

CULTIVATED SYMPATHIES:
HUMAN SENTIMENTS AND ANIMAL SUBJECTS
IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Tobias Menely

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Doctoral Committee

Deidre Lynch, Ph.D.

Nick Williams, Ph.D.

Richard Nash, Ph.D.

May 10, 2006

Lee Sterrenburg, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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This study examines the interlinked histories of sentimentalism and animal advocacy in the period stretching from the Restoration to Romanticism. Portraying Britain's culture of sentiment as the context for unprecedented public articulations of concern for nonhumans, it historicizes the logic of feeling that characterizes sympathy as disturbingly sentimental when its recipient is an animal. The story I tell has been previously overlooked due to the prevailing critical rejection of sentimentality's emotionalism, literalism, and didacticism. My project contributes to sentimentalism's current rehabilitation by attending to the political reach of its pathos, analyzing the models of feeling that shaped its reception, and suggesting that literary didacticism and animal subjectivity remain under-explored aesthetic problems. Drawing on natural history, periodicals, and classical precursors including Virgil and Cicero, I examine the self-consciously activist literature that brought humans into sympathetic proximity with beasts, and I trace how sentimental animal advocacy came to be associated with middle-class politeness, national progress, and political radicalism. Chapter One describes how Lord Shaftesbury's moral philosophy undermines traditional justifications for human sovereignty and conceives of a "public" defined by emotional norms. Chapter Two addresses depictions of genteel sport hunting in georgic poems by John Gay, Alexander Pope, James Thomson, and William Somerville, arguing that the georgic's emotional

didacticism and naturalistic attention to animal affect make it more suitable for a critique than a defense of rural blood sports. Chapter Three considers how Laurence Sterne, Anna Barbauld, and William Cowper supplement sentimental forms of persuasion with other models of ethical obligation, and describes the way these writers anticipate animal-rights discourse when they apply a pervasive language of liberty to animal subjectivity. To conclude, I pursue sentimental pathos into early parliamentary debates about animal welfare legislation. While this project focuses on the origins of animal advocacy, I am equally interested in sentimentalism as a model for the literary production of communal identification. My aim is to consider how a language of moral sentiment operated in, and to some extent constituted, eighteenth-century civil society. More generally, I suggest that sentimental humanitarianism comprises a significant and telling chapter in the history of social concern.

Deidre Lynch

Nick Williams

Richard Nash

Lee Sterrenburg

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*True benevolence, or compassion, extends itself through the whole of existence
and sympathizes with the distress of every creature capable of sensation.*
—Joseph Addison, 1711

The sphere of Justice necessarily includes all nature that has feeling.
—John Lamb, 1809

Introduction

I. Animals and Sentimentality's Decline

In November of 1797, the Tory statesman George Canning founded the *Anti-Jacobin; or, Weekly Examiner* as an organ for disseminating Church, King, and Country propaganda and for contesting the cultural program of British reformers inspired by the French Revolution, a war of ideas and images no less significant than the actual war being fought with the new republic. Canning's grand finale, a satirical poem entitled "The New Morality," appears in the *Anti-Jacobin* of July 9, 1798, its final issue before being spun off as a monthly literary review.¹ Adopting the heroic couplets and censorious tone of Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*, "The New Morality" attacks the eighteenth-century culture of feeling, particularly as it has been infected by egalitarian ideals. The poem personifies three feminized British virtues—Philanthropy, Justice, and Sensibility—each of which has been corrupted by contact with Enlightenment *philosophes* and Jacobin radicals. The national sympathies embodied by British Philanthropy, for instance, have been distorted by French cosmopolitanism and nature-worship: the new moral code expands "patriot passion" into "A love, that glows for all Creation" (96, 104). Similarly, a delicate and dutiful British Sensibility has been perverted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose fine feelings are narcissistic and whose sympathetic priorities are backward. The new Rousseauian sentimentalists feel for "For the crush'd beetle, *first*," and next for "the widow'd dove, / And all the warbled sorrows of the grove" (136-7). Making no attempt

¹ George Canning, written with George Ellis, "The New Morality," *The Anti-Jacobin* (9 July 1798), rpt. in *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* (London, 1799), 220-40. Cited hereafter in text by line number. For an extended analysis of the poem and James Gillray's caricature of the same title, see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 192-98.

to change things for the better, they reserve their emotional attention for those circumstances those “that mock relief” (141) and “O’er the dead Jack-Ass pour the pearly show’r” (143). At the outermost remove in the sphere of sympathetic consideration are the human beings and human communities that should be first: “Parents, Friends, a King and Country[.]” (139). While Canning’s fellow citizens squander their “tender tears” on insignificant birds and beasts, the revolutionaries in France have beheaded a monarch and drawn Britain into a bloody war (132). Canning inverts the conventional humanistic argument against cruelty to animals, that it leads to the mistreatment of human beings, suggesting rather that a love of beasts masks a vicious misanthropy. Men and women of feeling sympathize with brute animals, he implies, while they ignore the human suffering caused by the French Revolution.

While Canning is neither the first nor the last Anglo conservative to blame continental influences for cultural decline, his spite seems misdirected. In associating Rousseau with new humanitarian sensibilities, Canning has sublimated his British sources. The reference to the crushed beetle derives from a frequently misconstrued passage in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, where Isabella tries to convince her brother Claudio not to fear execution: “The sense of death is most in apprehension; / And the poor beetle that we tread upon / In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great / As when a giant dies.”² Isabella’s point is that we are tormented more by the fear of dying than by death itself, but her words were widely cited in the eighteenth century as evidence of Shakespeare’s benevolence. In his 1798 *Essay on Humanity to Animals*, the Cambridge-educated gentleman Thomas Young mentions the lines as proof that “A man who has

² William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. W. Lever (London: Methuen, 1965) 3.1.77-80.

made some little progress in humanity will avoid treading upon worms, snails [and the like] in his walks.”³ Canning’s reference to the widowed dove is taken from James Thomson’s poem *The Seasons* (1726-46), an influential early work of literary animal advocacy, which I discuss in Chapter Two. In the second book, “Summer,” the heat of midday finds all creatures silent except the “stock-dove” who

through the forest coos,
Mournfully hoarse; oft ceasing from his plaint,
Short interval of weary woe! Again
The sad idea of his murdered mate,
Struck from his side by savage fowler’s guile,
Across his fancy comes; and then resounds
A louder song of sorrow through the grove.”⁴

Readers are meant to pity this humanized bird and so to disdain the rural blood sports of which it and its mate are victims. The dead jackass is the most notorious of the literary animals invoked in “The New Morality.” It appears in Laurence Sterne’s 1768 send-up of the Grand Tour, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, which I analyze in Chapter Three. On the road to Paris, the sentimental traveler Yorick passes a dead ass, and later he meets the creature’s grieving owner, a German peasant returning from a pilgrimage to Spain. The pilgrim had been accompanied by “this poor creature,” the donkey, who ate “the same bread with him all the way, and was unto him as a friend,” and now, weeping “bitterly,” he wonders if his own misfortunes hastened the donkey’s demise.⁵ Yorick takes from this encounter a grandiose lesson: “Did we love each other, as this poor soul but loved his ass—‘twould be something” (35). It turns out not to have

³ Thomas Young, *An Essay on Humanity to Animals* (London, 1798), 192.

⁴ James Thomson, *The Seasons*, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 2.615-21.

⁵ Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 34

been Rousseau but three esteemed British writers—Shakespeare, Thomson, and Sterne—who taught Georgian Britons to sympathize with the brute creation.

“The New Morality” is a poem about the emotional consequences and moral perils of reading. Canning assumes that passions move contagiously between books and people, which is why he so easily conflates specific literary episodes, the affective experience of readers, and a personified emotional state that embodies collective feeling. Sensibility stands for a particular structure of emotional habits shared by a majority of literate citizens, a national character constituted by practices of reading. Canning recognizes emotion, which we often take to be the most interior and subjective of phenomena, as mediated and interpersonal, as always already in the realm of representation. His point, then, is not that his fellow citizens have become emotionally inauthentic through sentimental reading but rather that their emotional attachments have become dangerously promiscuous. That animals stand as representative sympathetic victims in a culture of emotional excess is not inadvertent. In 1800, Canning was an eloquent opponent of the first animal welfare bill brought before the British Parliament, a law to ban bull-baiting which failed by two votes, so it is fitting that two years earlier his attack on reformist values had emphasized sentimentality’s flawed objects of pity: insects, birds, and beasts.⁶

The same diseased economy of interspecies feeling is featured in a satirical print by the caricaturist James Gillray, also titled “The New Morality,” which was reproduced in the first issue of the new *Anti-Jacobin* literary review. The print figures Sensibility as a

⁶ *The Parliamentary Register* Vol. XI (London, 1800), 242-4. Reversing the affective logic of the law’s supporters, Canning argues that attending a baiting inspires “nobleness of sentiment,” and that the “natural instinct and mutual antipathies of animals” have long been and ought continue to be “a source of amusement to man” (243).



Figure 1 Detail from James Gillray, “The New Morality,” *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 1 (1 August 1798).

rumpled young woman weeping over a dead songbird. She grasps a book by Rousseau, and one foot rests upon the decapitated head of Louis XVI. Her attention is focused on the bird rather than the murdered king, an example of the age’s misdirected morality. More so than the poem it supplements, the caricature implies that cruelty lies below tender tears, that regicide is the natural outcome of sentimental affections, and that to love brutes is to be a brute. Still, this is an odd pairing: a slain monarch and a lifeless bird, their moral priority dangerously reversed through the writings of Rousseau. Its logic of association is best explained by a brief observation in Raymond Williams’s exposition on “Sensibility” in *Keywords*: in the latter 18th-century, Williams writes, “Much that was moral or radical, in intention and in effect, was washed with the same brush that was used to depict self-conscious or self-indulgent displays of sentiment.”⁷ The moral politics of sentimentality become embarrassing when revolutionary ideals are associated with feminine theatricality; and, simultaneously, sentimentality appears sinister when we see what dangerous inclinations may be harbored in domestic affections. For anti-

⁷ Raymond Williams, “Sensibility,” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 280-83.

sentimentalists, this is a forceful rhetorical linkage, and yet one fraught by instability: it is never clear whether sentimental feelings are dangerous because they are strong enough to motivate radical action or morally suspect because they are passive and artificial.

Canning and Gillray's counter-revolutionary propaganda drew upon a discourse that associates affection for animals with effeminacy, affectation, misanthropy, unchristian morals, and political turmoil. By 1798, sentiments that brought humankind closer to animals had been the subject of a number of polemics by conservative cultural critics. A genteel lady in love with her lapdog—or worse, monkey—symbolized cultural decline. Just as James Thomson established sentimental conventions writing as an animal advocate in the 1720s, critics of sentimentality, which grew more controversial as it grew more fashionable, defined its menace with reference to interspecies affection. These writers condemned sentimentalists, and the books they read and wrote, precisely because of sentimentality's agency in inspiring sympathy for brute creatures.

Two mid eighteenth-century writers, the philanthropist Jonas Hanway and novelist Sarah Scott, distinguish between an excessive love of pets, which they associate with neurotic women, and a legitimate if limited concern for animal welfare. A prosperous, self-made merchant, Hanway founded the Marine Society, the Magdalen Hospital, and published *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers* in 1785.⁸ His *Journal of Eight Days Journey* (1757) includes a chapter on “False Tenderness,” as well as “Remarks on Lap-Dogs,” which together offer a substantial critique of feminine pet-

⁸ In *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers, in London & Westminster* (London, 1785), Hanway writes, “so much is dependent on sympathy in the suffering of others, it is universally agreed, that man ceases to deserve his exalted pre-eminence, as lord of this lower world, when he ceases to indulge that quality” (ii).

keeping. Hanway's observations on improper affections are occasioned when he learns that a young female friend, Cordelia, is stricken with grief after the loss of her pet monkey. Hanway aims to "teach her . . . to reserve her passions for nobler objects."⁹ It is not so much feminine passion itself that concerns Hanway as it is an instance of affective ties extended to "an animal of instinct." In general, he states that, if a woman must "entertain some *degree* of affection for a *brute*," it should be a dog, a creature that does not bear a "vile resemblance [to] the human species," as a primate does. But Hanway's deeper concern is that ladies of sensibility act as if a particular pet has "incomparably . . . more value . . . than a *human* creature" (105). Here he articulates the essential postulate of the anti-sentimentalist: affection is a finite resource. "An immoderate love of a brute

Figure 2 Detail from the frontispiece of Jonas Hanway's *A Journal of Eight Days Journey*, which anticipates Gillray's suggestion that female affection for brutes undermines patriarchal authority.



⁹ Jonas Hanway, *A Journal of Eight Days Journey* (London, 1757), 100. Cited hereafter in text.

animal,” as he puts it, will “weaken the force” of a “charitable disposition.” Hanway goes on to argue that we demean our humanity when we overwork an animal to death or find amusement in animal suffering. Brutality without cause is no less excusable than loving animals to the extent that we relinquish our natural dominion.

Sarah Scott makes a similar argument in her 1766 novel *The History of Sir George Ellison*. Ellison is a benevolent patriarch who accumulates a fortune trading in the West Indies and marries a widowed plantation owner. His wife turns out to be a brutal racist, who severely punishes her slaves at the slightest provocation. Ellison reprimands his wife for her cruelty, and she takes consolation in the fact that her hard-heartedness is better suited to life in colonial Jamaica than her husband’s timorous sensitivity. Their exchange is interrupted when a “favourite lap-dog” falls from a high window, breaking its leg and inspiring sympathetic tears from Mrs. Ellison, who apologizes for her emotional “weakness.”¹⁰ Showing himself to be a man of feeling, her husband replies: “to see any creature suffer is an affecting sight; and it gives me pleasure to observe you can feel for the poor little animal . . . but I am surprised . . . to see such marks of sensibility in a heart that I feared was hardened against the suffering even of her fellow creatures.” For the virtuous Mr. Ellison, sympathy for animals is commendable, except when that sympathy fails to encompass humans as well. Like Hanway, then, Scott does not de-legitimate concern for animals in general but points to an instance where the love of a pet represents a deeper ethical failing.

Later critics of sentimentality’s excess conflate extravagant affection for pets with animal advocacy in general, rhetorically linking emotional insincerity and egalitarian

¹⁰ Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, ed. Betty Rizzo (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1996), 13.

idealism. Hannah More, an Evangelical and abolitionist, published an apostrophe to “Sensibility” in 1782, which supplied a template for “The New Morality.” The poem aims to redeem “tender anguish” and “Sympathy Divine” by ridding literary sensibility of its theatricality and extremism.¹¹ More maintains that the sentimental love of animals is always false love and that expressing affection for brutes is merely a way to act out one’s own righteousness and sensitivity. Her first example of an artificial and “disproportion’d” passion is a woman who grieves “because a sparrow dies” (282). This line comments on a growing subgenre of sentimental poems, mostly written by women, about songbirds who die when kept in cages.¹² Her sharpest criticism is aimed at the likes of Thomson and his imitators, poets who deprecate rural sports by publishing affecting portraits of animal suffering:

There are, who fill with brilliant plaints the page,
If a poor linnet meet the gunner’s rage:
There are, who for the dying fawn display
The tend’rest anguish in the sweetest lay;
Who for a wounded animal deplore,
As if friend, parent, country were no more. (284)

Sympathy, More implies, is necessarily artificial when its object is an animal. Its mere literariness is implied in the suggestion that such compassion provide an excuse for poets to show off their virtuosity by transforming torment into polished verse. The poet’s

¹¹ Hannah More, “Sensibility, a Poem,” in *Sacred Dramas* (London, 1782), 277. Cited in text by page number.

¹² It also interestingly evokes the Book of Matthew (10.29-30), where Jesus speaks of God’s omniscience: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Eighteenth-century preachers read this aphorism as a justification for human dominion, but in *An Essay on Man* Alexander Pope revised it to emphasize interspecies egalitarianism in a providential world—“Who sees with equal eye, as God of all, / A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,” in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale, 1963), 1.87-8. More may be responding to the ethical implications of Pope’s suggestion that God himself cares for fallen sparrows.

sympathetic anguish is self-dramatizing and his literary activism is an emotional indulgence. Such staged tenderheartedness reaches its zenith in those who “from the spider’s snare [will] save a fly” (284). The most famous eighteenth-century defender of the rights of flies is Laurence Sterne’s character Tobias Shandy, so it is not surprising that Sterne is More’s exemplar of merely theatrical feeling: “one genuine deed perform’d in the name of true sentiment, she writes, is better than “all thy soothing pages, polish’d Sterne” (285).

This debate about the appropriate limits of emotional fellowship occupied the pages of periodicals as well, where the naïve or misanthropic animal lover emerged as a satirized figure. In 1772, a correspondent to *The Town and Country Magazine* worried about those who had become “too sensible,” afflicted by every “trivial calamity.” “[T]here are many,” he writes, “whose nice feelings are so great, that they extend them to the whole animal creation, and are as much affected at the sight of a dying lamb, as the loss of a favourite child.” Pope’s *An Essay on Man*, a more sentimental poem than is often recognized, provides one quintessentially pathetic image of a dying lamb: “The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed today / ... / [who] licks the hand just raised to shed his blood.”¹³ And Pope, famous for the affection he showered on his pet dogs, offers one precedent for the correspondent’s unfortunate acquaintance, Nauticus, whose benevolent concern for canines brought him into “difficulties, embarrassments, and dangers.”¹⁴ One

¹³ Pope, *An Essay on Man*, 1.81, 84.

¹⁴ *The Town and Country Magazine* (September 1772). Oddly enough, three years later, the same magazine published a letter from “Grimalkin,” a feline with a sentimental story, which begins when he is taken from his young charge in a parish workhouse, because a pet might be looked upon “as an infringer on the rights of the poor,” and given to a boy who chases him with dogs and pelts him with stones. The cat is saved from this torment by a passing gentleman, a kindly benefactor not unlike Nauticus. Aside from the fact that its narrator is a feline, the story is presented pathetically and without irony, *The Town and Country Magazine* (March 1775).

day this sensitive gentleman rescues a sick dog from an angry mob. The moral of the tale becomes clear when the dog—who is, of course, rabid—bites his Good Samaritan. In *The Lounger*, Henry Mackenzie composed a letter from an imaginary correspondent, Barbara Heartless, who tells of her time as an attendant to Mrs. Sensitive.¹⁵ This lady had “the most acute and delicate sensibility,” which first became evident at the distress she felt when a fly drowned in a creampot. Mrs. Sensitive’s home, it turns out, is a lively menagerie, including “three lapdogs, four cats . . . a monkey, a flying squirrel, two parrots, a parroquet, a Virginia nightingale, a jackdaw, an owl, besides half a hundred smaller birds, bullfinches, canaries, linnets, and white sparrows.” The attendant’s role is to “accommodate” herself “to the feelings of the sweet creatures,” which involves learning to “understand their looks and their language from sympathy.” But it is not just that Mrs. Sensitive’s affection for her “little family” of pets is absurd in its immoderation. It is in fact immoral. By now we should expect the narrative turn, where apparent emotional extravagance is revealed to be rooted in profound ethical stinginess: “But the misfortune is, Mr. Lounger, that her feelings are only made for brute creatures, and don’t extend to us poor Christians.” Mrs. Sensitive is a penny-pincher, who refuses to hear the sob stories of charity cases, saying they upset her, and who prefers her pets to her in-laws. Mrs. Sensitive is not idiosyncratic but rather immoral and unnatural. She is the ancestor of our own crazy cat ladies, women whose maternal instincts, we are led to believe, have been displaced by an affinity for animals. This sort of hyperbole suggests that more is at stake here than an anxiety about eccentricity. As in Gillray’s caricature and More’s “Sensibility,” the sentimental animal lover is demonized in a manner that

¹⁵ *The Lounger* 90 (21 October 1786), in *The Miscellaneous Works of Henry Mackenzie* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 156-59. Like Hanway and More, Mackenzie was a critic of over-extended literary sensibility who attempted to preserve a place for moral feeling.

implies a strong current of cultural anxiety about the place of animals in moral community.

The rejection of sentimental affection for animals established by writers like Canning, More, and Mackenzie has retained its force in the twentieth century. The eighteenth-century bestiary is kept alive in attacks on the sentimental tradition. Irving Babbitt, in his *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), valorizes stoicism, formalism, and neoclassical universalism, while condemning the “emotional sophistry” and optimistic didacticism of sentimental literature.¹⁶ Babbitt associates sentimentality with Romanticism, drawing a direct line from Shaftesbury to Wordsworth, and, like Canning, he points to Rousseau as its chief architect. Though it is highly unlikely that Babbitt read Canning’s poem, its language and logic resonate throughout *Rousseau and Romanticism*, particularly in the link Babbitt draws between sentimentality and social upheaval: “In Robespierre and other revolutionary leaders,” he writes, “one may study the implications of the new morality—the attempt to transform virtue into a natural passion” (115). His chief instance of the period’s “indiscriminate sympathy” is the love of animals:

One is more irresponsible and therefore more spontaneous in the Rousseauistic sense in lavishing one’s pity on a dying pig. Medical men have given a learned name to the malady of those who neglect the members of their own family and gush over animals (zoöphilpsychosis). But Rousseau already exhibits this ‘psychosis.’ He abandoned his five children one after the other, but had we are told an unspeakable affection for his dog. . . . Rousseau’s contemporary, Sterne, is supposed to have lavished a somewhat disproportionate emotion upon an ass. (120-1)

From Rousseau, to revolutionary violence, to Sterne’s donkey, the common link is an inordinate affection for nonhumans.

¹⁶ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, 1919 (Cleveland: Meridian, 1955), 5.

The doctor Babbitt mentions was a famous neurologist named Charles Dana, who, in the early twentieth century, published an article in the *Medical Record* diagnosing “zoöphilpsychosis” as a nervous disorder defined by an overwrought concern for animals.¹⁷ In his medical research, Dana experimented on living animals, and the theory of zoöphilpsychosis served to pathologize the motivations of the antivivisectionists who had brought a bill to regulate animal experimentation before the New York Legislature. A 1909 article in the *New York Times*, with an unforgettable headline, reports on Dana’s discovery: “Passion for Animals Really a Disease. Its Name is Zoophil-Psychosis, Dr. Dana Says, and it Attacks Morbid Lovers of Pets.”¹⁸ It is fitting that Babbitt retrospectively diagnoses Sterne and Rousseau with this new syndrome given the way Dana himself weaves scientific language together with a familiar eighteenth-century anti-sentimental idiom. Zoöphilpsychosis reflects “fine feelings gone wrong” and an “overgrown sentimentality,” a tenderheartedness that is in fact an “expression of a selfish and weak nature.” Dana correlates this “obsessive psychosis” with the anxieties of modern life, and in particular with individuals whose overly sensitive constitutions make it impossible for them to see “things in their right proportion.” He provides two case studies of obsessive animal lovers, who are typologically reminiscent of Nauticus and Mrs. Sensitive. One patient was a middle-aged man who had “always been very careful of the comfort of animals and disliked to see them badly treated.” He was so attuned to the suffering of horses that he became unwilling to travel in the city, where he would witness the mistreatment of carriage-horses. This patient overcame his “morbid worry” after several years of consultation with Dana. The second case involved a childless

¹⁷ See Craig Buettinger, “Antivivisection and the Charge of Zoophil-psychosis in the Early Twentieth Century,” *The Historian* (1 January 1993).

¹⁸ “Passion for Animals Really a Disease,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1909.

woman who turned her house into a hospital for sick felines. Noting her membership in a humane society and the incidence of insanity in family members, Dana pronounces her beyond medical redemption. Like the eighteenth-century anti-sentimentalists, Dana pathologizes the concern for other creatures, designating expansive sympathies as diseased. Just as significantly, he conflates all such concern, so that the eccentric cat lady is the paradigmatic animal lover, motivated by the same hysteric impulses as the vegetarian, anti-vivisectionist, and anyone else who grants animals moral status.

Today “sentimentality” retains significance as a negative category, which distinguishes unnecessarily extravagant or clichéd emotion, kitschy or lowbrow art objects, and philosophically unsound opinions. I know of no other socio-aesthetic movement that has fallen so far, from near cultural hegemony in the mid eighteenth century to absolute denigration among twentieth-century cultural critics and philosophers. As a devalued category, sentimentality marks conventional or artificial emotional experience but, as the writings of its early opponents suggest, it also defines illegitimate emotional attachment. When we describe a cultural text or situation as sentimental, we are saying that its sympathetic objects are unworthy of our affections. The devaluation of sentimentality emerged in the later eighteenth century as a way of policing communal boundaries, including the border between human and animal, in a period when such boundaries were in flux. Rejecting sentimentality is a response to the types of relationships it promotes, the affective communities it works to produce. For eighteenth-century moral philosophers and for the poets and novelists who adopted its rhetorical strategies, sentimentalism offered a way of imagining how distant strangers might identify with each other through sympathetic fellow feeling. Such identification was often

mediated through shared sympathy with marginal members of the civic community: widows, orphans, slaves, the poor, and animals. The most compelling recent work on sentimental literature—work that reflects an “affective turn” in literary criticism and a rehabilitation of sentimentalism—has drawn attention to its significant role in the abolitionist campaign of the later eighteenth century.¹⁹ This study argues that eighteenth-century sentimentality supplied a rhetorical platform for animal advocacy because it drew attention to the affective proximity between humans and other creatures. It is this proximity, this growing field of affinity and identification—“A love,” in Canning’s words, “that glows for all Creation”—that troubles early sentimentality’s critics. Eighteenth-century sentimental texts aim to redefine the social order, often in radical ways, and it is, at least in part, this utopian aim that accounts for sentimentality’s cultural devaluation.

II. Sentimentalism: A Language of Culture and Nature

Sentimentalism arose as an optimistic theory of moral psychology according to which human behavior is in some measure motivated by social feelings. It is attended by an aesthetic interest in technologies of pathos, rhetorical strategies that elicit and extend native sympathies. Its emergence in Britain after the Restoration has been attributed to a number of intellectual and sociological dynamics. Historians of science, including Roy Porter and G.S. Rousseau, see its origins in the growing emphasis on embodied cognition and the nervous system in anatomical science, apparent in works like Thomas Willis’s *De*

¹⁹ See Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, and Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

Anima Brutorum (1672) and *Two Discourses Concerning the Souls of Brutes, which is that of the Vital and Sensitive Soul of Man* (1683). John Locke's empiricist epistemology of mind also plays a significant role, because it sets the foundations for a sensationalist psychology and a science of morals.²⁰ Isabel Rivers associates sentimentalism with Cambridge neo-Platonism, liberal theology, and the freethinking tradition, exemplified by the stress on human sociability, goodness, and benevolent action that defines the Church of England's latitudinarian movement.²¹ In aesthetic theory, it is linked to the interest in emotional response initiated by the translation of Longinus's *On the Sublime* and to the work of critics like John Dennis, Joseph Addison, and Edmund Burke, representative theorists of what Brycchan Carey calls the "New Rhetoric," which sees shared feeling as a more powerful moral stimulus than rational argumentation.²² Another widely-accepted narrative for the emergence of sentimentalism points to a rejection of transcendental sources for ethical imperatives in moral philosophy and to Lord Shaftesbury's reaction against the proto-liberalism of Locke and selfish ethics of Thomas Hobbes, his positing of an emotional moral sense, and the development of this theory by the Scots Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith. Hume, in particular, is well-known for

²⁰ G.S. Rousseau, "Discourses of the Nerve," in *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression*, ed. Frederick Amrine (Boston: Kluwer, 1989): 29-60; G.S. Rousseau, "Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility," in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century III: Papers Presented at the Third David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar*, ed. R. Brissenden and J. Eade (Canberra: Australian National UP, 1976), 137-58; Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton), Chapter 12; Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul* (New York: Norton, 2003).

²¹ Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); R.S. Crane, "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" *ELH* 1.3 (Dec., 1934), 205-230.

²² See Carey, *British Abolitionism*, Chapter One. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla argue that in the British tradition, in contrast with Kantian aesthetics, ethical imperatives are always bound up with aesthetic affect, in Introduction, *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 1-16.

arguing that all ethical values, judgments, and motivations arise in an immanent realm of feeling.²³

Beyond intellectual history, the sentimental movement is generally correlated with two widely discussed and debated eighteenth-century sociological transformations. Historians have described it as one element of an emerging middle class's attempt to claim cultural authority in terms of emotional refinement and active philanthropy. Paul Langford sees sentimentality as a central feature of a Georgian-era "code of manners," a sophisticated discourse of internal regulation and polite interaction meant to harmonize divergent interests.²⁴ Promoted as a new marker of virtue and an alternative to aristocratic *noblesse oblige*, sentimentality contributes what Susan Manning calls "emotional capital" to the middling sort seeking communal legitimacy and common identity.²⁵ The sentimental image of sympathetic concord offers a solution to the very problem created by the commercial classes: how to establish social cohesion in an expanding capitalist society defined by economic competition among anonymous individuals. Sentimental feeling promises to counterbalance selfish interests, particularly the desire for acquisition and luxury that drives markets. Scholars have also linked sentimentalism to new technologies of reproduction and exchange, particularly to a widening dissemination of books and periodicals, and to the growth of literacy associated with the rise of the middle class and the changing social role of women. These changes create new avenues for mass

²³ Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers* (London: Macmillan, 1888), 158-189; Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1998), 157-175.

²⁴ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), particularly Chapter 10. See also G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992).

²⁵ Susan Manning, "Sensibility," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740-1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 92.

consumption, expand the power and reach of public opinion (which is often defined in the period as a kind of collective sentiment), and enlarge the range of emotional community. In *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*, Julie Ellison wonders if “the Age of Sensibility and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [are] the same thing.”²⁶ This savvy observation hints not only at actual transformations wrought by print capitalism but also, as we will see, at the way sentimental discourse is organized around problems of textual mediation.

My contention is that sentimentalism supplied a language for representing affective affinities with nonhuman creatures and for promoting specifically human moral capacities and responsibilities. The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes the following definitions for “sensibility,” a cognate of “sentimentality,”²⁷ as having wide currency in the eighteenth century: “Power of sensation or perception . . . the readiness of an organ or tissue to respond to sensory stimulus”; “Emotional consciousness”; “the quality of being easily and strongly affected by emotional influences”; “readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art.” Embodied sensation, moral sentiment, and aesthetic receptiveness are all designated by the same term, which has at its etymological root the Latin *sentire*: “to be aware.” In an era that made affective responsiveness a source of moral status, it was nearly impossible not to consider

²⁶ Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999), 12.

²⁷ As Raymond Williams notes, the relation between “sentimentality” and “sensibility” is complex and disputed, in *Keywords*, 280-83. G.S. Rousseau suggests that sensibility comes before sentimentality, in seventeenth-century treatises on sensation (“Nerves, Spirits, and Fibers” 140-142). Others have defined “sensibility” as a post-Augustan, pre-Romantic literary movement. I take the safe route, advocated by Carey and others, and use the terms interchangeably.

humanity's obligations toward other sentient creatures. Animal suffering became a social problem, as Samuel Johnson implied when he told James Boswell in 1776 that he had recently heard "much talk of the misery which we cause to the brute creation."²⁸ The conversation noticed by Johnson was part of a sustained debate about animal welfare, one no less pervasive than the period's large-scale discussions about poverty and slavery. Animal advocates denounced traditional cruel pastimes, like hunting, bull-baiting, and cock-fighting, as well as practices associated with modernization, such as the overworking of post-horses in the interest of speed, the brutal methods of driving stock to London's cattle market to feed a growing urban population, and the slaughter of wild animals, like beavers and birds, for use in luxury goods. Such talk could be found in periodicals such as the *Tatler*, where Richard Steele condemned the custom of cock-throwing, the *Spectator*, where Joseph Addison described the vivisection of a dog with disgust, and the popular *Gentleman's Magazine*, which strongly censured hunting in 1736.²⁹ Questions about human obligations toward animals appear throughout the era's recondite treatises of theology and philosophy. Bishop Butler, in his influential *Analogy of Religion* (1736), argues for the "natural Immortality of Brutes," and two Anglican churchmen wrote extensive treatises on the animal soul, John Hildrop, *Free Thoughts upon the Brute Creation* (1742) and Richard Dean, *Essay on the Future Life of Brutes* (1767).³⁰ In his *System of Moral Philosophy* (1755), Francis Hutcheson articulates a common sentiment among moral sense philosophers, that animals "have a right that no

²⁸ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, 1791 (London: Dent, 1973), 2.36.

²⁹ *Tatler*, 16 February, 1710; *Spectator*, 18 July 1711; *Gentleman's Magazine* vi, 19, 1736

³⁰ Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (London, 1736), 23. The theological problem of animal suffering is treated in Peter Harrison, "Animal Souls, Metempsychosis, and Theodicy in Seventeenth-Century English Thought," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31.4 (October 1993): 519-544.

useless pain or misery should be inflicted on them,” and adds that our innate feelings of pity for suffering beasts serve as “intimations of this right.”³¹ Questions about the status of animals inform philosophical discussions about the nature of evil, the materiality of consciousness, the difference between instinct and reason, the state of nature and the social contract. In 1675, Thomas Hodges, an Oxfordshire rector, published two sermons promoting compassion toward brutes, *The Creatures Goodness, As they came out of God’s Hands, and the Good Man’s Mercy, to the Brute Creatures, which God hath put under his Feet*, though it took another century before sermons on animal welfare became widespread. In 1772, another Oxfordshire churchman, James Granger, delivered and then published *An Apology for the Brute Creation, or Abuse of Animals Censured*, which inaugurated a flood of sermons calling for kind treatment of beasts. Books aimed at inculcating humane sensibilities in children, including Thomas Day’s *Sandford and Merton* (1783-89) and Sarah Trimmer’s *History of Robins* (1786), began appearing in the 1780s. The revolutionary ferment of the 1790s occasioned radical pamphlets and books promoting animal rights, such as John Oswald’s *The Cry of Nature* (1791) and John Lawrence’s *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses and on the Moral Duties of Men toward the Brute Creation* (1796-8). Georgian Britain’s most popular visual artist, William Hogarth, claimed that a concern for animal welfare had motivated the production of his popular 1751 engraving *The Four Stages of Cruelty*:

The prints were engraved with the hope of, in some degree, correcting the barbarous treatment of animals, the very sight of which renders the streets of our metropolis so distressing to every feeling mind. If they have had this effect, and

³¹ Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* Vol. 1 (London, 1755), 314.

checked the progress of cruelty, I am more proud of having been the author, than I should be of having painted Raphael's Cartoons.³²

Such explicitly humanitarian aims, this dissertation argues, also prompted writing by a number of canonical poets, including Thomson, Pope, William Cowper, and Anna Letitia Barbauld.

My argument, more specifically, is that sentimentalism functioned simultaneously as a language of culture and of nature, drawing attention to humanity's unique moral responsibility for our passions even as it highlighted the emotional propinquity between humans and other animals. It may be characterized as pre-modern, then, in the sense given by Bruno Latour: it concurrently accommodates cultural activity and natural givens, representations and facts. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour proposes that modern thought is constituted and conditioned by an epistemological division between the domains of human culture and nonhuman nature, a division that induces the separate births of "man" and of "things, or objects, or beasts."³³ In its eighteenth-century form, sentimentalism encompasses both domains; Latour's "modern constitution" has yet to exert its full force. Sentimental ways of knowing range, as R.F. Brissenden writes, from "enthusiastic idealism" to the "coldly empirical."³⁴ They describe specifically human activities and offers models for conceptualizing social organization and cultural production. They draw attention, in another register, to innate physiological drives, the embodiment of mind, and the function of feeling in the economy of nature. In other

³² William Hogarth, *Anecdotes of William Hogarth, Written By Himself* (London, 1833), 65. Francis Cokayne analyzes the anti-cruelty imperative in *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, in a *Dissertation on Mr. Hogarth's Six Prints* (London, 1751), 36-38.

³³ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1993), 13.

³⁴ R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 20.

words, sentimentality supplies an epistemologically flexible language, not constrained by the powerful culture/nature dichotomy. It offers a supple (and, in some eyes, incoherent) ethical discourse, which calls upon a human sense of moral obligation established within culture while locating the foundation for such obligation in naturally occurring sympathetic feelings.

Enlightenment moral philosophers emphasize Aristotle's axiom that man is a gregarious, or social, animal. Like ants, bees, and baboons, we are naturally inclined to form and maintain communities. Social and even ethical propensities are built into our instinctive desires and drives. Human beings are innately social, seeking out company and capable of organizing complex societies, and we are also socialized, subject to a uniquely human process of social learning that constitutes our separation from the natural order. Locke's model of the human subject retains great authority throughout the eighteenth century, with its emphasis on the ductility of human thought and feeling, what Hume calls "the prodigious effects of education."³⁵ Post-Lockean moral philosophers examine the course of social education and the constitution of social norms, which explains the omnipresence in the period of terms like habit, manner, and custom, as well as the widely used metaphorical description of social life as a kind of contagion, a viral transmission of mental and emotional traits.³⁶ Insofar as it conceptualizes humanity's socialized nature, sentimentalism may be understood as a *language of culture*. Until the seventeenth century, Raymond Williams observes, "culture" is generally a "noun of

³⁵ David Hume, "The Sceptic," in *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 103.

³⁶ As Hume puts it, "The human mind is of a very imitative nature; nor is possible for any set of men to converse often together without acquiring a similitude of manners and communicating to each other their vices as well as their virtue," in "Of National Character," in *Selected Essays*, 115.

process” designating the “the tending of natural growth,” usually of plants or animals.³⁷ Among the Renaissance humanists, the term, and its constellation of cognates such as “cultivation” and “refinement,” begin to shift so as to also include social and educational activity, the “process of human development.” These different registers invite a metaphorical promiscuity throughout the period—a symbolic space in which plants and animals, selves and societies intermingle—but in all of its eighteenth-century definitions “culture” denotes an active re-working of a natural inheritance. It is neither static nor absolutely divorced from nature, which are often its implications in modern usage. Although always concerned with the natural and the inherent, writers in the sentimental tradition tend to see the passions as subject to human activity, be it in the unconscious sedimentation of custom or the self-conscious labor of cultivation. A key point of the sentimental perspective is the possibility of reforming feelings through the kind of reading and writing one does and the company one keeps. This emphasis on culturing the passions corresponds with a general Enlightenment trope that figures humans as the self-authoring animal, which transcends the natural order not because of any innate quality but precisely because of the plasticity of culture.

In the eighteenth century, specific emotional habits, behaviors, and values are perceived to give a society its unique character and thus to measure cultural difference and historical change. Conjectural historians like Adam Ferguson and James Dunbar link distinct configurations of feeling with stages of social and economic development, and, as Mark Saber Phillips has shown, sentimental assumptions about the socialization of

³⁷ Raymond Williams, “Culture,” *Keywords*, 87-93.

manners played a role in the emergence of comparative ethnography.³⁸ The distribution of cruelty and compassion is one axis upon which national character is identified, meaning that cultural difference may be indexed by, among other things, the treatment of animals. In 1732, the *Weekly Register* observed:

“Mahomet made a Tenderness to Animals an essential Part of a *Mussulman*. The *Indian Bramins*, by their injudicious Concern even for noxious Brutes and Insects, acted cruelty on themselves. The *Christians* are the only People who are cruel to so great a part of the Works of the Deity they Worship.”³⁹

Numerous travelers invoke this sentimental opposition between tenderness and cruelty when commenting on the status of beasts in foreign lands, and Britons began to confront a widespread reputation as having a bloodthirsty national character, evident in cruel customs like the throwing of cocks on Shrovetide and in their craving for roast beef.

Sentimentalism is an educative philosophy premised on the assumption that emotional habits are malleable. A sentimental education begins in childhood. Locke himself, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), observes that certain children seem to have a propensity for cruelty and thus that everybody “should be accustomed from their Cradles to be tender to all sensible Creatures.”⁴⁰ This is a common sentiment in the children’s literature, which begins to flourish in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and it led to a taste for didactic books like *Pity’s Gift, a Collection of interesting Tales, to excite the Compassion of Youth for the Animal Creation* (1798). Moral and emotional didacticism, in fact, motivates the majority of eighteenth-century literature, not just books written for children. The central aesthetic debate across the century is about the moral effects of reading, with defenders of sentimental literature promoting its

³⁸ See Mark Salber Phillips’s *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing In Britain 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), particularly pages 19-20.

³⁹ *Weekly Register* 119 (13 May 1732).

⁴⁰ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, fifth ed. (London, 1705), 211.

edifying effects. A writer in the *Universal Magazine* in 1778 endorsed the “general plan of modern education,” which “consists of the study of Poets and Sentimental Writers,” because it “contributes perhaps more than all other causes to humanize the heart and refine the sentiments.”⁴¹ This period saw an extensive rethinking of the social role of literature, occasioned by the expansion and feminization of the reading public and the professionalization of authorship. Shaftesbury, for instance, advocates poetic didacticism within a secular valence, placing poets at the forefront of a public culture of socialized morality, which I describe in Chapter One.

As a theory of the ethics and aesthetics of community formation, sentimentalism depends on sympathy, the means by which, in Edmund Burke’s words, “we enter into the concerns of others.”⁴² While moral philosophers and aesthetic theorists debated its precise machinery, they all pointed to sympathy as the psychic technology through which we transcend personal experience, circumstance, and interest. Shaftesbury identifies sympathy’s mediating quality when he describes how enthusiasm is “raised in a multitude and conveyed by aspect, or as it were, by contact or sympathy.”⁴³ Sympathy conveys us out of ourselves, allowing us to be contacted or touched by another’s experience. The mechanism of transport and translation at the heart of social feeling, sympathy is essentially semiotic, a system for reading another’s experience and communicating our own through what Shaftesbury calls “aspect” and Hume the “external signs of

⁴¹ Quoted in Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, 27.

⁴² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 44

⁴³ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 1711, ed. Lawrence Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 10. Cited hereafter in text.

countenance and conversation.”⁴⁴ Sentimental writers catalogue and contribute to a wide repertoire of emotional signs, linguistic and paralinguistic. The ability to read another’s feelings, as they are written on the body and communicated through voice or an inflection of semantic meaning, becomes an important virtue. Shaftesbury links our natural sociability, as well as the possibility of interspecies affection, with this capacity to interpret one another’s emotional signs, which take a variety of channels: “from accounts and relations of such happiness, from the very countenances, gestures, voices, and sounds, even of creatures foreign to our kind, whose signs of joy and contentment we can anyway discern” (204). In addition to the more immediate semiotic channels of gesture and voice, eighteenth-century writers were interested in how literature’s formal qualities—such as narrative (“accounts and relations”), characterization, and description—may work to foster sympathetic identification. For example, Adam Smith, who emphasizes sympathy’s imaginative and conceptual foundations, argues that fellow-feeling is intensified when we understand the particulars of another’s circumstance. Physical expressions of suffering, he suggests, excite our sympathies less than situations for which we are “informed of their cause.”⁴⁵

Literature’s capacity to mediate sympathetic relationships and establish emotional norms became one of its identifying characteristics. In *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701), John Dennis categorically defines poetry as

⁴⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739-40, ed. David Date Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 206. In *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1988), John Mullan draws attention to the importance of embodied semiosis in sentimental novels. Two recent books have usefully extended his insight: Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) and Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).

⁴⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 14-15.

affective language that cultures human passions. Seeking to reclaim enthusiasm from its association with the sectarian upheaval of the Civil War, Dennis values poetry—“pathetick” and “passionate” “Speech”—for its potential to “Instruct and Reform” the populace.⁴⁶ Sentimental art may be identified by a set of rhetorical strategies that implicate readers and viewers in the affective lives of others. It is an instrument for constituting identification, obligation, and responsibility through the mediation of affect. The moral philosophers of the period were particularly interested in the process whereby emotion becomes collective via the public sphere technologies of print culture, which is why they were at once fascinated and troubled by novels. For Lord Kames, the “ideal presence” of a book or painting is potentially just as emotionally engaging as a “real presence,” and it is the former that “strengthens the bonds of society.”⁴⁷ In the century that first endows a ‘public’ with authority, pamphlets, magazines, and books became an avenue for shared interior experience, for a very distinct notion of “society” as the sympathies disseminated through print. They also offered a powerful instrument for the humanitarian reform movement, in campaigns that depend on evoking the sympathies of readers to bring about social and legislative changes, with the aim of diminishing human and animal suffering. In this sense, I think it is fair to read sentimental literature as utopian. It projects an image of better, more just (and perhaps impossibly idealistic) world. This image is meant to rebuke the imperfect beings of this world and to spur them to improve.

⁴⁶ John Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (London: 1701), 23-4, vi.

⁴⁷ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 1762 (New York, 1908), 64-5, 69.

Regardless of our cultural activity and variability, according to Hume we remain bound by what he calls “human nature.” Even as we are transformed within culture, we remain animals. Roy Porter describes how the new medical sciences drew attention to humankind’s immanent, animal nature: “popular doctrines of the nerves presented the human animal as neither a Platonic *homo rationalis* nor a Christian original sinner, but as an embodied self . . . vibrating with impressions, emotions and sympathy conducted via the nervous system” (282). As a *language of nature* sentimentalism describes emotion’s biological foundations and its role in the economy of nature. Moreover, sentimentalism highlights the shared affective lives of humans and brutes. Based on the anatomical likeness between humans and animals, a near uniformity in muscles, nerves, and organs, Hume argues against an immortal human soul (though he allows that a system of universal “Metempsychosis” would overcome this objection) and for a fundamental “correspondence of passions in men and animals.”⁴⁸ “Animals,” he writes, “undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason, though in a more imperfect manner than men.”⁴⁹ The great skeptic himself writes with assuredness on a subject—the knowability of animal mind—that has been treated with profound skepticism by philosophers with far more metaphysical or positivistic certitude. Hume finds not just feeling but a principle of sociability operating throughout the “sensitive creation.” He observes “the force of sympathy thro’ the whole animal creation, and the easy communication of sentiments from one thinking being to another. In all creatures that prey not upon others . . . there appears a remarkable desire of company.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, 212.

⁴⁹ David Hume, “On the Immortality of the Soul,” in *Selected Essays*, 325.

⁵⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, 255 and 234.

One prevailing definition of sentimentality contrasts its subjectivism with science's dispassionate objectivity. The ecocritic Karl Kroeber, for instance, rejects the "cheap sentimentalism" of contemporary social ecology, opposing a hazy affection for organic nature to the "complexity of scientific ecology."⁵¹ Eighteenth-century natural history, however, was closely aligned with the sentimental movement. Jessica Riskin has shown in a French context that natural history was understood to be a humanizing activity.⁵² More significantly, "sensibility" served as a foundational term for investigations of animal life. John Ray, in his physico-theological masterpiece, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691), opposes mechanistic descriptions of animal behavior. In accounting for animal consciousness, he posits the "vital Principle" of a "sensitive Soul" or "Plastick Nature."⁵³ Specifically associating the Cartesian beast-machine with an invitation to brutality, he contends that nonhumans "having the same Members and Organs of Sense as we have, it is very probably they have the same Sensations and Perceptions with us" (39). Over the next century, naturalists abandoned Ray's quasi-supernatural vitalism but retained his emphasis on sensibility as the foundation of human/animal likeness. Robert Whytt's *Physiological Essays* of 1755 includes "Observation on the Sensibility and Irritability of the Parts of Men and other Animals," which recounts brutal experiments on brute creatures proving that nerves are the seat of sensibility. In his *Philosophy of Natural History*, Smellie

⁵¹ Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of the Mind* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 28.

⁵² Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002). In his *The Philosophy of Natural History* (Edinburgh, 1790), William Smellie proposes a surprising link between empiricism and sentimental education: "A habit of observations refines our feelings" (vi).

⁵³ John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (London, 1691), 26 and 37.

describes “sensibility” and “irritation”—in short, the operations of a nervous system—as a “distinctive” characteristic of “of animal life” (8).⁵⁴ Smellie provides numerous examples of animal emotion, often in highly anthropomorphic terms.⁵⁵ The elephant, he observes, has small eyes, but “they are lively brilliant, and capable of a pathetic expression of sentiment” (67). The only distinction between humans and nonhumans is a subtle one: many animals experience “feelings ... more exquisite than ours” and yet we have a capacity to reflect on and modify our instinctual passions (63).

This scientific recognition of the physiological similarity between humans and animals inspired attention to animal expression and to the ethical imperatives conveyed by such expression.⁵⁶ R.W. Serjeantson describes how early-modern natural philosophers differentiated between articulate human speech and a natural language of the passions, a distinction held in place by a series of dichotomies—intentional/reactive, rational/passionate, symbolic/embodied, conventional/instinctual—which purify

⁵⁴ “From numberless experiments and observations, it is unquestionable, that the nerves are the instruments both of sensation and animal motion,” Smellie, *Philosophy of Natural History*, 52.

⁵⁵ Eileen Crist, in *Images of Animals: Anthropomorphism and Animal Mind* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999), distinguishes between two approaches to the study of animal behavior. One, associated with Darwin (and, according to my argument, with a longer genealogy including Virgil and White), depicts animal action with language taken from the realm of “human affairs,” and thus “render[s] the animal world immanently meaningful; in turn, this affords the possibility of assigning ... [a] compelling presentation of inner life” (6). In contrast, a reliance on “technical language,” based on Cartesian skepticism about animal minds, conceptualizes “animals as natural objects,” “blind to the meaning and significance of their activities” (2, 6).

⁵⁶ In a 1997 lecture on the “autobiographical animal,” Jacques Derrida traces out the “Cartesian tradition of the animal-machine that exists without language and without the ability to respond.” See “And Say the Animal Responded,” trans. David Wills., in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003), 121. In this and other essays, Derrida considers the relation between this silencing and the exclusion of animals from ethical community. See also “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Winter 2002): 369-418; and “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” trans. Peter Conner and Avital Ronell, *Points . . . : Interviews 1974-94* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 255-87.

humanity's linguistic activity from the taint of the bestial.⁵⁷ René Descartes notoriously excluded animals from ethical community by designating their sounds and gestures meaningless, no different from the chimes of a clock. For eighteenth-century writers, the universality of expression, the common language of men and brutes, was a widely observed phenomenon.⁵⁸ Attacking Cartesianism, John Ray observes our native capacity to read and respond to animal "significations":

Should this be true, that Beasts were Automata or Machines, they could have no sense or perception of Pleasure or Pain, and consequently no Cruelty could be exercised against them; which is contrary to the doleful significations they make when beaten or tormented, and contrary to the common sense of Mankind, all men naturally pitying them as apprehending them to have such a sense and feeling of Pain and Misery as themselves have; whereas no man is troubled to see a Plant torn, or cut, or stampt, or mangled how you please. (39)

Animals express their passions, and, of equal importance, because of our *senses in common* we are capable of "apprehending" such expressions. In Ray's natural theology, this affective intelligibility and the pity it evokes confirm the providential intention of interspecies sociability and therefore trouble any anthropocentric defense of human cruelty. For Shaftesbury, writing *contra* Hobbes, our capacity to read "signs of joy and contentment" in "creatures foreign to our kind" offers proof of our natural sociability (204). In his 1776 animal-rights manifesto, *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, Humphrey Primatt extends the vague imperatives of Shaftesburian sociability into straightforward moral duties, calling for ethical and legal recognition of animal rights based on a recognition of shared articulateness: the "cries

⁵⁷ See R.W. Serjeantson, "The Passions and Animal Language, 1540-1700," *JHI* 62:3 (2001): 425-444.

