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### **Changing Perspectives of Bestiality: Breaking the Human-Animal Distinction to Violating Animal Rights**

As one website for the band “Zoophilia” satirically states when referring to bestiality, “If we can KILL animals, and EAT animals, then why can’t we FUCK animals?” ([www.myspace.com/zoophilia](http://www.myspace.com/zoophilia)). Even though the website mocks the prevalence of bestiality in society, the rates are actually much greater than most people might realize: “8 per cent of men and 3½ per cent of women had on occasion had a sexual encounter with an animal” (Dekkers 133). Despite this larger than expected percentage, the general public holds a negative view of bestiality as an immoral and impure practice. The explanations for bestiality’s stigmatization have changed drastically over the years in spite of the fact that almost all human cultures disapprove of the practice. People initially viewed bestiality negatively because it breaks the distinction between humans and animals and place humans on an equal level as animals. However, people condemn bestiality today because of the physically destructive nature of the sexual practice and increasing concern for animals’ rights to freedom from pain and injury. Thus, although people still disapprove of bestiality, the reasons for its condemnation have shifted from concern for humans to concern for the animals involved.

The domestication of animals established a degrading view of animals, as owners began to view them as tools to further the production of crops or, in some cases, of the animals themselves. Engels defined the meaning of production as ‘the transforming reaction of man on nature’ (Tim Ingold--Manning 4). Thus, people reduced the animal’s purpose to what the animal could provide for humans: in particular, the animal became a means for

humans' economic ends. In concordance with this demeaning view of animals, the first denominations of money were named according to the market value of animals:

“Pecuniary,” or money value, is derived from *pecus*, the word for cattle in ancient Rome. In Sumeria, sixty shekels equaled one manu, the amount carried by a donkey. A goat constituted five shekels, an ox twenty. Coins in Egypt and Greece were stamped with the heads of animals to indicate their value. The Indian rupee is from the Hindi word, *rupa*, for the zebu, a form of cow. The great archaic states of South America and Eurasia were based on load bearing, grist-mill turning, and pulling, to which animals were bred as the first machines. (Shepard 280)

Thus, people determined animals' value by how much labor they produced and how well they functioned as machines. As domestication consists of control and mastery, some people inquired whether it is yet another form of slavery. In response to whether domestication is a type slavery, Marx argued that humans cannot dominate animals as a master does its slave because “[b]eings without will, such as animals, may indeed render services, but their owner is not thereby lord and master” (Tim Ingold--Manning 17). Therefore, Marx defines domination as a form of social control implemented over people, whereas domestication is a form of mechanical control used over objects. Consequently, humans reduced animals to the status of machines by upholding the view that animals do not have wills. This view enables people to justify the exploitation of animals' labor power for economic purposes.

In concordance with the view that an animal's value depends on how well it functions as a machine, René Descartes attempted to show in *Discours de la Méthode* that animals essentially exist as sophisticated machines. He modeled his arguments off of mechanical animals in the gardens of St. Germain that moved by varying degrees of water pressure (Shepard 279). Descartes' arguments greatly influenced seventeenth century philosophers who began defining humans by how they differ from animals: if animals do not possess souls, feelings, minds, language, or self-consciousness as humans do, then what differentiates

animals from machines? Nicolas Malebranche adopted Descartes' philosophy of animals as automata:

[Animals] eat without pleasure, they cry without pain, they grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, they fear nothing, they know nothing; and if they behave in a seemingly intelligent manner, it is because God, having made them thus to preserve them, has so formed their bodies that they avoid mechanically and fearlessly everything capable of destroying them. (Preece 147)

Thus, some philosophers deemed that animals function in the same way that machines operate: by a series of impulses and reflexes. Scientists later adopted this mechanistic view of animals in order to justify the use of animals in medical research: "Laboratory animals were used widely in demonstrations and research, and biologists speak a vernacular of bodily processes such as 'the mechanism' of digestion or of nervous control and so on. The idea implies that animals are only machines" (Shepard 280-1). Hence, the mechanistic view of animals as automata enables humans to use an animal as a means to an end because they no longer see the animal as a living creature.

