

The Imago Dei and the Great Chain of Being:
A Wesleyan Case for the Rights of Nonhuman Persons

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I. Introduction

In May of 2013 India's Ministry of Environment and Forests ruled that "...dolphins should be seen as 'non-human persons' and as such should have their own specific rights and it is morally unacceptable to keep them captive for entertainment purpose."¹ In 2014 an Argentinian court granted rights to Sandra the orangutan which allowed her to be released from captivity, agreeing that though she was not a human in the biological sense, she was a person in the philosophical sense.² In response to demands for writs of habeas corpus for captive chimpanzees that worked their way through the New York courts, a state Supreme Court judge expressed the possibility that the extension of "human" rights might be inevitable.³ In light of the steady stream of neurological, genetic, and social data, a growing portion of the worldwide scientific community and of the American population are calling for the extension to animals of basic rights that have until now been reserved for human beings.⁴ Doing so would mean that what we have known as 'animals' would legally be considered nonhuman persons.

But are animals people? Can they be considered moral and ethical subjects? Should they be granted the legal status of persons? Such discussions, like developments listed above, can be disorienting for a Christian. To many, the Christian faith addresses the separation and reconciliation of human beings and their Creator. Attempting to recognize nonhuman animals as

¹ "India Bans Captive Dolphin Shows as 'Morally Unacceptable'" Environmental News Service, May 20, 2013 <http://ens-newswire.com/2013/05/20/india-bans-captive-dolphin-shows-as-morally-unacceptable/>

² "Court in Argentina Grants Basic Rights to Orangutan" - BBC News (BBC News) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-30571577>

³ David Grimm.. "Updated: Judge's Ruling Grants Legal Right to Research Chimps." Science Magazine. April 2, 2015. Accessed November 6, 2015.

Steven Wise, "That's One Small Step for a Judge, One Giant Leap for the Nonhuman Rights Project." Nonhuman Rights Project. August 4, 2015. Accessed November 6, 2015.

⁴ Erik Vance, "It's Complicated: the Lives of Dolphins and Scientists" *Discover*, September 7, 2011

Alan Yuhas, "A Third of Americans Believe Animals Deserve Same Rights as People, Poll Finds." Theguardian.com. May 19, 2015. Accessed November 6, 2015.

"Declaration of Rights for Cetaceans: Whales and Dolphins" <http://www.cetaceanrights.org/>

persons would appear to call into question the Imago Dei -- that mystical possession of humanity which connects us with our God. If animals are considered persons then our self-perception as their lords or caretakers is problematized. For animals to be considered persons they must be shown to share in the Imago Dei, but if animals can be shown to possess this divine gift one may have cause to wonder if the image is actually real at all. For some Christians our unique relatedness to God would be challenged if other animals are shown to participate in it as well. This sentiment is similar to views held by some of John Wesley's contemporaries who used the belief of the 'plurality of worlds' to object the truth of Christianity because it called the divine centeredness on Earth ---and thus on the human story--- into question.⁵

At a time when our global society is beginning to ask questions concerning the rights and personhood of other animals, many people recognize that our biblical and traditional sources of theology do not address these topics directly and consequently do not appear to allow us to enter the conversations in productive ways from a faith-based perspective. Even though the cause of animal welfare was originally an evangelical issue, and one near to John Wesley's own heart, distinctive Wesleyan voices have been absent from the theological conversations spurred by the emergence of Animal Studies.⁶ Individual believers are free to question the rightful place of nonhuman animals by engaging scientific literature, through traditional ethical approaches, through the philosophy of those like Jacques Derrida and Animal Theory, or through contemporary theologies like eco-feminism and Creaturely Theology. There is no clear framework that allows Wesleyan Christians to ponder and engage these questions using our own traditional Wesleyan theology. This thesis will argue that John Wesley's conception and use of

⁵ John Wesley, Sermon 103: "What is Man? Psalm 8:3"

⁶ David Clough *Early Methodists and Other Animals: Animal Welfare as an Evangelical Issue* delivered October 14, 2015 at the University of Chester

the Imago Dei and the Great Chain of Being can integrate current scientific observation and cultural concern to provide a starting point for a Wesleyan discussion about nonhuman animals. In the course of the argument I will present one way for our attitudes toward other animals to turn from stewardship to fellowship as we recognize their personhood. This thesis is not meant to be a contemporary engagement with animal theory or its theological counterparts as much as it is a historical study illustrating Wesley's own context, concerns, and predispositions. I hope to faithfully engage Wesley's theology as a conversation partner instead of a death mask. It is possible to preserve the spirit, intentions, and unique Wesleyan emphasis on the idea of the Imago Dei while finding a way for Wesleyans today to be in conversation with our current and expanding understandings of our relationship with the world around us.

II. John Wesley on Anthropology and Personhood

Before asking how traditional Wesleyan theology can speak to the possibility of nonhuman persons, our terms need to be defined and our foundations need to be set. Wesley addressed the 'human' category and its place in the cosmos most directly in the last decade of his life. Three of his later sermons are focused on anthropology: Sermon 103, "What is Man? Psalm 8:3-4" (1788); Sermon 116 "What is Man? [Psalm 8:4]" (1788) and Sermon 129, "Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels" (1790). Two Sermons are specifically concerned with cosmology and creation: Sermon 56, "God's Approbation of His Works" (1782) and Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance" (1782). A pair of sermons focus on angelology: Sermons 71 and 72 "On Good Angels" (1783) and "On Evil Angels" (1783). These last two center on the interactions between humans and the higher orders of creation, and appear to be rewrites of Sermon 135, "On Guardian Angels" (1726). Wesley maintains a dualistic anthropology throughout his life. He believed the human being to consist of two parts: the mortal body and the immortal soul or

“immaterial principle.”⁷ The soul is privileged over the body as the locus of identity or personhood, although Wesley shows great hesitation to completely divorce the two. Responding to the question, “What am I?” he is willing to assert that:

“Unquestionably I am something distinct from my body. It seems evident that my body is not necessarily included therein. For when my body dies, I shall not die: I shall exist as really as I did before. And I cannot but believe, this self-moving, thinking principle, with all its passions and affections, will continue to exist, although the body be mouldered into dust.”⁸

But in the same paragraph he continues to say

“Indeed at present this body is so intimately connected with the soul that I seem to consist of both. In my present state of existence, I undoubtedly consist both of soul and body: And so I shall again, after the resurrection, to all eternity.”⁹

As opposed to many dualistic anthropologies where the immortal soul is the true person, trapped and bogged down by the flesh and blood of the body, Wesley believed that one’s true identity had to consist of both parts.¹⁰ The soul is not temporarily imprisoned by the body and the physical world, yearning to be set free and return to God. Instead, the soul will also inhabit a glorified (but still material) body at the resurrection and live with God in the New Creation.¹¹ The fragility and mortality of our current bodies could not be proclaimed at the expense of our future but equally-certain glorified bodies. A human person both does and will consist of a body and soul, save for a brief intermediate state.¹² For the purposes of this project we can conclude

⁷ Wesley, Sermon 129: “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels” I.1, Sermon 116 “What is Man? [Psalm 8:4]” ¶6-8

⁸ Wesley, Sermon 116: “What Is Man? [Psalm 8:4]” ¶10

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This said, Wesley still did believe that the soul is obscured or limited by the limited physical body. “Heavenly Treasures in Earthly Vessels” II.3, “On Good Angels” I.1

¹¹ Wesley, Sermon 64: “The New Creation” ¶18

¹² Wesley, Sermon 132: “On Faith, Hebrews 11:1” ¶6

that any Wesleyan definition of ‘personhood’ must not preclude a material or physical element. A person is ---but is also more than--- their soul.

Materiality or the corporal nature of a person is both vital and inescapable in Wesley’s thought. Although bodily existence varies in its forms from “finer” ethereal bodies to the fleshy bodies we currently inhabit, material existence is a mark of creature-ness. We are in our bodies, but angels also have bodies.¹³ The one exception to this paradigm are the ‘disembodied souls’ of those awaiting the final judgement. Although Wesley seems to believe and assert that only God is pure Spirit and therefore only God is totally removed from physical existence, at least for a time these beings are allowed a seemingly immaterial existence.¹⁴ If this is indeed the case, it would be the singular exception to this otherwise cosmic rule. ‘We’ are not temporarily trapped by our bodies; in fact we are only ever temporarily released from them. Material existence was also vital. In “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels” (1790) the mature Wesley speculates that the weaknesses and limitations of our present bodies actually serves the divine purpose of protecting us and discouraging potentially blasphemous pride in our souls.¹⁵

For John Wesley, then, a ‘person’ was a being consisting of both a body and a soul. Human beings were not the only creatures that met this requirement by his own evaluation. Because of their creaturely materiality and their freedom before God, the category of moral subjects also included the host of angelic beings as well. This being said, Wesley does not appear to consider human beings as animals. In his first ‘university sermon’ “The Image of God” (1730), he appeals against those who claim they bear “the image of beasts” rather than “the

¹³ Wesley, Sermon 71: “On Good Angels” I.1

¹⁴ Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (Jn. 4:24), Sermon 132: “On Faith, Hebrews 11:1” ¶6-7

¹⁵ Wesley, “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels” II.5-7

image of God.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, in the same way that materiality distinguishes all creation from God, and liberty is the chief distinguisher between spiritual creation (angels and human beings) from the ‘brute’ creation, the self-moving/governing principle unites animate creation as set apart from the vegetable and mineral elements. Because the self-moving principle is strongly connected to the immaterial (spiritual) aspects of life, the bar for personhood does not need to be set at inclusion in our own species.

III. John Wesley on the Imago Dei

Because God is spirit, it is only that immaterial portion of a person that could be considered created in the Imago Dei. In keeping with his tradition, John Wesley viewed the Imago Dei as that something of the divine given to humanity at its creation which set it apart and above the rest of physical creation both in attribute and responsibility. Early Enlightenment thinkers generally defined it chiefly as “reason,” and Immanuel Kant would later identify it as “conscience.”¹⁷ Wesley believed the image of God to have three dimensions: the moral image, the political image, and the natural image.¹⁸ The moral image are those things belonging to the divine nature, not human nature: love, mercy, justice, righteousness, or in short, holiness. The political image was the authorization of humanity to act as God’s representative or “vicegerent upon earth” and the role of humanity to be a channel of grace, mediating it from God to the rest of the physical Creation.¹⁹ The natural image consisted of the gifts or attributes granted to humanity to make it able to live into the moral and political aspects of the Image. These

¹⁶ Wesley, “The Image of God” ¶3

¹⁷ Theodore Runyan *The New Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 13. While Wesley always saw the Imago Dei as more than reason, he did at least once call conscience “our inmost soul” in his *Notes* on Hebrews 9:14. This said, we have no evidence of Wesley ever reading Kant’s work.

