

Neal Bhattacharya
Sophomore Essay
Messrs. Luther & Yee
27 March 2017



Adam and Eve and the Goats:
Genesis as a History of the Animal

Cover image:

Kyle Staver

Adam and Eve and the Goats, 2016.

Oil on canvas. 54 × 64 inches

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

“Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string.”

Since the beginning of the year, I've had a question that has yet to be resolved: how should we read *Genesis*? It seems to me to be variably literature, cultural bedrock, and/or divine word. Or it may be something that takes components from each. One such reading I'm drawn to is history, perhaps arising from my personal interest in ancient things. Like literature, *Genesis* tells a story, but unlike literature and like history, the story's events are presented as true. The text also chronicles to the extent that it may assert a historical argument, one that strings together causal event(s) to effect(s) to consequence(s). Yet, if it is a history, a more cardinal sign I ought to find is a gravitational, anthropocentric pull. Why must histories be this way? In one sense, this may be the case by default. No beings save human beings author histories. But I think more intrinsically, it's because the qualities worthy of historical analysis seem to arise from no beings save human beings. The tentative histories of other beings turn out not to be inquiries, *historiai*, but studies, *logia*. Hence, such beings' states, such as rock formation, bird migration, or higher-power quiddity, are viewed through other lenses—geology, biology, theology—that are unable to supply a “story” per se. And, indeed, such a historical element is found thoroughly embedded in *Genesis*'s fabric. As even the brief pre-human period of creation is driven toward a human entrance, a bird's eye view of the work reveals a topography shaped by anthropocentric events.

But a subterranean view unearths another history, though spread discontinuously. It's a rare one, one that is perhaps indigenous to creation myths—a history of the animal. *Genesis*, it seems to me, does not gather and interpret animal data through the scope of a general hypothesis, as may biology. Instead, it tells a chronological & dynamic *story* of the animal, presented as true. To be sure, the animal-history does not have enough velocity to escape the work's anthropocentrism. And, in turn, the history of animals and of human beings are, as we

shall see, inseparably interwoven. Their entire history might be in truth just be a subset of our own. Nonetheless, I'm drawn to the distinction, and am terribly interested in what may bring to light. For we have a history that narrates the universal human and her relationship with other classes of beings entirely (in this case, the animal and a higher power), instead of the prototypical "one group of humans amongst themselves or with another group of humans". I will in this essay, then, attempt to extract the history of animals that *Genesis* weaves through shifts in their standing with human beings, and explicate the consequences. (A quick aside. Today we are informed by evolutionary biology that humans, too, are animals, and thus when the text says "animal", I think it refers to what is understood today as "nonhuman animal". But as the qualification is absent from the text, it is absent from my essay.)

Unlike Herodotus, I enjoy the benefit of having at least *one* clearly delineated endpoint to this history, the supposed first generation of animals and humans. My pleasure is curtailed soon afterward, for the text presents some apparent contradiction in the creation's chronology: there are two seemingly incompatible accounts. The first is that of the daily creation story, found in verses 1.1-2.3, which places the geneses of plants and animals before that of human beings. The second, found in verses 2.4-2.23, not only places creation in one day, it appears to place the creation of human beings *before* that of plants and animals. I think upon closer investigation, the two accounts are not necessarily incompatible—on the contrary, they may be complementary. The first account orders chronologically, but unlike the second, it places a strict ordinal delineation as to what was created when, by virtue of discrete "days". The second account, I think, focuses on the particulars of human genesis, and this focus may blur the other components. For one such result, it may introduce some temporal flexibility. So if we are to synthesize the two creation stories, we ought not to look at the second to determine order.

