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Humans, Animals, and the Image of God: An Examination of Difference in Kind and Difference of Degree Arguments for Human Uniqueness and Superiority

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Abstract

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By Brian P. Trepanier

Image of God language from the Genesis 1 account of creation has often been used to justify human superiority over nature. A significant problem with this approach is that the text does not identify what it means to be created *imago dei* and throughout history the God-like characteristic associated with humans has changed. This paper is an examination of the historical and traditional uses of image of God language along with modern reinterpretations of these perspectives that use both difference in kind and difference of degree arguments. In addition, this paper examines how claims for human superiority are undermined in light of modern scientific advances in biology, ethology, and archaeology and whether or not image of God language should be used in or is helpful for religious discourse in the present day.

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I. An Image Problem

In general, humans have described the relation between humanity and nature in two distinct ways. The first is that humanity exists apart from nature. There is something intrinsic to human beings that sets them apart from the rest of creation. The second relation is that humanity is part of nature and accordingly humanity is, "an animal among fellow animals." In this way there is nothing absolutely distinct about humanity.[1] It is precisely these two anthropologies that have led to the two major Christian interpretations of what it means to be created i*mago dei*, in the image of God. The first interpretation represents humanity as apart from nature and of having a difference in kind from the rest of nature. *Imago dei* can also be interpreted as describing humans as being different from nature and animals only by a matter of degree.

The question of what it means to be created *imago dei* has been debated throughout the ages. The text of Genesis 1:26 states, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'."[2] This text has provoked a variety of interpretations about what the concept of *imago dei* might mean. The multiplicity of interpretations is a result of the fact that, "It is difficult if not impossible to determine whether a text ever had an original, uninterpreted

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[1] Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 52.
[2] Genesis 1:26 NIV

meaning; more often than not, the qualitative distinction between this meaning and later, interpretative expositions is untenable."[3] There is a vast amount of Christian biblical commentary whose substance shows that any literal meaning of a text fluctuates depending on the time period and without access to the author any attempt to establish authorial intent can only be an approximation of the original meaning. That is not say that there was not an original meaning or particular message that the text was supposed to impart, but access to that particular point is impossible.[4] Even more problematic is that the Bible itself derived from a process of reflection and revision because, "as the evidence of inner-biblical exegesis attests, the oral and written words of a tradition continually interacted with readers, listeners, transmitters, copyists, and editors to generate new words, new meanings, and new texts."[5] The result is that no single value can be derived from it.[6] It is not surprising that there has not been one definitive reading of Genesis 1:26 throughout history. Christian interpretation of what it means to be created in the image of God has varied based on the individual contexts of the interpreters. However, within the Christian tradition, the notion that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God typically represents a difference in kind between humanity and the rest of nature.[7] It is precisely this viewpoint that is exemplified in the patristic fathers,

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[3] Jeremy Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It: The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 11.
[4] Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*, 9.
[5] Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*, 9-10.
[6] Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*, 11.
[7] Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, 52.

medieval interpretation, and even continues up to the present day. The characteristic that separates humanity is often different; however, a variety of authors describe a situation in which humanity's creation is unique and, moreover, superior to creation's other denizens by containing an aspect that does not exist in the rest of creation.

The goal of this work is to determine whether the concept of *imago dei* is better interpreted as a difference of degree or a difference of kind and to decide whether or not any interpretation is useful in light of modern science. It is necessary to examine historical interpretations to understand how each functioned and use that information to see if those interpretations are accurate with regards to scientific discoveries. This will also provide the general framework for why and how most modern Christians understand their relation to the world. Contemporary understandings of the image of God will also be discussed as a way to show how the traditional Christian understandings have influenced modern interpretations of an absolute distinction along with other interpretations that see a difference in degree. In addition, what it means to be animal must be defined so that it is possible to determine whether or not humans should properly be included within this definition. Modern biology and ethology will allow for this characterization and division using a set of guidelines and definitions that can be applied to every living thing. Lastly, other approaches will be briefly considered to determine whether or not the term *imago dei* is useful in contemporary discussions of human animal relations.

II. Church Fathers and the Difference in Kind

St. Augustine of Hippo, writing in the 4th and 5th centuries CE, provides an early Christian understanding of the distinctiveness of humanity. In the *Literal Commentary on Genesis* Augustine notes that the statement in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image and likeness," is followed by, "so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground," because these animals are irrational. According to the Genesis account:

> We are to understand that man is made in the image of God in that part of his nature wherein he surpasses the brute beasts. This is, of course, his reason or mind or intelligence, or whatever we wish to call it.[8]

For Augustine, human beings alone have reason and it logically follows that this distinctive characteristic of humanity is what grants human beings the ability to dominate and rule over nature. Not only do humans have the ability to dominate or rule, but they should also exercise this ability. Augustine's understanding that reason is that which enables humans to rule over those things that lack reason is

[8] St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis (Ancient Christian Writers)*, vol. 1 of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (New York, N.Y.: Newman Press, 1982), 96.

explicated in his book the *City of God*. The view that Augustine holds is a description of his view of the natural order. *City of God* states that:

> He did not intend that his rational creature, made in his own image, should have lordship over any but irrational creatures: not man over man but man over beasts. Hence, the first just men were established as shepherds of flocks, rather than kings of men. This was done so that in this way God might indicate what the order of nature requires...[9]

Gillian Clark notes that the focus of Augustine's concern, "is for human hierarchies, but it is clear why he did not think he needed to argue further for human rule over animals."[10] Reason rules over non-reason because it is the faculty of intellect that allows humans to tame animals. The reverse situation, however, is not true. Animals do not have the ability to tame human beings, even though they are often superior when it comes to physical strength and speed. For Augustine, "It must, then, be reason or intelligence in which humans surpass animals."[11] It is clear that Augustine is arguing for a difference in kind between humanity and the rest of nature that is based on the concept of *imago dei*. This difference is not only a description of what it means to be created in the image of

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[9] St. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 942.
[10] Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto, eds. *Animals On the Agenda: Questions About Animals For Theology and Ethics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 73.
[11] Linzey and Yamamoto, eds. *Animals On the Agenda*, 69.

God but also carries ethical weight. Human beings, as the sole possessors of reason, are meant to rule over nature and therefore animals are used to benefit those who rule.

St. Thomas Aquinas, who wrote at the beginning of the scholastic period in the 13th Century CE, provides what can be best classified as the dominant Christian mode of thinking about animals since that period. Aquinas both upholds and builds upon the difference in kind between human beings and other creatures that is seen in Augustine. In the *Summa Theologiae* Part I, Question 93, Article 2 Aquinas addresses the issue of whether the image of God is to be found in irrational creatures. Aquinas states in his response that:

> Some things are like to God first and most commonly because they exist; secondly, because they live; and thirdly because they know or understand; and these last, as Augustine says, "approach so near to God in likeness, that among all creatures nothing comes nearer to Him." It is clear, therefore, that intellectual creatures alone, properly speaking, are made in God's image.[12]

It is precisely the fact that humans have reason or an intellectual nature that sets them apart from animals which are guided and act on their instinct.[13] Human beings are the only creatures that have a rational capacity and the distinction between animals and humanity is only visible through the exercise of this

[12] ST I.93.2 FODP
[13] Linzey and Yamamoto, eds. *Animals On the Agenda*, 85.

capacity. This intellectual nature is the result of the distinction that Aquinas makes between different sorts of souls. Plants only have what Aquinas calls the vegetative soul, which has three powers. These powers are the power to grow, make use of food, and reproduce. Animals' souls have a vegetative soul along with what he calls the sensitive soul. The sensitive soul has the five exterior senses along with four interior senses, which are the common sensory power, the imagination, the estimative sense, and the memorative sense. Finally, humans have both the vegetative and sensible souls along with a rational soul.[14] Both humans and animals act out of a desire for the good, or sensible desire. However, humans have rational desire that is guided by practical reason which separates them from animals. Human desire guided by practical wisdom, "is the ability to moderate and direct the desires in ways that allow human beings to flourish fully as human beings, to find the happiness appropriate to human beings."[15] Human beings have control over their desires in a way the other animals do not.

Aquinas' understanding of the difference between human beings and animals raises the question: What are the implications for the treatment of animals that he draws from his arguments? Aquinas in ST II-II.64.1 discusses the lawfulness of killing animals:

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[14] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology: God, Humans and Other Animals*, ed. Celia E. Deane-Drummond and David Clough (Ithaca, N.Y.: SCM Press, 2009), 25.
[15] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 30.

> There is no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is. Now the order of things is such that the imperfect are for the perfect, even as in the process of generation nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection. Hence it is that just as in the generation of a man there is first a living thing, then an animal, and lastly a man, so too things, like the plants, which merely have life, are all alike for animals, and all animals are for man. Wherefore it is not unlawful if a man uses plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man, as the Philosopher states.[16]

Aquinas' understanding of the world draws heavily on the concept of *scala naturae* or what is sometimes referred to as the great chain of being. From this viewpoint the universe is divinely ordered and each element within the universe has an ordered place within the hierarchy.[17] Both animals and humans have an unalterable and particular way of life that is ordered towards the perfection in God. For Aquinas, the perfection of the universe is, "marked essentially by the diversity of natures, by which the diverse grades of goodness are filled up," and the fact that the universe would not be perfect, "if only one grade of goodness were found in things."[18] Aquinas is promoting a viewpoint that legitimizes the instrumental use of animals. God has ordered nature in such a way that plants are available for the good of animals and humans and also that plants and

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[16] ST II-II.64.1 FODP
[17] Linzey and Yamamoto, eds. *Animals On the Agenda*, 82.
[18] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 24.

animals are available for use by humans for the good of humans. When humans pursue human goods, "it is legitimate for the more perfect to use the less perfect because the good of the more perfect has a greater claim to be realized than the good of the less perfect."[19] Andrew Linzey summarizes this by noting the three elements that represent the relation between human and animals. First, animals are irrational; they possess no mind or reason like humans do. Second, they exist to serve human purposes and ends that are directed towards the human good. Third, animals lack moral status apart from when there is human interest involved.[20] The strength of Aquinas' argument by using the concept of *scala naturae* and absolute gradations in nature is that human distinctiveness lies in an individual capacity. The human intellectual capacity, because it is further up the ladder, means that any creature under humans can be used for the good of humans. However, this hierarchy also implies that humans should also exhibit a certain measure of humility because they are not at the top of the ladder either. God and the heavenly beings exist at higher levels of perfection than humans. Therefore, while the universe is hierarchical, "it is by no means anthropocentric."[21]

The unique capacity that signifies humans were created in the image of God in both Augustine and Aquinas relies on rationality or the intellectual capacity of humans. While this theoretically provides a sharp line that can be

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[19] Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge Our Moral Universe* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 128.
[20] Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, University of Illinois Press ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 14.
[21] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 24.

drawn between humans and animals there is also a danger in their argumentation. If it can be shown that animals exhibit these capacities then both the worldviews of Augustine and Aquinas fall short of their descriptions and arguments. The difference that they are proposing would not actually be one of kind. Intellect and rationality may be a measure of degree instead. In order to determine the coherence of their perspectives a study of animals and their capacities is necessary. The failure of both Augustine and Aquinas' arguments based on the fact that reason and intellectual capacity are not distinctly human capacity will be shown in chapter four. However, before this is done it is helpful to examine how both Augustine and Aquinas' search for a distinctive human characteristic has progressed in contemporary approaches to find a distinctive human capacity that separates them from animals.