In concordance with the philosophers' views that humans differ from animals in that animals are automata, people have viewed sexuality for several centuries as something that reduces a human being to an animal. As sexuality supposedly originates from one's base instincts, people will often refer to aggressive, sexual behavior as "bringing out the beast in one," "wolfish behavior," or "animal passions" ("Bestiality"). This claim leads people to equate sexual behavior with acting like an animal. When Christianity first developed, "it was far more hostile to sex than any other religion that was common at the time. It extended its disapproval to many sexual practices that were tolerated by other religions, such as masturbation, homosexuality, and bestiality" (Baumeister 193). The bestial view of sexual intercourse began during the Middle Ages in which people argued over interpretations of occurrences in the Bible: some people claimed that the serpent introduced sex to Eve in the

Garden of Eden after she took a bite from the forbidden apple. These animalistic descriptions of sexual intercourse imply that humans differ from animals and that people ought to exceed the sexual acts that occur in nature. Moreover, the way in which humans have sexual intercourse may act as an additional means of separating humans from animals. Specifically, unlike the front-to-back stance in which most animals copulate, the “missionary position” forces the couple to be face-to-face in order to execute the act (“Bestiality”). Therefore, religious interpretations influence people to associate sexual intercourse with animalistic qualities, resulting in a greater distinction between animals and humans.

The idea that sexuality reduces a human being to the status of an insatiable animal requires that humans are initially distinct from animals. Thus, people view instances in which people commit sexual intercourse with animals as especially heinous because bestiality blurs this fine distinction between animals and humans. In a discussion of the Christian law as it pertains to sexual intercourse, Leviticus 18: 23-25 states:

You shall not lie with any beast and defile yourself with it, neither shall any woman give herself to a beast to lie with it: it is a perversion. Do not defile yourselves by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am casting out before you defiled themselves; and the land became defiled, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. (Ellens 144-5)

Therefore, religious texts adamantly condemn bestiality because the sexual practice disbands any differentiation between animals and humans, which many theologians and philosophers have worked for centuries to identify. If animals and humans are not distinct, then the religious tenet which deems that man was created in God’s image may indeed be false. Hence, if humans are physically able to have sexual intercourse with some animals, then perhaps animals and humans are not as different as some people might like to think.

As a result of religious accounts that reprimand bestiality as sinful, most people today continue to find bestiality especially revolting because it reminds them of their connection to

animals. In a psychological study meant to determine the role of emotion in the transmission of urban legends, the experimenters found that people were more willing to pass along stories that elicited stronger disgust responses. However, “the only case for which transmission [of urban legends] decreased as disgust increased was the wedding video story, in which people accidentally see a tape of a man participating in bestiality” (Heath 1037). This discrepancy coincides with the emotional selection hypothesis, which states that people might enjoy stories that evoke more disgust but avoid passing along stories that are too disgusting. Furthermore, this disgust might also originate from people’s association of bestiality with psychologically ill people: “Psychiatric patients were found to have a statistically significant higher prevalence rate (55%) of bestiality than the [two] control groups (10% and 15% respectively)” (Alvarez 45). In another psychological study, people elicited the greatest disgust responses, as indicated by an upper lip raise and gape, to items having to do with human-dog intercourse. The psychologists describe these reactions as *animal-origin disgust*, which reflects people’s rejection of any suggestion that humans are animals: “disgust reflects the human concern to be distinguished from other animals or to not be considered as an animal at all” (Rozin 870). Thus, people’s reactions of disgust and revulsion to bestiality likely originate in people’s desire to differentiate themselves from other animals.

