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Peter Harrison

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# Animal Souls, Metempsychosis, and Theodicy in Seventeenth- Century English Thought

PETER HARRISON

## 1. INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE MOST wide-ranging discussions in seventeenth-century England concerned the status of animal creation. In Tudor England it was generally accepted that animals had been placed in the world to be at the disposal of man.<sup>1</sup> If there were those who doubted human sovereignty over the natural world, they needed only consult the classics, the Fathers, or scripture to have their doubts allayed. Genesis taught that man had been given dominion over nature, a principle reinforced by Aristotle's view that "nature has made all the animals for the sake of men."<sup>2</sup> For Aristotle, human superiority lay in the fact that while plants possessed a vegetative soul, and animals a sensitive soul, humans boasted a rational soul.<sup>3</sup> This view was endorsed by Augustine and Aquinas, both of whom suggested that we owe no direct duties to animals, on account of their inferior, irrational souls.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Augustine declared that "when we say, Thou shalt not kill, we do not understand this of the plants, since they have no sensation, nor of the irrational animals that fly, swim, walk or creep, since they are dissociated from us by want of reason, and are therefore by the just appointment of the Creator subjected to us to kill or keep alive

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<sup>1</sup> See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I.iii.7 (Loeb ed.).

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *N.E.* I.xiii; *De gen. an.* 736a–b; *De anima* 415a.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Augustine, *City of God*, tr. Marcus Dodds (New York: Modern Library, 1950), XXII.24 (p. 851); *The Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life*, tr. D. A. Gallagher and I. J. Gallagher (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1966), ch. XVII (pp. 102, 105); Aquinas, *Sancti Thomas Aquinatis in Aristotelis Librum de Anima Commentarium*, ed. M. Pirotta (Turin, 1925), §§ 255, 260, 279; *Summa theologiae*, 1a.78, 1.

for our own uses.”<sup>5</sup> Considerations such as these formed the weighty intellectual pedigree of the early modern view of the human relationship to the animal world.

To some extent, this common conception of the subservience of nature to human ends hardened into an even more rigid orthodoxy with the growth of natural science and the advent of the mechanical model of nature.<sup>6</sup> Francis Bacon’s influential programme for the renovation of science, articulated in the early 1600s, was based on the assumption that nature only yields up her secrets “when by art and the hand of man she is forced out of her natural state, and squeezed and moulded.”<sup>7</sup> Animals came to play an important, if unfortunate, role in the burgeoning life sciences, now modified along the lines of the Baconian model. On vivisection tables, in vacuum chambers, attached to numerous contraptions, they served as the hapless intermediaries between ruthlessly curious human interrogators and an apparently inert and uncooperative Nature.<sup>8</sup> Added impetus for this inquisitorial conception of science came from Descartes’s bold new mechanistic vision of nature. Physical bodies, according to the Cartesian hypothesis, were merely machines no more sentient than the material elements which constituted them. Mechanism became the dominant mode of scientific explanation, and animals were considered by Cartesians to be bereft of reason and feeling, in short, to be without souls. From about the middle of the seventeenth century, this view was to exert considerable influence in England.

Yet the seventeenth century also witnessed a countervailing tendency. The growing practice of pet-keeping wrought new relationships between people and animals.<sup>9</sup> Certain animals were now cared for not because of any labor which they might perform, nor on account of their nutritional value, but primarily because they could provide companionship—a role hitherto performed only by other persons. These new relationships between humans and particular animals challenged the view that no duties were owed to animals, and gave rise to further questions about the nature of animals—questions which until this time had only been asked about human subjects: Were ani-

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, I.20 (p. 26).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Caroline Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), ch. 7; John Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 18–21; Robin Attfield, “Christian Attitudes to Nature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983): 369–86, esp. 380f.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Bacon, *Cogitationes de natura rerum*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding, R. Ellis, and D. Harth (London: Longman, 1857–74), III, 29.

<sup>8</sup> See Anita Guerrini, “The Ethics of Animal Experimentation in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989): 391–407; Brian Klug, “Lab Animals, Francis Bacon and the Culture of Science,” *Listening* 18 (1983): 54–72.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, ch. 3.

mals immortal? Did they go to heaven? Could they have inklings of moral responsibility? These concerns were reinforced by reactions against both the fashionable mechanical conception of nature and the older Aristotelian model. The Cambridge Platonists, along with such figures as Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, Lady Anne Conway, and certain of the English radicals, put forward alternative, animistic views of nature.<sup>10</sup> The Platonists, while attracted to Descartes's dualism, came to reject his conception of nature as a spiritual vacuum, proposing instead that animating spiritual forces were operable in the external world. Others went still further, insisting that the whole of Nature was pervaded by, or even identified with, the Divine spirit. Such views served to bring man closer to the natural order and to the animal world over which he was supposed to rule.

These ideas, then, form the broad parameters of the seventeenth-century discussion of animals and their place in the created order. At one extreme was the Cartesian beast-machine hypothesis, at the other, versions of panpsychism which saw no difference in kind between man and the other animals. In the middle were the conservative Aristotelians and the Cambridge Platonists. Each view had serious ramifications for biology, the sciences in general, and even politics. But as we shall see, even more important were the religious implications of such views—implications which were to place limits on the sorts of entities that animals could be. Of major concern to virtually all who ventured an opinion about the nature of animals was how the benevolence of God could be reconciled with the suffering of his creatures. Much of the seventeenth-century debate about animal souls thus revolved around the question of theodicy. In the discussion which follows we shall deal first with Malebranche's adaptation of Descartes, the theological justifications of the beast-machine, and reactions to the Cartesian view in England. Second, we shall consider Platonist alternatives to Cartesianism, and how Platonic views of the soul were similarly informed by theodicy. Finally, the less orthodox speculations of the English radicals and Lady Anne Conway—both of whom entertained notions of metempsychosis or "transmutation"—shall be examined.

## 2. MALEBRANCHE, THE BEAST-MACHINE, AND ANIMAL HEAVEN

Descartes, notoriously, maintained that animals were merely biological machines, capable of complex behaviors, yet devoid of mental experiences of any kind. Against the numerous peripatetics who followed Aristotle and Aquinas

<sup>10</sup>This group coincides roughly with what Richard Popkin has termed the "third force" in seventeenth-century philosophy. He regards More, van Helmont and Conway as the major figures of the movement. See "The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy: Scepticism, Science and Biblical Prophecy," *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* 1 (1983–84): 35–63.

in asserting that conscious sensation could occur in the nonrational soul, Descartes held that both reason and perception are mental events which can take place only in incorporeal (that is, spiritual and immortal) substances. If beasts did not have incorporeal, immortal, and reasoning souls, then they were *ipso facto* incapable of feeling.<sup>11</sup> Animals, in Descartes's scheme, did not possess immortal souls, and as a result could not be the subjects of mental events.

The sceptical Pierre Bayle wryly observed that the theological advantages of Descartes's thesis more than compensated for its improbability, and indeed the advantages were considerable.<sup>12</sup> At a general level, Cartesianism stressed the reality and primacy of the spiritual realm at a time when materialism, then presumed to be inherently atheistic, was making inroads on traditional religious conceptions of nature. Animal mechanism, which in retrospect seems incipiently materialistic, was then held by many to magnify the glory of the Creator, who by design so regulated the activities of the brutes that, though devoid of reason, they act reasonably. Another advantage of Descartes's denial of the existence of animal souls has to do with safeguarding the goodness of God. The suffering of creatures which have done nothing to earn their misery and have no hope of happiness in a future state seems to impugn the justice of God. If, however, animals did not feel pain, God's goodness, at least in that regard, could be upheld. Proponents of the standard Aristotelian position—according to which animals possessed sensitive souls—had to face other, equally awkward, questions. Were these animal souls immortal? What became of them at the death of the animal? Would they simply be annihilated or might they proceed to heaven or hell? Could they reenter other bodies, animal or human? These difficulties were most easily resolved by denying that animals had incorporeal, immortal souls.

