A Creative Tension:

Anthropocentrism and the Human-Nonhuman Boundary in Christian Europe, 1400-1700

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Abstract

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This dissertation seeks to understand the idea of a boundary between humans and nonhuman creatures in the early modern era. The idea of a boundary between people and nonpeople, while implicit among most sixteenth-century theologians, is still an important feature of early modern history. However, the boundary, while rhetorically very important and static, did not match with the reality of the boundary in theology and culture as fluid. Theologians argued at length that humanity, being made in the “image of God,” retained a fundamental difference from animals and other nonhuman creatures, in which that boundary could not be crossed. However, they also allowed for animals to possess positive traits and even moral and legal culpability. They also accepted creatures that challenged the boundary, whether monsters (including exotic creatures and misbirths) or humans who were not thought to possess all of the constituent characteristics of the “image of God,” such as those with mental or cognitive deficiencies. Thus, they struggled to reconcile the experiential reality of a fluid boundary with the theological conviction of an anthropocentric hierarchy of creation.

This dissertation will address the inherent tension between these two views and assess the ways in which theological and cultural figures helped to resolve the tension. Using early modern commentaries on Genesis, we will first examine the rhetorical insistence on a firm boundary articulated by figures both mainstream and heterodox. Then, we will examine the popular perception of a fluid boundary, in which nonhuman creatures could be addressed and understood...
moral in bestiaries, saints’ lives, and trial records. Finally, we will examine how proto-
scientific thinkers of the sixteenth century, like Conrad Gessner, Andreas Vesalius, Johann
Weyer, and Ambroise Paré, actively challenged existing authorities and helped to resolve the
tension to a state in which humans and nonhuman creatures were different, yet both existed
within the broader sphere of nature. By the end of the sixteenth century, violations of the
boundary between people and non-people come to be rejected more for their natural than
theological implications.
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Wir sind Bettler, hoc est verum. Soli Deo Gloria.
Introduction

In 1692, in Swedish Livonia (in what is now known as Estonia), a man in the town of Jurgensberg was charged with a crime. Being held responsible as a witness in a robbery, he was summoned to appear before the town court and to answer questions. Upon arriving, however, he made a bold claim: the reason he was in the courtroom was not because of the case before the court, but for his other crimes, for Thiess of Kaltenbrun claimed to be a werewolf. On numerous occasions, he said, he had taken lupine form to do battle with the forces of the Devil and to defend the people of God and protect the harvest. Thiess claimed that despite these transformations, he was in fact a Christian werewolf and “God’s hound.”¹ The court’s response threaded the needle between acknowledging the ferocity of his unique claims without giving credence to it. Their questioning pried at the details of his account, looking both for inconsistencies and signs that undermined his claims of religious fervor. Ultimately, the result was his flogging and banishment for trying to turn people away from Christianity.²

This case illustrates many important details about Christian views concerning the boundaries between humanity and other species and beings in early modernity. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the traditional response to notions of boundary violations between species would have been with reference to the created order and God’s sovereignty. Because humanity was created in a special place by God, boundary violations were an affront to that order and to God’s power. Theoretically, they were possible within creation if they originated from God, but such violations could not arise outside of God’s sovereignty. With reference to lycanthropy, for instance, the notion that people might be able to transform into wolves without

² Ibid., 13-32.
involvement of the power of God served as an affront to God’s sovereignty and unique claim to
creative power over matter. Yet by the end of the sixteenth century and certainly by the
seventeenth century, the notion of lycanthropy was rejected not because of a challenge to
boundaries but rather because of the very notion of what could actually happen. Violations of the
boundary between people and non-people were rejected not because of their affront to the
theological order, but because of their affront to nature. Boundary violations of this kind did not
occur simply because they were not possible and did not happen, not because they posed an
affront to God. Thus, Thiess of Kaltenbrun’s supposed lycanthropy was impossible not because
it challenged God’s creative power, but because within the natural world, it was ludicrous, even
if his account spoke to other crimes.

This shift in early modern thought exemplifies the overall trajectory of early modern
views on the natural world. By the end of the seventeenth century, it would be relatively unusual
to claim that people could turn into animals, or that people could exist in states that straddled the
barrier between species. On the one hand, this shift in early modern thought is notable because it
clearly exemplifies the dramatic nature of evolving attitudes toward the natural world and how
scholars moved away from theological explanations toward natural explanations for natural
phenomena. At the same time, this shift is complicated, in part because the eventual answer to
questions of boundary violations (for instance, the question of whether lycanthropy is possible) is
fundamentally the same as it was before. Boundary violations in both cases are rejected, yet the
rationale used to reach that conclusion changes.

This dissertation examines early modern theological and intellectual perspectives on the
boundary between people and non-people. The idea of a boundary between people and non-
people is implicit rather than explicit among sixteenth-century theologians, but it still has a clear
presence and is an animating feature of early modern natural history. For this dissertation, non-
people includes both animals and creatures not considered animals but clearly viewed as
inhabiting physical space. This includes non-Adamic creation, monsters, and monstrous human
hybrids. While much scholarship focuses on a boundary between people and animals, inclusion
of beings not strictly considered animals is important to this project. Among early modern
theologians, views on a boundary vacillated between two primary perspectives held in tension.
On the one hand, theologians and scholars argued for the presence of a strict boundary between
humans and animals, affirming the unique order of creation in which humans existed as the
pinnacle of God’s creation. In this order, animals existed with positive traits and attested to
God’s glory but did not have the same elevated status as humans. Because humans were made in
the image of God, they retained a unique status before God. The crux of the “image of God” as
the human capacity for reason served to elevate human capability, while the lack of it served to
diminish and denigrate animals. For instance, the idea of bestial behavior not only was frowned
upon, but also carried moral connotations for humans and animals alike. Despite valuing
animals, comparisons to animal behavior were meant to obviously denigrate. In short, humanity
was simply built differently.

At the same time, early modern theologians were not only aware of, but also participated
in a culture which fostered notions of a greater fluidity between species and ways of being.
Premodern European culture allowed for a great diversity of spiritual creatures, with regular
accounts of fairies, dwarves, and other creatures. While ecclesiastical authorities expressed
discomfort with such accounts, a wholesale rejection of their reality required an explanation of

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3 In the beginning of his Small Catechism, for instance, Martin Luther notes the need for more religious instruction
among the common people, likening a lack of knowledge of fundamentals of the Christian faith to living “as if they
were pigs and irrational beasts.” Martin Luther, “Small Catechism,” in The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the
the experiences discussed by early modern figures without dampening religious fervor. Moreover, the notion of a fluid division between people and other creatures was also not unheard of, as accounts of witches taking the form of cats as demonic familiars or of individuals transforming into wolves permeated early modern culture. Theologians and scholars continually struggled to respond to accounts of premodern spiritual creatures in a way that would adequately explain the transgression of the boundary without also suppressing deeply held aspects and enthusiasm of popular culture. Moreover, even the most devout theologians accepted to some degree overlap between boundaries, as they accepted the reality of boundary violations through monstrous creatures and through instances of animal cognition. Yet the shape of the response to these issues evolved and changed over time, particularly in the sixteenth century with the rise of humanism and empiricism. ⁴

At the heart of the issue is this fundamental tension between affirmation of a strict hierarchy and boundary between species and the attempt to satisfactorily explain and understand potential transgressions of the boundary. Despite a firm rhetorical insistence among both Protestant and Catholic theologians of the strictness of the boundary, those same theologians also accepted, to varying degrees, perceived transgressions of the boundary, as well the ways in which their own attitudes allowed themselves to treat some animals in ways not completely aligned with the boundary. This means that violations of the boundary go beyond the idea that people could turn into animals or that creatures not accounted for in Genesis could exist; it also means human treatment of animals as exhibiting some form of moral culpability or responsibility.

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for their actions. There is less discomfort with this incongruity and less of a desire to address it to break the tension, but the overall picture of a firm boundary coexisting with these transgressions could be described, for lack of a better word, as exhibiting a “muzziness.”

Thus, the goal of this dissertation will be to examine the idea of a boundary between humans and non-humans in early modern thought. I will seek to articulate the nature of the boundary in Christian thought, demonstrate the unease with the idea of a fluid boundary, and will discuss the factors that led to the resolution of the tension in Christian thought and early modern culture. We will assess the rise of proto-naturalism and empiricism in the sixteenth century as fundamental to the resolution of the tension. This involves the rise of perspectives, like those of Conrad Gessner, Andreas Vesalius, Johann Weyer, and Ambroise Paré, that did not reflexively agree with ancient authorities surrounding the boundary, but actively diverged from and challenged existing authorities. We will see how the gap between rhetoric and reality of the boundary loomed in the minds of early modern thinkers until the emergence of this proto-naturalism. What broke the “muzziness” was the emergence of a proto-naturalist, proto-empiricist approach to humans and non-humans alike.

Yet we will also explore the ways in which new and evolving views did not immediately result in dramatically different results. Even when the paradigm transformed, the proto-naturalist often produced a result that, despite the new methodology, was functionally the same as before. For instance, while Ambroise Paré challenged the reasons and interpretation of monstrous births, he did not challenge the existence of such misbirths. Yet the fact that the results were the same should not obscure the drastically new method utilized and its significance for fundamentally resolving the inherent tension for Christian theologians and scholars before the sixteenth century.

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For instance, the theological response to lycanthropy remains ultimately the same in the fifteenth century and the seventeenth century- Christians reject the notion that a person can transform into a wolf. But the explanation in the fifteenth century- that people could not transform into animals because it represented an affront to God’s creative power- dramatically differed from that in 1700- that people could not transform into animals because it was not physically possible.6 Despite the similar end result, the approach shifts from one steeped in theological assumptions about the nature of the boundary to one that presupposes a naturalist vision of the world. In short, the impact of the rise of humanism is such that even when results seemed similar, the overall landscape had shifted considerably.

However, the gap between rhetoric and reality of the boundary between human and non-human illuminates this fundamental tension that could only be resolved by the emergence of proto-naturalism, especially from Reformed circles. End results might have seemed the same even with new methodologies; however, this dissertation is ultimately not about those end results, but about the period of transition in which theologians and scholars actively grappled with somewhat incoherent views to try to reach a place of coherence. These theologians, scientists, and physicians broadly held both the importance of received authority and the importance of direct observation in tandem, but eventually prioritized both direct observation and natural explanations over supernatural explanations where possible. The result of the emergence of proto-naturalism is the clarification of the boundary, as well as the divestment of the boundary of much of its power. The boundary both defined differences between species and cast a light on the nature of boundary violations. But the rise of proto-naturalism divested the

6 For more on the rise of *maleficium* as a category of crime incorporating lycanthropy, please see Rolf Schulte, *Man as Witch: Male Witches in Central Europe*, transl. by Linda Froome-Döring (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 31-35.
boundary of much of its metaphysical power by relocating humanity’s significance into the same realm as other creatures, even when it remained in an anthropocentric structure.

**Historiography**

The theme of this dissertation has become increasingly relevant in contemporary society and scholarship alike. The growth of scientific knowledge about animal empathy and cognition has continued to challenge preconceived beliefs and ideas about the nature of the difference between humans and animals. Recent scientific advances have proven key elements of animal cognition go beyond simple computations to more complex emotions, including the presence of empathy and more complex methods of communication. For instance, recent studies among pet owners have used communication boards with buttons to facilitate pet communication with owners. Pet ownership is increasingly high in the West, with pets outnumbering children in numerous large American cities, including San Francisco and Seattle. In San Francisco, for instance, there are estimated populations of 150,000 pets and around 115,000 children. The increasing popularity of pets has been accompanied by a popular perception of pets as analogous to children, and animals are more consistently depicted in popular culture as expressing human sentiments and emotions. The simultaneous growth of knowledge about animal cognition and humanlike attitudes toward animals has raised questions about how novel such treatment is,

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8 One notable example is Bunny the Dog, whose TikTok channel has garnered millions of views. In a study by the University of California, San Diego, a dog named Bunny has been trained to use buttons to communicate with her owners. She uses over 20 buttons to communicate with her owner from topics as simple as desiring food or a walk to more complex emotions such as fear for her owner’s safety, questions about a stranger, or of emotional connection with her owner. See “What About Bunny,” TikTok, [https://www.tiktok.com/@whataboutbunny?lang=en](https://www.tiktok.com/@whataboutbunny?lang=en). See also Emma Malden, “The ‘Talking Dog’ of TikTok,” *New York Times*, updated June 11, 2021. [https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/27/style/bunny-the-dog-animal-communication.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/27/style/bunny-the-dog-animal-communication.html)
particularly when examples of the importance of animals for premodern people become apparent.

These developments have prompted the rise in scholarship of the field of critical animal studies. Deeper consideration of the place of humans in relation to animals has served to undermine for many scholars the unique position of humans over animals in the world. Peter Singer notably addresses the ethics of eating animals slaughtered in factory farms, and stood at the vanguard of sentientism and other ethics approaches that place humans as existing in the same state of existence as animals. Similarly, Jacques Derrida’s seminal work *The Animal That Therefore I Am* began the process of untangling human feelings of superiority over animals by deconstructing and centering the interactions between people and animals. Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet* continued this trajectory of thought by exploring the idea of companion species and the interactions between humans and animals. Each of these thinkers, and the countless others inspired by them, challenge the notion of anthropocentrism inherent in much of Western scholarship in the twentieth century.

