

All Creatures Great and Small

Taking a look at the human-animal
bond in western culture

thesis by

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For Panther, Charlie, Chaim and Simcha.

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1. Prologue

Every day I wake up and turn to my cat curling up next to me, and while looking at HER she reminds me of the quote by the famous French Philosopher Montaigne: *'When I play with my cat, how do I know she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?'*¹

This is one thing I will never know for sure, because when I take my cat on hikes – as I do almost daily – and she is off the leash, she could escape and go anywhere. But she always comes when called upon. This is partly because of the training I have done with her right from the moment I got her as a kitten, but something else seems to be happening. Is it the snacks? O yes, of course I provide her with food, but nevertheless I have seen her capable to hunt for herself, so this must be more than just the food. By now I have traveled with Simcha – her name – all over Europe and she always returns. She enjoys the adventures we share and always stays right there by my side.

My love for cats was just the beginning of my fascination for other animal species. This just happened early on with a fascination for the smallest animals like bats or frogs, dead or alive, and for the biggest, even extinct ones, like dragons and dinosaurs.

I want to share my fascination; I would like to explore the way we have always envisioned the life of animal species, how that view has changed throughout history, with the annotation that I focus on Europe because that is what influenced me most, through its culture and religion. I will create an overview as an important body of text, as I've come across a lot of people that are less close to nature, let aside the intuitive world of animals and the possible connection between a human being and an animal. I will not go in-depth on every different opinion or philosophical idea on the matter, as I am more interested in creating – and talking about - a personal journey and explore this, rather than trying to suggest scientific research is at stake.

I will be exploring the human bond with other animal species, meaning I see you and me –us humans – as a part of the bigger animal kingdom. We are all animals, all creatures big and small. I will be using the word animal in the broadest sense, because it paves the path for explaining things a bit easier to digest for you, dear reader, whether you are a lover of animals or art, or neither. So instead of man versus animal, this thesis is more along this train of thought: humans are just another lifeform of domesticated animal species, like cats or dogs.

By using my personal bond with the animals in my life as examples, I like to explore how my fascination for those animals and the dynamic I share with them, has led me to see a glimpse of a world that most humans seem to be indifferent to.

I limit myself on the main focus: how we communicate, live alongside or together with animals and how we perceive their intuition, or better: smart intellect. And how we look at animals has been shaped in the last millennium by successive waves of change. Our time marks quite a turning point it seems, on the other hand we drift further away in our understanding of intuition and animals.

The main question of this thesis is:

How do we look at animals in the Western world and how is this influenced by our culture and religion?

^{1.} ¹ Frampton, S. *When I'M Playing With My Cat, How Do I Know That She'S Not Playing With Me? Montaigne And Being In Touch Wih Life*, London: Faber and Faber, 2011, P. 97.

2. Introduction: *My Cat and I*

One of the first things I recall as a child would be the understanding gaze of my childhood cat Panther. Not the talkative type, but he used to be very patient. He could listen to me for hours and hours and would never say that I was too much. As young as I was Panther felt to me like someone I could rely on emotionally. Because we were together so much, I would quickly learn his language of movements: a move of the tail could mean a friendly *hello*, or moving fast to express an annoyed gesture. A tone of his 'meow' could either be *good to see you* or *I'm starving, give me food*.

I think growing up with different species of animals really has helped me in my curiosity of the world. I remember clearly the moment I found out that the way I was communicating and seeing Panther as a family member wasn't the norm. One day I was visiting a friend's house and I don't remember exactly how, but we started to talk about animals and I declared that my Panther was like a brother to me. My friend looked me dead in the eye and said 'how can he be, it is just a cat'. This sentence has always resonated with me, back then it struck me and I got really angry.

We all know there are millions of domestic animals: a lot of people love taking care of their pets. But even those people tend to declare me insane when I tell them how much love I can have for my cat, how I treat and train her, or when I tell them I take her for walks in the park. I was accused of abusing my ownership, because I live and take care of my cat in ways that are not seen as the norm.

After Panther's death he left a huge emptiness in our family's heart. It took us time before we decided to get a new member to the family. Then we met Charlie! One proud Siamese cat. A change of characters, very different from Panther. Charlie joined me in whatever I did. He was eager to pretend he could speak, sleep on the bed with me, try to mimic me while I was working, and the thing he loved most: Spending time with me while I was painting in my room. Unlike Panther, who could be classified as a stereotypical house cat, Charlie really wanted to be out in the world, and let everybody know he was present. One day, after having seen a video online about training cats to walks outside I decided to give it a try. I bought a nice harness and trained him indoors. We slowly started going outside, each time a bit further than the previous time. I showed him that he was safe with me. He learned to jump into my arms if a big dog was approaching. The amazing thing about Charlie was that all he really wanted was to spend time together. Spending so much time outside together revealed Charlie's true personality. I realize that all pet owners brag how social their dog is or how funny his behavior, but the thing is that all animals seem to have different kind of personalities. Where Panther was more of a quiet socialite, even a classic cat relaxing on your lap, Charlie was a king of the castle, and indeed: the Siamese breed is known for being very loud.

On my walks with him one other thing had started to be apparent; it seemed as if the world around us took notice of us walking in the surrounding polders and forest. Not only did people look at us, asking me how I trained my cat, but also other creatures paid notice. The crows would notice me and Charlie and would come toward us – the curious crow-gang. They seemed to be interacting with us, the regular stroller and her cat. This had been the

first time a wild animal had ever willingly started to interact, notice me and say hello to me. Or to be more precise: They interacted with my cat, as the moment they'd noticed Charlie approaching too close, they would look for shelter with loud caws. They were sending a clear territorial message, that we were not allowed in this part of the wood. When we came too close, they started to attack Charlie and we left. Puzzled as I was after this interaction, I told some of my friends about it but they would not listen closely. For them it was just about a bunch of birds being aggressive. To be honest, I was quite disappointed by their lack of interest in the interaction as a way of communication and play.

I changed tactics and would bring the black birds some food. Not short after that they seemed to appreciate the offer. They got used to the food, and let us do an evening stroll. Even without Charlie, they would recognize me and would join me when I sat down on a bench. I got myself some new feathered friends.

Learning from this event, I've always kept my eyes out for crows, any kind of bird in fact, and learned about their patterns. Only one year later our dear Charlie sadly passed away, he was hit by a car. Losing him so early took a big hit on me.

I was living on my own for the first time, and could not help but noticing that I was slowly losing my grip without a companion, a brother, a friend, that helped me to keep my focus. To be mentally and physically fit, it is important for me to be connected to someone on an existential level, meaning: a selfless level without the need to constantly clarify myself or make statements, just to be and exist. Some do this with friends, family or even people they don't know. I do so too, but in moments of stress or discomfort I will turn to other creatures like dogs, cats or crows, or wild life just for a calm reassurance of the *here and now*.

