

back, when heretofore the best ran on foot like animals'. In the early eighteenth century one of the supposed attractions of life in South Carolina was that horses were so plentiful that one seldom saw anyone there travel on foot, except negroes, and even they often went on horseback.²⁸

In the same spirit, the colonists in Virginia began the task of converting the Indians by offering them a cow for every eight wolves they could kill, an exchange which neatly symbolized their view of the uses to which the natural world should be put. To give the Indians cattle, it was urged, would be 'a step to civilizing them and to making them Christians'.²⁹ It was for the same reason that, two hundred years later at the Great Exhibition of 1851, a booth displayed monkey skins from Africa. It was painful, wrote a sensitive contemporary, to think of the sufferings the creatures must have undergone. But there was a silver lining: 'the work of catching these monkeys is civilizing the African.'³⁰



iii. HUMAN UNIQUENESS

Inhibitions about the treatment of other species were dispelled by the reminder that there was a fundamental difference in kind between humanity and other forms of life. The justification for this belief went back beyond Christianity to the Greeks. According to Aristotle, the soul comprised three elements: the nutritive soul, which was shared by man with vegetables; the sensitive soul, which was shared by animals; and the intellectual or rational soul, which was peculiar to man.¹ This doctrine

had been taken over by the medieval scholastics and fused with the Judaeo-Christian teaching that man was made in the image of God (Genesis i. 27). Instead of representing man as merely a superior animal, it elevated him to a wholly different status, halfway between the beasts and the angels. In the early modern period it was accompanied by a great deal of self-congratulation.

Man, it was said, was more beautiful, more perfectly formed than any of the other animals. He had 'more of divine majesty in his countenance' and 'a more exquisite symmetry of parts'.² Jeremiah Burroughes reminded his congregation that, when God saw his other works, he only said that they were 'good', whereas when he had made man he said 'very good': 'Observe, it is never said "very good" till the last day, till man is made.'³

Even so, there was a marked lack of agreement as to just where man's unique superiority lay. The search for this elusive attribute has been one of the most enduring pursuits of Western philosophers, most of whom have tended to fix on one feature and emphasize it out of all proportion, sometimes to the point of absurdity. Thus man has been described as a political animal (Aristotle); a laughing animal (Thomas Willis); a tool-making animal (Benjamin Franklin); a religious animal (Edmund Burke); and a cooking animal (James Boswell, anticipating Lévi-Strauss). As the novelist Peacock's Mr Cranium observes, man has at one time or another been defined as a featherless biped, an animal which forms opinions and an animal which carries a stick.⁴ What all such definitions have in common is that they assume a polarity between the categories 'man' and 'animal' and that they invariably regard the animal as the inferior. In practice, of course, the aim of such definitions has often been less to distinguish men from animals than to propound some ideal of human behaviour, as when Martin Luther in 1530 and Pope Leo XIII in 1891 each declared that the possession of private property was an essential difference between men and beasts.⁵

By Tudor times the amount of inherited law on the subject was already enormous. Since Plato a great deal had been made of man's erect posture: beasts looked down, but he looked up to Heaven.⁶ Aristotle had developed the theme, adding that men laughed, that their hair went grey, and that they alone couldn't wiggle their ears.⁷ In the early modern period differences in anatomy continued to impress. According to one early Stuart doctor:

Man is of a far different structure in his guts from ravenous creatures as dogs, wolves, etc., who, minding only their belly, have their guts descending almost straight down from their ventricle or stomach to

the fundament: whereas in this noble microcosm man, there are in these intestinal parts many anfractuous circumvolutions, windings and turnings, whereby, longer retention of his food being procured, he might so much the better attend upon sublime speculations, and profitable employments in Church and Commonwealth.⁸

In the late eighteenth century the aesthete Uvedale Price drew special attention to the nose. 'Man is, I believe, the only animal that has a marked projection in the middle of the face.'⁹

Three other human attributes were particularly stressed. The first was speech, a quality which John Ray described as 'so peculiar to man that no beast could ever attain to it'. It was through speech, said Ben Jonson, that man expressed his superiority to other creatures. Without it, agreed Bishop Wilkins, man would be 'a very mean creature'. Because beasts lacked language, explained the eighteenth-century economist James Anderson, their experience could not be transmitted to their posterity: man progressed, but every animal species had 'the same powers and propensities . . . that they had at the earliest period they were known'.¹⁰

The second distinguishing quality was reason. Man, as Bishop Cumberland put it, was 'an animal endowed with a mind'. Whether the difference was of kind or only of degree was a matter of debate. Some regarded animals as utterly irrational. Robert Lovell in 1661 divided the whole animal creation into two categories, 'rational' and 'irrational', putting only man in the former class. Gervase Markham reported the 'strongly held opinions' of 'many farriers' that horses had no brains at all; he himself had cut up the skulls of many dead horses and found nothing inside.¹¹ But most thought animals had elementary powers of understanding, albeit highly inferior ones. They had some practical intelligence, taught Aristotle, but they lacked the capacity for deliberation or speculative reason. From man's vast intellectual superiority, it was agreed, came his superior memory, his greater imagination, his curiosity, his sense of time, his sharper concept of the future, his use of numbers, his sense of beauty, his capacity for progress.¹² Above all, man could choose, whereas animals were prisoners of their instinct, guided only by appetite and incapable of free will.¹³

This distinctive human capacity for free agency and moral responsibility led on to the third, and, in the theologians' view, most decisive difference. This was not reason, which was, after all, shared to some extent by inferior creatures, but religion. Unlike animals, man had a conscience and a religious instinct.¹⁴ He also had an immortal soul, whereas beasts perished and were incapable of an afterlife. This was no

matter for regret: 'The life of a beast,' as a seventeenth-century preacher put it, was quite 'long enough for a beast-like life'. To suggest that animals might be immortal, said another in 1695, was an 'offensive absurdity'. Belief in the posthumous extinction of beasts was very important, he explained. It preserved the dignity of human nature, by showing an essential difference between the spirit of man and the souls of animals.¹⁵