This dissertation is thus set against a backdrop of these developments in critical animal theory. However, the division between people and animals is only a part of the overall issue. Transgressions of the boundary in early modern thought did not just involve animals, but also extended to creatures and states of being that challenged the notion of human existence as static, or of existence as binary between people and animals. The rise of critical monster studies over

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10 Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* was groundbreaking in 1975 in its presentation not only of speciesism, but of equal consideration of animals in moral decisions. It has been updated five times since that initial publication. He has continued to elaborate on this theme with urgency throughout his career, with the most recent iteration titled *Animal Liberation Now* released in 2023. See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975); Peter Singer, “Speciesism and Moral Status, *Metaphilosophy* 40.3/4 (July 2009): 567-581.


the last two decades especially has illuminated the ways in which societies, religions, and cultures address and define the Other as outside the realm of human existence. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s “Seven Theses” critically defines the ways in which monsters stand in for and help to identify societal fears and anxieties, particularly around the crossing of boundaries. Other scholars, such as Asa Mittman and Timothy Beal, illuminate the ways in which monsters point to cosmogony as central, with monsters identifying the central order of the world as divinely constructed, yet also defying the divine order through violations of the order. Monsters are not merely socially constructed, but they represent both the experiences of societies and their religious, political, and cultural responses to them.¹³

Before discussing the landscape of this discussion further, it is useful to clarify a few points about terminology used in this dissertation. The idea of a boundary has more commonly been used in critical animal studies to indicate and complicate a divide specifically between people and animals. Meanwhile, critical monster studies has discussed implicitly the boundaries that separate humans from monsters in popular thought and has identified the importance of boundaries to society. For early modern thought, however, theologians grappled with animals and monstrous ways of being in ways that are complex and interconnected. The phenomenon of monstrous births and misbirths, for instance, posed a challenge, as these were often claimed to be babies born with severe malformations or animal characteristics, and thus did not neatly classify as human or animal.¹⁴ Likewise, premodern European culture generally accepted the existence of

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creatures not accounted for in the creation accounts of Scripture, including fairies, sprites, nymphs, and other creatures sometimes described as being a part of non-Adamic creation. The eccentric theologian and chemist Paracelsus wrote extensively about such creatures, accepting their existence, but posing numerous questions to the created order in the process. Such creatures could conceivably be viewed as monsters or as animals, and in either case would pose some sort of lessons for humans.\footnote{Paracelsus, “A Book on Nymphs, Sylphs, Pygmies, and Salamanders, and on the Other Spirits,” in \textit{Paracelsus: Four Treatises}, ed. with a preface, by Henry Sigerist; transl, C. Lilian Temkin, George Rosen, Gregory Zilboorg, and Henry Sigerist (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).}

Thus, this dissertation will discuss the notion of the boundary as encompassing both animals and monsters. When I write about a conceptual boundary, that boundary should be understood to be one between human beings, including humanity as created by God, and nonhuman beings, comprising animals, monsters, and human beings who challenge or complicate the notions of what it means to be defined as human. “Animal” in this context should be read to refer to specific biological creatures distinct from humans and accounted for in the creation narratives in Genesis. “Monster,” however, indicates those creatures which sixteenth century figures believed existed in the created order, either as foreign and exotic (being envisioned as coming from distant lands outside of Europe) or as existing in premodern Christian culture. In both cases, monsters are specifically understood as being distinct from animals because they have such unique features or deformities that they are rejected as being consciously part of God’s creation. Rather, they exist in part as interpretive figures, specifically meant to be understood as a guide or omen. The word “monster” itself comes from the Latin \textit{monstrare}, meaning to show or demonstrate. While medieval and early modern Christians moralized animals and read them regarding the moral lessons they provided for people, monsters existed
solely as conveying divine truth or messages to humanity. In both cases, the creatures exist for
the benefit of humanity, but animals exist as both moral message and responsibility, whereas
monsters simply exist to provide omens or portent from God. And both categories should be
read as essential parts of the boundary; not as different boundaries between human and animal or
human and monster, but as a broader, fluid boundary or continuum between human and
nonhuman creatures.

This notion of a broader boundary between human and nonhuman is one that is more
fitting and applicable for understanding the theologians and scholars of early modernity, who
would have included exotic creatures, monsters, and animals alike as being distinct and separate
from humans. While early modern figures would not have spoken explicitly about any such
boundary, they would have identified the key elements of a boundary in practical terms; that is,
early modern theologians clearly made distinctions between the creation of humanity and other
types of creatures, including animals, monsters, and separated intelligences like angels. Among
both critical animal theorists and scholars of early modernity, the ways in which
anthropocentrism was crucial to the created order is highly important. Keith Thomas is especially
important in this respect, providing an important study on the growth of that anthropocentrism in
England. The anthropocentric worldview held that humanity was superior to animals and unique
from animals, with animals being created specifically for the use of humanity; however, the rise
of naturalism undermined this ideal and encouraged the rise of fields like botany and zoology, as

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well as the ownership of pets and a greater sense of cruelty to animals as unethical.\textsuperscript{18} Scholarship about early modern theology can contribute to this growing discussion of anthropocentrism by identifying the ontological distinctions that Christians used to separate themselves from animals, even in the face of biological similarities. While theologians have explored the meaning of the “image of God,” relatively less historical scholarship centers this idea among early modern thinkers, with more scholarship focusing on contemporary trends and discussions, especially of transhumanism.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, even the scholarship that discusses contributions to animal studies in early modernity tends to focus on the emergence of humanism as separate from the overall cultural and theological development of the era. Discussions of the role of scientific development focus on the figures as proto-scientific thinkers, but largely ignores or underplays the import of these developments on the theological landscape.

Previous work on the notion of a boundary thus responds to potential transgressions in very specific terms, but lacks the sort of comprehensive treatment or conception of the boundary. A few key scholars discuss the theoretical issues inherent in the idea of a boundary. Caroline Bynum’s work on hybridity, metamorphosis, and identity is crucial for the field in discussing medieval conceptions of transformation and the very notion of the hybrid creature as a distinct entity. While her work focuses on firmly medieval examples like Marie de France and Gerald of Wales, it still presents a broader picture of human identity as in flux and consisting of “diverse essences and substances.”\textsuperscript{20} However, most scholars are not so comprehensive or systemic in


their treatment, focusing on specific examples. Susan Crane’s *Animal Encounters* is grounded in medieval notions of interactions between humans and animals, examining how those encounters result in the production and evolution of culture, with cross-species relationships informing and contributing to a broader overall dynamic of cooperation with animals that avoided diametrical opposition.\(^{21}\) Meanwhile, the body of literature on monstrous births and misbirths in early modern Europe is replete with examples of humans born with deformities, yet interpreted by theologians and scholars as signs or portents of God’s disapprobation or judgment, mattering less as natural organisms. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park’s *Wonders and the Order of Nature* examines the shift from teleological views of monsters to one that examines emotional responses, and grapples with the importance of these misbirths for theological and cultural understandings of figures that blur boundaries. Meanwhile, Philip Soergel and R. Po-Chia Hsia discuss the importance of miracles and marvels in early modern culture as theological signs, cultural spectacle, and political propaganda.\(^{22}\)

Meanwhile, the literature on how supernatural beings reinforce and challenge the boundary between human and nonhuman similarly aims to present a full picture of how early modern theologians and scholars understood the very notion of a boundary. Euan Cameron’s work on the history of late medieval and early modern superstition literature presents a picture of late medieval criticisms and Protestant reformers against magic and other unorthodox Christian beliefs and practices. Cameron’s work highlights the complicated responses of early modern

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theologians to elements of popular belief and culture that contradicted orthodox Christian belief, with theologians charting out responses that pushed back against perceived heretical practices without tamping down on Christian enthusiasm. Cameron presents a picture of a theological response that accounts not only for orthodox Christian doctrine, but also intersects with the remnants of a premodern European culture which informs the fervor of local belief and practice. However, Cameron presents a much firmer depiction of the ecclesiastical response to unorthodox Christian cosmologies, with theologians charting out a stronger vision of the boundary between humanity and other species or creatures, including celestial intelligences. Cameron lays out the complicated relationship between theological authorities and popular culture.23

Several other scholars discuss the treatment of potential boundary violations through the phenomenon of lycanthropy and shapeshifting. Charlotte van Otten notably explores the wide history of sources on human experiences of lycanthropy, describing how experiences of lycanthropy stood in for a variety of other issues, including criminality, violence, and social and sexual deviance.24 Rolf Schulte, Lara Apps, and Andrew Gow, meanwhile, explore the question of lycanthropy from the perspective of witchcraft studies, discussing how the charge of lycanthropy becomes amalgamated in the sixteenth century into broader charges of maleficium and sorcery, making up a significant portion of the overall body of those charged as witches. Again, while they argue that the criminal treatment of lycanthropy and witchcraft often stood in for other forms of deviant behavior, they also point to the potential violation represented by lycanthropy as its own problem, representing an affront to God’s unique claim to creative power.

23 Euan Cameron, Enchanted Europe; See also Euan Cameron, “Angels, Demons, and Everything in Between: Spiritual Beings in Early Modern Europe.”
Carlo Ginzburg’s seminal work explores and assesses the case of Thiess of Kaltenbrun in comparison with the *benandanti* of northern Italy, comparing the nocturnal journeys discussed among the *benandanti* with the journeys into hell related by Thiess of Kaltenbrun. Willem de Blecourt’s work, however, approaches the issue with an emphasis of the “Animal Turn” described among critical animal theorists, including through reexamination of Thiess of Kaltenbrun and the Livonian werewolves. Blecourt discusses the development of lycanthropic literature in early modern Europe, including Henri Boguet and Pierre de Lancre, who examined werewolves as bloodthirsty criminals, especially in cases such as that of the German werewolf Peter Stubbe. Blecourt suggests a tenuous link between Thiess and the cases of werewolves in Western Europe, critiquing the notion of shamanistic werewolves and calling for more complex, nuanced understandings of werewolves. Among all of these works persists an implicit attitude that I seek to highlight: that accounts of lycanthropy and other boundary violations were taken seriously by early modern figures, yet at the same time they were not always taken literally. In other words, theologians rejected the reality of lycanthropy, yet sought to respond to the numerous accounts of it without wholly discounting the experience.

The other significant backdrop for this dissertation that informs my treatment of this issue includes discussions of folklore and popular religion. Raoul Manselli’s work on popular religion in medieval Europe critiques the construct of elite and popular culture, arguing for a more distinct view of folklore as its own distinct body of work. Manselli argues that to study official

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and popular religion as strictly separate entities is a mistake, but that it is important to acknowledge the nuanced, complicated ways in which divisions between clergy and non-clergy emerged. Manselli also argues that the interplay between high culture and popular culture demonstrates how they influenced each other, and how the Christianization of Europe in elite, learned culture influenced popular culture. Manselli complicates the interplay between elite and popular culture, yet reinforces the division between the two.  

Similarly, J.C. Schmitt embraces this more pronounced view of a difference between elite culture and folklore. This position has been roundly critiqued, with the notion of folklore falling out of favor amongst most scholars; nevertheless, the notion of a broader popular culture accessible and comprehensible beyond the learned elite served as an important influence. The full picture of a popular religion distinct from, yet intersecting with, institutional religion is one that has been fleshed out in some ways through exploration of everything from the pervasive nature and shift in understanding magic and superstition to the elevation of local saints to belief in the Devil and witchcraft. Yet again, Keith Thomas’s shadow looms large over the field. In his *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Thomas discusses the attitudes and beliefs regarding magic as integral to understanding how premodern European culture, including from pagan and other non-Christian groups, encountered Christianity. His discussion frames how adherents of the medieval Church retained

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belief in a magically infused world and a church that was a “magical agency, no less than a devotional one.” And again, Cameron is useful in framing the discussion in the critique of and response to Christian culture in Europe. The debate of the field between a strict divide between popular and elite belief and a more united, fluid boundary between the two is both operative and formative for this dissertation, with the interplay between the perspectives itself important to illustrating the complexity of theological responses to the boundary. For my part, it is important to acknowledge that both perspectives are valid depending on the particular issue being addressed, as we see a theoretically strict boundary in some cases (as with spiritual beings) and greater fluidity in others. We can acknowledge how the debate affirms a strict division, yet at the same time allows for periodic violations and transgressions of the boundary in popular experience.

It is against this overall backdrop that I make this intervention. While the idea of a boundary has been addressed in piecemeal fashion among historians (and in more substantive fashion among critical theorists), the gap in early modern scholarship is served well by a coherent examination of how early modern Christianity (especially early modern Lutherans and Reformed Christians) addressed the conflict between humanity as made in the image of God and the related experiences and observations of transgressions of that boundary. The resulting study is thus wide-ranging, spanning early modern natural history, proto-zoology, medicine, monster studies, animal studies, theology, and demonology. However, the study is also focused on this specific tension between a strict view of the power dynamics between humanity and other species, and a sense of humanity’s overall place within the purview of creation. My intervention treats the variety of boundary transgressions as sharing common characteristics, allowing

34 See fns 5, 18.
comprehensive study and seeing them as existing in a continuum. All of the categories of transgression treat the notion of humanity as made in the “image of God.” But they also struggle to account for the reciprocal transgression of the boundary, in which humans fall short of the expectations of the image of God, and in which non-human creatures demonstrate human capacity that challenges notions of animal cognition and morality as limited. On a deeper note, I hope to challenge the reader to consider questions of our human responsibility to the “Other.” Challenges to a boundary of separation prompt greater consideration not only of what counts as normative to the human experience, but also of the process by which we address challenges in modernity. As we continue to learn more about animal cognition, study of the boundary and historical understandings of humanity’s relationship with the rest of the world, study of the boundary should help the reader to consider humanity’s relationship with animals and other creatures which challenge our understanding of the boundary.

Outline

This dissertation consists of three sections: foundations, exegesis, and science and culture. The first section, consisting of the first chapter, discusses the foundations of the human-nonhuman boundary in early modern thought, specifically through the long trajectory of Augustine’s commentary on Genesis, which proves formative for how Lutheran and Reformed theologians understand the created order. I also explore how both Greco-Roman and Jewish thought contribute to the overall landscape in which Christian theologians like Augustine navigated and constructed their own views of the boundary. The second section, consisting of chapters 2 and 3, discusses how Lutheran and Reformed theologians helped both to construct the boundary and to navigate the tension formed by its presence, with even the most unorthodox thinkers accepting the strictness of the boundary (at least in theory). Protestant commentaries on
Genesis offer clear instances of engagement with human creation, the meaning of the “image of God,” and the impact of the Fall into sin on humanity and the broader realm of creation. The final section, consisting of the fourth and fifth chapters, examines the broader understanding of the boundary throughout popular and learned culture. I describe the developments in early modern culture and scholarship that illustrate the permeability of the boundary, the factors that led to the rise of proto-naturalism, and the resolution of the tension in the boundary through the emergence of a more coherent vision of the boundary.