¹⁸ John Wesley *The New Birth* I.1

¹⁹ *Ibid.* I.3, Runyan, Ch. 1, pg. 16-17

characteristics were the intellect/understanding/reason, the affect/will, liberty/freedom, and “capacity for God” or the relational potential for humanity to be aware and grow closer to God.²⁰ While Wesley allowed that “degrees” of the natural image existed in the “brute creation,” he believed that a particular part of the natural image (the “capacity for God”), the political image, and the moral image were exclusive to humankind.²¹

Taken by itself, this understanding of the Imago Dei was only half the picture to Wesley, and the lesser half at that. Wesley believed in a *felix culpa*, a happy fall, where God allowed Creation to fall through humanity’s sin because through redemption in Christ all Creation would be elevated to a much more glorious level.²² Humanity’s degrees of the natural image, its physical abilities and attributes, even its very physical appearance would be glorified as humanity became like angels and the “brute creation” became more like humanity. This exaltation, however, extended to ability and attribute and not to form, although at least at one sermon Wesley demonstrates a sort of angelism.²³ Wesley speculates that at the New Creation nonhuman animals might even become “capable of God,” elevating even their portion of the natural and moral image.²⁴ With this evidence it is very likely that to Wesley the Imago Dei spoken of in Genesis 1:26 was not a static reality, nor the final intention of the Creator. God’s salvation is a much improved state than our original creation. While the image itself may have been unchanging, its imprinting onto creation was meant to be fluid. While the nature and

²⁰ Wesley, Sermon 45: “The New Birth” I.1, Sermon 62: “The End of Christ’s Coming” I.3-7, Sermon 60: “The General Deliverance” I.1,5

²¹ Wesley, Sermon 60: “The General Deliverance” I.4-5

²² Wesley, Sermon 57: “On the Fall of Man” II.10, Sermon 59: “God’s Love to Fallen Man” ¶1, Sermon 64: “The New Creation” ¶18

²³ Sermon 145: “In Earth as in Heaven” is a sermon fragment from 1734 where Wesley appears to argue that it is human destiny to imitate angels with the intention of becoming angels ourselves. He elsewhere insists that we will be made like angels when glorified, blurring the distinctiveness between these two orders of beings.

²⁴ Wesley, Sermon 60: “The General Deliverance” III.1-7

identity of the image remains the same, the degree to which it is possessed and expressed by different levels of creation was always intended by God to fluctuate and rise.

In addition to our possession of the Imago Dei being fluid and upwardly trending in salvation, Wesley also had a very poor estimation of the current state of that image in humanity. It is not uncommon to observe him using phrases like humanity “lost” the image, even “instantly” and “totally lost.”²⁵ Because of our primeval rebellion, humans became “lower than the beasts that perish” developing an “enmity towards God” that leads Wesley to exclaim that such enmity “is not found in any part of the brute creation; no beast is fallen so low!”²⁶ Because of this strong belief it may be incorrect to say that possession of the Imago Dei both unquestionably separates and elevates humanity apart from the nonhuman animals. At least those humans who have yet to experience salvation and Christian perfection do not have much to hold onto in asserting their superiority or favor over their nonhuman neighbors, as our condition currently stands.

IV. The Imago Dei Within the Great Chain of Being

Wesley’s conception of the Imago Dei was a carefully developed doctrine that relied on a foundation of cultural assumptions and scientific discovery. To answer the question “how do I relate to God?” one must first have answered “What am I? Who am I? And who or what is God?” For those living in the Eighteenth century, their answers to all these questions were rooted firmly in a Neoplatonic cosmology called “The Great Chain of Being.”²⁷ According to Arthur

²⁵ Wesley, Sermon 129: “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels”¶2, Sermon 116: “What Is Man? [Psalm 8:4]” ¶14

²⁶ Ibid. (Both sections)

²⁷ This section will deal in general characteristics in those places where Wesley does not demonstrate contrary opinions. Wesley places himself in this context directly in at least two sermons (“On Evil Angels”, and “God’s Approbation of His Works”) as well as in the preface to his *Survey of the Wisdom of God*. An invaluable full treatment of the history of the Great Chain can be found in Arthur Lovejoy’s classic *The Great Chain of Being: The History of an Idea*.

Lovejoy, Wesley's era was the time where the Great Chain enjoyed its widest diffusion and acceptance as an idea.²⁸ The Great Chain was a vision of a perfectly ordered cosmos, a reflection and projection of the inexhaustible majesty and genius of the Creator which operated on three main attributes: plentitude, continuity, and gradation.²⁹ In this conception, the entire universe from Archangels to atoms was comprised of every kind of variance and diversity possible (the principle of plentitude). Creation was completely full with every kind and sort there could possibly be, or else God's infinity and diversity remained unexpressed leaving the Almighty either unable or dishonest. The Universe was perfect as its Creator was perfect.³⁰ This chain progressed upwards from the smallest particle, through all kinds of inorganic matter to living things, up through plants and animals to humans, who represented the transition between the physical things and the spiritual bodies (the principle of continuity). This progression, however, was smooth and gradual, unperceivable in its track. There were found connections between all categories which seemed to prove this. Flying fish represented the links between fish and birds, polyps represented the transition between plant and animal. Beaches and marshes were seen as between oceans and dry land (the principle of gradation).

With a growing belief in life on other planets (known as "the plurality of worlds") it was even supposed that if such plentitude, continuity, and graduation could not be witnessed on earth it would be present elsewhere in the universe, for surely an infinite God would not be confined to only one planet. This represents one of Wesley's greatest departures from the Great Chain cosmology. In Sermon 103, he makes it clear that he does not believe in the plurality of worlds, at least not in the same way that some of his contemporaries did that led them to call the

²⁸ Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: The History of an Idea* (New York: Harper Row, 1939)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 183

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 185

‘Christian revelation’ into question. Nuancing the principle of plenitude, Wesley argues that because even the most expansive, complex universe imaginable would still utterly pale in comparison with the infinite God it is no more unreasonable that God might center creation around the Earth and fill it alone with the diversity which proclaims God’s majesty, power, and genius.³¹

Wesley’s thought characterizes the Great Chain as lacking an immutable rigidity. For the majority of its proponents this concept was a static order. Species were where they were by God’s design for God’s glory. More diversity could not exist and thus species could not be altered. Wesley, however, was not alone in believing that the Chain was malleable.³² This does not mean, as some later argued, that he and his contemporaries prefigured the theory of evolution or believed that one species could become another.³³ The malleability was in the ability of a species or members of a species to rise or fall as they were in attribute or ability dependent on their acceptance or rejection of God’s sustaining grace. In other words, the possession, expression, and stewardship of the *Imago Dei* affected the order of the cosmos, and the chain-like interlocking of species provided a means whereby through the actions of one link the shape of the cosmos affects the possession and expression of that same divine image. Wesley’s sermon “The General Deliverance” (1782) illustrates how the rest of creation was injured by the sin of the first humans, losing beauty, abilities, and relationality.³⁴ The perfect order and design, still

³¹ Wesley, Sermon 116: “What is Man? Psalm 8:3-4”, I.1-5, Sermon 64: “The New Creation” [1785] ¶10 –“...the difference between one and millions of worlds being nothing before the great Creator.”

³² Randy Maddox, “Anticipating the New Creation: Wesleyan Foundations for Holistic Mission” *Asbury Journal* 62 (2007). Maddox notes now the sense of malleability ---with species moving up and down the Chain--- might have been seen as violating the principles of the Great Chain, but Wesley asserted it, most likely borrowing the idea from Charles Bonnett. p. 61

³³ Randy Maddox addresses this interpretive move in his “John Wesley’s Precedent For Theological Engagement With The Natural Sciences,” *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 44 no1.Spring 2009 23-54. As noted previously, the possible presence of angelology in Wesley’s works challenges my ability to make a clear and ruthless statement.

³⁴ Wesley, Sermon 60: “The General Deliverance” II.1-5

extant, was crumpled and distorted. Humanity also “fell” in Genesis, distorting our place on the Chain where now some animals which humans were by their nature able to tame or overpower possessed lethal power over the unarmed human.³⁵

Because salvation involved restoration of the divine image, those who were truly Christian in Wesley’s eyes possessed a fuller image than those who were not Christians. Both Wesley brothers believed the converted Christian is truly a new creation. While they may not have been comfortable with the idea, one way to read this is that progressing through the *via salutis* creates one or more additional human links in the Great Chain. This establishes a fluid order even within our single species where individuals may rise and fall contingent upon their state of grace. In “On Evil Angels” (1783) Wesley describes how the stature of those rebellious angels fell, fracturing their equality with the rest of the Host and subjecting them to those retaining their higher position, essentially creating another link in the Chain as a whole.³⁶ Finally, in his moving picture of the New Creation, humans in their new bodies are like or equal to the angels in ways they were not before. Animals were also included in this schematic, as they would gain abilities and attributes when subsequently glorified after humanity. This implies that the possibility of salvation necessitates some elasticity in our reckoning of the Great Chain, if we do not label it a dynamic order to begin with.³⁷ While this can be seen as a return to a previously existing perfect harmony and order, the fact that it needed redemption in the first place speaks to its relative vulnerability. The assertion of Wesley’s among other voices that final perfection will be more

³⁵ Much like how the Good angels are always able to subdue their Evil counterparts, humans were supposed to be able to manage and govern the other animals. The fracturing of this order because of human sin is discussed in the section “John Wesley and the Imago Dei” where it is noted how humanity fell even lower than the “beasts.”

³⁶ Wesley, Sermon 71: “On Evil Angels” I.3-4; Sermon 72: “On Good Angels” I.5

³⁷ Wesley, Sermon 64: “The New Creation” ¶12; Sermon 60: “The General Deliverance” III. 6.

than restoration of a past norm demonstrates for us the fluidity of “order,” and this has everything to do with creation’s relationship with the image of God.

V. The Anthropocentrism and Theocentrism of the Great Chain of Being

Human beings were generally understood to be the “middle link” in the Great Chain. This did not mean, however, that we supposed ourselves half-way up the length. Rather it was a symbolic middle, as humans were believed to represent the transition between more physical and spiritual creatures as a necessity of the underlying three principals. Plenitude, continuity, and gradation demand that there be a unique hybrid or transition between these two categories of beings. This placement seemed appropriate because of a dualistic anthropology. As previously stated, we viewed ourselves as spiritual beings (souls) encased in but distinct from our physical bodies. According to the model, there are a finite number of beings below us which were completely physical, lacking the attributes of the spirit as humans possessed them, and an infinite number of species above us. These creatures boasted bodies of “a finer substance” which allowed unimaginable strength, speed, as well as mental and spiritual abilities.³⁸

But did humans see their placement in the “middle” (so to speak) as a positive or a negative estimation of their place in Creation? This is an important question because of the presence of a strong degree of anthropocentrism in our view of the creation would be a high hurdle in the way of our path forward in the discussion concerning nonhuman animals and personhood.