I will then look at the first story to see what, if anything, can be determined about our relationship from the order itself, as such an investigation is only definitively granted by this account. After the preliminary cosmological shaping,¹ the first fins are wet,² the first wings flapped,³ and the first paws stretched.⁴ Only then do human beings form out of the dust.⁵ I have suggested above, on p.1, that the order of creation signifies that it ultimately points toward human beings. For if I were to create a rough formula, I'd say that objects of primordial generation appear to be sequential with respect to prior necessity; that is to say, if *c* needs *b* and *b* needs *a*, then *c* is generated the day after *b* and *b* the day after *a*, and so on until human beings are generated on the final creative day. If the creation was preplanned, as I presume, then this gives us some sense of being the end goal. (But this is not necessarily to imply a given *importance* to the last object of creation, or to imply that a hierarchy can be gleaned from this alone. It is not strictly intuitive, for example, that the ax is more important than the steel it is formed out of, at least as it seems to me.)

An interlocutor may protest, "Consider that, instead of specifically for human beings, perhaps the creation was 'pointing' toward animals *and* humans! For it does not seem as though the birds or the fish, who were created on the fifth day, would be a prerequisite for our own existence, generated on the sixth day". Let's look at God's first decree to us, given after Adam's birth, as evidence to dispel our interlocutor's protestations,

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and *have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing* that moves upon the earth.⁶

In this command, we are prescribed a *raison d'être*, one that pertains expressly to animals. Consequently, animals are an ineradicable facet of our mode of being. It could not be the case that we live as God commands, while exclusively living amongst ourselves. The order of

creation, therefore, maintains its pointing, in mandating that animals of the prior days are a precursor for human beings, in the way that light is a precursor for the day. For a violinist is not a violinist without her first owning a violin, nor is a craftsman a craftsman without him having a craft. But unlike those particular roles, this role is not particular to Adam and Eve—it is assigned to human beings generally. Thus, animals are the beings that must be collectively held closest to ourselves, beings that we must guide and live alongside with throughout our existence.

Such closeness, it seems to me, is quantified in the quotidian spacing of creation. To be sure, “closeness” is imprecise, but the spacing nonetheless appears to be in accord with something intuitive about how close we as humans feel to other beings. I think it is uncontroversial to claim that, of the wide groups of beings—such as elements or plants—animals are felt to be second closest to ourselves, after only other human beings. The generative spacing reflects this, and is also reflective of more nuanced distances even among animals. We share a “birthday,” according to *Genesis*, with the animals with whom we share a broad terrestrial habitat, and so the temporal proximity reflects a physical one. One day older are animals who inhabit planes separate from ourselves, namely, fish of the sea and birds of the air. These animals are still relatively close, but the apparent physical distance slightly nudges back temporal order. For even these alien animals are intuitively closer than plants, who have a distance from us of three days, the farthest of any biotic creation. Do we, however, feel any closer affinity with the abiotic sun, moon, and stars—separated by only two days? The primary stars, somewhat like ourselves, are made to “rule” over their respective spheres, which are, in this case, day- and night-time. And if Aristotle and Dante are right,⁷ then the relatively short temporal distance of the stars reflects a fairly essential closeness, too. It may be the case that

we have dominion over animals and not, say, the land or the sea themselves, as a result of the fundamental closeness that creation illustrates. But we will return to this later.

We can now magnify the view onto our own creation, having explored, to some extent, its placement in the higher order. In God's words that engender this creation, the bestial generative progression is paralleled in the order of the dominion's objects,

Let us make human-kind in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.⁸

Our reply to the interlocutor now holds more weight. For note the similarity between the first command *given* to us, and the command that *created* us. They both concern dominion over animals—but the latter places the dominion as a composite feature of our being as opposed to, say, an “appropriate use” of given faculties, which might be the extent that can be suggested by a decree alone. I ought to revise an earlier statement, for guiding and living alongside animals is revealed to be more than just a mode of living for human beings. It is requisite for being human.

