

Running Head: UNDEFINING MAN

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A Case for Symbolic Animal Communication via Refutation of Kenneth Burke's  
"Definition of Man"

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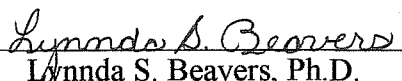
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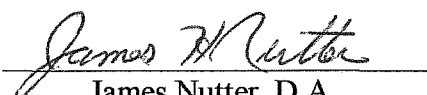
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Abstract

There have been tendencies in various fields to use communication as a way of differentiating humans and other species. Even when individuals are confronted with empirical evidence to the contrary, many still hold onto the notion that humans are in a communicative position clearly divergent in all ways from animals. This thesis will utilize Kenneth Burke's "Definition of Man" as a launching point to support a claim that animals utilize their conscious cognitive abilities to communicate symbolically.

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Introduction

I wasn't twenty feet down the path that encircles Pennsylvania's Lake Scranton before I was halted in my tracks by the sight of the animal that was a few yards away. Now, most stories that begin as such will usually proceed to explain one of two sorts of animals – either a grand and majestic rarity or a fierce and dangerous predator. This animal, however, was neither. It was an Eastern Gray Squirrel, but that is really not the point of the story. I quietly proceeded down the path and began making *tschih tschih tschih* noises, hoping to establish contact with the wild wonder. The animal seemed to notice my noises for a brief moment, a moment in which I held my breath in hope of communicating with the small bundle of intrigue, but the brief moment was truly that – brief. The squirrel then went on with its foraging in the dirt for its cache until another squirrel aloft in the trees called out in a loud *chirp, knock*. This time, the squirrel responded to the sound quite poignantly, dashing into a nearby fir tree, staying still, thus blending in with the gray and brown bark patterns. It became apparent that my silly attempts were not enough to cross the language barrier, but clearly there had been something said between the two squirrels that caused the squirrel to react as such. What was it that was said? More fundamentally, what is the nature of animal communication?

Over the years, various theorists, largely found in the coves of rhetoricians, have postulated that our symbolic form of communication is one that separates us from the rest

of the animal world. Individuals from Cicero to Isocrates have argued that human communication is unique and that animals simply do not operate on the same plane as humans. Kenneth Burke, in his book Language as Symbolic Action (1996), puts forth his “Definition of Man.” The definition differentiates humanity from the animal kingdom via unique attributes in communication, namely symbolic communication. That communication, however, is not truly as unique and exclusive as Burke would like to maintain. Animals also communicate symbolically and do so with conscious and cognitive capacities of varying degrees. Thus, this thesis will argue that Burke’s definition is not exclusive, but rather communication differences are at best differences in degrees between animals, for animals consciously symbolically communicate.

#### Literature Review

In order to examine the relationship between animals and communication, we will need to have a theoretical grounding for what our conceptions truly are. In Language as Symbolic Action, Burke’s work on the “Definition of Man” argues for human communication as a uniquely human attribute, set apart from animal uses of communication. His argument that “Man is the symbol using animal” (3) provides us with a countering point to the observational data concerning animal uses of communication.

Various communication sources provide a backdrop and support for the analysis of Burke’s “Definition of Man.” Greig Henderson argues that Burke’s view of symbol-using humans inherently sets up a duality in which humans can only communicate via symbols, not actually communicating the essence of which they speak (564-569).

Jeffrey Murray's work interpreting Burke's definition brings forth the claim that Burke's definition is agent-centered - focusing on the human action that takes place in the communication process, i.e. making, using, and misusing symbols, etc., within the duality (29-33). This focus allows us to then look at how animals communicate from an agent-centered perspective as well.

