

REVIEW ARTICLE

CAPTURING THE ANCIENT ANIMAL: HUMAN/ANIMAL STUDIES AND THE CLASSICS

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Abstract: This article reviews several books published since the turn of the millennium that explore the role and representation of animals in different areas of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Despite differences in focus and outlook, these books herald the arrival within classical studies of the questions, concepts and methods of human/animal studies as an emerging field of enquiry. This article takes their publication as an opportunity to take stock and to outline the relationship between these disciplines. I explore how current research on ancient animals resonates both in existing debates in classical scholarship and within the context of the larger interdisciplinary debate. I also suggest how this debate can point to productive avenues for further enquiry in classical studies. More specifically, I argue that the interdisciplinary debate sets an important agenda, which should be embraced more fully by classical studies. Classical scholarship on the role, function and perception of animals in different areas of ancient Greek and Roman life can provide important insights into one aspect of the heritage – Western conceptions of humanity and the place of the animal within it – which has not yet received the attention it deserves. I conclude that classical scholarship can make a significant contribution to the interdisciplinary debate, helping it deliver on its stated goal of examining and challenging Western concepts of self, as well as the ideologies of ‘the other’ underpinning them.

Keywords: anthropology, anthropocentrism, animals, ethnobiology, humanity, metamorphosis

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I. Introduction

Human/animal studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field spanning a broad spectrum of the ‘new humanities’ – the summary term for a number of subjects from the arts and sciences concerned with the study of man.¹ Several diverse disciplines contribute to the conversation, including biology, primatology, veterinary science, ethics, genetics, cognitive science, philosophy, history, literature and cultural studies.² The contributing disciplines with their different questions, methodologies and debates are brought together in a joint effort to examine the manifold and complex ways in which humans relate to animals. The field of human/animal studies also explores the ideas, motivations and assumptions shaping these relationships as well as their social, economic and ethical impacts.

In the wake of this wider interest in human/animal relations, classical studies has recently witnessed an upsurge in animal-related workshops, conferences and publications, including several monographs, edited volumes and articles. Although not all this research speaks explicitly to the larger, interdisciplinary debate, it does reflect an increased awareness in classical scholarship of the centrality of animals to numerous ancient-world texts and contexts.

Of course, the scholarly interest in ancient-world animals is not new. Non-human creatures have variously come into focus in research on the ancient world in the past.³ Yet traditionally this line of enquiry has not moved significantly beyond efforts to collect and assemble the information yielded by ancient sources about particular animal species.⁴ For almost a century, Otto Keller’s monumental two-volume work, *Die antike Tierwelt* from 1913 (reprinted 1963), was the sole comprehensive compendium of information on individual animal species in the ancient sources.⁵ The question of why we should care what the ancients knew about, say, the spotted hyena or the red octopus – not to mention why we might want to spend time and resources on such study rather than on other, apparently more weighty matters – remained largely unanswered.⁶

With the work of scholars such as Liliane Bodson and Richard Sorabji this picture started to change fundamentally.⁷ Their enquiries into the role of animals in certain areas of Greek thought and literature first highlighted the potential that enquiry into ancient animals had for our understanding of Greek culture and society more generally (see in more detail below). Most, if not all of the titles under review here have followed their lead and offer insights into ancient uses and conceptions of animals in different areas of life.⁸ Despite differences in scope and outlook, they are united in their efforts to make the ancient evidence speak to larger questions and problems within classical scholarship, to explore ancient animals from different perspectives and points of view, and to show links between the ancient material and the modern debate.

Animals come variously into focus in these books: as real creatures that interfered with human lives in several ways and that fulfilled various roles and functions in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds; as imaginary creatures featuring as literary motifs and/or complex symbols in all major genres of Graeco-Roman thought and literature; as objects of study and aids to knowledge-generation in science, religion and magic; and, above all, as an antipode to the humanity of man in a

¹ The ‘new humanities’: Gottschall (2008).

² Some foundational studies: Singer (1975); Berger (1980); Coetzee (1999); Wolfe (2003); Agamben (2004); Regan (2004); Steiner (2005); Calaro (2008); Derrida (2008).