Let's end the periphrastic investigation of what dominion is, and what it entails. I've used the verbs “to guide” and “to live alongside” as if they self-evidently stem from dominionship. To give these verbs proper grounds, and acquire other apposite verbs, let's explore two questions: what is dominion? and what does it entail? Unfortunately, there is no convenient definition found on the surface of the book, as far as I can tell. As a result, I will first attempt to mine the meaning from the instances of the word found throughout the text and their surrounding contexts. The (English) word alone suggests some rulership, and I think there is some textual support which specifies the kind of rulership. As someone who knows no Hebrew, I must rely on the virtues of my translators to claim, perhaps incorrectly, that the word

“dominion” is used only three times in *Genesis*. The first two instances are in the two passages above (pp. 3, 5), and the third is in Chapter 37, where Joseph is interrogated by his brothers after a surreal dream, where his brothers’ sheaves bow to his sheaf. The dream’s absurdity does not at all hinder the brothers’ cognizance of the subtext, as demonstrated by their rhetorical questioning, “Are you indeed to have *reign* over us? Are you indeed to have *dominion* over us?”⁹ In this context, the elder brothers’ incredulity implies that dominion entails some sort of obedience to a superior, who acts as does a king or queen. This I discern from its association here with the verb “to reign”. If we apply this sense analogically to our dominion over animals, then we ought to have some kingly/queenly rulership.

I think this analogy may hit the mark in some ways. We possess some of the key traits of monarchal rulership. Kings and queens are of the same kind as those whom they rule, which is to say, sovereigns are not (actually) divine beings who decree by means of supernatural intervention. Much in the same way, though there is some distinction between animals and humans, we lack God’s supernatural power or even a weaker demiurgy. Sovereigns, it further seems to me, do not need a moral doctrine from which to rule, merely a seat of *dominion* which of itself implies sovereignty. Much in the same way, human beings lacked, at the time that dominion was decreed, the primary prerequisite for moral exposition—a knowledge of good and evil. In sovereigns, it also seems to me, the seat of dominion does not come from them alone, rather it may aggregate from an army or some other external means of ensuring power. Much in the same way, we are not of ourselves the “strongest” or most physically formidable of the animals. (All the less so with only two of us.)

On the other hand, in sovereignty, there is some ulterior gain for the person in whom the rule is seated. There is nothing of the sort for us, at least during our tenancy in the Garden.

“But certainly,” the interlocutor may respond, “we gain much from animals, namely, meat, fur, and other by-products.” True—but none of these things were of use for human beings at this time. For after the decree of dominionship, God limits our sphere of consumption,

See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food,¹⁰

eliminating our apparent need for meat and edible by-products. Inedible by-products are useless, too. Leather, fur, and the like are useless, I presume, to those who are shamelessly naked and lack the work that would lead to art (or the art that would lead to work?).

So far, it appears that we have little but negative observations regarding dominion. Part of the difficulty in finding positive ones, for me at least, is the apparent unity between animals as a whole and ourselves at this stage. The obvious demarcations we can think of in the present day, or even think of for most points in human history, aren't present during our time in the Garden. Other than both lacking in art, both animals and human beings even share a language, or at least some form of interspecies communication, as the serpent's interaction with Eve demonstrates.¹¹

So let's turn to the differences. The obvious one, the “divine-image”, seems like a fruitful point of inquiry. For one, it is unique to human beings. For two, it by name correlates with some qualities of divinity, the elucidation of which may allude to the particulars of dominion's application, if dominion and the image are in fact related. We have discovered a few things that, by virtue of similarity, the image does *not* entail. Let's then try to answer what it does, and what role the image of itself may have. Having been made in the “image” is the first of the two qualifiers by which we are formed, prior to the dominion (see p.5 above). The text may be alluding to an interrelation between these two qualities or, rather, that dominion stems from

the image of God (and/or other divinities, as is potentially implied from the first person plural, “make humankind according to *our* image”). Or, perhaps, the dominion is innate and the divine-image merely facilitates its exertion. Nonetheless, I presume that there is some relationship.