The first section is composed solely of the first chapter on theological foundations for the early modern view of the boundary; that is, it discusses how the foundational texts and figures in ancient Christianity form the framework in which the boundary comes to be. In this chapter, I discuss those writings and the body of works which contribute to the overall framework of the early modern approach to the boundary, including the distinction between humans and animals and the interaction between humans and demons. The key figure for this purpose is Augustine of Hippo (354-430), whose understanding of Scripture and navigation of the ancient landscape is critical to understanding the overall view of early modern theological responses to the boundary. Augustine responds to a number of ancient viewpoints, including Gnostics, Greco-Roman culture, and Judaism. This chapter will explore Augustine’s interpretation and response to the boundary through his writings on the book of Genesis. The question of how to understand and respond to the creation narratives of Genesis preoccupied Augustine throughout much of his life, with his first major foray into the topic written in 388 CE, and his latest thoughts coming in 415 CE.  

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exists hierarchically and anthropocentrically; however, Augustine’s viewpoint also encompasses both animal and other non-human created being. His viewpoint reflects a hierarchy that is echoed both in his views of Scripture and his engagement with Greco-Roman culture, with spiritual beings taking priority over non-spiritual beings, and sentient beings taking priority over non-sentient beings. At the same time, Augustine affirms that animals possess something like intellectual capacity, while humans who act on their instincts betray the image of God through animalistic behavior. Augustine allows for some flexibility in responding to Greco-Roman culture, with his Trinitarian theology framing his response and promoting a view in which popular, non-Christian culture is not immediately discarded, but is utilized to the extent that it can avoid opposing Christian doctrine. This viewpoint sets the stage both for Christian embrace of a strict boundary and case-by-case consideration of violations of the boundary.36

The second chapter begins the section of the dissertation dedicated to early modern exegetical thought; that is, this section of the dissertation will trace how theologians of all stripes accepted, formed, and responded to the notion of a strict boundary between humans and nonhuman creatures. Genesis held enormous significance for Reformation-era theologians who sought to chart how humans fit in the natural world, and the relationship and tension between humanity’s creation in the “image of God” and the corrupting power of sin. This chapter examines Reformed and evangelical views of the meaning of the “image of God,” how it distinguishes humanity from animals, and the impact of sin and the Fall on humanity. This chapter discusses the educational and theological context which forms much of the early modern

36 Most of these developments come in Augustine’s response to the state of the world after the fall of Rome, in which he presents a discussion of the relations between the “Earthly City” and the “City of God.” Augustine discusses how the creation of humanity and the world (and the different species and creatures) functions regarding the boundary. Augustine of Hippo, The City of God against the Pagans, ed. and trans. By R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
Protestant view of the created world by specifically focusing on the Postils of Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349). Lyra’s work goes into great detail regarding the design of creation and the world; moreover, in his work, we see a clear understanding of a boundary between humans and animals which may be crossed, but in which transgressions prompt judgment. Both the creation narrative and the narrative of the Great Flood are informative for understanding the early modern view, as both clarify the anthropocentric hierarchy and the special effort and necessity of divine intervention to respond to the comprehensive impact of sin. These two passages receive extensive treatment from well known theologians like Martin Luther (1483-1546), Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), and John Calvin (1509-1564), as well as lesser known theologians including Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563), Johannes Brenz (1499-1570), David Chytraeus (1530-1600), Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562). Discussion of these commentators on Genesis will illuminate how the theological developments and innovations of the Reformation embraced the foundational theological authorities while also challenging and diverging from some of their tendencies. Yet among these critiques, the fundamental picture of creation as hierarchical and ordered through God’s creative power is not ultimately challenged.

While chapter 2 explores how orthodox and mainstream Protestant theologians respond to the boundary, chapter 3 explores the staying power of the boundary by examining its presence in the world of nontraditional theological sources. Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the work of the Swiss theologian and alchemist Theophrastus von Hohenheim, more commonly known as Paracelsus (1493-1541). Paracelsus’s reputation as an alchemist and unorthodox practitioner of medicine precedes him and dominates most scholarship about his work outside of medical

38 Most of these theologians are discussed and presented in Genesis 1-11: Reformation Commentary on Scripture, ed. John L. Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2012).
research, which emphasizes his pioneering role in toxicology and the treatment of poisons.\textsuperscript{39} And true to that reputation, Paracelsus is far more open than his peers to challenging anthropocentric ideals and to expanding the bounds of what might be considered under the purview of creation. But what is less emphasized is the degree to which Paracelsus falls within and remains within the boundaries of orthodox thought, especially regarding the nature of humanity in relation to other created beings. This chapter focuses on the degree to which this tension is important in the work of Paracelsus. Paracelsus is very open about understanding and addressing perceived violations of the boundary between human and nonhuman. In \textit{De Generatione Stultorum}, Paracelsus discusses the birth and production of “natural fools.” He justifies and explains the existence of humans who are born mentally deficient or falling short of the criteria ascribed to the image of God, explaining how such people still are made in the image of God, even though they fall short of those criteria. Yet Paracelsus also discusses the existence of creatures that he claims exist in the natural world, but are not accounted for in Genesis (the non-adamic creation including creatures like pygmies, nymphs, sylphs, and salamanders).\textsuperscript{40} In both cases, Paracelsus pushes the bounds of what is accepted about the boundary between human and nonhuman, while ultimately reasserting or reverting to the firmness of the initial boundaries.

The final section of the dissertation explores culture and knowledge outside of the strict confines of theology; that is, the final section of the dissertation traces how both learned and popular cultures outside of theology both undermine and challenge the boundary, as well as how


the emergence of the seeds of humanism and empiricism ultimately challenge the premises of the boundary and result in a resolution to the underlying tension for early modern culture. Chapter 4 discusses the contours of how fifteenth and sixteenth century culture responded to the notion of the boundary between human and nonhuman. Scholars, jurists, and laypeople all responded to the notion of a boundary between human and nonhuman in ways that pushed back against the strictness of the boundary without fundamentally or irrevocably breaking it. For their part, theologians permitted or accepted occasional violations of the boundary, so long as they did not alter or challenge the fundamental anthropocentric order of creation, nor the divisions between humanity and other species. In theological and popular circles alike, animals received high praise and treatment. Theologians praised animals for their reverence, acknowledging both their praise of God and examples of animal speech and interactions with humanity, and utilized sermon exempla and hagiographical accounts to illustrate this. At the same time, the label of animal behavior functions as an insult or harsh judgment. The same dichotomy and complexity animates popular culture as well. Saints’ lives regularly provide instances of animal behavior that aids humans, exhibits knowledge of the divine, and challenges humanity’s unique claim to relationship with God. 41 At the same time, the phenomenon of animal trials attested to complex views of animal agency in the legal realm, blurring the notions of culpability and responsibility for sinful behavior. 42 Finally, the heritage of medieval bestiaries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries spoke to the ways in which animals were used in medieval culture as symbols and as guidance for moral behavior. Bestiaries provided examples of medieval understanding of animals for their moral guidance, as well as for some inkling of their natural behavior. This chapter also

discusses the place of nonhuman nonanimals, including monsters and monstrous births. Finally, this chapter discusses categories in which the active conflict over the boundary is on display, most evidently in discussion of lycanthropy as a spiritual ground of conflict between divine and diabolical forces. As I shall mention, the task of understanding popular culture is challenging due to relative illiteracy of the general population; however, the chosen sources allow the reader to glean from institutional response the key parts of popular response to the boundary.\(^{43}\)

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of this trajectory and the resolution of the overall tension. This chapter discusses how the rise of proto-naturalism and forms of proto-empiricism begins to resolve the tension of the relationship between human and nonhuman by reasserting the anthropocentric divisions, emphasizing humanity as a part of creation, and shifting the explanation of various instances of violations of the boundary. The rise of Christian humanism also serves as the beginning of naturalism, and a variety of thinkers engaging in this proto-naturalism respond to different parts of the boundary. The first group of thinkers respond to the notion of humans and animals coexisting as natural beings within creation without a strict adherence to the anthropocentric hierarchy. The naturalist Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) and the anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) help to demonstrate the convergence between medicine, science, and theology by examining the ways in which humanity actually resides within the same natural world as animals. Gessner’s *Historiae Animalium* (also referred to as the *Historia Animalium*) attempts to provide a comprehensive, complete compilation of everything written about knowledge of animals, yet avoids attempts to moralize animals, instead pursuing arguments about their natural and observed qualities. Meanwhile, Andreas Vesalius’s *De

Humani Corporis Fabrica pursues a deeper knowledge of human anatomy by providing both analysis and detailed images of human dissection. Vesalius’s insistence on providing images from his own dissections rather than relying on authorities like Galen attests to the value of direct observation, as well as the understanding that humans exist within the natural world alongside animals. The second category of thought considers the possibility of human transgressions of the boundary through physical transformation. The Dutch physician and demonologist Johann Weyer (1515-1588) demonstrates a more inflexible view of the boundary by rejecting the reality of lycanthropic episodes and understanding the implications of the boundary for the parties involved. His work responds to the notion of lycanthropic transformation and responds to it using both humoral theory and common sense; as a result, he critiques the prosecution of lycanthropic episodes as criminal activity rather than as an issue requiring medical treatment. Finally, a third category of writers in the proto-naturalist category surveys the issue of humans who challenge the boundary through their very existence. French surgeon Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) helps to affirm and naturalize the phenomena of monstrous births and misbirths. Rather than treating such births as monstrous portents of divine judgment, Paré provides both theological and natural explanations of these events, relocating the issue of monstrous births within the natural realm.

Each of these proto-naturalists demonstrates a propensity to naturalize examples of animals which had previously been moralized. As a result of the rise of proto-naturalism, the answer to questions about boundary violations may be in principle the same, even though the

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specifics may vary. The substance of the answers began to separate out theological dimensions of these issues (such as the nature of the image of God) to focus on the natural or medical dimensions (for instance, the similarities and differences between humans and other creatures). Even so, the rise of proto-naturalism and its encounter with theological ideals of the sixteenth century result in the boundary becoming both firmer and more ambiguous, with humanity residing in the hierarchy, but no longer exhibiting some of the fundamental differences from animals and nonhuman creatures.

I hope with this dissertation to ultimately understand the process by which early modern Christians transitioned from a reliance on authority to a reliance on natural observation. In untangling the contradictions and complexity of the boundary and the messy transition to naturalism, I hope to convey some sense of the growing differentiation of forms of knowledge in early modern Europe. In moving away from more integrated forms of knowledge which considered theological and natural questions alongside each other, early modern thinkers began to differentiate modes of knowledge and inquiry more coherently, separating questions of what we can know naturally from what we know supernaturally. The idea of this boundary between human and nonhuman helps to understand the theological questions and presuppositions adopted by Christian theologians on the way to new understandings of the world. In understanding this boundary, we affirm how theologians, through both interpretation of Scripture and engagement with broader cultural views of the boundary, aimed to grapple with a deeply ingrained sense of human difference and uniqueness while still acknowledging the place of humans alongside the rest of the natural world.
Chapter 1: The “Image of God”, Order of Creation, and non-human beings-
Ancient and Christian Foundations and Augustine on Genesis, 393-415

The historic perception of the boundary between humans and animals in the early modern era, and the nature of how that view shifts, are tied very closely to the historic Christian understanding of humans and animals themselves. It would be easy, but lazy, to suggest that the anthropocentric view of creation that predominates much of Christian history was fully articulated from Christianity’s beginnings, and that Christian theologians writ large posit that humans inhabit a completely different space in the world from that of non-human creatures. However, understanding how Christian theologians understand the coexistence of humans and animals as a part of a broader picture of creation requires more than just a dramatic separation between humans and animals. Dissecting Christian anthropocentrism ultimately requires a more deft navigation of how anthropocentrism is structured in ways that respect and pay homage to a messier boundary between people and nonhuman animals. In short, understanding the early modern Christian view of the boundary between people and animals requires a broader understanding of how Christians understand and articulate the very existence of humans and animals, as well as the broader nature of the creation of the world.¹

The question of how to understand early modern animal theories, however, necessarily goes much deeper than interpretation of the available 15th and 16th century sources. Medieval and early modern theology was fundamentally dependent upon ancient sources and authorities. While medieval demonology did articulate innovative answers to local continental accounts of demonic activity or ambiguous boundaries between species, those innovations tended to be related closely

to interpretations of ancient Christian authorities and sources. The question of Christian anthropocentrism and notions of shapeshifting in early modern Christian society may have been shaped by the experiences and tales of a pre-Christian Europe, in which the lines delineating sectors of nature were not so clear, and in which questions of non-Adamic creation and other spiritual creatures abounded. However, for Christian theologians and demonologists, responding to these questions first necessitated understanding how foundational Christian authorities answered the question of the boundary between people and animals and the place of humans in God’s creation. For our purposes then, we must turn to the foundational ancient Christian authorities upon whom early modern demonologists rely, most notably Augustine of Hippo (354-430), whose contributions to Christian views of both natural theology and demonology fundamentally shape the contours of the initial prevailing views of Christian demonology, as well as its eventual shift.

Grappling with Augustine, however, requires understanding not only how he understood Scripture, but also how he navigated the ancient landscape, in which Christians constituted only one view. While Augustine’s writings emerged in an era in which Christianity was starting to predominate across the Roman Empire, he also emerged in a pluralistic landscape in which

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2 For more on the details of pre-Christian Europe, see Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

3 “Non-Adamic” means, in the Christian context, the notion of created beings, and even human beings (including the people in the New World) that exist outside of the paradigm of the seven-day creation story. Their separate origin from the Adamic creation was embraced by Paracelsus, as well as Giordano Bruno. See Philip Almond, “Adam, Pre-Adamites, and Extra-Terrestrial Beings in Early Modern Europe,” Journal of Religious History 30.2 (June 2006): 163-174.

4 Augustine relies on a theology of privation to define evil, and thus has to inform demons as fallen angels whose nature has been perverted or corrupted, but not completely changed. However, as Wiebe discusses, they are also a key part of understanding Augustine’s broader theology and understanding of Christian struggles with culture and society. For more on Augustine’s demonology, see Inta Ivanovska, “The demonology of Augustine of Hippo,” (PhD Diss., Saint Louis University, 2011); Benjamin W. McCraw, “Aquinas and Augustine on the Demonic,” in *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, ed. Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp (New York: Routledge, 2017), 23-38; Gregory Wiebe, *Fallen Angels in the Theology of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
Christianity, while beginning to gain prominence, was still one of many views. Augustine’s forays into natural theology begin as a refutation to Manicheanism, but eventually more of an overall response to and interpretation of the texts of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the literary culture of a polytheistic Greco-Roman landscape. Augustine’s influence on the early modern era is not just in how his writings are adopted and received by demonologists, but also in how Augustine’s own demonological and cosmological formulations advance a more ambiguous assessments of the fluidity of the boundary between human and nonhuman.