III. Contemporary Approaches to The Difference in Kind

The search for a distinct human characteristic that can be associated with the *imago dei* has continued from the time of Aquinas all the way to the present. Instead of relying on the capacities of language or reason, theological differences are used to construct the arguments for distinctiveness. The difference between humans and animals is often formulated in theological terms, such as humans having a special task or election; even the idea of divine incarnation generates a human distinction from the rest of nature.

Andrew Linzey, in his book *Animal Theology*, attempts to formulate an understanding of humans as unique or special because they are created in the image of God. Linzey, however, doesn't build upon Augustine and Aquinas' proposals that the human intellectual capacity is the difference. As someone who is concerned with the welfare of animals he wants to establish something about humanity that is both distinct and apart from nature while also challenging the traditional views that the world is for human use or pleasure. Linzey's formulation begins by noting that if God is the Creator and sustainer of the whole world, "then it is inconceivable that God is not also a co-sufferer in the world of non-human creatures as well."[22] The Christian tradition has obscured this according to Linzey because of the scholastic tradition of stating that animal

[22] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 50.

suffering isn't morally significant. Animals were and are used as a means of achieving human goods because animals are considered lower in the divine ordering of the universe.

The second step that Linzey makes is to associate priesthood with participation in God's redeeming presence in the world instead of solely as a human-God relation. He states that, "if Christian priesthood derives its authority from Christ, as the focus of God's own self-definition, then it should also follow that priesthood is an extension of the suffering, and therefore also redeeming, activity of God in our world."[23] Since God's presence is expanded to those animals that suffer then God's redeeming power should also be expanded and this generates a wider and more encompassing definition of priesthood. Linzey then suggests that the priest is the icon of Christ and should represent, "the love of God focused in Christ." This love or power is most accurately expressed in suffering service.[24]

According to this argument, priesthood involves the removal of suffering and pain from the whole of creation in a way that is often self-sacrificial. Linzey is espousing a notion of the image of God where:

> The uniqueness of humanity consists in its ability to become the servant species. To exercise its full humanity as co-participants and co-workers with God in the redemption of the world. This view challenges the traditional notions that the world was made

[23] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 52.
[24] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 54.

> simply for human use or pleasure, that its purpose consists in serving the human species, or that the world exists largely in an instrumentalist relationship to human beings. Only the most tenacious adherence to the passibility of God may be sufficient to redeem us from our own profoundly arrogant humanistic conceptions of our place in the universe.[25]

Linzey is arguing that humans have a special status because they can exhibit self-conscious sacrifice. He believes this type of action is not exhibited in other animals. Humans have the ability to act in a way that is self-sacrificial. We can acknowledge the suffering of others and respond to that suffering. Often times the response to that suffering requires that we sacrifice certain individual goods to help the other. Humans invite extra suffering on themselves in order to end the suffering of others (whether human or animal) and are fully conscious of their actions. For Linzey:

> Sensitivity to suffering (and with it compassion, empathy, mercy, loving forgiveness) are all the hallmarks of priesthood. Only when we can say that we too have entered—however fleetingly—into

[25] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 57.

> the suffering of Christ in the suffering of all creatures can we claim to have entered into the priestly nature of our humanity.[26]

Human creation in the image of God is a result of our unique capacity to be sensitive to the suffering of others. Both animals and humans are sensitive to their own individual suffering, but humans can recognize and respond to the suffering of others. It is our ability to enter into the suffering of others that marks humans as being created in the image of God. The ethical implications of human uniqueness as a result of being the servant species are quite clear. The first is that human beings have no reason to see the human-animal relation as a means to an end. The second implication is that because sacrifice is part of the human role then human interests no longer should automatically come before the interests of animals. Human beings should invite the suffering of others and as a result take what should rightly be, "our share of the burden of suffering which lies upon the world."[27]

Linzey's argument raises the question of whether or not his distinction is true. If it can be shown that another species exhibits some aspect of conscious self-sacrifice to end suffering in others then the difference in kind he is drawing between humans and animals doesn't actually exist. An in-depth study of animals in the next chapter will show that the argument that only humans exhibit this self-sacrificial or altruistic behavior does not hold up in light of modern experiments and observations of animals. However, before we examine

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[26] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 56.
[27] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 61.

how and why Linzey's argument fails because of scientific discoveries we should first look at other contemporary approaches to the difference in kind.

Robert Wennberg provides a case for a difference in kind based on a capacity or ability that he argues humans possess that animals do not. He believes that the fundamental capacity that sets humans apart is their religious capacity; humans can respond to and worship God. This capacity is not isolated or independent, but instead presupposes and relies on other capacities, "which may or may not represent a difference in kind."[28] These foundational capacities include a basic level of conceptual ability necessary to comprehend the idea of God and a moral understanding that includes the ability to understand ascriptions of goodness, sinfulness, and guilt. There is also the presupposition that humans are capable of commitment to spiritual ideals and that we have second-order desires and beliefs that are necessary for wanting to enter into a redeeming process. Furthermore, a crucial ability of humans is our "meaning-producing capacity," which is described as, "our ability to understand the world and our place in it in religious terms, to interpret who and what we are by reference to the transcendent."[29] He argues that this capacity is uniquely human and that it is present in all peoples, at all times, and throughout every culture. It is precisely this way that Wennberg thinks the image of God can best be understood. The idea of being made in the image and likeness of God implies two things. Humans are created in such a way, "that they can commune with God, and

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[28] Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 208.
[29] Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 208-209.

consequently they can be transformed into the moral 'likeness' of God."[30] Does the human capacity for religious communion actually separate humans from animals and is this theological claim coherent? As we will see in the next chapter, archeological evidence will serve as a refutation to this argument for a difference in kind, but the theological issue will be addressed here.

The theological problem for the difference in kind argument provided by Wennberg is that it is not biblically supported. David Clough correctly notes that, "the Bible repeatedly affirms that all of creation participates in the praise of God and each living thing has a part in God's purposes."[31] There are a variety of Biblical texts, including Psalm 148, Job 38-41, and Romans 8, that support the idea that all creation places itself in reference to the transcendent and wants to enter the redeeming process. The notion that all creation should praise God is explicit in Psalm 148:

> Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and cedars, wild animals and cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children. Let them

[30] Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 210.
[31] Barton and Wilkinson, eds., *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, 153.

> praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.[32]

The idea that somehow humans are the only creatures who place themselves within a reference to the transcendent is incorrect. All of creation is called to praise the Lord in a way that is appropriate to their nature and relation to God. Wennberg may accept the notion that all creation praises God and places itself in reference to the transcendent, however, he may argue that human beings are the only ones who participate or want to enter into the redeeming process of God's work. The desire for redemption could be the necessary separation between humanity and the rest of nature. A problem with this theological argument can be found in the New Testament.

In Paul's epistle to the Romans he addresses the relation of creation apart from humans and the redeeming work of God. It states that:

> For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated for its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of

[32] Ps 148:5-13 NIV.

> God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.[33]

All of creation is "groaning" for redemption. It is not just humanity that wants to enter into the liberating work of God. All of creation is both waiting and hoping for the redeeming process to occur, which for Christians happens through the work of Christ. One can look at Job 38-41, when God speaks from the whirlwind to Job, for further support. God rejects human superiority by noting the ways in which parts of creation are better than man. God also rejects any human ability to fully know human-nature relations and human-God relations because only God was there at the moment of creation. Nature is so vast and diverse it is incomprehensible to humans. Only God can understand all the processes and laws of nature. To argue that somehow animals do not want to be transformed or commune with God is theologically and biblically problematic.

There is another way to understand the image of God that promotes a situation where human beings are somehow separate from the rest of nature. This is typically referred to as the process of election whereby God sets humans apart and places them in a unique relationship with God. Just as Israel was separated from other nations and given a special status because of God's election, the same is true of humans as being created in the image of God. There is no specific attribute, ability, or capacity that creates the qualitative distinction; instead it is true precisely because God chose humans. For Christians, the notion

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[33] Rom 8:18-22 NIV.

of election revolves around the incarnation. This means that, "all Christian theology must be understood through the person of Jesus Christ, and creation is merely the external basis of the covenant of grace God establishes through Christ with human beings."[34]

The distinction between humans and other creatures is established for Christians in the fact that God becomes human in the person of Jesus. It is an absolute distinction because God did not become any other living creature; humans were elected in this way. The privileging of humans in this way, as a difference in kind based on God's choice, is both persuasive and appealing. It takes one of the most significant events for Christians and revolves the Genesis 1 narrative around it in such a way that cannot be disproven. It becomes a matter of faith, instead of a claim that can be verified by fact. However, the idea that God is granting humans a special status or privileging humans because of the incarnation runs into problems as well.

While the incarnation may imply that all humans are the elect and created in the image of God it becomes clear that this demarcation is not so simply or easily made when we look back at historical interpretations of the incarnation. The Acts of the Apostles describes a debate about the necessity of conforming to Jewish law for those who want to worship the Lord. It narrates this debate by noting that:

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[34] Barton and Wilkinson, eds., *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, 154.

> Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses." The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the Gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."[35]

This text can be summed up as a debate about whether the incarnation was an event where God became a Jew or whether the incarnation was an event where God became human. The language of election could either have been very inclusive or exclusive depending on the decision made during this debate. This is not the only time we see a problem with an incarnational perspective with regards to election. The incarnation has God becoming a male human being, not a female human being. In order to make the incarnation inclusive the maleness

[35] Acts 15:5-11 NIV.

of Christ needs to be deemphasized and the humanness of Christ needs to be emphasized. However, this has not been true throughout history. For Aquinas, man was properly in the image of God and this was further reinforced by God's choosing to become incarnate in a male.[36]

The use of incarnational language has obviously been expanded from its most literal sense. The demarcating factors have been both contested and redrawn to the point where election refers to all human beings. A problem is that these distinctions can be seen as arbitrary distinctions that human beings draw themselves. If we do not just draw the line at male Jews and are willing to expand the barrier to eventually include all humans then why not expand it to all creation? Incarnation and the image of God does not need to, "demarcate an absolute distinction between human beings and the rest of creation."[37] The language of election therefore works as a difference in kind just as easily as it fails. If one grants the logic that we can expand the notion or distinctiveness of God being a human to God becoming a creature then the absolute separation between human beings becomes not only one of degree, but not a distinction at all. The image of God becomes a completely inclusive term in this understanding of election.