In addition to the disgust that people feel when an act reminds them of their connection to animals, affective reactions play a role in the moral judgment of that action. Psychologists tested the concept that emotions factor into moral judgments by recording people’s measurements of the offensiveness of certain actions. Disgust seems to act as the “guardian of the purity of the soul,” because all human cultures have food and sexual taboos against acts such as incest, cannibalism, and bestiality (Haidt 615). In fact, the general public

disapproves of bestiality so much that, unlike organic disorders, “a proclivity for bestiality or ‘perverted carnal lust’ [has] been ruled to be insufficient to raise the issue of insanity during courts-martial trials” (Stanczak 729). Therefore, the public views a person who commits bestiality as perverted and corrupt rather than having a disorder. Even though research has not yet discovered a cause for paraphilias such as bestiality, the Kinsey Institute reported that paraphilias originate in childhood. Whereas female sexuality changes throughout adulthood, males have “a brief period of plasticity during childhood, after which sexual patterns are reasonably rigid” (Baumeister 362). Although childhood instances of bestiality seem to lead to a fixed pattern of the sexual practice in adulthood, genetic factors likely generate both the childhood behavior and the attraction towards animals (Baumeister 363). This rigidity in the behavior has led some people to claim that bestiality should be considered as an additional sexual orientation. However, the disgust that bestiality invokes in people because the behavior blurs the distinction between humans and animals makes people judge it as an immoral, regardless of whether or not bestiality constitutes another sexual orientation.

Even though sexuality and the notion of animals as automata differentiate humans from animals, the line between humans and animals became blurred once again with Darwin’s theory of evolution. By claiming that all species have evolved over time to adapt to environmental struggles, Darwin designated man as another facet of the animal kingdom. Darwin’s evolutionary theory created commotion throughout the population: the theory not only emphasized the relationship between animals and humans but also entailed that humans’ bodies must function like machines if animals’ do. The Platonist Henry More wrote to Descartes in 1648 to oppose his view of animals as automata “which snatches life and sensibility away from the animals”:

But I beg you, most penetrating man, since it is necessary by this argument of yours, either to deprive animals of their sense, or to give them their immortality, why should you rather set up inanimate machinery than bodies motivated by immortal souls, even though that may have been the least consonant with natural phenomena so far discovered? [...] [I]f one does not concede immortality to the souls of brutes, then all animals are of necessity inanimate machines. (Preece 149)

Thus, the acknowledgement of the evolutionary connection between animals and humans revived the undertaking of distinguishing humankind from animals since “the human body (our animal nature) was merely a machine” (Shepard 280).

Once several scientists acknowledged the evolutionary relationship between animals and humans, it became necessary to differentiate humans from animals in a separate sense. Whereas non-Western cultures ascribe souls to animals, people in Western cultures believe that humans can exploit animals (Preece 103). The thirteenth-century encyclopedist Bartholomeus Anglicus summarized this view of human domination over animals: “All types of animals, domestic and wild beasts as well as reptiles, were created for the best use of man” (Esther Cohen--Manning 61). Many people argue that this degrading view of animals in the West originates from Christianity, as the religion does not attribute souls to animals. In *Satire XV*, Juvenal states that animals differ from humans because God “[b]reathed life in them, in us a reasoning soul” (Preece 117). In support of the idea that human beings alone possess eternal souls, Descartes presumed that the soul’s essential trait is thought. As Descartes argued that animals do not think, it logically follows that animals cannot have immortal souls. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer claims that Christianity does not ascribe immortal souls to animals because the religion seems to fail to recognize the worthiness of other species:

Christianity brought into the Roman world the idea of the uniqueness of the human species, which it inherited from the Jewish tradition but insisted upon with still greater emphasis because of the importance it placed on the human being’s immortal soul. Human beings, alone of all being living on earth, were destined for life after bodily death. With this came the distinctively Christian idea of the sanctity of all human life. (Preece 122)

As Singer aptly states, people in Western cultures often turn to religious doctrine to determine that which distinguishes humans from animals. Once evolutionary theories linked animals and humans together, it seemed likely that human's bodies function just as mechanically as animals'. Consequently, it became necessary to differentiate humans from animals by humans' possession of abstract, immortal souls.