This chapter, then, will seek to understand the parameters of the early modern theological debate over shapeshifting and untangle which influences were more openly accepted in the Christian framework through the lens of understanding Augustine’s centrality as a demonological and cosmological figure. Augustine is the central figure for understanding early modern approaches to shapeshifting, but his views on the boundary between people and animals are not in a vacuum; rather, they exist in response to and in dialogue with his overall environment. This chapter will focus specifically on how Augustine interprets and responds to the idea of a boundary between humans, animals, and other nonhuman creatures, as well as his response to demonic activity and notions of shapeshifting. Augustine’s very approach, to “plunder the Egyptians,” contributes somewhat inconsistently to the development of an early Christian anthropology and natural theology, specifically when we compare his willingness to address Greco-Roman culture with his lack of engagement with Jewish sources. This chapter will explore why Augustine is more open to integrating a polytheistic, pagan cosmology (through

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interaction with Ovidian narratives of the *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*) than he is to integrating the contributions of Jewish thinkers.

In this chapter, we will explore first how Augustine interprets and receives the generally accepted texts and narratives of the Christian tradition surrounding animals, including narratives from books of the Hebrew Bible, as well as how he interacts with allusions to nature and shapeshifting in the Gospels and Pauline texts. Then, we can begin to explore specifically how Augustine navigates his own landscape in the production of a Christian framework; that is, how he comes to embrace much of the Roman heritage while disparaging the Jewish heritage. At the core of my argument is a close reading of Augustine’s writings, and a subsequent interpretation of his long-posed anthropocentrism. Without diminishing how Augustine views people as superior to animals, this chapter will delve into a more nuanced picture of how Augustine situates the boundaries between people and animals, and how he supports more ambiguous boundaries between matter than is usually claimed. This chapter will aim to partially deconstruct that formulation by challenging the idea of Augustine’s anthropocentrism as such a strict division. Moreover, I hope along the way to address questions of how Augustine views the very notion of personhood when it comes to understanding animals. While strict divisions still remain, and theological anthropocentrism still predominates in Augustine’s theology, a closer reading of Augustine’s language demonstrates a high esteem for animals and shapes how later Christians view and discuss animals.6

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6 The openness to a greater fluidity than supposed can be examined not only among the view on animals, but through the view on the Eucharist that eventually emerges. To understand the blurred boundaries of human and nonhuman, we must also acknowledge a broader sense of the blurred boundaries of matter for the early and medieval church. One of the key studies of the ancient and medieval beliefs around the Eucharist, as well as its blurred boundaries and its implications culturally for the medieval church can be found in Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
Plundering the Egyptians

Before we address Augustine’s natural theology, though, it is important to understand what considerations were ongoing for Augustine that shaped his approach to the wider culture of his era. The question of how Christians ought to grapple with non-Christian culture was not a new one, and had been addressed by other theologians prior to Augustine. Two broad tendencies emerged in Christian thought regarding interaction with non-Christian culture, with Augustine embodying and adopting the second view in some respects. The first view might be discussed as the idea of active counterculture. Tertullian, the first Latin theologian, prominently raised this view, acknowledging that while interaction within the broader culture is necessary, Christians ought to strive for purity and fidelity to the Gospel of Christ. Because Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the fullness of God’s presence on earth, further interaction and seeking of wisdom from culture or non-Christian tradition is not only unnecessary, but risks leading Christians astray. Regarding the overall emergence of philosophical approaches to religion in the ancient Greek world, Tertullian practices an adamant antipathy toward utilizing them within Christian theology. For Tertullian, “heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy.” Furthermore, he finds explicit injunctions from Paul to be on guard against “philosophy and vain deceit,” which both run counter to the “wisdom of the Holy Ghost” and result in manifold heresies. For “what indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”

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8 Ibid. “Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?” Tertullian’s work came significantly prior to Augustine, but his view was prevalent throughout the Roman Empire in part due to the necessity of less overt engagement with popular
Tertullian responds explicitly to the appropriation of pagan philosophy in Christian theological discourse and does not explicitly discuss the boundary between human and animal bodies. However, we get some sense of his antipathy toward the ambiguous boundary between bodies in the Greco-Roman world in his defense of the incarnation of Jesus. Tertullian avowedly defends the human incarnation of Jesus in response to Marcion, claiming that Jesus was not a separate being, nor a spirit, but flesh and blood. He writes that Marcion ought to either “take away nativity, and then show us your man; or else withdraw the flesh, and then present to our view the being whom God has redeemed—since it is these very conditions which constitute the man whom God has redeemed.”

Shortly after, he indicates his own antagonism to an ambiguous boundary between species, writing, “If, to be sure, He had chosen to be born of a mere animal, and were to preach the kingdom of heaven invested with the body of a beast either wild or tame, your censure (I imagine) would have instantly met Him with this demurrer: ‘This is disgraceful for God, and this is unworthy of the Son of God, and simply foolish.”

Tertullian is critiquing and advocating a sort of ambiguous existence of Jesus as both divine and human, a classic anti-Gnostic incarnational response. And yet, while he argues that God may use the things that seem foolish on earth to respond to humanity, he does not venture so far as to say that Christ taking the form of an animal would be acceptable. On the contrary, the ambiguous nature of bodies does not extend to the animal realm but would in fact be blasphemous.

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10 Ibid. “Si revera de lupa, aut sue, aut vacca prodire voluisset, et ferae aut pecoris corpore indutus, regnum coelorum, tua, opinor, illi censura praescriberet, turpe hoc Deo, et indignum hoc Dei Filio, et stultum propterea qui ita credit.”
In contrast to this notion of active counterculture, Augustine’s emergence in the era of permitted Christian practice prompts his own embrace of the notion of critical appropriation. Rather than reject popular non-Christian ideas entirely, Augustine instead advocates grappling with popular thought and appropriating those ideas, teachings, or literary works which advance the cause of the faith. He explicitly discusses this regarding the works of Roman philosophers. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine uses the example of Exodus 3:20-22. Just as ancient Israel carried off the riches of Egypt, Christians ought to utilize the valuable aspects of popular literature and philosophy. He writes

“In the same way all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the worship of the one God are found among them. Now these are, so to speak, their gold and silver, which they did not create themselves, but dug out of the mines of God’s providence which are scattered abroad, and are perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils...Their garments also—that is such human institutions such as are adapted to the intercourse with men which is indispensable in this life—we must take and turn to a Christian use.”

Augustine’s interaction with narratives of bodily transformation does not go so far as to affirm that the entirety of the Greco-Roman writings are valuable; however, this impulse to save what can reasonably be saved and discard the rest animates his writings to some extent, particularly regarding Greco-Roman philosophy and mythology. Two points are important to address regarding Augustine’s use of critical appropriation. First of all, both Augustine and Tertullian, while advancing paradigmatically opposing views, are wary that their discussions of ancient mythology and philosophy verge on interacting with potential demonic activity, and thus for

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Augustine must be handled carefully to avoid venturing into heresy. Second of all, and perhaps most interestingly, is that Augustine’s notion of “plundering the Egyptians” is more easily applied to his interactions with Greco-Roman culture than it is with Jewish sources, for reasons that we shall explore. This distinction helps to understand the parameters of Augustine’s anthropocentrism, as well as later Christian demonology.

**Augustine’s Natural Theology: Responding to Genesis and Biblical Texts**

Augustine’s significance to the eventual form and shape of early modern views of animal theory and shapeshifting is difficult to overstate. Much has been made elsewhere of Augustine’s centrality in understanding the ambiguous boundaries of the early modern world, and of Augustine’s paramount importance to the development of theology in the West. Navigating Christian views of the ambiguous boundaries between forms of matter and physical boundaries requires an interpretation of the very purpose of the creation of matter. Moreover, Augustine is the seminal figure to understanding Christian views on the existence of non-human spiritual creatures and “intelligences,” and the implications of non-human creatures for popular views of the possibilities and malleability of matter. Most historiographical scholarship avoids excessive entanglement with the specifics of Augustine’s views on matter, opting to focus on the implications of sin and human nature on the world. Scholars have continually dissected his assessment of human nature and notions of inherited guilt, with only some delving into the implications of those views for the malleability of bodies. Similarly, while some scholarship

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12 For a brief description of Augustine’s influence, from his works to his medieval and Reformation reception, see Paul Rorem, *St Augustine, His Confessions, and His Influence* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019).
14 Augustine’s focus on “original sin” has been a point of contention in theological scholarship especially. For an overview of his view, see Paula Fredrickson, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 57-61, 68-79.
does delve into Augustine’s views of “monstrous races,” these discussions fail to delve deeply into the broader questions of what the existence of “monstrous races” says about the boundaries between human and beast. On the whole, relatively sparse historiographical consideration has tackled the issue of Augustine’s view of the boundary between people and animals in any considerable length, with most treatment of his views on shapeshifting happening cursorily in other works. For instance, we find the most evident example of Augustine grappling with fluid boundaries between species in City of God, yet much historiography on City of God focuses on the political dimensions of the work, with little discussing his views on shapeshifting in any sustained way.

To understand Augustine’s impact on these views, it is wise for us to turn to the very beginning. Augustine’s treatment of Genesis emerges in a variety of different writings over time, and looms large over his early theological endeavors, and is a topic to which he returns as his theological discussions mature. His earliest works, including a specific refutation of Manichean objections to Genesis in 388 and an unfinished work on Genesis from 393, are less systematic and serve more as concrete responses to Manichees and other heretics. Over time, however, he engages in more systematic, less responsory interpretations of Genesis, found littered throughout his writings, in De Doctrina Christiana, a chapter of his Confessions, City of God, and a long-gestating Literal Commentary on Genesis, all emerging between 393 and 415

16 For an example of this, see Gerard O’Daly, Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Despite much coverage of Augustine’s social, political, and legal background, as well as his place in the Latin tradition; however, no mention is made of some of his views on the rest of the Latin tradition, and no mention is made of his discussion of Lycaeon.
17 A very good place to start!
Understanding the nature of God’s creation is crucial to his own theology, as he engages in questions not only of God’s purpose and design in creating the world, but also in addressing the ways in which sin shapes and corrupts God’s original design and humanity’s relationship with God. These responses also reflect how he responds over time to what he perceives are the most important questions regarding Genesis; namely, his response initially deals with the question of what hermeneutical approach to employ to best understand the text. His response to the human-animal dynamic in the Hebrew and Christian texts of the Bible can be read as comprising a general theory of creation and puts forward a rational, theistic cosmology in which the Trinitarian God is living, active, and structuring the world.  

On Genesis Against the Manichees and Literal Commentary

But Augustine navigates between and balances somewhat competing hermeneutical impulses to read Scripture either morally and allegorically, or to read it for the “literal,” plain meaning. For instance, his earlier work, On Genesis Against the Manichees, adopts a more moral, allegorical reading of Genesis without disputing the deeper layers of the text in order to respond to the Manichean dualism which created a division between the material and spiritual realms. Augustine writes this text after emerging from the Manichean sect, having been an auditor in the sect and subjected to its rigorous approach to life. In writing the text, he seeks to defend the “Old Law” against the heresies of the Manicheans, writing that because of their indiscriminate approach, he must refute them “by the plain facts, not by an elegant and polished

discourse” in order to aid both the “learned and unlearned.”  

But despite adopting a plain, more accessible manner of writing, Augustine’s response to the Manichees embraces a more allegorical approach than literal approach to what is written, and seeks to dispute and respond to Manichean objections to the Christian narrative of creation, such as questions of when and why God created the world, as well as whether God’s existence was eternal or temporal.  

Augustine’s refutation of Manichean critiques of Genesis delves not only into the existential questions of creation, but also into the questions of the boundaries of matter that animates both the world and its creatures. Augustine presents the Manichean objection to the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, which states that while “all formed things were made from this matter, this matter itself was still made from nothing.”  

Augustine insists that the Manichean objection to creation *ex nihilo* is an affront to God’s omnipotence, writing that unlike the carpenter who “does not make wood, but makes something out of wood,” God “did not have to be helped by anything he had not made...that is sacrilegious to believe.”  

In defending creation *ex nihilo*, Augustine advances a somewhat ambiguous notion of the boundaries between forms of matter. He notes that the unformed matter which God made from nothing was “first called heaven and earth,” which forms as the “seed out of which heaven and earth will certainly come.”  

More importantly, he notes that this matter was formless, invisible, and without order; in short, this matter, as the seed for the rest of creation, is described by different names so that humanity might try to understand a complex concept: that God created out of nothing. Moreover,

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21 Ibid., 49-50.  
22 Ibid., 57-58.  
23 Ibid., 58-59.  
24 Ibid. Teske notes here Augustine’s use of metonymy to explain why unformed matter can be referred to as “heaven and earth.”
the fact that the matter is “invisible and formless” implies an ambiguity to the purposes for which the matter can be utilized in the creative process.25

Further in the text, Augustine’s ambiguous view of nature, along with his trust in God’s sovereignty and wisdom, becomes important to understanding his early views of animals. In response to the question of why God created harmful animals, Augustine is more willing to acknowledge the beauty and good in creatures which have little apparent good purpose to humans. In response to the question of why God created so many creatures “that are not necessary for man” and that are indeed “harmful and frightening,” Augustine submits that Manicheans assume that the things they fail to understand are stupid or superfluous, like the person who walks into a workshop and assumes the tools they do not understand are unnecessary.26 Augustine admits, “I do not know why mice and frogs were created, or flies or worms. Yet I see that all things are beautiful in their kind, though on account of our sins many things seem to us disadvantageous.” To Augustine, species which seem either harmful or superfluous may not be necessary to humanity, but they help comprise the “harmonious unity” of God’s creation, and that while some creatures may not be necessary for humanity, they “nonetheless complete the integrity of this universe,” and consideration of this ought to lead humanity to appreciate the lowliest of creation, writing that in those creatures, one ought to find God’s measure and order in all creatures, so that you will “perhaps gather richer fruit when you praise God in the lowliness of a fly than when you cross the river on the height of some beast.”27 Augustine’s approach to creation here puts forth a positive assessment of all creatures (at least in a broader sense). While Augustine will later come to use beastliness as a moniker for acting

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25 Ibid., 60.
26 Ibid., 73.
27 Ibid., 73-74.
contrary to God’s purposes, it is important that Augustine’s overall assessment of created beings, even those that seem harmful, is one that confirms their inclusion in God’s order of creation.