Despite these advantages, Descartes's thesis of animal automatism was not primarily an apology for theism, but rather a product of his dualistic metaphysics. While at times he stressed its theological implications, in the main it was left to his disciple Nicolas Malebranche to spell these out in detail. Malebranche broached the problem of the animal soul in the classic *De la recherche de la vérité* (1674–75).<sup>13</sup> The most succinct statement of his position,

<sup>11</sup> John Cottingham has argued that Descartes did not deny feeling to brutes, but merely insisted that they were automata. See Cottingham, "'A Brute to the Brutes?': Descartes' Treatment of Animals," *Philosophy* 53 (1978): 551–61. Admittedly, Descartes did not emphasize this aspect of his theory, but it nonetheless seems an inevitable conclusion of his denial of animal souls. See Peter Harrison, "Descartes on Animals," *Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 219–27.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Rotterdam: Leers, 1697), "Rorarius," n. C.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *Recherche de la vérité*, IV, XI, § iii, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. G. Rodis-Lewis (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958–70), II, 104.

however, comes in the *Defence against the Accusations of M. de la Ville* (1677).<sup>14</sup> It is the common opinion, says Malebranche, that all beasts have souls and are “susceptible of all the Motions of the Passions, Fear, Desire, Envy, Hatred, Joy, Sorrow.” Yet this opinion, Malebranche points out, gives rise to consequences directly opposite to what we are taught by faith: “Now they [animals] never sinn’d, or made ill use of their Liberty [*sic*], since they have none: Therefore God’s Unjust, in punishing them, and making them Miserable; and unequally Miserable, since they are equally innocent.”<sup>15</sup> Malebranche goes on to point out that men, in any case, have the possibility of recompense in a future life for ills suffered in the present. It follows that if God renders justice to all his creatures, then animals must be incapable of suffering, for they have neither committed wrong, nor have they the opportunity for compensation in a future life. Malebranche also deals with the argument, implicit in both Thomism and Calvinism, that God may deal with the beasts as he sees fit. To see the error of this view, says Malebranche, we need only consider the hierarchy of being. What if angels were to insist that God treat them justly, yet not insist on his doing justice to men? God, he concludes, “renders Justice to all his Creatures; and if the meanest of them are liable to Misery, they must needs be capable of being Criminal.”<sup>16</sup>

Malebranche’s argument was in fact an adaptation of an old Augustinian principle—one destined to become the point of departure for virtually all seventeenth-century discussions of animal suffering. Early in the fifth century, at the height of his dispute with the Pelagians, Augustine formulated the principle *sub Deo justo, nemo miser nisi* (under a just God, no innocent suffers).<sup>17</sup> The bishop of Hippo deployed this principle against his opponents to establish original sin. It is clear, he said, that many infants suffer. Under a just God, therefore, they cannot be innocent. (For Augustine this meant that they must have inherited guilt as a result of Adam’s original trespass.) Expressing the matter formally:

- 1) Under a just God, no innocent suffers.
- 2) Infants suffer, therefore,
- 3) Infants are not innocent (i.e., they bear original sin).

Malebranche had introduced his own minor premise, resulting in this syllogism:

<sup>14</sup> Published in one of the English translations of *Recherche—Father Malebranche, His Treatise concerning the Search after Truth*, 2nd ed., tr. T. Taylor (London: Pr. by W. Bowyer, for Thomas Bennet, 1700).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *Against Julian*, bk. III, chs. 3, 5.

- 1) Under a just God, no innocent suffers.
- 2) Animals are innocent, therefore,
- 3) Animals do not suffer.<sup>18</sup>

Malebranche's theological reinforcement of Descartes's biology found favor with a number of continental thinkers, many of whom rehearsed his arguments in their own writings.<sup>19</sup> More significantly for our purposes, the beast-machine, along with its theological justifications, found its way across the channel.

While it has been maintained in some quarters that animal automatism was universally condemned in England,<sup>20</sup> a number of influential writers gave it qualified support. Sir Kenelm Digby was one. Digby and his mentor Thomas White were the first Englishmen to formulate a mechanical philosophy.<sup>21</sup> While Digby claimed that his atomism was essentially Aristotelian in character,<sup>22</sup> there is little doubt that he was strongly influenced by Descartes. In 1645, he announced that "Monsieur des Cartes" was "the first that I have ever met with, who hath published any conceptions of this nature, whereby to make the operations of sense intelligible."<sup>23</sup> His enthusiasm for Descartes extended to the hypothesis of the beast-machine, which sat as well with his atomic materialism as with Cartesian dualism. The apparently intelligent behavior of animals, according to Digby, was a credit not to the ingenuity of the creature, but to the Creator who had so fashioned these contrivances to perform such feats. Thus animals "are but material instruments to performe without their knowledge or reflexion, a superior reasons counsels: even as in a clocke, that is composed of severall pieces and wheelles, all the parts of it doe conspire to give notice of the

<sup>18</sup> Malebranche, *Recherche de la vérité*, IV, XI, § iii (*Oeuvres Complètes*, II, 104).

<sup>19</sup> Antoine Dilly, *De l'âme des bêtes* (Lyon: Anisson & Poysuel, 1676), 96–99; Jean Darmanson, *La Beste transformée en machine* (Amsterdam, 1684), 22f.; François Bayle, *Institutiones physicae ad usum scholarum accommodatae* 3 tom., (Tolosae, 1700), II, 645–54; Florentius Schuyll, "Ad Lectorum," in *Renatus Des Cartes. De Homine. Figuris et latinitate donatus a Florentio Schuyll* (Apud Franciscum Moyardum & Petrum Leffen: Lugduni Batavorum, 1662). See also Leonora Rosenfield, *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine* (New York: Octagon, 1968), and Hester Hastings, *Man and Beast in French Thought of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1936).

<sup>20</sup> See e.g., Sterling Lamprecht, *The Role of Descartes in Seventeenth-Century England*, Columbia University Studies in the History of Ideas (1935), iii, 181–240; Leonora Cohen [Rosenfield], "Descartes and Henry More on the Beast Machine," *Annals of Science* 1 (1936): 48–61. Even the more recent article by Wallace Shugg, "The Cartesian Beast-Machine in English Literature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 (1968): 279–92, concludes that in England "all poets, essayists, and journalists rejected the doctrine of the beast-machine" (292).

<sup>21</sup> See B. Dobbs, "Studies in the Natural Philosophy of Sir Kenelm Digby," *Ambix*, 18 (1971): 1–25.

<sup>22</sup> Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises, in the one of which, The Nature of Bodies, in the other, The Nature of Mans Soule, is looked into* (London: Pr. for John Williams, 1645), 343.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

severall . . . periods of time, which the maker hath ordered it for.”<sup>24</sup> In an anecdote which was to become commonplace in subsequent writings on the subject, Digby further reports that a certain king of China on first encountering a watch mistook it for a living creature. All men are to be excused, he goes on to say, for making a similar error with the beasts. Instead of marvelling at the intelligence of the creature, the structure and behavior of creatures ought to lead us to “straine higher, and looke with reverence and duty upon the immensity of that provident Architect, out of whose hands these masterpieces issue, and unto whom it is as easie to make a chaine of causes of a thousand or of a million of links, as to make one linke alone.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1675, Antoine Le Grand’s *Dissertatio de carentia sensus et cognitionis in brutis* was published in London. This work set forth a theory of animal mechanism identical in most important respects to those of Descartes and Digby.<sup>26</sup> But far more popular was the translation of his primer in Cartesian philosophy—*An Entire Body of Philosophy, according to the Principles of the Famous Renate des Cartes*—which appeared almost twenty years later, in 1694. Here again, we find the beast-machine: “A Beast is an Artificial Engin or Machine of GOD, furnish’d with a various and wonderful structure of Organs, containing in it self a material Principle of Life, Motion and Sense.”<sup>27</sup> Edward Tyson followed suit in his preface to Swammerdam’s *Ephemera vita* (1681), stating that the kingdom of God receives “no small honour,” from the study of the “extraordinary mechanism” of the ephemeron (“a fly that lives but five hours”). To understand “how ’tis that Nature gives Life and Motions to these *Automata*,” he says, we must “unloose the Case, and take asunder the several Wheels and Springs, and carefully observe how she joyns them all together.”<sup>28</sup> Such expressions were not uncommon in the second half of the seventeenth century, and while they may not necessarily entail a full endorsement of Descartes’s view, certainly they show the positive influence of his ideas. Thus, Henry Power spoke of “Insectile Automata,” and “prety engines,”<sup>29</sup> and the poet Richard Leigh observed that

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>26</sup> Antoine Le Grand, *Dissertatio de carentia sensus et cognitionis in brutis* (Londini: J. Martyn, 1675), 17, 57, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Antoine Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy* (London: Pr. by Samuel Roycroft, 1694), 254.

<sup>28</sup> Jo. Swammerdam, *Ephemera Vita or The Natural History and Anatomy of the Ephemeron* (London: Pr. by Henry Fairthorn, 1681). Tyson was the author of a number of monographs on the anatomy of specific animals. Swammerdam’s own view seems not to have extended beyond a general but nonetheless thoroughgoing providentialism. See, e.g., his *Book of Nature*, tr. Thomas Flloyd (London: John Hill, 1758), 7, 117–18, 159.