An image, so far as I can tell, is the shape of something without the presence of its material substance. In other words, to be in something’s image is to have its formal attributes but not its physical properties or underlying essence. As a point of contrast, Aristotle identifies the “formal” component of living things as the soul,¹² but I use it in a more naive sense, merely denoting the superficial image outlining the material “stuff”. Human beings, in turn, seem to possess God’s superficial abilities, but not his supernatural physical faculty. For God both separates (involving a physical act), and then calls the separated objects certain words (involving only a matching with the formal-image),

(A) God separated the light from the darkness. God *called* the light Day, and the darkness he *called* Night. ¹³

(B) Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and *named* them ‘Humankind’[...]. ¹⁴

We’re instructed only to do the latter, and call the things under our realm of dominion,

God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man *to see what he would call them*; and whatever the man called every living creature, *that was its name*. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field [...].”¹

Note that there are two methods of identifying present in the above passage—for other than calling is also naming. First we call animals, then God elevates our call to a name. God, notably, only names human beings, and nothing else of his creation. Other than in the above passage, he also commands that the name Abram be changed to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah, for these new words befit their new roles.¹⁶ Naming is thus—either by default or by divine allocation—largely anthropocentric.

Its location in us may shed light on naming's purpose and help contrast it from calling. Both naming and calling indicate a formal particularity that is a consequence of physical separation. For example, a newborn is called and named once having become a unique entity—separate from his mother—and a word is matched to the child's superficial image. God's elevation of Adam's "calls" to names suggests that a call is *prior* to a name. This, intuitively, seems to be the case: a call is not necessarily embedded in a broader social sphere in the way that a name is, though, to be sure, all names are first calls. To make this distinction clear, let's look at the colloquial expression, "I personally call her [M.J.], but her name is [Mary-Jane]", implying that Mary-Jane is how she is referred to outside of the speaker's personal interactions with her. And so the one call is personal, the other interpersonal. Naming, then, permits an expression of certain societal standings, including, for example, condemnation, vindication, lionization, or consecration. This task would be cumbersome if one had to physically indicate the one referred to. And because human beings are the only ones who seem to inhabit such a social sphere where names would be relevant, that may be why naming is centered around us.

The names given to animals, however, are particular in a less severe sense than is a person's name. They do not refer to, say, the St. John's dog "Arcadia Spector", but "Dog". This appears to be the case because animals are differentiated from one another by their individual formal image that corresponds to the particular species as a whole—perhaps a literal correspondence for our divine-image. One might say that we are naming something like the static Platonic form, as this animal name would, of course, suffice for all offspring falling under the same species image. Therefore the names ought to be held indefinitely, at least in so far as they indicate the animals to which they correspond. Although time may alter, say, the specific

phonetic vocalization due to social or historical circumstances, the animal himself does not change.

What, if anything, does a common animal lexicon afford us in our dominion? Of itself, the “naming privilege” seems to supplement the role. To be able to name something is to have power over its innate social identity—who names us but our guardians?—hence it asserts unequivocally that the seat of dominion over animals is located in human beings. But there is a more useful function: because naming is social, and because dominion and the divine image are “social” in that they are common to all human beings, then naming augments our ability to democratically reign over animals. God has left us the legislative space to ordain god-like decrees for those under our dominion, in the manner that he has ordained for human beings. The species-based quality of animal names further serves this end; it accords a specificity more precise than that permitted by the sweeping habitual groupings —“of land,” “of sea”, and “of air”—in which animals are presented to us by God. What may be fit for the dog may not be fit for the cat. What may be fit for the shark is surely unfit for the minnow.

To best enact dominion, we need to be well informed of our subjects, in order to determine the specifics of the law (or whatever means by which we apply dominion). This may present some difficulty. In some way, decrees made for animals must be distinct from those that are made for human beings by human beings. In the latter case, we may govern with the presumption that there is some sort of common rational-emotional faculty. The universal presence of such faculty allows for a “human understanding”, providing a foundation for legislative parameters. Indeed, it seems to me that we exonerate individuals from culpability in wrongdoings that they have committed if and only if extreme circumstances have rendered this

faculty null (can one “blame” the lotus eaters?). And without such faculty, we would lack the identifiability needed even for common extrajudicial functions—as basic as empathy.