³ See, for example, Geoffrey Lloyd on ancient science (Lloyd (1983) 7–57; (1991) 224–47) and various works of the so-called ‘Paris School’ around Jean-Pierre Vernant (see, for example, Detienne (1981a); (1981a); Vernant (1981)), as well as now outdated scholarship about animistic ideas in ancient Greek religion as discussed in Aston (2011) (with references). See also Dierauer (1977); (1998).

⁴ See, for example, the numerous entries on animals in the *RE*.

⁵ Keller (1963).

⁶ On the spotted hyena, *hyaena crocuta* (‘gefleckte Hyäne’), see Keller (1963) 1.152–57. For the red octopus, *octopus ruber*, see Keller (1963) 2.507–13, in particular 512.

⁷ For example, Bodson (1975); (1998); Sorabji (1993).

⁸ The potential of scholarly enquiry into ancient animals to generate insights into ancient and modern moral philosophy was first flagged by Sorabji (1993) (see in detail below).

conversation that extended from ancient philosophy into other genres of Greek and Roman thought and literature – a canvas onto which various modes of similarity and difference could be projected.

The appearance of broad synthetic works such as Kalof (2007), Newmyer (2010), Campbell (2014) and Kitchell (2014) reflects both the maturing of the field as well as its transition from a phase of material collection to one of interpretation. Their publication indicates that the stage of fact finding and research into the fundamentals of human/animal relations in the ancient world has produced enough information for the debate to move on and consider the larger implications of this data.

Productive avenues for further research then emerge, particularly in how the ancient material speaks to the question of the animal beyond the ancient philosophical debate – which is relatively well-researched and has dominated the discussion so far – and in more complex and divergent ways than previously thought.

II. The lives of ancient animals

The central place and function of animals in the cultures and societies of ancient Greece and Rome is at the core of the debate within classical studies. This line of research explores how ordinary Greeks and Romans encountered animals in everyday life and raises the question whether they related to animals in fundamentally different ways or shared our contemporary conceptions of and values towards non-human creatures.⁹

It has sometimes been argued that there is a fundamental disconnect between human and animal lives in the modern world. In his influential essay ‘Why look at animals?’, John Berger describes a deep rupture in the previously close relationship between humans and animals that emerged at the transition to modern industrialized society during the 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁰ The result, Berger argues, has been an increasing gap between man and beast in modern consumer society, a gap which accompanied (and perhaps even inspired or prompted) the efforts of man to define his own humanity in contrast to the animal.

A quick glance at the articles collected by Kalof (2007) and Campbell (2014) confirms how much the ancient world differed on this point. In antiquity, animals were an important part of everyday life. Both volumes illustrate just how central certain animals were to the lives of ordinary Greeks or Romans; as companions, means of transportation and livestock, domesticated animals lived in constant close proximity to humans, especially in the Greek and Roman countryside.¹¹ These animals were sacrificial victims, food and sources of fabric and other products.¹² Animals also provided status symbols for the elite and served as objects of scientific study.¹³ Various spectacles and competitions – sometimes involving exotic animals – provided popular forms of entertainment.¹⁴

The modern debate is certainly right to point out that, on the whole, human and animal lives were more closely bound in pre-modern societies. Yet, research into the kinds of ways in which human and animal lives intersected in the ancient world also suggests the need for a differentiated perspective when we evaluate the nature and level of the familiarity of humans and animals in the ancient world; much depended on the kind of animal species in question and whether we are looking at the Greek and Roman countryside or life in a major urban centre. In the former, domesticated animals (horses, oxen, sheep, goats and pigs) were an essential component of the agrarian economy, while in the latter contact with animals was largely restricted to them as foodstuffs, entertainment such as horseracing and companions (see below).

⁹ Lonsdale (1979); Dinzelbacher (2000); Dumont (2001).

¹⁰ Berger (1980) 3–28.

¹¹ Companions: Bodson (2000); Clutton-Brock (2007) on domestic animals. Livestock: Howe (2014a); Kron (2014a).

¹² Sacrificial victims: Ekroth (2014); Osborne (2016). Sources of food and other animal products: Howe

(2014a); McInerney (2014).

¹³ Status symbols, objects of study: Gordon (2007) 127–50.