And yet this positive assessment of animals in Augustine’s early work also coexists with a version of anthropocentrism that grapples with what it means that humans possess “power over the beasts.” While Augustine speaks figuratively and not literally, Augustine’s ambiguity regarding created animals is on display. In this text, Augustine explicitly ties the creation of humanity in God’s image to their power over beasts. To Augustine, creation in God’s image does not correspond to a specific anthropomorhism of God’s features, but rather to the rational capacity within humanity, or the “interior man, where reason and intellect reside.”

This capacity for intellect explains how animals are subject to humanity in two ways. First of all, the erect form of the human body implies that humans are more attuned to seeking God than animals, whose form demonstrates how they are concerned primarily with the things of the earth rather than God. Second, humanity’s power over the beasts does not suggest a literal, physical power over animals, but an allegorical power over animals, in which humans might be threatened by animals, but cannot be tamed by any wild animals. This allegorical approach goes deeper, though, applying to humanity’s very nature. While Augustine acknowledges that the verse can be read plainly that “man is master of all these animals by reason,” he argues,

We can still understand this verse spiritually in the sense that we should hold in subjection all the affections and emotions of our soul, which are like those animals, and have mastery over them by temperance and modesty. For if we do not rule these emotions, they burst forth and turn into the foulest habits, carrying us off with all sorts of destructive pleasures and making us like every kind of beast.

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28 Ibid., 76.
29 Ibid., 76-77.
30 Ibid., 78-79.
Augustine goes on to argue that when humans rule their beastly emotions, they become “completely tame and live in harmony with us. For the emotions of our mind are part of our nature.” Those emotions are, like animals, even “nourished along with us by knowledge of the finest rational and moral principles of eternal life.” While he affirms the place of animals in the created order, he still distinguishes in this response between human reason and connection to God and excessive emotion and affections, which draw humans away from “chaste and fair loves” to “perturbations and lusts and evil desires.” 31

Augustine seems to hold together this tension in responding to the Manichees that while all creatures are good and part of the unity of God’s creation, and while humans and animals both ultimately emerge from the same matter of the universe, humans still are separated from animals by their capacity for reason. Augustine addresses the idea that humanity was made from the “mud of the earth,” and goes into a fuller explanation of an earlier point about “water” as a stand-in for the formless matter of the universe. He writes that just as humans are made of body and soul, water “gathers, glues, and holds earth together when by its mixture it makes mud, so the soul by vivifying the matter of the body forms it into a harmonious unity.” 32 There is still a clear division between humans and animals regarding the control of their emotions and human capacity to relate to God rationally, but in book 2, Augustine reduces this division somewhat, arguing that sin signaled a withdrawal from God’s commandment, and that upon humanity’s dismissal from Eden, “he remained in such a state that he was animal. And so all of us who were born from him after sin first bear the animal man until we attain the spiritual Adam.” 33 While the division between the human and animal parts of nature are important, and Augustine is emphatic.

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31 Ibid., 79.
32 Ibid, 103-104.
33 Ibid., 106.
about the importance of virtue elevating humanity above animals, it is also important to acknowledge that this division emerges in light of Augustine’s affirmation of the place of animals in the unity of creation, the unity of matter in creation, and humanity’s place (due to sin) as animal in its own right.\(^\text{34}\)

However, Augustine’s perspective evolves somewhat over time. Augustine’s *Literal Commentary on Genesis* is his later work on the creation narratives in Genesis. Written initially around 393 CE, it was initially left unfinished, with the text of the commentary only completed around 415 CE and released in 426 CE. This work has special value for us because of this publication history; while it contains some of his earliest thoughts and instincts on these creation narratives, the fact that it was left unpublished for so long also grants us a sense of Augustine’s evolution of thought. While his thoughts on Genesis that are presented in *City of God* are formally his latest thoughts on the topic, *Literal Commentary on Genesis* manages to be both early and late in Augustine’s thought due to its publication history. Moreover, because the specific approach of *Literal Commentary* is on the literal meaning of the text without regard for contextual purposes or as a response to specific factors (as with his response to the Manichees), we gain a stronger insight into Augustine’s direct views on the questions surrounding the existence of created beings.\(^\text{35}\)

At the outset of this treatise, Augustine offers a fluid perspective of creation. Augustine affirms that God creates *ex nihilo*, but God’s act of creation, while existing instantaneously in a Platonic sense, does not exist instantaneously in a calendrical sense (that is, the very concept of

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 112. It is worth noting that the division Augustine creates applies not just to humans and animals, but extends to the creation of man and woman, with Adam representing the rational capacity to relate to God and Eve representing the emotions and affections, for “Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman...the body has the position of a servant, but also that virile reason hold subject to itself the animal part, by the help of which it governs the body.”

time in a linear sense emerges with the creation of day and night, but there is no sense of how
time functions in that interval before). Similarly, God’s act of creation can be broken down into
the key elements that underlay the foundations of the earth. While he presents clear delineations
between God’s acts of creation and ordering of the universe, the stability of that nature is an
issue. Augustine’s breaking down of the elements that comprise matter seems to indicate a view
wherein creation, while perfectly ordered and ordained by God, is also fragile and liable to
change. The elements of matter are not static, but relatively fluid, which informs the fluidity of
human and non-human creation in a physical sense.

Augustine’s assessment of creation is broadly positive and informed by God’s nature in
creation. This is evident in other parts of Augustine’s thought, including his clear opposition to
Manichean dualism, but Augustine makes it explicit here on its own accord, and not merely in
response to others. This positive estimation extends not merely to the very creation of the world,
but also to the ways in which God’s nature infuses creation. For instance, in addressing the first
chapter of Genesis, Augustine initially distinguishes between the creation of living creatures and
intellectual creatures. For Augustine, the Son of God “does not live a formless life,” and has a
different life from simply being in existence. In fact, Augustine states outright that “in His case,
not only is being the same thing as living, but living is the same thing as living wisely and
happily.” Augustine goes further, though, to clarify that for created creatures, while they may
possess a spiritual nature with reason and intellect, living is not the same as “possessing a life of
Wisdom and happiness.” \(^{36}\) As Augustine continues to discuss the importance of the created
realm, he does not exclude any created being from the divinity inherent in God’s act of creation;

\(^{36}\) Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1, transl. and annotated by John Hammond Taylor (New York:
in fact, God’s Trinitarian character infiltrates the entirety of his creation, including non-human creatures, which grants an important degree of honor to animals as well as humans.37

The *Literal Commentary* goes on to provide important insight into Augustine’s view of created beings, including spiritual beings, humans, and animals. Augustine proposes an order of creation largely consistent with his other works on Genesis, in which God’s Trinitarian character infuses all of creation and informs humanity’s creation in the image of God. But this infusion complicates a stark division between rationality and irrationality as the sole purveyor of the image of God. Augustine presents a broader spectrum than is recognized based on varying levels of rationality. Perhaps the most interesting distinction he makes in the *Literal Commentary* is regarding the capacity for something resembling rationality in fish. He notes that while fish tend to be referred to as “creeping creatures having life” rather than as “living beings,” authors have recorded fish in fish ponds awaiting and expecting morsels of food after repeated feedings from people, and that, “Having become used to being fed in this way, whenever people walk by the edge of the fountain, the fish will swim in schools back and forth alongside of them.” Augustine goes on to note that it is reasonable that “if a lack of memory or dullness of sense prevented us from calling fish ‘living beings,’ we would surely give this name to birds, whose life is manifest to us in their memory and their chatter as well as in the skill they have in building their nests and training their young.”38

At the same time, Augustine does not suppose that animals might become more like humans depending on their rationality. The distinctions made between humans and animals do not indicate that animals might possess the ability to inherently become more like humans or to necessarily be able to gain or develop greater rationality (although it does not preclude this

37 Ibid., 25.
38 Ibid., 81-82.
possibility explicitly). What Augustine does indicate, however, is a distaste for humans who betray or neglect the full use of their rational capacities, as well as a distaste for ideas of the transmigration of souls. Augustine argues that there are intrinsic differences between the souls of humans and the souls of beasts, and the souls of one cannot enter the other.\textsuperscript{39} This makes intuitive sense; while placing rationality on a spectrum, Augustine does link rationality with the nature of being made in the “image of God,” and despite a greater fluidity, does not think that the fluidity extends that far. Moreover, while humans may not literally become animals, humans who abandon full use of their rational capacities betray the very image of God, and thus betray their own role in the spiritual hierarchy of creation, as human honor is the “likeness of God,” while his “dishonor is the likeness of the beast, ‘Man being in honor abides not: he is compared to the beasts that are foolish, and is made like to them.’”\textsuperscript{40} And elsewhere, Augustine demarcates emphatically between humans and animals without denigrating animals, arguing that humans are better for being “rational animals,” but that it is merely rationality which keeps humanity “above the brutes.”\textsuperscript{41}

In short, Augustine’s perspective in the \textit{Literal Commentary} places rationality on a spectrum while also affirming a fundamental distinction between humans and other forms of life. Thus, the distinction between humans and animals practically and in terms of rationality is not absolute, but rather differs by degrees and accounts for elements of rationality in animals. His views set a firm pattern for early modern views of animals, yet one that is only elaborated partly in terms of anthropocentrism. Moreover, Augustine’s broad perspective of a spectrum of

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., vol. 2, 11-13.
\textsuperscript{41} Augustine of Hippo, \textit{On Order}, transl. by Silvano Borruso (South Bend, IN: St Augustine’s Press, 2007), 114-117.
rationality allows for some fluidity while affirming the boundary. Yet we also see these themes elaborated elsewhere in Augustine’s work.

**Augustine’s Confessions**

Augustine’s perspective on the boundary between humans and animals develops over time, and that development can be traced throughout his various other works on Genesis, including *On Christian Doctrine*, *Confessions*, and later in *City of God*. Books 12 and 13 of Augustine’s *Confessions* recapitulate many of the themes developed in his response to the Manichees, specifically on embracing an allegorical reading of Genesis and responding to the philosophical quandaries posed by the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. Augustine’s discussion of the concept of unformed matter informs the later discussion of the human-animal boundary in *Confessions*.  

Augustine’s view in *Confessions* does tend toward certain expressions of an anthropocentric division of creation; however, it is notable that this division does not imply an automatic denigration of animals. In fact, Augustine acknowledges the complexity and goodness that accompanies animals, as they can demonstrate remarkable behavior comparable to human behavior. He acknowledges this even while he seeks to differentiate humans (and his own spiritual connection to God) from animals, writing that “even beasts and birds possess memory...I will therefore pass even beyond memory that I may reach him who has differentiated me from the four-footed beasts and the fowls of the air by making me a wiser creature.”  

Elsewhere more directly, Augustine connects the creation of animals to God’s goodness, writing that God’s word is “a fountain of life eternal, and it does not pass away,” and brings forward a “living soul,” and “in this living soul there shall be good beasts, acting meekly... For all these

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43 Ibid., 263.
animals will obey reason when, having been restrained from their death-dealing ways, they live and become good.” Again, he echoes that human superiority to animals is primarily due to humanity’s capacity for reason, which is what is meant by “he judges all things...and he does this by the power of reason in his mind by which he perceives the things of the Spirit of God. But when man was put in this high office, he did not understand what was involved and was reduced to the level of brute beasts, and made like them.” However, Augustine continually relates these details not to a specific understanding of the universe, but the allegorical understanding of what the text implies- in this case, that mankind serves not as a physical superior force to animals, but that the spiritual man is superior to the non-spiritual man, and has been set over not only animals by virtue of reason, but also as superior to those who neglect their rational capacity for relationship with God.

By the time Augustine articulates a response to perceived societal collapse in *City of God*, his ideas on that boundary seem to have solidified into something more fully resembling an anthropocentric vision. *City of God* postdates these other works, but it remains worth consideration in direct conversation with his other work on Genesis, specifically his *Literal Commentary on Genesis*. While *City of God* provides a less systematic response to the questions inherent in the creation narrative of Genesis, his *Literal Commentary* provides a specifically organized, systematic response to the text without regard for issues of societal collapse (as with *City of God*) or the place of the text in his own personal conversion story and faith (as with *Confessions*). Moreover, *City of God* is significant in providing a lens to understand Augustine’s

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44 Ibid., 392, 31-32. Augustine does not appear to be implying that animals have an actual soul comparable to humans, but is using this language to provide a comparison with humanity.
45 Ibid., 394.
46 Ibid., 395.
ethical and ontological understanding of nonhuman animals.\textsuperscript{47} Despite not treating the Genesis creation narratives systematically, \textit{City of God} still provides major insight on Augustine’s perspective on how the image of God functions both in and outside of humanity.

\textbf{Augustine and the City of God}

\textit{City of God}, as mentioned, provides an assessment and theory about the state of the world in the aftermath of the fall of Rome. After the sack of Rome, Augustine authored the \textit{City of God} as a response to postulations that the adoption of Christianity had contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. In contrast, Augustine posited a theory about the order of relations in the world that human history represented an ongoing conflict between the “Earthly City” and the “City of God.” The overall thrust of Augustine’s work was to provide a history of these two “cities,” as well as the necessary focus of humanity in combating the satanic tendencies of the “Earthly City.”\textsuperscript{48} A significant part of the work is spent, though, discussing the origins of the two cities in the beginning of the world. Book 11 of \textit{City of God} focuses especially on this, discussing the creation of the world in Genesis, as well as the creation of the two cities by the separation of the good and bad angels. For our purposes in this chapter, it is more important to focus on how Augustine’s view of the “image of God” continues to evolve into one that, rather than being

\textsuperscript{47} Augustine presents a complicated picture of animal importance, which affirms the cosmic hierarchy in which animals are made for people, but in which rationality serves as the dividing line between people and animals. Yet Augustine’s viewpoint falls in line with the Stoic tradition. Yet other strands of patristic thought affirm the value of animal creation, including Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom. For more on Augustine’s view of animals, see Richard Sorabji, \textit{Animal Minds and Human Morals} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Christina Hoenig, “Augustine of Hippo on Nonhuman Animals,” \textit{Journal of Animal Ethics} 13.2 (Fall 2023): 122-134.