⁵⁸ In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1759 (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1968), Edmund Burke points out that "the natural cries of all animals, even of those animals with whom we have not been acquainted, never fail to make themselves sufficiently understood; this cannot be said of language" (84).

and groans” which “are as strong an indication to us of his sensibility of pain, as the cries and groans of a *human* being, whose language we do not understand.”⁵⁹ When their bodies and cries become eloquent, affectively expressive, animals are seen as morally significant subjects.

A rhetoric of sensibility, which emphasizes corporeal semiosis, supplied a framework for literary depictions of animal expression. In *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*, Ann Jessie Van Sant argues that the growing stress on the nervous system in medical science accounts for the articulate human bodies noticed by critics of the sentimental novel: the blushes, trembling, tears, fainting spells, and other gestures, which make legible the emotional state of characters, bringing interiority to the body’s surface. Nonhuman animals talk back in the eighteenth century in part because the widely held principle that man himself must be viewed as an embodied animal—a brain, a bundle of nerves and organs—justified attention to our own extra-linguistic forms of communication. As G.S. Rousseau remarks, “the nerve emerged as the signifier” in every non-transcendental theory of “human behavior.”⁶⁰ Reference to the nervous system explained a variety of uniquely human phenomena, from melancholy to morality, yet were equally applicable to animals. Van Sant notes an essential rhetorical similarity between Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Robert Whytt’s accounts of animal vivisection: “Both are narratives of suffering; in both, suffering is revelatory” (vii). Bernard Mandeville employs precisely the sort of graphic body language Van Sant has in mind, when, while

⁵⁹ Humphrey Primatt, *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (London, 1776), 13-14.

⁶⁰ G.S. Rousseau, “Discourses of the Nerve,” 39.

reflecting on the socialization of cruelty and our innate experience of pity, he demands that we listen to and look upon the “Symptoms of Misery” in a dying creature:

When a large and gentle Bullock, after having resisted a ten times greater force of Blows than would have kill'd his Murderer, falls stunn'd at last, and his arm'd Head is fasten'd to the Ground with Cords; as soon as the wide Wound is made, and the Jugulars are cut asunder, what Mortal can without Compassion hear the painful Bellowings . . . , the bitter Sighs that speak the Sharpness of his Anguish, and the deep sounding Groans with loud Anxiety fetch'd from the bottom of his strong and palpitating Heart; Look on the trembling and violent Convulsions of his Limbs; see, . . . his Eyes become dim and languid, and behold his Strugglings, Gasps and last Efforts for Life, the certain Signs of his approaching Fate? When a Creature has given such convincing and undeniable Proofs of the Terrors upon him, and the Pains and Agonies he feels, is there a Follower of Descartes so inur'd to Blood, as not to refute, by his commiseration, the Philosophy of the vain Reasoner?⁶¹

Through its cries and gestures, the bullock speaks, signifies, and proves beyond a doubt its interior state, thereby claiming status as a sympathetic subject with recognizable interests. As Rousseau argues, the language of sensibility migrates from the New Science to the new humanitarianism. Several scholars have noticed this historically atypical recognition of animal subjectivity as it manifests in eighteenth-century literature.

Blanford Parker describes a new literalism in depictions of animals after the Restoration, which replaces the “symbolic animal substitution” of the analogical episteme and reflects an emerging sense of ontological proximity between humans and animals.⁶² In an early effort to account for an eighteenth-century aesthetic that is neither Augustan nor Romantic, Northrop Frye notices what he calls an “imaginative animism” in the latter

⁶¹ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* Vol. 1., 1714 (Indianapolis: Liberty P, 1988), 173, 180-1.

⁶² Blanford Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics: English Literary Culture from Butler to Johnson* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 122.

part of the century, which explains “the curiously intense awareness of the animal world which . . . is unrivalled in this period.”⁶³

The experiencing, expressive animals represented by the language of sentiment require a change in how critics think about the status of animals in literary texts. Cultural and literary historians have tended to follow the philosophical tradition by silencing nonhumans, concerned as we are with language as the touchstone of human culture. In a reading of *Moby-Dick*, Philip Armstrong remarks on the limitations of a “traditional literary investment in animals as figures for human concerns (via fable, allegory, personification, metaphor),” which manifests in a critical reception history in which the whale is solely “a screen for the projection of human meanings” (94-6). Interpretive strategies meant for allegorical beast fables are applied to all literary animals, who are read as symbolic substitutes for human beings and human qualities, evacuated of their animal presence. In the prevailing critical climate, to read a literary animal as an animal—to imagine the substantive, experiencing creatures who partake of, at times even instigate, literary mediation—is to fall prey to the pathetic fallacy, to commit the sin of anthropomorphism, or to reveal one’s naiveté about discourse’s dominion. Even in recent studies intent on recovering the cultural history of nonhumans, their silence remains axiomatic. In *Perceiving Animals*, Erica Fudge claims that historically animals “had no voices and left no textual traces.”⁶⁴ Similarly, in *The Animal Estate*, Harriet Ritvo works from the premise that “Animals . . . never talk back.”⁶⁵ These writers see animals as fully constituted within human discourse and never themselves articulate subjects. The

⁶³ Northrop Frye, “Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility,” *ELH* (June 1956): 144-52.

⁶⁴ Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002), 2.

⁶⁵ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1987), 5.

hermeneutic at work here follows the linguistic turn, according to which nothing exists (or signifies) independently of human language. Language and culture become synonymous; both terms establish the limitless domain of human activity, which subsumes all nature. Though its intentions are different, the poststructuralist privileging of textuality is complicit with the doggedly persistent philosophical claim that human singularity is a function of our capacity to speak.⁶⁶ This dissertation, then, is not about the way in which eighteenth-century writers spoke through the trope of the animal or about the use of the animal to establish the boundary of the human.⁶⁷ It is rather about the various ways in which animals are referred to as subjects, like and unlike human beings, within the historically situated discourse of sentimentalism.

Two books that examine the interrelated literary, cultural, and intellectual history of animal advocacy provide important precedents for this dissertation. Dix Harwood's under-read 1928 *Love for Animals and How it Developed in Great Britain* commences its

⁶⁶ Its self-evident logic offers an instance of what Jean-François Lyotard calls a "differend," a case where a party or entity "is divested of the means to argue," is harmed and given no "means to prove the damage," in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988), 5-9. The perfect crime, Lyotard points out, is one where the victims are silenced, their testimony deemed meaningless, their idiom defined to be without significance. The authority of the differend appears nowhere more forcefully than in the history of speciesism, whether a byproduct of hermeneutic practice or justified through a philosophy of language. As Cary Wolfe notes, Lyotard himself tends to think in terms of a fundamentally human subject, preventing "the animal from occupying any of the discursive positions necessary for the ethical force of the different to apply," in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), 59.

⁶⁷ Here I distinguish my project from Erica Fudge's oddly titled *Perceiving Animals*, where she writes that her book is "not so much about animals as about the ways humans define themselves as human in the face of the animal" (1). My aims are closer to those of John Simons, who wishes to "stress the ways in which animals appear in texts, are represented and figured, in and for themselves and not as displaced metaphors for the human," in *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 6. Giorgio Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004) and, in a specifically eighteenth-century context, Richard Nash's *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2003), provide sophisticated and useful analyses of the role animals play in defining the boundary of human identity.

analysis with the middle ages, but asserts that the “modern point of view” regarding animals “developed most radically in the eighteenth century.”⁶⁸ This development, for which Harwood musters a trove of anecdotes and references, is posed as a shift from localized attachments to generalized ethical concern. While people have expressed affection for domesticated animals throughout history, Harwood asserts, rarely was such affection “applied to beasts at large” before the eighteenth century (64). Sentimentality, I argue here, offers a particularly significant model for thinking about how affection is abstracted and obligation widely dispersed. Keith Thomas’s *Man and the Natural World* similarly observes a “profound shift in sensibilities . . . which occurred in England between the sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries.”⁶⁹ Thomas points to four broad conditions for changing attitudes toward animals and the natural world more generally: modern science, secularization, urbanization, and the growth of the middle class. I agree with Thomas’s broad theses. My argument is more specific. In order to explain the intellectual and cultural saturation of animal welfare discourse in the eighteenth century, I look to a sentimental language of affective community uniquely positioned to promote a sense of obligation toward other sensitive creatures.

III. The History of Concern

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, published in 1785, Immanuel Kant seeks to establish an *a priori* foundation for morality, one that may be separated from the

⁶⁸ Dix Harwood, *Love for Animals and How it Developed in Great Britain* (New York, 1928), 2. Cited hereafter in text.

⁶⁹ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 15. Thomas provides an agenda for this dissertation when he writes: “The historian’s task is to explain why the boundary encircling the area of moral concern should have been enlarged so as to embrace other species along with mankind” (150).

contingent domains of history, culture, and experience. For Kant, the human individual's capacity for private reflection and self-willed action provide the sole resources for ethical activity. Reacting to moral sense theory in general and to Hume's emphasis on cultural normativity in particular, Kant imagines a "pure moral philosophy completely cleansed of everything that can only be empirical and appropriate to anthropology," one that finds the "grounds of obligation" in "pure reason."⁷⁰ Kant's ethical subject must abstract him or herself entirely from the affections and propensities that are the starting point of a sentimental morality. His language of ethical purification stands in direct contrast to Hume's image of an ethics of emotional contagion, an ethics constituted through social norms and enculturated sympathies. This dissertation works from a Humean understanding of ethical relationships and social concerns, one that sees them not in abstract imperatives but as embedded within a specific historical idiom. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury conceived of a moral philosophy that would "Teach [him] how [he] came by such an opinion of worth and virtue" (135). In proposing a study of the history of morals, at least of his own morals, Shaftesbury represents his era's emphasis on the actual, lived elements of ethical relationships. He anticipates something like the "phenomenology of ethical feeling," concerned with the "heartfelt aspects of ethics—of love, care, sympathy," that Mick Smith has more recently suggested should replace Kantian ethics, which he defines as "an abstract theoretical tool for

⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 57. Kant's famous Formula of Humanity—that one must act so as to treat humans as ends rather than means—explicitly restricts direct ethical duties to the community of rational beings. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), Kant claims that "so far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man" (239). Kant, however, notices that we may be educated in cruelty—he cites Hogarth's *Four Stages of Cruelty*—and that we may learn to love animals, and decides that, with the aim of cultivating our own humanity, we have indirect duties to animals (240-1).

passing judgments.”⁷¹ In this dissertation, I hope to suggest that literary studies is an ideal location for such analysis because of the way literature operates at the site where language and emotion, the abstract and the felt, meet and interact.

Friedrich Nietzsche provides one influential alternative to Kant’s ethical ahistoricism. *The Genealogy of Morals* poses a problem similar to that observed by Shaftesbury, in that it seeks to establish the “story of how responsibility originated” in concrete historical conditions.⁷² Nietzsche even historicizes Kant, describing the process whereby Kant’s autonomous moral agent, who trusts himself alone, gains a mastery “over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures” (60). Kant’s categorical imperative is a derivative of the Judeo-Christian moral tradition, a “slave morality,” which out of its own weakness transforms the “‘unegoistic,’ the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice” into a virtue. Nietzsche sees moral claims and values as self-interested and self-mystifying exercises in dominion over the self and the world beyond the self. He expresses a special antipathy for sentimentality, which he calls “Buddhism for Europeans” (19). The “overestimation of and predilection for pity,” as it manifests in a “pernicious modern effeminacy of feeling,” is the clearest instance of the slave morality, which turns its weakness into power (19-20). In his genealogy, Nietzsche seeks to uncover the interests that motivate ethical claims, and, like Hobbes, he dismisses the possibility of other-directed feeling or action.

Though as often Marxist as Nietzschean, a skeptical approach—which assumes, in Nietzsche’s formulation, that a “concept denoting political superiority always resolves

⁷¹ Mick Smith, *An Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity, and Social Theory* (Albany NY: SUNY P, 2001), 17.

⁷² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 58. Cited hereafter in text.

itself into a concept denoting superiority of soul” (31)—continues to define much of the scholarship on sentimental ethics. The most frequently encountered interpretative strategy simply works to uncover the economic interests that underlie ostensibly sympathetic relationships. One example is Robert Markley’s “Sentimentality as Performance,” published in the influential collection of essays, *The New Eighteenth Century*.⁷³ Markley sees in sentimental prerogatives an active suppression of the economic conditions that make charity possible, an ideological obscuring of actual material inequity. The “ideology of sentiment” is necessarily “conservative and essentialist” in its class politics because it associates the “victims of social inequality . . . with ‘feminine’ powerlessness,” rendering them incapable of challenging their condition and dependent on the supposedly tender feelings of commercial and aristocratic elites (212).⁷⁴ It is true that sentimental relationships entail an imbalance of power, because the reader or spectator stands at a remove from a victim who suffers from an unjust social structure or natural evil. The sentimental spectator necessarily occupies a privileged position. Julie Ellison has proposed that in the early eighteenth century there is a “move away from defining sentiment in terms of transactions between socially equal persons and toward scenarios of inequality” (6). As Markley and others have noted, this power disparity means that sentimental scenes potentially invite sadistic spectators (Nietzsche on the contrary

⁷³ Robert Marley, “Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue,” in the *New Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987).

⁷⁴ In *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), Terry Eagleton writes of “the myths of ‘natural goodness’ with which a benevolently weeping bourgeoisie concealed from itself its own exploitative practice” (17). In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), however, Eagleton points out that the politics of sentimentality are never so straightforward, allowing that, while Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* may have been a conduct book for aristocratic men, it supplied a widely available language of “utopian critique” (38).

worries about the masochistic implications of identifying with the suffering other). Yet sentimentality's pitiable objects are victims before being introduced into representational networks of performative anguish and sympathetic spectatorship. Markley and others make the interpretive mistake of assuming *a priori* that within any asymmetrical relationship those in power necessarily seek only to preserve and expand their power.⁷⁵

A less forceful version of this negative hermeneutic suggests that the problem with sentimentality is its practical inefficacy, its limitation as a force of moral motivation. Sentimental scenarios may inspire an aesthetic response but not an actively ethical one. In *Sensibility: An Introduction*, Janet Todd describes literary feeling in the 1770s and 80s as having “a decadent quality about it, a self-indulgent physicality and a self-contemplating vanity.”⁷⁶ In the very period when imaginative literature becomes uncharacteristically and self-consciously politically active, primarily through its involvement in the anti-slavery movement, literary sensibility, Todd argues, has the sole aim of inspiring an “emotional response, whose beginning and end are literary” (93). Timothy Fulford finds this aesthetic economy of inaction earlier, in Thomson's humanitarian verse: it “is enough for the readers to feel these emotions; there is no question of being urged to take any preventative action. The readers can instead congratulate themselves on their improved sympathy.”⁷⁷ Sympathy for another allows one to feel good about oneself, and to translate that good feeling into a claim of moral authority, without actually

⁷⁵ In his account of the mediated quality of global humanitarianism, Luc Boltanski seeks to avoid “an easy denunciation of the perverse spectator” without simply celebrating a “return of kindness,” in *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, trans, Graham Burchell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), xiv.

⁷⁶ Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 62.

⁷⁷ Timothy Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 26.

contributing to the other's welfare.⁷⁸ Another version of this mode of analysis, which is premised on a surprising degree of certainty about the critic's capacity to discern the experience of the reader, emphasizes the contextless specificity of sentimental scenarios, assuming that pity for particularized victims never leads synecdochally to awareness of structural injustice, that localized affections are never the anchor of generalized concerns.⁷⁹ As Boltanski observes, this condition is inherent to a politics of pity—it aims to be general but is elicited by the concretely specific—but the particular, he reminds us, may be positioned as representative.⁸⁰

A different critical approach to eighteenth-century sentimentality reflects an aesthetic devaluation of didactic literature that has origins in Romanticism. It is apparent in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's changing attitude toward sentimentality and animal welfare. As a young radical, Coleridge wrote his own sentimental poem hailing an overworked ass as a brother, and he provided a straightforwardly didactic moral in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner": "He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast. // He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things great and small."⁸¹ He later disclaimed this sort of sentimental didacticism—the sort he associated with Anna Barbauld, thanks to whom, he wrote, it had "become universally fashionable to teach

⁷⁸ Glenn Hendler, "The Structure of Sentimental Experience," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12.1 (1999): 145-53, astutely treats the problem of "emotional response" and "concrete action" in the interpretation of sentimental literature (146).

⁷⁹ To offer an instance to which I will return in Chapter Three, Jonathan Lamb argues that in Sterne's fiction, "the dogs, horses, mules, and asses that are so frequently encountered by the sentimental traveler" are "symbolic of nothing outside the situations that frame them, enforcing neither a moral nor a lesson," in *Preserving the Self in the South Seas 1680-1840* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001), 263.

⁸⁰ Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*, 12.

⁸¹ S.T. Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," 1797-8, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H. J Jackson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), lines 612-15.

lessons of compassion towards animals.”⁸² The older Coleridge, referring to Barbauld’s judgment that the “Ancient Mariner” lacks a clear moral, decides that the poem in fact had too strong a didactic design, and that the “obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader” undermines the purpose of imaginative literature.⁸³ Romantic aestheticism constituted its hallowed domain of unimpinged imagination by expelling emotional didacticism, and the formalist critique of sentimentality is premised on the ensuing separation between ethics and aesthetics.⁸⁴ As a result of this aesthetic devaluation, contemporary critics have trouble recognizing what is potentially interesting and/or complex about sentimental literature. Thomson’s twentieth-century critical reception again serves as a telling example. Patricia Meyer Spacks discovers a lack of emotional sophistication in *The Seasons*, and, particularly in Thomson’s lessons of kindness toward animals, a “facile sentimentality.”⁸⁵ Most perplexingly, she defines “social benevolence” as a “simple and conventional feeling.” She contrasts the poem’s sentimental didacticism with several instances of “emotional richness,” which are based on internal ambiguity and self-division (39). In Spacks’s analysis we find a familiar critical privileging of representations of contradictory feeling, which leave a reader conflicted in his/her identifications. The straightforward emotional pedagogies and moral instrumentality Spacks identifies in Thomson’s poem have led twentieth-century critics to dismiss much

⁸² S.T. Coleridge, *The Watchman* IX (5 May 1796), in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Vol. 2, ed. Lewis Paton (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 313.

⁸³ S.T. Coleridge, *Table Talk* (31 May 1830), in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 593.

⁸⁴ See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, “Sentimental Aesthetics,” *American Literature* 76.3 (2004): 495-523. Jerome McGann, in *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), enacts a version of Romantic ideology when he reads the poetry of sensibility divorced from moral and political aims.

⁸⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Varied God: A Critical Study of Thomson’s The Seasons* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1959), 45-6, 149.

of the period's literature as lacking the virtues of formal complexity and psychological realism.

In seeking an alternative account of sentimental ethical concern to Kantian ahistoricism, Nietzschean suspicion, and Romanticism's anti-didactic aestheticism, I draw upon recent investigations of the genealogy of Anglo-American feelings, what Julie Ellison calls the "cultural history of public emotion" (2), and, more generally, the affirmation of feeling's role in social life made by moral philosophers like Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum.⁸⁶ My study contributes to the rehabilitation of sentimentality initiated by Jane Tompkins's seminal 1985 book *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*, which observes the aesthetic values that underlie sentimentality's rejection: a critical distaste for moral didacticism, sensationalistic plots, female authors, and popular fiction. Against this grain, she interprets American sentimental novels, above all *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with unusual generosity, emphasizing their "moral commitment" and utopian aims.⁸⁷ Sentimental novels, she writes, seek to "reorganize culture" based on a "theory of power" according to which "the very possibility of social action is made dependent on the action taking place in individual hearts" (124, 128). Following Tompkins and the critical project she inspired, I consider this dissertation to be a cultural history of social concern, in which literature is seen to determine affective norms and foster communal identification.⁸⁸ This

⁸⁶ Robert Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), defines sentimentality as "the precondition for ethical engagement" (4); see also Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

⁸⁷ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 123. Cited hereafter in text.

⁸⁸ In addition to Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*, Ellison's *Cato's Tears* and Ellis's *The Politics of Sensibility*, the following works have been particularly useful in the ways they think about the genealogy of affect and the problem of sentimentality in a manner not overdermined by the

project commences from a significant etymological fact: in the eighteenth century, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “concern” comes to designate not only a perceived relationship but also a type of “sentiment.” As my two initial epigraphs indicate, when feeling is understood as the primary element of intersubjective relationality, the province of potential concerns expands to include all sensitive beings. This is a history of moral reference and of literature conceived as a means for extending such reference. I take seriously the sentimental notion that identification and obligation may be cultivated, in the ways we talk to each other and to ourselves, in what we write and what we read. Throughout this dissertation, I will be in dialogue with literary and cultural historians who have been revising inherited assumptions about sentimentalism (although I will also be suggesting that these studies have been unduly human-centered, given the extent to which sentimentalism was recognized by its eighteenth-century supporters and critics alike to redefine interspecies relations). For more general models of a genealogy of moral sentiments as they are embedded in social life and framed in literary texts, I look to work by William Reddy, Thomas Haskell, and Raymond Williams.

In *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, Reddy establishes a historical “anthropology of emotions” capable of accounting for their biological universality and cultural specificity. Reddy proposes that any culture may be defined by a specific “emotional regime”: a particular sets of rules guiding the translation

hermeneutic of suspicion: Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passions: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996); Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995); Margaret Cohen, “Sentimental Communities,” in *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), 106-32; Lauren Berlant, “Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding),” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-13.

of embodied feeling into speech about feeling and the discourses that govern such speech, which is to say, that define how emotional statements are ranked and operate in relation to each other and to wider social structures, practices, epistemes, and events.⁸⁹ He draws attention to a specifically linguistic element of emotion, a type of speech act that has performative and descriptive elements but can be reduced to neither, which he calls an “emotive”: “first-person, present tense emotion claims” (104). Through our use of emotives and other “emotional utterances,” Reddy contends, we absorb and negotiate collective emotional norms. His framework is particularly useful for this project because his Latourian argument that emotions are mutually constituted by biological forces and cultural vocabularies resonates with a primary supposition of eighteenth-century sentimentalism: that human beings share with other creatures an emotional life and yet have a uniquely cultural relation to emotions. Reddy’s framework also reveals why literary history will be central to any genealogy of moral sentiment, because it argues that at the heart of such history is the way we talk, think, and write about feeling.

In 1985, Thomas Haskell published two articles in *The American Historical Review* entitled “Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility.”⁹⁰ Although Haskell is interested in the emergence of humanitarianism in general—including prison and school reform, poor relief, and the care of the insane—his articles respond directly to earlier interpretations of abolitionism and have been read primarily in this context.

⁸⁹ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 63. Cited hereafter in text.

⁹⁰ Thomas Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility,” Parts 1 and 2, *American Historical Review* 90.2-3: 334-61 Apr 85; 547-66 June 85. These essays participate in a larger conversation described in Thomas Bender, Introduction, *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem of Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992).

Previous studies of the anti-slavery movement, most significantly David Brion Davis's *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (1975), depict it as an ideological reflection of economic interests. Abolitionist rhetoric is linked to an emerging middle class's defense of wage labor and assertion of cultural authority. Without discounting this hypothesis, Haskell proposes a connection between "humanitarian sensibility"—the very term implies an attempt to connote a level of felt experience not reducible to ideology—and certain cognitive changes brought about by capitalism (I 341). The expansion of a market economy effects a new perception of "causal connection" among remote strangers (I 342). Capitalism requires a capacity to calculate the spatially and temporally distant consequences of one's actions, and even marginal participants in the global market, Haskell argues, gained an enlarged sensitivity to the possible effects of local activity. Such calculation and sensitivity offer a foundation for the new humanitarianism, because—and this is the key to Haskell's thesis—moral responsibility requires an understanding of specific possibilities for ameliorative action, what Haskell calls "recipe" knowledge. This is not to say that the market is inherently humane, nor does it explain the particular manifestations of humanitarian concern in any given historical period. But Haskell's argument usefully suggests that "sensibility" is a mode of emotionally experiencing delocalized relationships and responsibilities, and it hints at why questions of action and effect, of will and consequence, come to be central in debates about the value of sentimental moral imperatives. Such questions are a central focus in Chapter Three, but throughout this dissertation I follow Haskell in suggesting that reading and writing in the eighteenth century provide a type of recipe knowledge, a stage for moral action, an avenue for exercising obligation toward others.

For scholars working on sentimentality, Raymond Williams's concept of a "structure of feeling," developed most prominently in *Marxism and Literature*, has been an inviting, though also challenging, theoretical resource.⁹¹ In *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s*, Chris Jones proposes that a structure of feeling "has many similarities with the concept of sensibility," above all in its stress on the transpersonal and symbolic dimensions of felt experience.⁹² Williams himself gives reason to regard sentimentality as a structure of feeling, when he relates the latter to the formation of a new class, and cites as his specific instance the very years in which the sentimental doctrine is articulated: "England, 1700-60."⁹³ Kevis Goodman, however, discriminates between a structure of feeling and more "shapely, staged, or well-defined emotions," such as "the sentiment of Yorick."⁹⁴ According to Williams, a structure of feeling is not quite ready to be articulated, a "formation . . . at the very edge of semantic availability" (134), and thus, as Goodman argues, appears distinct from the well-formed sentimental discourse excavated and explained by cultural historians. Yet Williams's formulation remains useful for thinking about sentimentality and the history of social concern. A structure of feeling is meant to identify a dimension of social life that by its very nature tends to escape critical analysis and yet very well may be historically determinative. Culture and ideology, while useful terms according to Williams, fail to

⁹¹ For a critical genealogy of the concept as it appears in Williams's work, see David Simpson, "Raymond Williams: Feelings for Structures, Voicing 'History,'" *Social Text* 30 (1992): 9-26.

⁹² Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), vii.

⁹³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 134. Cited hereafter in text.

⁹⁴ Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 4. In a footnote, Goodman acknowledges that there is only a "fine line—between a discomfort that cannot be easily named [a structure of feeling] and public displays of identifiable emotions (such as pity, pride, or other performances in the repertoire of sensibility)" (145).

recognize an element of affective experience lived in the present, feeling that is not a personal but “a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating” (132). The structure of feeling concept usefully resists a general habit of associating feelings with individuals, while explaining why even collectively experienced emotion may appear personal and particular. Most importantly, the concept encourages sensitivity to the irresolution and complex interweaving of ideologies that define any given historical moment, as well as a recognition that it is in the affective realm that ideology is lived and navigated. It points to an aspect of communal experience that is neither fully ideational nor ideological, and thus suggests that the cultural history of feeling can be recovered in full through neither the history of ideas nor the negative hermeneutic of ideology critique.

Chapter One

Hobbes, Shaftesbury, and the Domain of Ethics: Affections, Natural and Cultivated

We know that every creature has a private good and interest of his own, which nature has compelled him to seek by all advantages afforded him within the compass of his make. We know that there is in reality a right and a wrong state of every creature, and that his right one is by nature forwarded and by himself affectionately sought.

—Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*

Introduction

In the history of Western ethics, nonhuman animals have generally been excluded from the province of moral reference for one central reason: they are seen to lack a rational soul and thus access to both the realm of spirit and the community of fellowship and justice established among men. Aristotle's account of the absolute difference between men and brutes, and its moral consequences, remained influential until the eighteenth century. He maintains that while humans share a sensitive soul with other creatures, we alone have reason and belief. In *The Politics*, he posits a principle of duality, which manifests in all living beings, between ruling elements and subjected elements. Just as the mind rules over the passions in a human individual, his analogy explains, humankind rule over brute animals: "When there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals . . . the lower sort are by nature slaves."¹ He suggests, moreover, that only those beings capable of acting just are in turn due justice, setting out a principle of reciprocity according to which moral consideration requires moral autonomy. As he states in the *Ethics*, because a horse or an ox lacks what is the defining

¹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 10. Cited hereafter in text.

characteristic of humanity, a faculty for making deliberate choices, neither friendship nor justice may be extended to them.² Though animals share sensation and memory with humans, because they lack reason they are beyond the bounds of ethical concern.

In the Christian West, Aristotle's influence can be seen in the theology of St. Augustine, who states in *The City of God* that all animals, whether they "fly, swim, walk, or crawl," lack rationality, and, "for this reason, by the most just ordinance of their Creator, both their life and death are subject to our needs."³ Augustine confirmed the philosopher's opinion with regard to human dominion in his commentary on the New Testament episode of the Gadarene swine, in which Christ sends the demons that had been plaguing a man into a herd of swine, who then fall dead into the sea.⁴ At much greater length than Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, in the magnum opus of medieval scholasticism, *Summa Theologica*, limned the boundary between men and animals. He claims that men have control over their own actions and animals do not; it follows that the latter should be considered solely as instruments. He invokes Aristotle's master/slave dichotomy and states that, "as man, being made to the image of God, is above other animals, these are rightly subjected to his government."⁵ He further asserts that no charity

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. W.D. Ross (London: Oxford UP, 1915), 1161a. See Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origin of the Western Debate* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), a useful study of the place of animals in classical philosophy. Sorabji presents a more nuanced picture than the one offered here—to offer one example: Epicurus believed that wild animals have no sense of right and wrong, whereas tamed animals are responsible for their conduct (115)—but his general thesis is that Aristotle and the Stoics based their exclusion of animals from the realm of moral reference on their irrationality. Peter Harrison establishes the Aristotelian inheritance in seventeenth-century Britain, in "Animal Souls, Metempsychosis, and Theodicy in Seventeenth-Century English Thought," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31.4 (October 1993): 519-544.

³ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 33.

⁴ On Augustine's interpretation of the episode of the Gadarene swine, see Sorabji 195-6.

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns & Oates, 1947), 1.96.1.

is due to animals because charity ought be extended only to our neighbors, among whom “irrational creatures” are not included “since they have no fellowship with man in the rational life” (2.25.3). There have been countervailing voices, primarily in the lineage of Pythagoreans who asserted that animals have souls and are thus due justice. However, while the problem of the animal has never disappeared from Western moral philosophy, the primacy given to transcendental reason in classical and Christian metaphysics has generally ensured a thoroughly anthropocentric solution.

In the aftermath of the English Civil War, moral and political philosophers worked to formulate a system of ethics without recourse to transcendental authority. This “empiricist ethics” takes as its starting point a psychological appraisal of human nature.⁶ Hobbes and Shaftesbury, the subjects of this chapter, both contributed to the development of a naturalistic moral psychology that elevates embodied feeling over reason. Because humans and animals share access to the passions, as even Aristotle recognized, this moral philosophy undermined humanity’s perceived superiority over the brutes and put pressure on the boundaries of moral concern. Yet where Hobbes reconceives human distinctiveness as a capacity to form societies and so tame our selfish passions, thus providing a natural rather than metaphysical justification for speciesism, Shaftesbury pictures a providential world wherein social feeling is natural and universal. In a world designed by a compassionate Creator, humans and nonhumans share the emotional consciousness that is the source of moral status. According to Shaftesbury, however, humans are endowed with unique responsibilities as a result of our singular faculty for cultivating our passions.

⁶ I borrow this term from Blakey Vermeule, who characterizes “empiricist ethics” as seeking “to understand how psychology grounds different aspects of our moral lives, from our moral sentiments to our normative moral codes,” *The Party of Humanity*, 4.

I. Speaking (of) Wolves: Hobbes and Shaftesbury

In his *De Cive* (1647) and *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes challenged the traditional definition of a human uniqueness based on a rational and immortal soul and in its place posited an absolute material continuity between humans and other creatures. He states “that which is not Body is no part of the Universe,” thus situating humans in a fully physical cosmos, shorn of Platonic essences, Aristotelian ends, Christian souls, plastic powers, angels, demons, and all other metaphysical chimeras.⁷ Scholars have long noted the methodological and cosmological influence of Galileo’s mechanistic natural philosophy on Hobbes and the confluence between Hobbes’s materialist theories of nature, moral psychology, and government.⁸ From Galileo, he took a view of the universe as consisting solely of matter in motion, entirely reducible to mechanical relationships of cause and effect, and a method of analysis that reduces complex systems to their essential components. Hobbes imagines a world without the idealized stasis of transcendental reason, with only the unceasing movement of substantial bodies. He applies this materialist stance to his image of human nature, and, in doing so, he conceives the discourses of ethical naturalism and egoistic psychology that are, according to Sidgwick, the “starting-point for independent ethical philosophy in England.”⁹

Consciousness, in Hobbes’s view, can be accounted for solely in terms of corporeal processes. Our knowledge and experience of the world are derived solely through sense impressions, which, with the “mediation of Nerves, and other strings, and

⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968), 689. Hereafter cited in text.

⁸ See Douglas M. Jesseph, “Galileo, Hobbes, and the Book of Nature,” *Perspectives of Science* 12.2 (2004): 191-211; and J.W.N Watkins, *Hobbes’s System of Ideas: A Study in the Political Significance of Philosophical Theories* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965).

⁹ Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics*, 163.

membranes of the body, continue[] inwards to the Brain, and Heart” (85). Imagination and memory consist of the after-image of sensory experience and thus can be found “in men, and many other living Creatures” alike (88). Likewise, given the corporeal foundation of cognition, causal analysis, foresight, prudence, and understanding are all “common to Man and Beast” (98). Finally, humans are animals insofar as our sole source of activity and motivation are the passions, which can be reduced to desire and fear, which themselves can be reduced to two types of motion, one approaching, the other retiring (119).¹⁰ Passions, according to Hobbes, are intransigent natural forces, and, just like “other living creatures,” humans are driven by the “alternate succession of Appetites, Aversion, Hopes and Fears” (127). Because Hobbes downgrades cognition to a kind of substantial motion, because he conceives of no thinking independent of the passions, he leaves no method by which we might reflect on and transform the passions. As his contemporaries noticed, this means that volition, the free will that is the foundation for sin or salvation, is evacuated from the human frame. No longer situated on the great chain of being, between beast and angel, at once body and spirit—the divided existential state that had so troubled Hobbes’s contemporary, the poet George Herbert—Hobbes’s humans are merely animals who talk.

While Hobbes is notorious for effacing the long-standing metaphysical boundary between humans and animals, in its place he prioritized another category of human distinction: the capacity to speak.¹¹ Language enters the world when God instructs Adam

¹⁰ Hobbes does define human passions as more egoistic than those of other animals, and he allows humans one passion unavailable to other creatures—curiosity, or “Lust of the mind” (124).

¹¹ Erica Fudge, in *Perceiving Animals*, describes a shift from conscience to language as the central marker human identity in the seventeenth century: “The logic of Reformed ideas reveal the impossibility of a stable status which can be termed human. Instead the idea of conscience, an invisible status, is replaced by the more determinable ability of speech” (63).

to name the animals, and, Hobbes conjectures, Adam gave “more names, as the experience and use of the creatures should give him occasion” (*Leviathan* 100).

Language is invented in an exercise of human dominion, the domestication of animals, and thereafter it categorically differentiates man from brute. Animals cannot speak, and it is through speech that humans overcome their animal nature and establish social institutions:

But the most noble and profitable invention of all other, was that of SPEECH, consisting of the *Names* or *Appellations*, and their Connexion; whereby men register their Thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them one to another for mutuall utility and conversation; without which, there had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons, Bears, and Wolves. (100)

Speech is used to systematize, remember, and communicate thought. Speech does not permit access to a transcendental knowledge—Hobbes is to a large extent a nominalist—but with it we are able to establish general rules, analyze the “laws of nature,” and negotiate a social contract. Hobbes’s position is that there is no community prior to human speech; the state of nature is essentially pre-social, and speech is constitutive of society. He posits a separation between a mechanistic natural world, consisting of atoms and bodies in motion, and a social, linguistic, and solely human world. By permitting the articulation of common purpose, speech, not feeling, ties men together; passion, in the form of competing desires, is what places men in opposition to each other. Language, the primary conduit of society, replaces soul as the defining marker of human identity, as that which, in Hobbes’s terms, “distinguish[es] men from all other living creatures” (98-9).¹²

¹² Hobbes does note that humanity’s innate interest in causes and future events is the “seed of Religion” in man, which is “not to be found in other Living Creatures” (168). This leads to an interesting exchange with a French friend of Hobbes, François du Verdus, who proposed translating *Leviathan*. On the subject of animal religiosity, du Verdus notes that elephants are known to worship the sun and adds, “But even if that were not true, who can tell what goes on in

At the beginning of his section in *Leviathan* on the commonwealth, Hobbes addresses Aristotle's argument concerning social animals, with the aim of differentiating the instinctual drives of nonhumans from the self-interested, rational basis of human confederation. In *Historia Animalium*, Aristotle had delineated between solitary and gregarious animals; of the latter, some, including bees, ants, wasps, and cranes, are social, which is to say, they cooperate toward a common purpose.¹³ Humans, Aristotle notes, present "a mixture of the two characteristics" (488.8-9). Aristotle sees in man a natural sociability and in animals a natural capacity for social learning, which is to say, he does not set up an absolute division between instinctual and cultural activity. Human politics itself can be considered a continuation of an essentially natural drive: "[T]he state is a creation of nature, and . . . man is by nature a political animal" (*Politics* 3). In his response to Aristotle, Hobbes's intention is to demonstrate that humans, unlike bees and ants, are not innately social, which is why human communities require a coercive authority in order to maintain cohesion. Hobbes points out that Aristotle's so-called social animals do not have the reason to find fault with their social order; nor do they show the egoism and self-interest which lead to competition among humans. In essence, agreement among social animals is innate and unconscious, whereas for men it is "Artificiall," which is why an extrinsic power is necessary to "direct [men's] actions to the Common benefit" (226-7). For Aristotle, the social whole comes before the individual, whether we are speaking

the brains and hearts of other animals?" François du Verdus to Thomas Hobbes (3 December 1656), in *Thomas Hobbes: The Correspondence* Vol., 1, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994), 363.

¹³ Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, trans. D'arcy Wentworth Thomson, in *The Works of Aristotle* vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 488.1-14. Cited hereafter in text. See also Arnhart's "The Darwinian Biology of Aristotle's Political Animals," *American Journal of Political Science* 38.2: 464-85.

of animal or human communities; on the contrary, for Hobbes the state is an unnatural amalgamation of individual interests.

With this differentiation between social animals and rational self-interested humans, Hobbes reminds his readers why the commonwealth is a profoundly fragile entity, held together only by the tenuous grasp of the sovereign's power. The Leviathan is an artificial animal, always straining against the natural tendencies of its individual human constituents. Although Hobbes defines a linguistically constituted society as the basis for a categorical distinction between humans and nonhumans, in his analysis humanity's animal nature never fully recedes and our desires always remain in conflict. In making the point, in *De Cive*, that humans only ever provisionally transcend the natural state of war, he establishes one of his most explicit, and certainly his most well known, analogies between humans and wild animals. He writes, "both sayings are very true: That Man to Man is a kind of God; and that Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe."¹⁴ The first statement describes men living together under the absolute authority of a sovereign; the second describes international affairs, where there is no overarching authority to govern.¹⁵ The roving, asocial wolf stands for our natural tendency toward "War, Deceit and Violence: that is in plaine termes a meer brutall Rapacity." Humans prior to the establishment of a commonwealth are no different than wild animals, and even in the commonwealth that innate wildness still lurks within. Even though we may appear domesticated by the dress of society and manners, we remain wolf-like and assume that

¹⁴ Thomas Hobbes, Dedication, *De Cive* (London 1651).

¹⁵ That the figure of the vicious wolf standing in for international affairs was dusted off in a recent advertisement by the Bush administration attacking John Kerry is not surprising given the way this administration has adopted a Hobbesian discourse which sees fear as the master passion.

others do as well, which, Hobbes writes in *Leviathan*, is why we lock our door at night (186).

Hobbes furnished a theory of moral psychology to a society increasingly defined less by stable, hierarchical relationships upheld by divine sanction than by the competing desires of anonymous individuals in a market economy.¹⁶ As a radical nominalist, he allows no moral absolutes, no good or evil beyond those definitions agreed upon by convention and maintained by coercion. That which we desire, we designate “good”; that which is averse, we designate “evil” (120). Thus he condemns as impractical and meaningless older schools of moral philosophy, dedicated to notions of a greatest good, idealized virtue, or divine law. Moral philosophy, he claims, is merely a descriptive “Science” of good and evil as these terms are defined by “the conversation, and Society of Mankind” (216). This science of morals begins by establishing the constituent elements of society: atomized human individuals defined as fundamentally self-interested and acquisitive, and their passions, which conform to an egoistic psychology. Thus Hobbes establishes a hermeneutic of the passions that necessarily reduces all feeling to narrow self-concern. Pity for the suffering experienced by another, for example, amounts to an imagined sense that “the like calamity may befall” oneself (126). Similarly, we feel love for those from whom we received benefits (163). In the history of ethical ideas, this position establishes Hobbes as a modern ethical empiricist who formulates a theory of mutual obligation without any recourse to transcendent laws or ideals.¹⁷ In claiming to describe man as he really is, he transforms the geography of moral philosophy. Rather than speculating on what sort of ethical behavior is expected of rational man in a

¹⁶ See MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 131-2.

¹⁷ See Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics*, 168; and MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 130-139.

providential cosmos, he asks: what sort of ethical behavior can be expected of men who are essentially animals living in a state of nature? His answer is a system of mutual constraint built from what he considered to be the essence of human nature: a desire for power that is itself a reflection of an overriding fear of death.

Animals are excluded from the domain of Hobbesian ethical concern because they can neither make nor be governed by covenants. Because the state of nature is a state of ongoing warfare and because relations between humans and animals can never transcend this natural state, it follows, Hobbes maintains, that “one may at discretion reduce to one’s service any animals that can be tamed or made useful, and wage continual war against the rest as harmful, and hunt them down and kill them.”¹⁸ Humankind’s dominion over animals, Hobbes continues, must be considered a natural right rather than a divinely-granted positive right, because prior “to the publication of holy scriptures” animals and humans were engaged in a state of war; “Since therefore, it is by natural right that an animal kills a man, it will be by the same right that a man slaughters an animal” (105-6). Because nonhumans live outside the realm of potential sociability, and because it is impossible to conceive of a sovereign power who could rule over and create fear in both humans and animals, animals are excluded from moral consideration. This argument serves the heuristic purpose of limning the boundary of contractual society, with animals defining its outside.

Hobbes excludes theological considerations from the domain of political and moral life—leaving a place for religious institutions and beliefs only insofar as they contribute to the authority of the sovereign—and, based on this exclusion, he situates humans on an immanent material plane with other animals. In conceiving of the social

¹⁸ Hobbes, *De Cive*, 105.

body in terms of a linguistically negotiated contract, however, he excludes nonhumans from any theory of community formation or moral reference. In his account of humanity's transcendence of the state of nature, Hobbes asserts both humanity's animal origin and its unique capacity for self-conscious social organization.¹⁹

Criticism of Hobbes, who was often figured as a leviathan, a whale or sea-monster, harpooned by charges of impiety or atheism, was vehement and pervasive in the late seventeenth century.²⁰ What Hobbes's critics tended to share, irrespective of their theological or political backgrounds, was a habit of seeing Hobbes as the philosopher who placed humans on par with animals. Basil Willey describes what was at stake in Hobbes's rejection of the rational soul: "To deny it, in the seventeenth century, was no light matter of academic debate; it was the worst of atheisms, for it set man amongst the brutes."²¹ Bishop John Bramhall, Hobbes's chief contemporary antagonist, attacked Hobbes for reducing men to mere mechanical instruments, devoid of rationality and free will, and thus equivalent to the brutes. Bramhall claims a fundamental distinction between the spontaneous activity of a spider casting a web or a bird building a nest and the moral freedom of men. Bramhall's most interesting observation is based on a

¹⁹ This squares with Keith Thomas's observation, in *Man and the Natural World*, that the later conjectural history of the Scottish Enlightenment saw humans emerging from an animal state, and defined humanness in terms of the processes associated with society and language, rather than innate difference. Humanness comes to be figured increasingly as a kind of activity rather than an innate quality (130-2).

²⁰ Alexander Ross, in *Leviathan drawn out with a hook, or, Animadversions upon Mr. Hobbs* (London, 1653), imagined himself in a long line of humans fighting wild beasts: "David encountered with a Lion and a Bear; Daniel conversed among Lions; Paul fought with Beasts at Ephesus; Hercules skirmished with an Erymanthian Bear, a Nemaean Lion, a Lernaean Hydra; Aeneas drew his sword against the shadows of Centaures, Harpies, Gorgons, and Chimeras; but I have to do with a strange monster, called Leviathan" (To the Reader). See also Bishop Bramhall's *The Catching of the Leviathan, or the Great Whale* (1658)

²¹ Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1953), 107.

misreading that indicates that the problematic status of the animal is inescapable in the Hobbesian moral universe. Because Hobbes defines reason as itself a mere sense operation, Bramhall suggests, Hobbes “denieth to man all *dominion over the creatures.*” In eliminating the central category of metaphysical uniqueness, Hobbes “stood probationer for the place of Attorney General of the brutes.”²² Given that Hobbes explicitly argued for humanity’s natural right to dominion, Bramhall’s claim is revealing. It suggests how ingrained was the Aristotelian argument, which makes humanity’s rational soul the sole basis for unlimited rule over animals.

One angle of *ad hominem* attack depicted Hobbes as himself a brute, characterizing as beastly the philosopher who situated humans among the beasts. King Charles II, whom Hobbes had tutored during the king’s exile in France and then angered by writing a work, *Leviathan*, which legitimated Puritan rule, called him a “bear,” and he was widely referred to as the “monster” or “beast” of Malmesbury.²³ Critics described him as a “wild Bore [that] hath been in the Vineyard” and a “troublesome Fly, . . . always busie about the sores of Human Nature.”²⁴ A more theological line of critique emerged from the Cambridge Platonists Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, who saw Hobbes’s staunch materialism as even more dangerously atheistic than Descartes’s sundering of

²² John Bramhall, *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes his last animadversions in the case concerning liberty and universal necessity wherein all his exceptions about that controversie are fully satisfied* (London: 1657). Although he argues that “They were created for the use of man,” Bramhall does allow that “the tormenting even of the brute creatures needlessly for the pleasing of our sensual appetites, or the satisfaction of our humour, is not onely unchristian, but unhumane” (45).

²³ Ross Harrison, *Hobbes, Locke, and Confusion’s Masterpiece: An Examination of Seventeenth-Century Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). Harrison continues “Charles enjoyed watching Hobbes being baited at court. They went for the beast. Hobbes was hunted; *Leviathan* was hunted” (52).

²⁴ Quoted in Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1962), 55-7.

matter and spirit. Although Cudworth did criticize Hobbes for leveling the distinction between men and animals—“He does not perceive any high[er] degree of man than in an oyster”—he and More pointed to deeper moral and metaphysical problems with Hobbes’s philosophy: his reduction of ethics to relations of power, the determinism that follows from his mechanistic worldview, and the inadequacy of his mechanical thesis to explain the growth of plants, generation and instinct in animals, or human rationality.²⁵

Another line of attack came from the latitudinarians, liberal Anglican divines who found evidence for God’s benevolence in the order and beauty of the natural world.²⁶ They challenged Hobbes on the grounds not that he misrepresents humans by equating them with animals, but that he misrepresents animals, and in so doing, casts doubt on the existence of a loving Deity. The mystical poet and preacher Thomas Traherne pointed out that, although it may “surprise an Atheistical fool, that it should be ones interest to love another better than one self; yet Bears, Dogs, Hens, Bees, Lions, do it; they die for their

²⁵ Ralph Cudworth, *True Intellectual System* III 343. On the neo-Platonist response to Hobbes, see Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 80-102; and Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, 51-4 and 77-8.

²⁶ A number of writers disputed Hobbes’s analogy between humans and beasts for sociological rather than theological reasons. The Duchess in Margaret Cavendish’s utopian fiction, *The Blazing World*, 1666 (London: Penguin, 1994), 100, sets out to fashion a new world based on famous philosophical cosmologies. She finds that the world of Platonic Ideas lacks motion, Epicurus’s infinite atoms form a monstrous chaos, and the Cartesian vortices put her into a drunken dizziness. Finally she envisages a world “according to *Hobbs's* Opinion; but when all the parts of this Imaginary World came to press and drive each other, they seemed like a company of Wolves that worry Sheep, or like so many Dogs that hunt after Hares.” She decides that this state of affairs would create a stultifying stasis and is thus inadequate for envisioning a new world. In his “An Essay upon the Original and Nature of Government,” *The Works of Sir William Temple* vol. 1 (Greenwood Press: New York, 1968), 10, William Temple explores at length the animal analogy. Noting that writers on politics have long debated about whether human nature tends more toward solitude and competition or society and cooperation, he turns to the animal realm and speculates that herbivorous animals are inclined more toward natural sociability, while carnivores, due to the greater difficulty of finding food, are usually solitary. But, he realizes, wolves are seen in “herds to run down a deer.” In the end, he points out that men can be understood neither in terms of absolute individualism nor sociability: “Nor do I know, if men are like Sheep, why they need any government: Or if they are like wolves, how can they suffer it.”

young ones.” Traherne directly addresses Hobbes’s denigration of alpha predators and revises his claim that desire is the driving force of life:

THERE is no Creature so unsociable and furious but it is capable of loving something or other. Wolves and Tygres live at peace among themselves, Lions have an Inclination to their Grim Mistresses, and Deformed Bears a natural Affection to their Whelps, expressed in their Rage, when they are bereaved of them. Things must either be absolutely Dead, or live in misery, that are void of love.²⁷

In a similar vein, the preacher John Tillotson cites Aristotle in arguing that humans are naturally sociable, and he locates the foundation for human friendship and kinship in inclinations that can be compared with “those instincts which are in brute creatures, of natural affection and care toward their young ones.”²⁸

Although Shaftesbury was influenced by the optimistic theology of the Cambridge Platonists, in his most direct critique of Hobbes he follows the latitudinarians in appealing to observation of the animal world. Shaftesbury’s argument is that human sociability, in the form of natural affections, derives from nature, and in thus refuting Hobbes, he refers to the authority of “natural history”:

For to say in disparagement of man that ‘he is to man a wolf’ appears somewhat absurd, when one considers that wolves are to wolves very kind and loving creatures. The sexes strictly join in the care and nurture of the young, and this union is continued still between them. They howl to one another to bring company, whether to hunt or invade their prey or assemble on the discover of a good carcase.²⁹

In asserting that wolves form intra-species collectives, based on familial bonds, shared affections, and common interests, Shaftesbury transforms the significance of Hobbes’s analogy. If those beasts long considered to be among the most rapacious and anti-social—Aristotle classed wolves among the “savage” beasts (*Historia Animalium*

²⁷ Thomas Traherne, *Christian Ethicks* (London 1675), 520, 69.

²⁸ Quoted in R.S. Crane, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the Man of Feeling,” 224.

²⁹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 288.