¹⁴ Spectacles and competitions involving animals: see, for example, Hughes (2007) on hunting animals; Shelton (2007) on ‘beastly spectacles’; see also Bell and Willekes (2014); Östenberg (2014); Shelton (2014). On exotic animals, see also Bodson (1998).

Moreover, it would be mistaken to assume that the human appropriation of the animal for the sake of human self-definition is predominantly a symptom of modernity. Classical scholarship has shown that already in antiquity the proximity of humans and animals resulted in the desire to use animals in defining the human self. Timothy Howe, for example, suggests that in the ancient world animals were at the core of what he describes as an elaborate ‘value economics’ in which human status articulated itself in the kind of animals one could afford.¹⁵ The Homeric world serves as a case in point. Animal ownership helped distinguish the lowly trader from the rich, horse-owning aristocrat, and the status acquired in this way extended seamlessly from wealth to character. Greeks and Romans also sought to outdo their fellow citizens by acquiring (and devouring) ever more exotic animals, as Geoffrey Kron shows.¹⁶ And Michael MacKinnon illustrates that ancient hunting rituals provided various opportunities for the display of social status, for military training and as rite of passage – as well as a welcome source of meat beyond that afforded by blood sacrifice.¹⁷ These examples indicate that, in the ancient world as in the modern, animals served variously to articulate human status, class and even individuality.

Enquiry into the fundamentals of human/animal relations in the ancient world continues to yield important insights into how human and animal lives intersected in ancient Greece and Rome. It also reveals the often astonishing expertise the ancients had in many areas relating to animals, for example in the principles and practices of animal husbandry.¹⁸ Several avenues for further research emerge from this line of enquiry. How does the ‘value economics’ described by Howe affect the monetary economic value of animals and animal products in the ancient world? And what kind of considerations and values inform ancient attitudes towards particular animal species as manifest in various forms of interaction between man and beast?¹⁹

III. Animals in Greek and Roman thought and literature

The central place and function of animals in the ancient world transcends from the real into the imaginary. It explains the popularity of animal themes and imagery in Greek and Roman thought and literature, and informs their place in the ancient *imaginaire*. Animals feature widely, from the Homeric animal similes and the Aesopic fables to genres such as Greek tragedy and comedy as well as in philosophy and historiography.²⁰ At the same time, the literary tradition of the ancient world also illustrates an interest in critical enquiry into the nature and structures of the animal kingdom.²¹ This interest, which itself stood between the real and the imaginary, did not remain restricted to the philosophico-zoological literature but extends into authors such as Hesiod, Herodotus and Pliny.

The essays collected by Jeremy Bell and Michael Naas (2015), for example, illustrate just how deeply animal references are bound up with the larger themes of Plato’s oeuvre. Taken together, they show that Plato’s interest in animals goes well beyond core passages that are usually taken as exemplars of Plato’s attitude towards them: his doctrine of metempsychosis (the transmigration of the soul), as articulated most succinctly in the *Phaedo*, and his views on the irrationality of the animal, as explored both in the *Symposium* and the *Republic*.²²

Animal images, it emerges from this book, intersect much more widely with Plato’s central themes and questions. They are an important part of his deliberations on metaphysics, knowledge,

¹⁵ Howe (2014b).

¹⁶ See, for example, Kron (2014a); (2014b).

¹⁷ MacKinnon (2014). On the hunt, see also Barringer (2001).

¹⁸ Domestication, breeding, animal husbandry: Clutton-Brock (2007); Howe (2014a); Kron (2014a).

¹⁹ For the modern debate on animal communication, see, for example, Epsmark et al. (2000). On ancient attitudes to animals, see Bodson (1983).

²⁰ Animals in epic: Hawtree (2014). Aesopic animals: Lefkowitz (2014). Animals in tragedy: Heath (1999); Thumiger (2014a); Animals in comedy: Rothwell (2007); Pütz (2008); (2014).

²¹ Ancient zoological knowledge: Bodson (1984); (2014.)