It was Chaim who would give me this comfort, my white Turkish Angora wonder kitten. Who came into my life in 2020, and passed away that same year.

I lost all three cats in the span of four years. Even if time spent together is short it is still so precious.

Now I have my Simcha, the Bengal, and she makes me smile every day.

3. Humans and animals: towards co-existence

I was talking to a friend when we stumbled upon the topic of Dutch native animals, and how they survive in the spare nature we still have left. About how the local government has to step in and kill a certain number of deer and boars to make sure there is no overpopulation, because of the lack of natural predators. At some point my friend looked me in the eyes and asked: 'Ori, deer eat meat, don't they?' My first reaction was to laugh at the silly remark she had made. This couldn't be serious, right? She didn't seem too pleased with my reaction, SO I apologized and tried to tell her that there exist no deer as a carnivore as they are herbivores and therefor don't eat meat. She was a student psychology, but hardly believed my words. Her response was that it wasn't such a weird thing to think they could eat other animals, and that a lot of people didn't know.

This had me thinking, so I asked more people if they knew if deer were herbivores or carnivores. Shockingly at least half of the students in my dorm were not aware that a deer is strictly vegetarian. My common knowledge turned out to be something that some of my friends didn't know. I was shocked they didn't get this from primary school, but foremost: they did not care not to know it. What about nature? What about being a mammal yourself? I think most people lose their interest in the natural world around puberty, when the focus from exploring the world around you turns into creating one's own identity and figuring out who you want to be. I mean: how often did you hear a grown person tell you: 'I've just met the nicest cat on my way here'. My point is that I have noticed that not a lot of people really pay attention to the creatures or animals in their neighborhood or surroundings that are not their own pets.

Feline Paradise

One day I was watching BBC's Big Cats. Two parts stood out to me the most: the story of the Serval (*Leptailurus Serval*) cat in one of South Africa's biggest industrial wastelands, and the story of the panther (*Panthera Pardus*) in Mumbai India. The first shot of the first documentary opens at night, with a wide landscape full of big factories surrounded by – literally – flaming machinery: the narrator explains that this industrial landscape is the size of a town. Between the big machines lurks a big black shadow; it's the Serval cat. Between the machinery and high fences there is a lot of greenery, these small patches of green land are full of rodents, that attract the Serval. It is a secure wasteland, a place where humans rarely interfere and because of the high fence's larger predators like lions or cheetahs can't go in. It was amazing to see how the servals thrive in an otherwise apocalyptic scenery. Next to the factories were large pools of water kept to cool the hot machinery, but where there is water there is life: so, surrounding these pools is thick greenery, perfect for rats and mice to build their homes. Strange as it may seem this industrial wasteland is actually the most densely populated area for serval cats in all of Africa. It is a place, even though man made, where Servals can roam freely. Or as the narrator likes to put it: it's a small cat paradise.

The other story unfolds in Mumbai, India. One of the world's most populated cities, but not only with humans: Mumbai is also the most densely populated places with Panthers. During the day they spend most of their time in the surrounding forest and green lands, but at night they make their way into the city. The documentary introduces us to Krishna Tiwari of the Forest & Wildlife Conservation Society, he grew up in. Mumbai and knows its streets well. He

spends most of his research on the city's urban panther population. People see the big cats on a regular basis. The panthers leave the people alone, disappear into the night not wanting any interaction. It does not always go smoothly the narrator continues, which isn't strange as the cats do go to the city with a purpose: it's their hunting ground. Mumbai has a lot free roaming livestock that walks around unprotected, cows are holy and walk the streets. People use dogs as a way to protect and alarm the creatures, but they are way smaller than these big felines. The cattle and dogs are bound to fall prey to the big cats. Of course, there have been human related accidents as well, and in 2004 this got to an all-time high when in just one month ten humans got killed. Krishna and the local government knew that something had to be done, but not in the way you would expect them to handle it. Instead of shooting the animals, they choose to educate people how to safely live alongside the panthers. Things like locking up livestock at night, traveling in groups and instead of running away when you encounter a big cat, staying calm instead has made a huge difference to control human-panther related accidents. Because of the tolerance towards these big cats Mumbai has become one of the biggest habitats for leopards, where they can live alongside humans. Instead of fearing them, they choose to co-exist: it's a rare example but it shows a way of co-existing with animals that not always has to end in violence or extinction.

There are a lot of predators that live and roam around like this. Foxes in London for instance. But they get treated differently. Or the coyotes in Los Angeles. In big cities like these, animals of this size and predators are treated like the pest: traps are set and the local governments try to control their numbers by killing them or keeping the population in check.

These different ways of looking at – and living with – animals show how divided we are in our view of other mammal species. It's easy to think in a kind of divided way: animals belong in wild nature and humans belong in civilization. But the thing is that this imaginary barrier does not exist: humans and animals have always co-existed. We have gone from barbarism to urbanism, but have forgotten to be civilized towards animals. Older civilizations have proven that all kind of animals – from small rats to birds to more unnoticed nightly heroes like the fox or a panther or a snake – simply use the urban settings in a way we humans could not imagine. They keep it clean and healthy, without pesticides. They walk in between the gardens using hidden paths, but still, they live alongside us.

The notion of being divided originates from the way we look and try to understand other species. As I previously mentioned about my friend being ignorant of what a deer might eat, a lot of people have no awareness nor want to know more about our companions, let alone the intelligence that can inspire us. This thesis is not about how intelligent animals are in contrast to use humans, that is not a fair way of looking. We are all different creatures with different cultures and also different intelligences.

Co-existence & communication

We all use language. Just like cats, all animals have their own language. Animals can learn human language in a form of codes, for example macaw birds learning meanings of different words, dogs learning to press buttons with different meanings and monkeys learning sign language or Morse's coding. But then the question Arises: do they really understand what they are telling or communicate? Or do they just mimic what we want them to say?

One such occasion was that of the horse Kluger Hans, The owner, Willhelm von Osten. One day noticed how his horse could tell the exact measurement of the opening to the building where he parked his carriage, but before he could really use Hans the horse sadly died. In 1890 he bought another horse calling him Hans; with this horse he started teaching him different kind of things, colors, spelling words, etc. Hans would answer by putting his left hove to the ground. Some people thought Hans to be a genius, others did not believe the story and started questioning the story. Because they could not find any indication of sabotaging the whole act by neither the horse nor his owner, a group of scientists decided to test the horse and its owner.

Under the guidance of Oskar Pfungst they found out that Hanse used hints from either his owner or people in the public to indicate the answers to the questions, especially the tilt of the head (indicating he should move is hove one more time) was the way the horse could tell the right answer. So, Hans did not really know the answer to the question but he could sense in a very clever way the right answers from what he derived rightly from those people who wanted to have him say it.