In the seventeenth century the most remarkable attempt to magnify this difference was a doctrine originally formulated by a Spanish physician, Gomez Pereira, in 1554, but independently developed and made famous by René Descartes from the 1630s onwards. This was the view that animals were mere machines or automata, like clocks, capable of complex behaviour, but wholly incapable of speech, reasoning, or, on some interpretations, even sensation. For Descartes, the human body was also an automaton; after all, it performed many unconscious functions, like that of digestion. But the difference was that within the human machine there was a mind and therefore a separable soul, whereas brutes were automata without minds or souls. Only man combined both matter and intellect.¹⁶

This doctrine anticipated much later mechanistic psychology and contained the germs of the materialism of La Mettrie and other eighteenth-century thinkers. In due course, it would make it possible for scientists to argue that consciousness could be explained mechanically and that the whole of an individual's psychic life was the product of his physical organization. What Descartes said of animals would one day be said of man.¹⁷ In the meantime, however, the Cartesian doctrine had the effect of further downgrading animals by comparison with human beings. Descartes himself seems to have modified his doctrine in later years and was unwilling to conclude that brutes were wholly incapable of sensation; for him the essential point was that they lacked the faculty of cogitation. He denied souls to animals because they exhibited no behaviour which could not be accounted for in terms of mere natural impulse.¹⁸ But his supporters went further. Animals, they declared, did not feel pain; the cry of a beaten dog was no more evidence of the brute's suffering than was the sound of an organ proof that the instrument felt pain when struck.¹⁹ Animal howls and writhings were merely external reflexes, unconnected with any inner sensation.

Today, this doctrine may seem to fly in the face of common sense. But it is not surprising that Cartesianism had its supporters at the time. An age accustomed to a host of mechanical marvels – clocks, watches, moving figures and automata of every kind – was well prepared to

believe that animals were also machines, though made by God, not man.^{20*} Besides, Descartes was only sharpening a distinction already implicit in scholastic teaching. Aquinas, after all, had taught that the so-called prudence of animals was no more than divinely implanted instinct.²¹ Moreover, Cartesianism seemed an excellent way of safeguarding religion. Its opponents, by contrast, could be made to seem theologically suspect, for when they conceded to beasts the powers of perception, memory and reflection, they were implicitly attributing to animals all the ingredients of an immortal soul, which was absurd; and if they denied that they had an immortal soul, even though they had such powers, they were by implication questioning whether man had an immortal soul either.²² Cartesianism was a way of escaping both of these unequally unacceptable alternatives. It denied that animals had souls and it maintained that men were something more than mere machines. It was, thought Leibniz, an opinion into which its supporters had foolishly rushed 'because it seemed necessary either to ascribe immortal souls to beasts or to admit that the soul of man could be mortal'.²³

But the most powerful argument for the Cartesian position was that it was the best possible rationalization for the way man actually treated animals. The alternative view had left room for human guilt by conceding that animals could and did suffer; and it aroused worries about the motives of a God who could allow beasts to undergo undeserved miseries on such a scale. Cartesianism, by contrast, absolved God from the charge of unjustly causing pain to innocent beasts by permitting humans to ill-treat them; it also justified the ascendancy of men, by freeing them, as Descartes put it, from 'any suspicion of crime, however often they may eat or kill animals'.²⁴ By denying the immortality of beasts, it removed any lingering doubts about the human right to exploit the brute creation. For, as the Cartesians observed, if animals really had an immortal element, the liberties men took with them would be impossible to justify; and to concede that animals had sensation was to make human behaviour seem intolerably cruel.²⁵ The suggestion that a beast could feel or possess an immaterial soul, commented John Locke, had so worried some men that they 'had rather thought fit to conclude all beasts perfect machines rather than allow their souls immortality'.²⁶ Descartes's explicit aim had been to make men 'lords and possessors of nature'.²⁷ It fitted in well with his intention that he should have portrayed other species as inert and lacking any spiritual dimension. In so doing he

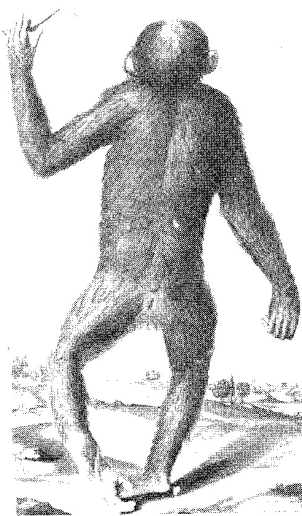
* The Cartesians cited the Chinese ruler who, when shown a watch, was supposed to have mistaken it for a living creature; Sir Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises* (1645), i. 400.

created an absolute break between man and the rest of nature, thus clearing the way very satisfactorily for the uninhibited exercise of human rule.