In response to claims based upon Scripture that animals do not have souls, contemporary theologians have attempted to reveal the errors in the foundation of these assertions. Charles Bonnet argued against the logic that leads some people to conclude that animals do not have souls: "To imagine the animal soul to be mortal merely because the animal is not man is equivalent to imagining the human soul to be mortal merely because man is not angel" (Preece 151). Furthermore, Lewis G. Regenstein observed that the Hebrew word for 'soul' (*nephesh*) and 'living soul' (*nephesh chayah*) are used interchangeably to refer to both humans and animals in Genesis. However, when referring to animals, most modern Bibles substitute the word 'life' for 'living soul,' or use the term 'living creatures' (Preece 127). In addition to the purposeful manipulation of the meanings of words, Dr. George Bush commented on the translations of specific words in Genesis:

The phrase 'living soul' is repeatedly applied to the inferior order of animals. It would seem to mean the same when spoken of man that it does when spoken of beasts, viz., an animated being, a creature possessed of life and sensation, and capable of performing all the physical functions by which life is distinguished, and we find no *terms* in the Bible to distinguish the intellectual faculties of man from the brute creation. (Preece 126-7)

Therefore, the original Scripture refer to animals as 'living souls,' just as it refers to humans as 'living souls.' However, the Hebrew words seem to have been purposefully modified in comparatively modern translations. These modifications support the assertion that Western Christianity has greatly influenced people's views on the exploitative treatment of animals.

Since the words used to describe animals as ‘living souls’ have been incorrectly translated to mean ‘living creatures,’ this misinterpretation implies that animals do not have souls and are thereby created for humans’ use.

Even though religious misinterpretations of scriptural words may establish that animals do not possess souls, several people have attempted to show that lacking a soul does not justify treating animals inhumanely. The Nonconformist minister William Youatt pointed out that the Bible does not specifically address whether or not animals have souls: “The Gospel which promises us another life, says not one word with regard to [animals] ... [...] [in heaven] *Man will there live again*: but what other forms of existence will surround him has not yet been revealed, and it become us not to be wise above that which is written” (Preece 121). In Youatt’s views, animals should be treated humanely simply because they are entitled to just treatment: “The claims of the lower animals to humane treatment, or at least, to exemption from abuse, are as good as any that man can urge upon man. Although less intelligent, and not immortal, they are susceptible of pain ... they have as much right to protection from ill usage as the best of their masters have” (Preece 121). In concurrence with the notion that the possession of immortal souls should not influence the way people treat animals, William Drummond writes in *The Rights of Animals* that if “this life is their all,” their condition “should be rendered as comfortable as possible, and no injury offered them by which it can be curtailed” (Preece 121). Thus, many people have recently argued that humans must treat animals humanely, regardless of whether or not the animals possess immortal souls, simply because they are able to feel pain.

Although arguments still abound concerning whether or not animals possess immortal souls, many people agree with contemporary animal rights activists’ claims that animals

deserve humane treatment simply because they can feel sensations such as pain. In *The Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, the Anglican vicar Humphry Primatt argues for the ethical treatment of animals based upon Christian principles of pain and suffering:

Pain is pain, whether it be inflicted on man or beast, and the creature that suffers it, whether man or beast, being sensible of the misery of it while it lasts, suffers *evil*; and the sufferance of evil, unmeritedly, unprovokedly, where no offence has been given, but merely to exhibit power and malice, is cruelty and injustice in him that occasions it. (Preece 119)

In a similar manner, Reverend Richard Dean argues in *An Essay on the Future Life of Brutes* that animals have the same ability to feel pain as those people who inflict it upon them:

“Brutes have sensibility; they are capable of pain; feel every bang, and cut or stab, as much as man himself, some of them perhaps more ... For a man therefore to torture a brute shows a meanness of spirit. If he does it out of wantonness, he is a fool and a coward; if for pleasure he is a monster” (Preece 119). Although people today still cannot agree on whether or not animals possess immortal souls, most people grant that animals deserve equal consideration simply because they have the ability to feel pain. Thus, people no longer focus as heavily on differentiating humans from animals; instead, people are beginning to vie for animals’ rights to equal consideration.

As publicity of arguments for animal rights based upon animals’ ability to feel pain increases, animal rights activists attempt to raise awareness regarding the cruel nature of bestiality. “Bestiality” could be more accurately called “forced sex with animals;” as animals cannot give their consent to sexual intercourse with a human, one must assume that the sexual intercourse is forced upon them (“Bestiality”). The law makes it perfectly clear that “intimate sexual acts should only take place with the agreement of both parties” (Blunkett 16). Since animals are unable to consent to sexual intercourse with humans, “[s]exual activity with animals is generally recognised to be profoundly disturbed behaviour” (Blunkett 33).