This discussion of the image of God as a difference in kind has primarily focused on how those claims fail in light of biblical and theological claims. However, the theological approaches to the difference in kind argument cannot be definitively disproven on these same grounds because they are interpretive

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[36] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 141.
[37] Barton and Wilkinson, eds., *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, 155.

rather than scientific discussions. The attempt to make a difference in kind argument based on the notion of image of God has been difficult. The theological challenge is difficult because while there are texts that refute the difference in kind there are also other texts that support it including Psalm 8. When speaking of humans it refers to God as having, "made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet."[38] Overall, however, the contemporary difference in kind arguments seem to run into a variety of theological problems. The question remains of whether or not animals exhibit any of the characteristics or capacities that have been previously described either by the church fathers or contemporary theorists in light of modern scientific research and experimentation.

[38] Ps 8:5-6 NIV.

IV. Scientific and Rhetorical Insights on the Human and Animal Divide

The argument that humanity is distinct from the rest of nature has been and is the traditional mode of thinking for many Christians. Even Linzey, an animal activist, is trying to establish a notion of the image of God that is both unique to humans and can only be actualized when humans commit themselves to helping animals. The capacity or characteristic of being created in the image of God has been interpreted in different ways by many different authors. While Augustine and Aquinas developed a human-animal distinction based in reason and rationality, other capacities have been hypothesized as the distinction between humans and animals. Some distinctions that have been made include tool making, cultural learning, creative problem solving, species-specific language, emotions, and self-awareness.[39] The process of identifying what the *imago dei* represents is both an old and ongoing process of setting humanity apart from nature.

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[39] James L. Gould, *Ethology: The Mechanisms and Evolution of Behavior* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 482-484.

Given that there has traditionally been a movement to set humanity apart from animals it raises the question: What exactly do we mean when we use the term animal? Since *imago dei* is traditionally used as something that separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom, the term animal refers primarily to nonhuman animals. It does not, in general, refer to either humans or plants. Also, while there is no single criterion for making the distinction between plants and animals there is a set of criteria used by most scientists. First, animals must actively acquire food because it is not produced internally. Second, animals have a sensory or nervous systems that allows them to respond to stimuli. Third, they have locomotion and specialized means of achieving locomotion. Fourth, they have a well-defined shape and their cellular structure is enclosed by a delicate membrane rather than cellulose.[40] According to the criteria there are at least 2 million species of animals on this planet.

By defining animal in this way it also helps us define what it means to be human, namely that to be human means that someone is part of the human species. What does it mean to be part of the human species? In principle the definition of species should be based, "in terms of reproductive capability and ecological niche."[41] To be human is to be able to reproduce and generate fertile offspring and to respond to the environment in a way that is typical of

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[40] Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 25.
[41] Jonathan Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee: Apes, People, and Their Genes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 186.

'humanness.'[42] From a common sense perspective it seems quite easy to distinguish human beings from the rest of nature. However, while the classical Christian view has upheld a significant human-animal divide, the distinction between humans and animals has not been upheld very strongly in practice. The science behind how we understand human and animal begins to blur with rhetoric and politics when one group of humans is confronted by another group of outsiders. Instead of acknowledging that the introduction of this group induces anxiety for the traditional way of life, humans find excuses to hate each other and, "are driven to fabricate an enemy as a scapegoat to bear the burden of denied enmity."[43] Rather than acknowledging we don't like another group of humans, we dehumanize them as a means of justifying conflict.

Sam Keen's *Faces of the Enemy* shows many examples of how the dehumanization of the other, the enemy, is a major mode of justifying war and dominance. This sort of imagery is used because:

> If the enemy can be relegated to the domain of nature, it follows from the logic of our supernatural metaphysic, that he is a means, an *it*, a bit of raw material with which we are morally entitled to do anything we desire. Indeed, as the bearers of reason we have a

[42] That is not to say that an infertile human is not human, but rather the theoretical combination of half of their genetic material with another would end up producing offspring that are genetically human and also fertile.
[43] Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 10-11.

> moral obligation to tame the bestial powers and put matter to good use.[44]

Human beings and societies have appropriated the instrumental view of animals and use this viewpoint as a way to associate other human groups and cultures with animality. In taking this step the outside group of humans can be treated and used any way that seems appropriate. The human animal-distinction that appears so simple does not seem as strong or real if it is manipulated for the purpose of dehumanization. We define ourselves as superior to nature while at the same time identifying humans who should fit within our definition as part of nature. They are construed as animal even though they are human. A good example of this is a piece of propaganda artwork produced by the Soviet Union in *Faces of the Enemy*.[45] It shows two ape-like creatures sitting on stools, one smoking a cigarette and the other drinking. One of the 'apes' has a gun in his hand and the other has a club or baton. What makes this piece dehumanizing is the fact that both have military helmets on that say U.S. The U.S. is being represented in a way that is inferior to the U.S.S.R. in this image and by using the military helmets it further reinforces an us-against-them mentality. Dehumanization allows the moral obligations we have to other human beings to be rejected because they are considered animal and not human.

The act of dehumanization has not solely been about warfare. The term chimpanzee has been used as a racial insult and a means of denying someone

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[44] Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*, 135.
[45] Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*, 113.

their humanity. Jonathan Marks notes that likening the Irish to chimps, which the Victorian novelist Charles Kingsley did by writing about the "white chimpanzees" of Ireland, results in the denial of their, "essential humanity, and thereby their worth as humans."[46] It has also been used as a means to support racism, such as referring to Africans as chimps. However, this activity of dehumanization is often done in a way that is much less apparent. Often times certain properties are culturally assigned to apes to disparage other humans. There were and are a variety of cultural stereotypes that have often been invoked when speaking of apes, particularly their stupidity or licentiousness. It was these stereotypes, "that were, of course, also applied readily to immigrant, impoverished, or otherwise excluded groups."[47] As much as we like to uphold a strict human-animal divide, we betray our own prejudices in the way we muddle the distinction. By attributing animalistic characteristics to other humans the argument for a strict divide between the two seems to be weakened.

The two previous examples of dehumanization show the ways in which the human-animal divide and definition seems to work poorly in practice. There is also a third example of the association of humans with animality rather than humanity. As Stephen Webb rightly notes, "Like animals, women have been deprived of basic rights because of supposed biological differences from the ideal animal, the male human being."[48] Aquinas' influence on the instrumentalization of animals has been discussed previously. His same method

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[46] Jonathan Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 186.
[47] Jonathan Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 70.
[48] Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion For Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1998), 55.

of argumentation is also applied to women. The male-female distinction and its relation to the *imago dei* is discussed in the *Summa Theologiae* I.93.4 which states that, "in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature."[49] According to Andrew Linzey the implication of this statement is that, "Men, not men and women, are made in the image of God and thus only males possess full rationality. Women are half way between men and beasts."[50]

The argument that women are more like animals than men is further developed in two ways. The first is that women are closer to animals because their traditional role has been reproduction and child rearing. If this is where their 'importance' or function rests then they are more like animals because these are animal functions. The second argument follows from the first in that women are considered to operate from the instinctual sphere like animals, whereas men are rational. Women have been historically portrayed as not using the capacity that is 'human' and therefore they are more animal-like and do not deserve equal standing with men.[51]

The debasing of enemies, minorities, women, and other human groups is often done by comparing these groups to animals and animal capacities. Furthermore, by actively engaging in this sort of treatment the human-animal divide and definition commonly used is not nearly as strong. It becomes more

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[49] ST 1.93.4 FODP
[50] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 141.
[51] Webb, *On God and Dogs*, 55.

difficult to argue what is human and what is not when the category is defined by fiat. These are not factual statements that allow for a real distinction; rather they are political statements that serve political purposes. The vagueness of declarations by fiat also means that there can be multiple competing understandings of the human-animal distinction making any practical application nearly impossible due to the multiplicity of claims.

Our difficulty in coming up with an unambiguous and apolitical human-animal distinction and the difficulty with which we use the term animal to describe different contexts and situations have a major implication according to Mary Midgley:

> 'You have behaved like animals!' says the judge to defendants found guilty of highly complicated human social offences, such as driving a stolen car while under the influence of drink. What is the judge doing here? He is, it seems, excluding the offenders from the moral community. His meaning, as widely understood, is something like this: 'You have offended against deep standards and ideals which are not mere local rules of convenience. You have crashed through the barriers of culture, barriers which alone preserve us from a sea of abominable motivations. The horror of your act does not lie only in the harm you have done to your victims, but also, more deeply, in the degradation into which you

have plunged yourselves, a degradation which may infect us all.'[52]

The use of the word animal this way denotes that there is something in our human nature that we are uneasy admitting is part of us. By connecting humans who we feel have acted inappropriately with the concept of animal it allows societies to disown them. We can say that inappropriate actions are alien to human nature; we don't really understand these animal instincts and shouldn't be held responsible for the motives of people who act in an animalistic fashion.[53] We see being animal as something that is anti-human while at the same time being anxious that there is a significant aspect of our character that is in fact animal. It is possible to understand the apparent necessity of setting ourselves apart from nature and establishing an absolute human-animal distinction as a series of, "compulsive rituals, shadow dramas in which we continually try to kill those parts ourselves we deny and despise."[54] Human beings want to distinguish themselves from nature and animals because to be animal is to be subjected to the hazardous aspects of living, like affliction and death. Therefore, we do our best to deny this reality even though significant portions of human life are marked by, "periods of injury, illness or other disablement."[55]

It is undeniable that humans are animals. Humans reproduce, they explore and respond to the outside environment and stimuli, they obviously

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[52] Gill Langley, ed., *Animal Experimentation: The Consensus Changes* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1989), 1-2.
[53] Langley, ed., *Animal Experimentation*, 2.
[54] Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*, 11.
[55] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues (The Paul Carus Lectures)* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 1.

have animal cells and have a distinct 'human' shape, and they feed on other plants and animals because they are heterotrophs, they cannot produce their own food internally. It is precisely these characteristics that compel Desmond Morris to proclaim that at our core we are a "naked ape."[56] He says this because, "Despite our grandiose ideas and our lofty self-conceits, we are still humble animals, subject to all the basic laws of animal behavior," and that as much as humans attempt to remain dominant at a certain level there is a biological limit or control on us.[57] Frans de Waal also notes that it is true that humans are animals because of the "profound similarities between human and animal behavior," including maternal care, sexual behavior, and power seeking.[58] These similarities—biological and behavioral—are apparent to anyone who is willing to look.