In recent years scientists have started concentrating on doing experiments the other way around: humans learn languages from other animals. Instead of learning words you have to focus on body language, look at the expressions. They soon found out that the way other species communicate and interact with other species, is a way more complex than they had first imagined. For example, dolphins can feel attracted to humans, and monkeys can wage wars. Pets, only the domesticated animals, almost form a kind of exception because most of them grow up with humans and learn our language from a very young age onwards. Dogs can almost smile like humans and cats manipulate their meow to get what they want from us.

Finding the right balance between humans and animals, is about finding a way to co-exist and respect and understand each other's worlds. To co-exist on planet earth is seeing the human species as an animal species. What could this bring to us in the future? We did take a long route from co-existence to enslaving, use and abuse, yet having millions of pets that we dominantly love or breed to eat. Let's have look at the predators we have become.

4. Animals in European Art & History

In this chapter I will research & analyze how the relationship between humans and other mammal species has developed throughout history. Because this is such a vast leap through times I will be focusing on the bigger picture. From time to time, I will zoom in on things I choose to be of importance to demonstrate our – lack of – view on animals. Focusing mostly on Europe, I will explore the way we look and live with animals has gone through quite a few different stages.

I. Pre-history

I will begin our journey through history roughly around 4,5 million years ago. According to evolutionary science we humans are part of the primate family, along with gorillas and other big apes. Early human ancestors stopped swinging in trees and started walking on the ground sometime between 4.2 million and 3.5 million years ago. Following the English philosopher and scientist Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, we went from *tree dwellers* to *ground dwellers*. All those millions of years ago our primate ancestors split off from the other evolution paths and went their own way. Most tree dwellers had a mostly vegetarian diet. But our ancestors, once on the ground, started hunting for small prey, or eating meat from carcasses.

Then, starting around 2 million years ago, still in the Paleolithic period, we started making our own tools. This allowed us to hunt more effectively. To a huge effect. We could hunt for bigger animals like mammoths. We know this because of traces left behind, like the spear points found by the German archeologist Hartmut Thieme in 1995 in Schöningen, Germany. These wooden spears are thought to date from around 400,000 BC and form the oldest weapons ever to have been found. At that point in time our ancestors had turned into hunters and gatherers. Most of them lived as nomads, moving from place to place. The new knowledge of making tools and roaming around seemed to give our ancestors a new kind of awareness of the world around them. This is most notably in one of the oldest cave drawings in the world, discovered in 1951 in The Cave of Maltravieso in Cáceres, Extremadura, Spain. It shows red hands all over the wall and figures of buffalo like creatures running: these drawings are estimated to be from around 64.000 BC.

Many more such drawings have been found depicting lions, rhinos, buffaloes and mammoths. It is remarkable that most of the cave drawings depict animals but not a lot of humans. Scientists believe that the humans of that time thought that the animals they hunted had some kind of magical power. This early form of magical believe was later called animism, a term first used by Sir Edward Tylor. There is no set definition for animism, but is the believe that there is no boundary between the spiritual and the physical world, meaning that souls exist in everything, from human to animal, from mountain to river. Souls are often the spirits of beings and things. It is believed that early humans thought they could capture the spirits of animals by eating them and thus becoming part of them, so lots of other animals were almost worshipped because of their great power.

Around 13.000-15.000 BC meteorites fell on the earth, the climate began to change, and so did the way of life. Scientists estimate that mammoths and other large animals were going extinct around this time. The ice age was coming to an end and so was the lifecycle of hunters and gatherers.

So, instead of traveling around people started to settle, hunt smaller prey and focus on growing plants. Around 14.000 to 3.000 BC humans started domesticating animals. Domestication meaning: taking a wild animal and slowly over time breeding it and seeing which of its offspring is the friendliest towards humans, making sure it is fit to live with. We don't know for certain how domestication really started.

By looking at one of our oldest non-human companions, the dog, we can get a pretty good idea how this process went down. Between 13.000- 11.000 BC the ancestors of dogs (*Canis Lupus*) started living near settlements approaching humans, because they had lots of food and left overs (including poop). It seems our ancestors saw the importance – and potential – of having these wolf-like creatures around them, to scare off other predators for instance. Slowly, over time with each generation, the ancestors of the dogs started living with us. Scientists are not sure if this process got started by humans or if the dogs started it themselves, and that humans took over later on.

We did not only domesticate dogs, but also livestock, cows, sheep, chicken, horses as humans started settling and become farmers. Proof of domesticating horses is found from around 4000 BC, and their domestication is believed to have been widespread by 3000 BC. Herd animals have shown to be the most suited for domestication, because of their group mentality. It is easier for them to accept humans as part of a group or even as their leader. Of all animals that have been domesticated cats are shown to have a preference for the solitary life rather than as part of a group. Because of that some scientists are debating if cats are fully domesticated or that they have domesticated themselves. Cats' bones together with human bones have been found on the Greek island Cyprus dating back to around 5.000 BC. Wild cats are not from this island so it is safe to say that they have been an early bond between the two.

The ancient Egyptians get most of the credit when it comes to domesticating early wild cat (*Felis silvestris libyca*), around 4.000 BC. cats were attracted to the early human settlements because we were starting to store grain and other crops, which lured lots of rodents. The Egyptians and cats developed a symbiosis, since they had plenty of rodents to kill and in turn us humans were not losing any more food. As the author of *The Cat in Ancient Egypt* Jaromir Malek writes: '*In this way, the cat eventually became a domesticated animal or to put it more precisely, domesticated itself.*'² The Egyptians believed in animist traditions, where the world is full of spirits and humans are not superior but equal and sometime lower than other animals

Animals as gods

In ancient Egypt people believed in a Polytheistic religion, meaning they had many more gods than one God. At that time people still viewed themselves as being part of a bigger

² Malek, J. *The Cat in Ancient Egypte*, London: British Museum Press, 2017, P. 75-6.

whole, meaning they did not differentiate themselves from other living things. Between 1.000 BC and 350 AD cats turned in Egypt onto deities, the most well-known being the goddess Bastet.

*'Embodying a freedom and happiness that humans have never known, cats are still strangers in the human world. If they have been seen as unnatural creatures, it is because they live according to their nature. Since no such life can be found among humans' cats came to be seen as demons or gods.'*³

Grey explains that from being household helpers and companions, cats became omens of good fortune and, thus sacred animals. He continues to state that by the 4th century BC. There existed a 'temple of the living cat' with a large cemetery nearby of mummified cats. Mummifying something or someone is a way of preparing them for the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians are well known for mummifying people, but they also mummified hawks, crocodiles, ibis and most of all: their beloved cats.