<sup>29</sup> *Experimental Philosophy* (London: Pr. by T. Roycroft and James Allestry, for John Martin, 1664), preface, quoted in Shugg, “Beast-Machine in English Literature,” 281.



insects are like "living watches" which contain "a thousand *Springs of Life*, and *moving Wheels*."<sup>30</sup>

In England, then, many were familiar with the thesis, and some were sympathetic, yet few of its supporters progressed beyond a general providentialism to address the issue of theodicy as Malebranche had done. The most prominent writer to do so was John Norris. Norris was a man of many parts. He was an enthusiastic proponent of Malebranche's philosophy, which necessarily placed him in opposition to John Locke. In addition, he was deeply influenced by the Cambridge Platonists, and had carried on a correspondence with Henry More. This influence, however, did not extend to his views on the nature of animals. In his *Essay towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World* (1704), Norris includes a lengthy "Digression concerning the Souls of Brutes, whether they have any Thought of Sensation in them or no."<sup>31</sup> Here he restates the Cartesian position with approval, and details its theological advantages.

Like the others, Norris stresses the providential aspects of animal automatism. The actions of brutes may "be the result of pure Mechanism," for "God, if he pleases so far to exert his Power, may make a Company of Machines that shall do just as they do, and have the same appearance of Thought which they have. Animals thus bear witness to the Infinite Wisdom and Power of God."<sup>32</sup> However, Norris also makes specific reference to the argument of "St. Austin" (whom, he notes, Malebranche also cites). He draws the same conclusion: "Brutes are innocent, therefore they are not miserable. . . . But then they must have no Sense or Perception, since if they have, 'tis plain that they are often miserable or in pain."<sup>33</sup> Norris concludes his digression with a plea for kindness to animals, his views about their lacking sensations notwithstanding, for, though "Reason does most favour the side which denies all Thought and Perception to animals, yet . . . our Reason [may] deceive us, as 'tis easy to err in the Dark."<sup>34</sup>

Norris had not been the first Englishman to point out the theological advantages of animal automatism in this way. This honor fell to one "T. B.," a correspondent to *The Athenian Gazette*.<sup>35</sup> Brutes, announced T. B. in his 1693

<sup>30</sup> "Greatness in Little," *Poems by Richard Leigh* (1675), quoted in Shugg, "Beast-Machine in English Literature."

<sup>31</sup> John Norris, *Essay towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World*, pt. II (London: Pr. for S. Manship, 1704), 58–100. This section is actually a very good summary of the arguments for the Cartesian position.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–76.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 100, cf. 59.

<sup>35</sup> It is possible that T.B. and John Norris were one and the same. John Norris was closely associated with the three founders of *The Athenian Gazette*—John Dunton, Samuel Wesley, and Richard Sault. The four were responsible for answering queries sent to the *Gazette*. This makes it likely that "T.B." was Norris's mouthpiece. Alternatively, Norris might have appropriated the

letter to the paper, “have no Souls, but are pure Machines, or a sort of Clock work, devoid of any sense of Pain, Pleasure, Desire, Hope, Fear &c.,” and to assert the contrary, he continues, would be to impugn the justice of God: “Brutes have never made ill use of their Liberty, and those Natural Powers which they receiv’d in their first Creation; therefore if God punished them with pain, and makes them not only unhappy, but equally unhappy, who are all equally Innocent . . . then I can’t see how God can be just. . . .”<sup>36</sup> He also points out that if we attribute incorporeal souls to animals, we must take account of what happens to that soul at the death of the animal. The general belief that the beast’s soul is annihilated at death leads to the conclusion that animals, unlike humans who in the afterlife have a chance of recompense for the ills of the present world, “have been unhappy and innocent, without any expectation of a future recompense.” But why then would God instill in animals a soul which was incorporeal, and hence naturally immortal, only to annihilate it at the animal’s demise? This is either unnecessary or unjust. This correspondent hoped, in conclusion, that the *Gazette* would be able to provide a satisfactory response to the dilemma, not only for himself, but for “all Cartesians” and “the rest of the World.”

As it turned out, the newspaper, whose stated aim was to resolve “all the most nice and curious questions proposed by the ingenious,” printed in the same issue a rejoinder by “R. S.” (probably Richard Sault, mathematician and amateur theologian). From this response it can be inferred that the Cartesian view was not simply the preserve of an isolated few. “When I first engaged in this Subject,” writes R. S., “I was very sensible what Numerous and Learned Adversaries I had to deal with, there being scarce any of our Modern Philosophers who are not *Cartesians*.”<sup>37</sup> Brutes, he goes on to say, in true Augustinian fashion, were made for man’s service and use, and it follows that the pains under which they labor result from Adam’s transgression. Animals are thus implicated in original sin. The souls of brutes, moreover, are immaterial, and when the animal body dies, they may be annihilated, they may migrate into other bodies, or they may “wander up and down these lower Regions, ’till the time spoken of by St. Paul,” when “*the creature shall be deliver’d from the Bondage*

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views of this correspondent in his later work. Both John Dunton and Richard Sault, incidentally, were also enthusiastic followers of Malebranche, the latter having translated into English both the *Recherche* and the *Traité*, in 1694 and 1695 respectively. For the influence of Malebranche’s philosophy on the Athenian circle, see C. J. McCracken, *Malebranche and British Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 4f.

<sup>36</sup> *The Athenian Mercury*, Saturday, February 11, 1693 (vol. 9, no. 18). (*The Athenian Gazette* became *The Athenian Mercury* in the second number, perhaps because of the proximity of the original title to the more established *London Gazette*.)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

of Corruption.”<sup>38</sup> This last option, which R. S. personally favored, relies on a passage in Romans in which Paul speaks of the whole of creation as awaiting redemption, which it will eventually receive.<sup>39</sup> According to R. S., support for this last view came from “a very Pious, Learned Divine,” who had apparently told a group of his friends that “*God Almighty may for his own Glory make some use or other of all Creatures in another Life, perhaps for the service of Glorified Bodies, since he sees no reason for the annihilation of their Souls.*”<sup>40</sup> Animals, then, might well go to heaven, which would seem to solve the difficulty.

A significant number of seventeenth-century divines had pondered the possibility of the final redemption of the animal world.<sup>41</sup> If the fate of animals was so closely bound up with that of humans—as notions of their suffering as a result of the Fall would suggest—then they might also have a place in God’s redemptive plan. If animals could fall with Adam, might they not also be raised with Christ? As George Abbot put it, because “there is such affinitie betweene man, and the beastes which are subjected to his vse, that the sorrowes of the better do easily touch the worsers,” it should follow that on the day of judgment the beasts “shall returne to that beautie, wherein they at first were established.”<sup>42</sup> Thomas Wilson concurred. Creatures, he said, “being liable and subiect vnto labour, wearinesse yea and death for our sakes,” shall enjoy a restitution “like the resurrection from the dead.”<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately the relevant passage in Romans does not specify the extent of this general restitution. Thus exegetes differed in their views on precisely which living things were to make their appearance in heaven. Poet Henry Vaughan spoke of the restoration of “trees, beasts and men.”<sup>44</sup> Godfrey Good-

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Romans 8:19–22.

<sup>40</sup> This divine was in all likelihood Samuel Wesley, member of the Athenian Society and father of the Methodist John. (In that case, father and son shared similar views on the matter. See John Wesley, “The General Deliverance” [1788], Sermon LX in *Works*, 11th ed. [London: John Mason, 1856]; VI, 226–37.) This whole issue might well have been discussed by Norris, Sault, and Wesley in one of their editorial meetings at Smith’s Coffee House in Stock’s Market.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Edwards actually lists the belief in animal resurrection as one of the errors of the sectaries, despite the fact that it was taught by a number of respectable divines. See *Gangræna*, 2nd ed. (London: Pr. for Ralph Smith, 1646), 27. Also see Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 137–42.

<sup>42</sup> George Abbot, *An Exposition vpon the Prophet Ionah* (London: Imprinted by Richard Field, 1600), 466.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Wilson, *A Commentarie vpon the most Diuine Epistle of S. Paul to the Romanes* (London: Pr. by W. Iaggard, 1614), 591, 589. Also William Cowper, *Heaven Opened*, in *Works*, 2nd ed. (London: Robert Allott, 1629), 115f.; Thomas Hodges, *The Creatures Goodness, as they came out of God’s Hands* (London: Pr. for Tho. Parkhurst, 1675), 15–18; Nathaniel Homes, *Αποκαλυψις Άναστασεως. The Resurrection Revealed* (London: Pr. by Robert Ibbitson, 1653), 528f.