The task of determining what, if anything, makes human beings unique or made in the image of God requires us to appeal to modern science. Relying on religious texts alone is problematic because claims of human superiority in texts like Genesis 1 are contradicted by texts like Job 38-41. Instead, science provides the ability to make a single claim that can be revised in light of new evidence and is testable. If we are to propose a characteristic or quality that is distinctive to human beings then we must take into account the evidence that supports or refutes the qualities described. Based on just simple observation it is clear that

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[56] Desmond Morris, *The Illustrated Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal*, 1st American ed. (New York: Random House Value Publishing, 1986), 38.
[57] Morris, *The Illustrated Naked Ape*, 38.
[58] Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved (Princeton Science Library)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 65.

humans definitely have characteristics in common with animals. However, we should also examine certain modern claims about human-animal distinctions in light of scientific evidence including evolution and genetics.

Charles Darwin's core argument in the *Origin of Species*, the theory of natural selection, has withstood scrutiny and is the best way to understand differences we see in the natural world. Darwin's work is not so much based on vast amounts of observational data, but instead is a chain of reasoning that appeals to common sense. Also, unlike many scientific theories, it did not involve mathematics. Instead, it was empirically verifiable or falsifiable.[59] This allowed its validity to be established before the advent of modern genetics and the quantification of evolutionary theory. The basic argument, helpfully summarized by James Rachels, begins from the fact that organisms reproduce in such quantities that if all of the offspring were to survive and reproduce they would grow exponentially and overrun earth. Obviously this type of growth does not happen because populations reach a certain size and then plateau. There must be a certain percentage of organisms in a population that die before they are able to reproduce. This limitation on population numbers occurs mainly because, "the increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence."[60] There is a struggle for existence that determines what organisms live and die. The outcome of who lives and dies can be determined by differences

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[59] James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1990), 35.
[60] Thomas Malthus, *Population: The First Essay* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 49.

between individuals or due to random causes. There are variations between members of each species, some of which can either help or harm an organism's relation to the environment and its chance for survival. Since some particular characteristics will be beneficial, the organism will be more likely to survive and reproduce. These beneficial particularities will be passed on to the offspring and those characteristics that promote survival will be more apparent in future generations. This process causes species to be modified; the descendants will have different characteristics than their ancestors. Eventually this new variety of organism will accumulate enough modifications to result in a new species.[61]

Humanity, if it is part of nature, must also be subject to the laws of nature. *Homo sapiens* would be the result of natural selection and the descendants of earlier hominid forms. Darwin supported his argument by appealing to the fact that humans have variations between themselves and that they reproduce in greater numbers than can survive in a particular ecological niche or terrain.[62] Also, because humans spread out over such a great range geographically the separated humans diversified further than closely located individuals. Finally, humans have vestigial organs that show humans evolutionary history even though they are no longer useful. The *os coccyx* is a vestige of a time when our ancestors had tails and our appendixes are vestiges of when our ancestors were primarily vegetarian.[63] Darwin believed it was clear that humans must have

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[61] Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 35-36.
[62] For humans living in the 'first world' now this second point is not as obvious. However, one only needs to look at reproduction rates in the 'third world' to see that this is true.
[63] Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 53-54.

descended from apelike ancestors and in the *Descent of Man* proposed a series of small changes that might have added up to the differentiation we now see.[64]

Modern archaeology and the examination of the fossil record supports Darwin's understanding of descent with modification. The discovery of a variety early hominids helps to establish the branching tree of evolution. Based on the available fossil record the most plausible ancestor for our own species, *Homo sapiens*, is the species *Homo heidelbergensis,* which was also likely the progenitor of *Homo neanderthalensis* a prominent hominid approximately six hundred thousand years ago in Africa. Based on the fossil record and scientific investigation it has been postulated that:

> Our species is the sole survivor from an extended human family of at least twenty members. These extinct branches of our family tree have lived and died out in the 7 million years since we shared that last common ancestor with the chimps. A few million years further back in our ancestry, earth was truly a 'Planet of the Apes', with at least thirty different kinds of primates scattered across the world from France to China to Africa.[65]

The fossil record's account of human history seems to support fully Darwin's notion of descent with modification because through it we can see the variations

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[64] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1981), 107-156.
[65] Douglas Palmer, *Seven Million Years: The Story of Human Evolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), ix.

and modifications from these proto-humans leading all the way up to *Homo sapiens*.

Archaeology and the examination of the fossil record is not the only scientific technique that has allowed us to better understand human origins. In the mid-1960's it was discovered that rates of change of proteins varied little between species. In order to determine the difference between human, orangutan, and baboon proteins a technique was developed by Allan Wilson and Vincent Sarich to measure these differences. Using the fact that there is a nearly constant rate of protein evolution, how much change occurs in a stretch of time, and how much protein change had occurred between humans and chimpanzees it was possible to calculate the time at which human and chimpanzee lineages diverged. The solution to this 'problem' was that human and chimpanzees diverged from a common ancestor between 5 and 7 million years ago.[66] While this experiment identified that modern humans and chimpanzees share a common ancestor it does not reveal how similar these two species are in the present.

Genetics offers a solution to question of similarity because DNA sequences and their subunits "can be tabulated and numerically manipulated."[67] This data also provides support for the claims based on empiricism made by Darwin because it allows us to see how differences in genotype, the source of variations, are expressed in phenotypes. Most experiments have shown that the human beings and chimpanzees share approximately 98% of their genetic

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[66] Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 11.
[67] Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 24.

structure. Some experiments determine the difference to be 0.7% others 1.9% and some up to 3%. Regardless, all evidence concludes that human beings share a great similarity with chimpanzees.[68] While this shows us that humanity is not only part of nature, but also very closely related to certain other species within it, these types of comparisons run into a major problem: How do we evaluate these differences? There is a significant question of what that 2% difference means. Saying that humans and chimpanzees are 98% similar and humans and x-other species are 67% similar does not shows us exactly what is unique to humans compared to the other species because, "in general the physical units of the body cannot be directly and specifically matched up with particular DNA segments. Just how to get a four dimensional organism from the linear one-dimensional sequence of DNA, is entirely obscure." [69] Laying the DNA side by side will not tell us why humans are human and not chimpanzee, it only tells us that the chasm between species is very narrow.

In seems clear based on the above evidence that to discuss human beings as being apart from nature, as not subject to the laws of nature or any other natural factors such as evolution, is an absurd conclusion. We can trace our ancestors back through millions of years thanks to the fossil record. Genetic analysis both confirms this and shows that what constitutes humans, as DNA-based life, is the same as all other living things. To argue that humanity is a special creation in the sense that it apart from nature doesn't seem to hold up under any intense scientific scrutiny. Does this mean that human beings cannot

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[68] Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 29-36.
[69] Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 263.

be separated from the rest of animals and nature as a difference in kind? No, that is not the case. Just because humans are subject to natural laws does not mean that during our evolutionary history a unique property, characteristic, or capacity did not develop. Humans may still have a difference in kind between themselves and the rest of nature; however, this difference has to stand up to scientific scrutiny because science, unlike religious texts or declarations, can be tested and will also not have to compete with contradicting claims. Two scientists may disagree about a point but in-depth studies will reveal the correct claim.

As was previously discussed, both Augustine and Aquinas, along with many other figures throughout history, concluded that what made humanity separate from other animals and the rest of nature was the human capacity of reason. Humans have the ability to direct their desires towards human flourishing and do not act based purely on instinct the way that animals do.[70] Alasdair MacIntyre, in *Dependent Rational Animals,* makes it a point to note that when we have a reason for an action it means that we identify certain goods and then pursue them. He quotes Warren Quinn who stated that, "a reason to act in a certain way is nothing more than something good in itself [the action] realizes or serves, or, short of that, something bad in itself that it avoids."[71] In order to show that animals also have reason in the way humans do three things must be identified in members of the other species. These three criteria are:

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[70] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 30.
[71] MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 24.

> A set of goods at the achievement of which the members of that species aim, a set of judgments about which actions are or are not likely to be effective in achieving those goods and a set of true counterfactual conditionals that enable us to connect the goal-directedness and the judgments about effectiveness. Characteristically we identify all three of these in conjunction with each other.[72]

MacIntyre proposes dolphins as a means of testing these three criteria. One of the goods in the life of a dolphin is the consumption of fish and as a result the act of hunting for fish is an essential activity. It is through an examination of episodes of dolphin hunting that will help us determine whether or not dolphins meet these three criteria. MacIntyre notes that dolphin scouts searching for fish on behalf of the herd will detect a large quantity of fish and the herd will recognize this and change course to begin hunting. Saying that the herd changes course for this reason asserts that had the herd not recognized fish had been detected by the scouts they would not have changed course. Also, either they would have needed another reason not to change course or the change of course was impossible due to physical reasons.[73] Furthermore, dolphins adopt one means of achieving an end and if that proves ineffective they will adapt their means. This is true in the case of bottlenose dolphins, "who have first tried to drive a school of fish towards the shore, in order to pen them in, but who are

[72] MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 25.
[73] MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 25.

failing to do so, will instead drive the fish out to sea towards the rest of the herd."[74] The observation of the activity of hunting done by dolphins, "commits us to asserting the truth of sets of counterfactual conditionals of exactly the same type as those to which we are committed by accurate descriptions of human activity." It seems clear that the distinction between humans and animals based solely on this kind of complex reasoning is a false dichotomy because we can identify such reasoning in some animals in nature.

Language has also been one of the most frequently used markers to establish a qualitative difference between human beings and other creatures. David Clough notes that Noam Chomsky, in *Language and Mind*, argued that language was a "species-specific human possession," and served as an absolute distinction between humans and animals.[75] Is language what separates humans from animals? Is this the difference in kind that makes humans unique? Scientific studies are once again helpful in determining this. Francine Patterson began teaching a gorilla named Koko sign language in 1972. Through this training Koko was able to learn a vocabulary of 1,000 words and could respond to questions asked by Francine.[76] Examining the transcripts of conversations that Koko had is enlightening with regard to the ability of other species to use language. The variety of conversations that Koko was able to have was remarkable. The responses ranged from being fairly predictable:

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[74] MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals,* 26.
[75] Stephen C Barton and David Wilkinson, eds., *Reading Genesis After Darwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2009), 152.
[76] Paola Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: St Martins Press, 1994), 58-59.

> "What do gorillas like to do most?" "*Gorilla love eat good.*" Or, "What makes you happy?" "*Gorilla tree*." "What makes you angry?" "*Work.*" "What do gorillas do when it's dark?" "*Gorilla listen* (pause), *sleep*."[77]

To some responses indicating that Koko was able to make jokes:

> KOKO *That me.* (pointing to adult bird)
>
> BARBARA Is that really you?
>
> KOKO *Koko good bird.*
>
> BARBARA I thought you were a gorilla?
>
> KOKO *Koko bird*.
>
> BARBARA Can you fly?
>
> KOKO *Good*. (i.e., yes)
>
> BARBARA Show me.
>
> KOKO *Fake bird, clown.* (Koko laughs)
>
> BARBARA You're teasing me. (Koko laughs) What are you really?
>
> KOKO *Gorilla Koko*.[78]

Finally, some of the most interesting responses had to do with death:

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[77] Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project*, 62.
[78] Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project*, 66.