Living beings including gods, people and animals. The modern idea of separating so called religion and everyday life did not exist. And so, the view of the world around them and their place in it was still mostly based on their animistic beliefs. The Egyptians were all part of the same world in which humans were not superior to other animals.

Looking back at how we think cats came to live with us, I cling to the notion that it is not a strange idea that the ancient Egyptians started worshipping cats. It was their way of living together with the world around them, and the story and myths that came from this symbiotic lifestyle turned cats and other animals into gods and deities.

Many ancient people worshipped animals as gods, or used them to represent their gods. One such religious belief is Hinduism. Hinduism came to be as a mixture of ancient Indian beliefs, blending together around 3.000 BC. An interesting aspect of the Hindu believe is their perception on reincarnation. Hindus believe that after life both humans and animals are reborn. But you don't know whether animals can become human's or if a human can become an animal. This is because Hindus believe every life form to be divine. Many of the big polytheistic believes – like Buddhism, Taoism and Hinduism – have things in common: that there is sacred life in everything, and that humans and animals are one and the same, that we are all part of a bigger whole.

Around the time of the ancient religions, there is one religion slightly different from the others. This is the one I am most familiar with: Judaism. It's the world's oldest monotheistic religion, dating back to almost 4000 BC, as we count in this year 2022 back to 5783. Judaism started with Hebrew tribes in the Mesopotamia region of the Middle East. It took a while for Jews to become monotheists, says feminist historian Elke Weiss, and in ancient Israel, many worshipped both 'El', the god of Nature, and his consort, the mother-goddess Asherah. According to historian Raphael Patai, monotheism was actually a minority religion for a while, and we find inscriptions of the worship of 'Yahweh and his Asherah', represented by a cow (sacred mother figure feeding its calf).

³ Gray, J. *Feline Philosophy*, Great Britian: Allan Lane, 2020, P. 100.

One can believe in this and still believe in the bible, since the bible discusses the battle for monotheism in great detail.

We also find Asherah idols in biblical digs that pertain to the Israelite period. These ideas continued into Judaism, becoming the 'Shekhina', the divine presence of God which is feminine. I took this from Elke Weiss' answer to what everybody should know about Judaism, though this view will not be widely known. The Torah Includes the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

There are also traces left in Genesis, implying that people at early times practiced animistic beliefs and rituals, like the worship of the Golden Calf.

According to Hebrew history recorded in Exodus, the second book of the Torah, the Hebrews became a people and adopted a nation on the Mount Sinai in Southern Arabia, between 1300 and 1000 BCE. This officially states the beginning of Judaism becoming a monotheistic religion. The Torah, or Hebrew Bible, states that humans were created in the image of their God, therefore making God anthropomorphic, or humanlike.

In the Torah humanity is given domination over animals, and has the right to use animals for legitimate needs. This idea of dominion would have profound effects on the western civilization for centuries to come. The term dominion means to rule over nature and is the idea that humans are in charge of the world on behalf of God. Some Christians – who adopt a literal interpretation of the Bible – believe that this gives humans the right to use the world's natural resources for their own benefit.

Back to the laws of the Torah: animal flesh can be consumed food; animal skin was used for clothing as the Torah itself must have been written on animal hides. But we are only allowed to use animals in this way when one has a genuine, legitimate need. And it may only be done in a way that causes the animal the least suffering. Under Jewish law animals have the same rights as humans (= *tza'ar ba'alei chayim: prevention of cruelty*). Animals rest on Shabbat, as do humans. We were joining in the WORK AND REST, together. Kosher slaughter is meant to be as fast and painless as possible, and Halal takes the same view of the strict rules of the ritual of slaughter.

II. Classical antiquity

Now we Take a jump to the classical antiquity, also called 'the classical era'. The period of cultural history between the 8th century and the 6th century AD.

Ancient Greece had different kind of cultures, as it was a conglomerate of different states. In general, animals were widely depended on for food, clothing and work. These uses were not questioned, because people believed that everything in nature had its purpose.

In this thesis I mention that the Greek mythology is filled with stories of gods transforming into animals, and with animals that are deities or companions of deities. Recent studies by Julia Kindt, an academic and author who specializes in ancient Greek history and religion, state the general suggestion that ancient Greek religion is not simply a two-way system of

communication and mediation between gods and humans, but rather, a tripartite system with animals as a third point of reference.⁴

Animals were critical to the Greek understanding of the divine. They also helped to frame the human condition, in particular the distinctiveness of special individuals such as heroes, like for instance Herakles. In Greek mythology we find that humans are reflections of their gods, but the gods transform in animals, a fancy especially of Zeus who turned from Swann, Taurus and Eagle. Many heroes had to fight huge animals and creatures that were half human, half animal like centaurs, sphinx, saters, sirens and the famous minotaur.

Most gods had an animal as their attribute, a kind of sacred animal, that if people saw a cow or a peacock, they would know that the goddess Hera would be around. Athena had her owl, Artemis a deer, Apollo a snake and Aphrodite a dove, bees or a swan. Animals, humans and gods are entangled in Greek religion. The three categories are perceived to have permeable boundaries, for instance in cases of divine and human metamorphoses, such as those of Demeter, Poseidon, Dionysus. In each case, the animal form opens the door to an experience that is beyond the capabilities of humans to account for. While animals, especially domesticated species, are familiar to humans, they are also – just like the gods - radically and irremediably different from humans. This mix of similarity and difference leads to a perception of entanglement among these three categories of living beings, and it allows for the identities of each group to be in a constant state of flux.

The tripartite structure of communication between/among humans, gods and animals also functioned in the context of ancient Greek magic, in particular in animalizing humans. Circe's transformation of Odysseus' companions into pigs and Lucius' transformation into a donkey in the Pseudo-Lucian's *Onos and Apuleius*'. Metamorphoses are interesting and often funny examples.

The classical Greek period from 500 to 320 BC was most influential when it comes to ideas regarding animals. Classical Greeks practiced a *polytheistic* religion, with different gods and deities. But what makes them different was that they used philosophy in their way of understanding the world. They did not have one central philosophy or ideology, instead they followed the teachings of various philosophers.

Pythagoras – a philosopher of that time – and his followers developed the concept of *metempsychosis*, meaning that human animal souls transmigrate into other humans or animals after their death. They thought their contemporaries not to harm other animals believing them to have been humans in a previous life. They relied more or less on a vegetarian diet, depending on the range of animal species invited in transmigration.

Later the idea of transmigration was picked up and expanded upon by Plato who distinguished a so-called double nature in man's soul. For its better part divine and shared with the gods *logistikon* (meaning the rational element). And for the other related to animals the *thymoeides* (meaning the spirited elements) and *thymetikon* (meaning the appetitive Element). A person could only fulfil themselves by giving their thoughts or reasoning control over the irrational forces of his soul.