<sup>44</sup> “The Book,” *Silex Scintillans*, II. For the background of Henry Vaughan’s views, see Alan Rudrum, “Research Reports, VI: Theology and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England,” *The Clark Newsletter* 15 (1988): 5–7.

man claimed that “by a course of iustice . . . *all the Creatures* in generall shall partake with vs, in our future intended renouation.”<sup>45</sup> Richard Overton concurred: “all other Creatures as well as man shall be raised and delivered from Death at the Resurrection.”<sup>46</sup> Others were less generous. G. H. Gent poured scorn upon those who, with Overton, looked forward to an eternity with “all the Toads and Frogs and poysonous Serpents.” “Those who are to live amongst all these,” he sagely observed, “are likely to have a gallant time of it.”<sup>47</sup> William Gearing shared Gent’s foresight, proposing that “those Creatures which are bred of dung and corruption” along with “Thornes, Thistles, Briars, and such like” be excluded from the heavenly company.<sup>48</sup> Thomas Draxe similarly thought that thistles, briars and brambles, mules, wolf dogs and wolf bitches, monstrous creatures, and creatures bred from corruption such as “frogs, flies, wormes, mouldes, mise, crickets, bats, barnacles” would not take their place amongst the saints. In fact, Draxe thought that only certain of those animals still living when Christ returned qualified for immortality.<sup>49</sup> Elnathan Parr favored the view that heaven would contain “some singulars of all kinds,” just as Noah had preserved some of each species in the Ark.<sup>50</sup> Thomas Horton was of the same opinion, arguing that a general resurrection of beasts was absurd and unbiblical. It is sufficient, he states, that “all *kinds* of the Creature are *perfected*, though many, yea most of the Particulars and Individuals are extinguished.”<sup>51</sup>

Another solution to the conundrum of the unjustly miserable condition of brutes—a solution which for the most part was overlooked in the seventeenth century—was that the suffering of animals might be caused by de-

<sup>45</sup> Godfrey Goodman, *The Creatures Praising God* (London: Pr. by Felik Kingston, 1622), 29 (my emphasis).

<sup>46</sup> Richard Overton, *Mans Mortallitie* (Amsterdam [London]: Pr. by John Crane, 1643), 50.

<sup>47</sup> G. H. Gent, *The Grand Prerogative of Human Nature* (London: Pr. by Roger Daniel, 1653), 110. Against Gent it could be argued that those creatures antipathetic to man were only so as a result of the Fall. In the general restoration, they would be restored to their original (and presumably more amiable) perfection. See, e.g., Homes, *Αποκαλυψεις Αναστασεως*, 89, 190, 528–30; Hodges, *The Creatures Goodness*, 17f. (Aquinas, incidentally, suggested that there would have been a natural antipathy between some creatures even if sin had never entered the world. *Summa theologiae*, 1a.96, 1.)

<sup>48</sup> William Gearing, *A Prospect of Heaven* (London: Pr. for Tho. Passenger, and Benj. Hurlock, 1673), 98f.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Draxe, *The Earnest of Our Inheritance* (London: Imprinted by F. K. for George Norton), 5f.

<sup>50</sup> Elnathan Parr, *A Plaine Exposition vpon . . . Romanes* (London: Pr. by George Purslowe for Samuel Man, 1620), 89f.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Horton, *Forty Six Sermons upon the Whole Eighth Chapter of . . . Romans* (London: Pr. by A. Maxwell for Tho. Parkhurst, 1674), 369f. The good Doctor Horton seems to have relied heavily upon Thomas Wilson for his views on the matter.

mons.<sup>52</sup> Thomas Wilson, in a passing remark, noted that part of the bondage of the creature lies in the fact that “all of them are forced to doe service vnto the diuels, which range in the aire.”<sup>53</sup> This sentiment was echoed in William Cowper’s suggestion that the devil “accounts a beast his prey,” in order that he might indirectly torment mankind.<sup>54</sup> Neither pursued the thesis with any great vigor. More than a century later, however, Père Bougeant’s *Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bestes* (1739) set out with mock seriousness the view that animals were actually embodied demons. This explained both their suffering, which they deserved, and their apparent intelligence.<sup>55</sup> Bougeant’s Jesuit colleagues failed to appreciate his humor, however, and he was forced to retract a number of offending passages. The thesis also excited controversy in Britain, where it appeared in two separate translations.<sup>56</sup>

Future rewards for animals, then, seemed to provide the best compromise between the demands of orthodox belief on the one hand, and justice for creatures on the other. Of the remaining possibilities, annihilation of animal souls was orthodox, and meshed neatly with the view that animals were created for the sake of man. Radical Gerrard Winstanley, for example, asserted a universal salvation for all mankind at the end times, but excluded the beasts: “In the end every man shall be saved . . . other creatures which were made only for man’s use, will be dissolved into nothing.”<sup>57</sup> More conservative writers, of whom there were many, also inclined towards this opinion.<sup>58</sup> Others

<sup>52</sup> This has also been suggested quite recently. See, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 149f.; Richard Swinburne, “The Problem of Evil,” *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. S. Cahn and D. Shatz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 12f.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Wilson, *Commentarie vpon Romanes*, 587.

<sup>54</sup> William Cowper, *Works*, 116.

<sup>55</sup> Père Bougeant, *Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bestes* (Paris, 1739). Bougeant also relied upon the Augustinian principle *sub Deo iusto, nemo miser nisi*, but his application of the syllogism led to the conclusion that the beasts, on account of their suffering, must be “culpable victims of divine vengeance” (43f.). The souls of animals, in Bougeant’s system of philosophy, had incurred the wrath of the deity in a preexistent state, and were condemned, as a result of their infractions, to be imprisoned in the bodies of lower creatures. Bougeant thus took the logic of the English Platonists one step further, reasoning that if the souls of fallen angels could inhabit the bodies of savages, they could as easily inhabit the bodies of brutes. At an animal’s death, the evicted devil was reincarnated by chance into the embryo of “a bird, a fish, or a butterfly.” A fortunate few might be embodied in pampered pets. Others, less favored by fortune are confined in the bodies of beasts of burden or live under the constant threat of the hunter’s knife (56–58).

<sup>56</sup> Two London editions, printed for T. Cooper, appeared in 1739 and 1740, while another translation was published in Dublin, printed by Cor. Wynne, again in 1739.

<sup>57</sup> Gerrard Winstanley, *The Myserie of God concerning the Whole Creation* (1648), in *Works*, ed. George H. Sabine (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1941), 82.

<sup>58</sup> John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (London: Pr. for Samuel Smith, 1691), 39; Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, ed. John Harrison, 3

who advocated annihilation did so in the belief that animals have no claims on the justice of God, whose authority as creator is absolute. As Thomas Browne put it, "Shall the vessel say to the potter, 'Why hast thou made me thus?'" "Men that live according to the right rule and law of reason," he continues, "live but in their own kind—as beasts do in theirs, who justly obey the pre-script of their natures—and therefore cannot reasonably demand a reward for their actions. . . ." <sup>59</sup> For Browne and others like him, the question of the fate of animal souls was related to a wider discussion about the salvation of virtuous pagans who had led blameless lives. Whereas human standards of justice might suggest that such innocence or virtue be rewarded, or at least go unpunished, Browne and his ilk implied that divine justice was different in kind from human justice, and consequently that there was no reason why, at death, animals or noble pagans should expect more than oblivion, or considerably worse. Annihilation of animal souls was not so much the solution to a problem, as a refusal to admit that one existed. <sup>60</sup>

For many, the idea that God's justice was of a different order from natural justice was highly problematic. English Platonists flatly denied this narrow conception of the righteousness of God, and in their attempts to address the plight of exemplary pagans and innocent beasts, they flirted with the time-worn doctrine of metempsychosis—a heretical opinion, but one which yielded a far more sympathetic theodicy than annihilation.

### 3. PLATONISM, PREEXISTENCE AND TRANSMIGRATION

In seventeenth-century England there was considerable interest in the ancient view of the transmigration of the soul. In large measure this was owing to a revival of Renaissance Platonism and Hermeticism. The Cambridge Platonists, at the forefront of this revival, were concerned to maintain a spiritual view of nature by wedding the new scientific approach to an arcane philosophical tradition. The Cambridge circle included Benjamin Whichcote, Ralph Cudworth, Henry More and George Rust. At Oxford, Joseph Glanvill and John Norris also came under their influence.

The Cambridge Platonists were generally antipathetic to the empiricism of Bacon and the materialism of Hobbes. While they welcomed Descartes as an ally in the fight against materialism and atheism, they generally took excep-

vols. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), I, 81; III, 90. Annihilation is also mentioned by Wilson, *A Commentary*, 588, and Parr, *A Plaine Exposition*, 89.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, ed. R. H. A. Robbins (Clarendon: Oxford, 1982), I.54 (57).