\textsuperscript{48} Veronica Ogle, \textit{Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine’s City of God} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 12. Ogle suggests that Augustine’s discussion of the “Earthly City” must be understood as a counterfeit, parody city, aimed at connecting with his readers to help them learn how the world fits into the broader story of the conflict between the “Earthly City” and the “City of God.” Notably, she emphasizes the ways in which Augustine’s analysis is rooted not in conflict, but in dispelling the short-sighted nature of self-love (amor sui) and arguing for the love of God (amor Dei) as a source of renewal for society.
formally and emphatically in favor of an anthropocentric notion, is far more ambiguous than usually acknowledged.

Augustine’s recounting of the creation accounts of Genesis responds directly to the human-animal divide, and more broadly to the importance of non-human creation in the overall trajectory of the world. For Augustine’s perception of the world, angels are crucial. Augustine writes that the creation of angels does not occur outside of the initial 6-day creation, but rather occurs under the umbrella of the creation of the first day. In short, that angels are included in the heavens. Wetzel notes that Augustine presents angels not as entering creation at a specific point in time, but as entering with all of time, forming part of the light that “bathes the rest of creation at the very beginning.” In fact, Augustine is explicit that as angels are included in the Genesis scheme of creation on the first day, we can understand them as the “light” that God separates from the darkness and that they “certainly were created as partakers of the eternal light which is the unchangeable wisdom of God.”

This logic leads to a sort of stark binary for Augustine, at least regarding non-human separated intelligences. If angels are defined by their relationship to God’s eternal light, then fallen angels are those that turn away from that light and “are called unclean spirits, and are no longer light in the Lord, but darkness in themselves.” Here is one of Augustine’s famed definitions of evil as that which has “no positive nature, but the loss of good has received the name evil.” Thus, while angels are deemed either good or evil, that actual status might be considered ambiguous in certain respects; namely that the good or evil is not an inherent quality, but that evil results from abandoning good. Unclean spirits or demons abandon

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
the goodness of their created state but are not created or intended as evil. This fundamental ambiguity in angels (that they are not created with inherent goodness or evil) is not directly relevant to notions of the image of God in other creatures; however, it does help to demonstrate the nuance of Augustine; even though they support stark dichotomies of creation, Augustine’s definitions permit a degree of ambiguity that informs our understanding of the existence of other creatures.

Regarding notions of the “image of God” in creation, Augustine’s articulation in this book of *City of God* continues to blur these lines. In *City of God*, Augustine’s discussion of the “ranks of creatures” seems static and strictly hierarchical at first glance. He ranks the living creatures based on their “utility” or “gradations of being,” and ranks them by the following: those that “have life” are ranked above “those which have none,” with “those which have the power of generation, or even desire of this faculty above those which want this faculty.” He prioritizes sentient life over non-sentient life (for instance, he ranks living animals over trees), and “among the sentient, those that have intelligence over those that have not intelligence—men, e.g., above cattle. Finally, he ranks immortal beings with intelligence, like angels, above mortal beings with intelligence, like humans. Yet Augustine is quick to complicate this hierarchy. While theoretically we might hold these rankings to be strict and unyielding, Augustine yields to popular experience and common sense that the gradations according to nature may not match with the rankings according to utility. Sometimes something that is inanimate may be preferable to something animate (the example used by Augustine here is that one might obviously prefer “bread in his house than mice, gold than fleas”). Similarly, Augustine notes that we might apply this consideration elsewhere, as human assessments of utility often place non-human creatures

52 Ibid., 470.
53 Ibid.
over humans (as a horse being more valuable than a slave). Utility is certainly different from essential character, but Augustine seems open to common sense readings in which utility does have some bearing. Augustine’s understanding of intellect and the order of creation is anthropocentric in theory, but practical in application, as he understands that both necessity and “will and love” might dictate the value outside of the scale of creation, so that “though in the order of nature angels rank above men, yet, by the scale of justice, good men are greater than bad angels.”

This practical element of judging created beings both by their place in the order as well as by utility helps us to make sense of the nuance applied by Augustine throughout his responses to Genesis. But Augustine goes deep beyond their utility to their actual purpose and intention. In discussion of the fall of the angels, Augustine notes that angels gain their knowledge of God in a dual manner; that is, the angels possess two kinds of knowledge: a “twilight knowledge” whereby they know the contours of creation in themselves, and a “noonday knowledge,” whereby they know things in God. Augustine uses the examples of the created realm as part of this; the “animals, fowls, and fish...and monsters of the deep” are understood vaguely by angels in themselves, and fully “the eternally abiding causes and reasons according to which they were made” in a deeper knowledge of God. Augustine understands non-human forms of creation not merely according to utility, but also according to a deeper purpose intended by God.

The rest of Augustine’s recounting of Genesis delves less directly into the creation of animals, and instead discusses the creation and fall of angels, as well as the importance of the Fall and the impact on even animals during and after the flood (including a probing section on whether Noah provided animals to eat for carnivorous animals onboard the ark). Augustine does

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54 Ibid., 471.
55 Ibid., 489-490.
mention in a short section that the “image of God” ought to be understood as the rational soul, which differs from the body, which “returns to dust.”  

But while Augustine’s treatment of the creation accounts in Genesis pays little direct attention to the specifics of animal intelligence or to how the image of God impacts creatures outside of humanity, Augustine does discuss some of the mechanics elsewhere earlier in the volume, albeit regarding the work of Apuleius, and more directly regarding the valuation of angels, demons, and humanity under the categories of “rational souls.”

In book 8, chapter 14, Augustine addresses the Platonic threefold division of “gods, men, and demons.” Augustine connects this division to a Platonic “delight in the obscenities of stage plays and the fictions of the poets; for they are subject to human emotions, from which the gods are far removed...from this, we gather that Plato, in detesting poetry and prohibiting works of fiction, deprived not the gods...but the demons of their pleasure in theatrical displays.”

Augustine dissects this division by interrogating Apuleius’s De deo Socratis, in which Apuleius argues that Socrates was connected to a sort of divine being, who warned Socrates to “refrain from acting when what he proposed to do would not have had a favorable outcome.” Augustine seeks to undermine Apuleius’s argument, demonstrating that Apuleius

56 Ibid., 534-535.
57 Ibid., 332. Apuleius, in addition to being a Platonic philosopher, is also noted for his novel The Golden Ass, a bawdy narrative in which the protagonist, Lucius, is accidentally transformed into a donkey. The fact that Augustine engages here regarding the moral and animal state of demons has clear implications for engagement with the implications of human transformation into animals, as he seems open (or at the very least aware) of fluid views of boundaries between species in the context of the Roman Empire. Vincent Hunink notes that Augustine pays more attention to Apuleius than to any other post-classical author form Latin literature, but argues that Augustine’s response to Apuleius and to the Metamorphoses in general is derisive and cognizant of the demonic implications. See Vincent Hunink, “Apuleius, Qui Nobis Afris Afer Est Notior: Augustine’s Polemic against Apuleius in De Civitate Dei,” Scholia: Studies in Classical Antiquity 12.1 (2003): 82-95. See also Stefan Tilg, Apuleius’ Metamorphoses: A Study in Roman Fiction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
58 Augustine of Hippo, The City of God against the Pagans, 332.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
not only states this was a demon, but that he also presents a picture that Apuleius “upholds the dignity of demons.”  

Augustine goes on to dispute the Platonic depiction of demonic superiority to humans. This is significant for this chapter, for in this section, Augustine raises in what category he includes demonic entities, utilizing direct comparisons to animals. First, he rejects the notion that demons are better than humans due to the quality of their bodies, otherwise, “he will have to place above himself many beasts which surpass us,” and directly raises that “power and vision of the eagle...the dog in his sense of smell...in speed the hare, the stag, and all the birds...[in] strength the lion or the elephant...in length the life of the serpent.”  The human propensity for moral reasoning is what precludes both demons and animal from superiority to humans. Similarly, the Platonic argument of demonic superiority because of their ability to fly prompts scoffing from Augustine, “for, by this reasoning, we place all the birds above ourselves.”  Ultimately, Augustine accepts the Platonic order when it comes to physical bodies, but rejects it regarding souls, because “it may well be that a superior soul will inhabit an inferior body and an inferior soul a superior body.”  Humans are to be valued above demons, for the “despair of the demons is not to be compared with the hope of the godly.”  

Apuleius also attributes several traits to demons, including that they are “animal in genus, passive in soul, rational in mind, aerial in body, and eternal in time.”  But Augustine acknowledges that just like demons, humans are also animal, passive, and rational. Augustine takes some issue with Apuleius’s identification of demons as animal in nature, for “so are the

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 334-335.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 335. It is notable here that Augustine relates the ordering of living creatures with Platonic principles of the elements, but articulates that the different status of the elements advises that living creatures are not directly correlative with the classes of the elements, an understanding of matter that recurs in his “Literal Commentary.”
65 Ibid., 336.
beasts; they are not above us in being rational in mind, for so are we also; and what good does it
do them to be eternal in time if they are not blessed?” Demons being animal puts them in
Apuleius’s rationale on the same plane with “gods and the beasts.” The broader point
Augustine is making here revolves around the fact that demons being in the animal plane
removes them from any sort of religious veneration or worship. The comparison with animals is
important for Augustine’s views on the image of God; demons are rational to a point, but only
for the purpose of stoking misery and chaos. This puts them in a similar vein with non-human
animals, despite their capacity for reason. The ultimate result is that demons, in the logic of
Apuleius, ought not to be worshiped. Their minds are subject to “passions of lust, fear, anger,”
which make them more akin to animals in practice, except that the rationality they do possess
prompts them toward misery and chaos.

In Book 12 of City of God, Augustine explicitly discusses the nature of non-rational
creatures and beings. Much of this book details theological arguments surrounding the age of the
universe, God’s role in creation, the lateness of the creation of humanity, and other details that
are less relevant to this chapter. A few aspects emerge as particularly salient for this chapter.
First of all, “God is praised in every species and kind of nature,” for “all natures...simply because
they exist and therefore have a species of their own...are certainly good.” Drawing from the
creation account in Genesis 1, Augustine affirms the inherent goodness in design of all forms of
life, including those of non-human animals. Second, Augustine unambiguously affirms the
creation of the human soul in the image of God as distinct from animals and the workings of

60 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 339-340. 367. Augustine relates this further to Apuleius’s relation to magic, which “depends on the
assistance of malign spirits.”
68 Ibid., 504.
“natural and bodily causes.” Third, Augustine affirms that God alone is the creator of the world, and that while angels may participate in aspects of that creation, they are not responsible for the creation of mortal creatures and animals. Finally, Augustine describes that “every nature and every species of every creature, is made and formed only by the work of God.”

Augustine, though, describes two types of form in nature, one which is “imposed from without upon every item of corporeal matter whatsoever,” which comes from God, and “another and internal kind of form, which is not itself made, but which produces, as their efficient cause, not only natural corporeal forms but also the very souls of living creatures, and which springs from the secret and hidden choice of a living and intelligent nature.” Augustine’s description of this second form as a “divine and, if I may so express it, productive energy which cannot be made, but makes,” provides us some insight into Augustine’s ambiguity regarding non-human creatures. While there is a distinct order, this “productive energy” can be attributed to God, but also possesses a sort of energy of its own. They are the general workings of nature, which Augustine compares to the elements that occur for reproduction of humans but are still attributable ultimately to God. The “corporal and seminal causes...in the generation of things,” which include the agency of “angels, men, or some kind of animal,” ultimately come from God. The fact that Augustine does not exclude non-human creatures from this agency or creative power (the “productive energy”) is significant, in that it attributes the less corporeal, more spiritual aspect of creation to non-human animals, regardless of the debate regarding souls or overall nature. He might seem to be referring primarily to humans, but the inclusion of animals suggests Augustine views animal intelligence as more complicated in nature.

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69 Ibid., 535.
70 Ibid., 536.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
The debate over the nature of non-human creatures goes far beyond the animal boundary. In Book 15, Augustine addresses the accounts of Nephilim in Genesis, and in Book 16, Augustine addresses the origin of monstrous races. Yet elsewhere in City of God, Augustine presents a picture of physical deformities that one might think threaten human dignity; however, Augustine’s discussion of congenital deformities clarifies that he thinks of people with disabilities or deformities as created consciously by a competent God. Disability might diminish some degree of dignity, as dignity reflects the interplay between rationality, utility, and beauty; however, disabilities will be wiped away in heaven. Their purpose on earth might be to warn others, but they do not diminish one’s inherent character or one’s design by God. In other words, disability is not intrinsic to one’s being and will be remedied in Paradise. But Augustine’s treatment of the topic in City of God sets a framework from which we can more effectively understand why Augustine might be more favorable to understandings that blur the anthropocentric order without fully rejecting it. This blurred understanding is further fleshed out in Augustine’s Literal Commentary on Genesis.

It is worth noting here that while Augustine clearly engages with the Greco-Roman context and seeks to accommodate it, he makes comparably less accommodation for Jewish texts or figures. The prevailing view among scholars has emphasized Augustine as fundamentally anti-Jewish, and engaging in a tradition of provocation of the Jews and anti-Judaism through works like Adversus Iudeaos, which present a picture of Augustine as having promoted anti-

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73 The case of the Nephilim in Genesis 6 remained an immensely problematic passage, as it seemed to imply a second fall into sin. Augustine’s response rejects the notion that literal angels reproduced with human women to produce giants; rather, he refers to these “sons of God” as those who “rebelled against God in the beginning, and fell with the devil.” But Augustine affirms the creation of literal giants, who were allowed by God to “show once more that a wise man should not attach great importance either to beauty or to the size and strength of the body, for the wise man is blessed with far better and more certain goods than these.” See Augustine, City of God, 680-685.

74 Alexander Massman, “Those who cannot see the whole are offended by the apparent deformity of the part: Disability in Augustine’s City of God,” in Journal of Religious Ethics 50.3 (September 2022): 540-566.
Jewish polemic, including accusations that they were responsible for the death of Christ and that they engaged in evil desires. However, recent scholarship has sought to reorient Augustine’s views on Judaism somewhat. Paula Fredriksen’s 2008 study *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* argues that the Jews possessed a special status as living witness to Christian truth, a status that facilitates the emergence of toleration of Judaism. Augustine defends the existence of the Jewish people; while he accepts certain anti-Jewish frameworks, he views their existence as positive for the world and Jesus and his apostles as having maintained adherence to Jewish customs. Even if this positive assessment is taken at face value, Augustine’s more positive treatment of Jews and affirmation of the value of bans on heretics draws in stark relief his lack of engagement with Jewish cosmology or purpose. This is heightened by the fact that his writings on Judaism are fueled by his own interaction with Jews in his diocese (albeit perhaps limited interaction). Some of this might be explained by Augustine’s lack of working knowledge of Hebrew. He preferred the Septuagint as the source of the Hebrew Bible and relied on Jerome’s Vulgate translation. But even accounting for his lack of facility with Hebrew, Augustine clearly favors engagement with Greco-Roman thought over Jewish cosmological or ethical understanding.