The Cartesian view of animal souls generated a vast learned literature, and it is no exaggeration to describe it as a central preoccupation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European intellectuals.²⁸ Yet, though Descartes's work was disseminated in England, the country threw up only half a dozen or so explicit defenders of the Cartesian position. They included the virtuoso Sir Kenelm Digby, who did not hesitate to declare that birds were machines, and that their motions when building their nests and feeding their young were no different from the striking of a clock or the ringing of an alarm.²⁹ Many physiologists agreed that the body had its mechanical and involuntary movements. But the theologian Henry More was more representative of English opinion when he bluntly told Descartes in 1648 that he thought his a 'murderous' doctrine.³⁰ Most later English intellectuals felt with Locke and Ray that the whole idea of beast-machine was 'against all evidence of sense and reason' and 'contrary to the commonsense of mankind'. As Bolingbroke remarked, the plain man would persist in believing that there was a difference between the town bull and the parish clock. The nonconformist divine John Howe could understand Descartes's anxiety to distinguish between men and animals, 'lest any prejudice should be done to the doctrine of the human soul's immortality'. But he thought his formulation 'a great deal more pious than . . . cogent'.³¹

Yet Descartes had only pushed the European emphasis on the gulf between man and beast to its logical conclusion. A transcendent God, outside his creation, symbolized the separation between spirit and nature. Man stood to animal as did heaven to earth, soul to body, culture to nature. There was a total qualitative difference between man and brute. In England the doctrine of human uniqueness was propounded from every pulpit. John Evelyn heard a sermon in 1659 on how man was 'a creature of different composure from the rest of animals; as both to soul and body; [and] how the one was to be the subject to the other.' In 1683 the Dean of Winchester conceded that animals had some human qualities, albeit 'in an inferior manner', but he denounced the idea that animals and men were therefore the same as a 'dangerous imagination'.³² Throughout the eighteenth century the theme was reiterated. 'In the ascent from brutes to man,' declared Oliver Goldsmith, 'the line is strongly drawn, well marked, and unpassable.' 'How slender so ever it may sometimes appear,' wrote the naturalist William Bingley, 'the barrier which separates men from brutes is fixed and immutable.' The

practical advantages of this distinction were clear, even if its theoretical rationale was elusive. 'Animals, whom we have made our slaves,' Charles Darwin would write, 'we do not like to consider our equal.'³³



IV. MAINTAINING THE BOUNDARIES

Of course most of these learned disquisitions passed far above the heads of ordinary people. But consciously or unconsciously, the fundamental distinction between man and animals underlay everyone's behaviour. What, for example, were religion and morality, if not attempts to curb the supposedly animal aspects of human nature, what Plato called 'the wild beast within us'?¹ As Richard Baxter put it, 'he that hath well learned . . . wherein a man doth differ from a brute, hath laid such a foundation for a holy life, as all the reason in the world is never able to overthrow.' If a man's mind was not pure, said Oliver Cromwell, there was no difference between him and a beast. The eighteenth-century Evangelical John Fletcher explained that regeneration meant passing from nature to grace: 'He was an animal man; in being born again he becomes a spiritual man.'² It was no accident that the symbol of Anti-Christ was the Beast, or that the Devil was regularly portrayed as a

mixture of man and animal. When people saw what they thought were evil spirits, it was usually in the guise of some animal: a dog, a cat or a rat; one diarist noted the case of a man 'heaved into the water by one in the shape of a bull'.³

Like morals and religion, polite education, 'civility' and refinement were also intended to raise men above the animals. England was not one of those societies, like Bali,⁴ where the consumption of food was regarded as a disgusting operation, best carried out in private. But people cooked their meat, rather than eating it raw like animals, and they thought gluttony a 'beastly' vice. ('[I was] a little swinish at dinner,' writes the eighteenth-century Irish Quaker John Ruddy in his spiritual diary.)⁵ His contemporary Oliver Goldsmith considered that 'of all other animals we spend the least time in eating; this is one of the great distinctions between us and the brute creation; and [he added piously] eating is a pleasure of so low a kind that none but such as are nearly allied to the quadruped desire its prolongation.' (Goldsmith had been understandably upset by the contemporary case of the young man from Bristol who came of a ruminating family and, a quarter of an hour after each meal, began to chew his meat all over again, declaring it tasted better the second time round.)⁶

Long before Goldsmith, Erasmus's decisively influential textbook on civility had made differentiation from animals the very essence of good table manners, more so even than differentiation from 'rustics'. Don't smack your lips, like a horse, he warned; don't swallow your meat without chewing, like a stork; don't gnaw the bones, like a dog; don't lick the dish, like a cat. (Even so, the Venetian ambassador in 1618 was shocked to discover that Londoners shamelessly munched fruit in the street, 'like so many goats'.)⁷ Erasmus's rules for bodily comportment show the same preoccupation: don't shake your hair like a colt; don't neigh when you laugh, like a horse, or show your teeth, like a dog; don't move your whole body when speaking, like a wagtail; don't speak through your nose: 'It is the property of crows and elephants.' In the eighteenth century Henry Fielding remarked that it was 'those great polishers of our manners', the dancing-masters, who were 'by some thought to teach what principally distinguishes us from the brute creation'.⁸

Since all the bodily functions had undesirable animal associations, some commentators thought that it was physical modesty, even more than reason, which distinguished men from beasts.⁹ There is an instructive passage in the diary of the New England clergyman Cotton Mather for 1700:

I was once emptying the cistern of nature, and making water at the wall. At the same time, there came a dog, who did so too, before me. Thought I; 'What mean and vile things are the children of men . . . How much do our natural necessities abase us, and place us . . . on the same level with the very dogs!'

My thought proceeded. 'Yet I will be a more noble creature; and at the very time when my natural necessities debase me into the condition of the beast, my spirit shall (I say *at that very time!*) rise and soar . . .

Accordingly, I resolved that it should be my ordinary practice, whenever I step to answer the one or other necessity of nature to make it an opportunity of shaping in my mind some holy, noble, divine thought . . .