<sup>60</sup> Another way of ameliorating the problem of animal pain was to argue that animal suffering was inconsequential when compared to human suffering. Thus Richard Baxter argued that animals were "less capable of misery," and that brutes, lacking doubts and fears, were "far more happy than my self!" (*Of the Immortality of Mans Soul* [London: Pr. for B. Simmons, 1682], 19f.).

tion to the doctrine of the beast-machine. Cudworth, for example, waxed enthusiastic over Descartes's "rediscovery" of atomic theory, yet saw in the Cartesian extension of mechanism to the animate world a threat to a spiritual view of nature. Prophetically, he perceived how easily the beast-machine could become the man-machine.<sup>61</sup> Cudworth thus resisted the extreme dualism of Descartes, suggesting that the activity of the animal world resulted neither from the deterministic workings of some organic machine, nor from continual interventions into the causal nexus by the Deity, but rather from the workings of "plastic nature." By "plastic" or "artificial" nature, Cudworth meant purposeful, but nonconscious powers operative in nature. These powers fell under God's general providential design, yet were not directed by him. The instinctive behavior of animals—nonintentional, yet purposeful—was, for Cudworth, a conspicuous example of how plastic powers operated.<sup>62</sup> Even the human mind, he pointed out, evidenced unconscious activity, as for example in dreaming.<sup>63</sup> Cudworth's "plastic nature" thus represented a middle position between those who would banish spiritual substance from the universe altogether, and those who have the world so permeated with spirit that the distinction between the two disappeared.

Cudworth's colleague Henry More also offered perceptive criticisms of both materialism and panpsychism, proposing in their place his own often unwieldy synthesis of contemporary science, Hermetic cosmology, and Christianity.<sup>64</sup> More followed Cudworth in asserting that while the natural world was not the body of God, neither was it totally devoid of his ongoing influence.<sup>65</sup>

Materialism, however, was by no means the Platonists' only concern. Equally, they were concerned at the growth of Calvinism, which had been on the ascendancy in England since the turn of the century. Chief amongst their reservations concerning this austere faith were questions to do with predestination and the justice of God. Why would God hold us responsible for Adam's sin, they wanted to know? Did God create the vast majority of the human race for the express purpose of sending them to hell (as Calvinism implied)? Why should whole nations of heathens die without any hope of heaven, simply

<sup>61</sup> A fear which he shared with Descartes's critics. See Descartes, *Reply to Objections* IV; *HR* II, 235. Cf. J. A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 8. See also Rosenfield, *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine*.

<sup>62</sup> Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, I, 243.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of D. Henry More*, 2nd ed. (London: Pr. by J. Flesher for W. Morden, 1662). Also Richard Popkin, "The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy," 55–58.

<sup>65</sup> Popkin, "The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy," 57f.; B. P. Copenhaver, "Jewish Theologies of Space in the Scientific Revolution: Henry More, Joseph Raphson, Isaac Newton and Their Predecessors," *Annals of Science* XXXVII (1980): 522f.

because they were geographically remote from the cradle of Christianity? What hope of salvation was there for those who lived before the time of Christ? The solution to these quandaries lay in the direction of Platonic notions of God's goodness and of the human soul—a path which had its logical terminus in the doctrines of preexistence and metempsychosis.

Intrinsic to Calvinism is the nominalist notion that God's goodness is different in kind from our own. Whatever God wills, is good. Human reason cannot fathom divine justice. The Calvinism which prevailed during the Interregnum had no difficulty with this harsh solution. The Platonists, however, found it rather unsatisfactory. As Joseph Glanvill declared: "For the first Errour, which is the ground of the rest, is, That things are good and just, because God Wills them so to be; and if that be granted, we are disabled from using the arguments taken from natural Notions. . . . If there be no settled Good and Evil, Immutable and Independent on any Will or Understanding, then God may have made his reasonable Creatures on purpose to damn them forever."<sup>66</sup> But once it was accepted that God's goodness was similar in kind to our own, how was this goodness to be reconciled with a world in which, as one writer put it, "many whole nations both of old and at this present day were so overrun with all kinde of barbarity, ferity, and bestial lust, so utterly estranged from the knowledge of God and the love of vertue . . ."?<sup>67</sup> For the Platonists, such a reconciliation was to be afforded by the doctrine of the preexistence of souls, described enthusiastically by Joseph Glanvill as "an Antient and Probable opinion, which . . . may contribute somewhat to the clearing and vindication of the *Divine Attributes*."<sup>68</sup>

The idea of the soul's preexistence had been introduced into Christianity by the most controversial of the Church Fathers—Origen. This platonizing theologian, long regarded with considerable suspicion in the West, had been restored to grace during the Renaissance, owing to the efforts of such luminaries as Erasmus and Thomas More. Amongst the Cambridge Platonists he had a devoted following. It is almost certain that the work which reintroduced his theology to the seventeenth-century world—*A Letter of Resolution concerning Origen and the Chief of His Opinions* (1661)—originated from within the Cam-

<sup>66</sup> Preface to George Rust's *A Discourse of Truth*, in Glanvill, *Two Choice and Vseful Treatises* (London: Pr. for Sam. Collins, 1682). Cf. also George Rust, *A Discourse of Truth*, passim, and Glanvill, *Lux Orientalis*, ch. VII, both in *Two Choice and Vseful Treatises*; Henry More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (London: Pr. by James Flesher for W. Morden, 1660), 504, *Divine Dialogues*, (London: Pr. by James Flesher, 1668), I, 361–63; Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, bk. 2, appended to *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, ed. John Harrison.

<sup>67</sup> [George Rust?], *A Letter of Resolution concerning Origen and the Chief of his Opinions* (London, 1661), 29.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Glanvill, *Lux Orientalis*, Preface.



bridge circle.<sup>69</sup> In this work, the author (probably George Rust) pointed out that virtually all of the apparent injustices and inequalities of the present life could be explained by the hypothesis of preexisting souls. Those born in less than ideal circumstances beyond the boundaries of Christendom had been condemned to their plight by virtue of infractions committed in a previous existence. “[T]hose wretched souls,” said Rust, “had of old by their long *revolt* from God and the laws of his righteous Kingdome highly deserv’d this scourge.” It was “by choice and affection” that these souls “fell off to in other regions of the world.”<sup>70</sup> A similar doctrine of preexistence can be found in More and Glanvill.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, while they were committed to preexistence, none of the Cambridge

<sup>69</sup>The work is traditionally attributed to George Rust, but cf. D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 124f.

<sup>70</sup>Rust, *Letter of Resolution*, 31. Cf. Origen, *De principiis*, I.viii, II.ix. We also find this view in Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.iii.12–16. It is possible that Origen and Plotinus learned this doctrine from their common teacher, Ammonius Saccus.

<sup>71</sup>More, *Divine Dialogues*, I, 503; Glanvill, *Lux Orientalis*, passim. Also C. P., *A Dissertation concerning the Pre-existancy of Souls* (London: Pr. for J. Wickens and Rob. Kettlewell, 1684). A number of refutations of the doctrine also appeared at this time. See Isaac Barrow, *Anima Humanae Corporibus non Præexistens*, in *Works*, IV (London: Pr. by M. Flesher for Brabazon Aylmer, 1687); Samuel Parker, *A Free and Impartial Censure of the Platonick Philosophy with an Account of the Origenian Hypothesis concerning the Preexistence of Souls* (Oxford: Pr. by W. Hall for R. Davis, 1666); Edward Warren, *No Præexistence* (London: Pr. by T.R. For Samuel Thomson, 1667).

Arguments about preexistence, it should be noted, were related not only to theodicy, but to a more general debate about the origin and destiny of the human soul. In seventeenth-century England there was a lively controversy over whether human souls preexisted, were infused into the embryo by God at or shortly after conception, or were produced *ex traduce* by the parents (traduction). The dispute also extended to the fate of the soul at the end of life. Whereas the orthodox belief was that the human soul was an incorporeal substance which was liberated from the body at death and took its place in heaven or hell to await judgment, “mortalists” (who numbered in their ranks John Milton, the young Thomas Browne, Thomas Hobbes, and Richard Overton) maintained that at death the human soul perished with the body, or “slept” until the resurrection and the day of judgment. See, e.g., John Milton, *The Christian Doctrine*, bk. 1, chs. 7, 13, in *Works*, ed. F. Patterson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–38), XV, 37–53, 215–51; Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, I.7 (8); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 38, 44, 46; Richard Overton, *Mans Mortallitie*. For the background of this debate see Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972) and Philip C. Almond, “The Journey of the Soul in Seventeenth-Century English Platonism,” *History of European Ideas* 13 (1991): 775–91. The controversy was rekindled in the early 1700s by William Coward, who, perhaps inspired by Locke’s “thinking matter,” again vigorously set forth the mortalist position. See, e.g., Coward, *Second Thoughts concerning the Human Soul* (London, 1702). Clarke, Turner, Baxter, Dodwell, Sykes, Law and Peckard all joined the eighteenth-century dispute. For a summary of the arguments see Caleb Fleming, *A Survey of the Search after Souls* (London, 1758). These controversies are relevant to our present discussion because they focussed upon what was then seen to be “the essential difference between Man and other Animals,” the confounding of which, as one writer expressed it, “strikes at the whole of Religion, and renders That unnecessary, and Man contemptible” (M. S., *A Philosophical Discourse of . . . Rational and Irrational Souls* [London: Pr. by Richard Baldwin, 1695], 34).

circle publicly endorsed reincarnation. Exceptions might be made in the case of those dying in infancy. The souls of dying infants, according to Glanvill, return to a state of insensibility and await embodiment in another terrestrial vehicle.<sup>72</sup> Cudworth also tentatively proposed that the souls of brutes might, like those of their human counterparts, preexist.<sup>73</sup> But this was as far as it went. Others less intimately involved in the Cambridge circle, however, took the plunge, proposing that the souls of the departed may again enter human bodies.

Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont was the son of the famous Belgian physician and chemist Jean Baptista van Helmont. A friend of Henry More, he combined interests in Lurianic cabbalism and Platonism. Van Helmont argued that one lifetime was too brief for repentance and salvation. Moreover, those dying young, those born before the birth of Christ, and “such imperfect Creatures as Fools and Naturals, Abortives and Monsters”—all were at something of a disadvantage (at least according to the prevailing Calvinist and Arminian soteriologies). Such short or impoverished lives could only be compensated for, van Helmont believed, by the soul’s rebirth in another body.<sup>74</sup> The anonymous “N. N.” also held that one lifetime might not be sufficient to ensure a reasonable chance of salvation. In his *Letter to a Gentleman . . . concerning the Revolution of Humane Souls* (1690), he repeated a number of van Helmont’s arguments. All men, in all ages, he says, who have died without hearing the Gospel, “shall live again in the World in some Age and Place where they shall hear it, before the End of the World.”<sup>75</sup> And so it is that God “does give unto every Man, a long day of Visitation, even of a thousand years, to live upon this Earth, that he may be converted. . . .”<sup>76</sup>

Neither of these theodicies involve a fully-fledged metempsychosis, in which human souls enter the bodies of animals. The Platonists’ concern only extended to “brutish” nations, but not to brutes themselves. Glanvill, admittedly, had earlier toyed with “Pythagisme.” In a letter penned in 1661, presumably to George Rust, he wrote with some enthusiasm of the newly revived origenism, noting that the hypothesis of preexistence naturally tends towards metempsychosis:

<sup>72</sup> Glanvill, *Lux Orientalis*, 24.

<sup>73</sup> Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, III, 90.

<sup>74</sup> F. M. van Helmont, *The Paradoxal Discourses of F. M. van Helmont concerning the Macrocosm and Microcosm* (London: Pr. by J.C. and Freeman Collins, for Robert Kettlewell, 1685), 107; *Two Hundred Queries Moderately Propounded concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls* (London: Pr. for Rob. Kettlewell, 1684), 3f., 16, 134, and passim. *Seder Olam* (London: Pr. for Sarah Howkins, 1694) gives a strict timetable for the cycle of rebirths.

<sup>75</sup> N.N., *A Letter to a Gentleman Touching the Treatise . . . concerning the Revolution of Humane Souls* (London: Pr. for A. Churchill, 1690), 16.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

For (1) the divine goodness which regards all his creatures seems to require it, otherwise some will be faultlessly miserable; for what account els can be given of the state of beasts who some of them are all their lives subject to the tyrannicall tastes of merciless man, except wee suppose them to have deserv'd this severe discipline by some former delinquencies. (2) Some men seem naturally prepar'd for a descent into brute bodies, by the brutish dispositions, and have almost nothing to speak them betterwhile in humane flesh but speech and their external persons. . . . (3) The next state is a state of punishment to the wicked, and therefore worse than this, and therefore they will have worse bodies. . . .<sup>77</sup>

It interesting that in this letter Glanvill also makes reference to the Cartesian beast-machine. He says that we have no reason to conclude that animals have immaterial souls, and that God certainly could make such "machinas." Glanvill, at this stage at least, believed that the justice of God extended to all his creatures, and that some account of their suffering was required.<sup>78</sup> But Glanvill never seemed to follow this through in his mature writings.

Others in the Cambridge circle had spoken of terrestrial life as essentially animal in character. More, for example, seemed to regard all material bodies or "terrestrial vehicles" as animal bodies. Thus, when "Adam's Soul descended into the prepared Matter of the earth," he became "a down-right *Terrestrial Animal*."<sup>79</sup> Idolatry, according to More, was "the *proper fruit of the Animal life*," and was manifested in the worship of the sun and moon. Idolaters thus lived the lives of animals. More, curiously enough, held that elephants and apes worshipped the sun and moon, and was thereby led to the conclusion that "what the *Apes* and these *Elephants* in *Mauritania* do, the same is done by the *Idolaters* of the *East Indies*."<sup>80</sup>

We should note in passing that the view that animals could entertain sentiments of religion was not merely one of More's flights of fancy. The piety of elephants had been originally reported by Pliny, who probably served as the source of not only More's views, but also those of Montaigne and a number of

<sup>77</sup> Glanvill's letter reproduced in Charles Mullett, "A Letter by Joseph Glanvill on the Future State," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 1 (1937): 447–56. Again, this sounds very much like Plotinus. Speaking on the descent of the soul, Plotinus stated: "all that is fixed is that each several soul descends to a recipient indicated by affinity of condition; it moves towards the thing which it There resembled, and enters, accordingly, into the body of man or animal" (*Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna and B. Page [Chicago: William Benton, 1952], IV.iii.12).

<sup>78</sup> In *Lux Orientalis* Glanvill stresses that divine justice is universal: "For this *Justice* is but the *distributing* to every thing according to the requirements of its nature. And that *benign wisdom* that contrived and framed the natures of all Beings, doubtless so provided that they should be suitably furnisht with all things proper for their respective conditions" (97).

<sup>79</sup> More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, 28, in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of D. Henry More*.

<sup>80</sup> More, *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, 50. Cf. John Smith, "An Account of Mistakes about Religion," *Select Discourses* (London: Pr. by J. Flesher for W. Morden, 1660), 375.

seventeenth-century natural historians.<sup>81</sup> Somewhat earlier, in 1622, Godfrey Goodman had actually produced a complete work on the topic, entitled *The Creatures Praying God: or The Religion of Dumbe Creatures*. Goodman ventured the thesis “that the dumbe Creatures haue likewise their proper kinde of religion as well as men, and that they are very deuout, godly, zealous, strict and most religious in their owne kinde.”<sup>82</sup> He went on to show that animals acknowledge one God (albeit implicitly), immutable, eternal, good, simple, wise, free, powerful, and providential.<sup>83</sup> The piety of animals was defended even in the eighteenth century by Richard Dean, the Curate of Middleton, who announced that “it is notorious to the World, that numbers of them [animals] make as great a Point of attending at Church on public Service day, as the most rigid pietists do.”<sup>84</sup> One can only wonder what transpired at the curate’s Sunday services.

For the Platonists, at any rate, “animal religion” meant something quite different. For them it was what true piety had degenerated into, just as men might degenerate into animals. If animals were in fact degenerate men, then the beasts could be said to be morally culpable, and thus to have deserved their plight. Accordingly, Glanvill suggested that Noah’s son Ham, traditionally regarded as the father of heresy, had spawned a race of apes.<sup>85</sup> This conjecture sat well with the general theory of degeneration current at the time, according to which the world was in a state of gradual decline.<sup>86</sup> The human race was implicated in this decline, for as John Dove put it, “man which is a lesser worlde declineth, and it followeth therefore as a good consequent, that

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., Montaigne, “An Apology for Raymond Sebond,” *Essays*, tr. John Florio (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d.), II, 180; Wolfgang Franzius, *The History of Brutes* (London: Pr. by E. Oakes, for Frances Haley, 1670), 25; John Johnston, *A Description of the Nature of Four-Footed Beasts* (Amsterdam, 1678), 18. Cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, x.41.

<sup>82</sup> Goodman, *Creatures Praying God*, 4f.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–12. On animal prayers, see also Abbot, *An Exposition*, 471.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Dean, *An Essay on the Future Life of Brutes, Introduced with Observations upon Evil, Its Nature, and Origin*, 2 vols. (Manchester: Pr. by J. Harrop, 1767), II, 71.