Anthropocentrism is the extent to which we view the world from an exclusively human perspective or believe that the universe revolves around and exists for us. An anthropocentric view has two facets that require engagement, one more obvious than the other. The more obvious

³⁸ Wesley, Sermon 72: “On Good Angels”

facet is a “Baconian” view of the world, named for Sir Francis Bacon. He maintained that the world exists for the purposes of humanity’s use and discovery alone. In keeping with colonialism of his time, Bacon and his colleagues assumed that nature and all that was in it was to be exploited for our discovery, dissected, almost tortured as it is interrogated for the answers we seek.³⁹ He is quoted as saying

“Man...may be regarded as the centre of the world; For the whole world works together in the service of man; and there is nothing from which he does not derive use and fruit...insomuch that all things seem to be going about man’s business and not their own.”⁴⁰

The other facet of an anthropocentric view (the more subtle of the two) is our tendency to measure everything by human criteria. When we ask “are they intelligent?” “How evolved is _____ part of their body or brain?” “Can they think, feel, or do _____?” we more often than not are asking “Are they intelligent *in the ways we are intelligent?*” “How evolved is their brain *in relation to how our brain developed and functions?*” and “Can they think, feel, or do _____ *in the manner that we know ourselves to do the same?*”⁴¹ Both of these assume a very high estimation of humanity’s relative position in the Great Chain. As the transitional species between the base material world and the higher spiritual realms, all matter below us which does not have something of the spirit in it would naturally exist for our benefit. What harm is there in using what is ours to the best of our God-given ability and for our God-willed wisdom and pleasure?

³⁹ Jürgen Moltmann “Sighs, Signs, and Significance: Natural Science and a Hermeneutic of Nature” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Spring 2009, pg. 9

As one might expect, this distinction may be theoretical at best as Wesley can be cited in support of both anthropocentric and the theocentric view. As an example of Wesley’s anthropocentrism, see *Survey of the Wisdom of God* (published in Bristol by William Pine, 1770) v.3, pg.37-38 where he acknowledges that while members of a species may be seen as unique individuals, their unique features and temperaments did not exist to serve themselves but only to aid humanity for purposes of identification of property.

⁴⁰ Lovejoy, 187

⁴¹ Anne Benvenuti, *Spirit Unleashed: Reimagining Human-Animal Relations* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014) pg. 47, but more generally Chapter 2 “Other Nations: thinking In Terms of Multiplicity of Being”

This thought process emphasizes that even though we are a “middle link” we are still the pinnacle of the physical things, and as thus are the golden standard for the evaluation of the rest of the inferior order. How other species measure up is synonymous with how they measure up to us. This is how order works. If the Great Chain of Being is indeed an anthropocentric model of the universe, then we would have to set the bar for personhood at membership in the species *Homo Sapiens*.

There is also much to commend the Great Chain as a more theocentric model.⁴² As Lovejoy notes, this model functioned as a means to lower the self-esteem of humanity, reminding it to be humble in its place in God’s order.⁴³ Humanity may have been living earth, on the centerpiece of the universe, but in this way of thinking at the center of the earth was Hell. Only as one got further away from earth, into the solar system and the more pristine farther reaches of space, deeper into the Heavens, could one find a purer existence that was less impacted by the rippling sins of Eden. Humanity then, was helpless to remain in the lower levels of Creation. Humans were reminded that they were indeed closer to the bottom of the Chain than they were the top. They were dust and clay, closer to rocks and earth than the legions of angels who were approaching the holiness of God. In the appropriately named sermon, “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels” (1790), Wesley boldly lays bare human fragility and the inescapable dust we are and to which we will one day return.

⁴² Maddox, 53 – Wesley lies between a “modest anthropocentric” and theocentric cosmologies, which Maddox seems to credit to those Wesley abridged and relied upon. Charles Bonnet and John Ray offered “modest anthropocentrism” and in works where Wesley speaks for himself he leans towards a theocentrism where some animals might seem to serve humanity, but all of Creation, humankind included, belonged to God and to God’s pleasure.

⁴³ Lovejoy, 186. Wesley also notes in Sermon 103 “What Is Man? Psalm 8:3-4” I.1-5 how the vastness of our species relates the individual as infinitely small, and likewise the vastness of the universe reminds humankind of how small and vulnerable they are.

“The word [earthen] is exquisitely proper, denoting both the brittleness of the vessels, and the meanness of the matter they are made of. It directly means what we term ‘earthen ware’—china, porcelain, and the like. How weak, how easily broke in pieces! Just such is the case with a holy Christian. We have the heavenly treasure in earthly, mortal, corruptible bodies. ‘Dust thou art’, said the righteous Judge to his rebellious creature, till then incorruptible and immortal, ‘and to dust thou shalt return.’”⁴⁴

He may have had a high expectation of what humanity once was and what it could one day be again, but this is representative more of a very high evaluation of God’s grace rather than the current uniqueness divinity of the human being. Perfection ---not our souls--- is the treasure contained in our earthen (elemental, more akin to the earth) bodies. The principle of plenitude while affirming human uniqueness also affirmed the uniqueness of every other species in a way that troubled the relationship between being unique and being something inherently more divine. The principles of continuity and gradation reminded the human that while they are unique, there were doubtlessly species immediately above and below them somewhere on earth or on another plane that were distinct from humanity only by nearly unobservable degrees.⁴⁵

The Great Chain is a theocentric model because when humans evaluated creation in anthropocentric ways they believed they were measuring it by the standards of divine attribute. Creatures were ordered contingent upon their separation from God.⁴⁶ The criteria humans used to measure them: intelligence, the presence of a will or emotions, degrees of liberty...these were not exclusively human. Indeed they were properties of Spirit, something also possessed in greater amounts by the heavenly hierarchy above them and in perfection by God. Therefore it may be said that humanity reckoned the rest of creation to the standard of themselves insofar as they bore the image of their Creator. This theocentric systemic is only functionally

⁴⁴ Wesley, Sermon 129: “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels” II.1

⁴⁵ Lovejoy. 195-6

⁴⁶ Benvenuti, 131

anthropocentric because of assumptions derived from the political image of God. The ‘regent’ half ‘viceregent’ tempts humans to forget that we are not the greatest being.

Finally, the primary function of the Great Chain in John Wesley’s thought seems to be to counter the Baconian view of our relation to the rest of Creation. Charles Bonnett, whom Wesley studied and adapted, directly opposed Descartes in his work. Wesley eliminated all references to Descartes from the sources he edited into his *Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation*. He also removed all the anthropocentric quotes from William Derham’s work that he republished. It is very likely the principals of the Great Chain of Being with their emphasis on creation’s interdependence is what kept Wesley opposed to Bacon, Decartes, and others.⁴⁷ Wesley remained deeply concerned for the ways animals were treated when they were viewed as unfeeling things. Given that the purpose of the Creation recognized by this model was the display and revelation of the majesty and wisdom of God, each individual link or species would then exist not for the needs of any other link above or below it but exist only for the sake of existing.

Much in the spirit of Psalm 19, each part of Creation exists as a testament to the wisdom and majesty of its Creator, and exists for that purpose alone.⁴⁸ While the Great Chain may have been used by some in anthropocentric ways, it also lent itself to a more theocentric view limited only by humanity’s conception of God and their own relatedness to the divine. This means the cosmology upon which Wesley grounded his doctrine of the Imago Dei and with which he made sense of the world around him was inherently flexible. Wesley’s Great Chain provides a helpful conversation partner for contemporary Wesleyans who live in a world where scientific

⁴⁷ Maddox, “Anticipating the New Creation” 53;57

⁴⁸ Ibid. 186, Wesley can be found expressing similar sentiments in Sermon 60: “The General Deliverance” III.7

discoveries constantly challenge how we think about ourselves and the other animal inhabitants that call this planet home. Instead of a ridged, stratified pyramid it may be more accurate to view Wesley's Great Chain as a flexible web – able to be stretched and pulled, and one where the movement and activity of one affects the others. The stage is now set for our own anthropocentric assumptions to be challenged and changed while we remain recognizably Wesleyan.

VI. Anthropocentrism Challenged

To Wesley, the imprinting of the *Imago Dei* gave humanity something that set it apart from the rest of earthly creation. “Now man was made, who was the chief of the ways of God, the visible image of the Creator's glory”⁴⁹This would seem to necessitate a type of “human exceptionalism” where by some criteria humanity would be uniquely superior and separate from the other creatures below them on the Chain. Indeed, there have been many criteria hypothesized through the centuries that were thought to prove that humanity was alone on its level and therefore existed as a superior to the rest of Creation. Wesley and his contemporaries engaged with this human exceptionalism not in mere theory, but made use of the natural sciences to inform their beliefs. Therefore contemporary scientific observation is a fair standard for seeking to investigate our place in the cosmos and among the other animals. In the Eighteenth century, the *Imago Dei* doctrine and natural science sought to confirm humanity as uniquely superior to the other animals. If we are able to establish that humanity is not unique among the animal kingdom then we will have to likewise adapt the doctrine and in doing so reevaluate Christian conceptions of personhood. In her book *Spirit Unleashed: Reimagining Human-Animal*

⁴⁹ Wesley, *Notes on the Old Testament*, Gen. 1:31

Relations, Anne Benvenuti identifies no less than sixteen different characteristics and capabilities once thought of as the exemplar of human uniqueness, the cornerstone to human exceptionalism.⁵⁰ Her list includes:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. tool making | 10. empathy |
| 2. the capacity for abstract thought | 11. altruism |
| 3. the use of language | 12. awareness of death and grieving |
| 4. mathematical reasoning | 13. moral sensibility |
| 5. self-awareness | 14. social learning and culture |
| 6. social cognition | 15. political affiliation |
| 7. complex emotional bonds | 16. the capacity to know what is the mind of the other |
| 8. humor | |
| 9. creative play | |

This list contains elements of what Wesley would have considered to be parts of both the natural and moral images of God. Science is constantly revealing these traits in many different types of nonhuman animals. While every single criteria may not be present or not yet observed in every animal, the observation of any one of the criteria in any species of nonhuman animal is sufficient to negate it as proof of human uniqueness, thus weakening the claims of human exceptionalism and anthropocentric reasoning. In short, because all of these have been observed outside the bounds of *Homo Sapiens*, we are left with no case for our conceived separation from nonhuman animals. Evidence of these traits and abilities among the wider animal kingdom is presented in Appendix One.

However, to fully address Wesley's evaluation of the relative place of humanity in the Great Chain, we must also add "capacity for God" or simply "spirituality" to this list. As was previously mentioned, because of the *Imago Dei* Wesley believed humanity's distinction from the rest of the Chain below us was not merely an attributive one but also a relational one. He

⁵⁰ Benvenuti, 44

accepted that “brutes” shared in other aspects of the Divine image that set them apart from inanimate Creation: self-movement, intellect, will, and liberty. But of all physical Creation, humanity alone was thought to be able to be in a relationship with the Divine. Their unique aspects of the natural image allowed humans to perceive God, know their condition before God, and to grow closer to God. As researchers explore the neurological aspects of spiritual experience, we are able like never before to gain insights into the internal and perhaps spiritual lives of other animals. Findings related to the possibility of nonhuman animal spirituality are presented in Appendix Two. In short, spiritual experience occurs in the theater of neuroscience, and humans are not unique in the architecture of that theater. Many nonhuman animals share the same neurological “hardware” that enables human beings to have spiritual experiences, and even if the strong possibility of their spirituality cannot be accepted it also need not be outright denied. Evidence suggests that other animals may share in the relational capacity of the natural image, which only strengthens the case for a reassessment of the *Imago Dei*, and thus the category of ‘person.’