It thus became in 1711 his firm resolution to use the occasion of the usual evacuations of nature to form

some thoughts of piety wherein I may differ from the brutes (which in the actions themselves I do very little).¹⁰

Not everyone reached so exquisite a level of self-consciousness. But most people were taught to regard their bodily impulses as 'animal' ones, needing to be subdued. The alternative would be 'bestly' or 'brutish'.¹¹ Lust, in particular, was synonymous with the animal condition, for the sexual connotations of such terms as 'brute', 'bestial' and 'bestly' were much stronger than they are today.¹² Lust, said a sixteenth-century moralist, made men 'like . . . swine, goats, dogs and the most savage and brutish beasts in the world'.¹³ In the bestiaries and emblem books a remarkably high proportion of the animals which appear are meant to symbolize lasciviousness or sexual infidelity. For Gerrard Winstanley, sexual freedom was 'the freedom of wanton unreasonable beasts'. For Jeremy Collier, the loose morality of the Restoration stage broke down 'the distinctions between man and beast. Goats and monkeys, if they could speak, would express their brutality in such language as this.' The sexual impulse in man was usually conceived of as thrusting upwards from below.¹⁴

Wherever we look in early modern England, we find anxiety, latent or explicit, about any form of behaviour which threatened to transgress the fragile boundaries between man and the animal creation. Physical cleanliness was necessary because, as John Stuart Mill would put it, its absence, 'more than of anything else, renders man bestial'.¹⁵ Nakedness was bestial, for clothes, like cooking, were a distinctively human attribute.¹⁶ It was bestial for men to have unduly long hair: 'Beasts are

more hairy than men,' wrote Bacon, 'and savage men more than civil.'¹⁷ It was bestial to work at night, for the same reason that burglary was a worse crime than daylight robbery; the night, as Sir Edward Coke explained, was 'the time wherein man is to rest, and wherein beasts run about seeking their prey'.¹⁸ It was even bestial to go swimming, for, apart from being in many Puritan eyes a dangerous form of semi-suicide, it was essentially a non-human method of progression. As a Cambridge divine observed in 1600: men walked; birds flew; only fish swam.¹⁹ One commentator even thought that the reason some Red Indians coloured their teeth black was that they supposed it 'essential to men to differ from the brutes in every respect, and therefore it was necessary not even to have teeth of the same colour'.²⁰

Even to pretend to be an animal for purposes of ritual or entertainment was unacceptable. William Prynne declared it immoral to dress as a beast on the stage because to do so obliterated man's glorious image. Many moralists shared his objection to animal disguises; and in the early seventeenth century the hobby horse seems to have largely disappeared from the morris dance. Other ways of dressing as animals also became uncommon until they were revived by folklorists in modern times. At the same time traditional tales about the metamorphosis of humans into animals were condemned as either poetical fancies or diabolical fictions.²¹ One of the reasons that monstrous births caused such horror was that they threatened the firm dividing-line between men and animals.

Close relations with animals were also frowned upon. When in 1667 Dr Edmund King planned the transfusion of a lamb's blood into the veins of a man, the experiment was at first held up because of 'some considerations of a moral nature'; and in the nineteenth century one of the great arguments against vaccination would be that inoculation with fluid from cows would result in the 'animalization' of human beings.²² Bestiality, accordingly, was the worst of sexual crimes because, as one Stuart moralist put it, 'it turns man into a very beast, makes a man a member of a brute creature'.²³ The sin was the sin of confusion; it was immoral to mix the categories.* Injunctions against 'buggery with beasts' were standard in seventeenth-century moral literature, though occasionally the topic was passed over, 'the fact being more filthy than to be spoken of'.²⁴ Bestiality became a capital offence in 1534 and, with one brief interval, remained so until 1861. Incest, by contrast, was not a secular crime at all until the twentieth century.²⁵

* It is revealing of the extent to which sensibilities on this point have changed that a learned modern commentator should find the legal prohibition of bestiality 'pointless'; Tony Honoré, *Sex Law* (1978), 176.

HUMAN ASCENDANCY

In early modern England even animal pets were morally suspect, especially if admitted to the table and fed better than the servants. It was against the rules of civility to handle dogs at the table, ruled Erasmus. 'Over-familiar usage of any brute creature is to be abhorred,' said a moralist in 1633.²⁶ An unconventional pet – a toad or a fly or weasel – could be identified as a witch's familiar, while for gentlewomen to cherish pet monkeys in their bosoms was, as Helkiah Crooke ruled in 1631, 'a very wicked and inhumane thing'. The godly remembered the story of the pious Elizabethan Katherine Stubbes, who, on her deathbed, caught sight of her favourite little puppy.

She had no sooner espied her, but she beat her away, and calling her husband to her, said 'Good husband, you and I have offended God grievously in receiving many a time this bitch into our bed; we would have been loathe to have received a Christian soul . . . into our bed, and to have nourished him in our bosoms, and to have fed him at our table, as we have done this filthy cur many times. The Lord give us grace to repent it' . . . and afterwards she could not abide to look upon the bitch any more.²⁷

It was during these centuries that most farmers finally moved the animals out of their houses into separate accommodation.*

Sentiments about animals, say the anthropologists, are usually projections of attitudes to man.²⁸ In early modern England the official concept of the animal was a negative one, helping to define, by contrast, what was supposedly distinctive and admirable about the human species. By embodying the antithesis of all that was valued and esteemed, the idea of the brute was as indispensable a prop to established human values as were the equally unrealistic notions held by contemporaries about witches or Papists. 'The meaning of order,' it has been well said, 'could only be grasped by exploring its antithesis or "contrary".'²⁹ Animal analogies came particularly readily to the lips of those who saw more of animals, wild and domestic, than do most people today. The brute creation provided the most readily-available point of reference for the continuous process of human self-definition. Neither the same as humans, nor wholly dissimilar, the animals offered an almost inexhaustible fund of symbolic meaning.