> When Koko was seven, one of her teachers asked, "When do gorillas die?" and she signed, "*Trouble, old.*" The teacher also asked, "Where do gorillas go when they die?" and Koko replied, "*Comfortable hole bye.*" When asked "How do gorillas feel when they die—happy, sad, afraid?" she signed, "*Sleep.*"[79]

Koko's use of language is impressive and shows that gorillas are able to both understand and manipulate a symbolic system in order to communicate with members of another species. These discussions, especially the one concerning death, are striking because it shows the ability to use language for more than just simple conversations about food or play. Instead, it shows that gorillas are able to communicate their interpretations about significant events and events not personally experienced.

The ability to use language the way Koko does is not unique to her. According to Clough, "While Koko's use of language is exceptional, similar experiments have been done with chimpanzees and bonobos, and other studies have shown dolphins to be capable of syntactical analysis." It is nearly impossible to discount the "the depth and range of evidence" of the ability of apes and other animals to use language. Furthermore, "it is hard to avoid the consequent disruption to what we previously considered an absolute distinction between human beings and other species."[80]

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[79] Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project*, 67.
[80] Barton and Wilkinson, eds., *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, 152.

If there is a difference in kind between humans and animals then it does not seem possible base it on humans' ability to reason and use language. These capabilities are a matter of degree rather of kind because we are able to identify these capacities in other species beside ourselves. The distinguishing features, which have so long been a part of how humans tried to uniquely identify themselves, fail under the scrutiny of modern scientific investigation. Andrew Linzey, quoting Archbishop Robert Runcie, is right to point out that:

> There lies the theoretical difficulty of defining what it is that decisively distinguishes the human from the non-human—a difficulty that increases as, for instance, naturalists detect in non-human creatures subtleties of behavior and complexities of communication which, until recently, would have been thought unique and exclusive to humans.[81]

Trying to base human uniqueness on the natural attributes of intelligence fails now that scientific studies of animals are widely done. This is not to say that human beings don't use language or reason in a more nuanced way than animals. Instead, it indicates that while we may use them in the "highest" or most sophisticated way there are animals that also have these capacities and use them in a way that might not be at the level of humans, but still definitively proves that they are exercising these capacities.

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[81] Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 46.

Linzey, in his search for a uniquely human capacity, argued that humans are unique in their ability to identify the suffering of others and respond to it in a self-sacrificial way. Humans will try to remove the suffering of others by taking on more themselves. In discussing this sort of self-sacrificial activity it is helpful to distinguish between what makes an action selfish versus altruistic. When scientists use the terms they mean something different when they are used in common parlance. When we use the term "selfish" its usual connotation has to do with actions that are self-serving or self-interested. Frans de Waal notes that in a strict sense this is incorrect because, "animals show a host of self-serving behaviors without the motives or intentions implied by the term 'selfish'," and for this reason, "to say that spiders build webs for selfish reasons is to assume that a spider, while spinning her web, realizes that she is going to catch flies." Instead, it is more proper to say is that, "spiders serve their own interests by building webs."[82] In a similar way, the term "altruism" is defined in biology, "as behavior costly to the performer and beneficial to the recipient regardless of intentions or motives." Using this definition de Waal shows that when a bee stings a person for getting too close to a hive the bee is acting altruistically since, "the bee will perish (cost) while protecting her hive (benefit)." However, he concludes that it is unlikely that the bee is operating in a way that is knowingly self-sacrificial. Instead, the bee's motivation is probably hostile rather than altruistic.[83] The difficulty is that a distinction must be made between intentional selfish or altruistic behavior and the mere functional equivalents like the above

[82] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 177-178.
[83] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 178.

cases. De Waal, however, raises the question of whether humans or animals ever intentionally help one another.

While most people would quickly answer with an affirmative to this question, De Waal notes that humans are, "excellent at providing *post hoc* explanations for altruistic impulses." Much of human behavior is automatic and intuitive and that a great deal of moral decision making is, "too rapid to be mediated by cognition and self-reflection."[84] Humans are much less altruistic then we often think we are. While humans may be capable of intentional altruism we should be open to the fact that much of the time our moral decision-making occurs through rapid-psychological processes. At the same time we need to be clear about what animals know abut the consequences of their behavior to consider them altruistic. De Waal, who works with chimpanzees, thinks that:

> They may evaluate relationships from time to time with respect to mutual benefits, but to believe that a chimpanzee helps another with the explicit purpose of getting back help in the future is to assume a planning capacity for which there is little evidence. And if future payback does not figure in their motivation, their altruism is as genuine as ours.[85]

Instead of the term altruism de Waal prefers the term "targeted helping." This sort of help is a response to specific or novel situations that requires a

[84] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 178-179.
[85] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 179.

distinction to be made between the self and the other's situation while maintaining an emotional connection that serves as the motivation for behavior. In these situations the source of the arousal to help is the situation of the other and not the self and one needs to understand what is causing the state of the other. Therefore, "targeted helping is defined as altruistic behavior tailored to the specific needs of the other in novel situations."[86] De Waal proposes a model to explain moral behaviors. It begins with the state of emotional contagion where the seeing of another's mental or physical state causes an unconscious state matching between individuals; seeing pain acts very much like feeling pain. This first layer provokes a second layer called cognitive empathy where the individual appraises another's situation. In these cases, "The subject not only responds to the signals emitted by the object, but seeks to understand the reasons for these signals, looking for clues to the other's behavior and situation."[87] This makes it possible to take the interests of the other into account and allows the subject to act accordingly.

In 1964 Masserman et al. published a fascinating study that found that rhesus monkeys refused to pull a chain that delivered food to themselves if a result of that pull was an electric shock delivered to a companion that it could see. After a variety of trials that allowed the researchers to determine the extent to which the perception of pain dissuaded the monkey from pulling the chain it was discovered that the majority of monkeys would exhibit sacrificial behavior in order to prevent pain in the other rhesus monkey. One of the monkeys refused

[86] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 36.
[87] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 40.

to pull the chain for five days and another refused to pull the chain for twelve days meaning that they would rather starve themselves than cause pain. These monkeys would rather suffer hunger than secure food at the expense of another.[88]

The obvious rebuttal to this, especially considering Linzey's argument, is a question brought up by James Rachels in his discussion of these series of experiments: "But the monkeys only showed an aversion to causing pain for others of their own kind. Would they do the same for other kinds of animals?" He provides a cogent response that also seems to imply a difference of degree rather than kind by stating that, "Most people—even those who have a fine respect for the interest of other humans—are fairly indifferent to the interests of beings not of their own kind." In addition he states that, "Human compassion comes in varying degrees and strengths: some of us are quite compassionate, and some of us are relatively indifferent to the plight of others," so then why is it surprising that monkeys function in a similar way? [89] Humans tend not to be concerned about the welfare of animal species. We often do not try to lessen the suffering of animals by sacrificing our own interests. Therefore, we should also not expect rhesus monkeys (or any other animal species) to be more concerned with the suffering of another species as opposed to their own kin. Based on this experiment sympathy, empathy, and self-sacrificial activity within one's own species seems to be a difference of degree rather than kind. However, humans do

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[88] Masserman et al., "Altruistic Behavior in Rhesus Monkeys," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 121 (1964): 584-585.
[89] Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 152.

occasionally exhibit self-sacrificial activity towards other species, so Linzey's argument that this is what makes humans unique is valid unless there are examples of animal species acting altruistically and self-sacrificially towards a differing species.

Linzey's argument that human beings are the only ones who act as a servant species does not hold up, like all difference in kind arguments so far, under the scrutiny of scientific inquiry. Ladygina-Kohts' interaction with the chimpanzee Joni provides an example of this empathetic response or targeted-helping between species:

> If I pretend to be crying, close my eyes and weep, Joni immediately stops his play or any other activities, quickly runs over to me, all excited and shagged, from the most remote places in the house, such as the roof or the ceiling of his cage, from where I could not drive him down despite my persistent calls or entreaties. He hastily runs around me as if looking for the offender, looking at my face, he tenderly takes my chin in his palm, lightly touches my face with his finger, as though trying to understand what is happening, and turns around, clenching his toes into firm fists.[90]

[90] N.N. Ladygina-Kohts, *Infant Chimpanzee and Human Child: A Classic 1935 Comparative Study of Ape Emotions and Intelligence* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2002), 121.

The chimpanzee seems not only to understand the emotional pain of the other but also makes an attempt to relieve that pain or suffering by comforting the other, even if it means giving up another task or playing. Joni is concerned about someone who is part of a different species. Ladygina-Kohts provides other examples that seem to highlight the fact that chimpanzees also exhibit the characteristic of being a servant species:

> If my husband pretends to be beating me, threateningly waving at me with his hands, and I pretend to be crying, screaming, and groaning, Joni gets worried. He appears from under the chair, assumes the vertical position, extends his arms majestically toward the offender, and utters a long sound, "oo-oo-oo." If the offender does not pay attention, does not stop beating, and my groans continue, Joni hits the offender with his hand; if that does not help Joni throws himself at the offender and tries to bite.[91]

Joni not only has the emotional contagion response, but also has the empathetic reaction that identifies the threat and recognizes what is causing the pain in the other. This then affects Joni's course of action of trying to stop the offender. In a situation like this Joni is not just comforting and sacrificing time in another activity, but also sacrificing bodily integrity in defense of the other. There is the possibility of harm to Joni in this situation (even though it is controlled so it

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[91] Ladygina-Kohts, *Infant Chimpanzee and Human Child*, 122-123.

doesn't happen), but this does not prevent him from acting or taking on his share of pain in defense of the other. This seems to show once again that chimpanzees also exhibit the ability to be a servant species, even if the scope of help is smaller than what humans can achieve.