On the other hand, in finding the parameters for animal rule, this is absent. It appears we are limited to the knowledge of physical features that are supplied by external images, the same image that our animal name is matched to. For we can never “get into the mind” of a rabbit, octopus, or peacock in the way that we can “get into the mind” of another person, even if we know only her physical features. For if the experience of an animal is determined by or secondary to the animal’s physical features, we have a problem: either they are features that we do not have in its bestial arrangement or they are ones we cannot conceive having. What human knows what it’s like to have a dog’s sense of smell or water in place of air? If we ignore the physical, then we still have a problem: we cannot conceive of an animal-mind in itself. If Aquinas is right that humans are unique among animals by virtue of our rationality, then all other animals are deficient of rationality, and it doesn’t seem to me one can think to the “arational” by means of the “rational”. This forces a distance between us. Maybe this is what prevents our conceiving of a “pure” animal-history, populated with internal deliberation and choices.

All is not lost. There is, at the same time, the aforementioned closeness demonstrated by the creation spacing. For the superficial features are only one of the two sources of data that can inform our governance. The second is gathered from the common traits that we see in them and in ourselves, such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring, physical consumption of biotic food, familial loyalty, and the behavior that arises from these. (The first two commonalities I took from Aquinas.¹⁷) However, the principal common trait is an immediate mobility. Indeed, it is this trait in conjunction with life that *Genesis* gives as one definition of

animals (see p.3 above). It has a dual role: along with the others, the attribute serves as information by virtue of being common, but it also permits dominion to properly be received on the side of the animal. If they lacked it, then animals may as well be plants, who respond to circumstances on a languid timescale. There would be an insurmountable barrier in governing without this mobility, as the shepherd and his sheep illuminate well.

All these commonalities, I think, are what we look at when we determine that animals are the beings second closest to ourselves, and may be why the authors placed animals so close to us in creation. Such similarity with ourselves is, of course, disseminated throughout *all* of the animals, even those farthest in being. Consequently, we are able to exercise dominion not just over the cattle and wild animals of the earth, but also birds of the air, and the fish of the sea. We consider *each* species' physical features and determine an appropriate use of given faculties. In this way, taking part of the divine-image, and sharing qualities with animals, we are able to act as an intermediary.

Lest we get the impression that we are only constrained to biological and anatomical data, it seems we are able to make evaluations such as which of God's animals is the craftiest (namely, the serpent). By observing the external qualities juxtaposed with common features, we are able to enter something of our character traits into animals by matching them to certain bestial traits and behaviors, almost in the same manner that we form caricatures. I think such a comparison has to have its origins in human behavior, and cannot arise from an animal of itself, as the experience of the animal-mind is hermetically sealed. Such evaluations provide, along with information, a tool of comparison—exemplified well by a psalmist. He [David] is able to proclaim in complete supplication, “But I am a worm, and not human”.¹⁸ This humbling is achieved by placing himself *into* the animal that is apparently the farthest-in-being and least

human; the closeness that is nonetheless there is what allows the entrance and is what vivifies the metaphor (compare, “But I am dirt, and not human”). This limited “entrance” into animals need not only be humbling or derogatory. From it arises, I think, a wide spectrum of utility, as evidenced by the epithet “Lionhearted Achilles”, the animal-comparison game discussed in *Meno*,¹⁹ and the conditions of the soul assigned to species in the Myth of Er.²⁰

The true role of dominion in the overarching cosmic picture has been unveiled. God, by himself, separates primeval substance into the heavens, the earth, and the sea; and he also rules over the closest analog to himself found among his creation, human beings. Human beings, in turn, rule as a species over their closest analog among these newly formed physical habitats. We separate them in an attenuated way befitting an image. That is, we separate not by physically displacing the inhabitants, but by splitting the animals from larger habitual groupings—land, sea, air—into particular species as is afforded by the separation-through-name. And from there we govern, it seems, for the highest benefit of animals. Such a cosmic role grants us purpose and allows us to direct that which we share with divinity toward an indefinitely progressive goal, a virtue that we perpetually uphold.