488.30)—are in fact affectionate and cooperative amongst themselves, surely humans are not the purely egoistic beings Hobbes represents them to be. Shaftesbury had made a similar point in his first published writing, a preface to the *Sermons* (1697) of the latitudinarian preacher Benjamin Whichcote. Shaftesbury begins the preface by suggesting that Hobbes in his account of the passions “forgot to mention Kindness, Friendship, Sociableness, Love of Company and Converse, Natural Affection.”³⁰ Hobbes, he observes, discovers less “*Good-nature*” in humans than in “the worst of Beasts.” In humans Hobbes only finds “mischievous Passions,” those connected with egoism and ambition, which do not exist among animals, who, Shaftesbury continues, even Hobbes would admit show affections for their own kind—which is more than he allows for man.

What is especially notable about Hobbes’s reception is the way natural history becomes the defining context for debates about human moral psychology. Even the metaphysician Henry More concludes that the best way to argue with an atheist is to adopt the “plain shape of a mere *Naturalist*.”³¹ To take the guise of a naturalist in order to confront Hobbes is to accept his essential premise: that man is an animal, who may be understood through comparison with other species. Shaftesbury similarly asserts that humanity’s natural passions “may be known from what we see of the natural state of creatures” (222) and that such a “natural history of man” must play a role in a philosophy of human nature (233). Both Shaftesbury and Hobbes invoke representations of wolves to suggest something about what it means to be human. In so doing, they indicate a new philosophical proximity between humans and other creatures.

³⁰ Preface to *Select Sermons of Dr. Whichcote* (London 1697).

³¹ Henry More, *An Antidote Against Atheism: Or, An Appeal to the Natural Faculties of the Mind of Man, Whether there be not a God*, in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Henry More* (London, 1662), 7. Cited hereafter in text.

II. Shaftesbury, Sentimentalism, and Natural Religion

In his reaction to Hobbes's egoistic ethics, Shaftesbury mapped out the foundations for a secular moral philosophy that promoted a culture of expansive sympathetic identification. In the eyes of eighteenth-century Britons, Shaftesbury was inextricably linked with the culture—in some eyes, cult—of sentiment. The *Biographia Britannica* of 1789 named him the “Head of the School of the sentimental Philosophy.”³² He is usually described as the originator of the notion of a moral sense, which was expanded by Francis Hutcheson and influenced David Hume and Adam Smith, and he was a popular figure among the French *philosophes* and Germans like Kant, Goethe, and Herder, the last of whom called him “the virtuoso of humanity” and compared him to Plato.³³ But Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, a three-volume collection of his major writings which saw at least thirteen English editions published between 1711 and 1790, had as much of an effect on eighteenth-century culture as on philosophical inquiry. It has long been a commonplace to look to Shaftesbury's writings as the intellectual foundation for Georgian-era sentimental culture. His moral philosophy was particularly attuned to the ideological needs of the new century. Natural affection and innate benevolence, refined into politeness and altruistic disinterest, provided a solution to the problem of social consensus that presented itself in the civil war and the expanding market economy. Shaftesbury, who served in the House of Lords after his father's death in 1699, wrote for an audience of gentleman who shared his broad humanistic education and his vision of a society governed by the social elite. However, in challenging the

³²Quoted in Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 152.

³³Quoted in Stanley Green, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm* (Ohio UP, 1967) ix.

traditional authority of Court and Church, he helped design an emergent cultural space—to use a term that appears often in *Characteristics*, a “public”—associated with Whig cultural politics and defined by a rhetoric of tolerance, open dialogue, civic involvement, and humanitarianism. Terry Eagleton argues that Shaftesburian sensibility was so influential because it promised a new form of social power, one that could link the empirical immediacy of individual sense experience with a prior, providential order, and in doing so, naturalize and normalize social cohesion.³⁴ While Hobbes sees the passions as the root of human discord, Shaftesbury defines them as the natural force that facilitates communal life. Lawrence Klein suggests that this transformation may be summed up in the changing meaning of “politeness,” a term that had been associated with gentility but came to designate a middle-class code of manners aimed at harmonizing differences in an expanding public arena.³⁵

In his rethinking of the grounds of moral community, Shaftesbury establishes the intellectual context for the growing concern for animals in eighteenth-century British society. Historians of environmental ethics and animal advocacy have unduly overlooked Shaftesbury’s significance. He receives no mention in Roderick Nash’s encyclopedic *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* or in Preece’s similarly capacious *Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb: A Chronicle of Sensibility to Animals*. In examining how Shaftesbury establishes the foundations for the Georgian culture of feeling, I show why Shaftesbury deserves more attention as a central figure in the history of animal advocacy. While he followed Hobbes in establishing a non-theological psychology of affect, he diverged by asserting the significance of natural affection and

³⁴ Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 32-38.

³⁵ Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 4-20.

sympathy. As an advocate of natural religion, he focused attention on the world of animated nature. In making the economy of nature and animal passions an integral part of his moral philosophy, he leveled the ostensible differences between humans and animals, establishing a common ground of shared affective experience. Yet he also defined humans as a unique species, fit for both virtue and barbarity, and he offered a nuanced account of human culture, based on a recognition of the communication and malleability of the passions.

Shaftesbury associates Hobbes with the Epicurean school of philosophy, exemplified by Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, which rejects providential purpose in the cosmos, and thus, in Shaftesbury's view, leads to a moral relativism according to which right is always a reflection of might. An atomistic account of the material world leads to a social theory premised solely on egoism, on the contentious relations among self-interested individuals. Shaftesbury designates Lucretius and Hobbes "cool philosophers" because they categorically reduce all human motivations to "cool and deliberate selfishness" (54). Much like today's proponents of the selfish gene, the cool philosophers find a way to explain what appear to be acts of disinterested sociability—friendship, kindness to strangers, philanthropy—as, on a deeper level, manifestations of self-interest. This "extraordinary hypothesis" is flawed hermeneutically, according to Shaftesbury, because it diminishes the complexity of human motivations to a single principle—just as modern day sociobiologists reduce human culture to a biological base. Shaftesbury offers examples of a number of passions that transcend mere egoism, among them "passion, humor, caprice, zeal, [and] faction" (54). His point here is not that sociability is an

unequivocal good but that it must be acknowledged in a descriptive account of the human species. Shaftesbury believes that Hobbes's philosophy should be understood by situating it within its historical context, the strife of the English Civil War. He also cunningly points out that even in Hobbes's writing one detects the natural tendency toward sociality, which Hobbes denies. Shaftesbury observes that Hobbes, in the very act of trying to persuade readers to accept the stable authoritarianism of the commonwealth, shows a sense of public duty. If there is no natural affection, Shaftesbury questions the cool philosopher, then "why all this concern for us?" (43).³⁶

Shaftesbury directs his criticism equally at the mercenary ethics of Christianity, which, with its emphasis on future rewards and punishments, bases morality on grounds not unlike Hobbes's egoistic psychology. Christian morality reduces virtue to a simple calculation of desire and fear, to a kind of bargaining between short-term and long-term interests. A person who is good only because he hopes for salvation or fears divine retribution, Shaftesbury says, is no more virtuous than a chained tiger is gentle (183). A religion that emphasizes rewards and punishments actually works to strengthen self-love, and to turn its adherents away from a concern for the public good, because it has the effect of inflaming the imagination to such an extent that everyday reality is neglected. The Christian is so focused on the life beyond that he feels no inclination to engage communities that do not further his salvation (46-7). When Shaftesbury says of the Christian, "[h]is conversation is in heaven," he is contrasting this focus on the transcendent with the polite dialogue that is the foundation of civilized society. In framing this critique, Shaftesbury invokes a residual language of disinterested aristocratic

³⁶ It was in fact common to point to Hobbes's own virtue as an argument against his theory. Shaftesbury notes that he was "a good sociable man, as savage and unsociable as he would make himself and all mankind appear by his philosophy" (42).

virtue, which is opposed to the self-concern of economic man; the Christian with an eye to salvation is more interested in striking a “bargain,” in computing advantage, than in being good (165). Thus an overriding concern for the future life has the paradoxical effect of being at once sublime and stingy, of encouraging a state of mind that is simultaneously “transported” and “narrowly confined” (188). The Christian fails to occupy the intermediate space of the polis, and if he does participate in public life his participation will be defined by habituated self-interest or otherworldliness. Shaftesbury often points out that an atheist has the advantage of not seeking future rewards and is thus more likely to value goodness intrinsically. In speaking of (and to) the potentially virtuous atheist and risking charges of heterodoxy, Shaftesbury is arguing that social affection, the grounds of morality, exists prior to religious belief. Religion may improve or corrupt moral feeling, but it does not constitute it. Furthermore, according to Shaftesbury, Christianity is dangerous because, by positing a transcendental authority, it opens the way to factionalism and zealotry. For all the differences among them, Shaftesbury is like Hobbes and Locke in proposing an immanent ethics premised on a naturalistic appraisal of moral psychology, which makes virtue “independent of religion” (267). Where Hobbes looks to Epicurean materialism, Shaftesbury finds a prototype in Socrates, who established an ethics of civic society, who, in Cicero’s terms, brought philosophy down from the heavens.

In *Reason, Grace, And Sentiment*, Isabel Rivers proposes that ethics was separated from religion in a discourse of sentiment formulated by freethinkers critical of the Established Church, like Shaftesbury. Others have seen this process in its embryonic stage in the liberal Anglican theology that appeared after the Restoration. R.S. Crane’s

influential article, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling,’” suggests that the sentimental ethic, with its emphasis on humanity’s innate good nature, the virtue of benevolent worldly action, and the cultivation of tender feeling, was first given voice in the sermons of broadminded Anglican divines.³⁷ Latitudinarians revitalize the Pelagian position, seeing man as naturally good, in sharp contrast with the stress on original sin that is the centerpiece of Augustinian Christianity. Crane points out that this view of human nature, with its curious and atypical insistence on masculine sensitivity, had little classical or Christian precedence.³⁸ In *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, Ernst Cassirer describes the neo-Platonist movement at Cambridge in the late seventeenth century, as it is expressed in the writings of Ralph Cudworth and Henry More in particular, as another source for sentimental ethics. The Platonists antedate the

³⁷ The latitudinarians themselves disagreed on humanity’s responsibility toward the brute creation. William Claggett, in his 1686 *Of the Humanity and Charity of Christians*, explicitly excludes other creatures from sympathetic exchange: to “Man only of all Creatures under Heaven, God has given this quality, to be affected with the Grief and with the Joy of those of his own kind; and to feel the Evils which others feel, that we may be universally disposed to help and relieve each other,” quoted in Crane, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy,” 212. Clarke in *The Great Duty of Universal Love* (1705) extends this notion of sympathetic benevolence to other creatures, “each in their several Stations, and according to the measure of their several Abilities,” quoted in Crane, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy,” 212.

³⁸ Crane’s article initiated an ongoing debate about the nature of Anglicanism in the early eighteenth century. His most sustained critic, Donald Greene, in “Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling’ Reconsidered,” *Modern Philology* 75 (1977): 159-83, and other essays, argues that most of the qualities Crane associated with latitudinarianism, such as the emphasis on humanity’s essentially good nature and the acceptance of public feeling, have a long history in Christian and classical texts, and that the latitudinarians never accepted the argument that good works are more important than faith. Greene asserts that Shaftesbury alone should be seen as the source of sentimentalism. More recently, Frans De Bruyn, in “Latitudinarianism and its Importance as a Precursor of Sensibility,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 80 (1981): 349-68, and Richard Nash, in “Benevolent Readers: Burnet’s Exposition and Eighteenth-Century Interpretation of the Thirty-Nine Articles,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25.3 (Spring 1992): 353-60, have offered evidence for Crane’s thesis. Shaftesbury himself gives currency to the image of latitudinarianism as an innovative doctrine, which can, to a certain extent, be associated with free thought. He writes that the Church “declaim[s] against free thought and latitude of understanding. To go beyond those bounds of thinking which they have prescribed is by them declared a sacrilege” (467). As opposed to Augustinian orthodoxy, he lines up “free livers, freethinkers, latitudinarians” (467).

freethinkers in their emphasis on the naturalness of religious feeling and the possibility of non-transcendental morality. Against Calvin's arbitrary and judging God, they argued that God must be just, reasonable, and good, and More in particular looked to the natural order for evidence of a benevolent Deity. Additionally, like the latitudinarians, the Cambridge men revised traditional attitudes toward emotion, which they saw as an instrument of ethical motivation rather than a sign of human depravity. Cassirer argues that it was in Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* that the optimistic theology of the Christian Platonists reached the mainstream of European thought. Although certainly influenced by the liberal Anglicans, Shaftesbury may be more closely associated with the English freethinkers like John Toland, who brought out the first version of Shaftesbury's *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* in 1699, Anthony Collins, and Mathew Tindal.³⁹ These writers were hostile to Christian institutions and the clergy, whom they described as having used superstition to create fear and accumulate social and economic power. True religion must be available to all reasonable beings, they argued, which is why they devalued the authority of revelation and scripture and found evidence for providence solely in the natural creation. Where freethinkers including Shaftesbury followed the direction of liberal Anglicanism was in espousing an optimistic theism, a belief in a just and benevolent deity whose primary concern is the happiness of his creatures.

In *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury explicitly associates himself with free thought. The influence of skepticism is evident in the way Shaftesbury at times defends theistic belief in pragmatic terms, arguing that faith in a well-ordered cosmos and a benevolent creator are the foundations of a benevolent temperament. Theism is less a metaphysical

³⁹ The traditional term is deist, but Rivers and others have pointed out that this is an elusive term, which was generally not accepted among its ostensible adherents.

truth claim than a condition of psychological health and ethical practice. His heterodoxy was certainly evident to readers of the *Inquiry*, wherein Shaftesbury explicitly seeks to articulate a system of morals not predicated on divine law or judgment. In fact, Shaftesbury's posthumous popularity in England was only possible due to the greater tolerance for religious dissent that followed the accession of George I in 1714.⁴⁰ Where Shaftesbury does acknowledge evidence of the deity is in the immanent world of secondary causes, which offer confirmation of a principle of benevolence and design in animated nature. Shaftesbury's religion is a natural religion, and the physical order of nature, not Revelation, is his source of religious feeling and knowledge of God. It is Theocles, the theist in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*, who argues that "we can never be concerned in anything hereafter, we must understand perfectly what it is which concerns or engages us in anything present" (253).

Shaftesbury was dismissive of the scientific activities of the Royal Society because he associated natural philosophy with the mechanistic worldview of Hobbes. But he was sympathetic to physico-theology, the study of concrete relationships in the natural world, which in their intricacy offer confirmation of providential design, which is to say, of the existence of God. Isaac Newton's influence notwithstanding, the New Science had connotations of atheism, whereas natural history safely demonstrated the providential purpose manifested in the natural order. In doing so, it drew attention to the complexity and interdependence of natural processes, anticipating modern ecology. In *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, Clarence Glacken proposes that arguments from design have, since classical antiquity, encouraged a focus on the specific materiality of natural processes.

⁴⁰ See C.A. Moore, "Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets in England, 1700-1760," *PMLA* 36 (1916), 271-275.

Troubling simple distinction between transcendent and immanent explanations, between religion and science, he observes that the design hypothesis promotes attention to effective causes and local ends within the material system of nature. Noting the irony, he argues that there is an inherent empiricism in natural theology because it is “hospitable—altogether too hospitable for its own good—to the visible, to the detailed, to the secondary qualities, to random and casual observations that could be made of plants, animals, insects, parts of the body, streams, clouds, snowflake formations.”⁴¹

Although natural theology has always had a place in orthodox Christianity—Aquinas claims that the order of nature confirms the existence of God and John Ray commences *The Wisdom of God* by quoting Psalm 104, “O Lord, how manifold are thy works”—arguments from design gained a new stature in the late seventeenth century. This involved a reappraisal of the habitable earth based on a more optimistic theology, evident in the controversy that ensued after the publication of Thomas Burnet’s *Telluris Theoria Sacra* in 1681.⁴² Rather than seeing mountains, deserts, and wild beasts as symbolizing nature’s deterioration since mankind’s fall from grace, writers like Henry More described the earth as a system constant in its operations and designed by a benevolent creator. Natural theology also involved a reaction against the increasingly prestigious mathematical sciences associated with Descartes. Mechanists rejected final causes, interpreted the actions of individual entities only in terms of abstract natural laws, and, as we saw with Hobbes, tended toward atomism, whether in interpreting nature or human society. In contrast, the organic view of the earth articulated by physico-

⁴¹ Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967), 406.

⁴² Published in an English edition between 1684 and 1689, as *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*. See Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, 1959 (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1997), Chapters 4 and 5.

theologists begins with an apprehension of the whole and relates individual entities to wider systems, focusing, for example, on the interrelation between plants and animals, on patterns of organic distribution, and on the fitness of particular beings to their habitat. Both mechanists and organicists shared a belief in the constancy and uniformity of nature, against the orthodox belief in miracles.

While physico-theological themes appear throughout Shaftesbury's writing, they take center stage in *The Moralists*, a philosophical dialogue between the theist Theocles and skeptic Philocles, later recounted to Palemon. Philocles tells Palemon how their mutual friend Theocles, taking the guise of a naturalist, convinced him to concede that there is purpose and order in the world and thus a divine architect. The discussion between Philocles and Theocles on natural religion begins, appropriately, outdoors—during a walk through the fields of Theocles's estate at dusk. When Philocles shows his familiarity with some of the local plants, Theocles remarks on his friend's "insight and accurate judgment in the particulars of natural beings and operations," but suggests that such natural knowledge should inevitably lead to an appreciation of the interrelationality and design that run through all nature (273). Theocles proposes that the organs are to the body what the individual body is to the species, what the species is to the entire economy of animals, and what the system of animals is to the systems of plants and inanimate matter (274-5). He repeats this image of nested systems a number of times, showing how each system has both autonomy and significance in a wider whole. "All things in this world are united," he states (274). Teleological principles facilitate recognition of concrete relationships of interdependence in the natural world. Theocles describes how, "as much as the strong and upright trunk of the oak or elm is fitted to the twinning

branches of the vine or ivy; so much are the very leaves, the seeds, and fruits of these trees fitted to the various animals; these again to one another” (274). Such complex systems serve in Theocles’s argument to affirm “workmanship” in nature and thus prove the existence of a supreme architect, but his emphasis is on interdependence and adaptation in the natural order rather than the original creator.

Since antiquity, arguments from design have reinforced anthropocentric observations about the favorable conditions on earth for food production, navigation, and human comfort. Viscount Bolingbroke, more influenced by the Whig Shaftesbury than he cared to acknowledge, points out in his *Fragments* that anthropocentrism and teleology have long supported each other: “That man is the final cause of the whole creation ... [is] assumed by all the ancient and modern theists, those of paganism and those of Christianity.”⁴³ Among the pagan writers whom Bolingbroke surely had in mind was Cicero, one of Shaftesbury’s classical touchstones. In Cicero’s dialogue, *De natura deorum*, which, according to Glacken, remained the most influential exposition of the design argument until the early eighteenth century, the Stoic Balbus argues that because man is the sole intelligent creature on earth we can assume that it was designed for his well-being. Balbus does observe the interdependent relationship between plants and animals as well as the wondrous variety of species on earth, but generally affirms that *design* means *designed for man*. The horse was created to be ridden, the ox to plow, and the dog to hunt and guard our homes.⁴⁴ From our upright carriage to the timber with which we build ships, there is evidence not only that the earth has been created but that it has been created “for those living creatures who enjoy the use of reason” (95-6). It was

⁴³ Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Fragments or Minutes of Essays*, in *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke* vol. iv (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 324.

⁴⁴ Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. P.G. Walsh (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1997), 60.

precisely such anthropocentrism in the design argument that Lucretius attacked in *De Rerum Natura*, pointing out, among other things, that large portions of the earth are not habitable for humans.

Shaftesbury's contemporaries expressed ambivalence about humanity's status on the providential planet. Descartes adopts the Lucretian stance, mocking the doctrine of final causes with specific reference to anthropocentric assumptions. In *An Antidote Against Atheism*, Henry More notes that some have argued that divine beneficence would be more evident in the natural creation if there were no "*offensive* Creatures in the world to trouble us" (178). He reminds his readers that this argument is based on the "false principle, *That the World was made for man alone*, [whereas] assuredly the Blessed and Benigne Maker of all things intended that *other living Creatures* should enjoy themselves as well as *Men*, which they could not do if they had no existence." Generally, though, More's argument from design presumes a human-centered *telos*: timber and load-stone promote human commerce, as do the artful global distribution of commodities and the sea itself. More finds evidence of design in the perfect fit between the shepherd, his flock, and his dog, and like Balbus, he concludes, "that which made both *Dogs* and *Ducks* and *Hares* and *Sheep*, made them with reference to us" (62). A similar dissonance marks the writing of the naturalist John Ray, who pays credit to More for invigorating physico-theology but writes with greater knowledge of natural processes. In the most influential work of seventeenth-century physico-theology, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*, Ray defends teleological arguments against Descartes, but acknowledges the epistemological and theological problems with the *a priori* assumption

that minerals or animals have been designed solely for man's use.⁴⁵ Even so, in Stoic fashion, he describes how wind fortuitously fills the sails of our ships, trees supply us shade, and animals labor for us.

In contrast with the equivocation of More and Ray, and the straightforward anthropocentrism of his Stoic predecessors, Shaftesbury denies that man is the end of creation. When Philocles suggests that humans are the "noblest of creatures" and thus worthy of nature's "care," Theocles condemns his pride: "But how is it you complain of the unequal state of man and of the few advantages allowed him above the beast? What can a creature claim, so little differing from them" (276). When Philocles finally admits that man is not the apogee of creation, Theocles points out that once we allow that "nature herself be not for man but man for nature, then must man, by his good leave, submit to the elements of nature and not the elements to him" (280). Shaftesbury situates humans as equal participants in nature's economy, and even human mortality plays a role in the greater good. Having been converted to Theocles's natural religion, Philocles describes a food chain to Palemon, stressing interdependence and equilibrium: "The vegetables by their death sustain the animals, and animals bodies dissolved enrich the earth and raise again the vegetable world. The numerous insects are reduced by the superior kinds of birds and beasts, and these again are checked by man, who in his turn submits to other natures and resigns his form a sacrifice in common with the rest of things" (245). Foregoing pious statements about man's everlasting life, Shaftesbury envisions an ongoing recycling of matter. As creatures die their substance is passed on to others. Nature's constancy and economy apply as much to man as to other creatures,

⁴⁵ Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested*, 71 and 128-9.

“profuse to none but bountiful to all” (282). In this precise economy, mankind receives no special benefits, although he may by his art cultivate nature to his advantage.

The distinctiveness of Shaftesbury’s position is evident when we examine his attitude toward wild animals and the wildernesses they inhabit, features of the natural order that have posed problems for anthropocentric theism. Cicero’s Balbus defines humans as formed in the image of the deity, as creative beings who “cultivate the earth,” who “do not permit it to degenerate into wild haunts for savage beasts, nor to be ravaged by thorny thickets.”⁴⁶ Like Balbus, John Ray faces the thorny theological problem of wilderness by defining it as an opportunity for man to express his powers as a cultivator. In the Christian tradition, the wastes and wild beasts are taken to be signs of mankind’s fall. While Adam controlled the animals and cultivated the Garden, in the postlapsarian world animals and plants defy man. In Milton’s rendition, the fall introduces into the world not only sin, death, and novel emotions, including “guilt, / And shame, and perturbation, and despair, / Anger, and obstinacy, and hate, and guile,” but also a new order of nature.⁴⁷ Although God acknowledges that the serpent was only an instrument of Satan, the entire animal order suffers the consequences of human disobedience. After the fall, “Beast now with beast ‘gan war, and fowl with fowl, / And fish with fish; to graze the herb all leaving / Devoured each other, nor stood much in awe / Of Man, but fled him, or with countenance grim, / Glared on him passing” (10.710-14).

Invited to rhapsodize on the sublime operations of nature, Theocles describes the world beyond the cultivated tracts and temperate climes, spanning the globe from the

⁴⁶ Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, 82

⁴⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 10.112-14.

frigid poles to the torrid zones to the broken mountaintops. He then turns attention to the deserts:

The wildness pleases. We seem to live alone with nature. We view her in her inmost recesses, and contemplate her with more delight in these original wilds than in the artificial labyrinths and feigned wildernesses of the palace. The objects of this place, the scale serpents, the savage beasts and poisonous insects, how terrible soever or how contrary to human nature, are beautiful in themselves and fit to raise our thoughts in admiration of that divine wisdom, so far superior to our short views. Unable to declare the use or service of all things in this universe, we are yet assured of the perfection of all and of the justice of that economy to which all things are subservient and in respect of which things seemingly deformed are amiable, disorder becomes regular, corruption wholesome and poisons, such as these we have seen, prove healing and beneficial. (315)

Because they form a part of the natural system, wolves, snakes, and insects all have purpose and deserve respect. According to this holistic conception, no particular being may be considered evil as long as we understand how it functions “with respect to any other order or economy” (169). Even the cruel crocodiles of Egypt are less wicked than that country’s priests, who, in spreading superstition and faction, have “made desolate the earth.” Shaftesbury establishes the groundwork for a growing appreciation, in the eighteenth century, of non-domesticated and non-charismatic creatures, such as Edward Bancroft defending insects and snakes in *The Natural History of Guiana* or Gilbert White explaining the role of earthworms in the economy of nature in *The Natural History of Selborne*.

Shaftesbury is a philosopher for whom the aesthetic and the ethical are closely linked, and the expansion of moral community that his work promotes is expressed in a romantic enthusiasm for wild nature. After mustering his rational proof of order in the universe, Theocles shifts to a poetic fervor that verges on nature worship; as Philocles reports to Palemon, “It was nature he was in love with. It was nature he sung” (246). This

aesthetic may be neoclassical in its emphasis on harmony, but only if we understand harmony in expansive terms, as that which leaves nothing out, which discovers proportion in rugged mountains and order in the economy of insects. There is grace in wilderness, Theocles claims, in rude rocks and in wild beasts. Philocles likewise expresses a new love for the uncultivated, the original, the wild: “I shall no longer resist the passion growing in me for things of a natural kind, where neither art nor the conceit of man has spoiled their genuine order by breaking in upon that primitive state” (317). Aestheticized enthusiasm for the natural order replaces religious enthusiasm. Philocles makes this turn explicit when he states that the heightened feeling of religiosity ought to be associated with mountains and forests rather than monuments and churchyards (289). Of course, such enthusiasm is an engagement with the deity; as Theocles argues, the “beautifying, not the beautified, is the really beautiful” (322). Beauty is not in the body but in the constitutive power of the designer. But there is an ambiguity here, because, as Rivers notes, in Shaftesbury’s essays nature “sometimes mean[s] what is created and controlled by the organizing principle, and sometimes that principle itself.”⁴⁸ Shaftesbury tends toward an almost animistic worship of nature, a heterodox conflation of the creator and the created. Augustine warned against confusing God and his works, stating that the “earth is no mother; it itself is a work of God.”⁴⁹ In his enthusiasm, Theocles apostrophizes a “mother earth,” making God immanent to nature (311).

The environmental historian Roderick Nash argues that the enlargement of moral community beyond the human species has required a concomitant expansion of knowledge about the interdependence of biological communities: “By creating a new

⁴⁸ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 140

⁴⁹ Quoted in Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, 167

conception of the meaning of biological community, the ecological sciences also suggested a new basis for moral community.”⁵⁰ Such a process seems to have marked the eighteenth century as well as the twentieth. Shaftesbury made conceptions of nature’s economy and interdependence, which had been articulated in novel ways by contemporary naturalists like John Ray, the foundation for an expansion of moral community. A concrete understanding of the interdependence of natural systems is easily reconciled with the argument from design—in fact, for Shaftesbury atheism is most troubling because it refuses to see order in nature—but is inimical to anthropocentrism. As we will see, for Shaftesbury the ‘is’ of biological interdependence becomes the ‘ought’ of virtuous action. What mediates between the two, in Shaftesbury’s moral philosophy, is feeling: the enthusiasm of disinterested aesthetic appreciation but also the natural affections that we share with other animals.

III. The Natural Economy of Passions

Shaftesbury claims that passions and affections are significant features of the providentially designed world. One of the most innovative and overlooked aspects of his philosophy is the manner in which he situates an economy of passions in the economy of nature. I have not found a similar discussion of animal feeling or behavior in any of his predecessors. Cicero’s Balbus, for instance, only briefly mentions “sensation,” explaining that it allows brutes to “discriminate between what is harmful and what is health-giving” (91). Neither More nor Ray comment on the role of animal feeling other than to object to

⁵⁰ Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989), 9.

the Cartesian thesis, which itself may be understood as an attempt to evade the problems raised by animal consciousness. Contrary to both Descartes and the Pyrrhonian skeptic, Shaftesbury fixes as an *a priori* principle the essential commonality between humans and nonhumans:

We are henceforward to trust our eyes and take for real the whole creation and the fair forms which lie before us. We are to believe in the anatomy of our own body and, in proportionable order, the shapes, forms, habits and constitutions of our animal races. Without demurring on the profound modern hypothesis of animal insensibility, we are to believe firmly and resolutely that other creatures have their sense and feeling, their mere passions and affections, as well as ourselves. (428)

What is unquestionably knowable in ourselves is feeling, Shaftesbury writes at another point, and here he makes a materialist leap, arguing, based on common anatomy, that such feeling is shared with other animals. Different animals may have different types of feelings, but all creatures have a “humour, temper and turn of inward disposition” (429). Rather than seeing the passions as uncontrollable forces, associated with the fall, or at best divisive impulses managed by a civil contract or in the marketplace, Shaftesbury asks what role the passions play in the operations of the natural order. The world is not designed on a purely physical level, in the mechanics of bodies, the food chain, and the hydrological cycle. Its complex order is also defined by the emotional lives—the sensations, constitutions, and habits—of animals. Physical sympathies in nature are complemented in affective sympathies among living creatures. As Theocles explains, there is more to the economy of nature than merely material relationships:

Such then ... is the admirable distribution of nature, her adapting and adjusting not only the stuff or matter to the shape and form, and even the shape itself and form to the circumstances, place, elements or region, but also the affections, appetites, sensations, mutually to each other, as well as to the matter, form, action, and all besides. (282)

Animal feeling plays an essential role in the natural economy. There is a natural “economy of [each] particular creature or species,” a system of interactions, material and affective, which define its conditions of life (198). An animal that lacks strength, for instance, must be timorous. For such a creature, a tendency toward animosity would go against its particular interest. Similarly, herbivores tend toward gregariousness, while carnivores are necessarily solitary and courageous.

The passions and affections have two purposes, one intrinsic and one extrinsic. First, for all creatures good feeling is an irreducible end-in-itself, because living beings, designed by a God of infinite love, are placed on earth to enjoy the experience of life. Emotional fulfillment is the universal endowment of a generous Deity. This formulation reappears in the work of a number of eighteenth-century animal advocates and plays a significant role in early animal rights discourse. The extrinsic end of animal feeling is self-preservation, motivating creatures to feel concern for themselves. Shaftesbury, however, complicates the usual conflation between self-preservation and self-interest established by Hobbes. He notices that supporting one’s species or community contributes to self-preservation, adopting a form of ethical naturalism that echoes the arguments of twentieth-century evolutionists who describe how the moral sentiments “evolved via reciprocal altruism, kin selection, and perhaps even group selection.”⁵¹ Affections compel creatures to cooperate for mutual conservation. Love preserves the self because it encourages cooperation. That private good and common interest overlap, however, is not a calculated recognition made by a rational subject but an affective principle built into the constitution of all animals.

⁵¹ Vermeule, *The Party of Humanity*, 5.

Shaftesbury's classification of the passions is based on a distinction between social affections, which are directed toward public good, self affections, which lead to private good, and the unnatural affections, which tend toward no good at all. This typology assumes the epistemological primacy of interest. Although Shaftesbury attacks a conception of 'interest' as a rational self-concern opposed to unruly passions, his classification is still premised on an expansive notion of interest, a concept which, according to Albert Hirschman, had become paradigmatic in the early modern period, the "key to the understanding of human action."⁵² Shaftesbury's portrait of the passions is nuanced in a manner that belies his reputation as a naïve promoter of benevolent good nature. He acknowledges that misdirected and over-zealous social affections may be destructive. Factionalism, intolerance, and cruelty receive as much attention as natural affection, community, and compassion. And he acknowledges that private affections are both necessary and potentially beneficial to the public. In moderation, concern for one's own life, fear of death, indolence, a desire for public praise, and the physical pleasures associated with nourishment and generation, are all healthy and self-preserving, though in excess they are transformed into cowardice, luxury, vanity, envy, and sloth.

The crux of Shaftesbury's refutation of Hobbes, however, is his claim about the prevalence of social affections. Because no creature is "absolute and complete in himself," the passions—and this is true for all species, to some extent—are constituted in such way as to make cooperation felt and desired (168). The social affections, including love of one's species, courage, gratitude, pity, parental love, filial love, friendship, and compassion, constitute and regulate community. Like beavers, elephants, and ants,

⁵² Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), 42-48.

human beings are a species in which the social affections predominate. Shaftesbury follows Aristotle in claiming that man is naturally a social animal, a species that herds, confederates, and joins. The “associating inclination,” he writes, is “natural and strong in most men” (52).

Shaftesbury does describe a specifically human form of innate sociability, a tendency built into the human frame, which he calls *sensus communis*. This common sense is not only shared judgment but also our sensitivity to community, our natural inclination toward company. Shaftesbury points out that the usual idea of common sense as widely accepted opinion, as a universal ideation, is limited because a survey of human societies shows little agreement on such subjects as religion, politics, and morality. Instead common sense is a type of sociable feeling. He traces this idea to the Greeks, but offers examples from Virgil and Juvenal, who describe in man an innate “sense of public weal and of the common interest, love of the community or society, natural affection, humanity, obligingness” (48). There is a darker side to this community sensibility. Even bandits and barbarians, Shaftesbury points out, enjoy the pleasures of company. Factionalism itself is an expression of humanity’s propensity toward confederation: “the very spirit of faction, for the greatest part, seems to be no other than the abuse or irregularity of that social love and common affection which is natural to mankind” (53). Sociability is not an unequivocal good for Shaftesbury, but it is the starting point for social and moral analysis because it explains the affective motivations of a social species.

With his attention on man as a type of animal, Shaftesbury refutes the conceit that had, with Hobbes, become instrumental to social analysis: the image of a pre-social state of nature and with it the conception of an absolute split between the animal world and

human society. For Shaftesbury, nature is the original space of sociability and the human world is never free of nature. He poses a thought experiment that resonates through eighteenth-century literature: would a man remain human if he were stripped of his social affections and separated from those of his species? Of course, according to Shaftesbury, he would not remain human because without “*society and community he never did, nor ever can, subsist*” (287). For Shaftesbury, there is no time before sociality, no period when affection, fellow-feeling, and community are not a part of what it means to be a human being. He argues that if any human capacity or inclination is to be called natural, than it must be the propensity toward familial affection and fellowship. Shaftesbury, along with a number of Hobbes’s critics, observes that the social contract itself seems to require a prior sociability, and that ideas such as “faith, justice, honesty, and virtue” could not be invented *ex nihilo* or constituted at the moment of the social contract (51). Even adopting an Epicurean cosmology, the idea of an original state of nature is an absurdity because it reifies as a condition of being what can only be imagined as the continuous process whereby nature “by accident, through many changes and chances, raised a creature which, springing at first from rude seeds of matter, proceeded till it became what it is now.” In this case, there must be a “hundred different states of nature” (286).

In his study of the passions, Shaftesbury draws attention to the continuity between humans and animals. Such continuity is the foundation for a self-consciously anthropomorphic epistemological principle: in analyzing the “economy of the passions” one may study “instances in the species or kinds below us” (198). Although there is a residual assumption of hierarchy in this statement, throughout *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* Shaftesbury emphasizes similarity. Animals tell us what it means to be

human. For much of the *Inquiry*, he uses the ambiguous term “creature,” meaning any created being, to denote the subject of passions, and he interweaves examples from the animal world and the human world.⁵³ He repeatedly describes how social affections extend to “the species or the public,” drawing attention to continuity and discontinuity by reminding readers that affections are shared by all creatures and that humans are unique insofar as they fashion a ‘public.’ Even when he writes of rationality, caveats indicate that the differences between humans and other animals are of degree rather than kind. He describes the animals “who have not the use of reason and reflection, at least not after the manner of mankind” (213) and writes of “mankind and all intelligent creatures” (209). He points out that if elephants, a species he respects for both their sociability and their reason, were equal to beavers in their mechanical abilities, they would contend with human beings for dominance on earth (431).

The fact that Shaftesbury defines human uniqueness in very nuanced terms, and draws unusual attention to the similarities between animals and humans, not least by basing ethics on creaturely feeling, did not go unnoticed among his early readers. The orthodox attack on Hobbes, Rivers notes, was redirected at Shaftesbury in the early eighteenth century: he was said to reduce “human morals to the level of a horse or dog.”⁵⁴ A more sympathetic reader, who has been speculatively identified as the young Benjamin Franklin, conveys this outcome in a redaction of Shaftesburian ethics. The writer worries that readers will not take kindly to his doctrine because “Mankind naturally and generally

⁵³ In Shaftesbury’s usage, “creature” refers to both humans and animals simultaneously. In his *Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1757), Samuel Johnson attempted to sharpen the boundary between human and animal. He notes the most common definition, “A being created,” but then clearly distinguishes between a usage designating “An animal not human” and another meaning, “A general term for man.”

⁵⁴ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 86.

love to be flatter'd: Whatever soothes our Pride, and tends to exalt our Species above the rest of the Creation, we are pleas'd with and easily believe, when ungrateful Truths shall be with the utmost Indignation rejected." A moral system founded on natural affection, he acknowledges, requires that we "bring ourselves down to an Equality with the Beasts of the Field! with the *meanest* part of the Creation!"⁵⁵

For humans and nonhumans alike, the motivating force of natural affection is enjoyment and its primary mechanism is sympathy. Passions are communicative, and the physiological proximity between humans and animals means that we can recognize emotional expression in other species. Sympathy traverses the species boundary:

It will be considered how many the pleasures are of sharing contentment and delight with others, of receiving it in fellowship and company and gathering it, in a manner, from the pleased and happy states of those around us, . . . *from the very countenances, gestures, voices, and sounds, even of creatures foreign to our kind, whose signs of joy and contentment we can anyway discern.* (204, my emphasis).

In this passage, the essential premise of Shaftesburian moral philosophy, that humans share with other animals innate social affections, extends into the grounds for an ethical concern for nonhuman creatures. Responding to a body's signs, we experience a pre-rational certainty about another's feeling, even that of an animal other. Sympathy is premised on a physiological contiguity out of which we presume a common experience of subjectivity.

In the grand scheme of the creation, Shaftesbury acknowledges, the purpose of animal life is not evident (167). All we know is that "every creature has a private good and interest of his own" and that this interest is defined by emotional experience. At

⁵⁵ Author unknown, "A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (23 June 1730). A. O. Aldridge, in "Franklin's Shaftesburian Dialogues not Franklin's: A Revision of the Franklin Canon," *American Literature* 21.2, argues against the conventional view that this essay is by Franklin.

times, though, Shaftesbury suggests that the immediate purpose of sensory organs is no different from the *telos* of a nature fashioned by a benevolent Deity. What is truly natural for a particular creature is that which leads to “its happiness” (428). The natural order, Theocles exclaims, is designed so that “[t]he temporary beings quit their borrowed forms and yield their elementary substance to newcomers,” so as to maximize the number who will “enjoy the privilege of nature” (307). Felt experience seems to be the purpose of the Creation, and it is notable that Shaftesbury describes the task of philosophy in fully immanent terms as the “*study of happiness*” (336). Such an emphasis corresponds with the optimistic theology of Shaftesbury’s age. The Cambridge Platonists had asserted not only the humanistic notion that God must be just and good, but also the Platonic vision of a God defined by his creative love. Joseph Addison, in a *Spectator* essay published the year after *Characteristics*, linked this neo-Platonic doctrine with the Aristotelian notion of a great chain of being: “Infinite Goodness is of so communicative a Nature, that it seems to delight in the conferring of Existence upon every degree of Perceptive Being.”⁵⁶ The principle of plenitude ensures that the greatest possible number of species will “enjoy[] the Happiness of Existence.” Even anthropocentric writers acknowledged that certain animals seem to be designed for no other purpose than to experience their own existence. John Ray’s formulation is particularly interesting because of the way it links an image of God as a benevolent architect and a naturalist’s observation of the world beyond human dominion: “there are many Species in Nature, which were never yet taken notice of by Man, and consequently of no Use to him, which yet we are to think were Created in

⁵⁶ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* 519 (25 October 1712).

vain; but it's likely" were created "to partake in the overflowing Goodness of the Creator, and enjoy their own being."⁵⁷

In *The Animal Question*, Paola Cavalieri argues that the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham is the first moral philosophy to transcend what Cavalieri calls the "agent-patient parity principle," the notion, which we saw articulated by Aristotle, that only autonomous moral agents are due moral consideration.⁵⁸ Utilitarianism focuses attention on the status of all conscious subjects based on the criterion of "greatest happiness." According to Cavalieri, "While within this phrase the highlighted element is often that of maximization, it is in the prominence of the notion of happiness that the key to the expansion of the moral community lies" (61). Western moral philosophy has generally started with a theory of moral agency, a conception of the conditions of virtue, but utilitarianism begins instead by considering the outcome of moral action and thus makes prominent the subjective states, the pleasures and pains, of potential moral patients. Put simply, utilitarianism stresses the end of moral action more than the state of the moral actor. Shaftesbury's sentimental morals, in drawing attention to animal feeling and to our innate capacity to recognize such feeling, offers an important early version of the utilitarian formulation.⁵⁹ In *Characteristics*, animals are represented as sharing with human beings a subjective life, a potential for happiness and for suffering. Shaftesbury

⁵⁷ Ray, *The Wisdom of God*, 129.

⁵⁸ Paola Cavalieri, *The Animal Question: Why Nonhuman Animals Deserve Human Rights*, trans. Catherine Woolard (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 59. Cavalieri contrasts deontological ethical theories, which emphasize the rightness of actions and actors, regardless of consequences, and consequentialist theories, of which utilitarianism is the exemplar, which judge actions on the basis of their outcomes (60).

⁵⁹ According to Ernest Albee, in "The Relation of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson to Utilitarianism" (*The Philosophical Review* 5.1 [Jan. 1896]): 24-35, for Shaftesbury the end of moral action is not unambiguous, but there is evidence that it is the maximization of happiness, that happiness and "the good" are "different aspects of the same fact of moral health or harmony" (29).

challenges traditional ethical systems by asserting that a creature need not be a self-conscious moral agent in order to be due moral status. This emphasis on shared feeling, on the common apparatus built into the frame of living creatures by a benevolent deity, resonates with Shaftesbury's biocentrism. Unlike nearly all of his philosophical contemporaries and predecessors, even those sympathetic to brutes, Shaftesbury never says that humans have a natural right to use animals to our ends.

Cavalieri does note that utilitarianism is less than adequate in its conception of motivation, in how it frames the demands put on moral agents. Bentham's only answer to the question *why be moral?* is to sanction behavior, to legislate in such a way that ensures the maximization of happiness. Shaftesbury addresses the problem of the moral actor in two ways, both of which highlight specifically human qualities. He describes, first, the faculty of a moral agent to cultivate benevolent feeling through self-reflection and, second, the role of public moralizing in normalizing ethical behavior. It is the process of self-conscious cultivation, the active reformation of self and society, and not the rational soul, that underlies humankind's distinct moral responsibilities. Human uniqueness is conceived of as potentiality, as an aptitude for progress, a characteristically Whiggish interpretation of what it means to be human. In conceiving of human progress, Shaftesbury follows the Stoics, describing how private selves become virtuous citizens through internal discipline; more significantly, he sanctions an idea of the *public*, which is defined by sociological norms and shared emotional habits disseminated through print culture.

IV. Human Uniqueness: Cruel Customs and Cultivated Feelings

In his essays written in the voices of adherents to four schools of classical philosophy, David Hume highlights the key difference in how Hobbes and Shaftesbury conceive of emotion. Hobbes is associated with Epicureanism and Shaftesbury with Stoicism. Hume's Epicurean believes that art and refinement can do nothing to reshape humanity's innate propensities: "When by my will alone I can stop the blood . . . then may I hope to change the course of my sentiments and passions."⁶⁰ The Stoic, on the other hand, sees human industry in remaking nature as a metaphor for the cultivation of the self. The passions are plastic and governable. Desire, love, and aversion are all potentially open to "amendment . . . flexible or variable" (423). For Shaftesbury, such plasticity is the starting point for theories of self and public cultures based on the cultivation of affection. Along with his affirmation of natural goodness, this Stoic understanding of feeling as habituated and malleable is Shaftesbury's key contribution to sentimental discourse. By defining the passions as subject to discipline, Shaftesbury envisages an immanent ethical ideal, which facilitates critique of certain passions and the behaviors they promote.

Unlike animals, humans can shape their passions because they are not subject to the frugality of nature's economy. By cultivating the land, humans produce surplus resources, and those who benefit from this surplus, gentleman like Palemon and Theocles, are given time to cultivate the self. Animals have no opportunity to nurture their feelings because their days are spent searching for food and caring for their young. Since nature is necessarily frugal, the economy of animal passions is designed so as to fit

⁶⁰ David Hume, "The Epicurean," in *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 78.

perfectly in the material system of nature. But when an animal is taken out of the natural order and all of its appetites and needs are fulfilled, “it may be observed that, as his circumstances grow thus luxuriant, his temper and passions will have the same growth” (213). Creatures tamed by man and not made to labor, which is to say pets, become more luxuriously psychological. When removed from nature’s economy, the passions in humans and other animals are transformed, but humans have the potential to effect this transformation consciously through self-reflection and self-command. Shaftesbury is a Stoic because he believes that humans reshape their passions. This capacity to transcend the economy of nature is, for Shaftesbury, a source of both benefits and dangers, placing humans in a vexed state that requires negotiation between nature and culture: “For as the highest improvements of temper are made in humankind, so the greatest corruptions and degeneracies are discoverable in this race” (199).

Shaftesbury’s chief example of corrupted human passions, of what he calls inhumanity, are the “sanguinary sports,” which had been banned by the Puritans during the Commonwealth years but had regained popularity after the Restoration. Among these public spectacles the most ubiquitous are “the baitings and slaughter of so many sorts of creatures, tame as well as wild, for diversion merely” (121). Shaftesbury’s observations on animal baiting are significant because they connect the abstraction of sentimental moral philosophy with objection to specific social practices, and hence anticipate later animal advocacy. Records of animal baiting in England go back to the reign of Henry II in the twelfth century.⁶¹ Elizabeth, James I, and Anne are all known to have attended baitings,

⁶¹ A useful account of baiting and other forms of staged animal torture is John Swain’s *Brutes and Beasts* (London: Noel Douglas, 1933). See also Tobias Hug, ““You Should Go To *Hockley in the Hole*, and to *Marybone*, Child, To Learn Valour’: On the Social Logic of Animal Baiting in Early Modern London,” *Renaissance Journal* 2.1 (Jan. 2004).

and the sport was under royal patronage during Tudor times. The most famous arena for baiting animals in London was Paris Garden in Southwark, and most provincial towns had their own bear garden. A baiting is essentially a battle between a large animal, usually a bear or a bull, and a pack of dogs. The bear or bull is tied to a stake, roused by an application of pepper to its nose or the lighting of firecrackers, and attacked by specially bred dogs. The sport ends when the dogs pull the animal to the ground and drag it round the ring or when the animal vanquishes the dogs. There are records of baitings involving badgers, apes on horseback, asses, horses, lions, tigers, a panther, a polar bear, and a walrus. Baitings were the most popular spectacle, but there were other ways of staging cruelty to animals. In 1575, Queen Elizabeth observed a bear-beating, which consisted of a bear being harassed by dogs and then surrounded by a number of men, who proceeded to whip it to death. Torture of cocks, totemic representatives of the French, went beyond the “Royal Sport” of cock-fighting. One straightforward pastime involved tying a cock to the ground and beating it to death. A favorite practice, and the only one considered indigenous to England, particularly common during Shrovetide, the carnivalesque days between Quinquagesima Sunday and Ash Wednesday, was known as cock throwing. A cock was hung in a container and participants threw broomsticks until someone succeeded in killing the bird.

Shaftesbury addresses these cruel customs a number of times in *Characteristics*. He correlates staged cruelty with the third class of feeling, the unnatural passions, which are contrasted with the social and the selfish passions: “Of this kind is that unnatural and inhuman delight in beholding torments and in viewing distress, calamity, blood, massacre and destruction with a peculiar joy and pleasure” (226). Enjoying another’s suffering is

the precise inverse of sympathy, because one's own affective experience is intimately contrary to the other's. This pleasure is not animalistic. The inhuman is a specifically human attribute because only humans are potentially unnatural. Part of what makes the feelings associated with cruelty unnatural is their inexplicability. The passions involved in taking pleasure in another's suffering are defined by the fact that they benefit no one, and Shaftesbury is unable to explain their motivation because they fail to fit the paradigm of interest: "to delight in the torture and pain of other creatures indifferently, natives or foreigners, of our own or of another species, kindred or no kindred, known or unknown, to feed as it were on death and be entertained with dying agonies—this has nothing in it accountable in the way of self-interest or private good, above-mentioned, but is wholly and absolutely unnatural as it is horrid and miserable" (226).⁶² While their motivations are inexplicable, sanguinary sports do prove that not all emotions are inherently good. Shaftesbury asks, "Cruel spectacles and barbarities are also found to please and, in some tempers, to please beyond all subjects. But is this pleasure right?" (151). Critiquing an Epicurean relativism according to which the good is merely what we desire, he objects to the dictum that "tastes are different and must not be disputed" (251). Twice Philocles cites the pleasure taken by the cruel spectator—"Is not malice and cruelty of the highest relish with some natures?"—as an example of why taste itself may be disputed, why experiencing something as pleasurable is not enough to prove that it is good.

⁶² In this passage, Shaftesbury is not far from Hobbes, who himself was unable to explain the pure malevolence of what had not yet been designated sadism: "For, that any man should take pleasure in other mens great harmes, without other end of his own, I do not conceive it possible" (126). James Steintrager, in *Cruel Delight: Enlightenment Culture and the Inhuman* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004), points out that most moral philosophers addressed the problem of cruelty, but none could explain its motivation (1-13).