⁴ Kindt. J. *Animals in ancient Greek religion*, Routledge monographs in classical studies; New York, 2020

Aristotle, Plato's student, saw the connection between the rational and sensitive parts of the soul. He initiated important research in animal psychology, and is believed to be one of the fathers of a so-called natural hierarchy in which humans and animals and plants even objects were arranged by their level of perfection. Aristotle's ideas about ranking humans and animals in society would influence western thinkers for centuries to come.

This ranking system translated in Latin is called the *scala naturae*, ladder of nature, or the great chain of being. The Great Chain of Being (Latin: *scala naturae*, 'Ladder of Being') is a concept derived from Plato and Aristotle (in his *Historia Animalium*), Plotinus and Proclus. Further developed during the Middle Ages, it reached its full expression in early modern Neoplatonism. The top of the ladder was occupied by humans, because in the mind of Aristotle only humans had rational souls, capable of belief, reason and thought. Below the humans were other animals. Aristotle thought that their souls allowed them to feel emotion but that their minds were unable to hold reason. And finally, at the bottom of the ladder, were plants. Incapable of neither feeling nor reason they rank last. Even though humans were at the top, if one would zoom into the humans, one could discover a ranking system of their own. Even among humans there was a natural hierarchy. First the freemen, then slaves, then women and at last children.

We cannot talk about Classic Antiquity without mentioning the Roman Empire. It started with the city of Rome, run by Etruscan Kings moving up to a state, into a Republic in 510 BC. Romans had a warrior mentality and would expand their empire by conquering other countries and cultures. I jump from kings, to republic to the imperial time. The son of Caesar, August, became the first emperor. The emperors delighted in brutal competitions and sports to keep the civilians happy and entertained. One location for such games was the Colosseum of Rome. It was a massive arena that featured Events in which wild animals fought to death with each other, or with humans. Often animals were chained or tormented with burning irons and darts to make the fighting fiercer. The Spanish bull fights stem from this. That would make one think: where there are no laws against animal abuse? Not against games, no, but it is known that in some villages stork's and for instance grass snakes were protected by law. This was for this basic reason of rodent control for which both species were far more superior than humans.

Rise of Christianity

Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD, ruled by Emperor Constantine the Great. This put an immediate end to the killing humans in the games because in Christianity the human soul is sacred, but this of course did not include the games and sports involving wild animals. Now we are finally getting into what is still the biggest religion to this day all around Europe: Christianity. Christianity began its life as a sect of Judaism, during the 1st century AD. Its followers believe that the Messiah had finally arrived in human form as the son of God, named Jesus Christ. Believing in this concept became the credo, and as a Christian you would go to heaven if you lived well. The beliefs are written down in four Evangelical books, as the New Testament or the Bible.

Christ's followers regarded the death of Jesus as a human sacrifice similar to the animal sacrifices that were common in the Jewish religious practices of the time. The Bible mentions

many animals but mostly in context of everyday life, and as a food source. Christians maintained the same belief from the Torah that humans have dominion over animals. They took this step even further as the human soul was a central point of Christian theology, as they established that God could have a human child, therefore stating the position of humans even higher than that of animals. Many Christian philosophers such as Saint Augustine, argued that only humans, not animals, have rational minds and souls. Taking what Aristotle had said before them and elevating the idea of a hierarchy even more.

The traditional Christian view

For most of history Christians largely ignored animal suffering. Christian thinkers believed that human beings were greatly superior to animals, and this was also derived from Aristoteles' evolved structure of the ladder of being. They taught that human beings could treat animals badly because people had few (if any) moral obligations towards animals. When early theologians looked at animals, they concluded that it was a natural law of the universe that animals should be preyed on and eaten by others. This was reflected in their theology. Christian thinking downgraded animals for three main reasons:

- God had created animals for the use of human beings and human beings were therefore entitled to use them in any way they want
- Animals were distinctively inferior to human beings and were worth little – if any – moral consideration, because humans have souls and animals don't; humans have reason and animals don't.
- Christian thought was heavily human-centered and only considered animals in relation to human beings, and not on their own terms

III. The Middle Ages

Not all Christians shared the same ideas. Christianity is not an inherent enemy of animal rights. Christian theology – like all other religious traditions – has some unique insights to viewing animal life as having fundamental value. Throughout history there have been Christian thinkers who have raised tough ethical questions about the moral status of animals. Francis of Assisi is perhaps the most well-known figure, and we celebrate his birthday now on October 4th as World Day of Animals. He is most famous for his love for animals; it is said that he preached to birds and released animals from traps.

During the Middle Ages the Christian church worked hard – and violently – to cleanse the world of what the Church considered to be evil, and man was considered on top of animals. Christian thinkers believed that human beings were greatly superior to animals. The traditional Christian theology looked down on animals, as bestial, inferior creatures. They considered it a natural law of the universe that animals should be preyed upon. This was reflected in their theology. Modern Christians generally take a much more pro-animal line of thought. They think that any unnecessary mistreatment of animals is both sinful and morally wrong.

West Europe entered a new dark time better known as the Middle Ages. Once the Roman Empire had fallen, the authority of the Christian church grew and would become the biggest religion in Europe. In the Middle Ages the Christian church worked hard to rid the world of its evils such as pagans, still holding on to their animistic beliefs and rituals, animal worships, and anything non-Christian. Many such holy wars as they were called were held between 1095 and 1492. One of the most well-known of these crusades is that of the 'Holy Land' (1095-1291). Its goal was to conquer Jerusalem, and take it over from the Muslims who had reigned over the Holy City.

A Roman Catholic philosopher in the thirteenth Century was Saint Thomas Aquinas. Unlike many currents in the Catholic church, Thomas embraced several ideas put forward by Aristotle, and attempted to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy with the principles of Christianity. He published his work of *God and his Creatures (Summa contra Gentiles)*⁵, in 1264 AD, and he included in book two a chapter on: '*Arguments of those who wish to prove that the Human Soul perishes with the Body, with Replies to the same That the Souls of Dumb Animals are not Immortal.*' He argued that animals can't properly communicate or have reason. Therefore, their actions are driven by wild instincts, not by self-awareness. Animals can only comprehend the present, not the future, nor can they reflect the past. All of this is because they are not shaped in God's image, so their souls could never be immortal.

Islamic thoughts on Animals

Following the rise of the Christian belief was the fall of the Roman Empire late 5th century through 16th century AD in the west, and the fall of Constantinople (nowadays known as Istanbul) IN 1453, in the East, where Ottomans and Muslims had taken over the Middle East, North Africa and most of Spain.