Furthermore, bestiality is physically destructive to the animals involved, often resulting in torn rectums and internal bleeding, and small animals frequently die during the act (Pet-Abuse). Moreover, chickens are “frequently decapitated because this intensifies the convulsions of the sphincter, thereby increasing the sexual pleasure of the man” (“Bestiality”). In line with the modern view that animals should not be harmed because they can feel pain, John Hawkesworth wrote in *Adventurer* : “To take pleasure in that by which pain is inflicted, if it is not vicious is dangerous; and every practice which, if not criminal in itself, yet wears out the sympathizing sensibilities of a tender mind, must render human nature proportionately less fit for society” (Preece 119). Thus, bestiality is considered to be repulsive today by the general population because the perpetrator’s sexual pleasure comes at the cost of pain or even death of the animal involved.

The assertion that one must not knowingly cause animals pain changed people’s perceptions of nature: people originally considered wildlife to be a source of food, clothing, and shelter; however, people today tend to view wildlife as a national treasure that needs to be protected and preserved (Lilly-Marlene Russow—Hoage 25). Nonetheless, the claim that humans need to protect nature once again places humans outside of nature: humans are superior to defenseless wildlife, because they serve as its guardian. Raymond Williams has indicated that “to speak of man ‘intervening’ in natural processes is to suppose that he might find it possible not to do so, or decide not to do so. Nature has to be thought of...as separate from man, before any question of intervention or command, and the method and ethics of either, can arise” (Tim Ingold--Manning 4). In concurrence with the idea that humans are the guardians of nature, Americans tend to neotenize animals, to see animals as children (Lilly-Marlene Russow—Hoage 33). The American public often holds a view “of the wild as

unspoiled innocence, of animals as the proper subject of sentimental concern, yet still holds that adult humans have some sort of responsibility towards them, tied to our more developed rationality. Combining all of these feelings creates a picture of animals as innocent children: cute and unspoiled, but in need of protection by more rational beings—us” (Lilly-Marlene Russow—Hoage 33). Therefore, while it is crucial to give animals equal consideration and not cause them pain, people must also bear in mind that humankind is subject to the same evolutionary laws as all other animals. Hence, people are not the protectors of nature; rather, humans and animals are equally part of nature.

While science, theology, and humanism denied animals’ capacity to be human by claiming that animal automata do not have souls, “another segment of society was busy humanizing them as surrogate people, substitute children, and living toys” (Shepard 278). Although the view of animals as small people has led to extra protection for wildlife, a negative outcome of this neotonization is that people who commit the “fixated sex” type of bestiality view animals as love objects and as their only sexual partners (Pet-Abuse). These people define themselves as “zoophiles,” those who love animals, and differentiate themselves from “bestialists,” those who abuse animals. The zoophile’s need to distinguish himself or herself from bestialists reflects the pedophile’s differentiation between those who love children and those who abuse children (“Bestiality”). Similarly to the way in which zoophiles are sexually attracted to the infantile characteristics of animals, males find females who exude youthfulness and vitality attractive:

Cuddliness and mateability coincide best from the perspective of a man. After all, the sexual attraction of his mate is based to a large extent on infant characteristics; outwardly she has remained much more childlike than him. While he has become angular and sinewy, often also bald, she remains rounded and soft, with a small nose, small chin and long hair, accordingly he calls her his ‘dearest pet’ as an expression of tenderness. (Dekkers 61)

Therefore, zoophiles present the same justifications for committing bestiality as people offer to protect submissive wildlife. Subsequently, one must recognize one's place in nature and make a conscientious effort to not harm animals. However, zoophiles must realize that anthropomorphic views of animals do not validate using an animal as a substitute for a human sexual partner, especially when the zoophile's sexual pleasure often results in pain or death for the animal.