The use of the symbols, however, can be seen as an action. In How to Do Things With Words, J. L. Austin's work on language as action, Austin claims that when an individual speaks, he or she is not only symbolically representing something, but rather the utterance is a performative action (6). For instance, in a wedding ceremony, the phrase "I do" contains a contractual and promissory essence that is established through the utterance. The phrase is not merely simple representation, but rather an act. Austin intends to say that humans do something when they communicate. He divides the categories that statements fall in into three possibilities – "locutionary," "illocutionary," and "perlocutionary" acts (97-101). Locutionary acts are the acts of uttering words that one knows to have meaning. This act merely contains the rhetic act, which is the act of sense and reference. The illocutionary act is the doing of something by saying something, such as the promissory "I do." It is the "performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something" (99-100). Perlocutionary acts are instances when individuals not only say something, but by design say something and bring about specific effects on the hearer. The effects may be on belief, attitude, or behavior. An individual may persuade another, for instance, to do something differently (107). Any given perspective/category can be applied when

looking at any particular communicative act, and each speech act has the potentiality for fulfilling each category. This perspective will provide us the foundation for investigating whether animals *do something* when they communicate.

The discussion begs the question of the use of symbols. The definition of signs and symbols are brought to light by works such as that of Saussure. A sign is something that points to something beyond itself. Words are the most common of these signs. Words can be constructed vocally as phonemes, which is a compilation of particular possible sounds produced by the vocal chords. These signs are broken into two parts, the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the representation, the word itself. The signified is the conception of what is being referred to, the object itself. Signs to Saussure are conventional in that they are decided to have meaning only because that consensus has been reached among those involved (65-78). Morphemes are constructions of phonemes. Morphemes are thus words, and these words can be combined in larger thought units to form larger semiotic units. Semiosis is the arrangement of morphemes into a larger unit of sense. When there is a large arrangement of semiotic units, discourse is definitionally the result. A discourse consists of a vocabulary, and a system of meaning and utilization within a group.

We now come to the contextual evidence specific to animals. In When Elephants Weep, Jeffrey Masson argues that animals exhibit behaviors and tendencies that do not fall within the normal conception of “instinct,” the action of an animal to act automatically in a manner consistent with a survival mentality (xxii – xxiii). Masson gives observational examples to justify his claim that animals exist apart from a strict

instinctual life. The core of the examples rely on field study of animals acting in manners that either jeopardize their own survival seemingly knowingly or in manners that simply have nothing to do with survival. The first set of survival jeopardy includes instances such as elephants who return to fallen elephants in times of distress in order to assist the fallen elephant, regardless of the known danger. Other examples include chimpanzees that mourn the loss of family members until the point of death (91-97).

The second set of animal behaviors that seem unrelated to survival involves what one might consider “fun” in a truly anthropomorphic sense. Examples include crows that slide on the onion domes of the Kremlin for no known reason, buffalo that spend time skating across ice, and lemurs that simply bask in the sun (122-129).

While Masson realizes that there is a theoretical possibility that we simply are unaware of the survival necessity of these activities, it seems likely to him that there is no immediate connection. He utilizes these examples not to make strict, hard truth claims regarding the nature of animals, but rather to counteract the equally speculative argument that animals are merely robotic creatures operating out of *a priori* instinct (15-23). This basis will be essential for our study of animal communication, as the state of animal affairs will need to be understood properly in order to establish correctly a paradigm through which to evaluate their communication.

Many works will also be examined that speak toward the communicative capacities of animals. In varying degrees, these works contend that animals do communicate with one another. Bradbury’s Principles of Animal Communications creates the groundwork for animal communication, pointing to the fact that animals use



various systems of signals in order to convey messages of sorts to other animals. These signals may be in many forms, be they acoustic, chemical, etc. and may communicate messages relating to predatory danger, foraging location, or breeding (1-10).

Communication is also discussed in other works, such as in Tim Friend's Animal Talk, where he attempts to decode the various language usages that animals employ (1-32).

The work Animal Vocal Communication by Donald Owings takes the concept of animal freedom, along with animal communication, and applies it to the communicative relationship that animals exhibit between and amongst themselves. He argues that animals act as managers and use communication to get other animals to act in ways that are beneficial to the managing animal. The counterpart to the manager is the assessor, which may or may not act in accordance with the manager's interest. The interaction between the manager and the assessor thus creates communication situations more complex than one would initially realize (48-58). This will provide insight into how animal communication relates to our conceptions of human communication. Works such as Eloquent Animals by Flora Davis and Communication in the Animal World by William Evans will give specific instances of the communicative capabilities of animals.

Additionally, works will be used that establish cognitive abilities of animals. These works include Principles of Animal Cognition by William Roberts and Through our Eyes Only? by Marian Dawkins. These works contend that animals are conscious and have cognitive abilities beyond much of the levels ascribed to them by individuals of the human species.