Yet there was little objective justification for the way in which the beasts were perceived. 'As drunk as a dog,' the proverb said. But who has ever seen a drunken dog?³⁰ Men attributed to animals the natural

INFERIOR HUMANS

impulses they most feared in themselves – ferocity, gluttony, sexuality – even though it was men, not beasts, who made war on their own species, ate more than was good for them and were sexually active all the year round. It was as a comment on *human* nature that the concept of 'animality' was devised. As S. T. Coleridge would observe, to call human vices 'bestial' was to libel the animals.³¹



V. INFERIOR HUMANS

In drawing a firm line between man and beast, the main purpose of early modern theorists was to justify hunting, domestication, meat-eating, vivisection (which became common scientific practice in the late seventeenth century) and the wholesale extermination of vermin and predators. But this abiding urge to distinguish the human from the animal also had important consequences for relations between men. For, if the essence of humanity was defined as consisting in some specific quality, then it followed that any man who did not display that quality was subhuman, semi-animal. 'In each constructed world of nature,' writes one modern anthropologist, 'the contrast between man and not-man provides an analogy for the contrast between the member of the human society and the outsider.' It is common, says another, for tribes to appropriate for themselves the arrogant title of 'man', referring to other peoples as 'monkeys'.¹

In early modern England there were exclusive groups, like the Family of Love, of whom it was said in Elizabethan times that 'whosoever is not of their sect they account him as a beast that hath no soul'.² But

* See below, p. 95.

the same exclusive attitude was more widely displayed towards those 'primitive' peoples who lacked the same attributes as those in which the animals were deficient: technology, intelligible language, Christianity. Many of the early explorers would have agreed with Gibbon that 'the human brute, without arts or laws, . . . is poorly distinguished from the rest of the animal creation'.³ Culture was as necessary to man as was domestication for plants and animals. Robert Gray declared in 1609 that 'the greater part' of the earth was 'possessed and wrongfully usurped by wild beasts . . . or by brutish savages, which by reason of their godless ignorance, and blasphemous idolatry, are worse than those beasts'. The Earl of Clarendon agreed: 'the greatest part of the world is yet inhabited by men as savage as the beasts who inhabit with them.' 'Their words are sounded rather like that of apes than men,' reported Sir Thomas Herbert of the inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope; 'I doubt that many of them have no better predecessors than monkeys.' 'The Hottentots,' thought a Jacobean clergyman, were 'beasts in the skin of man' and their speech 'an articulate noise rather than language, like the clucking of hens or gabbling of turkeys.' They were 'filthy animals', said a later traveller, who 'hardly deserve the name of rational creatures'. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw many discourses on the animal nature of the negroes, their beastlike sexuality and their brutish nature.⁴

The American Indians were not normally thought of in this way, but occasionally they too were described in similar language. Frobisher found them living in caves and hunting their prey, 'even as the bear or other wild beasts do'. Robert Johnson saw them wandering 'up and down in troops, like herds of deer in a forest'. In Virginia they were observed 'creeping upon all fours . . . like bears'; their houses were said to be like a 'den or hog-sty', and they themselves, 'more brutish than the beasts they hunt'. In 1689 Edmund Hickerlingill, an English cleric who had once been to the West Indies, spoke disdainfully of 'the poor silly naked Indians' as 'just one degree (if they be so much) remov'd from a monkey'.⁵

Many saw the Irish in a similar light. They lived 'like beasts', thought the Elizabethan Barnaby Rich; 'in a brutish, nasty condition', said Sir William Petty. They ate raw flesh and drank hot blood from their cows.⁶ The Irishman's animal nature had been discovered long before those Victorian caricatures which depicted him with simian features. In the 1650s a captain in General Ireton's regiment told how, when an Irish garrison was slaughtered at Cashel in 1647, they found among the bodies of the dead 'divers that had tails near a quarter of a yard

long'; and when the story was challenged, forty soldiers came forward to testify on oath that they personally had seen them.⁷

There were other animals nearer home. 'What is an infant,' asked a Jacobean writer, 'but a brute beast in the shape of a man? And what is a young youth but (as it were) a wild untamed ass-colt unbridled?' Small children were not in control of their actions and the language of infancy was 'no little, if at all, better than the sounds the most sagacious brute animals make to each other'.⁸ Young men, being still unable to control their passions, were only a little better. They were 'like wild asses and wild heifers', said George Fox; like young colts, thought Gerrard Winstanley.⁹

Women were also near the animal state. Over many centuries theologians had debated, half frivolously, half seriously, whether or not the female sex had souls, a discussion which closely paralleled the debate about animals and was sometimes echoed at a popular level. At Witley in Surrey in 1570, one Nicholas Woodies allegedly asserted that women had no souls; at Earls Colne, Essex, in 1588 the minister himself said the same; and in the diocese of Peterborough in 1614 a local wit was reported for 'avowing and obstinately defending that women have no souls, but their shoe soles'. The Quaker George Fox met a group of people who held that women had 'no souls, no more than a goose'.¹⁰ Contemporary gynaecologists laid heavy emphasis on the animal aspects of child-bearing. A pregnant woman was commonly said to be 'breeding'; and one pre-Civil-War clergyman in the pulpit compared women to sows. Puritan opponents of the churching ceremony sometimes did the same, referring to the mother as a sow with her piglets following her.¹¹ Until the eighteenth century, the suckling of babies was usually regarded by the upper classes as a debasing activity, to be avoided if possible by putting infants out to the wet-nurse. Jane Austen was in a long tradition when she described her sex as 'poor animals', worn out by annual childbearing.¹²