There is, in this way, a wholly just hierarchy—one that is inoculated from pain, animus, and violence. For human beings have no contradiction with God’s realm of ruling, given that we do not attempt to govern or decree the physical landscape, only “subdue” the earth, which I interpret to mean populating it and interacting with it in a way that an animal would interact with her environment. (See the Gospel of Matthew, the son of the same God in this text controls the habitats themselves so as to be the “sort of *man* [...] that even the winds and the sea obey him”.²¹) Humans and animals, too, have no reason for enmity: for we each have sources of consumption that do not encroach on one other, consuming only vegetation (see p.7 above);

and this springs out of the ground without travail. Inter-human conflict would have no foundation, as there is also no centralization of power except in God: again, we are given dominion *as a species*. The earlier metaphor of an “altruistic sovereign” should be usurped by an aristocratic coup d’état. Thus the three beings—God, humans, and animals—coexist as parts of a fleshy sphere revolving without friction, or as a triad resounding in perpetual harmony.

This raises the question: how are we to have dominion and order, a seemingly moral enterprise, while at the same time lacking a knowledge of good and evil? A helpful analogy, which may or may not be entirely accurate, is that of the gear in a machine (holding aside the conversationally pejorative connotations). It is possible that all that is necessary to enact our dominion is sourced from our divine-image, and there is in this way an amoral (not *im*-moral) rule and justice through emulation. One may, of course, recall the city of the *Republic*—who philosophizes and knows the truth besides the philosopher-king? In order to function properly, the gear neither has to know nor have the capacity to know its ulterior purpose. Its placement, design, and cause of motion is completely external to itself, though the gear fulfilling its purpose is fundamental to the working of the system of which it is a part. The system, in this case, is the consummate biotic order.

Well, that was the case at that stage of the history. Let’s, then, see how our standing with animals has changed after having eaten the fruit. Personally, I had always struggled with determining the grounds for *blaming* Adam and Eve. How, without any moral knowledge, are they to know that such an act, even as severe as disobeying God, *is bad*? Placing the event in the context of dominion, I think, illuminates a reason for culpability in the act and illustrates the extent of its consequences. For we need not even moral knowledge to know that obeying the serpent is to go against our given purpose and being. If we use the gear metaphor, to disobey

God alone may be to, say, turn at a different speed than the one assigned. In obeying the serpent, the direction of the dominion has inverted, with an animal influencing *us*. This is to go against both our own nature and also nature as a whole. It as though the gear turned in reverse, functioning so improperly as to upset the processes of the whole machine, throwing it into utter chaos. The disorder began, then, not at the first taste of the fruit. It began when the serpent convinced us.

There are many indicia of the ensuing disarray. Many of them are conveniently compressed into a litany of complaints and commands—given by God immediately after he becomes aware of the misdeed. First, he commands the enmity between the serpent and future human beings.²² Although the serpent is only one species out of the exhaustive number over whom we rule, a microscopic dent would be eventually noticeable against the backdrop of an erstwhile perfect balance. What was before an unadulterated outpouring of benevolent rule must cede to partial hatred. Out of this animus, too, arises the first violence, as God proclaims, “[The child of Eve] will strike your head, / and you will strike his heel.”²³ And from the introduction of pain arises, I think, the fear of one another. If this is true, this would be the genesis of the second psychological disturbance, after shame. Such mental agitation, exacerbated by the ill-effects of moral knowledge, may be what snowballs into the same-species violence between Cain and Abel.²⁴

Yet the true imbalance revealed by this, I think, is the interference from God into what should be *our* realm of dominion, since we unconditionally failed in our guiding over it. Earlier, God was able to simply craft the animals, command that they multiply, then stand afar. Now, he must tangle the lines of power by entering into the picture and placing himself in charge of a previously human affair, commanding what is to be done by the serpent. This not only upsets

the illustrated cosmic order, but it reduces the absoluteness of dominion in human beings. Given that, in our creation, dominion was fitted as a composite part of our being, it may not be a stretch to say that in reducing our dominion, God was required to reduce some essential part of humanity.