The early Arabic culture – before converting to the Muslim religion – used to be a nomadic people, called the Bedouins. They lived in the Arabic desert, raising camels and practicing a form of Animism. They believed that spirits lived within all natural things. The first Kingdom appeared around 1000 BC, and over the next few centuries society became more central. Around 570- 632 AD Islam was founded by their Messiah Muhammad ibn Abdullah, Prophet Mohammed in short, founder of the third monotheistic religion.

The Quran, the Islamic sacred text, has many references to animals. It teaches, like Judaism and Christianity, that humans can use animals if needed, but should not harm them unnecessarily. According to Islam, animals are conscious of God. According to the Quran, they praise Him, even if this praise is not expressed in human language. It is forbidden to kill any animal except for food or to prevent it from harming people. This is also the kosher law for Jews: only killing when necessary and not to kill in mass consumption is allowed. Both Muslims and Jews have forbidden foods, like pigs and certain types of sea creatures. This is also reflected in Halal, the traditional sacred rules for meat that Muslims can only eat from a Halal killed, painless death – for the love of the animal.

⁵ Joseph Rickaby, S.J. *OF GOD AND HIS CREATURES An Annotated Translation (With some Abridgement) of the SUMMA CONTRA GENTILES Of ST. THOMAS AQUINAS*, London: Burns & Oates, 2005.

A legend tells how fond Muhammad was of his cats. One night one of his cats had fallen asleep on his robe. Muhammad simply cut a hole around the animal not to disturb his sleeping friend. He also loved horses, and considered breeding them an honorable task, as many Arabs still do. There is a big Arabic culture around breeding fine, strong horses for transportation, sporting events and warfare.

Cats turning evil

Meanwhile in the rest of Europe the idea of 'evil' became a wide spread idea in the Christian world. Many mediaeval people believed that the devil and his servants were among them, Assuming the devil had a human and an animal form.

The famous scholar Desmond Morris writes: *'The ancient horned god that protected earlier cultures, was first transformed into the evil devil of Christianity. And the sacred feline of ancient Egypt became the wicked sorceress cat of medieval Europe. Many things considered holy by previous religious faiths have automatically been damned by a new religion. In this way began the darkest chapter in the cat's long association with mankind. For centuries it was persecuted and the cruelties happened upon it were given the full backing of the church.'*⁶

Although all kinds of animals would take on the role as devil servants, by far the most famous would be the cat. A cat was closely associated with the devil, and of course, the owner would be accused of being a witch. Roughly a million cats have been burned at the stakes. Around the fourteenth century cats have been almost completely wiped out of Europe, only semi wild cats survived the killings. There is a clear anti-feminine twist in all of this. Carried over from ancient Egypt, associations of cats and the feminine further contributed to the cat's poor reputation. Before the popularization of the cult of the Virgin Mary in the high Middle Ages 1000-1300 AD, women were associated with Eve and the Fall of Man, the guilty expulsion from the Garden of Eden. All women were seen as sinful, lusty, and responsible for man's first fall, as well as for the struggle each individual man after Adam had to endure.

Another connection has to be made: during the Middle Ages the Jews were haunted as Christ-killers: this is the period when in Europe Jews were also connected to cats. It was believed that Jews worshipped cats (I see some truth in that, personally) and some would even be able to turn into cats themselves, to sneak into Christian homes and cause mischief. It was a vile fact that to the patriarch, the church as the monolithic ruler, the mighty Vatican, the cat was the vilest creature to creep across the earth.

This all backfired when in 1357 AD the second pandemic of the plague took hold of Europe. Dubbed the Black Death, it killed nearly a third of Europe's population. The disease spread through fleas on infected rodents. And as all cats were killed, the disease spiraled out of control with no cats around to hold the rodent population under control. Linking Jews and

^{2.} ⁶ Morris, D. *Cat Lore*, London: Avon, 1992, P. 158.

cats together as evil, the Jews were blamed to spread the plague. This cat hatred seems to have been unique in Europe as in other places during the same period the cat retained her status as protectors of grain and other food supplies.

IV. The Renaissance

As the Middle Ages started to fade away, one type of animal cruelty seemed to remain: the 'blood sports. Just like the 'games' of the old Roman empire, animals had to fight against each other, until death. These types of sports included beating and whipping all kind of animals like bulls, bears and cock fighting. These types of 'beatings' found its origin in the Middle Ages where it was used as a way to make the meat more tender. It quickly grew from butchers whipping the animal to letting dogs join in to scar the beast even more. Such forms of beating quickly gathered an audience. And so, it started to expand into its own form of entertainment.

The church did not have an issue with such forms of entertainment. Only the Puritans, a Christian group wanting change in the church of England, saw it as something inhuman. They took power over British parliament mid 1600 AD and banned the blood sports, but this was only short lived. When the Puritans were thrown out of power the blood sports returned and became even more popular. The puritans fled from England to the new world and brought their ideas with them. In 1641 AD the Massachusetts bay colony enacted a body of liberties that set out fundamental rights of the colonies⁷. Article 92 stated: '*no man shall exercise tyranny or cruelty towards any brute creature which is usefully kept for man's use.*' This is considered the first modern law against animal cruelty. After the dark times of the Middle Ages followed the rebirth with centuries of intellectual curiosity and scientific advancement. Excavations and revealed Roman and Greek art opened our eyes for the ruins and remains of the classical world.

I make a giant leap from the Renaissance towards a century that puts mankind in the spotlight, instead of all light on the church and God. This time period came to be known as the Age of Enlightenment. Many of the superstitions and fears of the Middle Ages were forgotten, European societies became more advanced and literate.

The church began to lose its grip on people and in its place came A more scientific based knowledge. An example is the famous painting by Rembrandt, the dissecting of a corpse by professor Tulp, A teaching during an autopsy. This kind of science had been banned by the church for centuries during the Middle Ages and because of this there was little to no progress when it came to knowledge about anatomy. This is when animal experiments would become a big research tool for modern medicine.

In 1600 AD the French Philosopher René Descartes published influential essays, in which he claims animals could not think at all ⁸, a thought that many people still share to this day. Descartes argues that because only humans have an eternal soul, only humans could use

⁷The Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641). USA. Hanover Historical Texts Project,1996.

⁸ Massey G. J. & Boyle D.A. *Philosophical Topics*, USA: University of Arkansas Press, 1999, P 87.

reason. And because humans have the gift of language, that in itself is proof that mankind is philosophically different from animals. Descartes – being fascinated by the field of mechanics – saw the parallels between a mechanical machine and an animal. He saw animals functioning as a kind of machine, that only responds to rewards and avoids punishment, just empty husks driven by instinct. He wrote that animals were just mechanical things, like a clock, therefore could not experience any real pain. He argued that, yes, when you hit an animal, it cries out in pain, like a human would. Difference is that with an animal it is just a mechanical response. The animal is not feeling real pain, it is just responding to its instinct.