Main Body

The discussion of rhetoric presupposes and rests upon various facts and assumptions about communication. We will thus endeavor to unearth various aspects of communication. In particular, in order to maintain the point that animals communicate symbolically and do so with conscious and cognitive capacities of varying degrees, we will examine Burke's first clause in his "Definition of Man" – "Man is the symbol using animal."

The first word used in this clause is "man". This term is one that seems to casually denote the human existence – *homo sapien sapien*. (While various scholars and social traditions have rejected or affirmed the gender biased possibility of the term "Man", we will interpret this term as referring to humankind in an unbiased manner and maintain its use in order to maintain the straightforward rearticulation of Burke to refute him properly.) This term is intended to isolate this species from all other biological life forms that fall under the animal kingdom.

The second word is the verb "is". This is the present tense of the being verb and thus denotes a current existence of Man in regards to the definition.

The third word is "the". This word is grammatically a definite article. The use of the word "the" is a definite and specific clarification that points to exclusivity. It is important to note that Burke did not choose the word "a" but rather chose "the" so as to make his definition exclusive of the rest of animals.

The fourth word we encounter is "symbol". This word by dictionary definition means "something that represents something else by association, resemblance, or

convention” (“Symbol”). It calls to mind the writings of the individual that took the first true plunge into semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure creates his distinction between sign, signified and signifier. The signified is the concept being called to reference. The signifier is the object, sound, or markation that is used to call up the concept. The sign is the combination of the two. A symbol, be it a particular word, language, etc., is a sign with motivation behind it (64-68). It can thus be attributed to Burke’s use of “symbol” that the symbols that Man uses are objects, sounds, markations, etc. used with the motivation of calling up a certain concept.

“Using” is the fifth word used in clause number one of Burke’s “Definition of Man.” This term simply refers to the servicing or utilization of something. Thus, Man *does something* with symbols.

“Animal” is the final word in this clause. It generally refers to those classified within the kingdom animalia, as opposed to non-living organisms or living organisms that fall under the kingdom plantae.

With a proper understanding of this first clause in mind, we will now refute the exclusivity of Burke’s first premise. The core of refutation relies on Burke’s use of the term “the”. This term’s denotation of exclusivity is a necessary part of the definition, but is nonetheless false. Thus, here we must establish that animals other than Man use symbols.

Two issues must be addressed in order to refute the exclusiveness. The first is that animals and symbols occur in relation to each other, that is to say that what an animal does is symbolic at certain points. However, to make this truly a refutation of the first

clause, we must address the second issue, which is the *use* of symbols. It is not merely enough to say that animals engage in symbolic interactions with one another, but rather that they are symbol using creatures. We will thus now attempt to explain enough concerning animals to answer these two issues. The first premise we must conquer is the symbolic nature of animal interaction.

The concept that animals communicate is one to which most people will adhere (Bradbury 6). Wolves howl at the pack, rattlesnakes jitter their tails, and birds sing to one another. These are aspects of nature that almost anyone will accept. Those that do not believe that animals communicate in any sense (i.e., that they do something to communicate some sort of message to another animal, have either a very interesting perspective on the nature of this world, a very strict view of communication, or simply no knowledge of the existence of animals). In any regards, hopefully the discussion of symbolic communication will be enough to convince one of communication in general. The claim that animals communicate symbolically is perhaps a tautological statement in that communication is inherently symbolic unless the sender can transmit the actual object or concept to the receiver via communication (Henderson). Once the claim that animals communicate is established, it thus follows that the animals communicate symbolically.

We will explore many examples of communicative situations in nature to elucidate on the symbolic nature of animal communication. Burke himself utilizes an example of his experience with nature, where a bird seemingly missed what seemed *obvious* to Burke, in order to prove his point. Nonetheless, it only seems possible to

prove the arguments of this thesis via example, as no theoretical discussion that I am aware of can prove in one direction or another the nature of animal existence, let alone their communicative experiences.