²² Metempsychosis: see, for example, Pl. *Phd.* 81e–82b; *Resp.* 620d; *Ti.* 42c. The irrationality of animals: for example Pl. *Symp.* 207a–c; *Resp.* 440e–41b.

ethics (especially virtue) and aesthetics, as well as his political philosophy. It seems that it is particularly various dualities within human society which are at stake in Plato's representation of animals. As Bell and Naas point out, 'it is ... often through images of examples of animals, along with the analogical relationships that come along with these, that Plato is able to develop a hierarchy not just between humans and animals, but between rulers and ruled, men and women, adults and children, free men and slaves'.²³ This analogy between the human and animal realms is, for example, at the core of the imagery of horse-taming in Plato's political philosophy (discussed in Bell's own contribution) or in his use of pigs as complex symbols to articulate gender in the ancient Greek city (Marina McCoy's chapter).²⁴

Ultimately, this parallelism also informs Greek and Roman thought about the structures of the animal realm and attempts to situate the human animal within it. It is usually Aristotle who is credited as the 'father' of scientific enquiry into humans and animals. In *Historia Animalium* he sketches an elaborate classification of all living creatures; other works display an interest in modes of reproduction and forms of locomotion.²⁵ Yet, as Stephen Newmyer and Liliane Bodson point out, views on the capacities of animals or the natural balance between them can already be found in Hesiod and Herodotus respectively.²⁶ And what was to become a popular topos in the philosophical tradition – speculation about what separates humans from animals (see below) – features already in Hesiod.²⁷

Jeremy Lefkowitz shows that the Aesopic animal fables include a self-reflective dimension. They occasionally point 'to the folly of anthropomorphizing and the potentially disastrous results of confusing animal and human behaviour'.²⁸ Already early on in the literary tradition of the ancient world, it seems, animal imagery raised a number of ontological questions.

Nowhere are such questions more prevalent than in those contexts and narratives exploring the possibility of metamorphosis from human into animal form. This kind of boundary crossing invariably conveys the air of spectacle, yet in the end more serious problems are on show here. As Chiara Thumiger points out, metamorphosis served to 'engage seriously with Greek beliefs about man and animal, bringing out and amplifying the challenges metamorphosis poses as a fixed definition of "human"'.²⁹ The reverberations of this engagement are widespread and far-reaching. They can be felt in particular in the context of later Roman literature and the authors of the so-called Second Sophistic. Texts like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius' *Golden Ass* ask us to think about the humanity of man as a problem of mind and body. Metamorphosis, it seems, is at once the pinnacle of the parallelism of human and animal lives and an attempt at its ultimate dissolution.

Metamorphosis can thus help reveal what is at stake more widely in the literary substitution of human and animal lives. The comparative perspective is set up by two divergent moves: an effort to anthropomorphize animals and to animalize certain human traits. Individual authors and genres differ mainly in the emphasis they put on one or the other, or, indeed, in their efforts to combine both. While the Aesopic animal fables are deeply rooted in the idea of animals behaving like humans, tragedy – more often than not – depicts humans behaving like animals. It is in the contested space between the anthropomorphism of animals and the animal nature of humans that much of the literary evidence positions itself.

Yet at the same time, the human/animal relation can also be used to convey a sense of the non-human, the other, the wild. In her contribution on animal imagery in tragedy, Thumiger points to the multiple ways in which tragedy uses animals to represent the destructive aspects of nature.³⁰ For this reason, wild and threatening animals often feature in genres such as tragedy, epic or histo-

²³ Bell and Naas (2015) 2.

²⁴ Bell (2015); McCoy (2015).

²⁵ Locomotion: Arist. *De motu animalium*; Reproduction: Arist. *De generatione animalium*.

²⁶ Newmyer (2007) 153; Bodson (2014).

²⁷ Hes. *Op.* 274–80.

²⁸ Lefkowitz (2014) 13.

²⁹ Thumiger (2014b) 386. On metamorphosis, see also Forbes Irving (1990); Tornau (2008); Buxton (2009).