VII. Contextualizing in Wesley’s Broader Theology

Up to this point I have argued that Wesley’s understanding of the *Imago Dei* was inherently fluid in that both human and nonhuman animals were able and expected to grow and regress in their possession and expression of the divine image. This expectation is especially striking in a cosmology where the whole universe is ordered by the degree to which each species and individual resembles and relates to their Creator. In an effort to begin deconstructing our anthropocentric worldviews, I have argued that many nonhuman animals also share with humanity parts of the *Imago Dei* that either they were not thought to possess before, or possess in much greater degrees than may have been previously assumed. Should Wesley have had access

to our current scientific evidence in place of eighteenth-century data he might have privileged animals higher in his cosmological reckoning. Having established this interpretation of Wesley's cosmology it is now necessary to ask whether or not this interpretation resonates or harmonizes with Wesley's theology more broadly considered. In this section I will offer five areas of his thought where extending the category of person to at least some nonhuman animals can be seen as either being at home or a natural extension of his dispositions. These areas are: Wesley's concern for animal welfare and the possibility of the animal soul; his definition of salvation as being a present reality and anticipation of the New Creation; the function of the *Imago Dei* as a cosmological concept; his angelology; and finally his acceptance of "degrees" of the image of God in nonhuman animals.

Animal Welfare and the Animal Soul

In his sermon "The General Deliverance" (1782), John Wesley expresses his deep concern for the welfare of nonhuman animals. He notes with disdain how worse these creatures suffer at our own hands in comparison to their treatment of each other, let alone the fact that their current misery and fallenness is the result of our sin and not their own.⁵¹ Wesley likely inherited his interest in animals from two different places. First, animal welfare had already been an issue taken up by non-conformist denominations, with whom Wesley shared a good deal. Second, the place of animals in God's salvation was a theme in several of the Patristic authors, of whom Wesley was a dedicated student. Ireneaus, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa all found a global perspective present in God's redemptive plan.⁵² David Clough has shown that animal welfare

⁵¹ Wesley, Sermon 60: "The General Deliverance" II.6, II.1-2

⁵² Clough, *Early Methodists and Other Animals: Animal Welfare as an Evangelical Issue* (Transcript obtained by request), 8

also was concern for early Methodists following Wesley.⁵³ William Wilberforce was one of the supporters of Britain's first legislation banning animal cruelty, and was one of the original members of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824.⁵⁴ In the November 1807 issue of *The Methodist Magazine*, a sermon was published with the title, "A Sermon on the Sin of Cruelty to the Brute Creation."⁵⁵ This would only be the first of many of its kind in the publication. Finally, Clough asserts

"...there is no evidence that Methodists, or other Christians, took a decision to set aside the teaching of Wesley and others concerning animals and the ethical implications of this position. One possible reason for a diminished interest in animal cruelty is that the movements against cruelty towards other animals were conspicuously successful... We might therefore speculate that with the eradication of the most egregious contemporary examples of cruelty towards non-human animals, and a successful campaign for legislation to regulate better treatment of other animals, Methodists and others switched their efforts to other significant social ills."⁵⁶

His interest and concern for animals, however, extends beyond their welfare. Already in Wesley's life, naturalists, divines, and philosophers debated vigorously whether or not other animals had souls. From his time as a student at Oxford to the last years of his life it is a debate in which Wesley was both interested and engaged. Anglican Bishop and contemporary of Wesley Joseph Butler argued for the existence of souls in animals in his 1736 *The Analogy of Religion, natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*. In a section on afterlife he posits that we cannot confirm what happens after death, we have no evidence that animals lose their 'living powers' when they die, if it was possible for anyone or anything to lose their living powers at all.⁵⁷ This argument assumes that animals indeed possess a living power, which might otherwise be termed a 'soul.' John Hildrop, whose *Free Thoughts on Brute Creation* was

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 2

⁵⁵ Ibid. 9-10

⁵⁶ Ibid. 16

⁵⁷ Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (New York: Homer Franklin, 1840), 118

republished by Wesley, also argued for animal immortality.⁵⁸ The other side of the debate is best epitomized by René Descartes who claimed that animals were senseless automatons, no different than machines.⁵⁹ He and his followers made this claim out of theological concern, claiming that if some animals possessed an ‘immortal soul’ then there would be no reason to refuse that all animals down the Chain to sea sponges also had them. Those arguing in this vein insisted that this would cheapen the value of life in the same way an influx of gold would flood a market. They also supported their claim by pointing out that pain was a consequence of sin, and since nonhuman animals were innocent only an unjust God would make them susceptible to suffering. Finally there was an appeal to conscience in that if nonhuman animals possessed souls then even mild-mannered humans would commit murder daily, “so it is more humane to believe that they suffer no pain.”⁶⁰

John Wesley was much closer to Bishop Butler in this regard. We know that he made the souls of animals the topic of one of the two “wall lectures” required for his master’s degree from Oxford.⁶¹ While neither the text nor his argument survive, we can assume from his great concern in “The General Deliverance” (1782) and his publishing of tracts which argued for the souls of animals that he argued for their existence in that early lecture. Similarly, he addressed the souls of animals in his *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation* (1763), arguing that animals would

⁵⁸ Clough, *Early Methodists and Other Animals*, 7

⁵⁹ David L. Clough, *On Animals, Vol I: Systematic Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 137-143

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 139

⁶¹ Randy Maddox, “Anticipating the New Creation: Wesleyan Foundations for Holistic Mission” *Asbury Journal* 62 (2007) p.59

“Wall Lectures” were a series of six “solemn lectures” delivered to qualify one for an MA degree. They took their nickname from the fact that the lecturers often had to give their disputations to an empty room with only the walls for an audience. Different students took this assignment with varying degrees of seriousness, some simply sitting in the room with a leaf or two of Latin to begin reciting if someone were to stop in and observe. While it is impossible to know Wesley’s treatment of these lectures and their content, we may assume from his industrious disposition while attending Oxford that he approached these disputations with the appropriate gravity.

Christopher Wordsworth, *Scholae Academicae* (New York: Augustus M. Kelly Publishers, 1969) 232-2

return to their immortal essence at the end of time and humanity's treatment of them would be addressed before God.⁶² All this illustrates that where the nature, rights, and our responsibility towards other animals were concerned, Wesley was himself strongly predisposed to assert and defend their value before God, their close relation to humanity in the order of the Cosmos, their former participation in the divine life but for humanity's sin, and their future participation in the drama of salvation. His natural disposition and trajectory of sentiment is a ready foundation for recognizing the personhood of nonhuman animals.

Salvation and Anticipation of the New Creation

A central theme of the Methodist message was that salvation by faith was a present reality. Regeneration allows the believer anticipate and participate in Christ's resurrection and to begin the restoration of the *Imago Dei*, which eventually would even surpass the state enjoyed by the first humans in Eden. This aspect of cosmic redemption ---that salvation would affect the whole created order raising different species above their original state--- is a notable departure from even the cosmological concept of John Hildrop (d.1756), which Wesley accepted, edited, and republished.⁶³ This unique emphasis on the possible future state of nonhuman animals implies that Wesley saw such enhancement as the will of God from eternity in the same way that God intended it for humanity as seen in the *felix culpa* discussed earlier. Randy Maddox has interpreted Wesley's call as one to 'participate responsively in the renewing work by anticipating Christ's victory.'⁶⁴ Recognition of eventual nonhuman animal personhood as the divine plan and will puts Wesleyans on solid ground when they advocate for the extension of personhood and

⁶² Clough, *On Animals*, 136. Quoting Wesley in *Survey of the Wisdom of God* (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1823) p.129

⁶³ See the introductory comment on Sermon 60: "The General Deliverance" in the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley's works.

⁶⁴ Maddox, "Anticipating the New Creation", 62

basic “human” rights (rights to life, freedom from torture, freedom from unlawful imprisonment) to at least the most sentient of nonhuman animals as a natural aspect of the call to “anticipate our Heaven below.”⁶⁵

The Imago Dei as Cosmological Concept

John Wesley made most use of the Imago Dei in soteriological discourse. Its brokenness in humanity is the cause of sin, and its restoration and perfection is the end of salvation. In this sense it applies most directly to humans, the focus of Wesley’s ministry, but this is not the only way the doctrine functions. As was seen in the sketch above of the Great Chain of Being, the Imago Dei also functions cosmologically in Wesley’s thought. He saw the Imago Dei as the life and attributes of spirit, and the presence and degree of spirit (of which only God is pure) serves as the blueprint and hermeneutic for the ordering of all Creation within the Great Chain of Being. Each creature was ordered by their level of God-likeness or their degree of participation in the divine life and image. Because the Imago Dei is the ordering principle for all creation, its fracturing is one that affected the whole of creation, and God’s redemptive work and plan was one that involved much more than solely human or even sentient life.⁶⁶ From this we can conclude that the Wesleyan way to look at the world and all that fill it is through the lens of the Imago Dei, being unsurprised or even expecting to find fellow creatures participating in the divine life and love in ways very different from our own or differing only by “imperceptible degrees.” By faith we are offered the ability to not only see and feel the love and spirit of God in ourselves in in our fellow human beings, but to see the image of God as something imprinted

⁶⁵ Charles Wesley, “Glory to God and Praise and Love,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989) 58

⁶⁶ Wesley, Sermon 54: The New Creation – Wesley includes abiotic creation in the corruption that stems from sin, and includes the whole of the universe in God’s redemption.

over the whole of Creation as one, as we all stand as beloved creatures in need of grace before our one Creator. Both human and nonhuman animals in this way can be seen as sharing in the image of God, and thus co-claimants of the category of ‘person.’

Angelology

Similarly, Wesley’s angelology also predisposes one to maintain a flexible definition of ‘person’ and to see the limits of moral and religious subjects as transcending the boundaries of our species. While this doctrine might not feature as prominently in Wesley’s theology as justification by faith or Christian perfection, it offers us an invaluable glimpse into how he saw the universe operating. First, for Wesley angels are not humans but they are people, and their existence challenges the human claim to the pinnacle of creation. Wesley’s angelology blurs the line of definite criteria used to evaluate personhood: they share materiality with all creation, they share self-movement with humans and nonhuman animals, and they share higher reason and the capacity for God with humans. While Wesley appears to draw the line at ‘capacity for God’ his thought allows for attributes to be shared among links so that in different respects angels, humans, and ‘beasts’ may be seen as sharing the same categories. Second, angels are moral and religious subjects. As seen in his two sermons on the subject, angels are charged with obedience to God like humans were, and also have the power to obey (as seen in the good angels) or to rebel (as seen in the evil angels). Therefore human beings are not the only religious and moral subjects before God and because of their shared attributes with humans and other animals we have reason to pause before drawing the line ourselves elsewhere.