Birds are a good place to begin in our study of animal communication, as the existence of “bird songs” is commonly acknowledged. Individuals study bird calls, even to the point that there is a market for tools that can replicate the sounds created by various species. Birds, such as the hooded warbler can be found making noises such as *chipp*s and *chink*s at various times of the year (Owings 4). Blackbirds give warning *seeeee* calls (Evans 81). Essentially all birds communicate, and much of this communication is via sound. Whether this sound is symbolic, however, needs be addressed in order to truly refute Burke’s first clause.

Regarding the symbolicity of communication, two points can address the question. The first point was stated briefly before, that communication itself requires the use of symbols. Outside the ability simply to share thoughts in their mental state, creatures must use something as a representative. This other form embodies a representation of the thought and thus calls to mind the concept one wishes to communicate (i.e., this other form is a symbol). Sound is the form that we discuss here. The sounds birds make are the medium by which these animals can communicate (this does not, however, negate the fact that there are ways in which birds and other animals communicate aside from auditory communication). If we agree that bird sounds communicate ideas via sound representations, we agree that bird sounds are inherently symbolic.

Secondly, if the first point is too definitional in its approach, we can use various empirical cases to point towards the symbolic nature of bird sounds. Calls seem to have various fixed meanings or uses. The male hooded warbler will produce *chipp*s and *weeta weeta weTEEoo* sounds when in the nesting/breeding phase, as competition for breeding territory is continued between males. When the female enters, males can be heard then mixing specific additional songs into the loop. When intruders come near nesting young, parents will be heard making high-pitched *chinks* (Owings 5-6). Calls of starlings are distinct when in the context of distress or danger. The result of such calls is the flock's departure. These calls have even been recorded so as to be a detractor of starlings in areas where starlings are a nuisance to humans (Evans 80). The blackbirds produce a distinct *seeee* noise only when a predator or other danger confronts the flock from overhead. A *chuck* sound is used when predation is a threat from the ground (81). The sounds are all used in specific contexts. It seems reasonable to say that sounds used by birds in specific contexts are thus for specific purposes and thus contain specific messages. Therefore, the bird songs would be symbolic.

Birds, however, are not the only animals that interact symbolically. Underwater mammals produce distinct noises that elicit distinct responses. For instance, killer whales emit specific noises that cause gray whales to flee (Davis 142). Not only are sounds emitted by aquatic mammals in certain contexts, but underwater mammals have the capacity to decode various sounds and respond accordingly. Dwight W. Batteau created an electronic device that took human speech and transmuted it into whistle patterns. Various formulaic instructions were then contrived using a vocabulary of whistled words

created by Batteau's speaking into the machine. Commands such as "hit-ball-with-flipper" were taught to the porpoises being trained via reward methods (Davis 148). While this was not an instance of intra-species communication, it at least points to the capacity for aquatic animals to recognize noises as symbolizing specific desired action and thus seems to point towards an inductively sound argument that the innumerable noises that aquatic mammals make around and to each other contain symbolic meaning. It makes sense then that aquatic mammals also participate in symbolic communication, for according to Evans, "the entire life of the whale is intimately bound up with [its] ability to perceive and produce sounds" (126).

Our final examples of symbolic interaction rests on a profound example of the capacity to engage symbolically. This example is that of primates. Vervet monkeys make distinct noises as alarm calls dependent upon which predator is present: "Short, tonal calls [are] emitted in the presence of a leopard, low-pitched staccato grunts [are] made when an eagle [is] seen, and high-pitched chutters [are] emitted if a snake [is] detected" (Roberts 361-362). The responses to these symbolic calls are very specific. For the leopard call, the response is to climb high into the trees. The monkeys scan the skies and run into the bush when the eagle call is given. In the instance of the snake call, the monkeys coalesce on the located snake in a mob-like fashion in order to subdue the predator (362).

In studies of vervet monkeys, these calls have been recorded and played back. This is due to the claim that the calls themselves are not symbolic or semantic in nature, but rather instinct and behavior mimicry that create the situations that seem to be

symbolic exchanges. According to this argument, one vervet monkey sees a leopard, screams, and then runs to the tree tops to avoid predation, and the rest simply follow by example. In the playback tests, however, the sound was emitted by a speaker-system near a group of monkeys. The monkeys all responded to each distinct call in the predicted way, even in the absence of either a calling monkey to mimic or an actual predator. It is thus the sound that contains the message that elicited the reaction (362).