If the two previous examples were not convincing or one wishes for other examples of targeted helping or altruism that do not involve a human as the recipient of care, Frans de Waal provides an example of a bonobo acting like this with regard to a bird:

> One day, Kuni captured a starling. Out of fear that she might molest the stunned bird, which appeared undamaged, the keeper urged the ape to let it go. Perhaps because of this encouragement, Kuni took the bird outside and gently set it onto its feet, the right way up, where it stayed, looking petrified. When it didn't move, Kuni threw it a little way, but it just fluttered. Not satisfied, Kuni picked up the starling with one hand and climbed to the highest point of the highest tree, where she wrapped her legs around the trunk, so that she had both hands free to hold the bird. She then carefully unfolded its wings and spread them wide open, one wing in each hand, before throwing the bird as hard as she could towards the barrier of the enclosure. Unfortunately, it fell short and landed onto the bank of the moat, where Kuni guarded it for a

> long time against a curious juvenile. By the end of the day, the bird was gone without a trace of a feather.[92]

In this case we once again see de Waal's model of morality at work. The fact that a species other than *Homo sapiens* can act in such a way to place themselves within the definition of a servant species. Kuni's actions would obviously have been improper towards another bonobo. However, Kuni was able to recognize that the other was a bird and that normally birds fly. This bird wasn't flying so Kuni tried to fix the situation. When the act failed to achieve its aim Kuni then protected the bird at the expense of her own time. This may not be at the scale of what Linzey is proposing for humans as servant species, but it seems to show that the characteristic that one must have is also exhibited in other species. The idea that being a servant species indicates a difference in kind is compromised by these examples. Instead, it appears that the concept is scalar instead of absolute and therefore what Linzey is proposing does not make humans unique per se.

One danger or counter-argument to the previous examples is the charge of anthropomorphism. In modern studies of behavioral science there exists a dilemma between choosing and invoking cognitive parsimony or evolutionary parsimony. Cognitive parsimony favors explaining things in the simplest terms. In the case of animal behaviors it promotes the idea that one should not explain a phenomenon with higher mental capacities if lower ones will do. Explanations

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[92] Frans de Waal, *Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 156.

that avoid complexity are better than ones that are complex. Evolutionary parsimony is different because it considers shared phylogeny. If two species are closely related then it is likely that the mental processes are similar too. An example of this is the fact that we propose similar causes of behavior and actions for dogs and wolves, so why not chimpanzees and humans?[93] However, by using the language of human activity and behavior with reference to chimpanzees our descriptions begin to sound anthropomorphic because we are attributing typically human qualities to a non-human species.

Anthropomorphism can be defined two ways. The first way it can be defined is, "as the misattribution of human qualities to animals." However, the term can be defined in a broader sense, "namely the description of behavior in human, hence intentionalistic, terms."[94] Anthropomorphic language used this way is a valuable heuristic tool because it allows for the generation of hypotheses that are testable. This type of language allows one to acknowledge the particularities of a species, like chimpanzees or bonobos, while attempting to frame them in a way that is understandable for humans. Obviously, this is opposed to the projection of human emotions or intentions onto animals, "without justification, explication, or investigation."[95] If we don't have issue with describing humans in animalistic terms then describing some animals in human terms should not be considered intrinsically bad if it is done in a way that will allow testing of the validity of this use of language.

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[93] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 62.
[94] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 63.
[95] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 64.

Another defense of using anthropomorphic language is the fact that, "it would be unreasonable to think that researchers are always guilty of this sin, whenever they find that animals have previously unsuspected qualities."[96] The experiments with rhesus monkeys by Masserman et al. that attributed altruism to them had considerable experimental results and data. The scientists made it a point to test alternative hypotheses to make sure they were not overstating or reading into behaviors qualities that were not there. Also, as James Rachels rightly notes, "if anthropomorphism is a sin, we should be wary of the companion sin: the similarities between ourselves and other animals may too easily be underestimated."[97] The traditional bias of seeing humans as apart from nature may lead us to ignore certain characteristics or qualities that can and should be described in more anthropomorphic terms. To ignore evolutionary phylogeny betrays a certain human hubris to disassociate ourselves with nature.

The argument for a difference in kind based on language, reason, or self-sacrificial activity all are problematic when scrutinized with modern scientific discoveries. This leaves Wennberg's argument that humans are unique because of their religious capacity. This claim should be examined in light of modern archeology and studies of Neanderthal dwelling and burial sites. If it can be reasonably shown that another living creature apart from *Homo sapiens* has possessed a symbolic understanding of the world, religious sentiment, or rituals that point to a life in reference to the transcendent then Wennberg's notion of uniqueness fails as a difference in kind.

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[96] Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 169.
[97] Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 170.

Modern archaeological evidence supports two major points. First, Neanderthals were not, "significantly different from moderns in their genetic capacity for cultural behavior," and that, "symbolic behavior was a significant part of their adaptation."[98] The examination of Neanderthal technology, tools, apparent rituals surrounding burials and offerings, art, and habitations forces the conclusion that, "for prehistorians to argue that Neanderthals were incapable of religious sentiment, art, burial, foresight, symbolism, sophisticated technology and language is tantamount to invoking ad hominum arguments against many of the best excavators and researchers of this century."[99] The data supports the notion that Neanderthals were very much like *Homo sapiens* and that to think that somehow even something like our religious capacities is somehow unique is to ignore the information that points to other conclusions.

Second, the recent excavation of Neanderthal skeletons in Murcia, Spain also seems to support the idea of Neanderthals having deliberate burials and symbolic thought. A paper by Walker et al. describes the burial of three Neanderthals who were each placed very specifically with their hands placed close to their heads all in the same position. According to the researchers, "the most economical interpretation is that the articulated skeletons represent corpses that were introduced intentionally and become covered by rock tumble

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[98] Brian Hayden. "The Cultural Capacities of Neanderthals: A Review and Re-evaluation." *Journal of Human Evolution* 24 (1993): 114.
[99] Hayden, "The Cultural Capacities of Neanderthals: A Review and Re-evaluation,"140

and scree that became cemented."[100] The position of these skeletons was not a random accident and appears deliberate especially considering that other skeletons have been found buried in the same position. The deliberate placement seems to point out that humans are not the only creatures who have death and burial rituals. Therefore, symbolic thought and meaning-making is not an exclusively human capacity. On the other hand, it is one thing to note that Neanderthals may have been symbolically oriented creatures; it is quite another to automatically assume that somehow the burial process was a religious ritual. It's possible that the act of burial was just a way to respect the dead instead of a complex supernatural ritual.

Barbara King, an anthropologist, argues that at its most basic level religion is practice based on emotion in action.[101] If we accept her claim then these Neanderthal burials, whether or not they necessarily assumed an afterlife, seem to imply, "an intersection of the symbolic with the emotional."[102] The social act of burial is not by itself a contact with the sacred; rather it has the ability to create what is sacred. The performance of actions is what generates sacredness. King believes that, "emotion is the element that separates the sacred from the merely routine."[103] Neanderthal burials would appear to be an emotional event and therefore it is possible to speak about these burials as religious rituals that

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[100] Walker, M.J., et al. "The Excavation of Buried Articulated Neanderthal Skeletons at Sima de las Palomas (Murcia, SE Spain)." *Quaternary International* (2011): 14.
[101] Barbara J. King, *Evolving God: A Provocative View of the Origins of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 1-28.
[102] King, *Evolving God*, 104.
[103] King, *Evolving God,* 104.

occurred apart from those done by *Homo sapiens*. If this is the case then to speak of human beings being created in the image of God as a difference in kind based on religious capacity seems to fail with regards to archaeological evidence.

There is one difficulty with using modern archaeology to understand and refute Wennberg's argument. While we can infer that non-humans had religious rituals and understood the world in reference to the transcendent, a difficulty lies in the fact that it cannot be proven or reproduced in practice. Unless we were to travel back in time to observe these practices the exact meaning of burials will remain hidden. Instead, we have only our most educated guesses about the actual purpose of Neanderthal burials.

The difference in kind argument based on the idea that humans were created in the image of God is untenable in light of modern science. Each proposal that describes an absolute distinction between humans and animals does not hold up under intense scrutiny. A different conception of the image of God as describing human superiority or uniqueness must be developed that better takes into account scientific discoveries and the facts of human existence.

V. The Human Difference as a Matter of Degree

The goal of establishing a distinction between humans and animals based on an in-kind argument has been shown to be problematic for both theological and scientific reasons. The attempts to retain some aspect of human superiority or uniqueness does not have to stop here. A more fruitful discussion of humanity's position as superior but still a part of nature could potentially be formulated if we acknowledge that it is very unlikely that we will find an absolute distinction. Instead, it is possible to argue that while many of the characteristics we identify aren't unique, humans exercise them with a capacity that far exceeds other animals.

Arguments that reason, language, or morality set humans apart from other animals fail when confronted with modern scientific evidence. However, if we examine the way in which these capacities or many others are exercised it may still be possible to categorize human beings as superior and unique compared with other animals. In a difference of degree line of reasoning each species would possess some or all of these capacities, but one of the species would exhibit a particular capacity to a much greater extent. Isn't this true when we compare humans to other animals? The answer appears to be a resounding yes.

Take for example the discussion of ape language earlier. There should be no doubt that apes have the ability to manipulate a symbolic system given to them by humans in order to communicate. Jonathan Marks, however, introduces

the idea that the human use of symbols for communications is much more complex than anything described in the ape-language experiments. We have a "zoologically unique" way of communicating. Humans impart arbitrary meanings to sounds and the way the sounds are ordered. Our use of language and symbols involves phonology, semantics, syntax or grammar, and sociolinguistics.[104] Human language is much more complex than what we observe in the language of other animals. Our systems of communication involve multiple levels of arbitrariness. The amount of symbolism that occurs within our modes of communication is much more extensive than the symbolism used by other species. There is a huge difference in the extent and capacity for language between human beings and apes, but it is a matter of degree rather than an absolute distinction. In addition, while human studies of apes have identified certain sounds that apes make in specific contexts, their mode of communication with each other does not occur as frequently or with as much complexity as humans who communicate with each other.[105]

We can see differences of complexity in more than just language. Tool making as a means to achieve certain goals has been shown in both chimpanzee and raven species. An example of this is when chimpanzees will, "select and prune sticks in order to dig out ants and termites."[106] Their use of tools fits under McIntyre's categorization of an activity that shows the capacity for reason. They do it in order to achieve a good and as a response to other activities that

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[104] Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 184.
[105] Marks, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee*, 184.
[106] Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 204.

fail to achieve their goals. Chimpanzees' use of tools is an uncontroversial fact with regards to how they act within their environment. Furthermore, the fact that they can do this means that we should be "genuinely impressed."[107] Apart from humans there are very few other species that exhibit tool-making behavior. It is an incredible feat considering the number of species that exist as compared to the number of species who have the ability to act in this way.

While this use of tools may be impressive it is much less fantastic when it is compared to the way in which humans use tools. Humans have the ability to use tools to construct buildings that are a thousand feet tall, build machines that fly, create weapons that can kill from long-distances, build a computer that calculate faster than thousands of people etc. We develop and use tools just like a few other species, but it is foolish to think that all tool making is the same. The scope and intricacy of human tools far exceeds anything found in the rest of nature. While humans should be both impressed and fascinated by the use of tools in other species, the vast difference in how and why tools are used for human beings shows there is a huge degree of difference between the complexity of our tool-making and tool-use than that of other species.