While Shaftesbury is unable to explain what motivates cruelty, he does observe how custom may teach one to do something “against his nature” (179). Taking a cue from Montaigne, he points out that men even grow accustomed to eating human flesh. Rather than seeing man as innately sinful, Shaftesbury is one of a new generation of writers who define humans as creatures of habit and convention. Custom, a model of habitual, performative, and affective communal practice, replaces original sin as the source of evil.⁶³ Bear gardens and other brutish spectacles represent not natural passions but those perverted by custom. As a means of elaborating the historical distance between barbarism and civility, custom was often linked with another category of thought crucial to the Enlightenment: cruelty. James Steintrager has drawn attention to the “negative anthropology” of cruelty in an era that understood compassion as both an innate human quality and a cultural ideal.⁶⁴ While Shaftesbury was confounded by the psychological motives of cruelty, custom offered a way of understanding its dissemination and habituation. Like a number of travelers from the Continent, he saw public spectacles of animal suffering as revealing a barbaric side of English identity. His countrymen, Shaftesbury claims, seem in their taste to be more Roman than Greek, more oriented to body than mind. An absence of politeness and an emphasis on butchery marks English criticism, theater, and literature, all of which are comparable in their brutality to the “bear-garden,” where both sexes enjoy the spilling of “bestial and human blood,

⁶³ E. P. Thompson distinguishes between two usages of ‘custom’ operating in eighteenth-century Britain. There is an older meaning according to which ‘custom’ is synonymous with ‘culture’ or ‘second nature.’ More significant in Thompson’s study is a usage wherein custom functions as a “rhetoric of legitimization for almost any usage, practice, or demanded right,” in *Customs in Common* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 2. In Shaftesbury’s writing, these two constellations of meanings remain inextricably linked: a language for visualizing the production of cultural particularity shades into a language for contesting or legitimating particular social practices

⁶⁴ Steintrager, *Cruel Delight*, xiv.

promiscuous wound and slaughter” (447).⁶⁵ Cruelty may not be native to human nature, Shaftesbury remarks, but it does seem unduly common among Britons. Moreover, to watch the suffering of other creatures with pleasure reveals a uniquely English “inclination . . . for amphitheatrical spectacles” (121). In the amphitheatre occurs a type of sympathetic communication that shows the dark side of sociability. Elsewhere, Shaftesbury describes the anti-social enthusiasm of religious zealots as a kind of “panic,” an emotional contagion (a metaphor later borrowed by Hume and Burke): “in this state their looks are very infectious. The fury flies from face to face, and the disease is no sooner seen than caught” (10). In this somatic theory of interpersonal interchange, Shaftesbury shows the aristocrat’s suspicion of unquestioning sociability. The herding mentality normalizes the inhumane behaviors of the bear-garden, just as an excess of sociability, when it manifested in fanaticism and factionalism, led to its opposite during the Civil War.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, Shaftesbury invokes John Dryden’s *The Conquest of Granada* as an instance of impolite drama (447), but Dryden himself, in the epilogue to *Aureng-Zebe* (1676), imagines bear-baiting from the standpoint of a comparatively civilized Frenchman: “Bold Britons at a brave bear-garden fray / Are rouses, and clatt’ring sticks, cry, “Play, play, play!” / Meantime, your filthy foreigner will stare / And mutter to himself, “Ha, *Gens barbare!*” / And gad, ‘tis well he mutters—well for him: / Our butchers else would tear him limb from limb. / ‘Tis true, the time may come your sons may be / Infected with this French civility, / But this in after ages will be done; / Our poet writes a hundred years too soon,” in *The Works of John Dryden* vol. 13 (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), 249-50. For Dryden, custom, a culturally specific practice located within a narrative of historical progress, is rendered visible in the intersecting gazes of playwright, foreigner, and spectators, which together contribute to the panoptic scrutiny of public life. Moreover, custom is understood as a form of cultural performance, which is evident in the way the spectators themselves become spectacles and in Dryden’s analogy between bear-garden and stage. This performance has an affective component, insofar as the baiting arouses a bloodlust in its viewers, which threatens humans as well as bears. Although the normative force of the outsider’s gaze may be undermined by his grime and by the contrast between British virility and Gallic “civility,” Dryden ultimately positions himself, as underappreciated poet, with the foreigner, condemning the barbarism of his own countrymen and looking forward to the refined manners of a future age.

The bear garden is an amphitheatrical space designed to enact humanity's absolute dominion over other creatures. It transforms into an incontrovertible and vivid spectacle the proposition that animals are due no moral consideration. The critique of the bear garden offers another kind of stage, a platform for public moralizing, on which one performs politeness and benevolence. The outsider's critical gaze is aligned with an emergent cultural identity premised on politeness and affective sociability. In his notebooks, published as the *Philosophical Regimen*, Shaftesbury comments more explicitly on how kindness and cruelty to animals are staged in the theater of morals: "How often is [natural affection] seen in children themselves and in good-natured people toward other creatures? And how kindly are several species of creatures entertained by us, so as that to use any of them harshly and cruelly is ill looked upon, as, on the contrary, to be kind and favourable towards them is recommending?"⁶⁶ The sentimental concern for animals often implies three subject positions: the mistreated animal, the human subject who sympathizes or does not sympathize with it, and an implied onlooker, one who "look[s] upon" and judges the sentiments and behavior of another. This sense of watching and being watched in public space by an anonymous gaze—which is implicit in the way the moral philosopher observes the sadist who observes the baiting—is a defining characteristic of eighteenth-century moral philosophy. It is in the panoptic spaces of public life and print culture that concern becomes a type of identity, a mark of recommendation.⁶⁷ For Shaftesbury, customs are situated within the context of a sociable

⁶⁶ *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury Author of the "Characteristics,"* ed. Benjamin Rand (New York: Macmillan, 1900) 1.

⁶⁷ A similar moment of auto-ethnography appears in James Boswell's *London Journal, 1762-1763*, ed. Frederick Pottle (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 86-7, on the day he decides to live like a "true-born Old Englishman" by dining on beef-steak and visiting the Royal Cockpit cock-fight, where he found himself "sorry for the poor cocks. I looked round to see if any of the spectators

public sphere wherein they may be debated and criticized: “There can be no impartial and free censure of manners where any peculiar custom or national opinion is set apart, and not only exempted from criticism but even flattered” (7). Customs are recognizable when they are subject to a society’s internal debate about its self-definition, and cruel customs are the negative image of the refined sociability that underlies Shaftesbury’s idealized culture of manners.

Shaftesbury’s recurrent critique of cruel customs in general, and cruelty toward animals in particular, is one of the few instances of direct social commentary in his writings. It shows him attempting to shape public opinion, to establish public morality on the foundation of politeness. Baitings were an obvious target for the social reformer not only because they exemplified the dangers of mob mentality, but also because of all the forms of mistreating animals that were to be attacked in the eighteenth century—hunting, culinary torments, the abuse of post-horses and of cattle being driven to market—baiting is one that serves no conceivable purpose. Shaftesbury was not the only popular writer polemicizing against animal baiting in the first decade of the eighteenth century. In one of the seminal organs of secular moralizing, *The Tatler*, Richard Steele wrote several articles condemning it, including a piece in which he wondered how to “excuse the death of so many innocent cocks, bulls, dogs, and bears, as have been set together by the ears, or died an untimely death, only to make us sport.”⁶⁸ The emerging periodical press and the polite philosophy of the 3rd Earl together articulated a culture of manners opposed to

pitied them when mangled and torn in a most cruel manner, but I could not observe the smallest relenting sign in any countenance.” Boswell’s attention focuses more on the human spectators than on the bird itself. He looks around to see how the visible violence on the bodies of the birds is reflected in the gaze of the spectators. He reads not only the cocks but also the audience. The felt expression, or lack thereof, of other spectators becomes a spectacle in itself.

⁶⁸ *The Tatler* 134 (16 February 1709-10).

cruelty. This sentimental moral code was more than a theater of virtue. Shaftesbury objected to a specific set of social practices, anticipating the concrete humanitarian aims of later sentimental writers. Although not banned by an act of Parliament until 1835, occurrences of baiting are said to have declined precipitously by the middle of the eighteenth century.

Just as humans are the only species capable of evil, they are the only species capable of virtue. Shaftesbury differentiates between an innate goodness, based on creaturely affections, and cultivated virtue, which is categorically human. A horse, he remarks, may be vicious or good in its nature, but we would never consider it virtuous. If a creature, no matter how innately compassionate, “cannot reflect on what he himself does or sees others do so to take of notice of what is worthy or honest and make that notice or conception of worth and honesty to be an object of his affection, he has not the character of being virtuous” (173). Self-consciousness, reflection, and the capacity for deliberate reformation of the affections define human uniqueness. Shaftesbury explicitly defines the human against the animal in his discussion of virtue in the *Inquiry*, as he transposes an aristocratic idiom of masculine self-sovereignty and honorable citizenship onto the discourse of species. In his history of political thought in the long eighteenth century, J.G.A. Pocock differentiates between the juristic model of politics and rights, associated with Hobbes and the natural law theorists, and a classical republican tradition, which emphasizes self-rule and commitment to the public good, activities often framed under the banner of “virtue.” Pocock sees a tension in the period, and inside Whig discourse itself, between the proto-liberal discourse of rights, which is itself intimately bound up

with the origins of possessive individualism, and the aristocratic discourse of citizenship, which, he suggests, is converted into a sentimental idiom of manners over the course of the century.⁶⁹ Shaftesbury enters this debate on the side of republican virtue. Mobilizing the language of classical humanism, he outlines a program for the formation of a virtuous personality that is singularly human. Divested of divine spark and the prerogatives that accompany it, Shaftesbury's humans are no longer the kings of creation. However, they remain aristocrats in the order of nature, as a result of a faculty for self-conscious emotional self-making that complements their capacity to remake natural landscapes.

Shaftesbury is often figured as advocating a simplistic intuitionism, a theory of moral sense defined as a unique organ of moral knowledge. But where Cudworth and his fellow Christian Platonists claimed for humanity an innate knowledge of good and evil, Shaftesbury instead sets morality on the foundation of mammalian sociability and sympathy. Similarly, Shaftesbury's rejection of the nominalism of his tutor and friend, John Locke, was not an assertion of the existence of innate ideas so much as an affirmation of natural affections. While moral feeling is always already manifest in the human frame, however, the specifically human aptitude for virtue develops as we are nurtured in a communal world. It is in his account of moral education that Shaftesbury shows the influence of the Stoics, particularly Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. He sees these philosophers as having established a philosophical and ascetic program in which "we were properly our own subject of practice" (77). For the Stoics, virtue is based on inner moral autonomy, developed through self-dialogue, self-command, and self-

⁶⁹ J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 37-50.

cultivation. Cultivating the self requires an expansion and husbandry of interior space, made possible through various types of mental labor and asceticism.

In Shaftesbury's version, the georgics of the self begin with a kind of self-mapping; exploration and surveying precede agriculture (the georgic idiom will be explored more fully in Chapter Two). Readers are invited "to explore the interior regions and recesses of the mind, the hollow caverns of deep thought, the private seats of fancy, the wastes and wildernesses as well as the more fruitful and cultivated tracts of the obscure climate" (427). The self—its habits, beliefs, and affections—is initially an unknown geography. Direct intervention follows exploration. One must learn the practice of "subduing and subjecting" the affections, as if they were wild creatures. What he calls the "*improving mind*" guides and disciplines, though does not eradicate, the impulses of sensation. From farming we move to building: one who "applies himself to cultivate another soil, builds in a different matter from that of stone or marble and, having righter models in his eye, becomes in truth *the architect of his own life and fortune*" (332). Shaftesbury's idiom of emotional self-construction borrows copiously from the vernacular of the georgic: the affective self, like the land, is cultivated, refined, labored over, improved, subdued, and developed. To cultivate the self is to uproot certain passions and nurture others. Self-remaking is a gardener's art, requiring the "vigorous application of the shears and pruning knife" (83). He envisages an expansion of inner life not in the terms of authenticity and unification, which are central to histories of modern selfhood, but rather as an ongoing process of laborious remaking and self-multiplication. For instance, he seems to foresee a particularly romantic form of privacy when he suggests that one "retire into some thick wood, or, rather, take the point of some high

hill,” but in his regimen, such retirement is not an opportunity for escaping sociability, but for establishing it. Once the student finds himself alone in the woods, he is meant to talk to himself (73). Shaftesbury reads the Delphic inscription, “Recognize yourself!” as a way of saying “Divide yourself!” (77). Inner conversation, or soliloquy, is the key to human autonomy. The soliloquy of self-examination is guided by what Shaftesbury calls “reason’s culture” (331). Reason is a distinctly human aptitude, which, in his usage, generally denotes language and a reflective distance from the passions. But reason is not itself a comprehensive moral faculty. Feeling impels moral activity and reason serves only to direct feeling toward virtue. The process of becoming human involves not a repression of disruptive animal propensities, but an expansion and channeling of innate animal nature. Reason is employed to “secure the right application of the affections” (175), which it does by conceiving and objectifying positive emotions: “the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude and their contraries, being brought into the mind by reflection, become object,” and so “there arises another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves” (172). It is the self-reflexive capacity to have feelings about feelings that defines human virtue.

Shaftesbury’s innovation occurs less in his appeal to Stoic practices of the self than in the way he repositions these practices in a theory of public culture, wherein poets take the place of the interior interlocutor and reformer. This is where his philosophy develops from an aristocratic discourse of disinterested but self-constituted virtue to a potentially middle-class discourse of socialized morality or manners. In a conjectural history of the verbal arts, he differentiates between societies governed by fear, such as those imagined by Hobbes, and societies in which “persuasion was the chief means of

guiding” (107). In the latter, orators and bards first appeared, inventing the arts of rhetoric and poetry. In free societies—according to Shaftesbury’s Whig politics, personal liberty and art reinforce each other—poets are arbiters of and instructors in humanity, whereas in absolutist France, poetry operates as ideology, making men satisfied with their own repression. Poetry exerts a normative force, and in a free society, to the “correction of humour and formation of taste, our reading, if it be of the right sort, must principally contribute” (152-3). Poets perceive the order and harmony of the affections and conceive ideals of moral feeling and action. They depict the “boundaries of the passions,” and, in doing so, make moral distinctions, separating the “beautiful from the deformed, the amiable from the odious” (93). This act of selecting and idealizing particular passions is a way of making virtue beautiful, of using our aesthetic sensibility to normalize and expand humane feeling. For Shaftesbury, “civility and humanity” are a “taste” (151), as are “brutality, insolence, riot,” and “the most natural beauty in the world is honesty and moral truth” (65). Ethics enter into proximity with aesthetics in sentimental theories because both involve a similar relation to the passions: both require and contribute to the self-conscious cultivation of habituated feeling.⁷⁰

Shaftesbury acknowledges the challenge posed by moral education in a liberal society. “The temper of the pedagogue suits not with the age,” he writes, “[a]nd the world, however it may be taught, will not be tutored” (32). Even in his approving preface to Whichcote’s *Sermons*, he questions the persuasive power of the pulpit. He criticizes the moral dogmatism, exemplified by writers of conduct books, whom he calls haranguers, and “holy advisers,” who merely pass on moral precepts (75). The problem

⁷⁰ On Shaftesbury’s conflation of ethics and aesthetics, see John Andrew Bernstein’s *Shaftesbury, Rousseau, and Kant: An Introduction to the Conflict between Aesthetic and Moral Values in Modern Thought* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1980).

with such didacticism is that “giving advice was, properly, taking an occasion to show our wisdom at another’s expense” (70). Moral teachers must avoid the dynamics of power and hierarchy that have corrupted Christian institutions. They must refrain from simple rule-making, because moral subjects, in order to be virtuous, must be self-directed. Students are meant to constitute their own moral selfhood, because self-discipline is a more powerful and consistent arrangement than social discipline based on fear. Poets make good moral advisers, Shaftesbury suggests, because they know how to be subtle in their teaching. They openly claim only to please, and their advice, their instruction in “rules of life ... manners and good sense,” is implicit (71). There is a necessary slight-of-hand or *legerdemain* in giving moral advice. Poetic persuasion follows the *via media* of polite society, between stoic autonomy and the stern didacticism of the priest or pedagogue. Furthermore, poets—writers of verse, of drama, of philosophical dialogues—are models for the inward soliloquy that constitutes the heart of autonomous moral subjectivity. In answer to the question, “for who can multiply himself into two persons and be his own subject?” Shaftesbury says, “Go to the poets” (72). Even in a corrupt age, poets are exemplars of self-dialogue, of inner-soliloquy.

The problem of disseminating moral feeling in a society of tolerant but self-directed agents is related to a second problem: that of expanding the *sensus communis* beyond immediate acquaintances, of *imagining* more extensive communities. In its natural form, sociability is physical and direct because sympathy requires likeness and contiguity. One of Shaftesbury’s chief examples of such bounded sympathy is a gentleman’s undue love for “a horse, a hound, a hawk” (416). Local phenomenological affection may occur naturally, but the broader concern, the sympathetic identifications

and obligations that underlie a non-local community, must be actively constituted. This problem is examined in *The Moralists* when Philocles tells Theocles that he can imagine the amorous love that is directed to another person, “but this complex, universal love was beyond my reach. I could love the individual but not the species. This was too mysterious, too metaphysical an object for me. In short, I could love nothing of which I had not some sensible, material image” (256). The interesting term here is “material image,” because of the way, even as Philocles is making a claim about the necessary physicality and proximity of the love-object, he suggests that love is always already imagined. Because of this, Theocles argues, one can extend one’s love by raising “such image or spectre as may represent” universal humanity (257). Imagination plays a role in the process of cultivating virtue and expanding sympathy because it allows us to form a relation to larger moral communities. Philocles finally admits that it is possible to “stamp upon [his] mind such a figure . . . whether it stood for mankind or nature” (257). Much as we form a feeling about the feelings we value, we constitute an image, an embodiment, of the community to which we belong, be it a public, mankind, or the natural world.

The goal of harmonizing one’s own interests and affections with the public good, of acting with *disinterest*, marks moral philosophy as it is conceived among the Stoics, by Kant, and most recently, by John Rawls. Shaftesbury stands distinct from this tradition in part because of his validation of feeling. Where he sees a poetic expansion of sympathetic community, Kant prescribes the rational exercises of the Categorical Imperative and the Formula of Humanity. In both its sentimentalist and rationalist forms, though, the activity of virtue ethics is to orient oneself to the public good. Shaftesbury posits an ideal ethical subject, one who is “universal,” which is to say, not particular, in his sympathies (20). He

approaches the Kantian ideal of absolute disinterest: “If there be a general mind, it can have no *particular* interest; but the general good of the whole and its own private good must of necessity be one and the same (21). Ethical self-cultivation is a matter of self-consciously bringing one’s feeling into harmony with an extensive community. For Kant, this disinterested concern extends only to other rational beings. The case is similar with the Stoic writers who were otherwise a central influence on Shaftesbury. In his conception of a unified, providential cosmos and of self-practice as the source of virtue, Shaftesbury echoes Epictetus, the freed Greek slave and well-known Stoic philosopher. Yet, Epictetus states that other animals “were not born for themselves, but for service” to man.⁷¹

Shaftesbury, on the contrary, makes it clear that the limits of moral community are not circumscribed by the species boundary. Beyond one’s kin, one’s community, one’s country, and one’s species, the cultivated affections must extend to all beings with whom we share the Creation. Man’s potential sociability is not set “within the limits of his own species but” grows “in a yet more generous and extensive manner” (433). The aspiring soul, the virtuous citizen, the man of feeling expands his sympathies further and “seeks the good of all and affects the interest and prosperity of all” (244). Shaftesbury describes a potential expansion of compassion that acknowledges no scarcity, that sets no boundary, because “Our *natale solum*, or mother earth ... [is] the real globe itself which bears us and in respect of which we must allow the common animals, and even the plants of all degrees, to claim an equal brotherhood with us under this common parent” (401).

⁷¹ *The Discourses of Epictetus*, trans. Robin Hard (London: Dent, 1995), 39.

Chapter Two

The Augustans and the Weeping Stag: Hunting, Sentimentalism, and the British Georgic

amor omnibus idem
—Virgil¹

The chase is one sure means for blunting in men the sentiments of pity for their fellow creatures.

—Voltaire

Introduction

During the past decade, few issues have so galvanized public and parliamentary attention in England as sport hunting. In 1999, Tony Blair's government commissioned a report on the subject, which concluded that hunting with dogs "seriously compromises the welfare of the fox," but that a ban would harm rural communities, at least temporarily.² Nearly half a million supporters of the hunt marched in London in 2002, but in November of 2004, the House of Commons utilized the Parliament Act, a rarely invoked constitutional provision, to bypass the Lords and push through a total ban on hunting with dogs. Since the passage of the law, which went into effect in February of 2005, hunters have threatened civil disobedience and a challenge under the European Union's Human Rights Act. In reams of reporting and editorializing, commentators on both sides of the issue have engaged in a series of demystifications: the ban is not really about animal welfare but about an intolerant and sentimental urban bourgeoisie flexing its power, or, on the

¹ The most literal translation of this line, from Virgil's famous passage on the passions of beasts in Book III, is "love is the same for all." Hereafter, references to the *Georgics* will be taken from Smith Palmer Bovie's 20th-c translation of the poem (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1956), which offers a more literal rendering than Dryden's idiosyncratic translation of 1697—although in the case of my epigraph, Bovie's translation adds an interesting inflection: "love levels all."

² Lord Burns et. al., *The Final Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales* (London 2000).

contrary, sport hunting is not really about rural economies or stabilizing fox populations but rather a reflection of residual aristocratic barbarity. In this debate about rural blood sports, one side invokes custom, the other modernity, each projects its own idealized image of British identity, and the very status—as cultural symbol or experiencing subject—of the hunted animals remains uncertain.

As this phase in the controversy over blood sports plays out in the Parliament, press, and fields of England, this chapter examines an earlier episode in the history of the chase, one that casts light on the manner in which nonhumans have been discursively constituted in civil society as experiencing subjects with interests of their own. Hunting occupies a robust space in British literature, which we mark as beginning with an epic wherein a Germanic hero, Beowulf, hunts down and slaughters a family of wild beasts. The first zoocentric critique of sport hunting in Britain is usually credited to Thomas More. In More's *Utopia* (1516), the Portuguese narrator Raphael Hythloday tells of the island nation Utopia where animal slaughter is left to "butchers" and regarded as a material "necessity" to be clearly distinguished from the sadistic "pleasure" of sport hunting.³ More objects not to strict forest laws that favor the elite, long a source of popular resentment, but to the torment of animals for human diversion. He thus identifies nonhumans as beings with a recognizable interest within Utopia's idealized social space. Additionally, More establishes the terms of what was to become a central problematic in eighteenth-century discussions of human obligations toward animals: the (always slippery) distinction between unavoidable violence and elective cruelty. In case his point

³ Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1516, trans. Edward Surtz (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964), 97-8. Cited hereafter in text. A number of eighteenth-century utopias advocated humanitarianism or animal rights, including Sarah Scott's *Millennium Hall* (1762), James Burgh's *An Account of the First Settlement, Laws, Forms of Government, and Police, of the Cessares, a People of South America* (1764), and the anonymously-authored *Bruce's Voyage to Naples* (1802).

lacks clarity, More lets down the guise of utopian ethnography and addresses his critique directly at the British reader, using a normative language of affect, an explicitly moral pathos, which foreshadows sentimentalism: “if you are attracted by the hope of slaughter and the expectation of a creature being mangled under your eyes, it ought rather to inspire pity when you behold a weak, fugitive, timid, and innocent little hare torn to pieces by a strong, fierce, and cruel dog” (97-8).

As More’s demystifying analysis implies, sport hunting is a performance of human dominion, a ritualistic spectacle of aristocratic authority premised on the sacrifice of animals.⁴ Yet this instantiation of absolute hierarchy is partially undercut by “figurative excess and irresolution,” which Donna Landry describes as frequent elements in the cultural history of hunting.⁵ The literature of the chase tends toward symbolic inversions and unresolved ambiguities because it depicts a liminal activity in which the border between human and animal becomes permeable. In his essay “Of Cruelty,” Michel de Montaigne describes the hunt as overpowering the one quality that distinguishes humans from brutes, “so master[ing] us that reason can have no access.”⁶ Alexander Pope similarly observes the potential danger hunting poses to humanity in a letter to the son of his friend John Caryll, where he describes the pursuit of game as “inspiring Animalls & Rationalls with like Fury and Ardor,” adding, “the Zeal of the Chace devours the whole

⁴ Analyses of sport hunting as cultural performance include Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1993); and Garry Marvin, “Unspeakability, Inedibility, and the Structures of Pursuit in the English Foxhunt,” in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002), 139-158.

⁵ Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), xv.

⁶ Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cruelty,” *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen (Baltimore: Penguin, 1958), 183.

man.”⁷ In these formulations, hunting destabilizes the Aristotelian distinction between humans and animals, rational souls and sensitive souls, which, since Augustine, had been the core Christian rationale for dominion over nature. The hunter becoming animal in his pursuit of game is a familiar trope in representations of the chase, and is reflected in Ovid’s story of the huntsman Actaeon, who is transformed into a stag by Diana and then hunted by his own men, and by the classical pantheon that associates the chase not only with the restrained Artemis, or Diana, but also with the intoxication and libidinal excess of Dionysus.

The inverse metamorphosis occurs with equal frequency during the hunt, as the animal quarry will often be transformed into a humanized subject. The image of the weeping stag, for instance, whose “heavy groans” and human tears claim our “pity,” first appears in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, when one of Aeneas’s men shoots the partially domesticated creature.⁸ In his essay of “Of Cruelty” (1580), Montaigne evokes Virgil’s expressive stag in an account of his own distress watching the “pursuit and slaughter of an innocent creature” for the pleasure of genteel hunters.⁹ In a scene that became a favorite subject for Shakespeare illustrators including Blake and Constable, Jaques, the man of feeling in *As You Like It* (1600), shares tears with an injured stag, who “heav’d forth such groans / That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat / Almost to bursting.” This sympathetic encounter leads Jaques to a stern critique of sport hunting: “we are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what’s worse, / To fright the animals and to kill them up / In their assigned and

⁷ Alexander Pope to John Caryll, Jr., 5 Dec. 1712, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* Vol. 1, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 163.

⁸ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden, 1697 (London: Penguin, 1997), 7.698-9.

⁹ Montaigne, “Of Cruelty,” 186.

native dwelling place.”¹⁰ The figure reappears in the hunting sequence of Denham’s panegyric to Charles I, *Cooper’s Hill* (1655), in Margaret Cavendish’s critical rewriting of Denham, “The Hunting of the Stag” (1664), and in a number of eighteenth-century hunting poems. The potential for an unsettling return gaze is intrinsic to the logic of the chase, which requires that the quarry be an active and at times noble agent capable of autonomy and resistance. Thus even early-modern hunting manuals feature animals who speak through their body language and cries, and in so doing question the ostensibly singular subjectivity of humanity, resisting their fate by imploring sympathetic identification.

While moral discomfort has long haunted the pursuit of game—the Spanish philosopher and pro-hunter José Ortega y Gasset wonders if “uneasiness” has “always” accompanied the hunt¹¹—criticism of genteel field sports first became widespread in early eighteenth-century Britain. Historians have generally explained the emergence of public unease regarding blood sports as reflecting the growing cultural influence of an urban middle class, who kept pets for pleasure and whose polite sensibilities were promoted as a civilized alternative to the retrograde values of the squirearchy and the uncivilized enthusiasms of the urban mob.¹² In the first years of the century, criticism of the hunt was often expressed in the burgeoning periodical press, an important vehicle for bourgeois self-fashioning. On May 21, 1713, an essay by Pope was published in Richard Steele’s short-lived journal, *The Guardian*, which argues that humans are morally

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare As You Like It*, ed. Agnes Latham (London: Methuen, 1975), 2.1.36-7, 60-3.

¹¹ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting*, trans. Howard Wescott (New York: Scribner’s, 1972), 101-3.

¹² See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 119 and 183; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 461 and 503; and Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside*, 7.

“accountable for the ill Use” of other creatures.¹³ Pope establishes as a problem the place of animals in the national conscience, in the secular moral community that public sphere discourse promotes. He names hunting as one of the cruel customs that define British character, but while he regards torturing insects and bear-baiting as unequivocal evils, he expresses ambivalence about the moral status of the chase. Hunting is itself a “Sanguinary Sport[,]” but because of its association with “Authority and Custom”—the monarchy and the rural gentry—he considers it above “attack” (47). Yet Pope does object to a particular “Custom yet in Use,” which he links with the barbarism of the Goths and Scythians: encouraging high-born ladies to cut the throat of a captured stag, a “trembling and weeping Creature.” In a collision of affect, the pity evoked by the Virgilian figure of the weeping stag is contrasted with the nervous “agitation” and enthusiastic emotional contagion of the chasers, which serve to “resist those Checks, which Compassion would naturally suggest in behalf of the Animal pursued” (47). Custom habituates certain types of feeling, which are culturally specific and distinct from the innate benevolence that, according to Pope, remains evident in our capacity to understand the natural language of animal expression, their “Voice or Cry, so nearly resembling the Human” (49). Although he avoids explicitly condemning the hunt, Pope hails a reader whose passions are not molded by custom, who sympathizes with the suffering stag rather than the genteel hunters. Such address is the medium of Pope’s cultural critique, a critique made possible within a sentimental paradigm that understands the public venue of print to be intimately and instrumentally linked with the realm of individual feeling.

¹³ *Guardian* 61 (21 May 1713), in *Selected Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed. Paul Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987). In their earlier publications, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, Steele and Joseph Addison had occasionally advocated concern for the animal creation as part of their wider project of molding a culture of politeness.

Pope hints at why critics of cruelty were hesitant regarding the hunt. Its association with elite rural tradition made it a far more ambitious target for humanitarian reformers than bear-baiting, which, though thoroughly enjoyed by the Stuart monarchs, had come to be seen as a barbaric pastime of the urban underclass. It is therefore appropriate that the most nuanced examinations of the moral status of the chase appears not in periodical essays or on the London stage but in georgic poetry, a genre whose concerns were predominantly rural, even if its audience was not. The hunt and other field sports are primary topics of interest in four well-known and widely read georgic poems published between 1713 and 1735: Gay's *Rural Sports*, Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, Thomson's *The Seasons*, and Somerville's *The Chase*. Like their prototype, Virgil's *Georgics*, these poems contribute the imaginative foundations to the project of "nation-building," to borrow Rachel Crawford's phrase,¹⁴ because of the way they seek to mediate social difference, between, for example, rural industry and urban literacy or customary practices and progress narratives. In this chapter, I suggest that the broad national community imagined in georgic poetry's ideal presences and sympathetic identifications encompasses animals in addition to rural laborers, squires, and urban readers. In Chapter One, I examined the Restoration-era intellectual context in which animals became subjects of moral consideration. Here I consider how, in the debate about hunting, animal subjects entered and occupied the sentimental community envisioned by georgic poetry.

¹⁴ Rachel Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 93.

I. Virgil in a Sentimental Age: Didacticism and Expressive Animals

References to the hunt are scarce in Virgil's *Georgics* (37-30 BCE), the primary source text for eighteenth-century rural didactic poetry. In Book I, the poet observes that "Men discovered how to trap and hunt" at the advent of the iron age, these being among the "civilizing arts" requisite for life under Jove's postlapsarian regime of labor (1.139, 145). Among the specific tasks prescribed for the winter months are snaring cranes, coursing hare, and hunting roe (1.309-10). In Book III, four lines attend to the care and training of canines for the pursuit of hare, boar, and stag (3.410-13). The hunt, though it receives little specific treatment in Virgil's poem, is an activity compatible with the georgic's utilitarian ethos. The statement of theodicy articulated in Book I envisages the natural creation as providentially resistant to human will and thus requiring continuous intervention, toil, and innovation to be made habitable. Creatures such as venomous serpents and predacious wolves attest to Jove's intentions for the present age of labor. The language of epic warfare is surprisingly prevalent in a poem that advocates the arts of peace: the earth must be wounded and conquered, the farmer's tools are "armaments," forests are leveled and native animals dispossessed. As a genre that expresses humanity's role as destroyer and active shaper of the natural order, the georgic offered a fitting outlook for poetry celebrating the hunt. And indeed the *Georgics* served as a model for post-classical didactic hunting poems by Grattius, Nemesianus, and Oppian, all of which saw English translations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁵

In the *Georgics*, the principle of human mastery exists in productive tension with recognition of what Virgil calls "nature's vital force" (2.45). Culture (*cultus*) in the poem

¹⁵ John Chalker, *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge, 1969), 158-62.

does not connote human activity enclosed within itself or altogether set against the natural order but rather a dynamic interface with an animated and varied world of seasons and soils, plants and animals. As conceived through Virgil's anthropomorphic poetics, nature is neither mechanistic nor inert. A language of affective subjectivity is used to depict a continuity of experience, an inner life shared among the varied constituents of the natural order. The earth is grateful; crops rejoice; crows feel "exceptional joy" (1.414). The poem's most substantial principle about cultivation is that it requires an acquired knowledge of geographical localities, soil types, seasonal patterns, plant attributes, and animal behavior. The basic principle promoted in Virgil's *Georgics* is that the successful husbandman must interpret the signs (*signa*) of an expressive natural order. The poem's opening lines, for example, promise to teach the farmer to interpret the heavens and so to place natural signs in the service of human culture (tellingly, the Latin *sidere* denotes both signs and stars). In *The Georgics*, Virgil shows himself to be an attentive ethologist. He describes the habits of gulls, herons, and ravens, meditates on the impressive cognitive capacities of wild animals, and stresses the teachability of domesticated creatures like dogs and bulls. And he steadfastly includes human beings in the grand processes of animated nature. His description of the amorous desire universal among "every living creature, man and beast, / The ocean's tribes, the herds, the colorful birds" has captivated the attention of numerous readers, including eighteenth-century georgic writers like Thomson, for whom it became a set-piece (3.242-3). Further stressing the interspecies continuity of experience, he asserts that like love, "The ruthless grasp of death ensnares us all" (3.66). In several instances, this recognition of shared embodiment and perception leads to descriptions of pity for animals, particularly horses

(e.g., 2.542), but compassion for brutes is never prescribed. *The Georgics* emphasizes mastery over rather than affection for animated nature.

Anthony Low has traced the presence of georgic values, if not formal georgic poetry, through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it was John Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, published with a critical preface by Joseph Addison, that revitalized the genre for Britain's own Augustan era.¹⁶ Eleven years after Dryden's translation, the publication of John Philips's *Cyder* initiated a vogue for formal Virgilian imitations in England. Of equal importance, two watershed political events, the Union between England and Scotland in 1707 and the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, created fertile soil for the growing popularity of the georgic, a mode well-suited for mediating the divergent energies of an expanding commercial empire. Stylistically, the georgic stands between the lofty epic and lowly pastoral, and, as scholars have long noticed, mediation is one of its primary characteristics. Frans De Bruyn sees georgic poetry as working to reconcile "pastoral ease and epic seriousness, sensory appeal and plain instruction, retirement and engagement, cyclical return and historical progress."¹⁷ Aesthetically, the georgic's middle style, its emphasis on didacticism and naturalistic description, fit the new century's model of practical neoclassicism. Ideologically, the georgic served to position rural life at the heart of national identity and rural labor as the means to national prosperity in an age of shifting borders, growing metropolitan clout, and expanding

¹⁶ Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton UP 1985). Dwight Durling, *Georgic Tradition in English Poetry* (Port Washington NY: Kennikat, 1964), 4-8, describes the reemergence of the georgic in a wider European context.

¹⁷ Frans De Bruyn, "Reading Virgil's *Georgics* as a Scientific Text: The Eighteenth-Century Debate between Jethro Tull and Stephen Switzer," *ELH* 71.3 (2004), 661. In *Georgic Modernity*, Kevis Goodman characterizes the genre by its concern with the mediation of information. In a proliferating media culture, she argues, georgic verse discloses historical "presentness" as it is signaled in a perceptual dissonance caused by information overload (3).

global commerce. Its celebration of a productive and humanized countryside resonated with Locke's positing of a laborious "subduing [of] the earth" as the foundation of property rights, economic progress, and national greatness.¹⁸ The *Georgics* supplied an idiom and ideology of cultivation for an age of agricultural and social improvement. Of course, genres are sustained through continual rebirth, and the georgic meant something different in the eighteenth century than it did for Virgil. Still, two characteristics of Virgil's poem were particularly significant to eighteenth-century readers: didacticism and natural description.

With its pragmatism, literalism, and spurning of baroque aestheticism, the eighteenth century provides a high water mark in the post-classical history of verse didacticism, a fact reflected in criticism as well as practice. Classical and Renaissance generic taxonomies generally exclude didactic poetry, even when this means leaving undefined the place of canonical works such as the *Georgics* and Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.¹⁹ Didactic verse, as a specific mode and rationale for literary production, tends to be elided from twentieth-century criticism as well, committed as it is to a narrative of the evolution from a neoclassical poetics of mimesis to a Romantic poetics of self-expression.²⁰ Yet, with Virgil as an archetype and a growing list of imitations to consider, eighteenth-century critics theorized at length about the traits and techniques of didactic verse. The young Joseph Addison noticed the paucity of critical attention to the *Georgics*, observing that critics had generally either passed it "over in silence" or inappropriately

¹⁸ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, 1689 (London: Everyman, 1999), 131.

¹⁹ See Alexander Dalzell, *The Criticism of Didactic Poetry: Essays on Lucretius, Virgil, and Ovid* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1996), 1-34.

²⁰ E.g., M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1958).

classed it with the pastoral.²¹ Following Montaigne and Dryden, Addison argues for the canonical primacy of the *Georgics*, calling it the “most complete, elaborate, and finish’d piece of all Antiquity” (267), and he maps out a series of identifying characteristics that distinguish the “class of Poetry” to which it belongs (258): variation, excursus, description, genealogy, and a balance between aesthetic sophistication and technical instruction. Addison’s essay is most innovative in examining the problem of literary didacticism, the manner by which verse educates its reader. He first invokes a principle associated with Horace: the pleasure a reader receives from beautiful images and ornamental language supplies the honey that sweetens a lesson. Addison further observes that a georgic precept “enters as it were through a by-way,” that Virgil “loves to suggest a truth indirectly, to let us see just so much as will naturally lead the imagination into all the parts that lie concealed” (260). Encouraged to locate the implicit instruction concealed in description, the georgic reader is made hermeneutically active.²² Such activity constitutes a responsive reading subject while simultaneously appealing to a human desire for independence, thus allowing for the transmission of knowledge without the appearance of tendentiousness.²³ Didactic verse, in Addison’s view, is the ideal teacher, for it affirms moral and intellectual autonomy even as it cultivates and instructs.

To put this another way, the georgic, though associated with dry precepts and the smell of

²¹ Joseph Addison, “An Essay on Virgil’s *Georgics*,” *Miscellaneous Works in Verse and Prose* Vol. 1 (London, 1713), 258. Cited hereafter in text.

²² See Kevis Goodman’s discussion of didactic obliqueness in *Georgic Modernity*, 33-4.

²³ As Pope puts it in *An Essay on Criticism*: “Men must be *taught* as if you taught them *not*,” *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, line 574. Joseph Warton describes the problem this way: “Profess’d teaching is highly disagreeable to the natural pride of man, as it implies a superiority of understanding over the person instructed,” in “Reflections on Didactic Poetry,” *Works of Virgil* vol. 1 (London, 1753), 394.

the barnyard, is as committed to *producing* subjectivity as are the pastoral and lyric poetry—in this case, the subjectivity of the reader rather than the poet.²⁴

Over the next half century, a number of critics contributed to this theorization of didactic verse, and in 1753, Joseph Warton published his “Reflections on Didactic Poetry” in a four-volume *Works of Virgil*.²⁵ This essay indexes the extent to which sentimental assumptions had permeated the aims and methods of didactic poetry—which increasingly sought to inculcate not only practical and aesthetic but also moral and emotional precepts—in the fifty years since Addison’s brief inquiry into literary pedagogy. What for Addison had been the problem of conveying practical and aesthetic knowledge through the indirect “by-ways” of poetic language expands, in Warton’s essay, into a question of how “precepts may gain an easy admission into the heart” (394). Warton links the value of pathetic digressions in didactic poetry with a principle of Lockean psychology: habituated sensory impressions supply the contingent foundations of moral response. Adapting this principle to literary criticism, Warton writes, “The understanding feels no pleasure in being instructed twice in the same thing; but the heart is capable of feeling the same emotion twice, with great pleasure” (400). Didactic poetry institutes sentimental values by constituting a reader responsive to pathos, turning

²⁴ The *Georgics* is an explicitly didactic poem, although critics agree that it should be understood more as a celebration of rural productivity rather than as a systematic treatise on farming. Virgil conveys the centrality of rural life and labor within national community; his audience extends beyond the readers who may put into direct practice the poem’s technical precepts; and his didactic intentions are as much political and moral as they are agricultural. See Dalzell, *The Criticism of Didactic Poetry*, 105-27.

²⁵ Most important among them was the Oxford don Joseph Trapp, whose lectures on poetry delivered between 1714 and 1719 were published in 1742. In his observations on “Didactic or Preceptive Poetry,” Pratt describes the difficulty of teaching—“Human Nature, at the same Time it is desirous of Knowledge, is cautious of confessing its Want of it” (187)—and also encourages an expansion of georgic subject matter, noting that “Hunting, Fishing, Hawking, and the like . . . are excellent Subjects for Didactic Verse,” *Lectures on Poetry Read at the Schools of Natural Philosophy at Oxford* (New York: Garland, 1970), 199.

sympathy, if not virtue, into a habit. The georgic asserts the value of rural labor while simultaneously refining the feelings of its sentimental urban readers by its presentation of subjects—primarily, animals and the laboring poor—with whom they may sympathize from a distance. Affective repetition, argues Warton, offers a more powerful tool than overt moral precept because it allows the reader a perception of intellectual autonomy while still shaping his/her sentiments.

The georgic poet cultivates his readers as he teaches them to tend the earth, their own passions becoming a field for georgic activity. This humanistic vision of georgic self-culturing depends on an analogy between passions and land, people and plants, which has its roots in Roman stoicism and is key to the early-modern reception of the *Georgics*. Erica Fudge describes humanism as premised on the assumption that “there is no always-already human, there is only human-ness, a quality which must be learned, and can be lost.”²⁶ The Renaissance recovery of a classical language of culture is at the heart of a transformation in the categorical definition of humanness, away from static traits like the immortal soul and toward a process of continual and contingent self-making. In this redefinition, the *Georgics* supplied a metaphoric of human activity, what Giorgio Agamben calls an “anthropological machine,” a model of the human being as a uniquely self-culturing animal.²⁷ When he turns his attention to “*knowledge of our selves*”²⁸ in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Francis Bacon associates Virgil’s poem with the “habite & not . . . nature” that is the basis for “morall vertues”:

²⁶ Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals*, 65.

²⁷ Giorgio Agamben describes an “anthropological machine,” which facilitates “the humanization of the animal,” which is to say, the constitution of man, in *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004) 35-7.

²⁸ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2000), 93. Cited hereafter in text.

And surely if the purpose be in good earnest not to write at leasure that which men may read at leasure, but really to instruct and suborne Action and active life, these Georgicks of the mind concerning the husbandry & tillage thereof, are no less worthy then the heroical descriptions of *virtue, duty, & felicity*. (134-5)

Culture distinguishes a domain of human agency from providential nature, a space of potential social critique, responsibility, and reformation. In the eighteenth century, as I have suggested, this georgic humanism was framed within a cultural defense of poetry that overlapped with the vogue for Virgilian imitations and didactic verse in Britain.

While eighteenth-century critics endorsed the *Georgics* as a model for didacticism and human self-creation, they also noted its vivid depictions of the natural world, particularly its animals. It is a wonderfully suggestive fact that Virgil's rural poem served as a foundational text for both Enlightenment humanism and natural history. Addison sees Virgil as achieving the ideal of empirical mimesis, total transparency between word and object, so that in language "every thing ... may immediately present itself" (262).

Although critics generally understood Virgil to have far surpassed Lucretius, not least in his piety, they often noted the influence of Epicurean materialism in Virgil's awareness of natural phenomena. Virgil supplied classical cachet for a shift away from the allegorical rendering of animals and natural phenomena in poetry and for the new popularity of literalistic descriptive verse. Critics were particularly struck, and sometimes threatened, by Virgil's anthropomorphism, which they found more heterodox, in its undermining of humanity's metaphysical distinctiveness, than the anodyne human/animal allegories of the beast fable. Addison remarks on the numerous "metaphors" in Book II, where trees are accorded "oblivion, ignorance, wonder, desire, and the like"; the analogies in Book IV are less "daring" because "human thoughts and passions may be

more naturally ascribed to a Bee, than to an inanimate Plant” (265). According to Warton, Virgil “ascribes human properties and passions to plants and animals” as a manner of ornamenting what would otherwise be dry description and thus eliciting the reader’s engagement (405). Warton explains Virgil’s potentially disconcerting personification of nonhuman nature as a rhetorical strategy, a way of adding gloss to his lowly subject matter. Virgil’s depiction of floral and faunal subjectivity and affective expressiveness intrigued and disturbed these sympathetic critics.

Others saw Virgil’s attention to animal behavior and natural processes as a commendable instance of empiricism. Later eighteenth-century critics and naturalists admired Virgil as a careful observer of animal life, seeing him as the forerunner to James Thomson, their own nation’s master of zoopoetics. In his proto-ecocritical polemic, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777), John Aikin condemns contemporary poetry for the vice of “perpetual repetition of the same images” and calls for empirical, ongoing, and comparative observation of natural objects on the part of poets.²⁹ The author of the *Georgics* is designated the ideal naturalist-poet, above all in his observation of animals: “No writer among the ancients appears to have a more advantageous use of zoological observations than Virgil” (35). For Aikin, comprehending the animal creation requires attention to “moral and intellectual character . . . motions, habitations, and pursuits.” In other words, Aikin’s poetics of natural history, which is premised on a non-Cartesian epistemology that recognizes nonhumans as conscious beings, emphasizes animal characteristics held, as he puts it, “in common” with humans (34). Aikin sees Virgil’s descriptions of animals as true to nature because they are

²⁹ John Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry*, 1777 (New York: Garland, 1970), 2. Cited hereafter in text.

attentive to an economy of animal feeling: to how animals act and how their actions are expressive of an inner nature. Even naturalists recognized the *Georgics* as a significant work of natural history. Among others, Thomas Pennant in *British Zoology* (1768-70) and Gilbert White in *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (1789) draw attention to Virgil's descriptions of specific species, attempting to match up Latin names with contemporary identifications and paying attention not only to visible markers but also to cues of behavior and character.³⁰ For the ethologically-minded natural historians of the later eighteenth century, who sought knowledge of the "life and conversation of animals," Virgil, rather than Aristotle or Pliny the Elder, was considered the preeminent naturalist among the ancients.³¹

We tend to associate the georgic with a rural debate between classically-educated squires and empirically-minded improvers, and sentimentalism with an emergent urban culture of manners, but Virgil's middle mode was understood as particularly amenable to the ideas and ideals of sentimentalism. It was so because of its didacticism, which was increasingly extended into moral and emotional territory, and its descriptive emphasis on an expressive, rather than deep and essentially private, subjectivity. The passions the georgic is concerned with are not the infinitely nuanced emotions of a hidden selfhood but rather the cultivatable affections of social subjects and the expressive affects of nonhumans. Even as the georgic asserts the necessity of labor and a utilitarian relationship with nature, it cultivates sympathetic humans and discloses animal being. This generic tension means that the supporter of the chase could appeal to the georgic's

³⁰ See Pennant, *British Zoology*, 4 vols. (London, 1768-70), on the Long-Tailed Field Mouse (1.103), the Nightingale (2.257), and the Bittern (2.343); and White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne, in the County of Southhampton* (London, 1789) on the dove (113-14) and the various *Hirundines* (173).

³¹ The phrase comes from Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, 93.

utilitarian attitude toward nature; an opponent, to its humanism and attention to animal subjectivity; and writers like Gay and Pope, to whom I turn next, could use its dialecticism to thematize their own ambivalence about the hunt.

II. “*The Sylvan War*” in *Gay and Pope*

The peace treaty signed in Utrecht in 1713, which brought to an end Britain’s involvement in the War of Spanish Succession, was celebrated in a cavalcade of peace poems. The treaty, negotiated by Anne’s Tory ministers, added territories in North America and the Mediterranean to the newly incorporated Kingdom of Great Britain, in addition to the *asiento*, the exclusive right to slave-trading in Spanish America. Among the panegyrics, two are notable for their invocation of georgic themes: Pope’s *Windsor-Forest* and John Gay’s *Rural Sports*. Like Virgil’s *Georgics*, these poems consider how an imperial nation defines itself when no longer unified by the epic struggles of war, and the common answer is to position rural pursuits and agricultural production at the heart of national identity. The georgic reimagines heroic action and patriotism for a pacific age, idealizing, in Anthony Low’s words, “planting and building instead of killing and destruction.”³² More so than Virgil’s poem, though, both *Windsor-Forest* and *Rural Sports* focus on the hunt, and thus on a form of violence, a “Sylvan War,” as Pope describes it, that must be integrated into the culture of peacetime. The georgic offers a mode for contemplating the sublimation, containment, and inevitability of violence toward nonhumans. On the surface both poems advocate field sports, and yet both position their authors and readers at a distance from the hunt, not least by evoking

³² Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution*, 12.

sympathy for the hunted animals. This multiplication of perspectives, I will argue, creates emotional dissonance and moral ambiguity, requiring readers to consider different points of view and to define their own identifications, sentiments, and principles.

John Gay is generally remembered for his portrayal of London's lower classes in the urban georgic *Trivia* and in *The Beggar's Opera*. His second published poem, though, celebrates the "sweets of rural life" intimately known by the dedicatee of the poem, Alexander Pope, who spent his adolescence in the environs of Windsor Forest.³³ Gay calls attention to his generic pretensions with a subtitle, "A Georgic," added in the 1720 edition, and early in the poem when the narrator conceals himself in a bower and peruses Virgil's account of "the various rural toil[s]," which are paraphrased in twenty-five lines (71). Gay marks his generic lineage so clearly because recreational hunting and fishing remained dubious topics for the georgic. Addison had drawn attention to the pleasing embellishments that accompanied the genre's didacticism, and Pratt had suggested field sports as appropriate subject-matter, but most georgic writers of the period focused on self-evidently utilitarian and productive tasks: growing apples and brewing cider, cultivating sugarcane, raising sheep. After all, the defining ideology of Virgil's *Georgics* is not its celebration of country life in general but its stress on the necessity of unceasing labor. In choosing the georgic, Gay faced the rhetorical challenge of convincing readers that gentrified field sports constitute a legitimate form of rural activity, of transforming the "pleasures [that] recreate the soul" into "toils" that serve the nation (1.122, 131).

Anxiety about the legitimacy of rural blood sports as a subject for a self-described

³³ John Gay, *Rural Sports. A Georgic*, 1713 (London, 1720). Cited hereafter in text by line number. John Aden, in "The 1720 Version of *Rural Sports* and the Georgic Tradition," *MLQ* 20.3: 228-32, argues that the complete reorganization of the poem in its 1720 revision, which I am using here, served to emphasize its georgic elements.

“Georgic” explains why Gay frames the fishing and hunting sequences with images of peasant laborers working the land and why he advocates that the gentry refrain from the chase during the harvest (281-88). Practical didacticism also serves to justify the choice of genre, the conflation of sport and labor, and thus the hunt itself. The poem is loaded with technical precepts: observations on the ideal conditions and seasons for fishing and fowling, on selecting bait and tying flies, on assuring a plentiful supply of game, on deceiving different species of fish, netting partridges, and training dogs. Above all, the implied student of Gay’s poem, as in the *Georgics*, is instructed to pay sustained attention to the natural order, to seasons and geographical locales, to the details of insect markings and animal habits.