From an Austinian point of view, the symbolic reference vocalized by the monkeys was a locutionary act. The warning created and the promise of eminent danger conveyed was an illocutionary act. The perlocutionary perspective can be seen from the designed response that the particular calls elicited. More to the point, within each of these perspectives these various examples all support the idea that animals engage in symbolic communication. The question of whether they truly *use* symbols, however, is a question that requires further discussion. The term “use” seems to carry the baggage of intention. Thus, to prove that animals are *symbol using* one must prove the capacity for use, or intention, i.e. cognitive ability and consciousness.

The existence of animal consciousness or cognitive ability is difficult to prove. It is not something that definitional logic or an interesting anecdote can point to as a logical necessity. Consciousness is not something that is provable. The search for infallible proof that animals are conscious and have cognitive capabilities illuminates the fact that we cannot even prove that humans are conscious with cognitive capabilities. This is because “we are always on the inside [of our own skins] and can know about other ‘I’s only from the outside of their skins” (Dawkins 1). For instance, if another human has a



headache and expresses that he or she has a headache, one may not know whether the individual is truly experiencing a headache. Although the individual claiming to have the headache may be exhibiting the same physical reaction to what one observing would consider a headache, one can never be sure that the person claiming to have a headache is actually *feeling* or *experiencing* that which we call a headache, nor that they are truly *conscious* of such, for perhaps they are just going through the motions by “instinct.” As Dawkins states, “We can know what we experience on the inside of our own skins but our knowledge of experiences inside other bodies is strictly limited. The study of consciousness in other animals would therefore seem doomed to fail” (10).

Despite the seeming impossibility of proof, we all continue with our lives as though it were completely possible to know what is inside another person’s head. We make jokes to ease a friend’s distress, we avoid hostile people, and we comfort the sad. In our actions that presume to know what is logically impossible to know (another’s consciousness) we often find adequate results. Often, our jokes *do* ease the distress and the sad are uplifted by our comfort. This seems to point inductively to the fact that we are able to discern consciousness in another, as we react accordingly. This is done by two processes. The first process is by using our set of experiences to predict that other individual’s experiences play out similarly to ours. The second process qualifies the first, as it takes into account the particular circumstances surrounding another’s experience, including the differences between theirs and ours (Dawkins 11). We are thus able both to discern and to act in accordance with another’s consciousness and cognitive ability.

In the case of animals this seems possible as well. The difference between utilizing our abilities of discernment with humans and with animals is that there are biological and situational differences between the two. However, Dawkins seems to address this poignantly:

If we look beyond the skin, beyond whether the animal lives in the sea or flies through the air, to the animal's own world, we find similarities that are at first not obvious at all. If we put aside the fact that, say, a particular animal carries out many of its social interactions through a system of sounds that are incomprehensible to us and concentrate instead on what the sounds tell it about fellow members of its species and on the insights it seems to have about what they will do next, again, we see analogies where previously we saw none. (12)

Let us then examine some situations of animals that will allow us to come to the conclusion that animals are conscious. Before we do, however, we must be aware of the tendency to anthropomorphize animal experiences and project onto their situations what we think the human experience is. This calls into play the second of the processes, whereby we must be conscious of the differences between "us" and "them." However, just as we can use the situation's unique attributes in conjunction with our own to predict other human actions and reactions with high success, the use of such has proven quite successful in the animal kingdom, and thus anthropomorphism can be avoided or even proven inconsequential. Even the most ardent arguers against anthropomorphism, such as John S. Kennedy, concede that it is a useful and successful way of predicting behavior,

and thus of attributing the existence of consciousness to non-human animals (Masson 36).