Despite the acknowledgement that bestiality is often physically painful and sometimes lethal for the animals involved, activists have called attention to the fact that concern about bestiality generally focuses on humans: "Disregard for the suffering of animals should be viewed as a red flag, because people who abuse animals rarely do so only once and will often move on to abuse their fellow human beings. Studies show that offenders who commit bestiality often go on to commit sex crimes against humans" ("Man..." 7/29/2004). Thus, the sole fact that bestiality injures the animals involved does not convince people to attempt to reduce the prevalence of bestiality; rather, people want to stop bestiality simply because it indicates possible future crimes committed against humans. Similarly to how the patronizing view of wildlife places animals as submissive to humans, this stance also places humans above animals in a hierarchy of importance. As an example of this egocentric view, after videotapes containing bestiality were found at a farm in Enumclaw, Washington, "investigators want to make sure crimes such as child abuse or forcible rape were not occurring on the property" (Sullivan 7/16/2005). Even though the article concedes that animal cruelty is a crime, it also implies that sexual assault committed against animals is not nearly as appalling as the same acts committed against humans.

In a discussion of how people psychologically separate themselves from their victims in order to commit heinous actions, Charles Patterson describes in *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* that the perpetrators of violence will reduce their victims to the status of animals in order to justify their actions. Patterson references John Dower, who writes, “The attachment of stupid, bestial, even pestilential subhuman caricatures on the enemy [...] and the manner in which this blocked seeing the foe as rational or even facilitated mass killing. It is, at least, for most people, easier to kill animals than fellow humans” (Patterson 37). In the same way that people reduce their victims to animals’ status in order to justify harming them, people who commit bestiality have been reduced to immoral monsters. In the Bible, Leviticus describes the ritual practices of neighboring peoples as distortions of the ceremonies devoted to Yahweh: Israel “shall not walk in the *statutes* (regulations) of the Canaanites but in the *statutes* of the Lord,” for the Egyptians and Canaanites participated in acts such as “sexually consorting with relatives, sexually consorting with women during their ‘menstrual uncleanness,’ adultery, child sacrifice, homosexual behavior, and bestiality” (Ellens 108). Just as the Bible used bestiality as a justification for acts against religious adversaries, “the imputation of bestiality has been used to portray a specific group of people as ‘others,’ to distance them from those making the charges” (“Bestiality”). For instance, “[f]orced sex with trained dogs was a form of torturing Jewish women in Nazi Germany; it was recently used against female political prisoners in Chile” (“Bestiality”). Thus, modern perpetrators of violence and prejudice no longer simply degrade their victims to the status of animals; they degrade their victims to the level of people who commit bestiality and thereby cross the boundary between animals and humans.

In response to the initial question, “If we can KILL animals, and EAT animals, then why can’t we FUCK animals?” one might state that people initially disapproved of bestiality because having sex with animals breaks the fine distinction between humans and animals. However, Darwin’s theory of evolution linked humans and animals together, so theologians and religious leaders necessarily distinguished humans from animals by granting humans an eternal soul. Even though people still argue about the fundamental difference between animals and humans, awareness concerning animals’ right to equal consideration has become increasingly prevalent as the animal rights movement gains momentum. Whereas people initially condemned bestiality because it supposedly reduces a human to animals’ status, the modern view of bestiality acknowledges that the animals are often physically harmed during the process. This gradual progression towards concern for the animal’s wellbeing illustrates that the animal rights movement might spread to other practices, as well. People might start to recognize the underlying cruelty to the process of eating meat, since some people argue that it is equally inexcusable to harm an animal for sexual pleasure as it is to kill an animal solely because one likes the taste of meat. Additionally, perpetrators of violence often justify their actions against their victims by first reducing their victims to the level of animals. If the public viewed animals as worthy of consideration, then these perpetrators would have greater difficulty justifying their actions. Therefore, viewing animals on an equal status as humans might improve people’s treatment of both animals and humans. Consequently, the gradual shift to condemning bestiality because it harms animals reveals society’s increasing consideration for animals’ and humans’ welfare in instances besides bestiality, such as eating meat and mass violence committed against other people.

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