<sup>85</sup> Joseph Glanvill, *Scepisis Scientifica*, ed. John Owen (London: Kegan Paul and Co., 1885), 211.

<sup>86</sup> On the theory of the world’s degeneration, see Victor Harris, *All Coherence Gone* (London: Frank Cass, 1966); D. C. Allen, “The Degeneration of Man and Renaissance Pessimism,” *Studies in Philology* 35 (1938): 202–27; Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 162f., 379–92; Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 254–94; George Williamson, “Mutability, Decay, and Seventeenth-Century Melancholy,” *Journal of English Literary History* 2 (1935): 121–51. Views according to which degrees of degeneracy produced human diversity also provided a basis for racism. See, e.g., Richard Popkin, “The Philosophical Bases of Modern Racism,” in *Philosophy and the Civilizing Arts*, ed. Craig Walton and J. Anton (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974).

the greater worlde also doth decline."<sup>87</sup> Some sections of the human race had, in this scheme of things, sunk to the level of beasts. Perhaps for this reason there was in the sixteenth century some confusion as to whether the natives of the Americas were human or not. According to Corneille de Pauw, Americans were at first thought to be "orang-utangs, or large monkeys, that could be destroyed without remorse and without reproach."<sup>88</sup> Eventually, as De Pauw tells it, a Pope intervened, recognizing the Americans as true men.

Despite such episodes which suggested that men could naturally degenerate to the level of beasts, few thinkers saw fit to develop a theory according to which human souls were reincarnated in animal bodies. To be sure, Origen had believed that degenerate human souls would be reborn in the bodies of beasts. But his embarrassed seventeenth-century disciples had not been prepared to go that far, even denying that Origen had espoused this extreme view.<sup>89</sup> The sole English exponents of this ancient but heretical view were Lady Anne Conway and certain of the English radicals.

#### 4. THE ENGLISH RADICALS, LADY ANNE CONWAY AND TRANSMUTATION

The English Civil War in the 1640s had brought with it a general relaxation of censorship laws, allowing the circulation of texts, both Renaissance and contemporary, which challenged the prevailing political, religious, and scientific status quo. While the Cambridge Platonists had been somewhat circumspect in their rehabilitation of Hermetic and Neoplatonic ideals, the ideologues behind such radical groups as the Diggers and the Ranters threw caution to the winds.<sup>90</sup> In particular, the medieval hierarchical ontology which underlay both political and natural structures of domination was called into question. Gerrard Winstanley, leader of the Diggers, announced in 1649 that when "the great creator, Reason, made the earth to be a common treasury, to preserve beasts, birds, fishes and man . . . not one word was spoken . . . that one branch of mankind should rule over another."<sup>91</sup> As the distinctions which placed one

<sup>87</sup> John Dove, *A Confutation of Atheism* (London: Pr. by E. Able for H. Rockett, 1605), 92.

<sup>88</sup> Corneille de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, I.32f., in *Was America a Mistake?* ed. H. S. Commager and E. Giordanetti (New York: Harper, 1967), 90.

<sup>89</sup> Transmigration was claimed to be "so ridiculous a doctrine" that such worthies as Pythagoras, Plato, and Plotinus were thought not to have personally believed it, though they clearly taught it. See *The Athenian Gazette*, April 1691 (vol. 1, no. 7); Whitelock Bulstrode, *An Essay in Defence of Pythagoras* (London: Pr. by E. H. for Tho. Basset, 1692); Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, I.37 (40).

<sup>90</sup> The classic account of these movements is Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975).

<sup>91</sup> Gerrard Winstanley, *A Declaration to the Powers of England* (1649), quoted in Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 123.

man over another were broken down, so were the barriers between man and the beasts. The whole of nature, according to Winstanley, was permeated with the one divine spirit. The divine Reason, he declared, "dwels in every creature, according to the nature and being of the creature."<sup>92</sup> Man, he added, lives righteously by "looking upon himself as a fellow creature (though he be Lord of all creatures) to all other creatures of all kinds; and in so doing to them as he would have them doe to him."<sup>93</sup> The Ranters were even more overtly pantheistic. It was an early tenet of the Ranter creed that "every creature is God, every creature that hath life and breath being an efflux from God, and shall return into God again, be swallowed up in him as a drop is in the ocean."<sup>94</sup> Small wonder that the Ranters were charged with propagating the doctrine of reincarnation into animal bodies.<sup>95</sup> Yet, despite the widespread dissemination of these heterodox opinions within these radical groups, it was left to Lady Anne Conway to provide the most systematic defense of the view that brutes were so closely related to humans that they might in future lives be reborn as men or women.

Described by Richard Popkin as "perhaps the keenest metaphysician in England during this period," Lady Conway included in her circle of friends van Helmont, Cudworth, Glanvill, and the ubiquitous Henry More.<sup>96</sup> Her only published work is the posthumous *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (1692).<sup>97</sup> This highly original piece contains searching criticisms of the ontologies of Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza, proposing in their place a monistic vitalism.<sup>98</sup> It fuses elements of English Platonism with continental

<sup>92</sup> Winstanley, *Truth Lifting up Its Head above Scandals* (1649), *Works*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 111. Richard Overton argued similarly that beasts were not given to man to eat in innocency, and that there was only a difference of degree between man and the animals. All creatures, he claimed, were mortal, and all would be raised from the dead at the resurrection (*Mans Mortallitie*, 17f., 50).

<sup>94</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 151.

<sup>95</sup> See, e.g., John Reeve and Lodowicke Muggleton, *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise* (London: Pr. for the Authors, 1652), 42; Lawrence Clarkson [Claxton], *Look about You for the Devil* (London: Pr. for the Author, 1659), 98. These references establish only that the Ranters were accused of teaching this doctrine. Clarkson, however, had at one stage of his religious peregrinations been a Ranter, and thus had first-hand knowledge of their doctrines. Other members of these radical groups narrowed the gap between man and beast by asserting that both were equally mortal. See Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 122f.

<sup>96</sup> Popkin, "The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy," 55. Conway's editor "I. C." (Possibly John Clark, or even professor of medicine Jodocus Crull), lacking prescience of the sensitivities of future generations, judged her to be "learned beyond her sex."

<sup>97</sup> Anne Finch Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (London, 1692). This English edition is a translation of the Latin version of 1690. A modern edition (English and Latin) is available, edited and introduced by Peter Lopston (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982). I have used the English edition of 1692.

<sup>98</sup> Given Conway's profession of this spiritual monism (not dissimilar to Berkeley's), her views regarding the metamorphosis of animals could not be the traditional metempsychosis which

cabbalism, bringing together Platonic notions of preexistence with cabbalistic metempsychosis.<sup>99</sup> The *Principles* possibly influenced Berkeley and Leibniz, and the latter was for many years presumed to be its author.<sup>100</sup>

As with the Platonists, defense of the justice of God was of paramount importance to the Viscountess. This justice, she declares, “most gloriously appears in the Transmutation of Things out of one *Species* into another.”<sup>101</sup> In Conway’s ontology, there are three “essences of being,” but many “manners of existence.”<sup>102</sup> God, the highest being, is immutable; creatures, the lowest beings, are mutable; Christ, the medium, partakes of both kinds of being. Transmutation can therefore occur in all creatures, for their essence is mutable, with species boundaries reflecting only superficial “manners of existence.”<sup>103</sup>

Transmutation may take place upwards or downwards. Conway takes as an example of the former the changing of a horse into a human.<sup>104</sup> Horses, she says, have been “indued with divers degrees of perfection”—a kind of knowledge, love, fear, courage, memory and “divers other Qualities which are in Man.”<sup>105</sup> Because it is the nature of every creature to tend toward a higher degree of goodness, a horse will generally perform good service for its master, and so be deemed to have performed its duty (unless the horse hinders that good impulse by voluntary transgression, of which Conway asserts horses are

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posits the rebirth of spiritual souls into material bodies (which implies dualism). Conway’s own term for her doctrine is “transmutation,” which is somewhat suggestive of alchemy. Conway, it should be added, is at times unclear on this issue, distinguishing, e.g., between the *body* of a horse and its *spirit* (69f.)

<sup>99</sup> One of the earliest writings of the cabbala, *Bahir*, contains a doctrine of transmigration (secs. 86, 104, 135) which seems to have been developed as a theodicy. Migration into animal bodies appears somewhat later, in *Temunah* (c. 1300). Here it is stated that the souls of the righteous must pass through animal bodies. The strict rules concerning the slaughter and eating of animals were apparently intended to ensure the smooth passage of the human soul as it ascends from its animal body into its human body. See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 188–98, 458.

<sup>100</sup> See *The Conway Letters*, ed. Marjorie Nicolson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 454–56.

<sup>101</sup> Conway, *Principles*, 66.