³⁰ Thumiger (2014a) 84–98.

riography. It comes as no surprise that the wonder literature of antiquity blurs the clear line between humans and animals. Strange creatures populate the margins of the known world in Herodotus, Pliny and other ethnographic writers, and it is there that the possibility of metamorphosis constitutes both an intellectual opportunity to explore things from the other side of the human/animal divide and an ontological threat.³¹

The fundamental otherness of animals is not confined to the social or cultural level but can affect the individual, too. To quote Thumiger again on tragedy, ‘I would ... attribute to animals the effect of expressing “otherness” within man, not only within society: otherness as the emotions, the instincts, or experiences that man perceives as escaping his or her control.’³² In the literary realm, the appearance and behaviour of animals also afford man the opportunity to recognize his or her own animal nature and otherness, and to consider his or her own humanity. In particular, physiognomy (which includes the use of the bodily features of animals to explain human behaviour), a popular feature of literary works from Herodotus to Aristotle and beyond, provides endless possibilities for human-animal comparison.³³ Animals do not just convey human characteristics, they also stand for concepts of disorder and wilderness, and represent the unpredictable and potentially destructive forces of nature.

It is important to pay close attention to the kinds of associations evoked in each context. Kenneth Rothwell (2007), for example, has shown that in contrast to the genres of tragedy, epic and historiography, in which animals frequently represent the destructive aspects of nature – including human nature – comedy presents them in altogether different ways. He argues that ‘animals were important not because they represented the forces of nature but because they made contributions to human culture’.³⁴ Social animals such as bees or birds constitute choruses. Again, the associations pertaining to different animal species – ultimately grounded in observations of real life – matter for the way in which these animals feature in Greek and Roman thought and literature.

Research into the representations of animals in Greek thought and literature contributes to our understanding of ancient attitudes towards animals. It also sheds light on the early proto-scientific interest in animals. What remains to be done now is to extend the enquiry to include representations of animals in the visual arts and the material evidence.³⁵ Animals are widely depicted on pots, in mosaics and in sculpture, as well as in paintings and in sculptural representations. This evidence provides insights into the animal in the Graeco-Roman *imaginaire* which is relevant beyond its existence in specialist studies to which it frequently remains confined.

IV. Religion and magic

Religion is situated at the intersection of the real and the imaginary. It is also an aspect of life which draws on an imagined other – the gods – to make claims about the nature of the human condition. To this end it draws on animals as a third category of beings, besides humanity and divinity, raising the question of what purpose animals serve in the relationship between gods and men.

Two large-scale studies explore the place of animals in the religions of the ancient world: Gilhus (2006) and Aston (2011). Despite significant differences between them, both studies come together in their interest in the animal body as a carrier of religious meaning.

Ingvild Saelid Gilhus’ book (2006) focuses on a key period in the history of religions: the transition between the traditional religions of Greece and Rome and early Christianity (first to fourth centuries AD). She starts from a broad survey of the various roles of animals in the historical,

³¹ Animals and wonder: Beagon (2014). Metamorphosis: Thumiger (2014b).

³² Thumiger (2014a) 91.

³³ On physiognomy, see, for example, Barton (1995) and, in particular, Swain (2007).

³⁴ Rothwell (2007) 2.

³⁵ Representation of animals in ‘art’: Morris (2007); Harden (2014); see also Richter (1930) on animals in sculpture.

intellectual and religious landscapes of the early Roman Empire. Later chapters focus in particular on the way Christianity took up and transformed existing views on the relationship between humans and animals, and put them at the core of a new religion that articulated the tripartite conception of god(s), humans and animals along different lines.

Gilhus points to several ways in which Christianity redefined traditional religious beliefs and practices – processes she presents as indicative of larger cultural shifts and social transformation. One key change brought about by Christianity was to shift the focus away from the animal body as a symbolic location of and offering to divinity towards the human body (of Christ) as the location of religious discourse. Gilhus goes on to show that, along with the decline in status as victims of traditional blood sacrifice, the religious and moral value of animals diminished too. In the Book of Genesis animals appear as a lower class of being: ‘None of the animals is Adam’s partner, and only man was made in the image of God.’³⁶

Gilhus’ work is an invaluable contribution to the illustration of how early Christianity reinterpreted various concepts of the traditional religions of Greece and Rome.³⁷ Ultimately, it is the connections between traditional Greek and Roman conceptions of the animal and the early Christian material that come into focus. Her discussion of the Greek material remains more underdeveloped, analysed mostly in the light of later developments and not sufficiently contextualized in its own respective cultural and historical contexts. As a result, there is a strong focus on sacrifice and a relative neglect of other religious practices pertaining to animals, such as divination and certain ‘magical’ rituals.