However, Augustine’s engagement with Greco-Roman writers like Apuleius and not Jewish thought is striking. Lee’s argument that for Augustine, the Jewish people existed for the edification of Christians, may gain credence in this context. The idea of Israel as a “slave people”

75 Anthony Springer, “Augustine’s Use of Scripture in his Anti-Jewish Polemic” (PhD Diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 55-57.
who exist for the church, for instance, diminishes Jewish contributions to society; in contrast, his critiques of Greco-Roman cultural belief are accompanied by acknowledgment of his own views and an effort to “plunder the Egyptians.” The lack of engagement with Jewish sources thus informs the eventual early modern attitude toward Jews as worthy of toleration while also meriting severe criticism.

Conclusion

This overview of Augustine’s thought regarding perspectives on the created order reveals some key facets that are echoed in later scholarship and which become important for understanding the conceptual shifts in the early modern era. First and most importantly, per these ancient sources, but especially Augustine, there is a hierarchy of the created order, based on the order of creation in Genesis. That created order encompasses non-human spiritual creation like angels and demons (unaccounted for explicitly in the Genesis narrative), humanity, and non-human creatures, including both animals and great monsters of the world. Augustine is not in total agreement with the Greco-Roman hierarchy, and disputes some of the logic of Platonic divisions between divine and human creatures, but in general, there is a sense of a hierarchy in Augustine’s thought that emerges from engagement with Greco-Roman culture, particularly through engagement with literature and philosophy. In affirming this hierarchy, Augustine also affirms the importance of Genesis toward understanding created beings, as well as their place and order in the universe. Spiritual beings take priority over non-spiritual beings, and sentient beings take precedence over non-sentient beings. This strictness in approach to the order of creation is apparent and crucial to understanding Augustine’s thought, but tends to obscure some of the more nuanced undertones to Augustine’s order of created beings.

79 Gregory Lee, “Israel between the Two Cities,” 525-526.
Second, Augustine and the early Greco-Roman and Christian landscape establish a fluid approach to that hierarchy. While in theory the hierarchy should be firmly established, in practice, the moral and utilitarian value of creatures varies. Augustine’s theological sensibilities accommodate a more flexible, practical approach, and Augustine’s response to the more flexible, ambiguous approach of the Greco-Roman culture makes clear that the order of creation in Genesis is not the only factor in assessing both the value of and the assessment of non-human states of being. Augustine’s understanding of creation conveys specific theological ideas about the Trinitarian unity of creation, in which animals and ambiguous creatures play a part. And in assessing the potential of non-human creatures to exhibit not just rationality, but also moral value (that is, the value assessed by humans to animals and whether humans see morality within animals), Augustine indicates a willingness to venture beyond the strict order of creation in assessing ambiguous forms of life, including animals, monsters, and humans who do not clearly exhibit the constituent elements of the image of God.

Third, and perhaps most surprisingly, Augustine is more selective with his willingness to embrace the idea “plundering the Egyptians.” He demonstrates a willingness to embrace Greco-Roman culture, yet also demonstrates a general reluctance to engage directly with Jewish thinkers, many of whom might otherwise align with his approach. This is not to say that there is never any overlap. Augustine and rabbinic scholars occasionally overlap on demonological issues, with one rabbinic explanation of Pharaoh’s sorcerers being remarkably parallel to Augustine’s. Bavli Sanhedrin 67b quotes Rabbi Eliezer saying, “A demon cannot create an entity smaller than the size of a barley grain,” and Rav Pappa saying, “By God! They cannot create an entity even as large as a camel! They do not create anything. Rather, they can gather these large animals, leading them from one place to another, but they cannot gather those small animals.”
The implication here is that demons cannot create, but they can draw from other places, which is similar to Augustine insistence on the delusory power of demons. Augustine argues that demons cannot do anything except what God permits, but that they have powers of delusion over the senses, by which they might substitute matter rather than transform matter. However, regarding notions of animal creation, Augustine avoids rabbinic scholarship and interpretation. Perhaps the decision to “plunder the Egyptians” must also be addressed with ontological questions regarding the essence of being. While rabbinic scholars do address ontological and cosmological questions, at least regarding animals, they are more concerned with exploring ethical questions regarding treatment of animals than Greco-Roman sources are. While Greco-Roman notions of fluidity in the created realm do not make moral judgments about how humans ought to interact with or consider animals, the fact that Greco-Roman myths does not make many explicit ontological assertions grants Augustine the room to engage with philosophers and ancient naturalists, like Aristotle and Pliny.

Finally, Augustine’s dichotomy between a strict order of creation and ambiguous boundaries and moralities between forms of creation sets the stage within Christian thought for later Christian naturalists and demonologists, especially in the early modern era, to venture from the strict order of creation to consider issues of cognition, rationality, and moral value in assessing non-human creatures and the boundaries between ambiguous forms of life. The flexibility between species is not merely centered around cognition, but is also invested in

physical flexibility and malleability of matter within creation, and the propensity for change. Yet that flexibility coincides with an affirmation of the theoretical order of creation. In balancing between Augustine and Aristotle, early modern scientists and naturalists like Conrad Gessner, Caspar Peucer, and Paracelsus explore the natural dimensions of created life, as well as the theological dimensions which help to interpret that life. We turn next to understand how this balance prompts and helps us interpret theologies of fallenness in the Reformation era, and how Reformation-era naturalists and theologians further comment on ambiguous forms of created beings, including animals, monsters, and humans who fall short of the definitive elements of the image of God.
Chapter 2: Early Modern Theologies of Fallenness in Creation

As we discussed in chapter 1, Augustine’s focus on created beings revolves around the question of what it means to be made in the image of God. For Augustine, his interpretation of Genesis reveals a more complex image than previously attributed to him. On the one hand, it is clear that Augustine does affirm the boundary between humans and animals, insofar as humans are explicitly created in the image of God and possess that rational intellect that makes connection with the divine possible in a way not possible for animals. Augustine reinforces an anthropocentric view of creation that imbues humanity with a specific connection to the divine, as well as specific responsibilities over the created realm.

At the same time, Augustine’s vision of creation is somewhat nuanced, and is given to certain tendencies. While he does not affirm that animals possess the image of God, he does provide detailed reflections that heavily suggest rational potential in animals. Animals may not possess the explicit capacity for connection or relation with God, but to Augustine, they clearly possess something resembling intellect that complicates the assessment. Conversely, while Augustine affirms that animals in intellect possess something resembling mental capacity, he also affirms the degree to which humans, who choose to act on their irrational, violent impulses, betray the image of God in themselves.

Augustine’s discussion of the image of God as central to understanding human life, as well as, to an extent, animal life, has a lasting, reverberating impact on theologies of creation in the early modern era. Augustine’s authority loomed over an era dependent upon the power of established tradition for assessing and understanding theological truths and new accounts and experiences. More broadly, Augustine’s impact is important as an early foray into interpretation of Genesis, with the account of creation itself a crucial part of understanding early modern
understanding of the boundary between humans and non-humans. In short, while Augustine served as a primary figure whose thought molded the contours of debate on theologies of creation, he was not the only one, and his influence was only as important as the accounts of creation for which he conducted exegesis.

What remains is to unpack the extent of the importance of Genesis in the early modern theological landscape, and the extent to which Reformation-era exegeses of Genesis influenced the trajectory of theological perspectives on nature over time. In short, while ancient and medieval authorities held a valuable place in early modern exegeses, Reformation-era theologians seek out ways to navigate established authorities while also staking out their own claims and exegetical methods, a method that plays a key part in shaping early modern perceptions of the boundary between people and non-people. Thus, this chapter will seek to address how early modern understandings of Genesis, particularly of the role of sin in creation, impact views of the boundary between people and non-people. The primary questions that emerge revolve around the very nature of humanity as created in God’s image, how that distinguishes humanity from animals, and the extent to which the fallenness of humanity impacts views of creation more broadly. We will first examine early modern commentaries on creation to get a broad sense of how early modern theologies approached these questions theoretically. Then, this chapter will turn to case studies to understand how theologians, reformers, and scholars reconciled theological suppositions about nature with the reality of lived experiences, and the degree to which their insufficiency prompted the emergence of new modes of thinking and prioritization of forms of knowledge. We first turn to some of the most prominent early modern theologies of creation.
Early Modern Commentaries on Creation and Sin

As I have discussed, Augustine’s impact on the early modern theological landscape is difficult to overstate, particularly with regard to his understanding of nature. Early modern commentaries on creation, and especially Genesis, repeatedly reference and interact with ancient authorities, including Augustine, Pliny, Aristotle, and others, and demonstrate a degree of continuity with their views. At the same time, the deviations in hermeneutical method and specific insights are crucial to understanding the specific ways in which approaches to nature and the understanding of animals evolve throughout this period. Moreover, Augustine’s dichotomous approach to animal life (evaluating animal life both in a spiritual, moral sense and in a practical sense) is only subtly evident, even though early modern commentaries on Genesis do embrace more nuanced approaches to understanding animal life. This raises the question later of what the impact of this blurry approach to animal-human divisions is on eventual Christian understandings of animal and non-human life itself (a question which extends to include animals, separated intelligences, non-Adamic creation, and human participation in transgressions of the human animal-boundary). This question also includes questions of the theoretical shift which occurs from enchanted, spiritualized visions of matter to less spiritualized, more empirical approaches in Christian theology and forms of knowledge. All of these questions will merit later responses.

As a brief elaboration to understanding early modern approaches to creation, we must first acknowledge the clear distinction between Augustine’s approaches. On the one hand, Augustine presents animal life, in the scheme of creation, as inferior to human life. Animals lack many of the advanced abilities of human life for deeper, spiritual, rational engagement with God, and God entrusts humanity with dominion and care over animal life. At the same time,
Augustine holds that animals are important to humanity for practical benefit and edification, not only through the consumption of animal products, but also as important for the spiritual benefit and edification of Christians, which comes to impact later Christian understandings in bestiaries and early Christian zoology as providing symbolic understandings of animals and non-human life, including separated intelligences, monstrous births and monsters. Moreover, Augustine acknowledges ways in which animals are morally important and worth understanding in their own right. While their cognition does not stretch as far as human cognition and rationality, Augustine’s acknowledgment of animal value on a moral scale sets early modern theologies of creation toward a path that affirms animal existence as both practically and morally important, while still ambiguous as to their specific moral status.

Early modern exegeses of Genesis are therefore a crucial piece of understanding early modern Christian approaches to animal life. Christian exegesis of the creation accounts in Genesis are not the only venues in which fifteenth and sixteenth century theologians express their views on animal life, as several of these theologians from Peucer to Luther discuss their views of the cosmic order elsewhere. We might consider, for instance, Luther’s own expressed ambivalence toward animal life in Table Talk and other areas.¹ Nor are the early modern theologians the first to provide exegesis of or responses to nature. The second book of Peter Lombard’s Sentences is notable, for instance, in asking questions about the variety of issues in Genesis, including why God created Eve out of Adam’s rib, among other things.² But the

¹ While Luther expresses a sense of animals as suited primarily for human use, with humans expressing “unconditional dominion” over animals, a feature that is present both before and after the Fall. However, Luther also views animals with some affection, and argues that they are a part of creation and may even share in the resurrection. He finds it especially difficult to believe that his own puppy Tolpel, who was a faithful companion “would be excluded from life eternal.” See Joshua Moritz, “Martin Luther and the Medieval Saints Among the Animals,” in Dialog 51.1 (March 2012): 7-12.
² Peter Lombard, Libri Quattuor Sententiarum 2.18.2, The Sentences: Book 2, 1150, transl. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008), 77. Implicit in this section that describes Eve as created from
influence of early modern commentaries on Genesis is crucial to understanding where precisely early modern theology of creation stood at a moment of immense transition during the Reformation, a period during which numerous physicians, scientists, theologians, and demonologists attempted to reshape approaches to and understanding of animal and non-human life. In approaches to Genesis, we see some of these views echoed, yet not all of them make their way into early modern cosmologies, nor do they fully comport with attitudes toward animals engendered by anthropocentric mindsets. So this chapter will address some of the most prominent approaches to Genesis of the sixteenth century, as well as the important influences on them from the fourteenth century writer Nicholas of Lyra, and assess the salient aspects that contribute to blurred understandings of the place of animals in the hierarchy of creation.

Nicholas of Lyra

Currently, historiographical scholarship around early modern commentaries on Genesis has focused on particularly salient issues in the commentaries. Response to commentaries has focused on the role of various reformers as utilizing Genesis to respond to issues in their own contexts, including accounts of creation, but also the importance of gender relations and approaches to understanding and responding to sexual immorality. However, there is somewhat less cohesive work regarding the boundary between human and nonhuman as structured in Reformation responses to Genesis. While there is much historiographical treatment of views on animals more broadly, they have tended to give more cursory treatment to the role of Adam’s side so that he will not be viewed as either dominating her or being subservient to her is a viewpoint about human dominion as being collaborative, and about women as participating fully in the dominion over animals. For some examples of these in practice, see Mickey Mattox, “Order in the House? The Reception of Luther’s orders teaching in early Lutheran Genesis commentaries,” in Reformation and Renaissance Review 14.2 (August 2012): 110-126; Debora Marcuse, “The Reformation of the Saints: Biblical Interpretation and moral regulation in John Calvin’s commentary and sermons on Genesis;” (PhD. Diss, Duke University, 2005); Kathleen Crowther-Heyck, “Be Fruitful and Multiply: Genesis and Generation in Reformation Germany,” Renaissance Quarterly 55.3 (September 2002): 904-935.
commentaries on Genesis in understanding Reformed and evangelical views of animals or have focused on specific authors.⁴

All medieval and early modern students of Scripture would have been familiar with the glossa ordinaria, the compilation of commentaries from the Church Fathers and other theologians, included in printings of the Bible as gloss surrounding the text.⁵ While readers would have come across many figures, the most significant of these is Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), whose postils and commentaries on the glossa ordinaria would have been known to virtually all students of theology and Scripture of the early modern period. Historiographical treatment is varied, as his influence would have been widespread and diffuse. Little is known about Lyra himself, as no records exist of his birth, although several locales claim him as their own.⁶ And even his postils have been a difficult task to discuss, as his glosses have been misattributed in the past, to the point where one of the more prominent copies of his gloss in print is still listed as written by the ninth-century monk Walafrid Strabo in 20th-century prints.⁷

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⁵ For more on the origins of the Glossa Ordinaria, as well as analysis of some of the most important themes, see Alice Sharp, “In Principio: The Origins of the Glossa ordinaria on Genesis 1-3,” (PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 2015).