Such attentiveness introduces a second rhetorical problem faced by georgic hunters: the need for an ethical, rather than ideological, justification for their sport. In her reading of the poem, Patricia Spacks observes Gay’s use of a technique common in Augustan verse, the repetition of a word, in this case “air,” in distinct contexts, which serves to proliferate the reader’s apprehension of different points of view, leading to a “breadth of perspective.”³⁴ In a far more overt manner, the genre’s descriptive naturalism leads to an emphasis on observable physiological evidence of animal experience, particularly animal suffering: “the gasping pains” and “quivering fins” of a dying fish (157, 252), the wily maneuvers, “trembling” fear, and “screaming” death cry of the hare (294-98, 383-7). At the conclusion of the second hare hunting sequence, the reader is positioned closer to the tormented quarry than to the hunter and his dogs: “spent at last, she pants, and heaves for breath, / Then lays her down, and waits devouring death” (386-

³⁴ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *John Gay* (New York: Twayne, 1965), 25. Other helpful readings of *Rural Sports* include John Chalker, *The English Georgic*, 141-79; and Adina Forsgren, *John Gay Poet “Of a Lower Order”* (Stockholm, 1964), 22-41.

7). Offered vivid insight into the perspective of the quarry, the reader is led to see the world through the eyes of the animal other. There is something radical about such perspectival shifts and the opportunities for identification they facilitate, because they suggest that animals, as beings capable of expressing interests, are potential members of a sympathetically imagined community.

Spack's emphasis on the poem's multiple perspectives leads her to the conclusion that "one's attitude toward hunting must depend upon whether one is hunter or hunted" (25). What is left undefined in the poem, though not unmarked, is the perspective of those who are neither hunter nor hunted: the narrator and the self-conscious reader. Regarding the chase, the narrator's own position is circumspect. In the opening stanzas, with their familiar pastoral distinction between the polluted city and wholesome countryside, Gay assures readers that "'Tis not that rural sports alone invite" the harried urbanite into the rural world (31). Just as the poet observes rather than participates in physical labor, he stands removed from the field sports the poem describes. His time in the countryside is marked by "Sweet contemplation" and rejuvenating retreat rather than the pursuit of game (113). The poem thus literalizes the essential georgic disjunction between productive rural activity and the interests of the urban literati, suggesting that the writers and perhaps readers of georgic poetry may not enjoy the sanguinary recreations of the rural gentry. Twice, though, the narratorial "I" does appear in sporting sequences. In the final stanza of Book I, the narrator defines his own principled if ambivalent fishing ethic. He avoids nets, spears, and draining ponds, and sticks to fly-fishing out of concern for the suffering of insects: "Around the steel no tortur'd worm shall twine, / No blood of living insect stain my line" (265-6). Here, the narrator's personal sentiments are presented with

normative force; they cap the first Book and seem to supply a (compromised) solution to the ethical problem implied by the depictions of animal suffering. The narrator enters one other hunting sequence, and the rapid affective shift from acceptance to pathos to angry irony bypasses the mock-heroic altogether and instead implies sharp critique. In this scene, the narrator views “with delight” the greyhound chasing the hare (291): “She turns, he winds, and soon regains the way / Then tears with goary mouth the screaming prey. / What various sport does rural life afford! / What unbound dainties heap the wholesome board!” (297-300). The poet situates himself in an ambivalent position, marked by ethical compromise, sympathy, and ironic distance. The contrast between this position and the straightforward humanitarianism of Gay’s later poem, *Trivia* (1716), is suggestive of the way the poet in *Rural Sports* deemphasizes his own commitments, creating a space for the reader to occupy various points of view.³⁵

As an epigraph to *Rural Sports*, Gay borrows a line from an earlier georgic hunting poem, *Cynegetica*, written by the Carthaginian poet Nemesianus: “Securi Proelia ruris / Pandimus,” or “I sing ... the battles of the quiet countryside.”³⁶ This is an ancient trope, in which the principle of just war serves to rationalize the chase.³⁷ According to the logic of Nemesianus’s analogy, all that remains of violent conflict is harmless sport: a

³⁵ In *Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (London, 1716), the poet laments the conditions of posthorses: “The lashing Whip resounds, the Horses strain, / and Blood in Anguish bursts the swelling Vein. / O barb’rous Men, your cruel Beasts assuage, / Why vent ye on the gen’rous Steed your Rage? / Does not his Service earn your daily Bread? / Your Wives, your Children, by his Labours fed!” (2.231-6).

³⁶ Nemesianus, *Cynegetica*, trans. J. Wight Duff and Arnold Duff, *Minor Latin Poets* vol. 2 (Harvard: Harvard UP, 1934), 485.

³⁷ In Aristotle’s anthropocentric formulation, the relation is reversed: “Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be made that she has made all animals for the sake of man. And so, from one point of view, the art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practice against wild beasts, and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such a kind is naturally just,” *Politics*, 1.8.

war that is and is not a war, featuring adversaries who may suddenly appear as victims. This analogy between hunting and warfare depends upon the potentially disconcerting symbolic substitution of animals for humans. When presented as an enemy in battle, the quarry is simultaneously humanized and evacuated of the moral consideration we generally extend to other humans. Such cognitive dissonance, with its implication of social discord and moral uncertainty, is the primary rhetorical effect of Gay's poem. It is apparent in the juxtaposition between the descriptions of an idealized countryside where the poet walks "undisturb'd" in a "quiet" broken only by birdsong (4-5) and of an activity characterized by "death in thunder" and "screaming" animals (342, 298). In one stanza, the chase is dubbed a "flying war" (375); in the next, the countryside under the reign of Anne is praised as "remote from war's alarms, / And all the ravages of hostile arms" (396-7). The squire is lectured against damaging the harvest with an ill-timed and haphazard ride, implying that he may well do so (281-88); yet in contemporary Britain, at peace with its European neighbors, "No trampling steed lays waste the ripen'd grain" (405). By accentuating these overt paradoxes, Gay avoids naturalizing the hunt, which appears as an inharmonious clash of interests and affects. Although not free from moralism, the poem works to represent society's uneasy tensions, which necessarily extend beyond the poet's personal and particular values. For the reader, the effect of these competing perspectives is "affective dissonance," a term Kevis Goodman uses to describe the georgic's disclosure of a society's unresolved tensions.³⁸ *Rural Sport* relates the pleasures of the chase and the delight of the fisherman whose "bosom glows with treasures yet uncaught" (146), although, notably, the hunter's experience at the instant of the kill—whether defined by a sadistic thrill or an absurd bathos—is erased from view.

³⁸ Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 4.

Using the affective language of Virgilian zoological description, the poem discloses the expressive torment of the quarry, the “fear” and “gasping pains” of the trout (217, 157), the loss of life experienced precisely as loss by partridges and woodcocks. Additionally, it imparts its own sentiments, the poet’s effort to locate an ethical *via media*, which is “less cruel,” if not absent of cruelty (267). While *Rural Sports* enfolds historical time—a specific occasion, the Treaty of Utrecht—into the cyclical temporality of seasonal activity, it also marks for the reader the unstable and socially fraught nature of its subject.

Dissonance and difficulty, a tendency to advocate interspecies community and an anxiety about the heterodox implications of such advocacy, characterize the depiction of animals throughout Alexander Pope’s *oeuvre*. Pope’s seminal essay in *The Guardian* attests to his role in the formation of a public discourse of humanitarianism, in which the barbaric “Character of [the] Nation” becomes subject to criticism (46), and the poet recommends that “Humanity may be extended thro’ the whole Order of Creatures” (48). Long known as an innovative gardener, Pope also played a part in figuring the affective codes of bourgeois pet-keeping, a form of affiliation that turns animals into permanent children, slightly diminutive love-objects.³⁹ His letters, which were published during his lifetime, are rich with anthropomorphic anecdotes about his numerous canines, at least four of whom shared the name Bounce.⁴⁰ In 1711, he wrote a poem honoring Odysseus’s steadfast dog “Argus,” and, in 1736, published a mock-heroic epistle, “Bounce to Fop,” which compares canine life in country and court. His probable last verse is an elegiac

³⁹ See Pope’s extraordinary verse imagining Gulliver as a pet in the land of Brobdingnag, “The Lamentation of Glumdalclitch, for the Loss of Grildrig,” in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 482-4.

⁴⁰ The richest source of information on Pope’s pets is Norman Ault, *New Light on Pope* (London: Methuen, 1949), Chapter 22. Ault does worry about the “triviality” of this topic (337).

couplet, written, seven weeks before his own death, upon learning from his friend Lord Orrery that Bounce had died: “Ah Bounce! ah gentle Beast! why woudst thou dye, / When thou had’st Meat enough, and Orrery.”⁴¹ In his *ana*, a memoir of conversations, Joseph Spence recounts a discussion in which the poet sharply criticizes Stephen Hales for practicing vivisection, asking, “how do we know that we have a right to kill creatures that we are so little above as dogs, for our curiosity, or even for some use to us?”⁴² Even more radical is Pope’s proposal that “metempsychosis is a very rational scheme, and would give the best account for some phenomena in the moral world,” not least, I would add, the confusing implications of animal consciousness (239). In Pope’s “ethic poem,” *An Essay on Man*, we see an attempt to contain the radical implications of his humanitarianism. To an extent, the poem may be situated in the theriophilic tradition, in its critique of human pride and account of the aptitudes in which animals excel humans, such as the lynx’s eyesight and the hound’s sense of smell. Pope’s humanitarianism is evident as well, in the poet’s joy in seeing “each beast, each insect, happy in its own,” and his attack on those who “Destroy[] all creatures for . . . sport or gust.”⁴³ Yet Pope also defends the grounds of human superiority, trotting out the old Aristotelian models of the great chain of being and the rational soul: “what a nice barrier, / Forever separate, yet forever near” (1.223). The poem’s theme of cosmological interconnectedness and its tendency to highlight differences of degree over differences of kind are complicated when Pope invokes the paradigmatic rationales of Western anthropocentrism.

⁴¹ Quoted in Norman Ault, *New Light on Pope*, 350.

⁴² Joseph Spence, *Observations. Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men* vol. 1, ed. James Osborn (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1966), 118. Cited hereafter in text.

⁴³ *An Essay on Man*, 1.185 and 1.117. Cited hereafter in text by epistle and line.

Comparable tensions animate Pope's early georgic poem *Windsor-Forest*, which was published two months prior to his *Guardian* essay, in March of 1713. More explicitly than in *Rural Sports*, the Peace of Utrecht is the specific occasion for the poem, a wide-ranging exploration of England's past, from the Norman Conquest to the Civil War, and its present, marked by peace with Europe and a growing commercial empire. The poem centers on three hunting episodes, which stand figuratively for the activities—governance, industry, and warfare—through which the nation is constituted, but also literally invoke the customary rural sport of monarchs and swains alike. Ever since Earl Wasserman's influential reading of the poem, literary historians have seen *Windsor-Forest* as a Stuart panegyric, which celebrates the Tory Peace and laments a nearly inevitable Hanoverian succession.⁴⁴ Without dismissing its significance as political allegory, here I emphasize the extent to which *Windsor-Forest* is literally about hunting, situating it in the context of Pope's *Guardian* essay and the contemporary debate about the status of rural blood sports as cruel customs.

In the poem's first hunting sequence, Pope associates the chase with Norman inequity, tracing its origins in Britain to 1066, when William I, a "sportive Tyrant[]," appropriated productive land for hunting grounds and replaced common custom with the unjust forest laws of feudal Germany.⁴⁵ William's ardor for the chase is equated with his tyrannical governance and his waste of productive agricultural land. The Germanic hunt, with its severe forest laws, is defined as a despotic imposition of foreign custom on native

⁴⁴ Earl Wasserman, *The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins P, 1959). Chapter Four in David Morris's *Alexander Pope: The Genius of Sense* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1984) offers a more literalistic reading of the hunt in *Windsor-Forest* and is usefully attentive to the poem's georgic "attitude" (110).

⁴⁵ Alexander Pope, *Windsor-Forest*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, line 64. Cited hereafter in text by line number.

freedom. In contrast, the poem's second hunting sequence positions field sports within the cyclical time of seasonality rather than the linear time of history: fowling in autumn, hare-hunting in winter, fishing in spring, and the stag hunt in summer (85-158). Yet this idealized golden age, of timeless rhythms and natural abundance, is linked with a specific historical era, a period of "Golden Days" that have been inaugurated by Anne's reign. Under Anne, churches are being rebuilt, commerce and agriculture are valued equally, and peace with Europe is imminent. With the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, "The shade Empire" of the forest, which is to say, England, "shall retain no Trace / Of War or Blood, but in the Sylvan Chace," in which "Arms [are] employ'd on Birds and Beasts alone" (371-4). Here the chase seems to stand as a legitimate substitute for human warfare, an outlet for the exercise of the natural energies of the nation's youth, with their rich blood and pure spirits (93-4). Such an interpretation is girded by the poem's implicit yoking of the Peace of Utrecht with Queen Anne's well-known hunting exploits at Windsor and by Pope's imbuing of the second and third hunting sequences with a rich set of classical and medieval allusions, not least the comparison between Anne and the mythological huntress Diana.⁴⁶ In Pope's endeavor at national mythmaking, the royal hunting grounds are a microcosm of the nation's territory and rural sports are the characteristic English pursuit. Thus, like Wasserman, we might read Pope's attitude toward the hunt as defined by compromise. Within the ideal of *concordia discors*, the violence of the hunt is regarded as a necessity, both as a national custom linking past and present, queens and peasants, and as a means of displacing violent passions.

⁴⁶ On Pope's invocations of the medieval language of the hunt, see Pat Rogers, *The Symbolic Design of Windsor-Forest: Iconography, Pageant, and Prophecy in Pope's Early Work* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004), 94-103.

In *Windsor-Forest*, however, Pope sympathetically depicts the living creatures who inhabit the royal preserve. The pheasant who “feels the fiery Wound, / Flutters in Blood, and panting beats the Ground” (113-4), and the “mounting Larks [who] their Notes prepare, / They fall, and leave their little Lives in Air” (133-4), are presented as experiencing subjects, whose bodies actively attest to their suffering and whose deaths are registered as loss. In its analogies, its language, and its rhetoric, the poem draws attention to the similarity between violence toward humans and violence toward animals. In this anti-war poem, partridges imprisoned in the fowler’s net are likened to a prosperous town captured by the British army. Under the Norman yoke, the swain “with Tears his frustrate Labour yields, / And famish’d dies amidst his ripen’d Fields” (55-6), just as the partridges, “Secure they trust th’ unfaithful Field, beset, / Till hov’ring o’er ‘em sweeps the swelling net” (103-4). The Nimrod-like William transforms his subjects into “trembling Slaves” and treats them like “Royal Game” (64); the pheasant shot by the hunter is equally embodied as it “flutters” and dies “panting.” Pope trains his reader to read and sympathize with such animal expression, just as Britain’s monarchs after William I “heard the Subjects Cries” (85). We know that at least one early reader experienced the poem’s pathos along these lines. In a poem affixed to the 1717 edition of Pope’s *Works*, Francis Knapp described his own sentimental response to the poem: “Ah! How I melt with pity, when I spy / On the cold earth the flutt’ring Pheasant lie.”⁴⁷

One of Pope’s allusions to Virgil draws overt attention to human agency, to the difference between the material necessity of natural violence and the activities of man, who, as Pope puts it in the *Guardian* essay, “seeks out and pursues even the most

⁴⁷ Francis Knapp, “To Mr. Pope on the Publication of His Windsor Forest,” in *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope* (London, 1717). Quoted in Morris, *Alexander Pope*, 120.

inoffensive Animals, on purpose to persecute and destroy them” (46).⁴⁸ In the *Georgics*, a natural force, the murrain plague, is responsible for death: “Birds found the air too heavy for their wings / And, plunging earthward, left their lives aloft” (3.545-6). In *Windsor-Forest*, it is the hunter who “lifts the Tube, and levels with his Eye,” creating an overtly unnatural event, “a short Thunder breaks the frozen sky,” which kills—notice the Virgilian echo here—the “mounting Larks [who] their Notes prepare, / They fall, and leave their little Lives in Air” (129-34). A similar distinction between natural and human violence is crucial to the argument of *The Essay on Man*, a work that is both theodicy and “ethic poem,” at once asserting “whatever is, is right” and focusing “upon human action” with the design of “reform[ing] the mind” (Spence 130).

Wasserman reads *Windsor-Forest* as achieving a flawless aesthetic balance, and he sees Pope’s position on hunting as ultimately subsumed within the aesthetic and cosmological ideal of *concordia discors*. I read Pope’s ethical stance on hunting as defined not by balance but by an active ambivalence, a refusal to convert moral confusion into moral harmony. In the first months of 1713, partisanship was on the rise as the nation looked uneasily to the looming death of the heirless Anne, and Pope’s Tory coterie pushed him to stand more faithfully by his political affiliations. Not surprisingly, then, *Windsor-Forest* idealizes a hunt associated with a strong, and decidedly English, Stuart monarchy, and with a rural way of life that beats rhythmically as the heart of imperial Britain. Yet Pope was also an animal lover, who spoke against vivisection and wrote numerous poems about his dogs, and, in *Windsor-Forest*, he depicts hunted creatures

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Duthie argues that Pope sanctions the hunt by associating it with conquest, monarchy, and “nature’s complicity,” while deemphasizing the role of “human agency,” in “Public and Private Virtue in Pope and Thomson,” *Durham University Journal* LXXIV.I (Dec. 1981), 61.

with a didactic sympathy that is usually associated with Whig cultural ideology.⁴⁹ In the end, *Windsor-Forest* displays the same ambivalence toward rural blood sports evident in the *Guardian* essay: a distinction between barbaric custom and venerable tradition and a simultaneous undermining of such tradition by evoking pathos for hunted animals. Like *Rural Sports*, then, *Windsor-Forest* constitutes a hermeneutically active and unsettled reader, who must weigh the competing claims of customary cultural identity and sympathetic identification with that culture's victims.

III. Thomson's *The Seasons* and the Origins of Animal Advocacy

The georgic would have been an unwieldy but not insuperable mode for the sportsman had it not been for James Thomson's intervention in the hunting debate. Between 1726 and 1746, Thomson published what was to become one of the most popular poems of the eighteenth century, *The Seasons*, a work vividly attentive to animal presences, Shaftesburian in its moral sentiments, and strident in its attack on sport hunting.⁵⁰ Where Gay and Pope encourage readers to sort through rival imperatives, to remain active and unresolved in their affiliations, Thomson aims to inspire and to habituate a particular affective response in his audience. *The Seasons* is one of the first humanitarian poems in English, insofar as it seeks to shape public sentiment and social practice by advocating on behalf of particular victims. In its candid social activism, Thomson's georgic poem

⁴⁹ On sentimentalism as a Whig discourse, see Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*; and Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*.

⁵⁰ *Winter* was followed by *Summer* in 1727, *Spring* in 1728, and the complete poem in 1730. Between 1730 and Thomson's final version in 1746, the poem grew from 3902 to 5413 lines. I will refer to the 1746 version, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), cited hereafter in text by book and line number.

oversees a significant transformation in literature's social role, placing affective didacticism in the service of social reform. For Thomson, sentimentalism makes possible a powerful progress narrative, characteristically Whiggish in its rhetoric of social improvement. He conceives of a broad public, an audience whose sentiments and habits could be transformed by affecting verse. As John Aikin observed of *The Seasons* in 1779, "no poem was ever composed which addressed itself to the feelings of a greater number of readers."⁵¹ I interpret *The Seasons* as a seminal work of literary animal advocacy, which also played a significant role in establishing the conventions of performative suffering and sympathetic spectatorship that came to define sentimental literature.

Raised in a rural district in the Cheviot Hills near Scotland's southern border, Thomson was educated in Edinburgh for the Presbyterian ministry, but decamped to London in pursuit of literary fame in 1725. His first publication, *Winter*, was widely acclaimed by contemporaries and is often taken to signal a significant turn away from the urbane Augustan wit of Pope and Swift and toward the enthusiastic and emotive poetics of sensibility, a transition underscored by Thomson's adoption of Milton's expansive blank verse. In a Preface affixed to the second edition of *Winter*, Thomson explained his ambitious plan: to defend the "divine art" of poetry against puritanical detractors and petty scribblers by writing a poem about "the works of Nature," the subject most likely "to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment."⁵² Here Thomson confidently gestures at his intentions, an affirmative poetics

⁵¹ John Aikin, "An Essay on the Plan and Character of the Poem," in *The Seasons* (London: J. Murray, 1779), v. Cited hereafter in text.

⁵² Preface to *Winter*, in *Criticism and Aesthetics 1660-1800*, ed. Oliver Sigworth (San Francisco: Rinehart, 1971), 218-22.

that would transcend the dull and satirical verse of its age by rekindling the moral rhetoric and exalting subject-matter of earlier bards.

In the Preface, Thomson cites as a primary influence the work of the “rural Virgil,” with its deistic “devotion to the works of Nature.” He cites Virgil’s famous lines petitioning the muse for Lucretian knowledge of nature’s sublime mysteries yet avowing contentment with the simple pleasures of rural life. Like Virgil, Thomson believed that the georgic could mediate between country and city by portraying a rural world that retains purpose in the nation’s destiny and yet is accessible to the refined taste and polite sensibilities of urban readers. Though less technically didactic than the *Georgics*, Thomson’s poem shares its essential ideological claim that agrarian production is the foundation of national greatness. Against those who see georgic “themes [as] unworthy” of attention in an age of mercantile empire and urban sophistication he invokes the authority of Virgil, who instructed “wide-imperial Rome, in the full height / Of elegance and taste” to “venerate the plow” (*Sp* 54-67). Thomson contends that “every form of cultivated life”—art, technology, commerce, the formation of the state and the public sphere—has its origin in husbandry, the culturing of the earth (*F* 109).

Early readers were struck by both the poem’s sentimental didacticism and its naturalism.⁵³ Eighteenth-century reviewers generally shared the opinion that Thomson had bestowed on poetry a fresh emotional grammar: at once sublime and gentle, enthusiastic and benevolent. Thomson’s own sincere character and sentiments were understood to underlie the poem’s movements and motives. While faulting his undisciplined style, Hazlitt called him “the kind-hearted Thomson,” who “puts his heart

⁵³ Ralph Cohen’s *The Art of Discrimination: Thomson’s The Seasons and the Language of Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) provides an invaluable genealogy of Thomson’s critical reception.

into his subject, [and] writes as he feels.”⁵⁴ Sentimentalism was seen to shape even his natural description. Hugh Blair remarks, “Thomson is a strong and beautiful Describer; for he had a feeling heart, and a warm imagination.”⁵⁵ Two things are suggested here. First, that because animated nature is itself affective, accurate description relies upon sympathy as well as observation. Second, successful description should move its reader by replicating the narrator’s own experience, “impressing on our minds the effects, which the scene delineated would have on the present spectator or hearer,” as Joseph Warton puts it (297).

Such sentimentalism is a reminder that Thomson was, as contemporaries recognized, a devotee of Shaftesbury.⁵⁶ The third earl, “generous Ashley . . . the friend of man / Who scanned his nature with a brother’s eye,” is positioned in the pantheon of British worthies in *Summer* (1551-2). Thomson shares Shaftesbury’s deism, as well as his assumptions about humanity’s natural sociability and the role of the poet in public life. Thomson celebrates the wonder of creation with no reference to Christ or scripture, and, equally heterodox, his “moral song” (*F* 672) promotes virtue without regard to the future life. At times a distinct and benevolent force of creation, at times fully immanent to the physical order, God is nearly inseparable from Nature in the poem. Reflecting the latitudinarian influence, Thomson’s Creator is more generous than Virgil’s Jove: “joy” is the primary “wish of Nature” (*Sp* 154-5). God’s generous love is the prototype for social love, the existence of which troubles the hypotheses put forth by “the sons of interest,”

⁵⁴ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on The English Poets* (New York: Wiley, 1845), 102, 104.

⁵⁵ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* Vol. 2, 1783, ed. Harold Haring (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1965), 373.

⁵⁶ On the Shaftesburian influence on Thomson’s poetry, see Robert Inglesfield, “Thomson and Shaftesbury,” in *James Thomson: Essays for the Tercentenary*, ed. Richard Terry (Liverpool: U of Liverpool P, 2000): 67-92; and C.A. Moore, “Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets in England,” *PMLA* 31 (1916): 264-325.

Hobbes and Mandeville (*Su* 1391). Yet, like Shaftesbury, Thomson recognizes that while social feeling may be natural, it also must be constituted as a normative ideal, a task for which poets are suited. Moral sentiment is the foundation for secular ethics, and poets mold and expand sentiment.⁵⁷ Interesting recent scholarship on Thomson has investigated his attempt to, in the words of Stefanie Lethbridge, “reclaim the poet’s moral and cultural authority” based on the premise that “poetry’s affective powers were capable of cultivating both aesthetic and moral response.”⁵⁸ In the *Seasons*, poetry is a source of social progress, “a conjunctive force,” which facilitates “social bliss” (*Su* 1764-6).

Though *The Seasons* is an emblematic georgic poem in its attention to the interaction between the field of human activity and the physical order of nature, Thomson’s primary innovation as a poet is in realistically describing natural phenomena based on first-hand observation.⁵⁹ Early readers, beginning with Joseph Warton, saw the poem’s characteristic feature as its innovative, empirical, and vibrant descriptions of the natural world. Warton argues that, rather than borrowing from the tired conventions of poetic history as even his eminent predecessors had done, Thomson “painted from nature

⁵⁷ Patricia Spacks puts it this way, “Thomson is not often lyrical; *The Seasons* is not directly concerned with the emotions of the poet. It is, however, concerned directly with the emotions of the readers,” in *The Varied God*, 17. Cited hereafter in text.

⁵⁸ Stefanie Lethbridge, *James Thomson’s Defense of Poetry: Intertextual Allusion in The Season* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 24 and 55.

⁵⁹ Typically, late twentieth-century critics have focused on the poem’s ideologies of human agency rather than its naturalism. See Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) on visual and material relations to the landscape as a source of cultural authority. On emerging models of poetic agency in the public sphere and marketplace, see Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999); Lisa Steinman, *Masters of Repetition: Poetry, Culture, and Work in Thomson, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Emerson* (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1998); and Stefanie Lethbridge, *James Thomson’s Defense of Poetry*. One exception is Parker’s fascinating *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics*, which describes Thomson’s “invention” of a new literalism, his depiction of an essentially amoral and immanent landscape. *The Seasons*, Parker writes, is a poem about the “world of things that appear before us” (151).

itself.”⁶⁰ Johnson allows that *The Seasons* is a poem “of a new kind,” composed by a “mind that at once comprehends the vast, and attends to the minute.”⁶¹ In the 1770s, John Aikin wrote two long essays arguing that *The Seasons* had inaugurated a new era in literary history, one in which “natural description” became “the principal object” of poetry (“Essay on the Plan” viii). According to Aikin, Thomson’s exact depiction of concrete interrelations among plants and animals, seasons and habitats, proves that he had an “idea of the *oeconomy of nature*” decades before Linnaeus coined the phrase (xxi). Such knowledge makes Thomson the rightful heir of Virgil, both close observers of the natural order “and particularly . . . that part of it which regards the animal creation” (*On the Application of Natural History* 57).

Like other poets writing under the star of Newton in the first half of the eighteenth century, Thomson assimilates contemporary natural philosophy into his verse. His muse dilates on the new worlds discovered by the microscope and global exploration, rhapsodizes on Newton’s theory of gravitation and planetary orbit, and elucidates the latest hypothesis about the role of condensation in the hydrological cycle.⁶² Yet Thomson is a better naturalist than philosopher, and his innovation is in accurately describing natural phenomena based on first-hand observation. The clearest instance of such empiricism is in his attention to the avian world; Patricia Spacks wonders if the lives of birds offer the unifying theme of the poem (19). Over the course of *The Seasons*,

⁶⁰ Joseph Warton, *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 1756, in *Criticism and Aesthetics 1660-1800*, ed. Oliver Sigworth (San Francisco: Rinehard, 1971), 294. Cited hereafter in text.

⁶¹ Samuel Johnson, “Thomson,” *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* Vol. 4 (London 1793), 146, 155. According to Johnson, Thomson also takes from Virgil the poem’s “great defect,” its “want of method,” its apparent lack of coherence or unifying structure (155).

⁶² See Alan Dugald McKillop, *The Background of Thomson’s Seasons* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1942); and William Powell Jones, *The Rhetoric of Science: A Study of Scientific Ideas and Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1966).

Thomson studies the habits of twenty-eight species native to the British Isles, and alludes to the “brighter birds” of the tropics (*Su* 735) and the teeming multitudes of unknown species reported by Arctic expeditions. In *Spring*, he describes how swallows, eagles, rooks, and swans select habitats, build nests, and rear their young. He marvels at how white-winged plovers, wild ducks, and heath-hens will deceive predators, including humans, by enticing them away from their nests (*Sp* 690-701). Most impressively, he refers to the controversy about *Hirundine* migration, noting that it remains unclear whether swallows hibernate during the winter or journey to “warmer climes” (*Au* 845).

Writing at the discursive confluence of Shaftesbury’s sentimentalism and Virgil’s naturalism, Thomson represents animal passions as a vital and causal force in the natural order. Love and fear are the master passions, but these multiply into the courage shown by parents, the rage and shame of predators, the joy of quotidian animal life, and the sorrow of loss. Like the latitudinarians writing *contra* Hobbes, Thomson highlights the self-transcending passions he sees in the animal order. The natural “sympath[y]” of conjugal love (*Sp* 665) is one example, but parental affection is his primary exhibit. Parent birds who “Check their own appetites, and give” food to their young (*Sp* 686) remind readers that not passions are not necessarily self-interested. Thomson’s frequent use of periphrasis likewise draws attention to animal sociability. Classificatory circumlocutions—such as the “frosty tribe” of biting insects, the “busy nations” of bees, and the “tuneful nations” of birds—recognize nonhuman collectivities, which in Thomson’s rendering are held together by the social affections.

Man alone may be given a “voice articulate” (*Su* 1237), but all animals are capable of expressing their passions. *The Seasons* abounds with voluble, animated

creatures. Bird song is variously an expression of “joy” (*Sp* 589) or competition, a warning, a lament, a vehicle for flirtation and pair bonding. The central motive for animal communication is mating, a topic Thomson follows Virgil in emphasizing. The “voice of love” is given to “the birds and beasts” alike (616), and the pressures of selection even requires that the “arts of pleasing” be “inventive” (616-618).⁶³ All through the animal creation, Thomson finds a rich semiology, visible and audible signs of animal affect. For instance, when the steed is “provoked, / . . . his big sinews full of spirit swell / Trembling with vigour” (506-8). Even a fly caught in a spider’s web may “*declare* extreme distress,” through its “fluttering wing / And shriller sound” (*Su* 278-9, my emphasis). Thomson articulates a poetics of expressive animal experience, a vivid and versified depiction of animal bodies and animal feelings. Nonhumans are not allegorical figures in Thomson’s poem. The stag is not, as in Renaissance hunting poetry, a substitute for Christ or king, nor are songbirds symbols of creative activity. Rather, animals are literal, if also literary, presences: the “tortured worm” on a hook who “[c]onvulsive twist[s] in agonizing folds” (*Sp* 388-9), the spaniel “with open nose / Outstretched and finely sensible” (*Au* 364-5), the netted birds who “in vain . . . beat / Their idle wings” (370-1), the hunted stag whose “once so vivid nerves / So full of buoyant spirit, now no more / Inspire the course; but fainting, breathless toil / Sick seizes on his heart” (449-52). Recognizing and representing this corporeal semiotic, Thomson represents animals as subjects whose sensations are perceptible and comparable to our own.

⁶³ In *Fors Clavigera*, John Ruskin noticed the prescient implications of such lines: “Thomson’s finny tribes and connubial leagues are the denizens of a competitive and sexual earth invented in the eighteenth century. He created those ‘downward metaphors’ by which we were first brought into intimate and almost equal relation to animals.” Quoted in Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics*, 153.

For Thomson, the display of these signifying bodies is more than mere description. As his readers learn to read the language of animal bodies and utterances, to link what is visible or audible with interior states, they are expected to sympathize with the creatures whose subjectivity they have access to. *The Seasons* garners its rhythm in its swings between the local and the global, from a single hare in a field to the “planetary train” (*Su* 104), and its stanzas often oscillate between specific descriptions of animals and moral prescription, where he inveighs against what he calls “Inhuman” cruelties (*Sp* 704). Unlike Gay and Pope, who highlight competing interests and perspectives, Thomson’s aim is straightforwardly didactic: to cultivate and habituate particular affective responses in his readers. The “ungenerous passions” are deemed wicked (*Sp* 940), while “tenderness of heart” is designated virtuous (*Su* 23); certain actions such as hunting and birdkeeping evil, while charity is good. Thomson writes for an imagined community of readers whose identifications and sentiments, he believed, could be transformed *en masse*. Even so, ethical pedagogy is never straightforward, as Thomson acknowledges as he laments the caging of birds: “Spare the soft tribes, this barbarous art forbear! / If on your bosom innocence can win, / Music engage, or piety persuade” (*Sp* 711). He invokes three or four didactic strategies: the rhetorical purchase of claims about innate benevolence, the moving expressions of either birds or poets, and the moral prescription of religious stricture.

Thomson’s characteristic strategy for inspiring sentimental response is to telescope in on an isolated, sympathetically available subject, creating a pathetic image

capable of moving readers.⁶⁴ In calling for gentleness in sheep-shearing, he focuses on the pitiful animal—“How meek, how patient, the mild creature lies!”—who fears that he is to be slaughtered by the “knife / Of horrid slaughter” (*Su* 412-22). In hunting sequences, human agency, be it destructive or sympathetic, is often juxtaposed with the helplessness of the “weak and harmless” quarry, “miserable prey” in both possible senses (*F* 424, 986). At times, Thomson asks his readers to sympathize not with a creature enduring physical pain, but with a mate or parent who experiences the trauma of loss, thus expanding the definition of animal suffering to include psychological torment. He describes the nightingale mother returning to her robbed nest and then singing woefully through the night (*Sp* 714-28). Similarly, his critique of shooting is concretized and particularized with an image of animal mourning. In the heat of midday, the forest is silent, yet the poet’s solitude is—as is typical in *The Seasons*, a poem that eschews privacy—disrupted by the stock dove who mourns a mate killed by “savage fowler’s guile” (*Su* 615-21). Moral prescription alone is never sufficient for the sentimentalist writer. In order to arouse compassion, Thomson depicts specific sympathetic victims, moving from abstract injunctions to specific cases capable of moving the reader and thus habituating compassionate response. Yet, having moved a reader, moral injunction—the prescribing of particular courses of action—follows. For instance, the fisherman must avoid the use of worms, which bring suffering to both insect and fish, and must throw young fish back, leaving them more time to “enjoy[] the vital light of heaven” (*Sp* 420). Like Gay, Thomson recommends specific humane practices but leaves space for the continuation of the sport.

⁶⁴ Markman Ellis points out that “Sentimental scenarios work by being personalized, unique and discrete, so as to place the maximum pressure on the relation between the subject and the viewer,” *The Politics of Sensibility*, 72.

These sorts of reflections on hunting, fishing, and fowling occur throughout the poem, in extended sequences, which are often presented from the quarry's point of view, as well as in short asides and subtle similes. Major sporting episodes include the account of fishing in *Spring* (379-442), of fowling (360-78) and the pursuit of hare, stag, and fox in *Autumn* (379-482), and of shooting in *Winter* (788-93). But the effects and affects of hunting are a central preoccupation. The wandering poet complains of the silence of the decimated forest, objecting to the shooting of "thrushes, linnets, larks," a "miserable prey! / In mingled murder fluttering on the ground!" (A 970-87). In *Winter*, the homebound speaker notices that even "The hare / Though timorous of heart, and hard beset / By death in various forms, dark snares, and dogs, / And more unpitied men, the garden seeks / Urged on by fearless want" (257-61). Thomson makes his point in more understated ways as well. For a human in the midday sun, the cool forest is likened to the refuge a hunted hart finds in a deep stream (473-5). Here human experience is made comprehensible in an analogy to the animal. Another animal simile emphasizes the universally recognizable affective experience of the hunted animal: Musidora, a heroine in one of the poem's sentimental tales, is startled "like the fearful fawn" (Su 1320).⁶⁵

Twentieth-century critics have generally taken two routes in interpreting these sporting episodes and anti-hunting sentiments: denigrating their excessive and conventional sentimentality or celebrating their mock-heroic irony. In order to rescue the poem from its Victorian-era grammar school reputation and deprecation by the New Critics, they stressed the poem's complex and layered symbolism, irony, and foregrounding of moral ambiguity, thus diminishing the very qualities for which the

⁶⁵ In a June 13, 1726 letter to David Mallet, Thomson compares his experience in London with that of a caged bird: "How wild you wing, while I, here, warble like a City-Linnet, in a Cage," *Letters and Documents*, ed. Alan Dugald McKillop (Lawrence: U of Kansas P: 1958), 36.

poem was initially celebrated: its realist description and sentimental didacticism. Spacks admires those parts of the poem that show “emotional richness,” which in her analysis means psychological complexity. The poem’s major weakness is its “extraneous lines on benevolence,” which she sees as instances of “facile sentimentality,” a “simple and conventional feeling” (149); why exactly “social benevolence” is a less complicated feeling than existential melancholy or the religious sublime is never explained. Spacks and other readers point to instances of equivocation in the poem, recycling a common strategy of attacking sentimentalism: exposing the partiality lurking beneath its ostensible universalism. They notice that while herbivores are off limits to hunters, the fox is fair game; while young trout are owed an opportunity to live a full life, it is open season on adult fish; while vegetarianism is cited as an ideal, it is never mandated.⁶⁶ Such apparent equivocation shows Thomson working to set realistic limits, trying to define an imaginable space of potential reform rather than an untenable ideal; vegetarianism was, after all, associated chiefly with the pagan Pythagoras and the radicalism of levelers like Thomas Tryon. Ralph Cohen tends to read the sporting sequences as instances of the mock-epic, a humorous “burlesque” to balance the poem’s more weighty themes.⁶⁷ In fact, the most overt parody in the poem occurs not in the sentimentalized autumn chase, but in the post-hunt celebration at the pub, when the inebriated and “puking” hunters are mocked for their jingoism and masculine conceit (534).

Eighteenth-century readers, by contrast, understood Thomson’s sentimental sequences, exemplified by the hunting and fishing episodes, as emotionally fervent rather

⁶⁶ In *The Varied God*, Spacks writes, “Having given a sop to his humanitarian instincts, the poet is free to enjoy the sport” (161). Similarly, she states that the “choice of the worm as an object for sympathy [rather than the trout] appears to be an altogether arbitrary excursion into sentimentality” (45-6).

⁶⁷ *The Unfolding of The Seasons* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 5.

than ironic. In the first full-length book of criticism on the poem, *Strictures, Critical and Sentimental, on Thomson's Seasons* (1777), John More included a chapter on pathos, with a long section on Thomson's "pathetic" treatment of the "sufferings of creatures," who are "in so many important respects on a level with ourselves."⁶⁸ Thomson is one of a few benevolent spirits, including Pythagoras and Rousseau, who have looked past the anthropocentric sophistry of human pride and extended "humanity" to the "brute creation" (223). More lists a number of scenes that he finds particularly moving, among them Thomson's pathos-infused injunctions against smoking beehives, robbing nests, and shooting doves; an account of the last, More admits, reminds him of a similar incident, which "pierced every feeling in [his] heart" (231). The pragmatic John Aikin defends sport-hunting against Thomson's criticism, while acknowledging the poet's "universal benevolence, extending to every part of the animal creation" ("An Essay on the Plan" xxxviii). In his public letter supporting Lord Erskine's 1809 animal protection bill, John Lamb alludes to one of Thomson's well-known graphic images of animal suffering: "On Sunday goes forth the angler to his innocent recreation . . . and impales the poor earthworm, which in its torture writhes about with strength prodigious in so small and soft an animal, and almost baffles the determined angler in his attempt to put it on the

⁶⁸ John More, *Strictures, Critical and Sentimental, on Thomson's Seasons* (London, 1777), 219. Cited hereafter in text. Perhaps most interesting is More's analysis of Thomson as a man of feeling, which reveals the complex negotiation of gender terms at stake in this concept. Comparing him with the feminine William Shenstone, More writes, "Thomson has no inferior share of sentiment, but it never unmans him. The tear glistens in his eye on every proper or important occasion, but he scorns to prostitute his feelings on trifles" (229). The distress of a nightingale mother returning to her robbed nest is More's example of an appropriate occasion for masculine sympathy.

hook.”⁶⁹ A recent critic has wondered if the very scene alluded to here should be read as “mock-sentimental.”⁷⁰

It is in *Autumn*, the final book of *The Seasons* to be published, that Thomson articulates his most directed critique of blood sports. He sets up the digression on hunting with a description of the destructive flooding unleashed by an autumn storm. This description concludes with a moralistic pronouncement instructing the landed elite not to place excessive demands on their tenants after such disasters, implicitly situating the sympathetic urban reader in a position of moral authority against the pitiless squire. The pedagogical tone remains in the following stanza, as Thomson’s attention shifts to another instance of the potential “insolence of power” (391): the “sportsman’s joy,” or, from the poet’s point of view, “This falsely cheerful barbarous game of death” (360, 384). In this critique of hunting, Thomson carefully distinguishes between the necessary violence of nature and the unnecessary violence of the chase, suffering that is unavoidable in the postlapsarian world and suffering that is superfluous and/or sadistic.⁷¹ He acknowledges both the devastating effects of the flood and the existence of nocturnal predators who survive by hunting (3.88). But whereas such predators are “[u]rged by necessity,” the hunter “[f]or sport alone pursues the cruel chase” (3.388, 394). The hunter is a human whose passions are out of control, neither humane nor natural: “Inflamed

⁶⁹ John Lamb, *A LETTER To The RIGHT HON. William Windham on his opposition to Lord Erskine’s Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (London: Maxwell and Wilson, 1810), 19-20.

⁷⁰ James Sambrook, ed., *The Seasons and The Castle of Indolence*, note 217.

⁷¹ In his theriophilic theodicy, *The Universe* (London, 1746), Henry Baker proposes a similar distinction: “When life He gave, He meant that life should be / A state productive of felicity. / And, though, to kill there may be some pretence, / When raging hunger birds, or self-defence; / No cause beside can justify the deed. / ‘Tis murder if not urg’d by real need. // If the same Pow’r did ev’ry Being give, / If All for Happiness did Life receive, / Then ev’ry Thing has equal Right to live. / And how dares Man, who’s but himself a Breath, / Destroy through Wantonness, and sport with Death!” (523-32).

beyond the most infuriate wrath / Of the worst monster that e'er roamed the waste" (390-5). The particular emotion most alarming to Thomson, what Germans call *schadenfreude* and Spinoza deemed *sympathia malevolens*, he describes as "joy at anguish" (399).⁷² The analogy in *Autumn* is overt: feudal lords with no regard for their tenants are like "the steady tyrant, man" who wantonly devastates the animal creation for sport. It is left to the reader to see that this is not only an analogy: with few exceptions, gentleman are hunters and hunters are gentleman.

John More observes that among the poem's most affecting episodes is the hunting of the stag, an "elegant and masterly creature that wonderfully instructs the reader in his safety" (224-5). More's analysis is telling in its attribution of didactic agency to the stag and its implication that the primary interaction mediated in Thomson's hunting scenes is between readers and quarry. Thomson's stag-hunt is novel in that it eliminates the hunter from the scene, so that the animal's tears are accessible only to the reader, who is positioned as a sympathetic spectator. The reader's sympathy for the pathetic creature is called forth early in the scene, when the hart "sobbing sees / The glades" where he once struggled with "his butting friends" and won his love (441-44). The *denouement* has "big round tears run down his dappled face" as the dogs attack and tear him to pieces (454). The elision of the human hunting party from the entire scene works to authenticate the stag's emotional expression, which appears private and spontaneous, while removing one layer of mediation between it and the reader.

Underlying Thomson's division between necessary violence and elective cruelty is another distinction, one that lies at the heart of any progressive theodicy: between

⁷² In fact, Nathaniel Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1727) offered "epicharikaky," from the Greek: joy upon evil.

natural and social evil.⁷³ The longstanding association of theodicy, a theological justification for things as they are, with “cosmic Toryism” understands social or ethical critique as impossible within works aiming to explain the appearance of suffering, inequity, violence, and death.⁷⁴ Accordingly, any vindication of God’s ways to man becomes a vindication of man’s ways as well, a defense of the status quo.⁷⁵ Thomson does not shy away from primordial violence in nature, his fable of the golden age notwithstanding. Natural predation—spiders, serpents, wolves, tigers, and sharks all appear in the poem—as well as insect blights, plagues, and seasonal extremes all raise theological questions, which are answered in terms of the principle of plenitude: nature’s heterogeneity and complexity require a certain degree of conflict. Like the *Essay on Man*, though not so pithily expressed as Pope’s “All discord, harmony not understood; / All partial evil, universal good” (1.291-2), *The Seasons* contends that what the “bounded view ... deemed evil” is in fact part of “The great universal scheme” (*W* 1066-7, 1046). However, Thomson distinguishes this universal order of nature from the domain of human responsibility; as Elizabeth Duthie puts it, “Nature and human nature cannot be judged by the same standards.”⁷⁶ This distinction is most evident in the transitions following the accounts of the autumn flood and the winter storm, both recognizable set-

⁷³ See David Anderson, “Emotive Theodicy in *The Seasons*,” *Studies in Eighteenth Century-Culture* 12: 59-76, on Thomson’s use of the religious sublime to justify and praise God’s ways.

⁷⁴ The phrase comes from Basil Willey’s discussion of Pope and Soame Jenyns in *The Eighteenth Century Context: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (New York: Columbia UP, 1953). He sums up the idea thus: “The perfection of the universe (and, we may add, of the existing social order) could be taken as established, and the main business of the philosopher was to vindicate them against all subversive criticisms” (46).

⁷⁵ Timothy Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority*, delivers a characteristic reading in the tradition of the hermeneutics of suspicion, arguing that Thomson turns “subordination [into] a pitiable ‘fact’ of nature” (19). Because sympathy is not channeled toward “large-scale reform of the social and political structure,” it must instead be a handmaiden for the ruling powers (22).

⁷⁶ Duthie, “Public and Private Virtue” 66.

pieces in a work of theodicy. The well-known sequence in which a lost shepherd is frozen to death in a snowstorm, which Fulford reads “as a tableau” that serves to “reinforce[] social hierarchies” (24), is followed immediately by a recognition of human responsibility and a charting of possible avenues for social reform. He asks the “affluent” reader to sympathize with those killed in war or trapped in dungeons, poverty, and madness, and specifically promotes prison reform, calling for parliamentary action to stop the torture of inmates (359-88). That the same transition occurs in *Autumn*, from the natural destruction caused by a storm to the overtly unjust activities of sportsmen, shows Thomson working to distinguish between natural and social evils and thus to constitute a horizon of potential reform—to open rather than close an imagined space of social change.

If the distinction between natural and human evil provides one animating tension central to understanding the poem’s attitude toward hunting, primitivism and progress offer a second. Numerous critics have observed the apparent conflict between, on the one hand, Thomson’s nostalgia for the primeval, reflected in his love of “Nature wide and wild” (*Sp* 505) and his romanticization of the noble Laplanders (*W* 843-86), and, on the other hand, his propagandizing devotion to global commerce and Enlightenment progress. In *Spring*, Thomson calls upon a familiar myth, variously articulated by Pythagoras, Ovid, Seneca, and the Book of Genesis, of a vegetarian golden age, a time before, as Virgil puts it, “A guilty race made meals of slaughtered bullocks” (2.540). Thomson’s imagines a state of nature when plants alone were “the food of man / While yet he lived in innocence, and told / A length of golden years, unfleshed in blood, / A stranger to the savage arts of life, / Death, rapine, carnage, surfeit, and disease--/ The lord

and not the tyrant of the world” (*Sp* 236-241). Thomson’s political language, the distinction between the responsible lord and the unjust tyrant, shows his allegiance to Shaftesbury, for whom the state of nature is always already social and, by virtue of this, in some sense political. The fall of man is signaled by the introduction of meat-eating, when man neglected the “wholesome herb” and chose to “dip his tongue in gore” (*Sp* 336, 357). This moral decline is accompanied by severe emotional turmoil, the passions “Hav[ing] all burst their bounds” (*Sp* 279), and an extinguishing of “social feeling” (305), which is replaced by anger, envy, fear, and melancholy.

As for Locke and Shaftesbury, Thomson’s idealized state of nature, characterized by affective community and a perfect harmony of interests, is not a source of nostalgic lack but rather a baseline of human behavior, a concrete outside to the present—though evinced in the fact that we continue to feel sympathy for animals—which may expand a reader’s sense of the possibilities of human progress. Thomson does not advocate an unproblematic return to the fabled golden age. Rather, the mythic origin supplies an ‘is,’ a specific order identified as natural, which becomes the basis of an ‘ought,’ a normative ideal. The imagined past forms the foundations for progress, a pretext for humanitarian reform. After all, Thomson has as much faith in culture as in nature, a fact revealed in his account of the establishment of the nation: “gathering men their natural powers combined, / And formed a public; to the general good / Submitting, aiming, and conducting all” (*F* 96-8). What stimulates moral progress is the (re-)socialization of the passions, a task ascribed to the poet. Reading Virgil’s *Eclogues*, for instance, is a way of cultivating and expanding the affections, “Sooth[ing] every gust of passion into peace--/

All but the swelling of the softened heart” (*Sp* 464-5). Of course, Thomson saw his own poem as achieving the same end.

Here we see how sentimentalism girds the Whig ideology of progress, which Pocock describes as a secular reframing of Puritan millenarianism, so that human potential is defined in terms of “the rational and even scientific perfection of human society.”⁷⁷ Thomson is a Whig ideologue because he understands humans as capable of fundamentally reshaping their relations to the natural world, society, and the self—“What cannot active government perform / New-moulding man?” (*W* 950-1)—and his space of public intervention is this realm of normativity, the affective social sphere constituted within an expanding print culture. His “moral song” (*F* 672), which saw more than seventy editions printed in the eighteenth century, aims to reform behavior by cultivating sentimental attachments and norms. Luc Boltanski suggests that it is an essentially affective idiom—such as the language of pathos identified in classical rhetoric or the passionate speech claimed by Whig cultural theorists like Dennis, Shaftesbury, and Addison as the medium of the public poet—that effects “the transition from individual speech and concern to collective commitment.”⁷⁸ Thomson mobilizes an emerging rhetoric of sensibility, an appeal to the collective sympathies of his polite readers, to delegitimize particular social practices—above all, cruel field sports.

More fully than any previous poem in English, *The Seasons* imagines nonhuman animals as conscious beings, whose capacity to experience and communicate interior states underlies their moral status. *The Seasons* presents the countryside as habitat,

⁷⁷ J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 93. This progress narrative is premised on the National Debt, which offered the basis for continual economic growth and the imaginative foundations for a belief in humanity’s “capacity to expand and grow and become what they were not” (98).