In contrast to Gilhus’ broad venture into the history of religions, Emma Aston’s study (2011) primarily approaches its subject matter thematically.³⁸ She points the way to how the role of animals in the religions of the ancient world can productively be studied without resorting to outdated concepts such as animism. She explores divine bodies featuring animal parts as a meaningful form of symbolic dimension complementing divine anthropomorphism. Aston does not deny ancient Greek religion’s strong preference for anthropomorphic representations of divinity; this affinity notwithstanding, she shows that Greek divinities like Pan and the river god Archeloo draw on the animal body as an alternative form of divine representation. Aston’s work shows that mixanthropic representations of divinity were widespread, with plenty of visual and literary evidence for study.

The books by Gilhus and Aston introduce the animal more firmly to recent scholarship on the religions of the ancient world.³⁹ They show different facets of how the ancients used animals as intermediaries in their efforts to communicate with the supernatural. As a result, both studies point towards a complex reading of Greek and Roman religion as relying on a triangular symbolic relationship between gods, humans and animals.

This tripartite relationship is not confined to the principles and practices of divine representation; it informs the traditional religions of the ancient world much more widely. Several chapters in Gordon Campbell’s handbook (2014) point to further contexts in which animals mattered in this way. In his contribution on divination, Peter Struck discusses the role of animals as portents in various forms of technical divination, helping humans to access the superior knowledge of the gods.⁴⁰ Richard Gordon and Daniel Ogden, in turn, illustrate that animal representations, parts and products also played an important role in ‘magical’ procedures, again enabling contact between the human and the divine realms.⁴¹ Here we find animals and animal parts as facilitators, if not agents, in the invocation of supernatural power.

³⁶ Gilhus (2006) 162.

³⁷ See also Gilhus (2014).

³⁸ See also Aston (2014).

³⁹ For an early, pioneering work in this area, see

Bodson (1975), which explores the role of particular animal species in the religions of the ancient world.

⁴⁰ Struck (2014).

⁴¹ Gordon (2010); Ogden (2014).

Gunnel Ekroth, finally, reminds us of the manifold ways in which oxen, sheep, goats, pigs and other animals were directly involved in how humans sought to relate to divinity through blood sacrifice.⁴² The focus on animals, Ekroth's contribution shows, offers a different take on Greek and Roman religion; rather than necessarily being a static ritual reaffirming social coherence, animal sacrifice appears to be a flexible series of ritual practices articulating a scale of values and ideas, depending on which animal was slaughtered, by whom and how.

Overall, research into ancient animals has extended our conception of Greek and Roman religion. While a comprehensive study of the manifold roles and functions of animals in the religions of the ancient world is still lacking, research on the place of animals in Graeco-Roman religion has already contributed to a better understanding of the kind of symbolic transactions underlying various, seemingly disparate religious beliefs and practices, including sacrifice, divination and magic.⁴³

V. The question of the animal in Graeco-Roman philosophy and beyond

Humanity, it seems, remain the constant point of reference in the way animals feature in the ancient evidence. Their multiple roles in Greek thought and literature, religion and magic, proved central to the human condition, ultimately raising the question of whether there is indeed a fundamental distinction between humans and animals. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given its metaphysical and ontological baggage, this question of the animal was explicitly posed by ancient authors. In particular, the ancient philosophers, from the Presocratics through to Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, and on to Plutarch and Porphyry, discuss whether there is an 'essential' difference between man and beast and, if so, whether this might have moral implications.

Ever since Sorabji's influential study, this evidence has been discussed in the contexts of ancient theories of the mind and Greek and Roman moral philosophy.⁴⁴ Sorabji points to the manifold/many ways the ancient philosophical positions anticipated current arguments of moral philosophy. He illustrates how widely and fundamentally the 'man-only topos' (μόνον τῶν ζῴων ἄνθρωπος) features throughout Greek and Roman literature, and highlights the variety of answers to the question of the animal suggested (and refuted) in Graeco-Roman philosophy, ranging from the obvious to the bizarre: man was said to differ from the animal in his ability to use language, in his use of geometry, medicine and religion, in his susceptibility to superstition and in the fact that he alone among animals has sex in all seasons.