Still more beastlike were the poor – ignorant, irreligious, squalid in their living conditions and notably lacking in some of the accomplishments supposed to be distinctively human: letters, numbers, manners and a developed sense of time. Intellectuals had long been in the habit of regarding the uneducated as subhuman.¹³ In the early modern period the attitude lingered. 'The numerous rabble that seem to have the signatures of man in their faces,' explained Sir Thomas Pope Blount in 1693, 'are but brutes in their understanding . . . 'tis by the favour of a metaphor we call them men, for at the best they are but Descartes's automata, moving frames and figures of men, and have nothing but their outsides

to justify their titles to rationality.¹⁴ To other observers, the poor were 'the vile and brutish part of mankind'; their occupations were 'bestial' and they 'toiled like their horses'.¹⁵ In his answer to the Lincolnshire rebels of 1536, King Henry VIII described the commonalty of Lincolnshire as 'one of the most brute and beastly of the whole realm'. In Elizabethan Pembrokeshire George Owen saw young people herding cattle, burned black by the sun, 'their skins all chapped like elephants'. The villagers of Tottington, Lancashire, were 'mere brutes', thought the local incumbent in 1696. In the Essex marshes in 1700 there were 'people of so abject and sordid a temper that they seem almost to have undergone poor Nebuchadnezzar's fate, and by conversing continually with the beasts to have learned their manners'. At Madeley, Shropshire, the vicar, John Fletcher, mused in 1772 on the condition of the bargemen:

Fastened to their lines as horses to their traces, wherein do they differ from the laborious brutes? Not in an erect posture of the body, for, in the intenseness of their toil, they bend forward, their head is foremost, and their hands upon the ground. If there is any difference, it consists in this: horses are indulged with a collar to save their breasts; and these, as if theirs were not worth saving, draw without one; the beasts tug in silent patience and mutual ritual harmony; but the men with loud contention and horrible imprecations.¹⁶

Most beastlike of all were those on the margins of human society: the mad, who seemed to have been taken over by the wild beast within; and the vagrants, who followed no calling, but lived what the Puritan William Perkins called 'the life of a beast'.¹⁷ It has been truly said that the image of animality haunted the madhouse.¹⁸ The same image runs through contemporary indictments of the vagrants, who did not 'range themselves into families, but consorted together as beasts'. Beggars were also like brutes because they spent all day seeking food.¹⁹

Once perceived as beasts, people were liable to be treated accordingly. The ethic of human domination removed animals from the sphere of human concern. But it also legitimized the ill-treatment of those humans who were in a supposedly animal condition. In the colonies, slavery, with its markets, its brandings and its constant labour, was one way of dealing with men thought to be beastlike. The Portuguese, reported an English traveller, marked slaves 'as we do sheep, with a hot iron', and at the slave market in Constantinople, Fynes Moryson saw the buyers taking their slaves indoors to inspect them naked, handling them 'as we handle beasts, to know their fatness and strength'.²⁰ Slaves were

often given names of the kind normally reserved for dogs and horses.²¹ One eighteenth-century London goldsmith advertised 'silver padlocks for blacks or dogs'; and English advertisements for runaway negroes show that they often had collars around their necks.²² Historians now think that black slavery preceded assertions of the negro's semi-animal status. Fully-developed theories of racial inferiority came later.^{23*} But it is hard to believe that the system would ever have been tolerated if negroes had been credited with fully human attributes. Their dehumanization was a necessary precondition of their maltreatment.

At home animal domestication furnished many of the techniques for dealing with delinquency: bridles for scolding women; cages, chains and straw for madmen; halters for wives sold by auction in the market, in the widely accepted informal ritual of divorce.²⁴ The training of youth was frequently compared to the breaking of horses; and it was no accident that the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of more humane methods of horse-breaking would coincide with a reaction against the use of corporal punishment in education.†

Above all, the common people were repeatedly portrayed as animals who needed to be forcibly restrained if they were not to break out and become dangerous. The best way to deal with them, thought Timothy Nourse in 1700,

will be to bridle them, and to make them feel the spur too, when they begin to play their tricks and kick. The saying of an English gentleman was much to the purpose, that three things ought always to be kept under: a mastiff dog, a stone horse [i.e. a stallion] and a clown; and really I think a snarling, cross-grained clown to be the most unlucky beast of [the] three.²⁵

This was not typical of the way in which all members of the well-to-do classes regarded their inferiors. But neither was it unique; and a recently-discovered letter by the gentle Charles Lamb, undated but evidently written at a time of agricultural unrest,‡ reminds us of how long it survived.

It was never good times in England since the poor began to speculate upon their condition. Formerly they jogged on with as little reflection

* See below, pp. 135-6.

† Cf. below, p. 189.

‡ Perhaps in 1822. Cf. *John Constable's Correspondence*, ed. R. B. Beckett (Suffolk Records Soc., 1962-8), vi. 88 ('never a night without seeing fires').

as horses. The whistling ploughman went cheek by jowl with his brother that neighed. Now the biped carries a box of phosphorus in his leather breeches ... and half a county is grinning with new fires.²⁶

Some anthropologists believe that it was the management of herds of domestic animals which first gave rise to an interventionist and manipulative conception of political life. Inhabitants of societies which, like those of Polynesia, lived by vegetable-gardening and growing crops which require relatively little human intervention seem to have taken a relatively unambitious view of the ruler's function. They believed that nature should be left to take its course and that men could be trusted to fend for themselves without regulation from above. But the domestication of animals generated a more authoritarian attitude.²⁷ In early modern England human rule over the lower creatures provided the mental analogue on which many political and social arrangements were based. Moreover, the two kinds of rule reinforced each other. The 'dominion' which God gave Adam over the animals, explained a Jacobean commentator, meant 'such a prevailing and possessing as a master hath over servants'.²⁸ Men enjoyed dominion over the lower creatures, but not all men. As a familiar proverb had it, 'The wisest of men saw it to be a great evil that servants should ride on horses.'²⁹

Domestication thus became the archetypal pattern for other kinds of social subordination. The model was a paternal one, with the ruler a good shepherd, like the bishop with his pastoral staff. Loyal, docile animals obeying a considerate master were an example to all employees.