The existence of conscious non-human animals with cognitive ability is hard to prove if all actions seem to fit a rote instinctual model. Instinctual actions simply geared towards self-preservation, or innate/unlearnt behavior definitely exists in animals, but not all behavior is as such (Dawkins 21). Instances defying self preservation thus seem to point to a higher level of cognitive ability and consciousness, or at least enough to fulfill our point. For instance, a pair of peregrine falcons, Arthur and Jenny, were successfully parenting their five fledglings. Jenny, however, did not appear one day, and Arthur's behavior changed dramatically. For the first two days of disappearance, he attended to the five fledglings meagerly, and continued to call for his mate throughout the day. On the third day Jenny was missing, Arthur uttered a sound he had not made before. Marcy Houle, the biologist observing the falcons described it as "a cry like the screeching moan of a wounded animal, the cry of a creature in suffering [...] the sadness in the outcry was unmistakable; having heard it, I will never doubt that an animal can suffer emotions that we humans think belong to our species alone" (qtd. in Masson 91). The fourth day was then spent with Arthur motionless on a nearby rock. The fifth day was full of intense hunting, bringing food to the fledglings. Arthur's actions later became more moderated. Biologists noted that three of the fledglings had died, while two had survived and fledged successfully (92). The actions of the falcon, however, had seemingly no connections with self preservation, but rather had negative consequences on the species as a whole, as

three of the fledglings died. This is an instance of an animal acting outside of normal instinctual or preservation oriented bounds.

Elephants often act in ways that suggest more than merely an instinctual existence. They often exhibit signs of grief and memory, as demonstrated by their interactions with elephant bones (Masson 95-96). While elephant graveyards do not actually exist, elephants nonetheless have a demonstrable fascination with bones of their own species. When they find them, they will inspect them thoroughly and often carry them for miles. Elephants, however, never demonstrate this same interest in bones of another species. Researcher of African elephants, Cynthia Moss, once took the jaw of a dead elephant mother of a nearby elephant family back to her camp for study. A few weeks later, the family wandered near the camp and made a marked detour to the jaw. The herd moved on, but the seven-year-old calf of the dead elephant stayed on long after the herd. The calf continuously touched the jaw, turning it over with its feet and trunk. The conclusion that Moss came to was that the intricacies of the jaw triggered a memory in the calf, calling up perhaps cognitions of grief and memory of the past mother (96). This situation held no survival imperative or instinctual guide to govern the actions. A calf leaving the herd of elephants is actually antithetical to elephant survival behavior. The actions are thus more indicative of cognitive ability by way of the seeming signs of grief and memory capacity.

Not only do instances of grief point towards non-instinctual action, and thus consciousness and cognitive ability, but instances of perceived pleasure do as well. Two male dolphins at an oceanarium were unusually tame towards each other compared to the

normal interaction between males. One, however, was taken to another exhibit at the oceanarium for three weeks. Upon return, the two filled the tank with movement, jumping out of the water and dashing about. They then spent the next several days “playing” with one another, ignoring the rest of the dolphins (Masson 115-116).

Other animals have been noted to simply enjoy their surroundings for no purpose. Before recorded distress calls and tame falcons were used to scare them off, crows inhabited the areas around the gold leaf domes of the Kremlin. The crows were purposefully scared off because of damage they were causing. They had found it to be enjoyable to slide down the onion-shaped domes for no apparent purpose, their claws doing great damage to the domes in the process. Additionally, bears have been seen sliding down snow banks like otters. Other bears have been seen floating in mountain lakes, where they stick their noses under water to blow bubbles and then use their claws to pop the bubbles. Bears have even been seen wrestling for logs, the winner of the tout being rewarded by the ability to lay on its back, juggling the log with its feet and roaring (Masson 125-127).

While these instances of “joyful activities” do not necessarily point to any point of cognitive abilities or consciousness, they point to a plausibility of the conclusion that there is more at work than merely an instinctual existence. From a survival standpoint there is no reasonable or direct explanation for the crows sliding on the Kremlin domes. The rule of parsimony sides with an enjoyment theory more than a theory saying that this band of crows was participating in an instinctual activity that would heighten their

survivability ratio: “The layperson... [and] most people who work closely with animals... take it as a matter of fact that animals have emotions” (Masson 3).

Countless anecdotal instances would support such a statement. Gorillas that mate for life have died by the side of their fallen mates instead of running for their own safety, thereby exhibiting what we would call grief, sorrow, and love. Elephants have been seen to risk their own lives to support and carry off a fallen and dying sibling (Masson 91-97). The existence of animal “emotions” thus seems to be a decent indicator of their consciousness, as “[*human*] emotions provide *us* with perhaps the most vivid of our conscious experiences” (Dawkins 141).