Arguably the most powerful fundamental position in this debate, however, held that man is a 'rational animal' (ζῴον λογικόν), differing from all the other, non-rational beings (τὰ ἄλογα ζῴα) in that they have no (or only limited) access to reason. This position is articulated most succinctly by Aristotle, to whom Sorabji attributes a 'crisis' in Western moral philosophy: the moment when non-human creatures were denied reason, Sorabji argues, introduced an insurmountable *caesura* between humans and non-human creatures – a gulf with catastrophic consequences for animals, now excluded from ethical and moral considerations.⁴⁵ This conception of humanity and the animal was eventually taken over by the Stoics and ultimately absorbed into Christian metaphysics, through which it came to influence Western thought more widely.

Several scholars have set out to respond to Sorabji's study. Newmyer (2005), for example, both extends and corrects Sorabji's argument. Like Sorabji, he points to the links between the ancient and modern philosophical positions on this issue, but assigns Plutarch a more prominent role in the debate, highlighting the fact that during the Flavian period, Plutarch wrote several powerful

⁴² Ekroth (2014). On pregnant animals in Greek sacrificial practice, see Bremmer (2005).

⁴³ For important preliminary work, see *ThesCRA* 8 supplement to vols 1–4, 385–468, s.v. animaux et plantes dans la religion grecque. See now also the essays

collected in Johnston et al. (2016), which touch upon important aspects of the role of religion in Greek and Roman myth and religion.

⁴⁴ Sorabji (1993).

⁴⁵ Sorabji (1993) 7–16.

treatises defending animals' capacity to reason and their right to moral justice.⁴⁶ These include his two famous dialogues *On the Cleverness of Animals* (*De sollertia animalium*) and *Beasts are Rational* (*Bruta animalia ratione uti*), and the tongue-in-cheek *Grunter* (*Gryllus*). The latter features a pig (Odysseus' comrade bewitched by the sorceress Circe) making a rational argument against its transformation back into human form.⁴⁷ Again, the question of whether animals have the capacity to reason is what is at stake. Newmyer's study assigns Plutarch an important role in an alternative tradition which seeks to relativize the 'man-only' topos by offering a more differentiated (and sympathetic) understanding of humans and animals.

Catherine Osborne's study (2007) takes this point further. Osborne emphasizes that – apart from Plutarch's philosophically motivated vegetarianism – there is a sizeable body of ancient evidence of humans' considerate attitude towards animals, such as Plato's views of reincarnation or Aristotle's ideas on the souls of humans, animals and plants. Osborne does not merely describe and analyse. Her own line of argument evolves from an erudite investigation of the ancient evidence but also participates in recent debates on animal rights, ethics and moral philosophy.

Osborne's study also heralds another productive opening. Even though her discussion is centred upon the ancient philosophers, it is not confined to them. In extending her argument from the philosophical debate into the realm of Greek literature, she is able to show that the ancient philosophical positions extend well beyond the parameters of the philosophical debate. In her chapter 'On nature and providence: readings in Herodotus, Protagoras, and Democritus', Osborne shows that Herodotus' *Histories* reproduces views on providence and nature's ability to ensure a balance among species which we later find reformulated by philosophers.⁴⁸

The way in which Greek views on humans and animals extend from philosophy into other genres of Greek thought and literature is also a major theme of John Heath's book (2005), which focuses on an important component of the 'man-only' topos: the claim that humans can speak whereas animals cannot. He shows that already in Homeric epic the ability to speak is associated exclusively with human beings and traces the idea through a number of Classical authors and genres, including Plato and Greek tragedy.

Heath rightly underscores the political dimension of this claim: language lies at the heart of the institutions and ideologies of the ancient Greek city. As a core skill in the political arena, the art of rhetoric legitimated a definition of man as *zōon politikon*: a 'political animal' different from all other creatures. Accordingly, 'the silence of the beast provided the cultural backdrop against which the Greeks played out their particular visions of what makes a life worth living for humans'.⁴⁹ There is no cultural interest in the animal 'for its own sake'; to think about the nature of animals is inevitably to think about the nature of man.