Third, we must consider our own relationship to angels. Wesley believed that between our deaths and the general resurrection we should share in the work of the angels: the redeemed souls assisting the good, and the ill souls assisting the evil. This is echoed in a sermon fragment

“On Earth as in Heaven” where it is said that humans are to imitate angels to the point of unity.⁶⁷ While this is seen as only temporary employment Wesley also believed that at the New Creation that humans would become like or even equal to the angels. This represents a significant elevation of our place, nature, and status. This is perhaps the most obvious proof of the Great Chain’s malleability, and a caution against assuming any visible order or hierarchy of beings is permanent or reflective of God’s ultimate design.

Degrees of the Imago Dei and Modern Discovery

Having surveyed many different animals in his study of Natural Philosophy, Wesley was willing to admit that nonhuman animals possessed varying degrees of understanding, affections, and liberty (broadly, the Imago Dei). This makes perfect sense in a cosmology where each different link or level is separated from each other by only imperceptible degrees. This necessitates that each attribute, including those included in the Imago Dei, do not have a hard cut-off point with any individual species. Each attribute would be enhanced or diminished in nearly unperceivable degrees. The links immediately above and below humanity in this model are to be thought of as extremely close to human degrees of the image, which we ourselves do not possess in its perfection.

As surveyed briefly in Appendix One, modern scientific discovery is constantly closing the assumed chasm between human and nonhuman animals. We are observing nonhuman animals demonstrating and sharing behaviors and abilities that we have previously assumed were distinctive human traits. From the perspective of the Great Chain of Being, this is to be expected

⁶⁷ “But without idly disputing whether we can do thus or no, let us do what we can. And we can, if we will, make his will at least the *sine qua non* in all our actions. And if we do this, we shall in time do more. And this shall be accepted, till we can do more, if we continually labour to do more.” “On Earth as in Heaven” II.3

and would not be surprising or that challenging. Instead of these groundbreaking discoveries being felt as threatening to Christian revelation or as breaking sacred boundaries, they would only show the need for recalibration of our understanding of the Great Chain. The concept itself could remain intact. Formed as he was in this Christian Platonist tradition, it seems unlikely that John Wesley would have been surprised or felt threatened at all by the discoveries being made with every passing year.

VIII. Difficulties and a Look Forward

This thesis is not intended to be an engagement with contemporary ecological, animal, or creaturely theologies, nor is it meant to establish a cohesive Wesleyan environmental ethic for human-animal relations. I have conceived of this project primarily as a historical study. As such, I have attempted to shine a light on what may be thought of as more obscure facets of Wesley's thought and to show how the richness of our primary sources (most notably Wesley's sermons) provide the Wesleyan Christian with adequate tools and material for engaging in the question of nonhuman persons in a constructive way that is still recognizable as being well within our Wesleyan heritage. This said, the Wesleyan tradition does not separate doctrine from praxis and in its infancy did not suffer doctrines that had no recognizable impact in the lived experience of growing in discipleship. The present argument is not without some reasonable objections and ethical considerations looking forward from this current work. In this section I will briefly address these in turn.

Why must we call them "persons?" Wouldn't it be just as appropriate and loyal to Wesley's concerns to work to increase their protection and conservation with our current laws?

This is a compelling argument which I admit might result in equal objective treatment of nonhuman animals. It is, however, an argument founded only on convenience and comfort. Because of scientific inquiry we are struggling to find any criteria that would rightfully uphold human exceptionality within *kingdom animalia*. While we may be unique and specially gifted *homo sapiens* are no more unique or gifted than any other of our fellow animals are. As we explore the minds and abilities of other animals we rediscover our place as creature, one piece of Creation as distinct as indistinguishable. Only when we rediscover our place as animals and animals as persons will we fully appreciate our own wonders and the wonders of our fellow animals, and only then will we truly be able to acknowledge the solidarity that undergirds true respect and protection. Simply put, there is only a shrinking case for continuing to exclude many nonhuman animals from the ‘person’ category.

The Great Chain of Being has long been recognized as outdated. Doesn't that make any argument founded on it similarly unfounded or misguided?

This is true. The Great Chain has proven inadequate for understanding the universe and its underlying principles of plenitude, gradation, and continuity cannot hold up as natural law any longer. This model has been shown to be severely anthropocentric as the “degrees” of the Image of God which Wesley generously identifies in other animals describe more their similarity with humans than they do to God, for humanity was seen as the standard of earthly divinity. No matter the theocentric intentions or characteristics, it is popularly anthropocentric. This project, however, does not advocate for acceptance of the Great Chain or serve as an apology for it. The intention of this paper is to provide Wesleyan Christians a recognizable entry point and platform for entering the discussion of nonhuman persons. The Great Chain is discussed because it was

Wesley's own model and thus provides a foundation for all Wesleyans and illustrates that Wesley's own thinking was already predisposed to the sentiments this project argues. This said, the Great Chain does help us understand key aspects of our relationship to other animals which are agreeable with scientific inquiry. First, in many respects we are separated from other species by imperceptible degrees. This is only becoming more abundantly clear. Secondly even though the Great Chain was supposed to illustrate the strict order of Creation, the concept of gradation also illustrated the difficulty involved with categorizing Creation and the fluid, largely arbitrary nomenclatures we use. This is illustrated by the recent collapse of the categories of "bird" and "reptile", the relatively recent separation of "plant" from "fungi", and the confusion in the classification of the once unified "Prokaryote Kingdom." In this sense The Great Chain continues to serve contemporary Wesleyans in better engaging and pondering our relationship to nonhuman animals even if it is nothing more than a pedagogical tool and illustration.

This thesis addressed how nonhuman animals share in the natural and moral images of God, but do they also participate in the political image of God, or is this one instance of human exceptionality we cannot escape?

As previously discussed, the political image of God is hierarchical in both essence and function. Because of their possession of it, humans are viewed as "viceregents upon the Earth" and are charged with conveying grace from God to the links farther down the Chain. This would appear to make a clear distinction between human and nonhuman animals, but these assumptions may tell us more about our preconceptions of power than the design of the system itself. While Wesley does make use of the language of humans having "dominion" over the Earth and all that inhabit it, to Wesley this is not equivalent to humanity asserting its own will or disposing of its inhabitants or resources as we saw necessary or desirable. Quite the opposite, because we

administrate the Earth under the authority of God we are only living into the political image of God to the extent we are seeking and doing God's will. All things belonged to God, first and foremost to Wesley, and were not ours to dispose of.⁶⁸ Because we possess this part of the image to the degree that we do, the current existential condition of other animals is contingent upon our alignment with God and God's grace and design. Searching out and recognizing God's design would mean being integrating new data and shifting our perceptions of the world around us. In light of the discoveries that blur the line between what is distinctly 'human' and what is shared with other species it is possible that recognizing our fellowship with other animals in addition to our stewardship with them and counting them as legal persons is the best way to align ourselves with that design. Wesley encouraged a 'chastened' stewardship, advocating for a '*resuming of this stewardship*' as opposed to Bacon's call to 'reclaim mastery over creation.'⁶⁹ Our having a supervisory or stewarding role over other animals does not have to preclude their personhood any more than having a human governor makes us any less of a person.

It is also very possible that like with the natural and moral images, nonhuman animals may also share in the expression of the political image. While the data is currently dominated by anecdote, those who have close relationships with other animals and are attentive describe not only the communication of love and mercy (which may be seen as a response to God's love shown through humanity) but also describe how their relationships with animals had taught them, convicted them, and impacted their discipleship.⁷⁰ Humans are cared for by a variety of animals which help the blind get around, help predict seizures, and calm anxiety. This means that animals minister to humans in many of the same ways that John Wesley believed the angels

⁶⁸ Maddox, "Anticipating the New Creation" 57

⁶⁹ Ibid. 58

⁷⁰ Benvenuti, 130-6

minister to us. They can directly improve our mood and health. The paradigm that the loving obedience of a nonhuman animal should be directed to humans as humanity's love is owed to God described by Wesley in *The General Deliverance* is not an a priori fact.⁷¹ It is a projection of a perfected version of the world Wesley observed, one where animals either lived for themselves or labored for human benefit with no apparent capacity to intentionally labor for God. The Great Chain mandated that even though God's providence extended to animals, they only had access to God through humanity. Brute creation was not capable of God. It was from humanity that God's grace flowed, and it was to humanity that their perfect obedience and thanksgiving could be channeled back to God. Appendix Two makes a case for the spirituality and spiritual experience of animals. If these hypotheses continue to be supported by emerging findings and we can say that animals are also directly capable of God in their own way, then there would be no logical barrier to God using animals to convey grace and minister to us in the same way God uses the angelic host and our fellow humans. Such anecdotes would then be able to be credited as direct experience of nonhuman expression of the political image of God. Some people may not find this part of my argument to be entirely persuasive, but I suggest that if we examined ourselves with the same type of serious scrutiny with which we examine nonhuman animals in this regard, we would have an equally difficult time explaining and quantifying the ways grace flows to, in, and through our own selves.

⁷¹ Wesley, Sermon 60: "The General Deliverance" I.5

Can the conclusion that traditional Wesleyan theology allows us to extend legal and moral personhood to nonhuman animals actually function practically?

This is a question that has plagued me since I began this research. How far should this be taken? What are the implications for Christian discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition? Should all Methodists be vegan, or if I hit a deer with my car have I committed vehicular manslaughter? Because this is not a proper or dedicated ethics paper I cannot make exact prescriptions for these and many more practical questions that may come up while considering this topic. For my own sake I have arrived at one guiding virtue and one conclusion that I am prepared to share. The guiding principle is a deep and conscious respect for life. While I am not prepared to advocate for abstinence from animal products, being conscious that when eating meat that a fellow creature, alive as you are, capable of thoughts, feelings, and preferences had to die in order for you to be eating your meal is a good first step. Respecting life for what it is, and being familiar with the true identity of the source of your food can set one on the right track to come to their own conclusions. Animal theologian David Clough is making such thought accessible to the public through his CreatureKind program.⁷²

The practical conclusion I have arrived at relating to how my findings should play out in Wesleyan communities is that I do not believe that we as a society are prepared to recognize many nonhuman animals as the persons I have come to believe that they are. We as a species have not yet even arrived at a point where we recognize and treat fellow humans as people. As illustrated by the question of what one is guilty of if they were to accidentally hit an animal with their car, we lack the legal precedent to adequately address these questions if we were to make a

⁷² <http://becreaturekind.org/>

sudden leap to recognize even a small number of nonhuman species as legal persons. Steven Jones, a genetics professor at the University of London, asked the question of a legal case regarding several chimpanzees “if we grant the request to extend ‘human’ rights to these apes, where do we stop?” He posited that we lack the definite criteria needed to define what exactly a ‘person’ is legally and the past attempts for small groups of people to decide what made someone a true person or not have ended disastrously.⁷³ To answer Dr. Jones I would point to another moment in history where a society was not prepared to deal with the ramifications of recognizing the personhood of those who deserved it: American Slavery. In doing this I in no way compare any group of people to animals, however. An entire economy and way of life was utterly dependent on denying of human rights to those who deserved it, yet justice could not wait. While I lack the space for a full ethical argument, the Nonhuman Rights legal campaign is using slave law in the New York state court system as a legal precedent for the extension of legal personhood to those who did not formerly have it. Discussions about slavery, to which Mr. Wesley was adamantly opposed, could provide an interesting conversation partner for the question of nonhuman persons moving forward.