This thought process of claiming that animals had no real emotions and therefore could not experience any real pain, helped making it morally acceptable to even cut open animals – without any guilt or shame – while they were still alive. For medical and scientific purposes. Literature of that time describes how living animals were getting vivisected in classrooms, just to discover and learn about anatomy. The cries of the suffering creatures were mostly dismissed as the screeching sounds machineries make when something is broken.

V. Modern Times

In Europe, during the seventeenth-eighteenth century, new social philosophical movements were coming up, questioning their philosophical predecessors. Like the Puritans did in the Americas, these new movements started speaking out against the mistreatment of animals. The culture of that time witnessed a radical redefinition of the concept of 'humanity' and its place in the environment, together with a new understanding of animals and their relation to humans.

In 1764 philosopher Francois-Marie Arouet de Voltaire attacked the 'mechanical animal' theory advocated by Descartes during the previous century. In his work titled: *Dictionnaire Philosophique Portatif*⁹.he argued that the scientists who were dissecting animals at that time found so called 'organs of feeling' within them, similar to those of humans, thus stating that that was enough proof that animals could indeed feel pain.

Then there were thinkers like Emmanuel Kant, who at first glance did not seem to particularly care about the way we treat animals, because in his eyes animals were not 'rational' beings. But Kant did have a strong moral standpoint when it came to animal abuse, and that was that we may not owe obligations towards animals, but we can have obligations in regards to animals that we owe to ourselves. Why? Because as Kant argues 'cruelty to animals can easily numb one's empathy and escalate into cruelty against other humans'. Homo homini lupus, as the Romans say: man is a wolf to another man. This idea of stopping animal cruelty for the sake of humans was a more acceptable idea and more easily embraced than the idea of preventing cruelty just for animals' sake. They would do it for mankind only.

⁹ de Voltaire, F.M.A. *Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary*. Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Lisa Reigel and the OnlineDistributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>. 2006.

Conflicting theories about Survival of the fittest

Charles Robert Darwin 1809-1882AD was a naturalist who formed the theory of evolution, whereby all species originate from a common ancestor. This branching pattern of evolution came from a process which he called '*natural selection*'. Darwin's theory was that natural selection has no purpose and that human species has come about by accident, not like many religious cultures would claim, as the center of the universe. Humans are not better than any other species, and although Darwin himself was not an animal rights advocate, his theory of natural selection had a profound impact on the way we consider our relationship to non-human animals.

When one thinks of natural selection, one can't help but think of the concept survival of the fittest. A term which has given many people (to this day) the idea that it is our right as humans to kill (or use) other creatures, and to exploit one another. That this term was first used by Darwin is a misconception. The term 'survival of the fittest' was coined by the philosopher Herbert Spencer¹⁰. He wrote: '*this survival of the fittest, which I have here sought to express in mechanical terms, is that which Mr. Darwin has called 'natural selection'. Or the preservation of favored races in the struggle of life*'.¹¹

The concept of the survival of the fittest – in the sense of the strong 'subjugating' the weak – is not consistent with Darwinism. Darwin's theory of evolution is more along the lines of a universal evolutionary kinship. Today many of Darwin's so-called followers still use the term survival of the fittest, and in doing so uphold the idea that humans are superior to other animals. Not being aware that this goes against Darwin's original beliefs, for many it was (is) A more comfortable way of accepting Darwin's theory. Concerning this notion Darwin states: '*Man and his arrogance thinks himself a great work worthy of the interposition of a deity. Humbler I believe true to consider him created from animals*'.¹²

In our central western tradition, it is the case that humans have always ranked higher than (other) animals. Because humans are (more) capable of conscious thought – as expressed in the text – Greek philosophers emphasized throughout the flourishing expansion of Christian thoughts. Before Darwin people based their arguments on human superiority perceived and enforced by their religious and cultural beliefs. Darwin's theory of evolution radically changed the way we view animals. However, his observations made him even more radical. Darwin didn't stop by claiming our physical evolution from animals. He also considered similarities in terms of our mental capacity. In his book *The Descent of Man*¹³ Darwin points out that animals, even insects, are capable of experiencing pain, play, pleasure and miscarry. Just like human beings.

'The love of a dog for his master is notorious. In agony of death a dog has been known to caress his master. Everyone has heard of the dog who licked the hand of the operator. For

¹⁰ Herbert, S. *Principles of Biology*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1864.

¹¹ Herbert, S. *Principles of Biology*, 1864, P. 331-402.

¹² De Beer, G. *Charles Darwin: a scientific biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958, P. 208.

¹³ Darwin, C. *Descent of men*, London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2013.

man, unless the operator was fully justified by an increase in our knowledge, or unless he had a heart of stone, must have felt remorse to the last hour of his life'.¹⁴

It is clear from his writings in *The Descent of Man* that Darwin thought of animals as thinking, feeling, sentient beings, something that he did not seem to share with a lot of people. Even today, these people would stick to the old ways of thinking: bias and prejudice are hard to change. And if they would think of Darwin's theory, they would only do so together with the notion of the survival of the fittest.

Another early defender of animal rights was Arthur Schopenhauer.

He believed that our immoral treatment of animals at the time was a example of western crudity and barbarity. He argued that animals should be treated with respect, as they just as much as us humans are subjected to what he calls the 'metaphysical will' and as a result experience suffering and craving.

Humanity Martin

In 1822 Richard Martin, being a member of the British parliament, sponsored a bill prohibiting cruelty to farm animals. This was one of the very first anti-cruelty laws of its kind. It granted him the nickname 'Humanity Martin'. Martin soon learned that passing a law and actually getting people to obey it where two different things. The government might have passed the bill, but that definitely didn't mean that they were interested in spending time prosecuting animal abuse cases. Martin started his own investigation together with a group of people that would later become the Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). The SPCA managed to win 149 convictions against animal abuse. In 1840 the SPCA was recognized by Queen Victoria and became the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). This initiative was the start for legislation on Animal Rights, WHICH took 27 years in all, although the use of animals in research seems a never-ending story.

In 1849 the Cruelty to Animals Act was passed. This act made abuse against animals illegal, and in 1876 it restricted the use of animals in scientific research. Many people involved in the fight against animal abuse were also involved in the child welfare and anti-slavery causes. This was exactly the idea developed by Kant that in the end permitting cruelty towards animals would lead to cruelty against other humans and weaken society.

VI. Recent History

Starting from the early twentieth century and forward, Western society has become more urbanized and way more technical and industrial. Laws preceding animals against abuse have increased. Working animals such as horses or elephants have been replaced by machinery. The middle classes have become wealthier and having pets has become increasingly more popular. Human animal bonds have evolved, and it will continue to develop as the relationship people share with different animals keeps on changing.