The last set of attributes or characteristics discussed in the previous chapter was that of morality. The experiments by Masserman et al. clearly showed that rhesus monkeys exhibited altruistic tendencies towards members of their own species. In addition, Frans de Waal's work with primates provided a variety of situations that indicate moral behavior and targeted-helping are

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[107] Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 205.

aspects of primate culture as well as human culture. The fact that certain primates act from principles of conduct, namely that harming other members of their species is wrong, means that morality is not an absolute distinction between humans and animals. However, the complexity of human moral systems is much greater than those of any other species. Human beings have codified rules of conduct, lists of obligations, and vast amounts of principles. Human beings theorize about different modes and ways of being moral and examine situations where there can be exceptions to our principles and rules. We have developed whole justice systems based on how humans ought to act. Other species do not exhibit nearly as much complexity as humans do when it comes to moral systems. According to de Waal:

> The biggest step in the evolution of human morality was the move from interpersonal relations to a focus on the greater good. In apes, we can see the beginnings of this when they smooth relations between others. Females may bring males together after a fight between them, thus brokering reconciliation, and high-ranking males often stop fights among others in an evenhanded manner, thus promoting peace in the group. I see such behavior as a reflection of community concern.[108]

[108] De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 54.

These actions of apes are paralleled in human modes of justice. We attempt to maintain the common good using strict systems of governance that provide order and delineate the actions members in society should not take. The foundational element also exists in other species but is not nearly as complex as that of humans.

The argument that human superiority is a matter of degree rather than of kind has much greater support if one wishes to draw on scientific data. To be made in the image of God means that human beings have evolved to the point where their capacities are exercised to an extent that overshadows those same capacities in any other species. Mary Midgley is right when she states that, "if the talk is of elephants, we can do justice to the miracle of the trunk without pretending that nobody else has a nose."[109] Human beings may be considered to be created in the image of God and somehow superior to other animals while at the same time exhibiting similar capacities as them.

The question is what capacities matter when we are talking about humans being created in the image of God and how do we evaluate our exercise of these capacities as superior? The essence or nature of living creatures is not neatly expressed in the use of simple definitions. There is not one capacity that makes us human, if there was we would be taking a difference in kind line of reasoning. Trying to isolate and rank individual attributes or capacities shared between species is also difficult because of the arbitrariness of the choice. The oversimplification of animals to something akin to a mathematical definition is

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[109] Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 206.

not helpful. "A triangle without three sides ceases to be a triangle. But a flightless bird does not cease to be as bird, nor a flying fish a fish."[110] What makes each creature unique is not some single quality that we attempt to identify and any attempt to do this would be almost impossible considering the complexity and variety of organisms.

There is some fear that if we grant that humans are different from animals only by a matter of degree the special moral status we grant to humans is compromised. The argument is that if, "humankind differs from other animals only in degree, the line that divides the realm of persons from the realm of things would be rubbed out, and with its disappearance would go the basis in fact for a principled policy of treating men differently from the way in which we now treat other animals and machines."[111] There is anxiety that not only the divide between species will become blurred, but that the grounds that we use to establish human dignity and basic rights will be lost because it could be argued that there is a "scale of degrees" that separates superior humans from lesser humans.[112]

This type of argument is problematic for two reasons. First, the assertion that if we uphold that humans are different in degree from the rest of nature we will lose a firm footing for human dignity and rights is problematic because it is based on the assumption that we exist in a world where human equality is a fact. As was previously discussed, the difference in kind argument has been used to

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[110] Midgley, *Beast and Man*, 206-207.
[111] Mortimer J. Adler, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1967), 263.
[112] Adler, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*, 264.

strip human dignity from other humans, so how does shifting to difference of degree necessarily make this worse? Dehumanization is already a problem so the fear of superior and lesser humans has been realized not as a result of a difference in kind but as an activity humans do anyway. The second problem is the idea that there would be no basis for uniquely human rights and that rights would have to be extended to all creatures because there would be no basis for treating human beings differently. However, this doesn't necessarily have to happen by accepting a difference in degree. If anything the difference in degree may actually provide the best foundation possible for different treatments of animals. It can also be used as a way to acknowledge that human relationships and rights are more important than those of animals when they come into conflict. If we base our evaluations of animals on degrees it may reveal that different animals have a certain amount of intrinsic value, but our obligations to animals would be, "neither as strong nor extensive as our obligations to humans."[113] Using the differences of degree we could establish a scale where human beings are at the top as superior. In this way we would also promote the idea that our obligations to each other are the primary concern when human interests and needs conflict with animal interests and needs. Primates, dolphins, elephants, and any other animals that might exhibit and exercise the qualities that we identify as important would then deserve to be valued incredibly highly, but not as much as another human being. This scalar evaluation of animals could go all the way down to whatever animal is at the bottom because they exhibit

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[113] Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 207.

and exercise the capacities the least. A difference of degree then allows humans to maintain that position at the top of the ladder that they hold so dear while also acknowledging that other species have great amounts of value too. The concept of humans being in the image of God is saved because it keeps the aspects of superiority we identify in ourselves and acknowledges that humans are part of nature while putting all other animals on levels below us.

The first problem with any difference of degree argument should be abundantly clear at this point. Any single capacity or locus of capacities we identify as being in the image of God are both arbitrarily chosen and evaluated. The text of Genesis 1:26 does not say what being made in the image of God is so it seems humans get to choose what their superior capacity is. We could argue that because the human use of language is the most complex out of any species that is what makes us superior and created in the image of God. However, why is the complexity of language intrinsically good? Humans continually misunderstand each other and we have more than one language which adds to communicative difficulty. If ape language is simpler but more accurate then why is our complexity better? The same problems are true of any other capacity arbitrarily chosen. What we think is "best" about that capacity is a human evaluation not based on any intrinsic quality. We might have the ability to exercise a moral capacity in a more nuanced way than animals, but at the same time we have the ability to dehumanize, kill, commit genocide, and treat everything else as instrumental. Humans might have vision in the color spectrum, but that doesn't make bees vision in the ultraviolet range any worse.

No matter what we choose as the single or many capacities that are part of the *imago dei* they all run into the issue of arbitrariness.

A second significant problem for the image of God and the idea of humans being a difference of degree apart from other animals is introduced when we move away from solely thinking about paradigmatic humans. The major issue is when we introduce humans who are significantly disabled to our discussion. If we allow for the arbitrary choice of certain capacities that make humans superior we then must begin ranking other animals in relation to ourselves. This process of scalar ranking raises the question: Where do severely disabled human beings fall on the scale and how does this relate to the claim that all human beings are made in the image of God?

When we speak of the severely mentally disabled it is necessary to describe the behaviors or range of activities that we are speaking about when we use this term. Typically those who are severely mentally disabled exhibit no interest in learning, even concerning vital needs, no ability to respond to expressions and reactions, no ability to respond to situations and objects, no perceptible reactions to feelings and stimuli, no observable communication, a reduced ability to receive, process, and express verbal information, the inability to coordinate sense impressions and movements, and an inability to react or distance oneself from persons or situations.[114] These individuals do not seem to possess reason, conscience, language, or even motor responses to stimuli, and yet they are still human. The reality of this creates a situation where:

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[114] Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project*, 162.

> Everything that makes a difference between humans and animals seems to be missing: abstract thinking and language as typical human attributes could be eliminated right away. What remains then?...What is a human being, this measure of everything, if the profoundly mentally handicapped are humans too?[115]

This is a very important question because if we do not want to exclude these individuals from the human circle it seems to have a profound influence on how we should understand the capacities of other animals.

According to Christoph Anstötz, "there is nothing that humans with the most serious intellectual disabilities can do or feel that chimpanzees or gorillas cannot; moreover, there is much that a chimpanzee or gorilla can do that a profoundly mentally disabled human cannot do."[116] Gorillas show linguistic abilities that severely mentally disabled individuals are unable to achieve even with extensive training. The testing of certain primates with the Standford-Binet Children's Intelligence Test provides shows that these primates test in the below-average human range. This is well above the ability of the mentally disabled who lack the ability to take the test.[117] Other experiments show problem-solving abilities and the expression of feelings of fear, confusion, excitement, pleasure, apprehension and other emotional responses in primates

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[115] Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project*, 163.
[116] Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project*, 165.
[117] Cavalieri, *The Great Ape Project*, 166.

that mentally disabled humans are incapable of. The capacities of primates far exceeds that of disabled humans and calls into question the blanket statement that human beings are superior because they exercise capacities "better" than animals.

If all human beings are created in the image of God and being in the image of God is signified by the difference in degree between humans and animals, what happens when it's shown that some human beings have fewer of the capabilities we identify as part of the *imago dei* or exercise these capabilities less than other animals? The first possible response is to argue that the question we are concerned with is of the paradigmatic cases and that outliers shouldn't matter when we discuss these issues. Humans who have strokes or serious accidents later in life which rob them of most human capabilities would still be considered in the image of God. Therefore, the profoundly disabled should too. The problem is that at one point these other humans exhibited the capacities that allowed for their categorization as superior over other species based on differences in degree. Those who are congenitally disabled have never exhibited these characteristics. We cannot argue for the image of God solely from the point of view of the paradigmatic cases of normal functioning humans because the text of Genesis 1:26 is inclusive; all humans are created in the image of God.

If all humans are created in the image of God, including those humans who are severely mentally disabled, but certain species like primates exhibit the capacities we identify as important more than those severely disabled humans it would appear primates need to be included as *image dei* too. However, if this is

the line of argumentation that is used, the image of God as based on a difference of degree isn't actually a difference at all. Humans and primates would not be different where the image of God is concerned. Some people may support this line of argumentation because it allows us to keep all human beings within the image of God definition and the verses of Gen 1:26-28 do not explicitly state that great apes are not in the image of God. However while this may not be stated:

> One can infer that its absence with respect to other creatures is significant; nevertheless, anyone who attempts to make the theological claim that some (or all) other creatures are not created in God's image in any sense of the term must depend on an *argumentum e silentio*—an approach that has proved somewhat hazardous, particularly with reference to the Bible.[118]

Using this sort of argument isn't very conclusive or helpful. Trying to make an absolute statement based on the absence of data rather than its presence is dangerous, because it opens us up to the problem of being able to make more absurd claims as we go along just because there is nothing that says it isn't so. There is nothing that says plants aren't made in the image of God either. A second problem with this approach is that human superiority and uniqueness are lost in this line of argumentation. Humans can't be superior if another species is included within the definition of the image of God. In addition, humans

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[118] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 106.

can't be unique if the capacities that determine the difference in degree are met by both apes and humans.