Finally, even if we are not prepared for the implications of these opinions as a whole, the concept of extending personhood beyond human beings is already one we have bought into as a culture. With the Citizens United decision, the US Supreme Court upheld the practice of viewing and treating corporations as persons in the eyes of the law. In this way we have already accepted that the category of ‘person’ is a dynamic and fluid one not tied to our own species or even single individuals. Additionally, it is estimated that over eighty percent of the DNA in a human body is not human DNA. The majority of cells in a human body are bacterial, with most of them

⁷³ Tom Geoghanan, “Should Apes Have Human Rights?” *BBC News*, March 29, 2007

living in our digestive tracts. Even though they are not genetically human, human beings could not live without them and they are integral parts of our body. This means that when Christ took on human life, God came to Earth as much as a mixed colony of microbial fauna as a genetically “human” person.⁷⁴

IX. Conclusion

In conclusion, both John Wesley’s thoughts on ‘brute creation’ and his larger cosmological paradigms provide the Wesleyan Christian with sufficient tools to enter into and participate in the wider social conversation over the rights of nonhuman persons in a way which is both loyal to the most recent scientific observation and recognizable as theology in line with our common Wesleyan heritage. Because the evidence of human exceptionality is outweighed by the evidence of our common creature-hood we have much reason and support for including at least some nonhuman animals as persons because they have been found to share in the *Imago Dei*. This is appropriate as in John Wesley’s thought the *Imago Dei* already functions as a cosmologically reality, imprinted on Creation as a whole. This conceptualization challenges Wesleyan Christians to not only embrace a more inclusive Image of God, but also one which is more honest and authentically Wesleyan. Perhaps it is only in recognizing the personhood of other animals that the Image of God can truly be perfected.

Reflecting on this it is clear that we do not have far to go theologically. The move to expand our ideas of personhood and participation in the divine image may in fact be the easier move if we make our Wesleyan tradition our starting point. Were we to continue both on

⁷⁴ Jürgen Moltmann “Sighs, Signs, and Significance: Natural Science and a Hermeneutic of Nature” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Spring 2009. He makes the argument that while Christ came as a human, humans are by composition matter. This same matter (carbon, nitrogen, and hydrogen atoms...etc) is shared by the whole universe and everything in it. Thus Christ was incarnated not so much as a human but as matter.

insisting that humanity is separate from nonhuman animals by virtue of the Imago Dei and continue discovering all that we have in common psychologically and socially with other animals we would be forced once again to redefine the doctrine as we search for the grounds of human exceptionality. Our present task allows us to not only maintain but to reassert our historic understanding of our imbedded relationship with our Creator with more vigor as we but expand our focus and draw the circle of God's presence wider. Upon hearing of Jane Goodall's observation of chimpanzees using tools her mentor Louis Leaky remarked that "We either have to redefine tool, redefine Man, or accept Chimpanzees as persons."⁷⁵ Similarly, in light of scientific observation we must either redefine "spirit", redefine the Imago Dei and all that it means for our salvation, or simply reevaluate humanity's exclusive claim to it.

⁷⁵ Benvenuti, 44

Appendix One:

Human Exceptionalism Challenged

In Section VI, I introduced sixteen criteria that has been used in the past to prove human exceptionalism, as collected by Anne Benvenuti in her book *Spirit Unleashed: Reimagining Human-Animal Relations*. John Wesley believed humans to be the sole possessors of the divine image insofar as humans seemed to be unique among the other creatures. My argument throughout the paper is that because humans' claim of exceptionality is growing weaker our exclusive claim to the Imago Dei has to be reconsidered. In this appendix I survey relevant research that demonstrates the presence of each trait or ability within the wider animal kingdom. Again, not every trait or ability needs to be shown in every animal for this hypothesis to be validated. If each ability or trait is found in only one species of nonhuman animal, human exceptionalism is still challenged.

1. Tool Making- While it was once thought that the use of tools and technology to augment our body's natural abilities and manipulate our environment was a distinctly human phenomenon, it is now well documented that apes such as chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas all use plant stems and sticks to foraged for food and "fish" for termites. It has now been confirmed that apes and some species of monkey use and even fashion stone tools as well, although they used these less often as sticks are more plentiful than rocks for the tree-dwelling species.⁷⁶ On a darker note, chimpanzees have also been observed breaking,

⁷⁶ Dorothy Fragaszy, Patricia Izar, et al. "Wild capuchin monkeys (*Cebus libidinosus*) use anvils and stone pounding tools" *American Journal of Primatology* Vol. 64 Issue 4, December 2004, pg.359-366
 Julio Mercader, Huw Barton, et al. "4,300-Year-old chimpanzee sites and the origins of percussive stone technology" *Proceedings for the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* Vol.104, Issue 9, December 2006

stripping, and sharpening sticks to use as spears for hunting. But apart from our nearest genetic relatives, tool use has been documented in birds, fish, and even insects.⁷⁷

It is clear that no other species on Earth is as technically proficient as human beings. We must be cautious that this observation may carry a latent value system with it. The same otters or monkeys that use rocks as hammers or anvils may not build multi-room houses with central air or may not produce means of artificial light, but in their way of living and being these things may not be necessary. We cannot equate “being able to do more” with “being superior.” After all, no animal but *homo sapiens* has constructed assault rifles, nuclear weapons, or enabled strip mining and deforestation. Our technical prowess is not unequivocally an advantage.

2. The Capacity for Abstract Thought- Abstract thought can be defined as the ability to think in general categories and concepts, making connections between items or groups of items when the point of their similarity may not be obvious. This, too, was once thought to be a hallmark of the human soul- that thing which set us apart and above the lower levels of the Chain. Two studies, one from 2001 and one from 2013 suggest otherwise.⁷⁸ These test were similar in that they involved multiple species of ape (baboons, orangutans, and gorillas). The subjects were shown pictures of various plants, animals, and everyday items. The apes were shown to

⁷⁷ James J. H. St Clair and Christian Rutz, “New Caledonian crows attend to multiple functional properties of complex tools” *The Philosophical Transactions B of the Royal Society* Vol. 368 Issue1630, November 2013
Janet Mann, Eric M. Patterson, “Tool Use By Aquatic Animals” *The Philosophical Transactions B of the Royal Society* Vol. 368 Issue1630, November 2013

John D. Pierce, Jr. “A Review of Tool Use in Insects” *The Florida Entomologist* Vol. 69, No. 1, March 1986, pg. 95-104

⁷⁸ Joël Fagot, Edward A. Wasserman, et al, “Discriminating the Relation Between Relations: The Role of Entropy in Abstract Conceptualization by Baboons (*Papio papio*) and Humans (*Homo sapiens*)” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Animal Behavioral Processes* Vol. 27 No.4, 2003, pg.316-328

Jennifer Vonk “Matching based on biological categories in Orangutans (*Pongo abelii*) and a Gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*)” *PeerJ* 1:e158 2013 <https://dx.doi.org/10.7717/peerj.158> Accessed November 9, 2015

be capable of grouping these pictures together by categories, such as “flowers” or “dogs” even when the appearance and species of flowers or breed of dogs were diverse. While these studies do not answer definitively if animals are capable of “abstract thought” we no longer can claim to be alone in our ability to view and make sense of our surroundings conceptually.

It is also worth noting in these experiments is that Fagot and Wasserman noticed disparities in the way the baboons would consistently categorize items and the way they themselves defined the bounds of the category. This led them to theorize that our different sensitivities to perceived chaos and order are different, and this may be shaped in part by the differences in our languages. This thinking is a demonstration of anthropocentric schemas being deconstructed, and it allows us to witness not “lesser” or “better” ways of organization but instead just different ways of being and looking at the world. This may explain why most of the attention has been given to primates thus far. Our own anthropocentric analysis limits us to only considering the animals which most resemble us in appearance, in thinking, or in ways of going about life on earth. We yet lack, for instance, both the insight and ability to devise and perform experiments that would test the abstract or conceptual thinking ability of a humpback whale, for instance, in the ways that whales think and process the world around them instead of testing their intelligence by human standards.

3. The Use of Language- Closely linked to our ability to think abstractly is the human propensity for language. By language here I mean a means of communicating one’s internal processes in a way commonly understood by others. Language takes many forms even in human society: the spoken word, the written word (both via alphabets and pictographs), symbolic communication, sign language, body language, some studies suggest pheromones may still be a way humans communicate and we definitely used them in our past, and even

visual art and music may be included in this list.⁷⁹ Studies of language in the animal kingdom only expand this list to include further marvels of ingenuity and communication. Yet should we want to restrict our search to spoken languages with set grammars and syntaxes that would be perceivable to humans we are left no less amazed.

While it may be assumed that our closest physiological and genetic relatives would be natural candidates, but the vocal chords of our primate cousins are ill-suited to produce sounds like we do. Once our anthropocentrism is suspended, however, we find that the closest animal language to our own in terms of syntax and pattern is birdsong, and in fact studies are suggesting that human language either evolved from or was heavily inspired by birdsong.⁸⁰ Humans are not the only species who “communicates” for nonutilitarian ends. Songbirds are also known to sing for pleasure. Should we be concerned with the linguistic capabilities that humans can “map” and translate, or with the ability to use language to communicate novel thoughts, such as to accurately describe something one is seeing for the first time, we need to look no further than prairie dogs. Prairie dogs have a language which not only uses unique “alert” sounds for different threats, but their language has also been observed to distinguish between the shape of humans and the color of their clothing.⁸¹ Gorillas frequently adapt their non-verbal communication when they are trying to communicate with infants, in a

⁷⁹ Richard L. Dorte, “Human Pheromones: Do They Exist?” Mucignat-Caretta C, editor. *Neurobiology of Chemical Communication*. (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press, 2014) Chapter 19.

⁸⁰ Shigeru Miyagawa, Shiro Ojima, et al, “The integration hypothesis of human language evolution and the nature of contemporary languages” *Front. Psychol.* 5:564.2014

An interesting case study can be found in Frits Staal’s 1975 *Ritual and Mantras: Rules Without Meaning* and Michael Wood’s 2006 PBS Documentary *The Story of India* where a ritual is performed and recorded. The mantras used have been passed down orally for generations, and it is believed they have preserved Bronze Age language even when the meaning has been lost. Upon examination it was found that the mantras were closer related to birdsong than with any human language or speech pattern.