Other sources of friction in the biotic order are the pain of childbirth²⁵ and the stripping of immortality.²⁶ More pertinent to animals, however, is that human beings are now reduced to the animal sphere of consumption—we now, too, eat only “the plants of the field.”²⁷ The alignment of our spheres of consumption entails that we now have something of the same essence, diluting the strength of divinity. For this literally brings us “down-to-earth”, being relegated from the fruits suspended in the air to the plants growing on the floor. (Fruit appears to be composed of the three elemental planes, with water in its juice, air in its suspension, and earth in so far as it is vegetation—hence the food may have some closer association with God in this way, but this connection is probably too tentative.) Accordingly, we are placed in nearer proximity to animals, which, on the surface, may imply something positive. But displacing the location of the power seems as though it would make our dominion less effective: can a parent rule well if he is closer “in essence” to his child? And at the same time that we have this fresh commonality with animals, we are made more like gods through our moral knowledge, stretching our static being into an indefinite genus.

Whatever disproportion compounds in the intermediary is likely to negatively affect the whole. But this takes time—our standing with animals is not yet terribly altered. Until at last, a minor disorder becomes global putrefaction, a pandemic infecting the whole of nature,

Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is

filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.”²⁸

For note that the victims include not only the other animals, “all flesh”, but the earth itself becomes corrupt as a consequence. Now God sees it fit to begin anew, having seen the physical landscape which he rules encroached upon. He must then do so in a manner that uses the uncorrupted planes of his rule, and he has the winds and the sea obey him.²⁹ All the while, what remains impervious to the flood are the same corrupted animals and human beings, rot that will ferment.

There is, then, a new natural order. Previously there were certain arrangements of closeness and pointing, stemming from the discrete days. Now, on the other hand, all is brought together into confusion of co-genesis in an unordered block of time. But all is not lost. In ensuring the continuity of all the animals, we are maintaining some facet of our previous dominion. This, however, entails some expansion in dominion’s scope. In the previous natural arrangement, there was no source of violence to protect animals against. This is evidently not the case here: to save a life, there must be something from which it is being saved. Although this may not be necessarily negative, human beings can no longer decree only in accordance with the two sources of information. That is, we cannot rule based on the species’ traits and behaviors, we must exercise *power* in order to protect against these novel dangers. To have power, it seems to me, is to be able to override the “choice” that animals make of their own accord (or if it improper to grant animals choice, then whatever analog that allows them to have free movement). Therefore, to guide the animals into the ark, Noah must place them in conflict with their natural behaviors and traits. This, perhaps, is the first material instance of the proverbial “caged bird”.

And when he the arranges the animals, there is a new qualifier that he must take in consideration—clean and unclean.³⁰ It is likely that the distinction arose during the preceding period of disorder, but this is the first time that the word and its antonym are present in the text, making it difficult to inquire more deeply into their origins. Nonetheless, the (English) connotations of the words reveal on their own how far the previously congenial relationship has fallen. There is now among our subjects a hierarchy of hygiene. Though terrestrial animals were closer, they were never in any sense “purer”; what was once nothing more than a distance of “being” among certain animals has now, too, possible physical distances—do we not quarantine ourselves from the unclean?

There is another prophetic sign of the underlying disorder that the post-flood world will possess. To determine whether the waters are entirely eradicated, Noah sends out a raven and a dove to see whether they would land on dry ground.³¹ In a literal sense, the first act of our dominion in *this* natural order is to use animals in order to protect ourselves. That is, we look the birds’ physical characteristics and exert our power for utility and not for virtue, as would have been the correct use prior, at least in my reading. This instance may be benign: Noah is not necessarily sending the dove selfishly, as he may be confirming the safety for the other animals as well. Regardless, the *capacity* for malignant purposes is revealed from this instance, even if it were an unavoidable one.