Together with Sorabji's earlier study, Newmyer, Osborne and Heath reveal just how controversially the question of the animal was discussed in the ancient world. Moreover, they illustrate that the ancient philosophical positions did not exist in a cultural vacuum, but extended into other areas of Greek and Roman thought and literature. In ancient Greece, the question of the animal was discussed much more widely than previously thought.

This is particularly evident in the range of contributions collected in Alexandridis et al. (2008). The 25 chapters are based on papers presented at a conference and investigate how the line between man and beast was drawn and redrawn, investigated, challenged and occasionally crossed in a number of ancient texts and contexts, including those discussed above. Even though this edited volume lacks the coherence in argument, perspective and method of investigation typical of a monograph, it illustrates how the question of the animal resonates beyond the confines of the philosophical debate.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Newmyer (2005) 1–9.

⁴⁷ Plut. *Mor.* 985D–992E.

⁴⁸ Osborne (2007) 24–40.

⁴⁹ Heath (2005) 5. Of course, this 'silence' is itself an ideological construct, as animals make noises all the time.

These contributions confirm what is already suggested by Osborne and Heath: that philosophy is only one area among many in which the question of the animal was raised in the ancient world. Conceptions of the animal were also constructed implicitly or explicitly in ancient Greek language, law, historiography, ethnography, art, science and religion – to name just a few texts and contexts relevant here. Greek and Roman thought and literature, from Homer to the rich literature on the subject in Roman Greece, are full of references which set humanity in relation to animal-nature in an attempt to define both. The ancient world, it seems, considered the question of what separates humans from animals in a broad range of texts and contexts far beyond the philosophical.

Unfortunately, the larger interdisciplinary debate has so far not registered the current discussion of the animal in classical scholarship. As a result, the origins of the human interest in animals in the Western tradition are still located almost exclusively in ancient philosophical positions.

The reason for this is that continental European philosophy – traditionally a dominant and defining voice in the emerging field of human/animal studies – has identified Aristotle and the Stoics as the origins of Western conceptions of humans and animals. Other ways in which the question of the animal features in Greek thought and literature, and the way in which it influenced the handling and attitudes towards real animals in the ancient world, have not been taken into consideration.

It is now incumbent upon classical scholarship to join the interdisciplinary dialogue more firmly and directly. One way of doing this would be for classical scholars to make more of the enormous comparative material the ethnobiological literature provides.⁵⁰ Relating anthropological research on how animals feature in different human cultures to the Greek and Roman material would allow classical scholars to place the anthropology of the ancient world once again at the core of the interdisciplinary study of man.

Another way would be to bring to the attention of scholars working in disciplines outside of classical studies some of the ways in which the ancient material resonates with current debates on human/animal relations. Did the ancients already consider primates to be a special class of beings, closer to humans than other mammals? How do ancient stories about the astonishing intellectual capacities of certain animals speak to the recent interest in animal cognition, in particular in the capacity of certain animals to communicate by signs? To bring this evidence more firmly into the picture will ultimately make it impossible to ignore the historical dimension of the topic. It will also help to illustrate that the ancients had a much broader range of attitudes towards animals than previously thought – a range of attitudes that warrants a longer discussion than a short opening paragraph to an otherwise unhistorical account.

All areas of study discussed in this review can, at least in principle, contribute to the conversation; research into the real lives of animals illustrates the underlying assumptions, attitudes and values as evident in various practices involving animals. Scholarship on the representation of animals in Greek and Roman thought and literature can apply the same focus to literary and material contexts of representation, including those of religion and science. Taken together, these areas show different ways in which the line between man and beast was drawn and redrawn, questioned, challenged and, occasionally, broken down in the ancient world. If classical scholarship connects these strands, it can position itself at the heart of the interdisciplinary debate.

⁵⁰ For an introduction to ethnobiology, see Albuquerque and Nóbrega Alves (2016). For current trends in this field of study, see Ford (2001). The *Journal of Ethnobiology* provides a good entry point to past and present research in this area.

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