⁸¹ Benvenuti, 54

phenomena similar to human “baby talk”.⁸² Gorillas have also appeared to be able to learn American Sign Language and communicate with their human caretakers.⁸³ Finally, many animal species make use of individualized calls, which in human language and behavior are called names. Moreover, these calls or names are not innate, but must be learned by infants early in life.⁸⁴

Stepping back, our observations of the animal kingdom have expanded our conceptions of how languages and communication can work. Dogs communicate more information than we may be aware of through scent.⁸⁵ Elephants can transfer information (such as a death notice) seismically over many miles through the ground which they can “hear” via special organs in their feet pads which connect to their ears.⁸⁶ Whales can send information over vast distances, and researchers are still unsure how they produce their songs.⁸⁷ Some even theorize that the way ants organize and communicate chemically accurately mimics the way our own neurons use neurotransmitters to relay information, while bees chemical language has been found to be able to communicate semantic content.⁸⁸ Indeed, with the discovery that the gene responsible for linguistic ability (FoxP2) was pervasive in the animal world,

⁸² Eva Maria Leuf, Katja Leibol “Infant-directed communication in lowland gorillas: do older animals scaffold communicative competence in infants?” *American Journal of Primatology* v.74 Issue 9, September 2012, pp.841-852

⁸³ Laura Petitto, Mark Seidenberg, “On Evidence for Linguistic Abilities in Signing Apes” *Brain and Language* Vol. 8 Issue 2, September 1979, pp.162-183

Petitto’s analysis does challenge the strength of these claims based on the amount and type of data used. In her analysis of the absence of precision in the relation on Koko’s signs and her intended object we may see an anthropocentric hermeneutic, as discussed previously in relation to Fagot and Wasserman’s work on abstract conceptualization in baboons and the role of entropy in how humans and baboons see relatedness and distinctions between categories differently. While Petitto’s careful and cautious evaluation is to be heeded in the cases mentioned, we have reason not to bend rules of language but to recognize different assumptions in different species that underlie the use of language.

⁸⁴ Virginia Morell *Animal Wise* (New York: Crown, 2013) 93-115, 192

⁸⁵ Benvenuti, 56

⁸⁶ Benvenuti, 51

⁸⁷ Ibid.55

⁸⁸ Morell, 47

Benvenuti, 44

present in brains with very different developments and structures, it stands to reason that we have only scratched the surface on the myriad languages and modes of complex emotional communication of even our nearest animal neighbors.

4. Mathematical Reasoning- As was the case with the previous three abilities, discerning whether or not animals can reason mathematically is difficult because one must first answer the question, “How can I tell if an animal is counting or otherwise using math? What counts as ‘math’ anyway?” Indeed, in attempting to look beyond anthropocentrism we should ask “how do animals use math?” instead of “do animals use math?” because the latter question always implies “do animals do math [in the same ways that humans do math]?” For one’s ecological context determines what skills one will evolutionarily be pressured to develop. There is no need for whales in the wild to be able solve algebraic equations. Nevertheless, to assert that humans are not alone in mathematical reasoning some criteria for comparison must be established. Perhaps the most correct way that this can be done is to illustrate how we see math being done by animals.

Evidence suggests that honeybees use landmarks quantitatively when retrieving food. Researchers placed a number of markers between the hive and a food source, and when they altered the number of markers at a later time the bees showed increased difficulty locating the food source, which was still in the same spot.⁸⁹ Rats, birds, and other primates are able to differentiate between groups based on the number of items in the group and can learn to perform tasks only a specific number of times in order to attain a reward.⁹⁰ Chimpanzees can be taught to correlate our numerals with the correct group of a number of objects, such as to

⁸⁹ Raymond Nickerson *Mathematical Reasoning: Problems, Patterns, Conjectures, and Proofs* (Psychology Press, 2009) pp.24

⁹⁰ Ibid. 24-29

associate a card with the number “3” on it with the plate that has three peanuts on it.⁹¹ Using this knowledge they can even learn to recognize our numerals 1-10 in order. They can point out the order these numerals should be in even if some numbers are missing, or if they are flashed on a screen for only a second before being covered up. In the cases where they were only shown the numbers briefly, the chimpanzees were able to still correctly indicate the correct order of the numerals even if they were distracted between the time the numbers were flashed and their indication. In this respect, the chimpanzees studied even outperformed their human counterparts!⁹² So while we may in truth be without rival in performing mathematical reasoning in the ways and contexts and for the purposes our ecological context has made necessary, we cannot say that we are alone in the ability to employ rudimentary mathematical skill.

5. Self-awareness- Self-awareness is the consciousness of an individual that they are a distinct individual and the ability to recognize oneself. A common way to measure self-awareness is a “red-dot test”, where a red dot is placed on a place the animal cannot see, such as on their head or posterior. The animal is then shown to a mirror where they see their own reflection. A self-aware animal will see their reflection with the red dot on it, recognize that the reflection is indeed themselves, and use the reflection to locate and remove the dot. An animal lacking self-awareness will not recognize that the mirror is reflecting their own image and thus will not notice or try to remove the dot. Additionally, whales and dolphins have pod-specific and individual-specific songs, that latter of which functions as names do for

⁹¹ Sarah T. Boysen, Karen I. Hallberg “Primate Numerical Competence: Contributions Toward Understanding Nonhuman Cognition” *Cognitive Science* Vol 24 Issue 3 2000, pp.223-243

⁹² Ewen Callaway “Chimp Beats Students at Computer Game” *Nature*
<http://www.nature.com/news/2007/071203/full/news.2007.317.html> published December 3, 2007, accessed November 10, 2015

humans. The presence of these songs supports the existence of conceptions of the pod and the individual as distinct entities. Besides human beings, animals that we currently understand as self-aware include: chimps, macaque monkeys, rats, dolphins, and elephants.⁹³

Yet may we not call into suspicion the above methods? The simple exercise described above is biased against animals who have a different primary favored sense for understanding the world. For instance, dogs fail the red-dot test every time. They do not appear to be able to tell that their reflection is not just another animal. By this standard, dogs do not appear to be self-aware. But what if we chose to test self-awareness in a way which did not rely on the sense of sight? Marc Becoff, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado devised a different test for his canine subjects where we removed patches of snow which had been urinated on by different dogs and placed them in areas where his dog usually urinated. Jethro, his dog, preferred to urinate/mark on patches where he had marked before even if this patch was moved, and then preferred to mark the areas that other dogs had previously marked. This may imply that dogs are in some sense aware of themselves as a distinct individual, but only do so using smell, not sight.⁹⁴ This should caution us before excluding animals from this or any other category before careful study in the animals own ecological context and niche.

6&7- Social Cognition and Complex Emotional Bonds- Social cognition, or the ability to store, process, and recall information about different individuals, groups, or social settings is believed to be enabled by Von Economo (VEN) or spindle neurons in the brain. While once thought to be a uniquely human possession, VEN neurons have been identified in certain apes, monkeys,

⁹³ Benvenuti, 56
Morell, 127

⁹⁴ Benvenuti, 56

zebras, cetaceans, elephants, and hippos.⁹⁵ So at the very least we must acknowledge that all the hardware needed for varieties of social cognition are present.

Many animals live in groups held together by complex emotional bonds. These groups are different than familiar kinship groups in that they are often voluntary and dynamic. Some individuals can choose to be a part of such relationships, and can even choose to dissolve relationships, as is noted in parrot marital relationships and in male dolphin friend groups. While all relationships (humans' included) can be explained evolutionarily, what makes these relationships complex is that they consist of more than what they can be boiled down to be. While groups may be evolutionarily necessitated, why such individuals band together with each other and not with others, how the group dynamics function, and why some choose to disband signals them as something unexpected, and surprisingly human. African Elephants live in herds led by the eldest female, a role which passes to the next eldest female upon a matriarch's death. These matriarchs must learn the skills necessary for guiding their herd, and the other members must learn how to read and trust their matriarchs.⁹⁶ Animals who live in these complex communities must be able to navigate a number of changing relationships, which demand their recognizing others as individuals, themselves knowing their place in the group, and remembering information about previous interactions either experienced or witnessed that would change the dynamic of the community. These relationships must be cultivated, learned, and maintained. Animals we have observed this in include parrots, crows, jays, apes, elephants, dolphins, and arguably wasps.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid. 43

⁹⁶ Morell, 138-145

⁹⁷ Morell, 195-196, 198 Male dolphins have been observed not only to organize into small groups with no biological relationship, but also to cooperate with other groups to accomplish tasks like stealing a female. Dolphins are the only species so far (outside of human beings) to have unrelated groups cooperate and coordinate in this way.

8&9. Humor and Creative Play- Both humor and play involve the emotion of joy, and display a consciousness of the body, social cognition, an intentional control of emotion, the ability to picture in the mind what one will do in the future, and knowledge of what is in the mind of the other. Additionally, Theologian Luke Timothy Johnson notes that play is a “combination of rest and action, contemplation and action- found intensely in art and worship,” suggesting that these aspects of embodied life are importance for understanding of spirit outside of “human” experience.⁹⁸ Should it be demonstrated that humor and play are present in other member of the animal kingdom, it would further solidify that humans are not the only animals who have internal lives.

While scientists have yet to discover joking in the animal kingdom, laughter has been studied a great deal.⁹⁹ Virginia Morell devotes a whole chapter to “The Laughter of Rats” in her book *Animal Wise* in which she explores Jaak Panksepp’s research on play, laughter, and joy in rats.¹⁰⁰ Janskepp has identified “sounds of laughter” similar to those of young children the animals made when tickled, and Dr. Marina Ross at the University of Portsmouth has documented similar phenomena in African and Asian apes, suggesting that the regions of the brain responsible for the subjective feelings of joy and cheer are shared between many different species.¹⁰¹ Play in particular, as a form of interaction that is “at once spontaneous and highly ordered,” can be observed in all kinds of animals including mammals and birds and requires

⁹⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Revelatory Body* (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdman’s Publishing Company, 2015) p.64-10 chapters “Spirit and Body” and “The Body at Play”. Quote from p.106.