A final approach would be to exclude great apes from the image of God, but as a result also exclude disabled human beings. This approach allows for the stability of the claims of human superiority and uniqueness based on whatever capacities we chose, yet is dangerous in other ways. If all humans, not some humans, are made in the image of God then the decision to exclude certain human beings based on capacities isn't coherent with that claim. One cannot first claim that all humans are created in the image of God, claim that this image is represented in our specific human capacities which are a matter of degree different vis-a-vis other animals, then acknowledge that some humans' capacities are less than that of other animals. If those lesser humans get included then the animals with those more sophisticated capacities should also be included.

While Thomas Aquinas' appeal to reason and rationality as the absolute between humans and animals appears to fail it is possible to try to read part of Aquinas with a different interpretation. Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* 1.93.4 describes that the image of God is found in all people but in one of three different ways:

> First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly,

> inasmuch as man actually and habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory…The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed.[119]

This implies that the concept of the divine image in humans is not all or nothing. Rather it is a matter of degree even among humans. In his argument only some humans, the blessed, are fully in the image of God. All humans may contain the image but some express this image much more perfectly or properly than others. This argument put in practice would mean that we can acknowledge that all humans are in the image of God, but because of their extra capacities the paradigmatic humans are somehow in the image of God more fully than those that are disabled. This sort of interpretation is problematic for the same reasons that have already been identified. Humans arbitrarily choose the capacities that they identify as representing the divine image. Primates or other species with equal capacities as disabled humans would also be included in the *imago dei* in this secondary sense posing a problem for human uniqueness. Therefore, trying to make the image of God itself a matter of degree doesn't solve any of the huge problems that arguments that identify humans being in the image of God as a matter of degree bring up.

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[119] ST 1.93.4

The argument that that human beings are created in the image of God and that this represents a difference of degree between humans and animals seems to be just as problematic as a difference in kind argument. The difference in degree arguments benefit from being more scientifically feasible, however, any of the capacities we choose as being part of the divine image are arbitrarily decided and evaluated by humans who have concluded what they want beforehand. The benefit of an absolute distinction between humans and animals is that there is no arbitrariness to the choice. It would be obvious what makes humans unique and as a result superior. However, thinking about the notion that humans are created in the image of God is problematic if one approaches it from both an in-kind or degree perspective. It seems that we've reached a point where the concept of humans being created in the image of God is no longer useful.

VI. Abandoning the Image

There is a significant problem when people talk about humans being made in the image of God. No matter how one typically frames the term, either as an absolute distinction or a scalar difference between humans and animals, there are both scientific and theological reasons that seem to contradict or undermine any claims using these lines of argumentation. This raises a significant question: Since both arguments have major problems is either one better or is there another option that we should consider?

The difference in kind argument attempts to maintain the uniqueness and superiority of humans by identifying certain characteristics, attributes, or functions that indicate humans are made in the image of God. Critical examination of these distinctions show that they do not hold up under scientific scrutiny. None of distinctions is unique to human beings. The difference in degree argument attempts to place humans at the top of a ladder that all of nature is a part of. Humans are subject to the same laws of nature as everything else, but it is precisely these laws of nature that have allowed humans to develop as a creature capable of the most complex and sophisticated tasks. Arguably this is what makes humans superior and unique. However, the degree arguments begin to fail when the nonparadigmatic cases of human individuals are considered because it makes it difficult to decide who should and should not be included within the image of God definition. The degree arguments also fail

because it forces us to make an arbitrary decision about what capacities matter and how those capacities should be evaluated to determine what is "best".

Neither line of reasoning seems to resolve the many issues surrounding the superiority and uniqueness of human beings. The use of either approach means that you are opening yourself up to a variety of critiques that seem insurmountable. The lack of resolution and the tendency of religious sentiments to rely on claims about humans being made in the image of God raises many questions. The most important questions include: Is it even worthwhile talking about the image of God at all? Is there some sort of third option that should be considered?

David S. Cunningham's examination of the word image and its usages is enlightening and helps to sort out some of these issues. He begins by asking us to imagine a painting that we know well. I propose we think about his argument in terms of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* because of its widespread notoriety. First imagine the painting itself, but then imagine a reproduction of the exact size and shape with "every detail precisely in place, right down to the texture of the paint and the irregularly faded colors and pigments."[120] This reproduction is so good it is like a forgery and of course it is an image of the original. One can also imagine a second reproduction that is smaller and lacking some texture. This is also obviously an image but it would also be clear that at the same time this is a reproduction and not the original. Now imagine a low-resolution computer print out of the painting. It still seems to be an image but not in the

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[120] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 110.

same way as the best reproduction. Next, imagine the *Mona Lisa* as a digital mosaic where the image as a whole is composed of a variety of other images. Finally, imagine a child's watercolor painting of the original that is only decipherable by the child's parents. This progression raises a very serious question: "At what point (in this journey of increasing distance from the original) does the attempted copy cease to be appropriately described as an image?"[121]

It seems clear that the term image is used as a designation of degree. It is easy to say that a high-quality replica of the *Mona Lisa* is a better image of the original than the child's watercolor or even the computer printout. The difficulty with this sort of designation is that it is, "very difficult to assess a range of possible images of a particular archetype and to say, straightforwardly and with conviction, that certain ones are images while others are not."[122] It is very hard or near impossible to say that one thing is an image while another is not.

So far this argument seems to be more in-line with the difference of degree argument proposed earlier, with human beings represented as the image of God because they are at the top of the ladder. However, Cunningham notes that while, "the foregoing analysis might give the impression that the degree to which something is an image of something else can be charted along a spectrum," there is a second aspect of the word, namely, "that something can be the image of something else in a variety of different ways."[123] Think about the image of a particular human being. This person can be represented in a variety

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[121] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 110.
[122] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 111.
[123] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 111.

of ways and art forms. There could be a painting, sculpture, literary description, photograph, movie, dance, and more, each of which functions as an image of that particular human being. Which of these image types is the best? The photograph might be great visually but lacks the sense of depth provided by the sculpture. An actor may seem best but they are reciting scripted lines. A hologram may appear lifelike while at the same time being ghostlike.[124] There is no "best" image among these cases. Each has merits and drawbacks and while one may compare what is best within a single mode, e.g. which photograph is best, it is impossible to develop a spectrum when so many different modes or forms are possible.

In the cases described above the archetype of the image is something that is well known and can be directly experienced and interacted with. However, when we talk about being made in the image of God the archetype, God, is inaccessible to humans. Even with divine revelation no one is able to conceive of the whole of the divine image. The reality of human life is that, "God remains sufficiently a mystery to us that we cannot easily point to specific features of the human being and say, *that* detail in our makeup is what makes us most like God."[125] We can claim a variety of things about this image and each of these claims may have arguments in in its favor, but it is impossible to look at God and look at humans and compare them. It is necessary to acknowledge the alterity of God and the fact that humans do not have access to the original image with which one can make a comparison.

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[124] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 112.
[125] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 112.

The task of trying to fit the *imago dei* either within the framework of an absolute condition or a linear spectrum of degrees seems foolish. The language and way that humans conceive of images does not function in this way and to assume that somehow the image of God is free from these difficulties and characterizations doesn't make sense. According to Cunningham the *imago dei*, "is neither an absolute condition (in which humans beings are created in the image of God and everything else is not), nor a series of receding approximations of likeness to the divine, as though human beings were 97 percent like God, whereas gorillas were 84 percent godlike…"[126] Neither the difference in kind or difference of degree claims about human-animal distinctions function well. The concept of image doesn't seem helpful if our goal is to determine any differences between humans and animals that carry significant theological weight. Just as we don't have access to the archetype of the image, neither do we have many other references to humans being made in the image of God outside of Genesis 1:26-27. The other places this language appears in the Hebrew Bible is Gen 5:1 and 9:6, which do not provide any context to even help shrink the possible interpretations. While there are plenty of biblical texts that describe God and provide examples of the character and capacities of the divine, deciding which of these texts should be favored is an arbitrary human choice. Furthermore, the biblical texts do not provide direct access to the archetype. They are images that represent God in one way or another, none of which is "best".

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[126] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 113.

It seems both a difference in kind and of degree approaches are doomed to failure when we are using the language of *imago dei*. This is especially true if we accept Cunningham's view that despite the millennia of study and interpretation of the image of God its foundation is very shaky. The notion of image is neither an absolute nor a linear spectrum. As a result it seems that any further attempts to examine human-animal distinctiveness should decline to use the language of the image of God and instead try to interpret questions of human uniqueness and superiority in light of something that can be better supported theologically and scientifically. As a result, Cunningham adopts the language of "flesh" as a more useful term.

There are a variety of reasons why the term flesh may be more useful for determining human and animal distinctions rather than the use of image of God. The word flesh appears in the NRSV and Apocrypha 321 times. The prevalence of the term seems to suggest that it is at least as worthy of attention as the rare image of God language. The language of flesh refers to the, "the physical stuff that makes up the body of an animal," whether it is human or not, along with reference to kinship as being "flesh of my flesh." In addition, the phrase "all flesh" is used 36 times in the bible to refer to all living creatures. The common usage of the term gives us more to work with compared to the infrequent image of God language.[127]

The term flesh is also helpful because it is often used to describe God's relationship to all creatures, not just human beings. The covenant that God

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[127] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 114-115.

makes in Genesis 9:8-11 is with reference to all flesh, not just humans. This indicates that all of creation is dependent on God.[128] Furthermore, the language of flesh, "allows us to see both what unites human beings with other living creatures and what differentiates them."[129] All living things share the same physical makeup, but the category of flesh is also used to establish distinguishing marks. An example of this is 1 Corinthians 15:39 where different types of flesh are determined to be different. The flesh of humans is different from other animals and different animals also have different types of flesh. The biblical recognition of this, "mirrors our own empirical observations, allowing us both to identify those aspects of life that human beings share with other species and to differentiate ourselves as well."[130] The language of flesh is more scientifically defendable then the language of image.

Finally, the language of flesh in reference to the idea that God became flesh means that, "God's incarnation is defined not so much by the accidental properties of this flesh (Jewish, male, human) as it is by its essential fleshly character, which human beings share with many other creatures."[131] The incarnation is for the entire universe, not just human beings. Rather than separating Jesus from all of creation like the language of image does, it connects Jesus to the element of creation that he participates in most fully, along with all of creation.

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[128] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 115.
[129] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 115.
[130] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 115.
[131] Deane-Drummond et al., *Creaturely Theology*, 116.

Abandoning the language of *imago dei* after millennia of usage may be difficult to do. It has been ingrained in the human psyche as a means of understanding our distinction from the rest of nature and the animals in it. However, in the contemporary world the decision to stop formulating questions of uniqueness and superiority on image language is necessary because there is no usage of it that is unproblematic. Instead, it may be necessary to begin introducing the language of flesh, or potentially another term, as a way of distinguishing humanity from animals in a way that is both theologically and scientifically supported.

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