or actions that come into conflict with our deontic experience. I then made use of Birch's suggestion that current criteria for considerability ought to be reconceived as rules for conduct toward other beings, as opposed to drawing a distinction between beings who are owed our moral consideration and those who are not. I then considered whether the concept of dignity as high rank can be used as a rule for our conduct toward other beings. I argued against doing so, given that this conception of dignity relies both on a problematic transcendence from a material or biological (which is to say, animal) body, as well as a reactionary denial of the capacities of other beings. Finally, I proposed that we reorient our thinking to utilize vulnerability as a criterion to guide our conduct toward nonhuman animals. Finally, I derived several guiding ideas from Coetzee's *Disgrace*, focusing on the protagonist's increasing vulnerability due to the loss of various privileges and status, in order to establish a preliminary ground for this new orientation toward other beings.

To conclude, I hope that the previously written material has provided robust arguments for a serious skepticism of certain conceptions of personhood and moral worth within the Kantian tradition. In particular, I hope to have fostered significant worries concerning the concept of human dignity insofar as it is conceived as high rank or worth over and above all other beings. Last, but not least, I hope to have provided, or at least

alluded to, a wellspring for alternative conceptions concerning our moral responsibilities and relationships to nonhuman animals.

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