⁹⁹ A possible exception is Kiko, the signing gorilla. Anecdotal evidence claims she once tied her handler’s shoelaces together and then signed the word “chase”, resembling a mutual enjoyment of slap-stick comedy between species. (http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/features/2014/the_humor_code/do_animals_have_a_sense_of_humor_new_evidence_suggests_that_all_mammals.html)

¹⁰⁰ Morell, 117-129

¹⁰¹ Marina Davila Ross , Michael J Owren, and Elke Zimmermann. “The Evolution of Laughter in Great Apes and Humans.” *Communicative & Integrative Biology* 3, no.2 (2010): 191–194.

negotiation and recognition of unspoken rules and the self-control to allow play by adhering to them.¹⁰²

10&11 Empathy and Altruism- Empathy is the ability to recognize the emotional state of another and respond accordingly, and altruism is the ability of an individual to express uninterested concern for another. These traits are examined together because both require a sense of self, a sense of other, and a sense of concern for the other's wellbeing that supersedes one's own evolutionary mandate to survive and reproduce. Each have long been thought to be exclusively human traits. Emory University's Dr. Frans de Waal, however, has shown that several different nonhuman species often reconcile after fighting, are able to console one another after a loss, are able to work in teams even when one member gains no immediate benefit from the task, and have senses of fairness.¹⁰³ Just one example of the length of nonhuman altruism is the 2013 instance of two mice who were fed to a snake in a Chinese zoo. When one mouse was taken by the snake, the other, though unrelated, proceeded to jump on the snake and tried to snatch his friend from the snake's jaws.¹⁰⁴

12. Awareness of Death and Grieving- Many animals have expressed an awareness of death and grieving practices. Chimpanzees, gorillas, crows, cows, whales, and dolphins all spend time with their dead.¹⁰⁵ Elephants, however, demonstrate some of the most compelling and well-known grieving practices. Elephants have been observed to assist and hold vigil over their dying family members, as well as vigil over the bodies of deceased relations. Their behavior patterns when

¹⁰² Quote from Johnson, 89. Also Morell, 120. As an example, chimpanzees have "play faces" which communicate playful intent, allowing actions which in other social situations might be unwelcome or interpreted as aggression. See, Lisa A. Parr and Bridget M. Waller, "Understanding chimpanzee facial expression: insights into the evolution of communication". *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 1(3), 221–228. <http://doi.org/10.1093/scan/ns1031>

¹⁰³ Frans de Wall, *Moral Behavior in Animals* at TEDxPeachtree, Atlanta, GA. November 2011

¹⁰⁴ Helen Collins, "The Moment a Brave Mouse Tried to Rescue his Friend From the Jaws of a Giant Snake by Jumping on its Head...and Failed." *The Daily Mail* August 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Morell, 148

encountering even skeletal remains is consistent. They approach cautiously and then examine the bones with their trunks and feet, feeling the crevices and hollows, paying special attention to tusks and skulls.¹⁰⁶ They stand over remains of known relatives, sometimes for up to an hour, and even differentiate between the bones of elephants versus bones of other species.¹⁰⁷ Such behavior demonstrates an awareness of the change that death brings, memories and internal experience, and a sense of self and others as selves even when their physical form is absent.

13. Moral Sensibility- Moral sensibility may be the most difficult of these traits and abilities to assess in those with whom we cannot communicate. Traditional Aristotelian and Kantian ethics demands that one must be able to reflect on their own actions and motivations to be rightfully considered a moral agent. In short, metacognition is required for a nonhuman animal to be recognized as having moral sensibility, and we currently lack any reliable way to evaluate the metacognition of nonhuman animals. In *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Ethics*, Mark Rowlands critiques what he sees as the “miracle of the meta” that privileges metacognition as a near-magical quality.¹⁰⁸ One may perform good acts on a morally good impulse and have a morally good reason to comply with their impulses without being conscious of those reasons and still be rightfully considered a moral agent. According to Rowland’s argument, the metacognitive process of reflecting upon the principles and motivations behind a possible course of action are not a silver bullet for establishing consciousness and a free and accountable will.

Rowlands’ argument comes close to identifying an anthropocentric bias in the Kantian and Aristotelian philosophical schools. Identifying metacognition with consciousness, and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 149

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 150-1

¹⁰⁸ Mark Rowlands, “Animals That Act For Moral Reasons” in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

requiring this consciousness to be considered a moral agent, denies a possible multiplicity of consciousness. They inadvertently hold up the form of consciousness and reflection that the majority of humans employ - the way the majority of humans process their internal feelings and impulses - as the benchmark for evaluating the actions and thoughts of all other beings. They measure all creation by a human criteria. In making room for an unconscious reasoning for cultivating virtue, Rowlands is also making room for a multiplicity of moral reasonings and processes not yet understood by humanity but still very present in nonhuman animals.

14. Social Learning and Culture- Social learning refers to the process of ideas and practices being taught and passed along in specific populations without outside assistance. Culture then is the product and process of social learning in a distinct population. Many animals have been observed demonstrating this capacity. Apes in captivity can teach and learn novel solutions to problems to and from each other such that different populations exhibit different ways of approaching similar situations. This is also seen in the wild where geographically isolated chimpanzee clans have different patterns of tool use. Different pods of cetaceans have distinct songs that have been passed down through generations which must be learned and taught by younger pod members, and pods in different regions exhibit different 'accents' that enable researchers to determine where an animal lives and its pod by listening to its song. The presence of population-specific behavior passed along by teaching or imitation constitutes rudiments of culture, disqualifying social learning and culture as defining human exceptionalism.

15. Political Affiliation- African elephants present an interesting case study for political affiliation in nonhuman animals. Each group is governed by the eldest matriarch who has the responsibility of evaluating perceived threats to their group, and the group looks to their

matriarch for guidance as to how to react to arising situations.¹⁰⁹ Each group have other groups with whom they are allied or opposed to, and these groups have been observed to kidnap or abuse younger elephants in opposing groups during territorial disputes. During power vacuums after the death of the matriarch there are often upheavals while a new matriarch is established, and these groups can splinter into separate relational groups.¹¹⁰ The experience of the matriarchs directly affects the safety and stability of the groups, as younger matriarchs lack the experience and temperament that comes with age. Groups that are forced to have younger matriarchs are not as safe or stable as groups with their older females intact.¹¹¹ Other nonhuman animals such as apes, dolphins, and canines also operate in politically stratified societies.

16. Knowing What Is In the Mind of the Other- There are two main ways to determine if an animal believes that another individual has a mind and has the ability to anticipate what the other may be thinking or planning. Those two methods are to observe the presence of either teamwork or deception in a species. Team work has been noted previously, both first-order coordination between individual unrelated dolphins in groups and second-order cooperation between different “allied” groups. Group hunting has also been observed many times in chimpanzees, though it is yet unclear to what degree the hunts are coordinated or cooperative. Chimpanzees also have the ability to ask human handlers for help in completing a task they could not complete by themselves, although they have yet to return the favor for their handlers.

What is more intriguing, however, is the pervasiveness of deception in the animal kingdom. Deception is a good phenomenon to look for because it involves awareness of one’s self, awareness of others, awareness of the reasonable perception of other individuals, and a

¹⁰⁹ Morell, 138-9

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 140-1

¹¹¹ Ibid. 154

projection of a precise desired future result. It is especially worth noting that the art of conscious deception is found even outside of mammal species. Scrub jays, archerfish, and dogs have been observed to deceive other individuals or their human counterparts.¹¹² Additional evidence for this phenomena is the fact aforementioned that lowland gorillas edit their communication, conscious that their young have different linguistic capabilities than their peers.

¹¹² Benvenuti, 32-4, 44-5, Morell, 55-58

Appendix Two:

The Spiritual Lives of Animals

Exploring the potential spiritual lives of nonhuman animals is difficult in part because exploring our own spiritual lives in any quantifiable way is difficult. To make a case that animals enjoy a life of spiritual experience I will first briefly describe current research on what constitutes spiritual experience biologically in humans and then demonstrate analogous structures in nonhuman animals to show that phenomenologically there is no longer any reason to deny the possibility of humanity's exclusive claim of "capacity for God."

In his book *The Spiritual Doorway in the Brain: A Neurologist's Search for the God Experience* Dr. Kevin Nelson dissects human spiritual experience to illustrate what happens in our bodies during times of near death experiences – those times when spiritual experience becomes the most lucid and when most feel closest to God or a transcendent reality. Nelson explains that we have three states of consciousness: wakefulness, REM sleep, and non-REM sleep. His book argues that the phenomena we call spiritual experience occurs when wakefulness and REM sleep overlap, when the neurological switch that shifts our brain activity from one to the other gets stuck in the middle.¹¹³ The motivator for this experience is not purely cerebral, however. These experiences begin with the arousal system in the more primitive brainstem, and the chemical impulses are processed by the limbic system in our brain, the system which stores and regulates memory as well as our feelings of value, reward, and fear. Because of this observation the phenomena of spiritual experience appears more egalitarian in respect to species. The trigger for these experiences is a part of the brain that at least all fish, bird, reptile, and

¹¹³ Kevin Nelson, *The Spiritual Doorway in the Brain: A Neurologist's Search for the God Experience* (New York: Plume, 2012) 10, 37-58

mammals have in common. These impulses are then interpreted through the lenses of memory and cultural conditioning to form a visual narrative experience which also affects our sense of self.¹¹⁴ Nelson goes on to note, “I strongly suspect that mystical feelings could exist in many other mammals that are endowed with a limbic system that is very much like our own.”¹¹⁵

We know that some of our fellow hominid species practiced ritualized burial in ways that hint at a spirituality outside our own species. Jane Goodall describes the chimpanzee waterfall dance as a spiritual practice, or at least one reflecting spiritual experience.¹¹⁶ More recently, scientists have observed what appears to be a chimpanzee ritual akin to altar-building we have found present in our own religious past.¹¹⁷ This said, spiritual experience is not limited to our immediate biological relations. Whales provide a compelling example of the probability of nonhuman spiritual experience. Because whales live in the ocean but must breathe air like we do, their brainstems do not control automatic breathing like ours. Instead, whales and other maritime mammals must be conscious of each breath. The need to be conscious of each breath means that for all intents and purposes whales can be seen as living in a state of mindfulness which is sought after in many contemplative forms of religion. Their need to be constantly conscious also means that whales do not sleep as we understand it, needing both to choose to breathe and to spend time in REM sleep to survive. To achieve this balance whales rest one hemisphere of the brain at a time.¹¹⁸ Returning to Dr. Nelson’s research, whales spend a large amount of time in the borderlands between wakefulness and REM sleep- the state identifiable with spiritual experience. What this suggests is that at the very least many nonhuman animals demonstrate the capacity if

¹¹⁴ Nelson, 93-5, 59-90

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 258

¹¹⁶ Benvenuti, 154

¹¹⁷ Hjalmar S. Kühl and Ammie K. Kalan, et al “Chimpanzee Accumulative Stone Throwing” in *Scientific Reports* 6, article 22219. February 29, 2016.

¹¹⁸ Benvenuti, 132-3

not the phenomena of spiritual experience. The human claim to an exclusive capacity for God is a contentious one at best.

We can ask the broader question, “How does one define spiritual experience in a verifiable or quantifiable way, even for humans?” Is it an independently experienced phenomena, or is it normal psychological experience stimulated by or in response to religious, supernatural, or transcendental thoughts, objects, or realities? Beyond Near Death Experiences, are feelings of awe properly called religious or spiritual experiences? Are feelings of existential anxiety spiritual experiences? Our difficulty in answering these questions of our own selves and experiences should likewise caution us against making declarations about the experiences of other animals who do life on Earth very differently and whose internal lives we have little access to of yet.

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