⁷⁸ Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*, xv.

occupied by animal subjects, rather than as a venue for private self-discovery. The poem provides its readers with resources to imagine a community that transcends the human, a social order intertwined with the natural world, encompassing city, farm, forest, mountain, ocean—even tundra, desert, and jungle. Envisioning this expansive community requires a new sort of poetry. Thomson declares his muse to be “most delighted when she social sees / The whole mixed animal creation round / Alive and happy” (*A* 379-83). Yet evidence of animal suffering is valid material for a poet who makes animal advocacy a motive for verse. As he castigates those who capture wild birds, Thomson describes how his own moral “music” resonates with animal voices, the listless song of the caged nightingale and the bereaved wail of a mother returning to a “vacant nest”: “Be not the Muse ashamed here to bemoan / Her brothers of the grove by tyrant man / Inhuman caught” (*Sp* 702-28). This extension of the muse’s concern means that even insects shall “Live in her law and flutter through her song” (*Su* 236-8), a position that foreshadows Gilbert White’s identification of earthworms as a legitimate subject for naturalists. In so raising the lowly, Thomson follows Virgil: dog dreams and insects flitting in the sunlight, the suffering of the hunted hare and the sorrow of the captive nightingale, share the stage with meditations on providence, empire, and virtue. Thomson’s sentimental didacticism, his effort to oppose blood sports by making visible and audible the needless suffering they create, supplied a template for later anti-hunting poetry, including Joseph Warton’s “Ode on Shooting” (1747), William Shenstone’s *Rural Elegance* (1763), John Aldington’s *A Poem on the Cruelty of Shooting* (1769), Francis Mundy’s *Needwood Forest* (1776), and Wordsworth’s “Hart-leap Well” (1800). In fact, *The Seasons* establishes the formula—positioning its audience with the forest’s personable denizens as

they respond to a malevolent human presence—for the twentieth-century’s most powerful polemic against hunting, wherein a young stag mourns his mother’s death at the hands of sportsmen: Disney’s 1942 film *Bambi*.

IV. *The Defense of Human Privilege in Somerville’s The Chace*

While earlier poets used the georgic to reflect on field sports as a moral problem worthy of national debate, William Somerville, a gentleman with a large estate in Warwickshire, published *The Chace* in 1735 with the intention of justifying rural sports.⁷⁹ We know that Somerville, like most literate Britons in the eighteenth century, read *The Seasons*; he even wrote an epistle, “To Mr. Thomson, On the First Edition of his Seasons.” With this literary transmission in mind, here I read *The Chace* as a direct response to Thomson’s critique of hunting, a response which is undermined by the fact that, even as he attempted to rewrite Thomson’s politics of nature, Somerville borrowed copiously from *The Seasons*. In Somerville’s meditation on hunting, nonhuman animals are figured as embodied presences. The poem’s sheer exuberance of physical and emotional energies, its richly depicted economy of animal feeling, disrupts the anthropocentric grain of the text and leads to rhetorical and narratological incoherence. In a preface to a late eighteenth-century edition of *The Chace*, John Aikin diagnoses Somerville’s problem—put simply, the unsuitability of pathos in a poem that condones the pleasure of pursuing and killing animals. He observes that in Somerville’s depiction of the fox hunt, the

⁷⁹ Samuel Johnson’s praise of Somerville’s poetry is faint, but he does give him credit as “a writer who at least must be allowed to have set a good example to men of his own class, by devoting part of his time to elegant knowledge; and who has shown, by the subjects which his poetry has adorned, that it is practicable to be at once a skilful sportsman and a man of letters,” *Lives of the Poets* Vol. 3, 104-6.

“pathetic incidents . . . appear rather incongruous in a scene which is represented as inspiring the “madness of delight.””⁸⁰ Aikin has already described a similarly incoherent emotional rhetoric in Somerville’s description of the hunting of a hare: “Though there are touches in the representation which may call forth the emotions of pity in a feeling mind, yet the poet has judiciously refrained from enforcing them by moral sentiment and reflection, which would act in contradiction to his purpose” (13). As Aikin notes, for Somerville such pathos potentially contradicts the purpose of the poem: legitimating and celebrating gentlemanly hunting. As this chapter has shown, implicit in the rhetoric of sentimentalism, in depictions of expressive bodies capable of eliciting a reader’s sympathy, is an ethic of equality in feeling. Somerville adopts a sentimental discourse—perhaps in order to appeal to an audience familiar with Thomson, Richardson, and Shaftesbury—which undermines his anthropocentric interests.

Somerville’s defense of sport hunting was made more difficult, and more necessary, because of the exclusivity maintained by the period’s controversial hunting laws. The Game Act of 1671, which was bolstered in 1750, limited sport hunting to the landed gentry and legislated harsh penalties for poachers.⁸¹ Although the killing of vermin such as foxes and otters was universally legal, hunting game animals—hare, moor fowl, and pheasants—was restricted to those who fulfilled strict property requirements, while elk and rabbits were protected as private property. In writing about what was essentially a diversion for his fellow rural elite, Somerville sought to link sport-hunting with the national good and to fashion an image of a reformed gentry, whose ease and

⁸⁰ John Aikin, Introduction, *The Chace* (London, 1796), 16. Hereafter cited in text.

⁸¹ See P.B. Munsche’s *Gentleman and Poachers: The English Game Laws 1671-1831*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981). Munsche writes, “The gentry’s identification with the game laws was complete. They wrote the game laws, benefited from them, defended them, enforced them” (6).

luxury were justified by their social utility, and whose exclusive pastimes could be associated with Enlightenment empiricism and the ethos of improvement. Somerville's idealized gentleman is defined by disinterested benevolence and paternalism rather than selfishness and pomposity. This is why, for instance, the poem recommends that the genteel hunter, in building a kennel for his dogs, avoid the "vain Expence" of "Corinthian Pillars," and instead use his money to feed and clothe the poor residents of his estate (1.143-7).⁸²

The Chace musters its argument through a series of dubious confluences, the key instance of which is this proposition that sport hunting is a form of rural industry and thus a suitable subject for georgic poetry. Throughout the poem, the ostensibly productive labor of genteel hunters is linked to wider human interests. The gentleman is figured as an improver, clearing the land of vermin and dangerous predators and preparing it for agricultural use. Somerville pairs the English fox hunter with the Mughal emperor Aurengzebe, who hunted "Beasts of Prey / Full-fed with human Gore" (2.319-20), and with England's own King Edgar, who offered a bounty on wolves, leading to their extirpation, and so protected his subjects and their flocks. Fox-hunting is defined as an act of paternalist benevolence, although a hint of mock-heroic irony indexes this argument's tenuousness: "Oh! how glorious 'tis / To right th' oppress'd, and bring the Felon vile / To just Disgrace!" (3.36-38). Hunting is explicitly aligned with the primal georgic activities of clearing wildernesses and draining fens. The poem invokes georgic conventions on a number of occasions: formally, in its four-book form and its adoption of

⁸² William Somerville, *The Chace, A Poem* (London, 1796), Book 1, lines 14-15. Hereafter cited by book and line number in text.

Thomson's blank verse; and thematically, in its epic digressions, enthusiastic patriotism, and practical didacticism.

In *The Chace*, clearing wildernesses, domesticating animals, and hunting are all activities that reflect humanity's divinely-granted prerogative to rule over the natural world. Somerville situates the hunt at the center of national history and culture. Although he echoes Pope when he describes hunting as "the Sport of Kings; / Image of War, without its Guilt," he differs in the story he tells about its origin and history in Britain. He praises William I for introducing modern hunting methods—"more decent Rules" (1.75)—and displacing the barbaric Saxons. The origin and development of the nation are closely bound up with the arts of the chase, with Britain's "Games more renown'd . . . / Than proud Elean Fields could boast of old" (2.68-9). He makes the unsurprising claim that in Britain, the "highly favour'd Isle," one finds "the perfect Hound" and the fleetest steeds (1.86-95). Somerville's elucidation of hunting practices in other nations—the Mughal imperial hunt, based on "Laws of the Chace, / From ancient Records drawn" (2.365-66); the manner in which nomadic Arabs hunt boars (3.316-43); the use of pits to capture elephants in Africa (3.261-91)—also raises the status of the hunt to national custom, as at once innately human and uniquely British. Just as the landed gentry are legitimate rulers of England, humans rightfully govern nature. In the course of the poem, Somerville invokes the two traditional justifications for human dominion. He cites scriptural authority: in Genesis, "ev'ry moving Thing that liv'd on Earth / Was granted him for Food" (1.66-7). And he appeals to the proposition, established by Aristotle and reiterated by Thomas Aquinas and numerous Anglican divines, that in a material world of constant growth and decay, only humans are privileged with a rational soul that, as

Somerville puts it, “Escapes the Wreck of Worlds” (4.6). This categorical difference between humans and brutes justifies humanity’s absolute dominion over the animal order: “The Brute Creation are his Property, / Subservient to his Will, and for him made. / As hurtful these he kills, as useful those / Preserves; their sole and arbitrary King” (4.9-12). In case theology proves insufficient, Somerville presents a materialist defense of meat-eating against detractors like the pre-Socratic vegetarian Pythagoras and contemporary Hindu Brahmins, arguing that, without hunting, wild beasts would fill the world beyond capacity and restrict humans to a diet of roots and nuts.

Although Somerville finds a rationale for human dominion in scriptural and theological authority, he calls upon a second myth to explain the origin of hunting. Reflecting his period’s attraction to conjectural histories, which traced humanity’s emergence from a state of nature and offered an alternative to scriptural history, Somerville recreates Nimrod’s primordial hunt. Somerville’s state of nature, like Thomson’s, is stripped of direct Biblical and mythological referents, but it retains the familiar vision of an original state of prelapsarian peace between humans and animals. Wild creatures considered man to be “their Lord, / But mild and gentle, and by whom as yet / Secure they graz’d” (1.48-50). The contrast with Somerville’s claim in Book IV about humanity’s right to arbitrary rule is striking. Here, human authority is defined as, in its original form, limited and benevolent. Our primal relationship with nonhumans was governed neither by Hobbesian power relations nor divine commandment, but rather by providential sociability. Somerville’s image of the first hunt is graphic and gruesome: untrained hunters with clubs and stones descend on a peaceful herd of unspecified quadrupeds and commit “grim Slaughter red with Blood” (1.51). A state of peaceful

coexistence with other creatures is transformed into a state of violence and sacrifice. Drawing attention to an association between human industry and violence against nature—an association familiar from sources as diverse as Genesis, *The Georgics*, and Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*—the poet explains that the hunt became necessary when vegetable food could no longer “sustain Man's lab'ring Race” (1.65). However, Somerville's depiction of the first hunters belies this justification of dietary necessity. They are driven by a “Rage licentious,” which “knows no Bound” (1.53), a line that echoes Thomson's suggestion that humanity's rupture with the animal world involved an unprecedented denaturing of our emotional economy: “the passions all / have burst their bound” (1.278-9). More generally, Somerville's description of the primal hunt sets the pattern for the hunts that follow: tranquil animals are attacked by hunters experiencing a sadistic thrill. These scenes are usually either preceded or followed by justification based on ostensible utilitarian necessity or theological authority.

In the origin myth sequence, Somerville's attention to the “trembling Herd” of quadrupeds (1.45), as well as to the rage and joy of Nimrod's band, suggests the primary representational mode of the poem: the description of passions and of bodies, both human and nonhuman, as indicators of felt experience. Even more than Thomson's *Seasons*, Somerville's poetry is marked by his era's acute interest in the nervous system, which had come to be defined as the locus of feeling and the nexus that linked body and mind.⁸³ In April of 1708, a letter to the *British Apollo* confutes the Cartesian doctrine of animal insensibility by pointing out: “That Dogs are endued with the Sense of Feeling is not to

⁸³ On the nerve paradigm and sensibility, see G.S. Rousseau, “Nerves, Spirits and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility”; John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988); and Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*.

be doubted, since they are not without Nerves, which are the most proper Organs of that.” Two years prior to the publication of *The Chace*, the physician George Cheyne, in *The English Malady: Or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds*, defines “Feeling [as] nothing but the Impulse, Motion, or Action of Bodies, gently or violently impressing the Extremities or Sides of the Nerves . . . which by their Structure and Mechanism, convey this Motion of the sentient Principle to the Brain.”⁸⁴ In *The Chace*, Somerville explicitly mentions the nerves ten times, in references to both humans and nonhumans. More generally, his representation of animal bodies as fundamentally expressive indicates how the discourse of the nervous system transformed the body into a semiotic system, in which physiological events and responses—a body trembling, a blush, a nose quivering—correlate with psychological experience.

Like Thomson, Somerville is a skilled conveyer of animal expression and behavior, who teaches his readers to interpret the body language and vocalizations of animals. His detailed attention to the body’s physical conduits of sensation—the heart, veins, nerves, blood, nostrils, eyes, and skin—represents animals as somatically legible subjects. He uses verbs that attest to subjective states, that link feeling with visible or audible action. In *The Chace*, animals tremble, quiver, shake, pant, faint, swell, growl, cower, skulk, cry, sob, whine, stretch, frolic, bask, glare, grin, and creep. In Somerville’s language of the body, sense details signify affective states: sounds like “imperfect Whimp’rings” (1.225) and “dying Shrieks” (3.470); visual cues like waving tails and “Eyes / With Life full-beaming” (2.141-2); and even smells, such as the scent particles that emanate from the frightened quarry and hang in the air for the hounds, who “with

⁸⁴ George Cheyne, *The English Malady; Or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds* (London, 1733), 71.

ev're Breath / Inhale the grateful Stream, quick pleasures sting / Their tingling Nerves" (2.141.2). Among the specific named emotional states ascribed to animals are joy, courage, ardor, ecstasy, timorousness, fear, hope, disappointment, rage, fury, jealousy, sadness, despair, horror, woe, and anguish. Somerville feels no compunction about so humanizing domesticated creatures; anthropomorphism is one of the central strategies of the poem. Interestingly, though, it is the hunted animals—the fox, the otter, and particularly the pacific herbivores, the hare and stag—who are given the fullest emotional lives and with whom the reader is positioned most closely.

The hare-hunting sequence offers one vivid example. As the hunt commences, the reader's attention is turned toward the visibly frightened hare: "there she lies; how close! she pants, she doubts / If now she lives; she trembles as she sits, / With Horror seiz'd" (2.137-9). During the chase sequence, the reader's point of view shuttles between the crazed and "blood-thirsty" dogs and the obviously distressed hare, whose eventual death is pathetic, in both senses: "How quick she turns! their gaping Jaws eludes, / And yet a Moment lives; 'till round inclos'd / By all the greedy Pack, with infant Screams / She yields her Breath, and there reluctant dies" (2.269-72). The effect of this final humanization of the "poor" hare, the reference to her human cry, is accentuated when her fate is compared with the "poor ill-fated Bard," Orpheus, who was pursued and killed by the raging Maenads, female worshippers of Dionysus (2.273-80). As if to compensate for this pitiable and pointless scene, Somerville immediately moves to an account of the Mughal emperor Aurengzebe's glorious and useful slaughter of malicious lions and tigers.

There are ways to understand Somerville's detailed presentation of animal subjectivity—e.g., the intelligence, fear, and child-like cry of the hare—in terms other than sympathetic identification. The symbolic economy of the hunt requires that animals be worthy competitors. An animal is a suitable quarry only if it can resist, and memory, emotion, and reason all contribute to this capacity. The aim of the hunt, after all, is to create a power dynamic in which humans have just enough of an advantage to assure a likelihood of success (the animal dies), but also a possibility of failure (the animal lives). The hunt requires that the animal be an active agent but also, ethically, a non-entity. Perforce hunting is in some sense necessarily premised on a sadistic logic, which, like bear-baiting or cock-fighting, relies on the spectacle of the other's suffering. With this fact in mind, the hare's vividly depicted interiority may be integral to the huntsman's pleasure.

Yet, the poem's rhetorical excess and inconsistency—its harried justifications for human dominion and clumsy commingling of epic, mock-heroic, and pathetic elements—index the poet's anxiety that a reader taught to interpret the language of animal feeling may well end up antagonistic to his cruel custom. This anxiety accounts for Somerville's revision of Denham's version of the royal stag hunt at Windsor Forest. As he has with other quarry, Somerville depicts the stag as a sympathetic subject, an active and expressive being, who is "wring with Anguish," "lifts his weary Limbs with Pain," and "sobs apall'd" (3.475, 508-9). The reader sees events from the stag's perspective as he flees the hunting party and hides in a stream before being trapped and attacked by dogs. Somerville follows closely Denham's sequencing of events, until the final scene, when the stag stands before the monarch, an exemplary sentimental tableau, and makes a now

familiar rhetorical appeal: “Beneath a Weight of Woe he groans distress’d: / The Tears run trickling down his hairy Cheeks; / He weeps” (593-5). Whereas Denham’s stag is shot by King Charles, in Somerville’s rendering the nameless monarch, with “Tenderness innate,” pities the creature and calls off the dogs (596). A reader intent on demystifying sentimentality, on showing that pity is always a form of power, would interpret the royal pardon as a celebration of monarchical sovereignty. I would suggest, rather, that the stag’s tears exert their own rhetorical force, particularly within a moral economy defined by affective sociability. To say this another way, the stag’s reprieve is a consequence of Somerville’s failure to spell out a rationale for dominion that would outweigh the sympathetic reader’s investment in the animal’s survival. The royal pardon has a significant parallel in the Mughal hunt, when the ladies of Aurengzebe’s court successfully petition to save a number of captured beasts. In the case of the stag-hunt, the monarch’s actions seem to reflect not a king’s mercy so much as the emergence of a humanitarian reading public attentive to expressive animals.

The reader is made to identify with the hunted animal and this identification makes it difficult for the poet to then sacrifice the creatures for no reason other than the hunter’s satisfaction. Once an animal becomes a subject of interiority and identification, it exerts pressure on the narrative. Twice in *The Chace*, Somerville speaks of a guilt that does not exist—hunting is an “Image of War, without its Guilt” (1.15) and “a guiltless War” (2.521)—an instance of denying the existence of something to such an extent that one suspects it exists.⁸⁵ Such unease explains Somerville’s need to legitimate and rationalize the act of hunting, as a matter of primal survival, a natural conflict with

⁸⁵ Keith Thomas notices “traces of guilt, unease, and defensiveness” in the period’s anthropocentric rhetoric, in *Man and the Natural World*, 50.

predators, a preparation for warfare, and a reflection of divine prerogative. As I have suggested, however, Somerville's rationales for unchecked human dominion seem inadequate in relation to the sheer fact of feeling. With its prioritizing of the experience of feeling, sentimentalism places human and nonhuman animals on a level moral playing field, and Somerville's attempts to prop up the human, and legitimate genteel hunting, strike an awkward counter-note to the sheer vividness of animal experience and the sympathetic identification such experience evokes. The real surprise is that Somerville adopts sentimental strategies in the first place. His doing so suggests the extent to which sentimentalism had come to operate as an almost hegemonic discourse. After Thomson, we can assume, readers expected animals who feel and who express their feelings.

In the poems discussed here, the depiction of animal affect and experience has the effect of troubling the human sovereignty otherwise celebrated in georgic verse. These poems sentimentally reconceive the hunting trope that transforms animals into sympathetic persons and huntsmen into inhumane brutes. In the poems of Gay, Pope, and Thomson, animals are depicted as discomfiting presences in an imagined civic community, sympathetic victims whose interests conflict with the customary practice of sport hunting. Somerville's *The Chace*, on the contrary, inadvertently demonstrates the rhetorical challenge of denying communal membership to beings who communicate subjective states and interests. Moreover, these four georgic poems oversee a change in the agenda of literary didacticism. The reader of *Rural Sports* and *Windsor-Forest* is brought into a place of productive uncertainty, his or her identifications mixed. The reader's active ambivalence correlates with an image of society as an amalgamation of conflicting interests held in unresolved tension. In *The Seasons*, we see the development

of a sentimental rhetoric of affective proximity and a publicizing of expressive suffering that mark the emergence of modern animal advocacy. Thomson's poem positions literary humanitarianism at the center of a Whiggish narrative of historical progress, insofar as it aims to influence public opinion and reform social practices by training readers to sympathize with animal victims. Somerville also adapts georgic didacticism to the purpose of emotional propaganda, but, in *The Chace*, the overdetermining language of sentiment undermines his goal of justifying human sovereignty. The poem nourishes emotional identifications that run counter to its ideological ambition.

Chapter Three

Sentimental Imperatives and Animal Rights in the Literature of Humanitarian Sensibility

*I am recompensed, and deem the toils
Of poetry not lost, if verse of mine
May stand between an animal and woe,
And teach one tyrant pity for his drudge.*

—William Cowper, *The Task*

I. Yorick and the Starling, Affect into Action in Sterne's Fiction

Yorick's encounter with the caged starling in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* is perhaps the most widely recognized depiction of a failed human/animal relationship in eighteenth-century letters. Having arrived in Paris without a passport, Yorick worries that he may be imprisoned in the Bastille as a spy. Semantic gymnastics lead him to the conclusion that the Bastille is but a "house" from which a "man can't get out," but this idealization of imprisonment falters where he hears a voice in his hotel hallway complaining "it could not get out" (59). Seeing "neither man, woman, or child," he continues on his way. Returning through the passage later, he discovers the nonhuman speaker, a "starling hung in a little cage." Yorick—who reveres Tobias Shandy, a man of feeling famed for releasing a bothersome fly—is moved to act:

I'll let thee out, cost what it will; so I turn'd about the cage to get to the door; it was twisted and double twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces—I took both hands to it. (60)

As the starling presses piteously against the bars, Yorick appears ready to destroy its cage, but then, unexpectedly, he backs away, apologizing: "I fear, poor creature . . . I cannot set thee at liberty." His affections "tenderly awakened," Yorick retires to his room, where he meditates on the "bitter draught of slavery" and prays for "LIBERTY" for himself and others, human and animal.

Intertwining self-concern and social concern, the prayer echoes the chapter. Trying to dampen his own fears, Yorick makes light of confinement until the voice of another awakens his sympathy, compelling him to recognize the horrors of captivity. This is sympathy in the terms articulated by Adam Smith in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), sympathy that achieves its effect not in a transcendence of self-interest but in a transcendence of the self's circumstances, as mediated by the imagination. Unlike David Hume's account of a sympathy that takes form in the transpersonal interchange of feeling, Smith built self-conception into the heart of sympathy's capacity to reach beyond personal interest. When we behold another in pleasure or pain, he argues, sympathy arises based on our idea of "what we ourselves should feel in the like situation."¹ We enter into another's experience when we imaginatively project ourselves into a similar position. Though we may travel beyond our own circumstances, feeling for a bird in a cage though we stand at liberty, we do not feel as the bird in the cage but as we would in its place. A residue of the self and its particular interests remains even as we concern ourselves with another's fortune. This is why sympathy is never in itself virtuous for Smith; it becomes so only when we stoically command our passions to "feel much for others and little for ourselves" (30).

Smith's model of sympathy helps to account for the way Yorick's self shadows the entire chapter, and, in fact, shadows each of the sentimental encounters which are his motivation for travel. Though a constant advocate and sometimes practitioner of benevolence, Yorick appears never to truly love others so much as he loves himself. This is evident in the following chapter, when, the caged bird still acutely in mind, Yorick

¹ *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 11. Cited hereafter in text.

dilates his imagination on “the miseries of confinement” (610). Unable to effectively envisage “the millions of [his] fellow creatures” born to slavery, he instead pictures a single prisoner, an image that moves him to action of a particularly self-interested sort: he decides to track down a passport immediately. It is difficult not to feel that a fear of incarceration motivates his concern for the starling, his entreaty for the end of slavery, and his imaginative conjuring up of the pitiful prisoner. Throughout the novel, Yorick is shown to prefer fine feeling to practical action, to luxuriate in his expansive sympathies until called upon to do something, and to then reveal himself to be more skilled at self-justification than at helping another. Accordingly, the key moment in the starling episode is when Yorick places his hands on the cage bars, motivated by an affective energy that leads him to decide to free the starling “cost what it will,” and then the fading of that energy in the instant between his clutching of the bars and his backing away. The reader cannot be sure if propriety holds him back, or economy, or indolence. Regardless, this moment represents the limit of his willingness to transform sympathetic concern into ameliorative action.

Although Yorick’s ethical limitations define the starling episode, a specifically humanitarian resonance is implicit in the chain of associations that run through his mind. Markman Ellis points out that the antislavery prayer and the invoking of the millions who suffer in slavery likely derive from Sterne’s correspondence with the African Ignatius Sancho, who requested that Sterne employ his cultural authority to draw attention to the abolitionist cause.² In a letter to Sterne on slavery in the West Indies, Sancho conveys optimism that the normative power of sentimental literature may directly shape social conditions: “that subject handled in your striking manner, would ease (perhaps) the Yoke

² Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, Chapter 2.

of many.”³ By imaginatively linking African slaves in the Americas, a prisoner of the absolutist French monarchy, and the caged bird, Yorick supposes an existential likeness between humans and nonhumans, a shared yearning for liberty. The starling who “can’t get out” is not a symbolic substitute for enslaved and imprisoned humans, a figure emptied of its animal being, but a dramatic and literal starting point for Yorick’s reflections on the evils of captivity. A captured starling crying for freedom would itself have evoked for readers an ongoing debate with a humanitarian resonance: the capture, caging, and sale of wild birds, both native and exotic.⁴ In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton had observed, “Put a bird in a cage he will dye for sullenness.”⁵ In *The Seasons*, James Thomson had objected to the practice, noting that birds become less expressive in appearance and song when caged. Thomson included a description of a mother nightingale returning to a nest robbed of her young, a moving image meant to particularize the moral precept: “Spare the soft tribes, this barbarous art forbear!”⁶ In the decades after the publication of *A Sentimental Journey*, a number of writers, including William Cowper and Humphrey Primatt, also objected to the practice.⁷ In the starling

³ Ignatius Sancho to Laurence Sterne, 21 July 1766, *A Collection of the Letters Written by the Late Rev. Mr. Laurence Sterne* (London, 1790), 121. Anna Barbauld commends Sterne for drawing “the attention of his readers to the wrongs of the poor negroes” (“The Origin and Progress of Novel Writing,” *The British Novelists* Vol. 1 (London, 1810), 40.

⁴ William Powell Jones dates the expansion of popular bird-keeping to an essay in Joseph Balgrave’s 1685 *The Epitome of the Art of Husbandry*, which explains how to care for singing birds, including canaries and nightingales, in “The Captive Linnet: A Footnote on Eighteenth-Century Sentiment,” *Philological Quarterly* 33 (1954): 330-37.

⁵ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621), 44. He continues: “or a beast in a penne, or take his yong ones or companions from him, and see what effect it will cause? but who perceiues not these common passions of sensensible creatures, feare, sorrow, &c. Of all other dogges are most subiect to this disease, in so much that some hold they dreame as men doe, and through violence of Melancholy run mad, I could relate many stories of dogges that haue died for grieffe, and pined away for losse of their masters, but they are common in euery Author.

⁶ *The Seasons*, “Spring,” line 711.

⁷ See Cowper’s “On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in his Cage”; and Primatt’s *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (London, 1776), 290-1.

chapters, Sterne places Yorick in a situation with a humanitarian frame of reference, one that indicates how the prevailing rhetoric of liberty was traveling from human to nonhuman domains.

When we discover the longer history of Yorick and the starling, however, any sense of a humanitarian imperative drastically changes, a characteristic result of Sternean narrative, which operates in cycles of optimistic expansion and cynical deflation. We learn first that a gentleman's manservant had captured the starling chick on the cliffs of Dover, taken it under "his protection," and soon "grew fond of it" (62). The bird has been brought under human dominion: taken from its wild state and domesticated. Insofar as the starling has been transformed into a pet, human affection mixes with self-interest. Starlings being known for an aptitude for mimicry, the groom, in Paris, teaches the bird its one-liner, a joke at the expense of French tyranny: "But his little song of liberty, being in an *unknown* language in Paris—the bird had little or no store set by him" (62). The semantic content of the bird's claim now appears meaningless, a manifestation of blind habit rather than intentional subjective expression: "mechanical," in Yorick's term (60). But the content also perfectly expresses the captive starling's situation, "so true in tune to nature," which is why the phrase inspires a brief sympathetic exchange of places. Sterne is drawing attention to the potential for faulty and false signals that bedevils sentimentality. Any validation of the sympathetic immediacy that drives Yorick's initial response to the caged starling is subverted by an epistemological question about the knowability of the other. It is not just that the starling is of a different species, as Jonathan Lamb emphasizes, because all difference in Yorick's sentimental travels—between cultures, genders, and individuals—creates conditions for as much

miscommunication as sympathy.⁸ For a sentimental reading, even more troubling than the problem of intelligibility that underlies and undermines sympathetic communion is the fact that Yorick not only does not free the talking bird but, once his own liberty is ensured, decides to keep it as a pet. La Fleur had purchased it for Yorick's amusement, so Yorick brings it with him back to England. Far from freeing the starling, Yorick accepts its status as commodifiable object, allowing it be passed through London society as a curiosity. In the eighteenth century, Powell notes, talking starlings were a valuable commodity, saleable for as much as five guineas (333). Finally, Yorick memorializes the creature, positioning a starling at the crest of his coat of arms (and, in fact, a starling does stand atop the Sterne family's coat of arms). From pet, to mistreated subject, to currency of exchange, the starling is finally evacuated of interiority and reduced to pure symbol.

Sentimental dictates may be impure, even inconsequential, but they are also expansive in Sterne's fiction, encompassing animals and humans alike. I have already mentioned Tobias Shandy, the benevolent old soldier in Sterne's first novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67), who "had scarce a heart to retaliate upon a fly." When a particularly large one torments him during dinner, Uncle Toby cups it in hand and releases it through a window—exclaiming "why should I hurt thee?—This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me" (TS 1.37), an act small in consequence but grand in compass. This famous gesture, in which the fly is briefly imprisoned and then freed, serves as a notable counterpoint to Yorick's encounter with the starling in *A Sentimental Journey*, and it belies any association between Uncle Toby's

⁸ Jonathon Lamb, *Preserving the Self*, 265-69. As Gardner Stout observes, one of the key problems of the book is "the great game of cross purposed called communication," Introduction, *A Sentimental Journey* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974), 35.

hinted-at physical impotence and sentimental ineffectuality. It is also explicitly educative, insofar as it “imprints” “a lesson of universal good-will” on the character of Tristram, the



Figure 3 Uncle Toby emancipating the fly, with Tristram looking on raptly, in *The Works of Laurence Sterne*, illus. Darley (Philadelphia, 1848).

novel’s young protagonist. Later in the novel, Tristram is shown putting this sentimental education into practice when he affectionately converses with an overburdened ass, “framing” the donkey’s “responses from the etchings on his countenance” (4.13). Like the startling, the donkey expresses itself through recognizable signs—in this case, body language. When this proves somewhat insufficient, Tristram imaginatively occupies the donkey’s perspective, conceiving “what is natural for an ass to think . . . upon the occasion,” thus entering the animal’s point of view in a manner that would be rejected by

Smith. The donkey, he realizes, is standing in place because it fears being beaten by its master if it moves. Tristram is able only to give it a macaroon, and he allows that the absurd pleasure of watching the creature eat a cookie outweighs the benevolence of the act.⁹ Again, sympathy's motivations are imperfect and its ameliorative agency is limited but its kingdom is wide.

Yorick equals Uncle Toby's generosity of sentiment but, as is evident in the startling episode, is little better than Tristram in his capacity to convert expansive feeling into meaningful action. In the Introduction, I briefly discussed the scene where, on the highway to Ambiens, Yorick and his valet La Fleur come upon a dead ass by the side of the road. La Fleur's horse refuses to pass the corpse by so La Fleur thrashes the animal "as he would have beat his drum" (32). Yorick unsympathetically instructs La Fleur to send the obstinate creature back to Montriul, which he does after giving it another thorough lashing. The sentimental traveler says nothing. In the next chapter, the two come upon a German peasant. He appears to be lamenting the death of a child but, Yorick quickly realizes, is in fact mourning for the dead donkey. The ass had accompanied the man as a "patient partner" on a pilgrimage to Spain, and now he mourns not for the "value of the ass—but the loss of him." The peasant's affection for his animal companion supplies Yorick with a grand lesson: "Did we love each other, as this poor soul but loved his ass—'twould be something." It is difficult, however, to see this lesson exerting any influence on Yorick himself. As they continue on their journey, with Yorick feeling "concern[ed]" and "pensive," his driver gives "an unfeeling lash to each of his beasts." Yorick calls for him to slow down, though it is unclear if he does so out of pity for the

⁹ In 1776, *The European Magazine* expressed concern about the treatment of donkeys: "There are few of us but have been witnesses to the underserved misery, the pain, the stripes, and punishments of every kinds that are lavished upon asses."

carriage-horses or because he desires a calmer ride—a typical Sternean insistence on the ambiguity of motives. In either case, the driver ignores him. It is worth noting that the harsh treatment of horses was one of the most widely noticed and decried cruel practices in Georgian Britain, and would have had clear humanitarian connotations for readers. If it has not occurred already, it is in this sequence that an attentive reader observes Yorick's fallibility as a character. In the contrast between the extravagant ideal he takes from the story of the beloved ass and his inaction when his servant and driver mistreat their horses, the reader is meant to gain distance from the protagonist.

Like Sterne's novels more generally, each of these scenes has a doubled quality. The pathetic Sterne represents a normative sentimental ideal: a call from beyond the self and a sympathetic response, which leads directly to an attempt at amelioration. The satirical Sterne shows the ineffectiveness of sympathetic identification and its origin in solipsism and false impressions. In the tension between these two registers, Sterne raises a question about the power of sentimental imperatives to actually influence behavior: do sympathetic dictates obligate a person to act and even to act in a manner opposed to self-interest? In both scenes from *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne portrays feasible ameliorative activity—liberating the starling, Yorick demanding that his valet and driver not beat their horses—and, in both cases, either Yorick's will or sympathy itself fails to push him to act and so to alleviate the suffering of the animal other. One might read Yorick's failure to act on behalf of the caged bird and the horses as revealing that self-interest and theatricality underlie all sentimental encounters. The fact that Sterne draws attention to the possibility of ameliorative action, however, distances the reader from identification with Yorick, and suggests that the satirical representation of Yorick's

ethical insufficiency is meant to offer instruction to readers. Satire functions as a supplement to sentiment, impugning not sympathy but complacency, and acts toward the same ethical end. That such moral education is possible, that sentimental travelers and readers alike may be moved to act differently, is the position taken by *A Sentimental Journey*'s more generous twentieth-century critics. Martin Battestin sees in Yorick's sentimental journey an emotional education; the novel teaches its protagonist while teaching its readers, mapping a "progress . . . from solipsism toward communion, from self-love toward a felt apprehension of the syntax of thing."¹⁰ If we apply Battestin's interpretation to Yorick's animal advocacy, a minor scene near the novel's sudden conclusion supplies some redemption for the novel's protagonist. Right after his apostrophe to the "Sensorium of the world!," the cosmological machinery that makes one "feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond" the self (98), Yorick, on the climb to the top of Mount Taurira, compels his driver to stop for the night after his horse, a "poor devil," loses its shoes (98). The very fact that Yorick says so little may attest to his reform; in this case, a sympathetic act speaks louder than all of Yorick's pathetic language. In *Tristram Shandy*, Tobias Shandy does act, and his action appears all the more meaningful given the insignificance of its beneficiary. As an exemplum, however, his gesture seems to have little influence on Tristram. Like Yorick, Tristram offers a satirical example to the reader who complacently believes that his/her fine sympathies are sufficient. Again, the reader is undergoing his/her own sentimental education, one that

¹⁰ Martin Battestin, "A Sentimental Journey and the Syntax of Things," in *Augustan Worlds*, ed. J.C. Hilson, M.M.B Jones, and J.R. Watson (Leicester UK: Leicester UP, 1978), 225. See also Arthur Hill Cash, *Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments: The Ethical Dimension of the Journey* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1966), an earlier reading that takes seriously Sterne's humane sentimentality, though Cash places a greater emphasis on Sterne's stoicism.

leads to a capacity to discriminate not only between the virtuous and the wicked, but between those who promote their generosity and those who act generously.

The majority of Sterne's critics have a habit of turning the questions he poses about sentimental imperatives into evidence for his absolute skepticism about sentimentality. Most twentieth-century readers have stressed the satirical quality in Sterne's depiction of a sentimental affection for animals. In fact, like a number of eighteenth-century and romantic-era writers, Sterne has entered the canon shorn of his sentimentality. In the thirties and forties, critics recuperated Sterne's reputation by emphasizing his cosmic irony. Ernest Dilworth's 1948 *Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne*, for instance, portrays Sterne as a social satirist, whose targets include fashionable humanitarianism. Dilworth recounts his own school days when he asked for a teacher's opinion on Sterne. When the teacher described Sterne as "sentimental," Dilworth requested clarification, and the teacher said only, "Uncle Toby and the Fly."¹¹ Attempting to emancipate Sterne from this reputation, Dilworth claims that Toby's releasing of the fly is marked by "not sentimentality but humor" (27), that Tristram's encounter with the ass is a "caprice" (29), and that Sterne's depictions of human/animal interaction have none of "our animal-story sentimentalism" because they result from "an adult humor that springs from an essential preoccupation with man" (29). Animals as animals, Dilworth suggests, are for children; to rescue Sterne from sentimentality is to rescue him from his beasts. More recent criticism has revalued Sterne as an ideological opponent of sentimentality, who unmasks its manipulative logic and covert reinstatement of the inequalities it claims to overcome. Markman Ellis sees the bird

¹¹ Ernest Nevin Dilworth, *The Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne* (Morningside Heights NY: King's Crown P, 1948), 2.

primarily as a bathetic device, which, in a characteristic sentimental maneuver, collapses the chapter's larger concern, antislavery, into triviality.¹² Jonathon Lamb reads Sterne's novels as presenting sentimental "experiments" in which fellow-feeling tends to "fail" (262). Observing that no "benevolent action" (265) follows Yorick's meeting with the starling, he argues against any reading of animal advocacy in Sterne's fiction: "the dogs, horses, mules, and asses that are so frequently encountered by the sentimental traveler ... enforc[e] neither a moral nor a lesson" (262). Paul Moore sees Yorick's "sympathy for the bird [as] mechanical and shallow" and claims that he in fact takes pleasure in animal suffering (45).¹³ The German pilgrim mourning his dead ass is meant to appear "ridiculous and excessive" (47). For these critics, Sterne uncovers the complacency, affectation, and voyeurism, which underlie and stimulate a culture of vicarious suffering.¹⁴

Before we conclude, however, that Sterne simply demeans or demystifies the imperatives built into sentimental literature, it is worth noticing how his contemporaries received him. Among Sterne's advocates, we find a desire to enter sympathetic communication with characters and situations, to read and weep. In an essay "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing," Anna Letitia Barbauld names Sterne as having

¹² Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, 71-77.

¹³ Paul Moore, "Sterne, Tristram, Yorick, Birds, and Beasts" *BJECS* 10 (1987): 43-54. Moore does conclude that Sterne represents Yorick as both "ridiculous and commendable" (53) and he draws attention to the final episode on Mount Taurira. Though he does not address the starling, Robert Markley offers the most stringent attack on Sterne's sentimentality, which he sees as an ideological sham, a vehicle for bourgeois "moral self-promotion," which mystifies structural inequality and provides no "impetus" for "action," in "Sentimentality as Performance," 219, 229.

¹⁴ Laura Brown, in *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001), reads the starling is a symbol for African slaves, but allows that Yorick is a "man of feeling, whose very nature is constituted by his leap of affinity with the nonhuman" (255). Although he does not address the starling episode, Christopher Nagle, in "Sterne, Shelley, and Sensibility's Pleasures of Proximity," *ELH* 70.3 (Fall 2003): 813-45, makes a strong case for Sterne as a sentimentalist.

established “the reign of sentiment,” which she links not with theatrical emotionality but with humanitarian ambition, finding in his novels a “great spirit of tenderness and humanity.”¹⁵ *A Sentimental Journey* popularized the term “sentimental.” In the last three decades of the eighteenth century, upwards of seventy different titles containing the word were published in Britain; before Sterne’s novel, there were two. Each of the scenes involving sentimentalized animals was anthologized in the hugely popular *Beauties of Sterne; including all his Pathetic Tales, & most distinguished Observations on Life. Selected for the Heart of Sensibility*, first published in 1782. Sterne’s animals have lived long literary afterlives. The starling, for instance, reappears in Byron’s *Don Juan*, where the narrator dreads the tame life of a poet who “like Yorick’s starling” cannot escape polite society, and in Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, where Maria Bertram complains of the iron gate at Sotherton, itself a sign of patriarchal constraint, “I cannot get out, as the starling said.”¹⁶ That the starling could serve as shorthand for unjust imprisonment suggests that for most contemporary readers the scene’s humanitarian impulse remained intact. While twentieth-century critics have characterized Sterne as an author of comic skepticism and linguistic play, the clergyman from Yorkshire was read in his own era as a man of feeling and animal lover. His example was widely noted by animal advocates. In a famous 1809 speech before the House of Lords in support of a Bill for preventing Malicious and Wanton Cruelty to Animals, Lord Erskine argued that a law would take the place of literature in constituting social norms, meaning that “it will not be left to a

¹⁵ “On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing,” in *British Novelists* Vol. 1 (London 1810), rpt. in *Anna Letitia Barbauld Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Orchard Park NY: Broadview, 2001), 403.

¹⁶ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, 1819-24, ed. Leslie Marchand (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 4.109. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 1814, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 89.

future Sterne to remind us, when we put aside even a harmless insect, that the world is large enough for both.”¹⁷

Many of Sterne’s contemporary readers were dismayed by the possible social consequences of his bestial morals—he was compared with the atheist Hobbes and the libertine Rochester—and advocacy on behalf of animals. In 1772, an American pastor complained that Sterne had debased virtue: “the feelings he describes are” no more “than we have in common with the brute creation.”¹⁸ Elizabeth Montagu called him a “Buffoon” and an “ape,” who “degrades himself in the rank of rational Beings,” and, perhaps in response to the propinquity of sentimental and libidinal feeling in his novels, accused him of “spiritual bestiality” (207-8). These critics noticed that sentimental moral feeling, animal in origin, tends to embrace animals in its sphere of concern. The novelist Fanny Burney, who herself admired Sterne, reports a conversation in which a female acquaintance disparaged the new masculine sensitivity: “when a man chooses to walk about the world with a cambrick handkerchief always in his hand, that he may always be ready to weep, either with man or beast,—he only turns me sick” (204). In his *Winter Evenings*, the preacher Vicesimus Knox tells a tale illustrative of the dangers of sentimental reading, of a young woman named Belinda who was “remarkably fond of pathetic novels.”¹⁹ It is “Sterne’s sentimental beauties” that are “her peculiar favourites,” which becomes evident when she quotes Uncle Toby (471). From her reading she “had contracted so great a tenderness of sensibility,” that she “could not bear the idea of killing

¹⁷ *Cruelty to Animals: The Speech of Lord Erskine, in the House of Peers, On the Second Reading of the Bill for preventing Malicious and Wanton Cruelty to Animals* (London, 1809), 27.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Sterne, The Critical Heritage*, ed. Alan B. Howes (London: Routledge, 1974), 203. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁹ Vicesimus Knox, *Winter Evenings: or, Lucubrations on Life and Letters* Vol. 1 (London, 1790), 469. Cited hereafter in text.

animals for food,” she loathed hunting and fishing, worried about the abuse of her coach horses, and, in fact, cared more for her cat than for her own child (469). This particular formulation became a cliché: sentimental concern for animals is essentially misanthropic. Its votaries care more for brutes than for people. Like George Canning, Knox implies that a sentimental affection for animals disrupts the social order—and not only the state, but the family itself. After his death, the rumor circulated that Sterne, sensibility’s brightest light, had mistreated his own mom—or, in the words of the abolitionist William Wilberforce, “A dead ass was more important to him than a living mother” (305).

The best explanation for these attacks arrives in the work of Richard Griffith, an editor who in 1770 published a counterfeit Sterne autobiography. Two years later, in the unimaginatively titled miscellany *Something New*, Griffith reflects on the “Unmoral Philosophy” that advocates on behalf of brutes.²⁰ His chief example is Hindu “superstition,” which reaches its fanatical and fantastical form in the “strange extravagance” reported by a traveler to the East, an “Infirmary, *for sick fleas*” (140). Yet Griffith worries that the Sternean concern for animals, epitomized by Uncle Toby’s freeing of the fly, might offer a “shining figure” to fellow Britons of “extraordinary sentiment” who believe that we “have no manner of natural right over the life of any animal” (141). The language of feeling, Griffith argues, troubles anthropocentric ideology, and Sterne’s sentimental heroes do impose lessons in interspecies affection. Griffith sees Sterne not as aesthetically crude but as threatening insofar as his sentimentality challenges the cultural logic of human dominion.

Sterne’s readers clearly recognized the possibility that his sentimental fiction might obligate readers to feel and act differently. We might read the ambivalence about

²⁰ Richard Griffith, *Something New* Vol. 1 (London, 1772), 138. Cited hereafter in text.

emotional imperatives thematized in Sterne's novels as reflecting the ironic self-consciousness of a writer who made sentimental prose a site for social activism. Yorick, whose momentary sympathy for the starling is surrounded by self-interest, looks a lot like Sterne, a writer who capitalizes on his capacity to commodify sensibility, who takes to the bank an aptitude for inspiring generosity. More generally, Sterne's reception reveals that, for contemporaries, the satirical force of his novels did not undermine their sentimental lessons. Satire, rather, functions alongside pathos: both are educative, both aim to reform. Like Adam Smith, Sterne stresses the epistemological unknowability of the other and the self-interest that is sympathy's constant companion. He suggests as well that sentimental education and sympathetic imperatives are limited in their potential to compel us to act otherwise. Yet, rather than demystifying ethical feeling altogether, Sterne's novels suggest that, as Yorick himself decides, "there is nothing unmixed in this world" (74). Just as Yorick's actions are never quite enough to count as ethically generous, and never so miserly to count as the opposite, so Sterne's novels suggest that emotional education is an ongoing and always-already compromised activity. As his contemporary reception indicates, Sterne's early readers believed that his novels promote concern for the animal creation even as they satirize characters whose fellow-feeling fails to prove itself in action. The satirical tone of the novels troubles sentimental complacency without questioning the value of a sentimental ethics.

II. Sentimentality's Consequence

This interpretation positions Sterne as a keen thematizer of his era. The latter decades of the eighteenth century are often classified as the Age of Sensibility, a period defined by a flood of pathos-inspiring literature, an ambitious agenda for humanitarian reform, and a widespread apprehension that sympathetic feelings had become overwrought or ineffective. With intensity atypical in literary history, the poems and novels in the decades before the French Revolution seek to obligate their readers to feel and behave differently, with the assumption that changes in emotional norms will instigate institutional and political transformations. At the same time, humanitarian writers express wariness about sentimentality's capacity to constitute such obligation and effect such change. Cognitive dissonance defines the era's approach to emotional persuasion, which is understood, sometimes in a single work, to be both radically transformative and entirely inconsequential. Each of the authors discussed in this chapter—Sterne, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and William Cowper—believed that the foundation of literature's moral authority was its capacity to foster social sympathy. Each addressed humanity's treatment of animals, as well as other pressing matters of social justice, including slavery and poverty. And each expressed hesitation about the culture of sentiment: about the complacency that accompanies a vogue for sensibility and about the danger of overestimating the power of sentimental imperatives.²¹ In various ways, this chapter

²¹ One manifestation of this wariness is a common distinction between politeness and emotional sincerity. Where Thomson and Hume see politeness and moral sentiment as the same, later writers seem to wonder if polished social intercourse is a sign of affectation and political quietism rather than active virtue.

argues, these writers deploy but also supplement the rhetoric of sensibility: Sterne with satire, Barbauld with reasoned argument, Cowper with a coercive Christian ethics.²²

A sense of literature's broadly instrumental purpose, its capacity to redress specific social ills by transforming public feeling, reaches a zenith in the decades around the American and French Revolutions. The language of sentiment traversed a growing horizon of potential political and social reform, as religious dissenters, Evangelicals, and middle-class humanitarians explored new avenues for popular participation in social and political activity. This period saw widespread petitioning for parliamentary reform and the expansion of the franchise, calls for the improvement of prisons with a new emphasis on rehabilitation, and the establishment of charity schools, hospitals, and other private philanthropic institutions.²³ The most significant theater for the new activism was the anti-slavery movement, a phenomenon that continues to raise complex questions about the historical interpretation of social concern, and supplies a significant analogy to the period's animal advocacy. In 1772, with the support of London reformers, the slave James Somersett brought a case before the King's Bench, suing for his freedom, and Lord Mansfield's opinion in his favor was taken to mean that the institution of slavery had no legal standing within Britain. Two years later, John Wesley published his *Thoughts on Slavery*, placing Methodism at the service of the abolitionist cause. In 1783, a group of Quakers presented a petition to Parliament to end Britain's involvement in slavery, and in

²² These supplemental domains accord with Esther Schor's argument that "The arena of the affections, once entrusted to produce a morality superior to that conceived through reason, was by the end of the eighteenth-century increasingly subordinated to two distinct authorities: the authority of religion and that of reason," in *Bearing the Dead*, 11.

²³ See Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 481-518. Langford points out that the period sees a new sort of philanthropist: "not great benefactors, but opinion-makers, men who sought out distress or injustice, analysed its causes, campaigned for its alleviation, co-ordinated its eradication" (483). He links the concern with public opinion to the "new sensibility" (485).

1787 the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in London. The following year saw the first mass “petitioning campaign on public matters ever to have been organized in Britain,” which influenced Parliament to pass legislation regulating the slave trade.²⁴ Adopting the rhetorical conventions of sentimental literature, British verse played an important role in the abolitionist cause, beginning with Thomas Day’s 1773 *The Dying Negro* (1773). The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade conceived of poetry as an powerful propaganda tool and commissioned poems from several established poets, including William Cowper, who wrote “Pity for the Poor Africans” (1788) and other abolitionist ballads. Other important antislavery poems include Hannah More’s *The Slave Trade* (1787), and Ann Yearsley’s *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade* (1788), and Mary Robinson’s “The African” (1798).²⁵

Activism on behalf of animals in the age of sensibility can be understood only in the context of abolitionism and the humanitarian reform movement more generally. As Yorick’s associative logic in the starling episode reveals, concern for animals was often linked with antislavery, and nonhumans were increasingly invested with natural rights, including a right to liberty. In his 1776 *Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, Humphrey Primatt invokes the emergent principle of universal rights, framed as the negative image of natural hierarchy, in an argument against slavery: “as there is neither merit or demerit in complexion, the *white* man (notwithstanding the barbarity of custom and prejudice) can have no right, by virtue of his *colour*, to enslave

²⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 353.