Treating animals in this way, in conjunction with the power that we now exert over them, leads, I think, to their newfound fear of human beings that God assigns to every animal. One only needs to compare the initial command of dominion (p.3 above) to the command after leaving the ark. Even the order in which the animals are listed here form a (weak) chiasmus with the earlier generative order, strengthening somewhat the sense of reversal,

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you [...].³²

Where there was dominion is now fear, and if we are to treat animals as utility, then it seems that the fear has a reasonable basis. However, it is not just a simple utility that we will now garner from animals, it is the absolute kind, consumption. For to consume something is to incorporate the thing consumed into oneself. Other physical utilities, I think, are for gains that are external, such as using leather for shoes or steel for an ax. Even the emotional well-being that some animals offer appears to be utility in the way that medicine is, which is to say, they are not necessarily incorporative as is food, merely “healing”. For whereas animals used to be “a part of ourselves” because we *guided* them and in that way made use of the divine-image, they now are a “part of us” because we reduce them to sustenance. We are what we eat. Intertwined with our dominion, then, is power applied through and for violence. The once benevolent symbiosis has devolved into distant antibiosis.

I don’t intend for this to be vegetarian polemic, but I think this shift is likely among the most consequential caused by the disorder—at least, in relation to the consummate natural order as it’s so illustrated. For what precipitated the dietary expansion was a practice that Noah employed immediately after he alighted from the ark. By conjoining the new utility of animals to the new cleanliness, he “took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered *burnt offerings* on the altar.”³³ This alone appears to have been what ensured the covenant. An offering, or a sacrifice, is to give up something of yourself. What we “give up” in sacrificing animals is the *closeness* that we have to them, and the concurrent distance is what vindicates such gruesome utility. Recall the entering of animals that allowed metaphor and comparison, as it is comprehensively applied here. For sacrifice is the most material rendering of any

metaphor: it is an immaterial entering of ourselves into the physical being that is capable of being entered into. What we put into them is then destroyed through violence, and it is in this way, I think, that a pharmakos is a pharmakon. The thing being healed in *Genesis* is only treatable, not curable—the underlying corruption of nature is, it seems, immutable. Earlier we had the tripartite, beneficent flow where God governs human beings, and human beings, through the divine-image, govern animals by means of this proportionate location. Now, we can see how the whole biotic order is reversed. We consume animals to sustain ourselves, and, all the while, we sacrifice to animate our deference before God.

The foremost example that I recall is Abraham and Isaac.³⁴ The weight of the “sacrifice” is derived entirely from the fact that Isaac is “too close” to Abraham. His son is the being that is, in fact, closest to himself, close both from paternal love and in substance. To confirm unalloyed piety, God had to ensure that Abraham’s distancing *himself from himself* was acceptable. God had Abraham take Isaac to the sacrificial grounds so that [h]e might look at him—how?—like a lamb.

Endnotes

NRSV used for all Bible quotations; all italics are mine

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|---|----------------------------|
| 1) <i>Genesis</i> 1.1-19 | 18) <i>Psalms</i> 22.6 |
| 2) 1.20 | 19) <i>Meno</i> 80a-d |
| 3) 1.21 | 20) <i>Republic</i> 620c-e |
| 4) 1.22 | 21) <i>Matthew</i> 8.27 |
| 5) 1.26-.28 | 22) <i>Genesis</i> 3.15 |
| 6) 1.28 | 23) <i>Ibid.</i> |
| 7) See <i>Metaphysics</i> 1074a20 (XII.6) &
<i>Comedy</i> Par.II.133-141 | 24) 4.8 |
| | 25) 3.16 |
| 8) <i>Genesis</i> 1.26 | 26) 3.19 |
| 9) 37.8 | 27) 5.18 |
| 10) 1.29 | 28) 6.11-.13 |
| 11) 3.1-.4 | 29) 7.1-8.8 |
| 12) See <i>On the Soul</i> 412a20 (II.1) | 30) 7.2 |
| 13) <i>Genesis</i> 1.4 | 31) 8.7-.12 |
| 14) 5.1 | 32) 9.1-.3 |
| 15) 2.19 | 33) 8.20 |
| 16) 17.5, 17.15 | 34) 22.1-.14 |
| 17) <i>Summa Theologica</i> , First Part of the
Second Part. Q.94 Art. 2, 'I answer that...' | |