Additionally, it should not be that difficult for an individual to accept that animals can “think” as their brains are often greatly developed, many times resembling human physiology. Often, however, individuals create the view that animals are “stupid.” Anecdotal tales are told of “dumb” animals behaving in ways lower than the expectations of a human. Thus, animals must all be dumb. Burke himself utilizes such an example when he uses the example of a bird trying aimlessly to get out of a room through the ceiling when a window was open only a few feet away. Dawkins explains:

A stumbling block that many people have when they look at animals is that they see their behavior as being the opposite of clever and complex. In fact, they see animals as essentially stupid. They will use examples like a bird fighting its own reflection in a mirror and say that this shows that the bird is very unintelligent because it apparently never realizes that there is not a real rival there. Or they point to a dog turning round and round on

a carpet before it lies down and say that this, too, is stupid because the dog does not realize that the grass it is attempting to flatten is nonexistent.

Their implication is, of course, that humans could never behave in such mindless, unthinking ways. (21)

This stream of argumentation, however, seems to ignore the unthinking actions of human beings – the drinking while driving, the abandoning of the family for an internet relationship, the starting of wars for political gain, the owning of slaves, or the supporting of a dictatorial regime. These are not situations in which humans recognize the “obvious” and are thus prime material for anecdotes analogous to the bird and the window.

This now brings us back to our original refutation of the first of Burke’s clauses. If animals have the cognitive ability to be conscious, have memories, and assess their situations, and then utilize specific signs in specific contexts, then it seems erroneous to say that “Man is *the* symbol using animal” [italics added], as there are other symbol using animals.

Burke, however, attempts to include qualifications so as to save his clause from arguers such as myself. He does so by allowing the amendment of “symbol-making and symbol-misusing” to the first clause.

Burke does not do much to defend symbol-making’s place in the definition nor the implications of this amendment. However, in terms of the production of symbols, animals participate in such to varying degrees. Dolphins, for instance, have a complex system of clicks, whistles, and other sounds inaudible to the human ear. These sounds

have been noted to be taught to the young dolphins, usually during the first twenty months that the dolphin spends with its mother before being weaned (Evans 132). The vervet monkeys we spoke of earlier often give false or misguided warning calls when they are young, sounding calls that mean nothing or that signal the wrong action for the predator nearby. As they get older, they must learn the correct cries from the rest of the troop (Roberts 362). Chimps being studied have been shown to be able to report back to the group what an experimenter has shown them. If food was shown to a chimp, the rest of the group comes running into the cage after interacting with the original chimp. If a snake is shown to the chimp and then hidden in the open cage, the group will come into the cage after interacting with the original chimp, but will be on alert in the cage, hair standing on end (Davis 174-176). Other studies using monkeys have shown great capacity for primates to learn sign language, even to the point of phraseology. Examples such as “open food drink” were signed by a chimpanzee when a refrigerator was present, “listen dog” was signed when a dog barked, and “cold rock” was signed after handling an ice cube (Roberts 363-365).

While these examples are not instances in which the animals “made” the symbols per se, they prove the ability of the animals both to learn symbols and to pass them down to others in the group. This is enough to refute the exclusivity of this portion of the Burkean clause, for there is no grounding in the argument that humans invented language, but rather we have learned it and reshape it in different ways. As animal communication develops *naturally* as they exist in nature, so too does human communication have transcendent *natural development* that crosses culture. For instance,



crying, laughing, smiling, and other communicative acts are culturally and historically transcendent. The communication is then honed and manipulated by particular sects of humanity. Animals too reshape language and contrive it in their own ways, as shown before. For instance, crickets end up with different dialects in the way they communicate. New Jersey crickets have a regional accent compared to those of South Dakota, and given a chance, crickets will on average mate with those who have similar dialects (Davis 114-117). Additionally, for song birds, competition for mating and territory creates an “arms race” in certain scenarios for the development and learning of new songs (Owings 147).

The final portion of the clause is that of the symbol-misuse. There are several implications and ways that Burke extrapolates on this point. The first is that symbols can give us a false sense of reality and change our reactions simply because of their symbolic stronghold. Burke uses the example of an anthropologist who ate dumplings but had thought they were simply blubber and thus got sick, even though he liked dumplings (7). Animals too operate in this way. Animals mock each other, mimicking actions to change the behavior of others, and the other animals respond in kind, because the symbol is deliberately misleading.