²⁵ See *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems About Slavery, 1660-1810*, ed. James G. Basker (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002). James Boswell, who opposed abolition, sums up the tenor of these poems, when he contends even lowly cobblers, practically enslaved themselves, had been inspired by the muse to, “in sentimental strain / That negroes are oppress’d, complain,” *No Abolition of Slavery; Or, the Universal Empire of Love*, in *Amazing Grace*, 238.

and tyrannize over a *black* man” (11).²⁶ Based upon an interest in one’s own well-being that is common to all sensitive creatures, Primatt asserts (again through negation) that rights extend beyond the human: “for the same reason, a man can have no natural right to abuse and torment a beast, merely because a beast has not the *mental* powers of man” (12). In the decades when American colonists, religious dissenters, and abolitionists were asserting that natural rights supply the foundation for previously unrecognized political rights, their rhetoric pollinated the language of animal advocacy. In limited and ambivalent ways, such as the starling’s questionable cry for liberty and Uncle Toby’s freeing of the fly, animals come to be imagined as autonomous subjects with the interests that are the basis for rights. David Perkins notes that as early as Thomas Tryon’s 1691 vegetarian polemic, *The Way to Health*, arguments for animal rights adopt a longstanding rhetoric of uniquely English liberty, but such assertions are sporadic until the last decades of the eighteenth century.²⁷ This chapter considers several works that make wider anti-cruelty arguments within the idiom of humanitarian sensibility—the mistreatment of post-horses observed by Sterne and Cowper’s Thomsonian critique of hunting—but I am also interested in instances where animal advocates invoke the rhetoric of liberty and rights. Humane writers begin to ask whether animals have not just a right not to suffer but also to live without human constraint.

In “The Paradoxical Origins of Human Rights,” Lynn Hunt claims that human

²⁶ Lynn Hunt argues that the defining transition in eighteenth-century conceptions of rights is away from the particularized rights of the “freeborn Englishman” to universal claims of human rights, “The Paradoxical Origins of Humans Rights,” in *Human Rights and Revolutions*, ed. Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn Young (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000): 3-15.

²⁷ David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 41. Perkins makes the debatable though interesting argument that animal rights might have appear less radical than assertions of human rights, which would require a “riskier alteration of the social order” (4).

rights depend on two interrelated phenomena, both associated with the Enlightenment: recognition of psychological autonomy and a “sense of empathy between psyches across space” (12). The rhetoric of rights requires both a conception of independent interests and a model of community in which individuals are capable of identifying with others and their interests. Hunt finds such a model in the possibilities sentimental print culture creates for sympathy “between separate psyches imagined to be in some fundamental way alike” (13). As I have argued, sentimentalism organizes *likeness* around feeling and thus expands the domain of potential identification beyond the species barrier. Animal rights, it appears, have the same historical origin, in sentimentalism, as human rights. Hunt’s argument is so interesting because it suggests an important, if “paradoxical,” connection between sentimental depictions of suffering victims and the claim that those victims have rights. In other words, the Enlightenment politics of reform depend upon interrelated principles of intersubjectivity and autonomy, so we should expect to find the rhetoric of pathos and the language of rights operating in close proximity to each other.

In her *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin*, Anna Seward congratulates the poets of the late eighteenth century, who made opposition to imperialism, the slave trade, and other forms of social injustice a primary motive for verse: “Greatly is it to the honor of our English poets, within the last twenty years, that, with very few exceptions, the best and most highly-gifted of them have sought their way to fame beneath the banners of Freedom and Mercy.”²⁸ She discovers several scenes in Erasmus Darwin’s *Loves of Plants* that attest to such social conscience and reformist aims. The first is a familiar image from the

²⁸ Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, Chiefly during his Residence at Lichfield, with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms on his Writings* (London, 1804), 224-5. Cited hereafter in text.

repertoire of animal advocacy: “of a wounded deer, escaping from her ambushed archer, and flying with her fawn, to the woodlands, over plains spotted with her blood; and, amid thick shades, hanging over her young, and weeping her life away” (340-1). The second is a pathetic scene in which an army officer’s wife watches from a nearby hill as her husband is mortally wounded in battle. These scenes illuminate a turn among contemporary poets away from the traditional epic, which positions violence at the core of national greatness: “Truly honourable is it to the Poets of this reign, that the best of them have never stimulated, but, on the contrary, have endeavoured to meliorate and abate that belligerent spirit . . . fruitful in the extreme of human misery” (341-2). Seward defines poetry’s expansion of sympathy as a concrete form of social action and as the defining characteristic of her literary age. Taking to heart John Dennis’s proposition that an affective literature could instruct and reform the public, sentimental writers positioned themselves at the forefront of humanitarian reform. They believed that fiction and poetry shaped emotional and behavioral norms, transformed social practice, and even instigated political change. Literary sentimentality offered writers a language to justify their social function and define their cultural authority. Such cultural authority, of course, accrued mainly to those in the middle station, whose claim to social legitimacy hinged upon a self-fashioned image of benevolent purpose, which could be contrasted with the emotional callousness of squires and laborers alike. The sense of aesthetic instrumentality that follows is evident in Sancho’s request that Sterne advocate on behalf of West Indian slaves. Sterne’s preacherly rationale for *A Sentimental Journey* is less topical but equally didactic: “my design in it was to teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures better than we do.”²⁹ Literary sensibility may be identified by its claim to be a site of social

²⁹ Laurence Sterne, *A Collection of Letters*, 146.

activism. Such activism becomes evident in depictions of pathetic situations that invoke larger social problems or articulate a wider frame of reference for sympathetic experience than the depiction itself. Yet, as literature becomes an avenue for humanitarianism, a way to imagine and effect social change, reform-minded writers wondered about the practical consequences of literary feeling.

As the case of Sterne suggests, humanitarian writers were not wholly confident about the actual effects of sentimental rhetoric because they were not certain about the force of the imperatives built into the sentimental reading experience. British literature of the second half of the eighteenth century may be read as a long meditation on Hume's radical hypothesis that reason exerts no motivating force, that there is no will but that which moves by the passions.³⁰ Sterne was not the only writer to wonder what sort of concrete obligations follow from sentimental reading. In an article in the *Lounger*, Henry Mackenzie summarizes the debate about literary pedagogy: "The effects of moral instruction and precept on the mind have been rated very highly by some grave and worthy men, while by others the experience of their inefficacy, in regulating the conduct of the hearer or reader, has been cited as an indisputable proof of their unimportance."³¹ Mackenzie himself is ambivalent on the subject. He doubts that "the relation that moves, has any permanent effect on the actions of him who listens or who weeps," but also suggests that exemplary and sentimental stories are not altogether "useless and vain." In her "Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations," Anna

³⁰ Hume's most famous articulation of this idea: "'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger," *Treatise* 2.3.3. Adopting a more philosophical idiom, he states: "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will," and it can "never oppose passion in the direction of the will," *Treatise* 2.3.1.

³¹ *The Lounger* 82 (26 August 1786), in *The Miscellaneous Works of Henry Mackenzie* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 135-7.

Barbauld expresses a similar uncertainty about the “moral tendency” of “fictitious suffering,” particularly when those representation offer no direct avenue to ameliorative activity.³² To be repeatedly affected by moving stories without the opportunity to transform those feelings into “virtuous action,” she argues, leads to emotional callousness and apathy. As Mackenzie and Barbauld suggest, the debate about the cultural value of sentimentality is often organized around questions of consequentiality. Blakey Vermeule has observed the same set of questions in the writings of Pope, Johnson, and Hume, all of whom she sees as moralists who “seek to obligate other people,” but who also “confront the limits of art as an instrument of obligation.”³³ On a similar note, R.F. Brissenden finds a widespread concern, as new avenues for humanitarian activity emerged in the later eighteenth century, that “individual acts of benevolence could not alter a general social conditions which was fundamentally unjust,” as well as suspicion toward those who feel and express compassion for victims in “a situation which was irredeemable.”³⁴

In the introduction to her edited collection *Compassion*, Lauren Berlant poses this problem anew: “In a given scene of suffering, how do we know what does and should constitute sympathetic agency?”³⁵ The literature of sensibility places readers in positions where they are asked to feel for others. What sort of obligation beyond a felt experience of sympathetic communion is entailed by this position? In order to understand the relation between affect and action, one must define the potential avenues for ameliorative activity and thus the concrete history of social agency. It is significant, then, that two historians have described a significant eighteenth-century transformation in the

³² In *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 205. Cited hereafter in text.

³³ Blakey Vermeule, *The Party of Humanity*, 18.

³⁴ R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress*, 82.

³⁵ Lauren Berlant, “Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding),” 4.

conditions of obligation and sympathetic agency. I have already mentioned Thomas Haskell's two essays on "Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility," which correlate eighteenth-century humanitarianism—abolitionism, as well as the appearance of institutions for the care of the poor, the insane, prostitutes, and orphans—to a new "perception of causal connection" (342), itself a direct manifestation of an "expansion of the range of opportunities available . . . for shaping the future and intervening in other lives" (356). Moral obligation, Haskell points out, requires a sense of one's own capacity to remedy or meliorate the situation in which one discovers the suffering other. Thomas Laqueur, in his essay "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," is also concerned with how compassion is elicited and "comes to be understood as a moral imperative to undertake ameliorative action."³⁶ Laqueur describes a genre he calls the humanitarian narrative, which ranges from novels to medical reports and is defined by the use of realist detail as the marker of truth. He contends that these narratives characteristically trace the "lineaments of causality and human agency" and establish "model[s] of precise social action" (178). As for Haskell, for Laqueur the claim of moral obligation that defines modern humanitarianism depends on a recognition and representation that the social order may be changed. For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century humanitarians, agency is premised on the new politics of reform and on new models of literary production and public opinion. Obligation and agency, both Laqueur and Haskell suggest, are interlinked and mutually constitutive. Moreover, the province of language itself may be a space of practical activity. As Luc Boltanski observes, speech should be understood as a force of moral action when there is such a thing as "public

³⁶ Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989), 176.

opinion engaging directly with political institutions”—the very phenomenon so often associated with the later eighteenth century.³⁷

Haskell and Laqueur’s arguments about a new experience of social agency that is closely intertwined with the obligations evoked by humanitarian sensibility are atypical. Since the eighteenth century, cultural critics have misconstrued an apprehension about the effect of affect, which is characteristic of the literature of humanitarian sensibility, as total disillusionment. This negative hermeneutic is striking in its confidence about the knowability of the reader. For sentimentality’s critics, a disjunction between affect and action—always represented as primarily internal to the subject, as a failure of the sentimental will—is one of its great weaknesses as a socio-ethical system. It is suggestive that Hannah More makes Sterne’s fiction her model of inconsequential and theatrical feelings, those that merely fashion a self-image rather than a society: “one genuine deed perform’d” in the name of true sentiment, she writes in her poem “Sensibility,” is better than “all thy soothing pages, polish’d Sterne.”³⁸ Sterne’s sentimentality, More suggests, inspires passivity rather than action. What is most interesting about this formulation is the way it clashes with the concerns of her contemporaries that Sterne’s work does in fact constitute ideologically threatening normative obligations. More’s critique of sentimentality as inconsequential may in fact reflect an apprehension about its ideological effect.

Although their motives may be different, later cultural critics took from sentimentality’s early opponents this questioning of the social productivity of sentimental writers. Oscar Wilde, in a long letter to his onetime lover Alfred Douglas, later published

³⁷ Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*, 18.

³⁸ Hannah More, “Sensibility,” 285.

as *De Profundis*, famously articulates one modern version of this idea. Accusing Douglas of borrowing money while exalting his own generosity, Wilde derides him as a “sentimentalist”: “one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for.”³⁹ Following Wilde, Jacques Barzun distinguishes Romanticism from sentimentality by pointing to the lack of activity in the latter: “Habitually to enjoy feelings without acting upon them is to be a sentimentalist.” Among his examples from this age of merely literary tears is a certain emotional effusiveness regarding “dead donkeys.”⁴⁰ In *Virtue in Distress*, Brissenden describes a tragic element—a sense of impossibility or paralysis—defining depictions of suffering in the later eighteenth century: “Most moving of all are the situations which are completely irremediable, those which all the generous impulses in the world can do nothing to alter, and to which we can offer only the tribute of our pity” (6). In one recent account of the literature of sensibility, Susan Manning assuredly reads its consequences in terms of inconsequentiality: “While the ethical standing of Sensibility might be defended by emphasizing its didactic and pedagogical functions—the education of the passions was its ‘business’—its actual impact inclined towards emotion that exceeded utility.”⁴¹ Writing about Sterne in particular, Robert Markley similarly asserts that if “sentimentality is not a dead end, it is a discrete moment that can provide the impetus only for reflection, not action.”⁴² These critics see literary sensibility as a form of political quietism masked by its claim to be an agent of moral pedagogy and

³⁹ Oscar Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas, January-March 1897, in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 768. He continues, “The intellectual and emotional life of ordinary people is a very contemptible affair. Just as they borrow their ideas from a sort of circulating library of thought—the *Zeitgeist* of an age that has no soul—and send them back at the end of each week, so they also try to get their emotions on credit, and refuse to pay the bill when it comes in.”

⁴⁰ Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic and Modern* (New York: Anchor, 1961), 75-6.

⁴¹ Susan Manning, “Sensibility,” 89.

⁴² Markley, “Sentimentality as Performance,” 229.

social reform. Though they never explain why, they seem breathtakingly confident about what happens when readers engage sentimental texts. This chapter, as well as this dissertation, argues for the inadequacy of these formulations, which suggest that a body of literature profoundly concerned with direct social change can be characterized precisely by its lack of consequence. As in my analysis of Sterne, in what follows I discuss Barbauld and Cowper's negotiations with the limits they perceived in sentimentality as a force of moral motivation. I also consider how their reception histories are organized around questions of the effectuality of sentimentality obligations, often expressed in a very selective manner of reading that suppresses or devalues the ethical imperatives that define their work.

III. Reasonable Sympathies in Barbauld's "The Mouse's Petition"

Anna Letitia Barbauld was one of a new generation of professional women writers who accrued extensive cultural authority and contributed widely to the critical, political, and philosophical debates of the day. In her essays, criticism, children's books, and verse, Barbauld provided a leading voice in the humanitarian reform movement, modeling humane education in her four-volume *Lessons for Children* (1778-9) and condemning the slave trade in *An Epistle to William Wilberforce* (1791). Intellectually a product of middle-class Protestant Dissent, Barbauld saw liberal sentiment and humanitarian activism as key elements in her class's claim to moral clout and social legitimacy. She was not, however, an unrestrained enthusiast for sentimentalism. I have already mentioned her "Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations"—published in *Miscellaneous*

Pieces in Prose (1773), a collection of her essays and those of her brother, the critic/naturalist John Aikin—where she discusses the strategies and limitations of sentimental pathos. Barbauld begins by reminding her readers of what a curious phenomenon it is that writers of tragedy and romance aspire to elicit tears from their audience by subjecting their heroes and heroines to extensive torment. She delineates between two distinct categories of sympathy, one that responds only to another’s bodily suffering and a second that responds to psychological torment, particularly when it manifests in a character who shows qualities of “mental or moral excellence” (197). Physiologically, the first type produces a tightening of the body and the second type, which she associates with pity, a relaxation. Barbauld illustrates this distinction with examples taken from humanity’s relation with the animal world: “When we crush a noxious or loathsome animal, we may sympathize strongly with the pain it suffers, but with far different emotions from the tender sentiment we feel for the dog of Ulysses, who crawled to meet his long-lost master, looked up, and died at his feet” (197). While graphic depictions of suffering may inspire an immediate experience of fellow feeling, Barbauld warns, they eventually lead to emotional callousness. Only when representations of distress are linked with virtuous emotions on the part of the sufferer—such as fortitude, intelligence, gentleness, and beauty—do they contribute to the refinement of moral feeling and successfully “move compassion” (198-9).⁴³ Understanding how Barbauld qualifies

⁴³ In her essay, “On Romances,” in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (London 1792): 39-46, Barbauld counters those who argue that compassion is always solely self-interested: “We commiserate [with] others, say they, that we may applaud ourselves; and the sigh of compassionate sympathy is always followed by the [congratulations] of self-complacent esteem.

sentimental imperatives allows us to read the rhetorical appeal in her most significant work of animal advocacy, “The Mouse’s Petition.”

Barbauld published “The Mouse’s Petition” in her debut collection of verse, the 1773 *Poems*. In a footnote, she describes the occasion for this poetic petition, which adopts the first-person voice of an imprisoned mouse: “Found in the trap where he has been confined all night by Dr. Priestley, for the sake of making experiments with different kinds of air.”⁴⁴ Barbauld had been visiting her friend Joseph Priestley, a well-known Dissenter and natural philosopher who had taught at the Warrington Academy, founded by Barbauld’s father, before moving to Leeds. During Barbauld’s visit, Priestley was conducting the research that led to his groundbreaking 1774 *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air*, and Barbauld’s poem records her hostility to Priestley’s use of live animals in experiments with vacuum pumps. In this opposition, she follows a number of eighteenth-century writers, including Addison and Pope, who objected to scientific research using animals.⁴⁵ The *Gentleman’s Magazine* and other liberal periodicals contributed to an ongoing debate about the ethics of animal experimentation, and the complex emotional responses to the issue are dramatized in Joseph Wright’s painting, “An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump,” completed two years before the publication of Barbauld’s poem. For its immediate audience this occasional poem would have been read topically, as it takes a specific event as the basis

But surely they who would thus reduce the sympathetic emotions of pity to a system of refined selfishness, have but ill attended to the genuine feelings of humanity” (44-5).

⁴⁴ Anna Letitia Barbauld, “The Mouse’s Petition,” 1773, rpt. in *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 69-72. Hereafter cited in text by line number.

⁴⁵ *The Spectator* 21 (24 March 1711).

for reflection and instruction on the larger phenomenon of animal experimentation.

The poem's opening quatrain addresses Priestley directly, admonishing him to show affective receptivity: to "hear" the mouse's plea and "never let [his] heart be shut" (1, 3). It is characteristically sentimental in its emphasis on sympathetic responsiveness—on the obligation to listen to the "sighs" and "cries" of the tormented other—and in its evocation of a universally recognizable language of sound and gesture. The poem's opening line augments the sentimental ethics constituted in the sympathetic relationship between the mouse and addressee (Priestley/reader) by invoking a higher moral authority: this petition is also a "prayer." However, it is reason, not the Deity, which provides the poem's primary alternative to sentimental ethics. "The Mouse's Petition" neither dramatizes the suffering mouse's experience nor allows its reader the position of sympathetic voyeur. The reader is addressed as a rational moral agent, is charged with a general code of conduct, and is given a direct route to ameliorative action. The poem does not incite fellow-feeling so much as it makes a reasonable plea based on the obligations of fellow-feeling. It offers an instance of what Carey calls a "sentimental argument," which establishes its force in a belief about sympathy rather than by eliciting sympathy, in ideational rather than affective experience.⁴⁶ The poem's short rhythmic quatrains, alternating tetrameter and rhyming trimeter, lend themselves to memorable statements of principle. The seventh stanza captures this aphoristic quality as well as the particular configuration of ethical subjectivity addressed in the poem: "The well-taught philosophic mind / To all compassion gives; / Casts round the world an equal eye, / And

⁴⁶ Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 38.

feels for all that lives” (25-8). In these lines, Barbauld echoes and significantly revises Pope’s statement on the impartiality of God in *An Essay on Man*: “Who sees with equal eye, as God of all, / A hero perish, or a sparrow fall” (1.87-8). Pope justifies natural equality with reference to the Supreme Being. Beyond the opening “prayer,” Barbauld locates the weighing of moral law entirely within the rational agent. This stanza also embodies the poem’s fusing of rational and emotional imperatives because it addresses an impartial subject who feels and sympathizes. Either emotion or reason alone, Barbauld suggest, are insufficient moral vehicles. The reader is made to feel for the mouse, but also to think about the creature’s situation and the ethical status of animal experimentation more generally. Moreover, the reader is asked to see the mouse’s particular circumstance through the lens of the universal principle that all living beings deserve our empathy. Sympathy with a specific victim coincides with an abstract judgment about justice.

Barbauld notably modifies sentimental conventions in her representation of the mouse as a recipient of sympathy. Sparing in her use of vivid corporeal details—the graphic language of animal experience exemplified in Thomson’s *The Seasons*—the poet depicts the mouse as an articulate, psychological subject, more like Argos than the smashed insect in Barbauld’s classification of sympathetic objects. There is no spectacle of suffering or sentimental tableau. The captive animal is “pensive,” “forlorn and sad,” and it “tremble[s]” at its fate (1, 5, 7), but beyond this it is represented as a rational speaking subject. The poem places little emphasis on physical harm. Its most graphic element is the plea that Priestley not “stain with guiltless blood” his house (13). The mouse’s suffering is psychological: it fears its fate and longs for freedom. Though “free-

born,” like the mythic English citizen, the mouse is now a “captive prisoner” (12, 1). Its plea is for “liberty” (2). Priestley is an “oppressive force” (11), and the mouse appeals to its captor’s own experience of “freedom” as an English subject and political constraint as a religious Dissenter (9-10). This language of liberation constitutes a radical mode of humanization, particularly with its Lockean implication that the animal retains an innate relation to its prior freedom.⁴⁷ An essential, existential distinction between freedom and captivity—which Sterne conceives in the starling’s articulate cry and then undermines by calling into question whether or not it is a conscious speech act—is in this case made applicable to a nonhuman subject. This distinction reflects Barbauld’s attempt to characterize the mouse as a noble victim. According to her rhetorical theory, a captive of an unjust regime is a more convincing object of pathos than a being threatened with corporeal pain. In applying a language of liberation to the mouse, Barbauld contributes to the emerging discourse of animal rights. The potentially self-authoring subjectivity intimated in the distinction between freedom and captivity entails a political right in a way that the subjectivity of a merely sensitive being does not. Just as Thomson and Shaftesbury grant animals ethical status because of their capacity to feel, Barbauld foresees a discourse according to which animals have a limited political status.

This rhetoric of rights is heightened by Barbauld’s adoption of the form of the

⁴⁷ In the *Second Treatise*, John Locke asserts that prior to the establishment of civil government, man exists “a state of perfect freedom” (116). When we come to occupy a social body, this prior state of freedom is what ensures our natural rights. For Locke, this principle of innate equality is based upon shared species identity: “being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another’s uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours” (117).

petition. As Marlon Ross has pointed out, the petition is “the most radical form of a political letter, which targets the heart of established power, by directly addressing the monarch and parliament.”⁴⁸ The unique force of the political petition, Ross observes, is the way it stages the very political authority it claims to be humbly requesting. The petition allows “disempowered individuals and groups to demand their rights by asserting the true source of political power in the voices of those who are governed.” David Zaret argues that the significance of the petition was transformed during the English Civil War, from a “venerable tradition” that deferred to authority into a mode of address that “constituted and invoked the authority of public opinion in order to lobby Parliament” (55). According to Zaret, “the right to express grievance” claimed by the petitioner is “central to modern conceptions of human rights” (53).⁴⁹ In the later eighteenth century, petitions were widely used by reformers, including supporters of the radical editor and MP John Wilkes, Dissenters opposed to the Corporation and Test Acts, and, beginning in 1776, abolitionists. The petition was a vehicle whereby marginalized subjects, and their humanitarian allies, asserted rights: by claiming the significance of their voice, petitioners demand other forms of political recognition. In its use of the petition and its appeal to a language of freedom, the poem borrows its idiom and argument from a wider field of liberation discourses, including abolitionism and religious nonconformity.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Marlon B. Ross, “Configurations of Feminine Reform: The Woman Writer and the Tradition of Dissent,” in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994), 98.

⁴⁹ David Zaret, “Tradition, Human Rights, and the English Revolution,” *Human Rights and Revolutions*, ed. Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn Young (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000): 43-58.

⁵⁰ The disembodied characterization of the mouse and the adoption of the petition form have encouraged recent critics—the past five years have seen a remarkable escalation of interest in “The Mouse’s Petition”—to read the poem allegorically, so that, in the words of Kathryn Ready, it comments “on a variety of hierarchical relations in Georgian society,” in “What then, poor

According to William Turner, “The Mouse’s Petition” moved Priestly to free the captive animal, though not to desist from animal experimentation more generally.⁵¹ In its immediate reception, the poem was read as a powerful protest against scientific experimentation on animals. The *Monthly Review* placed Barbauld’s *Poems* only one step removed from Milton and Shakespeare in “justness of thought, and vigour of imagination.” The reviewer describes “The Mouse’s Petition” as “truly moral as well as poetic” and hopes that it will be “of service” to Mr. Priestley and other scientists “who are not remarkable for their humanity to the poor harmless animals, that are so ill-fated to fall in their way.”⁵² A writer for the conservative *Critical Review* agreed, using his enthusiastic review of Barbauld’s *Poems* to testify to his own “abhorrence of the cruelty practised by experimental philosophers, who seem to think the brute creation void of sensibility, or created only for them to torment.”⁵³ In the decades after its first publication, the poem was reprinted in a number of literary miscellanies. Mary Wollstonecraft included it in her *The Female Reader* (1789), and Thomas Percival, in *A*

Beastie!’: Gender, Politics, and Animal Experimentation in Anna Barbauld’s ‘The Mouse’s Petition,’” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28.1 (2004): 92-114. Ready reads the poem figuratively, as calling for leniency in property crimes: “the mouse’s appeal to liberty and rights makes much sense if we read the poem as aimed at the reformation of the criminal justice system” (104). Mary Ellen Bellanca observes that the mouse, “Invoking liberty and decrying tyranny” is easily read as a “mouthpiece for liberal reform” (48), though Bellanca emphasizes the poem’s gendered critique of the scientific exploitation of nature, in “Science, Animal Sympathy, and Anna Barbauld’s ‘The Mouse’s Petition,’” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37.1 (2003): 47-67. See also Amy Weldon, “‘The Common Gifts of Heaven’: Animal Rights and Moral Education in Anna Letitia Barbauld’s ‘The Mouse’s Petition’ and ‘The Caterpillar,’” *Cardiff Covey: Reading the Romantic Text* 8 (June 2002). As each of these writers acknowledge, the poem is first and foremost a meditation about scientific experimentation on living creatures; the stanzas on metempsychosis and animal soul (8-10) are meaningful only when the mouse is read as a literal animal.

⁵¹ William Turner, “Mrs. Barbauld,” *Newcastle Magazine* 4 (1825). Quoted in *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 244.

⁵² *The Monthly Review* 48 (Jan.-Feb. 1773), 54 and 58.

⁵³ *The Critical Review* 35 (March 1773), 193.

Father's Instructions to His Children (1776), placed it at the end of a chapter that distinguishes between experiments done out of curiosity and those that “will tend to the advancement of real science, and to the good and happiness of mankind,” which—notice his ambivalence—“may perhaps be justified.”⁵⁴ Most significantly, “The Mouse’s Petition” initiated a deluge of occasional poems, mostly by women, that meditate on animal rights and animal freedom, often with subtle analogies to psychological and institutional forms of human subjugation, including Mary Robinson’s “The Linnet’s Petition” (1775), Robert Burns’s “To a Mouse” (1785), Mary Hays’s “Ode to Her Bullfinch” (1785), Helen Leigh’s “The Linnet; a Fable” (1788), Helen Maria Williams’s “Elegy on a Young Thrush, Which Escaped from the Writer’s Hand” (1790), Christopher Smart’s “Ode on an Eagle Confined in College Court” (1791), Ann Yearsley’s “The Captive Linnet” (1796), Ann and Jane Taylor’s “The Little Bird’s Complaint to His Mistress” and “The Mistress’s Reply to Her Little Bird” (1805), and Elizabeth Bentley’s “To a Redbreast, That Flew into the House, And Suffered Itself to be Taken by the Hand of the Authoress” (1821).⁵⁵

Responding to its initial reception as a work of animal advocacy and a critique of Priestley’s cruel experiments, Barbauld, in the third edition of the *Poems*, added a footnote: “The Author is concerned to find, that what was intended as the petition of mercy against justice, has been construed as the plea of humanity against cruelty.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Thomas Percival, *A Father’s Instructions to his Children* (London, 1776), 125-6.

⁵⁵ Excepting Burns’s “To a Mouse” and Smart’s ode, these poems are collected in *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era*, ed. Paula Feldman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997).

⁵⁶ Quoted in *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 69.

Priestley, she continues, would never treat an animal inhumanely, and the mouse would have suffered more “as the victim of domestic economy, than of philosophical curiosity.” The distinction between mercy and justice is Biblical: the merciful God forgives our sins, while the just God judges and punishes. In Barbauld’s reframing of the poem, the concept of justice is meant to indicate humanity’s rightful sovereignty over the animal creation. Mercy is a type of compassion premised on fundamental inequality. What is essentially a recanting of the poem on Barbauld’s part measures her own recognition of its potential cultural effect. The poem anticipates this retraction in the line when the mouse claims only “The scatter’d gleanings of a feast” (17), not an equal share of resources. The creature’s radical assertion of a natural right to liberty exists in tension with a more familiar model of human dominion and natural hierarchy. In this line, as in her restatement of authorial intent, Barbauld attempts to contain the poem’s far-reaching implications. However, by adapting the language of liberty from political reformers, “The Mouse’s Petition” had already expanded the possibilities of animal advocacy. Moreover, while Barbauld supplements her appeal to sympathy with a formal and rhetorical emphasis on rationality, she still asserts that shared feeling—as she puts it in a later poem, “The Caterpillar”: the “fellowship of sense”⁵⁷—is the foundation for our obligations toward animals and is a primary stimulus of moral education. And it is this progressive sentimental didacticism that underlies the decline in Barbauld’s reputation. In *The Watchman*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge observes, somewhat dismissively, the poem’s long-term influence: “thanks to Mrs. Barbauld . . . it has become universally *fashionable* to

⁵⁷ “The Caterpillar,” *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 179-180, line 27.

teach lessons of compassion towards animals.”⁵⁸ Coleridge’s evaluation of Barbauld’s pedagogical aims explains her diminishing status in the nineteenth century. As one Victorian critic puts it, her “poetry belongs to that artificial didactic school which is so antipathetic to the present age.”⁵⁹

IV. Cowper’s Pious Humanitarianism

While Georgian readers were startled by Sterne’s bawdy passions and edified by Barbauld’s measured pathos, William Cowper gently cajoled his wide audience with pious sentimentality. The most popular British poet of the last decades of the eighteenth century, Cowper appealed above all to the growing provincial middle class with his idealized portraits of domestic comfort and rural escape, and his yoking together of evangelical piety and humanitarian progressivism.⁶⁰ Like the Methodist preacher John Wesley, Cowper assimilates the language of sentiment—heretofore associated with deism, libertinism, and materialism—into a more religiously orthodox worldview.⁶¹ Cowper’s moral rhetoric jostles together a Shaftesburian language of natural sociability and embodied sympathy with a Christian language of sin, salvation, and divine

⁵⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Watchman* IX, May 5, 1796, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Vol. 2, Ed. Lewis Patton (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 313.

⁵⁹ H. Barton Baker, “Mrs Barbauld,” *Argosy*, in *The New Moulton’s Library of Literary Criticism* Vol. 7, ed. S.T Joshi (New York: Chelsea, 1989), 3669.

⁶⁰ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) find Cowper to be the most widely mentioned writer in a wide sample of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth- century journals and letters (157). For the evangelical middle class, Cowper was “the emblem of all their hopes and fears,” and both radicals and conservatives found “succour and inspiration” in his poetry.

⁶¹ Frederick Sanders, in *Evenings with Sacred Poets* (1869), rpt. in *Moulton’s* Vol. 6, captures this doubled aspect, calling Cowper “the great Christian poet of England, and . . . pre-eminently the poet of affection” (3315).

retribution. He exemplifies a characteristically Evangelical negotiation between worldly reform and otherworldly salvation, social activism and devout retirement. Lodwick Hartley recognizes this particular duality when he compares Cowper with Milton, a “democrat in his politics and an absolutist in his theology,” who required that “Man must preserve his dignity in the body politic and his debasement before God.”⁶² These competing impulses are evident in Book Five of *The Task*, where the poet denounces custom, political absolutism, and unjust imprisonment (in her marginalia, Anna Seward describes this section as “unequivocally Democratic”), and then turns away from secular politics, contending that human institutions are impermanent and the only true freedom is that of spiritual grace. As Conrad Burnström observes, “oscillation rather than synthesis” is Cowper’s “most characteristic maneuver.”⁶³

With some notable exceptions, critics have emphasized Cowper’s private and spiritual side, depicting him as a poet of the domestic sphere and the individual psyche and *The Task* as a work of spiritual autobiography. Even a recent essay stressing the georgic elements of the poem concludes that Cowper “has no faith in corporate life” and that his “occupations are self-directed.”⁶⁴ According to this mode of interpretation, Cowper’s relationship to animals was essentially private and symptomatic of a tortured inner life. David Perkins remarks on the profound cultural “influence” of Cowper’s animal advocacy, but accounts for his love of animals in biographical terms, as the

⁶² Lodwick Hartley, *William Cowper Humanitarian* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1938), 62. Hartley’s book has proved a useful resource, particularly Chapter 8, which is about Cowper’s animal advocacy.

⁶³ Conrad Burnström, *William Cowper: Religion, Satire, Society* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2004), 20.

⁶⁴ Griffin, “Redefining Georgic: Cowper’s *Task*,” *ELH* 57.4 (Winter, 1990), 874.

expression of a “pathologically shy, retreative, and anxious” self.⁶⁵ Concern for nonhumans amounts to a turning away from the public and political worlds. The myth of the private Cowper has had a similar effect, of deemphasizing his humanitarian ambitions, as the myth of the ironic Sterne. In my interpretation of animal advocacy in Cowper’s *Task* and in several shorter poems, I follow Lodwick Harley, Richard Feingold, and Kevis Goodman in stressing Cowper’s active though vexed engagement with the social world—his “public voice,” in Feingold’s words (124)—particularly insofar as it speaks to an agenda of humanitarian reform.⁶⁶

In *The Task* (1785), a relentlessly digressive six-book georgic poem, Cowper approaches literary didacticism ambivalently, partly due to concern about the efficacy of an affective ethics and partly due to uncertainty about the constructive role of human agency in a providential world. The poem frequently reiterates Calvinism’s pessimistic view of social life: human institutions are innately corrupt and human progress is impossible. In a jumbling of secular and religious origin myths, Cowper’s historical state of nature is Hobbesian and the human condition is fallen. Our principal passions are antisocial and modern commercial society is unable to hold them in check. Since violent and self-interested passions are inherent to the postlapsarian human frame, Cowper mocks the Shaftesburian moral philosopher who believes he can “smooth / The shad of savage nature” (5.692-3), insisting that only God’s grace succeeds in “humanizing what is brute / In the lost kind” (700-1). The poet enumerates the economic and customary interests, of which the polluted city stands emblematically, against which ethical verse

⁶⁵ Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights*, 55

⁶⁶ Richard Feingold, *Nature and Society: Later Eighteenth-Century Uses of the Pastoral and Georgic* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 1978), 124. *The Task*, he continues, “needs to be studied as a public poem.”

struggles, and concludes that even the reforming agent of previous generations, satire, can no longer tame the “Leviathan” and diminish vice (2.320-22). In such skepticism, Cowper follows Pope, who saw poetry as outmatched in its aim to reform a degenerating society and yet never embraced Swift’s deeper pessimism.

Cowper’s more worldly and progressive side is equally prominent in *The Task*. With close attention to the accoutrements of modern consumer life, he invokes Hume’s proposition that commercial society refines and expands human sensibilities. Even in a fallen world, social obligation and identification may be actively constituted through georgic labor on the passions: humans are “By culture tamed” (1.606). Society is held together through bonds of love and mercy, affective concord that must be laboriously and self-consciously created. A devoted gardener, Cowper extends the horticultural trope as far as any Georgian poet. In his garden, he finds a microcosm of the social world, and the act of cultivation symbolizes the role labor plays in improving the natural inheritance. “Man in society is like a flow’r,” and the poet is a gardener, actively cultivating order and keeping weeds at bay (4.659). Like all passions, love and malice are natural elements that may be encouraged or discouraged. What Cowper refers to as “English minds and manners” comprise a moral space distinct from the political state, a shifting center of literate public opinion (4.208). Cowper imagines a nation that resides neither in historical continuity nor geographical enclosure but rather in a changing concatenation of shared sentiments.

For all of his religious pessimism, Cowper does see poetry as a significant moral force in society: he wishes his “angry verse” will “speak to purpose” (3.64, 3.25). He uses ethical, didactic, and humanitarian terms when he reflects on the *task* of poetry. His

rhetorical toolbox is varied, and includes sentimental persuasion, self-exemplification, satire, and preacherly menace. He employs many of the tools of sentimental literature: modeling humane feeling, telling sentimental parables, depicting suffering victims in order to engage readers' sympathies, as well as straightforward prescription. The poet "recommend[s]" (3.705), giving voice to social norms: "What we admire we praise. And when we praise / Advance it into notice, that its worth / Acknowledg'd, others may admire it too" (4.702-4). Even in its idealization of an existence lived at a remove from the metropole and *beau monde*, *The Task* makes a public claim to emotional sincerity and self-cultivation in a world where politeness is mere polish and sociability conceals barbarity. Private life becomes an exemplary space, making autobiographical poetry written in retirement a form of "service of mankind" (3.372). In a proliferating media culture, the poet acknowledges, there is no absolute retreat, no "lodge in some vast wilderness" (2.1).⁶⁷ Cowper writes self-consciously not in a parochial space set apart but in a world increasingly interconnected by the information exchange and affective commerce made possible by print. The newspaper brings reports "Of wrong and outrage with which earth is fill'd" (2.7), and, in turn, in the poet's hands, the domestic space of the home, where virtuous selfhood is cultivated, becomes public. Withdrawing from the social world is conceived as an ethical activity through which society is remade. In this utopianism of the exemplary private self, the poet of Olney anticipates a significant strand of Romanticism.

Along with its emotional didacticism, *The Task* conforms to the sentimental tradition in its depiction of a natural world rich with affection, its close attention to the

⁶⁷ On Cowper and the new media, see Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, Chapter Three; and Julie Ellison, "News, Blues, and Cowper's Busy World," *MLQ* 62.3 (September 2002): 220-37.

goings-on of farm animals, forest creatures, birds, and insects. Like Thomson, Cowper finds in the countryside not a blank canvas upon which he might project his own expansive emotional life but a brocaded landscape of experiencing and communicative beings. The poet discovers a mournful air in motionless cattle (5.27-9), listens to the barnyard dog's "barks for joy" (5.51), worries with the sparrows in winter (5.70), observes the fawn's "delight of heart" as it gambols about the meadow unharried by hunters (6.328), and listens to the "content" warbling of the red-breast (6.77). He recounts his gentle dealings with a squirrel, a stock-dove, and a wild hare. Observing animated nature is not, for Cowper, merely a descriptive or even aesthetic activity. To recognize and partake of the affective lives of other sensitive beings is to expand one's own humanity. Extensive sympathies constitute ethical selfhood:

The heart is hard in nature, and unfit
For human fellowship, as being void
Of sympathy, and therefore dead alike
To love and friendship both, that is not pleased
With sight of animals enjoying life
Nor feels their happiness augment his own. (6.321-6)

The joy other creatures take in their own existence, as well as their capacity for suffering, is the basis of our duties toward them. Against the negative image of an emotionally enclosed self, Cowper conceives a new masculine sensitivity and suggests that interaction with nonhumans ought to involve the same sympathetic communion that we share with humans. To be compassionate is to wish to see "All that are capable of pleasure, pleased" (6.345).⁶⁸

Cowper's sentimental animal advocacy is evident in Book Three of *The Task*, which contrasts the poet's humane rural values with those of the genteel huntsman.

⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft may be echoing these lines in *Original Stories from Real Life* (London, 1791): "Look, what a fine morning it is. Insects, birds and animals, are all enjoying this sweet day" (10).

Reinventing the countryside as a space of benevolent pastoralism, Cowper claims, tendentiously, that the chase represents an intrusion of corrupt urban values with no customary status. The same natural scenes that the poet contemplates in order to “meliorate the heart” and “[c]ompose the passions” (304-5), urban interlopers “fill with riot and defile with blood” (307). Cowper’s country retreat is remade in the image of the depraved city; there is an element of puritan disapproval here, which defines hunting as an aristocratic indulgence like dancing and feasting. Cowper further worries about the huntsman’s affective makeup: the “supreme delight” and self-transcendence experienced during the chase (306). His primary objection to hunting, however, is based on an ethical concern for the animal other, expressed in sentimental terms. Granting nonhumans moral status as conscious beings, Cowper invokes a familiar rhetoric of animal voice as he protests the

detested sport,
That owes its pleasures to another's pain,
That feeds upon the sobs and dying shrieks
Of harmless nature, dumb, but yet endued
With eloquence that agonies inspire
Of silent tears and heart-distending sighs!
Vain tears alas! And sighs that never find
A corresponding tone in jovial souls. (326-333)

Animals are represented as innocent and articulate in their suffering. Like Shaftesbury’s bear-baiters, Cowper’s huntsman is the opposite of the man of feeling, whose sensibility exposes him to the experience of the suffering other. Like Thomson, Cowper notices that the sport hunter’s joy is malicious, not that of a self merely sealed within its own experience but that of a self taking active pleasure in the other’s suffering. Implicit in Cowper’s critique is a contest over who should manage the countryside: a civilized provincial middle class or a profligate and inhumane gentry.

The long anti-hunting stanza narrows from social censure to an account of the poet's personal interaction with a single animal, "one shelter'd hare" (334), a shift from normative public address to an exemplary private self. The domestic realm is presented as a space for recreating a minor Eden, where the poet's humanity is established through quotidian interaction with the animal other. He and the hare have become "familiar" (339). Cowper presents pet-keeping not only in terms of the familiar paternal affections of the pet-owner but also as a humanitarian act in a violent world: "for I have gain'd thy confidence, have pledged / All that is human in me, to protect / Thine unsuspecting gratitude and love" (346-8). Unlike the hunter's quarry, the hare "Has never heard the sanguinary yell / Of cruel man, exulting in her woes" (334-6). In this case, Cowper's idealized domesticity has what Conrad Burnström calls "the social value of oppositional example" (30). Middle-class pet-keeping is presented as a civilized alternative to the cruel labors of rural workers and the cruel leisure of rural gentleman. While its didacticism is more oblique than the direct censure and prescription of the anti-hunting sequence, it is still posed as an alternative to be emulated rather than as an idiosyncratic idyll. The shift from exhortation to exemplification registers a key facet of Cowper's faith, which emphasizes a relation to self (and to the self's own salvation) over moral address and social normativity. A comparable image of paternalist domestication informs the letter Cowper published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in June 1784, which recounts his keeping of three hares. Cowper observes that his audience knows only that "the hare is good to hunt and good to eat," and he challenges this unfeeling instrumentalism by representing these docile creatures as ideal companion animal.⁶⁹ Cowper humanizes and

⁶⁹ *The Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1784), rpt. in *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper* Vol. 5, ed. James King and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986), 40. Cited

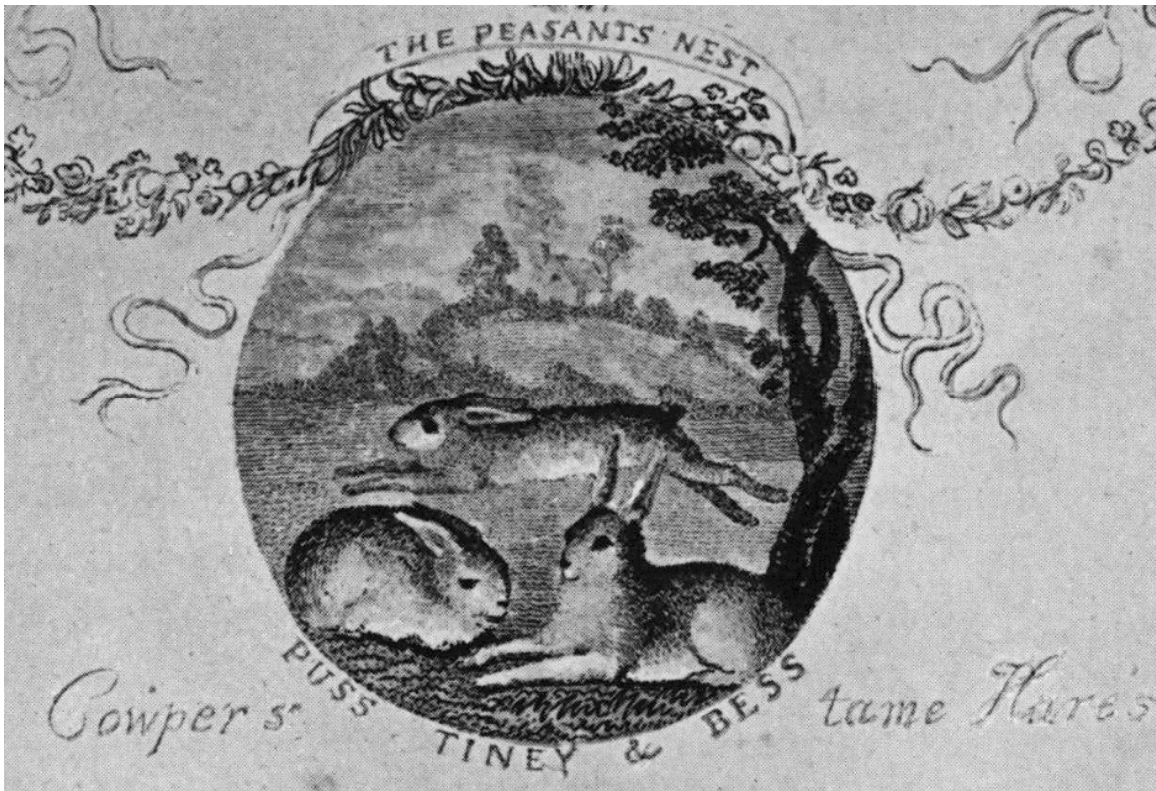


Figure 4 Cowper's tame Hares, in William Hayley's *Life of Cowper* (London, 1802), illus. by William Blake.

personalizes the hares, showing each to have a unique character and to be “in all respects sociable and friendly” (44). As in *The Task*, however, hare-keeping is not represented as a peculiar predilection, but is rather a compassionate substitute to “the sportsman’s amusement,” which Cowper has come to hold in “abhorrence” (43). Private life is presented to the public with polemical force.

As a literary animal advocate, Cowper is unique in the way he supplements the ethical imperatives of sympathy and emotional normativity with an orthodox vision of divine judgment. The promise of affective communion is augmented by a traditional Christian ethics based on reward and retribution. A punitive God lurks behind the moral

hereafter in text. Perkins observes that “Cowper’s conscience as a keep of hares (and wild birds in cages) did not trouble him,” in *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, 46. Even in the letter published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, however, there is evidence of ambivalence. Cowper, for instance, lets one of the hares play in the garden and notes “I had not long habituated him to this taste of liberty, before he began to be impatient for the return of the time when he might enjoy it” (41).

ought of Shaftesburian normativity: God's "avenging arm," the poet promises, will "smite / Th' injurious trampler upon nature's law" (6.464-6). A number of eighteenth-century clergymen had published sermons finding in the Bible injunctions to treat animals with care—e.g., the prophet Balaam being instructed not to harm his ass—and Cowper invokes this expansive Christian ethics, arguing that all creatures partake in "the universal father's love" (6.449). He cites Biblical authority: in Noah "and in him all mankind / The charter was conferr'd by which we hold / The flesh of animals in fee" (450-52). Humanity's moral duty is to imitate the compassion that God shows for all of his creatures. God records the mistreatment of animals: "many a crime, deem'd innocent on earth, / Is register'd in heav'n" (6.439-40). The consequence of not heeding these injunctions is dramatized in a digressive moral tale, which describes a journey undertaken by the vicious atheist Misagathus. On the road, Misagathus meets the pious Evander, who attempts to edify the moral monster with "gracious, kind, and sweet" observations on God's goodness (6.504). Misagathus rashly sets out to prove that he can face death without faith by spurring his horse to the edge of a cliff. The horse remains at a safe remove, and Misagathus, "Enraged the more by what might have reformed" (524), beats the creature "With sounding whip and rowels dyed in blood" (527). The horse again refuses to leap, and Misgathus rides on, believing his point to be proved. Later, though, the horse grows enraged, runs to the cliff, and catapults Misagathus into the gulf: "So God wrought double justice; made the fool / The victim of his own tremendous choice / And taught a brute the way to safe revenge" (557-9). Though it does not altogether undermine Evander's sentimental pedagogy, the tale does offer divine retribution as a backup.

While Cowper retains a sense of the intrinsic and normative value of humane sympathies, he assures readers that God will punish those who are cruel. A theology of threat, an ethics of retribution, prompts moral motivation where sentimental imperatives do not. Be compassionate because your heart so directs you, says the sentimental Cowper—and if you are not, the Calvinist Cowper adds, God will smite you. The Deity records all crimes against his creatures, and the man who shows no mercy “shall seek it, and not find it in his turn” (6.600).⁷⁰ The direct threat of divine retribution animates Cowper’s later poem “The Cock-Fighter’s Garland,” which he sent to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* but which was not published until the 1815 *Posthumous Poetry*. Cowper versifies the story, already published in the magazine, of a man of fortune who grew so enraged after his cock lost a fight that he had the bird roasted alive. When the bird’s pitiful cries inspired protest from several gentlemen, the cock-fighter threatened them with a hot poker and then fell down dead.⁷¹ This tale of instant karma seems to have appealed to Cowper because of the way it neatly shows that “the judgment of the skies” remains in force when sympathetic and normative imperatives fail. It is probably this peculiar commingling of sentimental and Christian ethics that made Cowper’s poetry so compelling to his contemporaries.

Such double-edged ethical imperatives characterize *The Task’s* treatment of slavery, its other significant humanitarian concern. In Book Two, the poet attacks slavery with sentimental exhortations based on the “feelings” of a “bleeding heart” (24), but then warns of a judging, retributive Deity, whose wrath explains recent earthquakes in Sicily:

⁷⁰ Anna Barbauld, whom McCarthy and Kraft refer to as occupying a milieu of “recovering Calvinists” (14), denounced “Calvinism, and the heart-withering perspective of cruel and never ending punishments.” Quoted in Introduction, *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 14.

⁷¹ The poem and story are reprinted in *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper* Vol. 3, ed., James King and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1982), 284-7.

“Tremble and be amazed at thine escape, / Far guiltier England” (159-60). Cowper finds significant parallels between slavery, the “foulest blot” on humanity (22), and the mistreatment of animals. Slaves are handled in such a way—held captive, overworked, and beaten—that to see such pains “inflicted on a beast” would make “mercy . . . / Weep[.]” (24-5). As sympathetic victims, suffering humans and suffering animals make comparable claims on the sentimental heart. Cowper’s final antislavery poem, published in the *Mercury* on May 17, 1792, also emphasizes the similarity between enslaved humans and mistreated animals:

To purify their wine some people bleed
 A lamb into the barrel, and succeed;
 No nostrum, planters say, is half so good
 To make fine sugar, as a *negro*’s blood.
 Now *lambs* and *negroes* both are harmless things,
 And thence perhaps this wondrous virtue springs.
 ‘Tis in the blood of innocence alone—
 Good cause why planters never try their own.⁷²

Like a number of abolitionist writers, however, Cowper deploys a rhetoric of kinship and rights that is premised on a recognition of shared human identity. In certain instances, ethical identification and obligation are circumscribed by the species boundary: “I think, articulate, laugh and weep / And exercise all functions of a man. / How then should I and any man that lives / Be strangers to each other” (3.198-201). Freedom is conceived of as categorically human, “the cause of man,” the absence of which makes him “bestial” and “unfit / To be the tenant of man’s noble form” (5.396, 453-4). In objecting to unjust imprisonment, Cowper wonders “That man should thus encroach on fellow man, / Abridge him of his just and native rights” (5.435-6). It is not a capacity to feel, in these cases, but shared species identity that underlies ethical status. Ethical claims that work by

⁷² William Cowper, “Epigram,” rpt. in *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. J.C. Bailey (London: Methuen, 1905), 459.

excluding the animal are common in abolitionist rhetoric. In his *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, published in 1785, the same year as Cowper's *Task*, the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson asks how a Christian can treat a fellow human "not as a brother, nor as one of the same parentage with himself, but as an animal of the brute creation?"⁷³ Like Cowper, Clarkson, elsewhere sympathetic to animal interests, here links ethical significance with categorical humanness.