Their faculties of mind are ... proportioned to this state of subjection [wrote an observer in 1758] ... they have knowledge peculiar to their several spheres, and sufficient for the underpart they are to act ... if they had a higher degree of knowledge ... they would be the plagues of mankind; they would repine, resent ... combine, rebel ... they would no longer endure their present necessary, and much happier, state of subordination.

This was not an eighteenth-century politician resisting a proposal for the education of the poor. It was a naturalist (William Borlase) discussing the lower animals. As Oliver Goldsmith wrote of the mole: 'A small degree of vision is sufficient for a creature that is ever destined to live in darkness. A more extensive sight would only have served to show the horrors of its prison.'³⁰

The ideal of human ascendancy, therefore, had implications for men's

relations to each other, no less than for their treatment of the natural world. Some men were seen as useful beasts, to be curbed, domesticated and kept docile; others were vermin and predators, to be eliminated. 'Let him bear the wolf's head,' they said in the thirteenth century of an outlaw. 'They act like wolves and are to be dealt withal as wolves,' remarked a clergyman in 1703 of the Indians in New England, in justification of their being hunted with dogs.³¹ In Jacobean Scotland a Campbell chieftain offered the same reward for the head of a MacGregor as for the head of a wolf; and in Cromwellian Ireland the Tories were frequently compared to ravening wolves.³² John Locke thought that an aggressor who ignored the dictates of human reason rendered himself liable to be destroyed like a beast. So in 1657 did the inhabitants of the Essex village of Great Horkesley: when, confronted by one Samuel Warner, 'the most dangerous, bloody villain in the county', who was said to have killed one man and assaulted another, they requested the authorities 'to tie him up, as they used to deal with savage beasts'.³³ It was in the same decade that, when the Quaker Edward Billing was attacked by a mob, 'a great one' said, 'trouble not a magistrate with him. Dash out his brains ... they are like dogs in time of plague. They are to be killed as they go up and down the streets, that they do not infect.'³⁴

It was, therefore, a serious matter when controversialists tried to dehumanize their opponents, as when John Milton compared his enemies to 'owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs'; or when the godly Nehemiah Wallington described the Royalists as 'tigers and bears for cruelty ... boars for waste and destruction ... swine for drunkenness ... wolves for greediness'.³⁵ From the medieval schoolman Albert the Great, who accused his opponents of blaspheming 'like brute beasts', to Karl Marx, who called Malthus a 'baboon', such language has been part of the tradition of European learned controversy.³⁶ In early modern England it was a regular weapon of religious and political polemic, whether used by Thomas More, who called William Tyndale 'a bold beast' and stigmatized his writings as 'a poisoned stinking tale of some stinking serpent', or by the Puritans, who denounced non-preaching clergymen as 'dumb dogs'. The bishops, said the anonymous author of the Marprelate Tracts, were 'hogs, dogs, wolves, foxes'.³⁷ Animal analogies were equally conspicuous in popular satire and abuse. Opponents of the Church's ceremonies frequently staged mock baptisms or funerals of cows, pigs, cats, dogs and horses.³⁸ And sometimes the Church's supporters retaliated in kind: in 1643 a Puritan triumphantly recorded the birth of a monstrous child to two Popish parents, a judge-

ment on the grandmother, who some years earlier 'out of an inveterate malignity . . . and in devilish derision' towards the famous victims of Archbishop Laud had named her three cats 'Bastwick', 'Burton' and 'Prynne', cutting off their ears, 'in desperate disdain of their glorious sufferings'.³⁹

Animal insults remain a feature of human discourse today. But they have lost the force they possessed in an age when beasts enjoyed no claim to moral consideration. For to describe a man as a beast was to imply that he should be treated as such. The story of religious persecution in the early modern period makes it abundantly clear that, for those who committed acts of bloody atrocity, the dehumanization of their victims by reclassifying them as animals was often a necessary mental preliminary.⁴⁰

Yet nearly all the protests which were made on behalf of the poor and oppressed in the early modern period were couched in terms of the very same ideology of human domination that was used to justify their oppression. Slavery was attacked because it confused the categories of beast and man,⁴¹ while political tyranny was denounced on the grounds that it was wrong that human beings should be treated as if they were animals. In 1596 the rioters in Oxfordshire protested that servants were being 'held in and kept like dogs'. James Harrington thought the people in Scotland were oppressed because they were 'little better than the cattle of the nobility', while for Edmund Ludlow the main question in dispute during the Civil War was whether the King should govern his people by law, or rule them by force 'like beasts'.⁴² 'Men,' as one opponent of monarchy put it in 1654, 'are not like sheep under a shepherd, where the dignity of the kind may justly challenge superiority and dominion over the inferior kind, in regard of the great difference of the species.' Reason ruled men, pronounced John Locke. Force was only for brutes.⁴³

The common people themselves were always extremely sensitive to the suggestion that they were to be equated with their animal inferiors. When the first Duke of Buckingham took to being carried round in a sedan chair, there were objections to the immorality of his 'employing his fellow-creatures to do the service of beasts'; and in Victorian times it was said to be a 'barbarous practice' that at hiring-fairs 'men and women should stand in droves, like cattle, for inspection'. Parents dreaded lest their infants should die unbaptized and be committed to the earth 'like dogs'; hence the distress in 1539 when the French foster-parents refused to bury an English nurse-child who had died in their care, and returned it to Calais 'as if it had been a dead calf'.⁴⁴

Much popular protest during the period consequently took the form of demanding that everyone should be admitted to share in that ascendancy over the lower creation which God had bestowed on mankind. 'All the land, trees, beasts, fish, fowl, etc.,' complained the radical author of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1648), 'are enclosed into a few mercenary hands.'⁴⁵ Many objected to the medieval forest law which restricted access to the royal game reserves; and they hated the statutes which, from the fourteenth century onwards, had confined the right to hunt game to those above a certain social level ('It is not fit,' James I explained, 'that clowns should have these sports.')46 The poor too wanted to be able to kill the deer and shoot the birds. They accepted the private ownership of domestic animals, but they held to the old common-law view that there was no property in wild ones (*ferae naturae*) until they had been killed or tamed.