¹⁴ Darwin, C. *Descent of men*, 2013. P. 48.

I would like to state that I am not an animal expert myself I have just always lived with my beloved cats and as I grew older and my understanding of the world around me deepened, I could not help but wonder how so many people around me did not share the same interest in animals. Or seemed not to care about animals at all. I could never understand how people did not notice the urban flora and fauna around us. This journey of discovering where our ideas on our fellow creatures came from was never meant to be a thorough scientific research, but a more personal journey through time. So, in the end I won't be going deep into how we treat animals in the here and now in the twenty-first century, rather I would like to gather my thoughts and see how the different ways of thinking and looking at animals influenced by all the different ideas and ideals have brought us to the point we are now. Opening up this conversation I want to start with a quote by the famous feline philosopher John Gray:

'Cats are often described as being amoral. They obey no commandments and have no ideals. They show no signs of experiencing guilt or remorse, any more than they do of struggling to be better than they are. They do not exert themselves to improve the world, or agonize over what is the right thing to do. If they could understand it, the notion that how they live should be decided by any external standard would be laughable to them'.¹⁵

I really like the way John Grey interprets the way cats think; instead of making them act like humans or giving them human thoughts, He not only accepts how they think, he goes beyond that in stating that if they would use human language this is how they would say it. So instead of forcing the cat to be like a human he is translating their nature into human language. This willingness to take an imaginative leap into the mind of another species is in great contrast with the message so many other big philosophers seem to have when it comes to the mind of animals. 'Animals are not philosophers': this seems to be the message of so many big thinkers like Aristotle, Plato, Descartes or Kant.

They seem to have the idea that if you write about animals, it comes from a place of pity or callous. And if they do write about them its suggesting and stating all animals are just machines, who can't think for themselves and are only driven by primitive instinct. On the one hand there seems to be a fascination for the so-called potential of the intellect of the animal, one the other hand they are being overly skeptical about that same intelligence. And almost being in denial that other animals could have the same base knowledge and skills as us humans: not only physically but also mentally.

In the nineteenth century Charles Darwin wrote about the capacity of humans and animals to have complex emotions. Many people opposed him, stating that it was insane to think in such a way. Now, so many years later, a lot of information has come out against the theory of the animal as just an empty husk with no will of its own.

Scientists and philosophers are doing a lot of tests to see how deep the intellect and culture of the different creatures we share this earth with really is. Reminding me of the skull and face measurements of criminologist De Lambroso, he was an Italian criminologist, stating women and villains had small brains and different physiognomy, like animals, therefore they

3. ¹⁵ Gray, J. *Feline Philosophy*, 2020, P. 45.

tended more to crime. These tests on intellect and culture used to be done by using the human point of view as a reference, like for instance learning a monkey sign language. But this method is finally seen as outdated. Instead, it's reversed, and nowadays scientist try to look from the animal's point of view: what can we learn from them?

In 1974 the philosopher Thomas Nagel wanted to find out what it would be like to be a bat. He concluded it is impossible to ever know because even if he could re-create the sensation of being a bat, he did not have the same experiences as other bats – only another bat knows what it's like to be a bat.¹⁶ This seems to follow the line of thought of another philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who said that if a lion could talk and describe his life and his point of view, we would not be able to understand him, because his experiences with life are so different then our own. We would not be able to comprehend what that could be like.¹⁷

¹⁶ Nagel, T. *What Is It Like to Be a Bat*. Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review, 2014, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Oct., 1974), pp. 435-450.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1958, P1, P. 223.

Conclusion: looking at animals and mirroring yourself

So, in order to reflect on our journey through time, I find it interesting to see how our relationship with other animal species has grown. How with the changes in our history it made us look different to the world around us. Something that I also noticed is that the way we looked at ourselves and our place in the world seems to have been the biggest mirror on how we look and treat the animals around us. In prehistorical times almost all cultures and religions were animistic and in sync with nature. From seeing ourselves as 'a small water drop in a big river' we went to putting ourselves on a pedestal and declaring everything that was even a little different as hellish and evil, is a true yet confronting journey for me. It also seems to be a big part of our human nature to want to be better than everyone else and contemplate and rationalize everything we do. Not wanting to be confronted with the reality of our own actions. In the dictionary of psychology, the definition of rationalization is this:

An ego defense in which apparently logical reasons are given to justify unacceptable behavior that is motivated by unconscious instinctual impulses. In psychoanalytic theory, such behavior is considered to be a defense mechanism. Examples are 'Doesn't everybody cheat?' or 'You have to spank children to toughen them up.' Rationalizations are used to defend against feelings of guilt, maintain self-respect, and protect oneself from criticism. In psychotherapy, rationalization is considered counterproductive to deep exploration and confrontation of the client's thoughts and feelings and their effect on behavior.¹⁸

In following the theory that we are the higher purpose as we are an image of God, we have shunned ourselves from being a part of nature, and the animal world. And in doing so it feels like we have placed ourselves outside, acting as if we are not part of nature. It was easy to hide in religious beliefs (: God grants people dominion over other animals). Because of this we did not have to be confronted with the way we treated other living beings, but times have changed and our understanding of the world has broadened.

By thinking so much about why we exist and wanting to discover every little thing about ourselves and the universe, it feels like we have forgotten too just be and live.

Animals – some more than others – like to learn and play. Family pets like to learn and play with their human companions; indeed, they can teach us! But we, old dogs – the humans – can we learn a few new tricks in a reciprocal behavioral modification program in which they domesticate and humanize us?

When I look at my cat, I still don't know what she is thinking, not in a human way. Because she is no human, she is a cat. As I explore the world with her, I try not to perceive the world through my human eyes, yet I try to see it from her perspective. The ultimate lesson lies in ourselves. to be content with who I am.

I now understand the origins of our commonly accepted ideas of the way we look at animals. Yes, call me a positivist, as I just hope that we can still make a difference and some progress, by learning from animal communication, as mentioned in chapter 3 let's elevate this hope.

¹⁸ Dictionary of psychology, rationalize vb.

Let's look at the world not only through our human centered vision, but try to take time to understand that we share this world with other beings – we simply do, there is no liking or disliking it. Animals should be able to live their lives to the fullest, according to their nature. And we should not use our own limited perspectives as our only mirror and looking glass at the world.

As John Grey puts it:

*'Cats have no need of philosophy. Obeying their nature, they are content with the life it gives them. In humans, on the other hand. Discontent with their nature seems to be natural. Cats do not need to examine their lives, because they do not doubt it is worth living.'*¹⁹

¹⁹ Gray, J. *Feline Philosophy*, 2020, P.4-6.

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Ori van Gelderen,

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