A rhetoric of freedom does inflect Cowper's understanding of animal welfare, which explains why, his reflections on benevolent pet-keeping and a specifically human right to liberty notwithstanding, he is ambivalent about animal domestication. In the early poem "On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in His Cage" (1782), domestication is shown to be far from benign. Like "The Mouse's Petition," the poem adopts an animal's first-person point of view and establishes an essential, existential distinction between liberty and captivity: "Time was when I was free as air / The thistle's downy seed my fare, / My drink the morning dew; / I perched at will on every spray."⁷⁴ In "On a Goldfinch," humans are an oppressive force. The second stanza records how the goldfinch was taken from the idealized state of nature, "caught and caged, and starved to death" (10). Like "The Mouse's Petition," this poem contributes to an emerging discourse of animal rights because it depicts a nonhuman as a speaking and potentially self-determining subject, who is unjustly subjugated by man. Another of Cowper's early poem, "Charity" (1782), similarly applies the rhetoric of liberty to nonhumans: "Nature imprints upon whate'er we see / That has a heart and life in it—'Be free!' / The beasts are chartered—neither age nor

⁷³ Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (London, 1786), 248.

⁷⁴ William Cowper, "On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in His Cage," in *The Poems of William Cowper*, lines 1-4.

force / Can quell the love of freedom in a horse.”⁷⁵ While all animals have an innate desire to be free, humanity’s ostensibly benevolent dominion is questionable. Human “protection,” the poet allows in *The Task*, comes at “dear a rate” (6.416-17). Cowper graphically details the various sorts of mistreatment to which domestic and captive animals are subject. A hunting dog is slain for a minor fault. Oxen are abused as they are driven to slaughter at Smithfield market. Coach-horses and racehorses are whipped to death in the interest of speed.

Posed against these depictions of human injustice, the poem idealizes a natural state of “wilderness” where animals are “free / And howl and roar as likes them, uncontroul’d, / Nor ask [man’s] leave to slumber or to play” (6.401, 403-5). Animals are “happiest” when they live far removed from humankind’s “abhorr’d resort” (397). Though Cowper is often read as the quintessential poet of domesticity, he was a close observer of wild creatures and an advocate for their rights. While *The Task*, unlike *The Seasons*, does not survey the sublime world ruled by sharks and tigers, Cowper has an appreciative eye for animals in the wild state. One of his widely known dictates reveals a naturalist’s recognition of how nature operates as a community independent of human interests and interference: vermin may be destroyed in the home but he who harms them in the field “Disturbs the oeconomy of nature’s realm” (6.579). That nature’s economy unfolds outside the realm of human dominion seems to confer intrinsic moral value on all creatures. Although Cowper elsewhere questions the impulse to know God solely through nature, here he follows writers like Ray and Shaftesbury in positing a link between providential design and moral status. Even in Cowper, who was notoriously gloomy in his religious beliefs, we find evidence of the optimistic theology according to which a

⁷⁵ “Charity,” *The Poems of William Cowper*, lines 169-172.

benevolent creator endowed all living beings with a joyous existence. Animal emotion is a primary manifestation of an active, benevolent Deity.⁷⁶ Animals have a natural inclination to pursue their own ends, an inclination supported by providential beneficence: “Beneath the open sky she spreads the feast; ‘Tis free to all—‘tis everyday renewed” (1.433-34). Animals are sentient, self-determining beings in the state of nature, and their self-interest, in a providential world, is the basis for their moral status. God’s creative act confers on animals a limited right.

Cowper does not altogether renounce human sovereignty, our right to exploit nonhumans for our own ends. Like Barbauld, he attempts to contain the radical implications of his poem. In one instance, he espouses the Augustinian view that humans alone have “grace divine” and therefore animals “exist but for our sake” (602-3). His most explicitly stated principle on the subject of human privilege is more moderate, though it proscribes only gratuitous mistreatment:

The sum is this: if man’s convenience, health,
Or safety interfere, his rights and claims
Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs.
Else they are all—the meanest things that are
As free to live and to enjoy that life
As God was free to form them at the first. (581-6).

In a postlapsarian world, however, a perfect equilibrium between this limited sovereignty and the right of animals to live freely and enjoy their existence is not easily maintained.

Following Milton and Thomson, Cowper sees in Eden an ideal image of affective sociability, which sentimental pedagogy seeks to recreate: human sovereignty over animals was “bounded only by a law whose force / ‘Twas his sublimest privilege to feel /

⁷⁶ Perkins is particularly convincing in his discussion of providentialism and animal rights, *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, 33-42: “The argument that God intends the happiness of his creatures was, if you believed it, the most compelling one in the Romantic age for kindness to animals” (35).

And own, the law of universal love” (6.358-60). Man ruled with kindness and was trusted by the creatures. After the Fall, animal passions were out of necessity transformed: in the “heart” of all creatures arose “jealousy” and “instinctive fear” (372, 374). Among humans, original sin is the source of cruelty: “Hence date the persecution and the pain / That man inflicts on all inferior kinds / Regardless of their plaints” (384-6). Animals have become objects for human sport, for the exercise of cruelty, for gluttonous pleasures.

A more sanguine, progressive Cowper suggests that even in this fallen world a sentimental poet may demonstrate and disseminate “the manners and the arts of civil life” (1.596). Among the most important arts of civility are those that allow humans to uphold just relations with the animal creation. Cowper describes how his verse is peculiar in its turn away from anthropocentrism.⁷⁷ He contributes to society not the public encomiums of classical poets, but rather praises nature and seeks to achieve, in very explicit terms, its protection:

And I, contented with an humble theme,
Have poured my stream of panegyric down
The vale of nature, where it creeps and winds
Among her lovely works, with a secure
And unambitious course, reflecting clear
If not the virtues yet the worth of brutes.
And I am recompensed, and deem not the toils
Of poetry lost, if verse of mine
May stand between an animal and woe
And teach one tyrant pity for his drudge (6.719-28).

Cowper’s clearest elucidation of his poetic purpose and his greatest optimism about poetry’s potential social effect appear in a discussion of animal advocacy. As he conceives it, the poet’s georgic labor is to transform public sentiment, and thus social

⁷⁷ Though he traffics in them himself, Cowper is attentive to the rationales that legitimate human sovereignty: man’s justifying “account” for why “bird and beast / Should suffer torture, and the streams be dyed / With blood of their inhabitants impaled” (6.389-91).

practice, by cultivating compassion for all sensitive creatures.

Contemporary reviewers declared *The Task* a masterpiece, and Cowper's particular brand of pious humanitarianism quickly seeped into the public conversation. The *Monthly Review* complimented the poem for awakening "tender sentiments . . . by pathetic representations," while noticing that some of its "reflections" serve to "rouse and terrify guilt."⁷⁸ Cowper's "benevolence," the reviewer observes, "is as extensive as the creation" (417). With its orthodox scaffolding, such benevolence lent cultural authority to serious Christians writing on behalf of animals. The vicar James Plumtre gave a sermon in 1796 on human duties to animals, which he claimed was brought to mind after "repeated perusal of Cowper's *Task*."⁷⁹ The finicky *Edinburgh Review* editor Francis Jeffrey described Cowper as a strikingly original poet, not least in the political ambitions of his poetry, his "contemplation of our public institutions . . . [and] moral declamations."⁸⁰ The Victorians, however, established an interpretation of Cowper that remains predominant. His sentimentality—or, as Edmund Spender says put it in 1900, "hypersentimental[ity]"—is either affirmed or maligned but, in either case, its reformist commitments and public voice are suppressed. William Hazlitt depicts Cowper as an emasculated man who preferred to drink tea with the ladies than walk in wild nature. Cowper's famous claim to abhor those who step on insects, Hazlitt suggests, owes more

⁷⁸ *The Monthly Review* 74 (Jan-June 1786), 416.

⁷⁹ Qtd. in Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, 2.

⁸⁰ "Hayley's *Life of Cowper*," *Edinburgh Review* (April 1803), rpt. in *Moulton's* Vol. 6, 3311.

to daintiness than compassion: “His walks and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails, with as much an appearance of *petit-maitreship* as of humanity.”⁸¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a more sympathetic reader, though she still diminishes Cowper’s love for other creatures to mere cuteness: “Wild time hares were drawn from the woods to share his home-carresses, / Uplooking to his human eyes with sylvan tendernesses.”⁸² The dominant nineteenth-century interpretation sees Cowper’s love for animals as an avenue of retreat and domesticity. He is conceived of as a sequestered localist, his social voice and poetical activism occluded. Hippolyte Taine remarks that “in a room, a garden, he found a world” and Leslie Stephen calls him a “religious recluse.”⁸³ During the Victorian era, it becomes increasingly difficult to recognize the ethical and political interventions made by sentimental writers like Cowper.

In the nineteenth century there appears one countervailing voice, who emphasizes the ethical force of Cowper’s affective poetics. In an essay that contrasts Edward Young, the proto-Romantic author of *Night Thoughts* (1742-45), with Cowper, George Eliot praises the latter poet’s “manifold sympathies.”⁸⁴ In Young’s verse, she finds a scarcity of genuine “moral emotion,” and, in its place, a constant “contemplation of a rule or theory” (56). For Eliot, as for Hume, affections are the seat of ethics because affect

⁸¹ Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*, 109-10. Hazlitt is responding to Cowper’s claim that “I would not enter on my list of friends / . . . (wanting sensibility) the man / Who needlessly set foot upon a worm” (6.560-3).

⁸² Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Cowper’s Grave,” lines 25-6, rpt. in *Moulton’s* Vol. 6, 3310.

⁸³ Hippolyte Taine, *History of English Literature*, 1871, rpt. in *Moulton’s* Vol. 6, 3315; Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 1876, rpt. in *Moulton’s* Vol. 6, 3316.

⁸⁴ George Eliot, “Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young,” *Westminster Review* (1857), rpt. in *Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884), 61.

motivates us to act, and it is precisely this active and sincere feeling, feeling in excess of thought, which she finds in abundance in *The Task*. “Where is the poem,” she writes, “that genuinely surpasses the *Task* in the love it breathes, at once towards inanimate and animate existence . . . in divine sympathy with the lowliest pleasures, with the most short-lived capacity for pain?” (59). Cowper’s particularizing eye, according to Eliot, reflects not a parochialism of interests but rather the expansive affections that “prompt his song” (60). For all of his emotional investment in domesticity, she observes, he often “takes a wider survey” and comments on the “men or the deeds which have a direct influence on the welfare of communities and nations” (61). It is a distinctively enlarged sense of communal welfare that underlies Cowper’s own attempt to influence society. Eliot finds in his verse “no pompous rhetoric about the inferiority of the ‘brutes,’ but a warm plea on their behalf against man’s inconsiderateness and cruelty, and a sense of enlarged happiness from their companionship in enjoyment” (59). Here she notices a subtle advocacy in *The Task*, a plea that has rhetorical designs on its readers, an ambition to “compel[] our colder natures” (61). Perhaps Eliot overstates her case with regard to Cowper, who engages in dour moralizing more often than she allows. But such overstatement, Eliot’s willingness to see as ethically significant the sympathetic imperatives in Cowper’s verse, offers a useful corrective to a tradition that reduces Cowper’s affective poetics to either overwrought sentimentality or psycho-spiritual confession. As is the case with Sterne and Barbauld, Cowper wrote from a belief that an emotional literature could obligate its readers to feel and behave differently. Like Sterne’s satire and Barbauld’s logoi, Cowper’s orthodox ethics supplement rather than displace

the characteristically sentimental conviction that sympathetic identification and obligation, cultivated in the act of reading, might concretely change society.

Conclusion

Sentimentalism, Liberalism, and the Politics of Animal Rights

Breathe the pathetic eloquence, that moulds / The attentive senate.

—James Thomson

*Legislation is the record, the register, of the moral sense of the community;
it follows, not precedes, the development of . . . moral sense.*

—Henry Salt¹

This study has examined a growing recognition of animals as social subjects whose capacity to feel underlies their moral standing. To conclude, I want to examine the relationship between being defined as a sympathetic subject within the civil society promoted by sentimental literature and being recognized as a political subject within the realm of law. Although this is by no means a principle generalizable to all progressive legislation, in the history of animal advocacy, as Henry Salt suggests, sociological normativity precedes and initiates legislative action. Law sanctions communal duties and rights that have already been, in some measure and by some members, endorsed within a culture. By discussing early appeals for a legal recognition of human duties toward animals, and focusing on the parliamentary debates about animal welfare legislation that commenced in 1800, I aim to suggest two things about the role of sentimentality in political life. First, I call attention to the extent to which emotional claims function within early nineteenth-century political polemic and parliamentary debate, and thus in some sense may be seen as a constitutive element of law. Though political philosophers have generally sought to marginalize passions in political discourse, sentimental rhetoric in fact

¹ Henry Salt, *Animals' Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (New York: Macmillan, 1894), Section VIII, part 2.

contributes powerful justifications to legislative action.² Law is literary, established on the sort of emotional appeals that literature makes, although unlike literature the law exerts a compulsory force. Second, I am interested in the degree to which early animal welfare legislation recognizes nonhumans as political subjects with limited rights, as compromised legal persons, within a sentimental idiom. Their civil rights are always partial, but rights nonetheless, involving a legal recognition of interests, which circumscribes the potential actions of others.³

These two claims are related. As Lynn Hunt suggests in “The Paradoxical Origins of Human Rights,” rights discourse simultaneously invokes claims about intersubjective obligation and autonomous capacities. It is at once prescriptive and descriptive. To put this observation another way, there is a significant tension within the rhetoric of animal rights between evoking the sympathetic identification of an already politically empowered audience and describing the interests of other sentient creatures. This tension raises a question about the relationship between sentimentalism and liberalism, a political philosophy that emphasizes the sovereignty of the individual and justifies political formations only insofar as they protect individual rights and interests.⁴ On the one hand,

² Cheryl Hall points out that early liberal political philosophers, including Locke and Hobbes, generally saw the passions as an obstacle to political harmony, which must be offset by reason. Passions were conceived of as partial and arbitrary, whereas reason was universal and objective, *The Trouble with Passion: Political Theory Beyond the Realm of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 23-5. With this distinction in mind, we see how striking sentimentalism is as an alternative philosophy of community formation, because it looks to the passions as the engine of our expansive and cooperative instincts.

³ In recent theories of animal advocacy, there is a central distinction between animal rights and animal welfare. In the period I am discussing, however, writers tend to use the term “rights” to describe what would now be considered animal welfare.

⁴ Andrzej Rapaczynski’s *Nature and Politics: Liberalism in the Philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987) has shaped my understanding of early liberal political theory.

it is possible to see sentimentalism as one of the eighteenth century's alternatives to liberal political theory, because of its tendency toward paternalism, its emphasis on benevolent sympathy, and its faith that shared sentiments, rather than free markets and legal rights, form the basis for community. On the other hand, the politicization of animal rights seems to suggest that sentimentalism may be seen as a rhetoric that operates within liberal society, which challenges the boundaries of political inclusion by sympathetically drawing attention to the interests of those who are mistreated or excluded. Sentimentality unsettles and extends liberal personhood. This observation expands on Robert Garner's suggestion in "Animal Rights, Political Theory, and the Liberal Tradition" that liberal principles underlie arguments both for and against the legal recognition of nonhumans. Garner notices that twentieth-century animal advocates invoke characteristically liberal ideas of rights, ethical utility, progressive reform, and egalitarianism. Their adversaries also refer to liberal ideas, specifically the principle of moral pluralism, according to which our duties toward animals are a matter of voluntary choice rather than political justice.⁵ As is evident in the early nineteenth-century parliamentary debates, opponents of animal rights define them as impinging on individual moral choice, so animal advocates must simultaneously appeal to interspecies sympathetic identification and assert the existence of ostensibly self-justifying rights.

For natural rights philosophers and social contract theorists of the seventeenth century, who established the liberal doctrine that individual interests are the state's sole

⁵ Robert Garner, "Animal Rights, Political Theory, and the Liberal Tradition," *Contemporary Politics* 8.1 (2002): 7-22. Cited in text. In a note similar to Hall's point about liberal rhetoric in general, Garner observes that that the "work of liberal animal advocates quite consciously emphasizes the language of reason and rationality, which is much more acceptable to a liberal audience than the vocabulary of compassion, of caring and feeling, which would seem to be appropriate in the discourse of animal suffering and exploitation" (15).

reason for being, there is little question that animals do not enter the realm of contractual obligation that defines the political sphere. The influential German jurist Samuel von Pufendorf, arguing against a prohibition on meat-eating, states that “no mutual Right or Obligation passeth between Men and Brutes.”⁶ Hobbes and Locke both explicitly exclude animals from the province of political justice. In the *Second Treatise on Government*, Locke frequently refers to “beasts” as existing outside the polity. In the state of nature, men live “by no other rules that that of beasts,” and those men who fail to conform to law “may be destroyed as a lion or a tiger, one of those wild savage beasts, with whom men can have no society nor security” (115, 120). In Locke’s account, animals enter the political domain only as property, the value added to nature by human labor. According to Hobbes, we cannot make contracts with dumb animals, and they are therefore excluded from political community: “To make Covenant with bruit Beasts, is impossible; because not understanding our speech, they understand not, nor accept any translation of Right; not can translate Right to another; and without mutuall acceptation, there is no Covenant” (*Leviathan* 197). What is notable about these statements, much like the numerous philosophical explanations as to why animals do not deserve moral standing, is that they are made at all. Beasts serve the heuristic purpose of limning the polity’s boundary, but the very fact that such a boundary must be established is a reminder that a political community is invented and contingent. In the very gesture of exclusion, such articulations hint at a logic according to which animals might have a legitimate status as political subjects and thus might be granted legal rights.

⁶ Samuel von Pufendorf, *The Law of Nature and Nations*, 1688, trans. Basil Kennet (London, 1749), 361.

A politicization of animal advocacy is signaled when Humphrey Primatt, in his 1776 *Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, points out that courts place a check on human cruelty and asks, “What Laws are now in force? or what Court of judicature does now exist, in which the suffering Brute may bring his action against the wanton cruelty of barbarous man?” (37). Primatt suggests that a capacity to suffer provides a being with interests that may be impinged upon and ought to be protected by the courts. Primatt’s statement indexes the political transformation occurring in Britain after the Seven Years War, in the various electoral and humanitarian reform movements, which concretize the relation between public opinion and legislation and reconceive the law as a means to progressive social change. In his *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, written in 1780, the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham points out that “the limits between” legislation and “private ethics” are “by no means easy to mark out.”⁷ For Bentham, positive law is a mechanism of ethics, so it must aim to maximize happiness and minimize suffering. Bentham’s utilitarianism equates a capacity to suffer and a natural right, meaning that humans and “other [a]nimals” equally partake in political justice. He notes that traditionally the latter, “on account of their interests having been neglected by the insensibility of the ancient jurists, stand degraded into the class of *things*” (308). In a well-known footnote Bentham imagines that a “day *may* come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny” (309). In his later *Principles of Penal Law* (1809), he articulates this point in a manner that indicates the close link between

⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London, 1789), 307. Cited hereafter in text.

sentimentalism and utilitarianism, both of which align moral standing with sentience: “Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being.”⁸ The troubling absence of such legal recognition was increasingly evident to observers in the 1780s. David Perkins notes that in 1784 a magistrate declared that he could not interfere with cruelty to a cow because “animals have no rights that the law could protect.”⁹ In *The Task*, after witnessing the mistreatment of horses, Cowper wonders why no legislation protects brute creatures: “Does law, so jealous in the cause of man, / Denounce no doom on the delinquent? None” (6.432-3). A year later, a letter in the *European Magazine* asks why the “rights of the creation” are so obviously trampled upon in an era and a nation that “boasts of refinement in every social virtue” and “teems with sentiment.” The author proposes new legislation in order to remedy a “deficiency of the laws of this country on the subject of the treatment of animals.”¹⁰

John Oswald’s 1791 pro-vegetarian polemic *The Cry of Nature; or, An Appeal to Mercy and to Justice, on Behalf of the Persecuted Animals* measures the reform-minded fervor inspired by the French Revolution, as well as the way in which sentimental rhetoric could promote radical political ideals.¹¹ With its secularism and revolutionary vernacular, *The Cry of Nature* is unique in the early history of animal-rights discourse, and yet it still incorporates the prevailing rhetoric of moral sentiment. Humanity’s

⁸ Jeremy Bentham, *Principles of Penal Law*, in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* Vol. 10 (New York: Russell, 1962), 550.

⁹ Quoted in David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, 16.

¹⁰ “On Cruelty towards Animals,” *The European Magazine* (November 1786), 321-2.

¹¹ Oswald served in a Highlander regiment in India, resigned from the army, and, according to legend, “lived a considerable time with some Brahmins, who turned his head.” He was killed fighting as a volunteer for the French revolutionary army in 1793. For an account of his life and politics, see David Erdman, *Commerce Des Lumieres: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790-1793* (Columbia MO: U of Missouri P, 1986).

relation to the animal creation, Oswald writes, ought to be “a system of life that is more a result of sentiment than of reason.”¹² Like other animal advocates, Oswald adopts a Thomsonian grammar of animal suffering. He wants his readers to hear the cry of nature because sympathy requires recognizable signs, or, as Oswald puts it, “from likeness mutual love proceed[s]” (58). Humans know innately how to read animal passions, because “nature [has] given, to almost every creature, the same spontaneous signs of the various affections” (53). Against this universal affective semiosis, theological and philosophical justifications for human exceptionalism have “incased . . . feeling” (10). Out of greed and ignorance, humans have narrowed their definition of the social realm, so as to “extend[] to man alone the moral scheme” (3). Yet, since society is always already a positive invention, there is no reason not to include other creatures within our “social bond.” If we can “learn to recognize and respect in other animals the feelings which vibrate in ourselves,” if we can become more sensitive to the animal emotions which we cannot help but acknowledge as real, Oswald writes, then we will raise ourselves “to the highest summit of enjoyment by the sympathetic touch of social satisfaction” (82).

Such appeals are familiar enough. Where *The Cry of Nature* is unusual is in its application of a language of Jacobin radicalism to sentimental morality. Oswald’s historical optimism owes itself as much to the French Revolution as to a sentimental progress narrative; it is motivated by the author’s observation that “the barbarous governments of Europe [are] giving way to a better system of things,” which leads him to believe “that the day is beginning to approach when the growing sentiment of peace and good-will towards men will also embrace, in a wide circle of benevolence, the lower

¹² John Oswald, *The Cry of Nature; or, An Appeal to Mercy and to Justice, on Behalf of the Persecuted Animals* (London, 1791), i. Cited hereafter in text.

orders of life” (ii). In his critique of anthropocentrism, Oswald adopts the egalitarian rhetoric of his acquaintance, Tom Paine. He imagines a shared social world in which mankind had become the despotic ruler over other creatures. He borrows the language of class-critique, suggesting that man is a tyrannical aristocrat, devoted to sensual pleasure (43) and ravaging the animal citizenry so that their “blood could impurple the pull of his pride” (76). Like purple-robed monarchs, humans impute their sovereignty to divine sanction (77). Oswald similarly proposes an analogy between the mistreatment of animals and Britain’s participation in slavery and imperial expansionism. Man’s power over the brute creation, “the slaves of his tyranny,” allows him to “disclaim[] the ties of kindred” (3-4). Humans, and particularly the Britons who are the focus of Oswald’s criticism, are an “imperial animal” who ransack “the remote corners of the globe” in order to “add a feather to the wings of his vanity” (76-7). Along with class inequality, slavery, and imperialism, abusing animals is a type of social exploitation, and animal rights are a form of social justice.

Oswald’s radicalism informs much of the animal advocacy of the 1790s. In 1797, John Lawrence included a chapter on “The Rights of Brutes” in his *Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses, and on the Moral Duties of Man Towards the Brute Creation*. Lawrence calls upon the British legislature to recognize what he calls *jus animalium*: the natural rights of animals endowed with “life, intelligence, and feeling.”¹³ Nonhumans ought be included in any scheme of justice, both because of these innate qualities and because their services to mankind imply a kind of reciprocal social contract.

¹³ John Lawrence, *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses, and on the Moral Duties of Man Towards the Brute Creation*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1810), 1.127. Cited hereafter in text.

Lawrence proposes that “the rights of Beasts be formerly acknowledged by the state” (132), maintaining that normative virtue alone is insufficient for protecting animal rights and that the prevailing legal conception of animals as property often serves as an excuse for cruelty. He even anticipates the sort of anti-sentimental critique articulated by George Canning, allowing, sardonically, that his readers will have “perceived that I naturally belong to the unfortunate class of superfluous sensibility” (196). In *Zoonomia*, Erasmus Darwin notes that philosophers, such as Hobbes, have denied that animals can make contracts and so justified their exclusion from human society. Darwin claims, to the contrary, that empirical observation proves that animals “form contracts of friendship with each other, and with mankind” as well.¹⁴ In her 1801 *Sketches on the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Helen Maria Williams states, “Had I any influence in the proposal or fabrication of laws, I should be tempted to leave the human race a while to its own good government, and form a code for the protection of animals.”¹⁵ According to Williams, such laws exist in other countries and were a mainstay in ancient Greece and Rome, where “the codes of legislators were filled with regulations of mercy in favour of animals.” In her earlier *Tour in Switzerland*, Williams remarks on the kindness shown to animals by the Swiss and recommends that the new French republic “interpose between the restless activity or avarice of the master, and the beast.”¹⁶ In 1797, a radical Manchester printer, George Nicholson, published his own *On the Conduct of Man to Inferior Animals*, which he

¹⁴ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; Or, The Laws of Organic Life* Vol.1 (London 1794), 169. Quoted in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 121.

¹⁵ Helen Maria Williams, *Sketches on the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1801).

¹⁶ Helen Maria Williams, *A Tour in Switzerland* Vol. 1 (London, 1798), 93.

expanded and republished in 1801 as *On the Primeval Diet of Man*. Nicholson cites Williams with approval, arguing that “animals should be protected by the legislature,” that the law should forbid “cruelty to animals, *simply as such*, and *without* taking in the consideration of it as an *injury to property*.”¹⁷ Nicholson is clearly distinguishing a form of legislation that would recognize animals as legal subjects.

In addition to revealing a more radical element in turn-of-the-century animal advocacy, Oswald and Nicholson, as well as the antiquarian Joseph Ritson, who in 1802 published the encyclopedic *Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty*, are important in the way they begin to anthologize and catalogue earlier writings on behalf of animals. Each of their books serves as both a polemic and a compendium of earlier humanitarian writings. Addison, Pope, Gay, Thomson, Sterne, and Cowper each show up with great frequency. In anthologizing the literature of eighteenth-century animal advocacy, these later writers invoke the cultural authority of a national literature. They point to poetry as an instrument of social normativity, a record that may be drawn upon to substantiate the appeals to historical continuity, which, after Burke, inform the rhetoric of even the most progressive reformers. They also exhibit a style of reading that highlights the straightforward educative and humanitarian aims of sentimental texts. Nicholson, for instance, quotes Cowper on hunting, Thomson on the caging of birds, and himself objecting to the mistreatment of donkeys, observes that “[t]he inimitable Sterne has endeavoured to render the ass respectable” (173).

¹⁷ George Nicholson, *On the Primeval Diet of Man*, 1801, ed. Rod Preece (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 1999), 203. Cited hereafter in text.

The first parliamentary debate regarding animal welfare legislation occurred in 1800, seven years before Parliament formally prohibited Britain's participation in the slave trade. On April 2, the Scottish MP Sir William Pulteney brought a Bill for preventing the Practice of Bull-baiting and Bull-running before the House of Commons. Baiting had come to be regarded as a vulgar pursuit of the lower classes and so offered a logical first step for anti-cruelty reformers.¹⁸ The Bill itself is framed more narrowly than the debate surrounding it, as a matter of social regulation rather than animal rights. Its preamble states as its primary justification the fact that baitings encourage "Idleness, Rioting, and Drunkenness." Throughout the debate on the Bill, the precise status of the animal remains unclear. Its supporters gesture at the injustice of baiting animals for amusement, but they never define the rights of animals as a central rationale for the Bill. After its first reading, Pulteney addressed the Commons, claiming that his primary concern is civil disorder, though he complains that the custom is "cruel and inhuman."¹⁹

An extensive hearing on Pulteney's Bill took place on April 18, when Pitt's Secretary of War, William Windham, rose to oppose it, giving one of the longest speeches on any subject in 1800, and thereby belying his own contention that bull-baiting was not a subject suitable for parliamentary debate during wartime. His most powerful and sustained argument in favor of what he deems a long-established custom adopts a populist idiom, framing his opposition to the Bill in terms of a liberal principle of

¹⁸ See Richard Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 81-2.

¹⁹ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* Vol. XXXV (London, 1819), 202. Cited hereafter in text.

individual rights.²⁰ The Foxite Whig Richard Sheridan observed that he would be denounced as a Jacobin if he were to so explicitly adopt such politics. According to Windham, the Bill is discriminatory because it abolishes the pastimes only of the poor, even though the upper-class sports of hunting and shooting are no less inhumane. He suggests that any emotional justification for the Bill reveals ethical partiality and thus an unfair assault on individual rights; sentimental arguments stems from “petty, personal, and local motives” (204). He also questions the “sensibility” of the genteel huntsmen who opposes baitings, drawing on the widespread association between sentimentality and hypocrisy (208). Windham rejects the sentimental principle, which was used to justify the Bill, that baitings habituate cruelty, arguing that the British are already so humane that they might be accused of “effeminacy” were it not for their cruel customs and martial prowess (206).²¹ Interestingly, he does allow that bull baiting occurs “at the expense of an animal which is not by any means a party to the amusement,” but, rather than state explicitly that this is an illegitimate justification for a ban, he returns to the rhetoric of class, pointing out that shooting is no less cruel. Windham seems no more comfortable opposing the justice of animal rights than the Bill’s supporters are in defending it.

²⁰ In the recent debate in the British House of Lords on a bill to ban hunting with dogs, Lord Banks, arguing in support of the bill, observed that in the bull-baiting debate of 1800, “Mr. Windham played the libertarian card, just as the Opposition Front Benchers have today. His arguments read like the mantra of today’s hunting supporters,” *Commons Hansard Debates* (7 July 2000), column 581.

²¹ Windham’s odd insinuation that bull-baiting in fact elevates the sentiments, which was extended by Canning, is noticed by William Hazlitt in the chapter on John Horne Tooke in *The Spirit of the Age: or, Contemporary Portraits* (Grasmere: Wordsworth Trust, 2004): “Mr. Windham, indeed, who was a sophist, but not a logician, charged him with having found ‘a mare’s nest;’ but it is not to be doubted that Mr. Tooke’s etymologies will stand the test, and last longer than Mr. Windham’s ingenious derivation of the practice of bull-baiting from the principles of humanity!” (156).

Endorsing Windham's position, George Canning, whose poem "The New Morality" had satirized animal advocates two years earlier, entirely reverses the sentimental argument about habit, proposing that baitings produce "a nobleness of sentiment and elevation of mind" (211). In his brief rejoinder to his opponents, Pulteney emphasizes the animal welfare rationale, pointing out that the key difference between baiting and hunting is the status of the animal: in the former, the "poor animal was tied to a stake, with no means of defense or escape, and tormented and tortured for a whole day" (209). Several Foxites, including Richard Martin and Richard Sheridan, articulated support for the Bill, which Sheridan calling attention to the injustice of torturing a "poor animal" merely for human amusement (213). To Pulteney's surprise, however, the Bill lost by two votes. Richard Ryder claims that after the rejection of the Bill, "bulls, bears, and badgers were subjected to celebratory baitings."²² A week after the debate, *The Times* editorialized against the Bill, refining Windham's liberal rhetoric of individual rights. A ban on baiting would be an assault on individual rights, an "undue interference with private life."²³

The following month, Pulteney anonymously published an open *Letter to the Right Hon. William Windham, on His Late Opposition to the Bill to Prevent Bull-Baiting*, which embraces a more sentimental tone and a more explicit defense of animal rights. Establishing a model for future reformers in Parliament, he allows that humans have been granted a limited sovereignty over animals. In this argument, he follows sentimental

²² Richard Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 82.

²³ *The Times* (25 April 1800). Quoted in Richard Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 83.

writers like Cowper, whose paternalist ethics authorize use deemed necessary but disallow malicious and unnecessary torture.²⁴ The author appeals directly to the “hearts” of the Bill’s opponents (2), against a practice of “wanton barbarity and studied cruelty” (3), and addresses his main adversary’s own humanity, noting that in conversation Windham had recommended a more humane way of slaughtering oxen. Pulteney casts the baited bull as a sympathetic victim, a sufferer of “maiming and wounding” (2), of “the most agonizing torture” (3). As he had in the debate, Pulteney dismisses Windham’s analogy between rural and urban blood sports—though he notes his personal abstention from hunting—again focusing on the experience of the animal: the hunted quarry is given an opportunity to escape and is never physically tortured. In the letter, Pulteney even acknowledges the truth behind Windham’s suggestion that the Bill is the “beginning of a system” to “prevent cruelty towards dumb animals in general” (15). The letter cites a number of petitions in support of the ban, and attaches several letters attesting to the sport’s cruelty and disruptive influence sent by gentleman in the counties, mainly Shropshire and Staffordshire, where baiting remained prevalent. The pamphlet concludes with several sentimental poems, including one in the style of Thomson featuring a hare who cries out like a “new-born babe” after being caught by the hounds (40). Pulteney’s pathos-infused letter notwithstanding, in 1802 an attempt to pass a similar bill failed.

In 1809, another Scot, Thomas Erskine, brought a Bill for preventing Wanton and Malicious Cruelty to Animals before the Lords. Erskine was an animal-lover, who kept

²⁴ [William Pulteney], *Letter to the Right Hon. William Windham, on His Late Opposition to the Bill to Prevent Bull-Baiting* (London, 1800), 18. Cited hereafter in text.

several dogs, a goose, a mackaw, as well as two leeches he considered pets.²⁵ He had made a name for himself successfully defending John Horne Tooke and other members of the London Corresponding Society in the Treason Trials of 1794. Erskine's Bill is far more expansive in its recognition of animal interests than Pulteney's. The Preamble states that human dominion is necessarily limited and that "cruel and oppressive treatment" of nonhuman creatures is "highly unjust and immoral." The Bill itself proscribes two specific types of mistreatment: "wanton cruelty" against post-horses and other draft animals, and the malicious abuse of livestock being driven to market. On May 15, Erskine delivered a long speech vindicating his Bill to the Lords, which was reprinted as a pamphlet and widely disseminated.²⁶ Erskine proposes that the 1800 and 1802 Bills failed because they emphasized civil regulation and so "obscured the principle of protection to animals."²⁷ In Erskine's careful formulation, which continues to define animal protection laws, beasts remain property, and humans retain dominion, but our use of animals is restricted to necessity. Animals are recognized as both objects and subjects, property and citizens.²⁸ He frankly acknowledges that his proposed legislation grants

²⁵ Christine Kenyon Jones, *Kindred Brutes: Animals and Romantic-Period Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 88-9.

²⁶ Among those in the audience was the newly seated Lord Byron. In *Kindred Brutes*, Chapter Three, Christine Kenyon-Jones examines Erskine's rhetoric, and the Burkean vocabulary at play in the animal welfare debates, and suggests the influence of Erskine's speech on Byron's depiction of bullfighting in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

²⁷ My citations, hereafter in text, are taken from the pamphlet: *Cruelty to Animals: The Speech of Lord Erskine, in the House of Peers, On the Second Reading of the Bill for preventing Malicious and Wanton Cruelty to Animals* (London, 1809), 10.

²⁸ This is precisely the status James Madison grants to American slaves in *The Federalist*, 1787, ed. J.R Pole (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005): "The federal Constitution, therefore, decides with great propriety on the case of our slaves, when it views them in the mixed character of persons and of property" (296). Slaves, as property, are comparable to "irrational animals"; as "moral

political rights to nonhumans. Animals, he states, are currently regarded “*as property only*—To destroy or abuse them, from malice to the proprietor, or with an intention injurious to his interest in them, is criminal—but *the animals themselves are without protection*—the law regards them not *substantively*—they have no RIGHTS” (2). In establishing the natural rights that underlie his proposed legal rights, Erskine invokes the two common claims of earlier animal advocates: knowledge of animal sensibility and autonomy gained by “natural history” and the design argument made by liberal theologians. Observation of the animal world proves that God endowed every creature, human and nonhuman, with “organs and feelings for its own enjoyment and happiness” (3). Humankind shares with animals the capacities—“Seeing—Hearing—Feeling—Thinking—the sense of pain and pleasure—the passions of love and anger”—that are the basis for self-interest and, in a providential world, natural rights. In representing animals as subjects, Erskine borrows a rhetoric of visible suffering from earlier sentimental literature. His audience is positioned as sympathetic spectators, as Erskine details graphic cases of animal cruelty, including the case of horses left to die slowly in slaughter houses, “reduced to eat[ing] their own dung, and frequently gnawing one another’s manes in the agonies of hunger” (15).

Sentimental conventions are everywhere present in Erskine speech, suggesting that their rhetorical currency had not altogether declined in the new century. For Erskine, the passions expand rather than restrict communal identifications. Hard-heartedness is opposed to generous “moral sympathies” (25), which are the foundation of a just community.

person[s]” they are “regarded by the law as a member of the society” and protected from violence.

Erskine cites both Sterne and Cowper, the latter of whom he credits for his “most affecting . . . appeal to our humanity and justice” (5). He positions his Bill in a sentimental narrative of national progress, maintaining that the law, if adopted, would introduce a new “aera in the history of the world” (27). Most interestingly, the speech puts a characteristically sentimental emphasis on emotional normativity. He claims that the law would have a two-fold effect: direct legal constraint and, more importantly, an indirect expansion of moral sensibility. The second effect is conceived in the sentimental terms of emotional habituation: the law will sanction a principle meant to “make the deepest impressions upon the human mind” (7), which will “extend its influence to the protection of everything that has life” (9). The law is meant to transform perceptions as well as practices, to “awaken and inculcate” a spirit of compassion toward all creatures. On June 9, the Bill passed the Lords.

When Erskine’s Bill was debated in the Commons, on June 12 and 13, William Windham delivered another long speech in opposition. He again begins by appealing to the politics of class, observing that the Bill will mainly impact poor drovers, while doing nothing to impede the cruel customs of the gentry. Windham directly confronts the Bill’s recognition of animals as political subjects. He distinguishes between humanity’s moral obligations toward the brute creation, which he allows, and the political rights granted by the proposed law. “The province of criminal legislation has hitherto been confined to the injuries sustained by men,” he observes, recasting Erskine’s narrative of a progressive

extension of political recognition as a species of Jacobin radicalism.²⁹ To legislate against cruelty is to recognize the rights of animals, which Windham denies, or else it is to legislate morality in such a way that undermines the rights of autonomous human individuals. Windham accepts the essential sentimental principle that moral standing is grounded in feeling and so “embrace[s] . . . the whole of animal life” (1031). The recognition of such moral standing, however, is defined solely as a voluntary individual virtue, which must not be subjected to law. In fact, to make kindness to animals compulsory would be to undermine rational freedom, which is the basis for virtue. Windham has “no objection to any sacrifices, which any one might be disposed to make in his own person, for sparing the pain or promoting the enjoyment of his fellow-creatures, whether men or inferior animals” (1031), but, he argues, to legislate such sacrifice is to impinge upon civil liberty. Windham has several further objections—the logic of the Bill is a slippery slope, which ultimately undermines all human sovereignty; the Bill is vague and so impossible to enforce—and he complains of the “exaggerated sensibility” of the law’s supporters, calling upon the now established association between affectation and concern for the “brute creation” (1038, 1025*). In response to Windham, the famous abolitionist William Wilberforce follows Erskine in imagining that the Bill would effect a transformation in sentiment in excess of its direct legal consequences: “By raising the estimation of the animal creation in the minds of the ignorant, this bill would create a sum of sensitive happiness almost impossible to calculate” (1029*). Initially

²⁹ *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time* Vol. 14 (London, 1812), 1029. Hereafter cited in text.

voted into Committee, at the end of the session the Bill was defeated in the Commons by 10 votes.

As was the case in 1800, the 1809 Bill was widely discussed in British society. *The Times* shifted its stance, supporting the Bill for establishing “the foundation for . . . a system of rights and privileges” for animals, while *The Edinburgh Review* argued that nonhumans were due no legal rights: “No reason can be assigned for the interference of legislation in the protection of animals unless their protection be connected either directly or remotely with some advantage to man.”³⁰ In 1810, John Lawrence published a third edition of his *Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses*, which includes a lengthy consideration of the debate over Erskine’s legislation. He notes the important distinction between legislating ethical responsibilities and recognizing natural rights: “The object of the proposed law is not to enforce duties, which must of necessity, be referred to human discretion, but to punish aggressive acts, which natural justice has made unlawful, and which for that plain reason, ought to be held equally so, in the social contract” (Vol. 2 530). Even so, like Erskine he represents suffering animals as sympathetic victims and himself as a man of feeling—e.g., in an anecdote of an old horse, left to die in the street, who “turned his head piteously towards his hollow flanks, and I was obliged to turn mine from the by-standers, to hide my tears” (556)—and he depicts Erskine’s adversaries as heart-hearted.³¹ In the same year, John Lamb, the elder brother to

³⁰ Quoted in Edward Fairholme and Wellesley Pain, *A Century of Work for Animals: The History of the R.S.P.C.A, 1824-1924* (London: John Murray, 1924), 22-3.

³¹ Lawrence also notes that the rhetoric of sentiment has lost some of its efficacy: “There is an open and avowed ridicule of compassion, and of those whose hearts are warmed by it” (539).

Mary and Charles Lamb, published a long open letter to Windham. Throughout his letter, Lamb invokes the sentimental literary tradition, including Burns, Sterne, Thomson, and Shakespeare. He follows Bentham in arguing, against early versions of liberal moral pluralism, that political justice has an ethical component: “the sphere is Justice necessarily includes all nature that has feeling.”³² Interestingly, he also explicitly adopts Burkean rhetoric, calling Windham a “metaphysician.” The very abstraction of Windham’s argument about imperfect duties is closer to a rationalistic Jacobinism than the grounded sympathies of animal advocates, the organic “feelings and habitudes” that Burke defined as the foundation of the “moral world” (11, 20).

In a September 21, 1811 letter in *The Courier* opposing Catholic emancipation, Samuel Taylor Coleridge explains his opposition to Erskine’s Bill, which he sees as one of a number of recent efforts to “enforce imperfect duties by penal laws,” to transform “supposed *sensibilities*” into statute.³³ Again we find a particular brand of liberal rhetoric that seeks to establish an absolute boundary between ethics and politics, though Coleridge adds a conservative twist in his contention that government encroaches on the Church when it mandates virtue because conscience falls under the responsibility of religion. He expresses gratitude to Windham, but for whom, he claims, we would see “suits carried on by old maids in behalf of worried tabbies and dogs with tin kettles at their tails” (310).

Coleridge invokes an anti-sentimentalist rhetoric in his insinuation of affectation on the

³² John Lamb, *A Letter to the Right Hon. William Windham on his opposition to Lord Erskine’s Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (London, 1810), 6. Hereafter cited in text.

³³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “On the Catholic claims, as Matter of Absolute Right: With a Critique of the Systems of Toleration and Religious Rights, of Hobbes, Lock, and Warburton,” *Essays on His Times in The Morning Post and The Courier*, in *Collected Works* Vol. 2, ed. David Erdman (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), 309. Cited hereafter in text.

part of humanitarian reformers and in his characterization of animal advocates as hysterical, anti-maternal women. Coleridge's position on Erskine's Bill is spelled out more clearly in an 1814 letter to Daniel Stuart, where he terms the State's ambition to compel virtue a form of "*Legislative Jacobinism*."³⁴ The "strongest instance" of this governmental overreach "was the attempt to legislate for animals by Lord Erskine," which vexes Coleridge not only because it attempts to legislate "imperfect Duties" in the human realm, but because it extends "*personality to Things*." More forcefully than Windham, Coleridge is aligning his position on animals with Bentham's "ancient jurists," those philosophers who deny the personhood of animals and thus their potential participation in positive law.

In the early 1820s, Erskine and Richard Martin, a well-known humanitarian and MP for Galway, succeeded in passing anti-cruelty legislation. Martin was an acquaintance of John Lawrence and was supposedly inspired by his writings on behalf of animals.³⁵ Learning the lessons of earlier attempts, Martin's Bill is very narrowly defined, legislating against only the mistreatment of cattle and horses by carters and drovers. Some supporters of the Bill complained that its ambitions were too narrow. The Bill's opponents again argued that animal welfare was an unfit subject for legislation and that

³⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Daniel Stuart (29 October 1814), *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Vol. 2, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1959), 537. According to Rapaczynski, by the middle of the eighteenth century, "the legitimization of even the most authoritarian forms of government had to appeal to individual interests," *Nature and Politics*, 8. The extent of Coleridge's conservatism is clear when we see him, in the same letter, characterizing the rights of individuals as absolutely subservient to those of the monarch. Murder, he states, is illegal because it deprives "the Kind of *one* of his *Subjects*," and robbery abates the "value of the *King's High-ways*" (537).

³⁵ See Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, 79. Martin himself brought about the first prosecution under his law, against two horse-dealers for malicious brutality of their charges.

the government had no authority to sanction ethical duties. They also asked which animals would be protected next, describing a slippery slope leading to a recognition of the rights of dogs, cats, rats, fish, lobsters, and oysters. In 1821, Martin's first Bill passed in the Commons by a large margin but failed in the Lords. The following year, the Bill that came to be known as the Martin's Act passed both houses and was signed into law on July 22. During the next three years, Martin and his supporters introduced a number of bills meant, in Martin's words, "to extend to other animals the privilege and protection which the House . . . had afforded to cattle."³⁶ Animals are explicitly represented as legal subjects, as Martin indicates when he describes how one of his bills aims to give "animals the right of protecting themselves."³⁷ In each of his speeches, Martin draws on a graphic language of animal suffering, detailing "instances in which barbarities of a very horrible description had been perpetrated upon animals," and he often cites public opinion, the "millions" of citizens who, he claims, oppose cruel practices. Each of these bills failed by close margins. In 1835, several years after Martin's death, broad legislation proscribing malicious cruelty to all domesticated animals was passed in both houses and signed into law.

³⁶ "Cattle Ill-Treatment Bill," 11 Feb. 1824, *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 10 (London 1824), 130-1.

³⁷ "Cattle Ill-Treatment Bill," 5 May 1825," *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 13 (London, 1826), 418.

Tobias Menely

Willamette University
Department of English
900 State Street
Salem, OR 97301

tmenely@indiana.edu
1242 NW Hillcrest
Corvallis OR, 97330

Academic Employment

- **Willamette University**, Salem OR
Assistant Professor of English, 2006-

Education

- **Indiana University**, Bloomington, IN
Ph.D. in English, May 2006
Dissertation: "Cultivated Sympathies: Human Sentiments and Animal Subjects in the Long Eighteenth Century"
Committee: Deidre Lynch and Nick Williams (co-directors), Richard Nash, Lee Sterrenburg
Ph.D. Qualifying Exams, Passed with Unanimous Distinction, March 2003
Minor: Colonial/Postcolonial Studies
- **Beloit College**, Beloit, WI
B.A. in Literary Studies (Honors), May 1998
Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa

Publications

"Traveling in Place: Gilbert White's Cosmopolitan Parochialism." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28.3 (Nov. 2004): 46-65.

Review of Felicity Nussbaum's *The Invention of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Forthcoming in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*.

"Animal Signs and Ethical Significance: Expressive Creatures in the British Georgic." Forthcoming in *Mosaic's* special issue on "The Animal."

Honors and Fellowships

Charlotte Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship, Woodrow Wilson Foundation, 2005-2006
College of Arts and Sciences Dissertation Fellowship (Declined), 2005-2006
Chancellor's Fellowship, Indiana University, 1999-2004
James A. Work Outstanding Graduate Student Award, Indiana University, April 2005
Russell Noyes Prize for Work in Romanticism, Indiana University, April 2001

College of Arts and Sciences Travel Grant, Fall 2004
English Department Travel Grant, Fall 2001

Teaching Experience

- **Teaching Fellow, Indiana University**

Designed and taught L204: Introduction to Fiction, "The Lost and the Found," Spring 2005

- **Associate Instructor, Indiana University**

Designed and taught W170: Projects in Reading and Writing, "Reading the Signs of Nature in American Culture," Spring 2002-Spring 2003 (four units)

Taught W131: Elementary Composition, Fall 2000-Fall 2001 (five units)

Conference Papers

"Sterne's Zoöphilpsychosis, or, Why Animals Are What's Wrong With Sentimentality." Johnson Society of the Central Region, Indiana University, May 2006.

"Hunting and the Poetics of Animal Expression." Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, University of Oregon, June 2005.

"Rural Customs and Sentimental Modernity: Hunting, History, and the British Georgic." Bloomington Eighteenth-Century Studies Workshop, Indiana University, May 2005.

"Sentimental Hunters? Animal Feeling, Humanitarianism, and Field Sports." American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, April 2005.

"British Brahmins and Hindu Sentiments: Transculturation and Animal Advocacy in the 1790s." North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, University of Colorado, September 2004.

"Traveling in Place: Gilbert White's Cosmopolitan Parochialism." NASSR, Fordham University, August 2003.

"Radical Sentiment and Ecological Politics in Oswald's The Cry of Nature." ASLE, Boston University, June 2003

"Thinking Outside: Subjectivity, Wilderness, and Becoming Other." ASLE, Northern Arizona University, June 2001.

"Learning By Going: The Mechanisms of Lack and the Process of Desire." Graduate Conference, Northern Illinois University, March 1998.

Professional Memberships

Modern Language Association
North American Society for the Study of Romanticism
American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
Association for the Study of Literature and Environment

Foreign Languages

Reading proficiency in French and Spanish

References

Deidre Lynch, Indiana University: (812) 855-0521
Nick Williams, Indiana University: (812) 855-7649
Richard Nash, Indiana University: (812) 855-2930
Lee Sterrenburg, Indiana University: (812) 855-2037
Kathy Smith, Indiana University: (812) 855-3282

For complete dossier, contact the English Department's Placement Secretary: Bev Hankins (bhanhins@indiana.edu): (812) 855-1543