<sup>102</sup> The terminology is reminiscent of Aquinas, who in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima* distinguished kinds of soul (of which there were three) from modes of existence. *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis in Aristotelis Librum de Anima Commentarium*, ed. M. Pirota (Turin, 1925), §§ 255, 260, 279.

<sup>103</sup> Conway, *Principles*, 51f.

<sup>104</sup> Conway thus prefers Origen and Plotinus over Plato. Plato allowed that a human soul could atrophy and enter an animal body, but considered the reverse to be impossible. Animal souls were qualitatively different from human souls and could not enter a human body, for animal souls have no prior knowledge of the forms. See *Phaedrus* 249b; cf. *Timaeus* 90. Origen and Plotinus had no qualms in asserting transmigration in both directions. See *De principiis*, I.viii; *Enneads*, IV.iii.

<sup>105</sup> Conway, *Principles*, 59.

capable). At death, the spirit of the horse, now more excellent than before, will pass into the body of another horse. (God might annihilate the horse's soul, but this would be unfair, given the soul's improvement.) In its next incarnation, the horse may undergo similar improvement, and so on. Now, asks Conway, is it possible "that a horse may always become better and better *ad infinitum*, and yet so remain a horse?"<sup>106</sup> This cannot be, she says, particularly if it is granted that the nature of man differs from that of a horse only in finite degrees. For, as the horse improves in those qualities which it shares with man, it gradually approaches humanity. Conway concludes that "a Horse may in length of Time, be in some measure changed into a Man."<sup>107</sup>

This rather novel view is made more plausible, Conway believed, if observed transmutations in nature are taken into account: air can be changed into fire or aether; one metal can be changed into another; "Barley and wheat are convertible one into the other"—for there are many places (apparently) where it is often observed that when barley is sown, wheat will spring up, and vice versa; worms change into flies; and the corrupted earth will bring forth animals without seed.<sup>108</sup> Transmutation is the order of nature, and displays divine goodness. God's justice, says Conway, operates "not only in Men and Angels, but in all Creatures."<sup>109</sup>

As an intriguing consequence of this view, all creatures become morally responsible. Animals are subject to God's law, its sanctions and rewards. "Every Creature whatsoever, that transgresseth this Law, is punished for it: But that creature which observes and keeps it, hath this reward, *viz*, to become better." It is for this reason, explains Conway, that the serpent was punished in the Genesis account of creation, and that the Jewish law had explicit penalties for animal transgressions.<sup>110</sup> Animals, then, are to a degree responsible for their "manner of existence," with their suffering being directly related to their "choices."

Transmutation was not all one way. At death, three possible fates awaited the human soul. It could become an angel, a devil, or a beast, depending on its actions in this world:

And so here is a certain Justice in all these, as in all the Transmutation of Things from one *Species* into another, whether it be by ascending from the Ignobler or Baser unto the Nobler, or by descending into the contrary, there may be found the same Justice: For Example: Is it not just and equitable, if a Man on Earth lived a pure and Holy Life, like unto the Heavenly Angels, that he should be exalted to an Angelical Dignity after

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 60f.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 61f.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 64f.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 66f.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.



Death, and be like unto them, over whom also the Angels rejoice? But if a Man here on Earth is more like a Devil raised from Hell than any other Creature, if he dies in such a State without Repentance, Shall not the same Justice tumble him down to Hell? and shall not such deservedly become like Devils, even as those who led an Angelical Life are made equal with the Angels? But if a Man hath neither lived an Angelical nor Diabolical, but a Brutish, or at least-wise an Animal or Sensual Life on Earth; so that his Spirit is more like the Spirit of a Beast than any other thing: Shall not the same Justice most justly cause, that as he is becom like a Brute, as to his Spirit . . . that he also . . . should be changed into the *Species* of Beasts to whom he was inwardly most like, in Qualities and Conditions of Mind?<sup>111</sup>

Neither return to this earth as a brute, nor serving time in hell as a devil were thought by Conway to be permanent, punitive states. Both were to be temporary and medicinal.<sup>112</sup> As for the traditional view of an eternity of torments in hell, this is dismissed (as in most of the Cambridge Platonists and radicals) as a "horrible *Idea* or Conception concerning God." All punishments, says Conway, "tend to the Creature's Advantage; so that Grace prevails over Judgement."<sup>113</sup> Lady Conway thus achieved a sound theodicy, but at the cost of orthodoxy.

##### 5. CONCLUSION

The seventeenth century, as we have seen, gave rise to a bewildering array of views about animals and their souls. Yet a common feature of the thought of the period was that the conclusions one could draw about the nature of animals were determined by theological concerns—the doctrines of creation and redemption, and more particularly, views about God's goodness and providence. Only when we have grasped the primacy of this theological agenda can we make any sense out of the variety of views of animals then current, including the "extreme" views of Descartes, and the colorful conjectures of the Platonists. Cartesianism, arguably, provided the most elegant solution to the problem of animal suffering,<sup>114</sup> and one more in line with the new mechanical science than the fanciful speculations of the Platonists. This accounts in large measure for its popularity in France and its more limited success in England. Certainly the Cartesian hypothesis was not favored merely because it legitimated such practices as vivisection, as some have implied.<sup>115</sup> The treatment of animals at this time was still related more to their perceived function in the created order than to their intrinsic properties. Thus, even those who conceded that animals could feel and suffer were not thereby deterred from

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 69f.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>114</sup> As even Bayle seems to admit; see *Dictionnaire*, "Rorarius," n. C.

<sup>115</sup> See, e.g., John Vyvyan, *In Pity and Anger* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), 22–24.

subjecting them to painful experiments. Man's dominion over nature, rather than some theory about animals being automata, legitimated such practices.<sup>116</sup> The Platonists, for their part, provided the only theodicy which could compete with the Cartesian hypothesis. The Platonic renaissance in England derived much of its potency from the fact that neither Calvinism nor Arminianism could give a satisfactory account of the justice of God. The doctrines of preexistence and metempsychosis thus made their appearance as integral parts of a general assault on the ruling theological dogmas.

Interestingly, the anachronistic Platonic views about the nature of animals were to outlive the beast-machine. Eighteenth-century discussions of animal suffering were often informed by Platonic philosophy, although more attention was now paid to the principle of plenitude than to the notion of migrating souls.<sup>117</sup> The beast-machine, however, was rarely mentioned. In the nineteenth century, the fortunes of theodicy as applied to animal suffering underwent a dramatic reversal. The acceptance of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection stood the old order on its head. Now, the natural world was to place constraints upon theology. Not only did evolution by natural selection do away with the grounds for asserting a radical discontinuity between human and other species, but the ceaseless and bloody conflicts between the species which lay at its heart cast into doubt cherished beliefs about purpose in nature and God's providential design. "I cannot persuade myself," Darwin wrote, "that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice."<sup>118</sup> Darwin himself

<sup>116</sup> Thus Guerrini points out that vivisectors did not rely on Cartesian arguments to justify their experiments, "Animal Experimentation in Seventeenth-Century England," 397. Significantly, it was the Cartesian Norris who preached kindness to animals; *Essay*, 59, 100.

<sup>117</sup> See, e.g., John Bruckner, *A Philosophical Survey of the Creation* (London: Pr. for J. Johnson & J. Payne, 1768); James Granger, *An Apology for the Brute Creation* (London: Pr. for T. Davies, 1772); John Hildrop, *Free Thoughts upon the Brute Creation* (London: Pr. for R. Minors, 1742); Soame Jenyns, *Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (London: Pr. for R. & J. Dodsley, 1757); *Disquisitions on Several Subjects* (Dublin: Pr. for R. Moncrieffe et al., 1782); Andrew Ramsay, *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: Pr. by Robert Foulis, 1748), I, 346–87; James Rothwell, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Dean, of Middleton* (London: Pr. in the year 1769).

<sup>118</sup> Cited in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. Francis Darwin (London: John Murray, 1888), II, 312. Cf. J. S. Mill's observation: "If a tenth part of the pains which have been expended in finding benevolent adaptations in all nature, had been employed in collecting evidence to blacken the character of the Creator, what scope for comment would have been found in the entire existence of the lower animals, divided, with scarcely an exception, into devourers and devoured, and a prey to a thousand ills from which they are denied the faculties necessary for protecting themselves! If we are not obliged to believe the animal creation to be the work of a demon, it is because we need not suppose it to have been made by a Being of infinite power" ("Nature," *Three Essays on Religion*, 3rd ed. [London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1874], 58.

exemplifies the new order of things—what is observed in nature dictates what can be believed about God. This priority, patently, was not that of the seventeenth century, and we must keep this fact firmly in mind when we attempt to interpret the curious biology of the age of reason.

*Bond University*