European jurists, like Grotius or Pufendorf, would devote much energy to refuting the belief of 'ignorant persons' that every man was entitled to a share in the God-given dominion over nature, but ordinary people remained unconvinced.⁴⁷ During the Civil War a group of Parliamentary troopers, quartered in Leamington, did much damage to Baron Trevor's dove-house. When their captain remonstrated,

they answered him that pigeons were fowls of the air given to the sons of men, and all men had a common right in them that could get them, and they were as much theirs as the Baron's, and therefore they would kill them . . . and not part from their right; upon which . . . the Captain said he was so convinced with their arguments he could not answer them, and so came away, letting them do as they would.

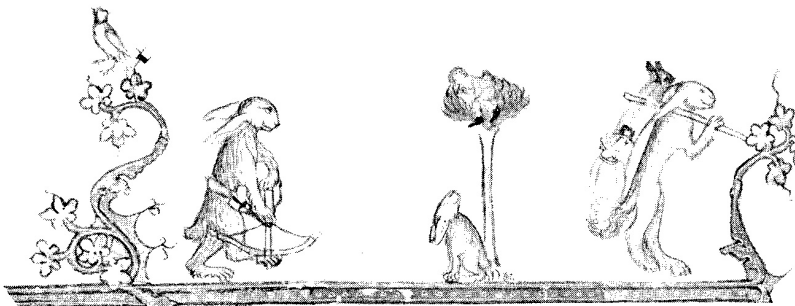
In the eighteenth century the great lawyer William Blackstone confirmed that forest and game laws were 'both founded on the same unreasonable notions of permanent property in wild creatures'.⁴⁸ It is not surprising that poachers were often unrepentant when apprehended: 'the deer were wild beasts,' said a convicted deer-stealer in 1722, 'and . . . the poor, as well as the rich, might lawfully use them.' Wild animals, birds and fish were God's gift to all men, 'everyone's property'.⁴⁹

The main dispute during the period, therefore, was between those who held that all humanity had dominion over the creatures, and those who believed that human rights over inferior creatures should be confined to a privileged group. Disputes about the game laws did not lead on to doubts about man's right to hunt birds and animals, because the lower classes were as committed to the idea of human domination as anyone

else.* After all, even labourers ruled over domestic animals, whom they could kick and curse when things went wrong. Farm animals were a sort of inferior class, reassuring the humblest rural worker that he was not at the absolute bottom of the social scale, a consolation which his industrial successor was to lack. The ox, as the Greeks used to say, was the poor man's slave; and even the poorest tinker had a dog at his heels on which to bestow the kick which indicated his superiority. The lower classes, thought Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792, domineered over animals 'to revenge the insults that they are obliged to bear from their superiors'.⁵⁰

Yet the uncompromisingly aggressive view of man's place in the natural world which has been sketched out in this chapter was by no means representative of all opinion in early modern England. Not everyone thought that the world was made exclusively for man, that nature was to be feared and subjugated, that the inferior species had no rights or that the differences between man and beast were unbridgeable. On the contrary, reality was much more complicated than that. If we look below the surface we shall find many traces of guilt, unease and defensiveness about the treatment of animals; and many of the official attitudes which have been described so far were remote from the actual practice of many people. The rest of this book will try to do justice to other, more ambiguous, modes of thought and action.

* In the nineteenth century Fourier, Saint-Simon, Engels and other Socialists explicitly aimed at the full separation of man from the animal kingdom and his complete lordship over inferior species; the exploitation of man by man was to be replaced by the exploitation by man of nature. See Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford, 1979), 517, 604, 665-6, 707; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1951), ii. 140.



II

NATURAL HISTORY AND VULGAR ERRORS

This is a general and main error, running through all the conceptions of mankind, unless great heed be taken to prevent it, that what subject soever they speculate upon, whether it be of substances that have a superior nature to theirs, or whether it be of creatures inferior to them, they are still apt to bring them to their own standard, and to frame such conceptions of them as they would do of themselves.

Sir Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises* (1645), i. 419.

i. CLASSIFICATION

It has been suggested so far that in early modern England it was conventional to regard the world as made for man and all other species as subordinate to his wishes. We must now see how this assumption was gradually eroded by a combination of developments, some of them already in operation when the period started, others emerging as time went on. Of these developments, the first was the growth of natural history, the scientific study of animals, birds and vegetation.

There was, of course, nothing new about the realization that the natural world had a life of its own, independent of human needs. The detached observation of nature had achieved an astonishing maturity in the work of Aristotle, and, although the literary culture of the subsequent fifteen hundred years added very little to them, so far as botany and zoology were concerned, there were plenty of people in medieval England who observed the natural world very carefully. In the late twelfth century Gerald of Wales recorded extremely accurate descriptions of fish and birds, while in the fifteenth century the antiquary William of Worcester gave the nesting habits of birds similarly close attention. Striking evidence of the direct perception of nature is to be found in the meticulous depictions of foliage in the thirteenth-century sculpture of Southwell Minster, the careful representation of flowers in medieval embroidery, and the marvellous fourteenth-century coloured drawings of birds in the Bird Psalter at the Fitzwilliam Museum and the sketchbook in the Pepysian Library.¹ In 1753, when the Society of Antiquaries was shown an illustrated fifteenth-century missal, its