Additionally, Burke goes on to say that substitution and condensation occur in our human use of symbols. This, however, assumes that animals do not use symbols, for if they do, then their symbols are merely encoded versions of a message, which is truly the form of a larger message. Burke explains the way it plays out in humans by using the example of calling someone Mr. Jones, thus “cutting many corners, as regards the

particularities of that particular person” (8). However, Owings goes so far as to say that animals operate in a manager and assessor relationship, in which the managers cut corners as needed to fit their end, which is capitulation by the assessors. The assessors then act in accordance with both the manager and other factors to make a decision of whether to obey (55-63). The animals are *performing*, or *doing*, in their communication (Austin 6). Additionally, if we conclude that animals use symbols consciously to convey meaning, then their symbols are inherently cutting corners as well, for there is an infinite regress in the particulars that the animals could utter. It is never possible to tell all the particularities of Mr. Jones, as mathematically one could continuously divide the particularities into further particularities and thus the description would never end. The symbolic nature of animal communication would fit just the same, as a directive to leave one’s territory could be described infinitely by further communication.

This brings us then to exactly the point. Burke’s first clause in his definition of Man is not exclusive, but at best is the beginning of a discussion on the degrees to which individual species of animals use, make, and misuse symbols. Perhaps the songbirds have a much more limited usage for symbolic communication compared to the vervet monkeys and their need for specific cries; perhaps the vervet monkeys are not as advanced in their language structure as humans are. This, however, does not make for a definition, but rather a point of comparison and analysis. Animals, like humans, have the capacity that is exhibited by some to communicate consciously and symbolically.

For many, though, this string of anecdotal evidence and piecemeal argumentation may be accepted but unappreciated. Many would wonder why we should even care about

animals and their symbolic communication capabilities. There are a couple reasons, however, that this work has importance and relevance in many realms of communication theory.

First, it lays the *groundwork* for further exploration. To go deeper into the subject, one must have the “conscious symbolic communication” gamut out of the way. This paper hopefully allows for that, at least on some level. This means that further work into the subject matter is possible, including a refutation of the rest of Burke’s clauses. Specifically, exploration into how animals *use the negative, are separated from their natural condition, engage in a spirit of hierarchy, and seek perfection* are all possible after this point (Burke 9-16).

Second, this study begins the process of opening up the more theoretical fields of communication to that of the animal world. The technical and biological aspects of animal communications open the floodgates for studies in the arts of persuasion, rhetoric, dialectic, and the sorts in regards to non-human species. Studies on how chimpanzees lie, dolphins comfort, or birds persuade are all given more theoretical backing for further studies by communication theorists. The rhetoricians, however, is not able to analyze the rhetoric within the life of an ape if it is not first understood that these animals consciously communicate symbolically. This thesis is a first step.

As a first step, though, the rationale for this study is not to say that upon reading and agreeing with these few pages that one can truly “analyze the rhetoric within the life of an ape” without problems. Unquestionably, the study of the languages of animals, in their various forms, is necessary to proceed.

This is not to say though that this work is only communicatively relevant as it pertains to future works. Communication theory relies on many underpinnings. Studies of these underpinnings thus implicate the larger schemes of communication theory. We often fool ourselves into thinking that we must use ancient terminology coined by the classics in order to truly study communication theory. On the contrary, the study of the various underpinnings is the study of a piece of the communicative puzzle. Whether this study takes on the guise of an analysis of what Aristotle meant by dialectic or analysis of the vervet monkeys' ability to ever be considered in the realm of dialectic, the study of communication is still inexorably linked to rhetoric. No one would discount Burke's writings on Man's ability to communicate as relevant to communication theory. It seems absurd then to discount a work on animals' ability to communicate as relevant.

Regarding current analysis of this issue, biologists undertake these endeavors at varying rates (Friend 1-4). The study of animal communication should have both those that are experts in animals and those that are experts in communication working together. There is a noticeable disparity in the number of communication theories and studies being undertaken by those in the "communication field" compared to those that are doing so in the animal field. Hopefully, works such as this are the first step.

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