⁶ A succinct summary of Lyra’s biographical information can be found in Ian Christopher Levy, “Nicholas of Lyra: The Biblical Prologues,” in Handbuch der Bibelhermeneutiken, ed. Oda Wischnmeyer (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2016), 239-241. See also Thomas Kalita, “The Influence of Nicholas of Lyra on Martin Luther’s Commentary on Genesis,” (PhD Diss., Catholic University of America, 1985).

Philip Krey’s discussion of Nicholas’s impact on apocalypse commentaries effectively touches on the printing of Nicholas of Lyra’s postils in the *glossa ordinaria*, and while Krey discusses his impact on medieval apocalypse literature, its title is an apt description of Lyra’s impact more broadly; he was a figure with “many readers but few followers.” Thomas Kalita’s work, for instance, discussing Luther’s use and familiarity with Nicholas of Lyra, is especially significant for suggesting and demonstrating the ways in which Luther both uses and diverges from Nicholas of Lyra’s commentaries in his own writings and sermons, but even if Kalita’s assertion is correct, and Luther’s use of Lyra has been overstated, Luther’s familiarity with Lyra points to how his work permeated and influenced the theological landscape of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Nicholas of Lyra’s Postils on Genesis tackle several issues regarding the creation narrative. His commentaries take a word by word and phrase by phrase approach, dissecting and commenting on specific phrases, yet also addressing broader questions within the structure of the text itself. For instance, early in the gloss, Nicholas addresses the question of why plants were not made in the same mode as humans, as well as the actual purpose of plants. Throughout the postils, Lyra frequently addresses such questions and the potential reasons behind various elements of Genesis. Moreover, specifically regarding Genesis, Nicholas of Lyra regularly invokes elements that imply interesting answers. Nicholas supports and invokes Aristotelian theory regarding the composition of nature, referring to the 4 elements, and adding humor and

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8 Philip Krey, “Many Readers but Few Followers: The Fate of Nicholas of Lyra’s ‘Apocalypse Commentary’ in the Hands of His Late Medieval Admirers,” in *Church History* 64.2 (June 1995): 185-207.
9 See Kalita, 36-38, 134-140.
vapor to them. Moreover, his familiarity with Jewish authors is notable, as he occasionally cites rabbinic authorities, such as Rabbi Eliezer the Tanna. 

The themes invoked in the Postils regarding the creation of animals and of humanity are especially significant, as they both reaffirm and add to the themes promoted by Augustine. Lyra’s discussion of the distinctive elements of the image of God, how those distinguish humans from animals, and the power of sin in impacting the image of God, set the tone for commentaries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Important facets of Nicholas’s discussion included the purpose and rationale behind both creation itself and the process of creation, the constituent elements of the image of God, and the corrupting power of sin on humanity.

Nicholas dissects in detailed fashion both the purpose of creation and the very nature of the creative process itself. While limiting himself broadly to exegesis of the text itself without inserting excessive theological discussion, Nicholas does delve into questions in his discussion of Genesis of the creation narratives. Nicholas provides two distinct approaches to commentaries on Genesis: the Postilla Literalis, or the literal commentary, and the Postilla Moraliter, or the moral commentary, in which he elaborates on the mystical sense of Scripture rather than the literal sense. Nicholas is explicit theologically on the broader parameters of the creation narrative. Nicholas notes that God creates in the beginning, denoting a beginning of time and of nature, created out of nothing outside of God, and produced heavens and earth as distinct bodies, but at the initial point of creation, unformed. But the moral commentary describes not the technical, practical elements of creation, but the theological components of creation read through

12 Ibid., 9. Col. 17, note 2. Thomas Kalita also addresses this in discussing the degree to which Lyra was influenced by Jewish authors in both his own upbringing and his exegetical method. See Kalita, 4-7, 28-30.
13 While there is clear value in the moral postils, this chapter will focus primarily, though not exclusively, on the literal commentary, as presenting Nicholas of Lyra’s sense of the ordering and creation of the world.
the lens of Christian teachings. Nicholas describes that creation is initially designed by God to be the best possible design for humanity, even though humans may be called “lesser worlds” by both philosophers and saints (a reference to the dichotomy of God’s control over the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosms of individual lives).¹⁵ He also describes how the human spirit is designed from the beginning to consist of two divergent elements: that element from heaven, which is engraved on humanity (“quod a Deo celitus donat”), as well as the flesh, which is earthly, fallen, and as a result, does not have any good in itself, as described in Romans 7 (“Caro vero hominis lapsi non habet exite aliquod bonum...in carne mea bonum, ideo subditur”).¹⁶ So while Nicholas does not necessarily see these theological concepts borne out early in the text, that alongside the literal commentary is also framed a broader, theological approach to the creation narratives.

Nicholas goes into detail regarding the design of creation in ways more directly connected to humans and animals themselves. In his discussion of the creation of plants, Lyra discusses how God decorates and adorns the world, but raises confusion over the order of events, going so far as to say that it would seem that the creation of plants should belong to the sixth day of creation rather than the third day, because the adorning of the world is similar in nature to the adorning of humanity.¹⁷ This section delves into some of the particulars of the created order, including what month of the year creation would have begun (depending on the condition of the trees and other flora, it could have started in the month of March or September). Shortly after that, regarding the fifth day of creation, Lyra discusses the creation of birds and aquatic animals,
where he identifies that birds and fish are not created from water alone, but from all four of the
elements of the earth, but that water is the most immediate way in which God’s creative process
can work for their design, in part because water has both humor and vapor.\textsuperscript{18}

Lyra’s commentary attends in detail to understanding the rationale behind specific
choices made by God in creation, but often relates those insights to the goal of understanding
humanity’s role and relation to the rest of creation. This is not to say that Lyra is not interested in
animals for their own sake, but that Lyra’s participation in broader debates and ideas relates
specific points of the created order to humanity. For instance, he discusses the creation of
animals in both male and female forms as part of a broader section on the distinction between the
material and the spiritual life. Lyra posits that the Jews fall into the “errors of the Saracens,” who
view the blessedness of human life in the future as linked to carnal delights, including food and
sexual pleasure, rather than the work of the mind and spirit, an error that not even non-Jewish,
“Gentile” philosophers made. Lyra links Jews and Muslims with materialistic thought and argues
that they focus on the material realm. He argues that as a result, Jews and Muslims miss that the
blessedness of the animal state differs from humanity’s blessedness, which is not material, but
intellectual and spiritual. This blessed state does not belong to “brute animals,” but rather to
intellectual and rational creatures.\textsuperscript{19} Additionally, Lyra identifies that while animals, including
birds and “brute animals” are comprised of many species, humanity is created as an individual
species (and indeed in an individual person), which means that there is not any discussion or

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., “Habet enim aqua humorem et vaporem, per humorem convenit cum piscibus, per vaporem qui sursum
elevatur in aere, convenit cum avibus.”

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 13. Col. 25, note 1. “Ex quo patet Iudaes occidisse in delectationibus corporalibus ciborum et venereorum,
quod non solum apud catholicos absurdam reputat, sed etiam apud Gentiles philosophos, qui beatitudinem hominis
ponunt in operibus intellective partis, afferents vita voluptosam esse vita pecudum, ur patet...Ethi propter quot
beatitudo ibi non est ponenda, cum felicitas nullo modo pertineat ad bruta animalia, sed soluad intellectual, et
rationale creatura, propter quod catholici bene ponunt beatitudine in visione et fruitione ipsius Dei.”
“mention” of any variety of human genus or species. Lyra’s discussion of the practical elements of creation thus intersects explicitly with his notion of human distinctiveness from animals of all sorts. The process of human creation differs from that of animals in regards to the type and nature of their blessedness, a distinction fitting with Augustinian insight and the broader perception of humanity’s separateness from the animal realm. And because the reproduction of avian and aquatic animals occurs through the mixing of male and female, Lyra notes that their reproduction is specially blessed. Additionally, Lyra gives some insight into how he distinguishes his own thoughts from his perception of the thought of others; his comparisons are perhaps unfair, but also play into a broader tradition whereby Christian thinkers view Jews and Muslims as too given to material and carnal concerns, a link which would not diminish among Reformation thinkers.

Once Lyra moves to the creation of the “beasts of the earth,” he elaborates on the specific natures of some of these creatures. Even before the creation of humanity, Lyra notes how beasts of burden (“iumenta”) are created toward the use of humanity (“Quantum ad animalai [sic] quae veniunt ad usum hominis quae generali nomine dicuntur iumenta, quasi iuvamenta.”) His discussion of reptiles and beasts does not explicitly detail their relation or utility to humanity, but rather articulates the things that distinguish them from other creatures, as with beasts, which are

20 Ibid., 13. Col. 26, note 2. “In piscibus enim et avibus et brutis animalibus sunt multa species subalternae, ac etiam specilissima, et ideo in productione eorum sit mention de generibus et speciebus, natura autem humana producta est primo in uno solo individuo, ut patebit infra, et ideo non sit ibi mentio de genere, vel specie.”
21 Ibid., 14. Col. 27-28, note 2. “Et quia multiplicatio per talem modum non est in plantis et herbis, ideo in productio earum non sit mentio de tali benefictio earum.”
22 For some background on Lyra’s reading of Jewish text and the place of Hebrew and rabbinic traditions in his and other Christian exegetical work, see Deanna Klepper, The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007). For assessment of the view of Muslims as carnal and Islam as anticrist and threat to Christendom, see Michael Uebel, “Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth-Century Responses to Saracen Alterity,” in Monster Theory: Reading Culture, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 264-291. This strain of thought in general makes an implicit comparison between Christian thinkers as spiritual and Islamic and Jewish thinkers as carnal. This theme would reemerge in the sixteenth century among Protestant critiques of Catholic thought. In both of these cases, the language and comparisons used draw animalistic associations.
called such because of their relation to the woods ("quantum ad animalia silvestria, ideo
dicuntur bestiae, quasi vastiae").

With the discussion of the creation of the sixth day also comes the discussion of the
creation of humanity, which Lyra divides into two parts: the creation of humanity, and the fall
into sin ("Et dividitur in duas partes, quia primo describit hominis formationem, secundo eius
lapsum et transgressionem"). Echoing Augustine, Lyra identifies the Trinitarian character of
creation, where Genesis notes God saying, “Let us create,” denoting the presence of all the
persons of the Trinity in creation. ("Faciamus, in plurali, ad denotandum pluralitatem
personarum in divinis"). He also identifies key characteristics that define the nature of the “image
of God.” Lyra writes that God created humanity according to his own image and likeness, and
that the image of God consists in those characteristics naturally belonging to God, including His
intelligence, will, and memory.23 The creation of humanity in the image of God enables
humanity to affect the will of God through both knowledge and love ("capax Dei per
cognitionem et amorem"). The creation in the image of God also implies an ordering of creation,
as humanity is subject in obedience to God, but the wisdom and prudence granted to humanity
puts them in the ordering above other created beings, with animals being subject to humans, and
animals over plants, in general following the idea of the more perfect governing the less perfect
("Secundo quia perfectiora gubernant imperfectiora"). Lyra does not deny a certain wisdom in
animals (he uses the example of a spider, which is able to construct a web), but distinguishes that

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imaginem et similitudinem suam. Imago autem Dei consistit in anima quantum ad proprietates naturales, scilicet
memoriam, intelligentiam, et voluntatem.”
from human prudence, which is evident more broadly across human nature than in specific skills.\textsuperscript{24}

The third reason Lyra gives for human dominance over animals is that, in being created in the image of God, humanity is initially obedient to the second nature; however, as penalty for the fall into sin, that obedience to the second nature (presumably the spiritual nature rather than the corporal nature) is removed, with the obedience of the inferior nature to the rational nature, and of the spirit to the body.\textsuperscript{25} Lyra’s brief mention of sin’s power here tells a great deal about his view of sin, which he does describe further later in his discussion of the Fall. But this brief mention here also tells us that Lyra views sin as not necessarily fully negating the image of God, but that it does remove humanity from strict obedience to its spiritual nature and introduces the conflict of the corporal nature, in addition to the introduction of death and the inability to prolong life, as well as the particularly gendered punishments to male and female.\textsuperscript{26} The image of God may distinguish humans from animals, but sin, in its own way, puts animals and humans as more level in a way tacitly acknowledged by Lyra. While Lyra says little regarding the human charge to subdue the earth, he is clear about his perceived order of creation, and he still holds to human dominance over animals as a facet of the created order.

Additionally, Lyra exerted a critical impact on early modern theological discourse through his familiarity and use of rabbinic sources. Lyra regularly engages with and identifies rabbinic sources within his Postils. In the section discussing the creation of plants, Lyra

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, col. 33. “in homine, in quo est prudentia generalis. In animalibus vero sunt quaedam prudentiae particulares tantum, ut in aranea ad faciendum telam, et sic de aliis, et ideo animalae sunt homini subiecta [sic].”
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. “Tertio quia homo factus est ad imaginem Dei, ideo iuste obediunt ei inferiora secundum naturam instidutam [sic], sed in poenam peccati ista obedientia est ei subtracta, sicut et obedientia virium inferiorum respectu rationis, et corporis respectu anime.”
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 51-54. In his discussion of the end of Genesis 3, Lyra details that the Hebrew text omits the audience for God’s words, and inserts that the audience is the angels, through whose ministry humans were ejected from paradise. See col. 105-106, note 4.
acknowledges the perspective of the “Hebrews,” such as Rabbi Joshua, who holds that the world would have been created to start in the month of March, in which plants begin to grow and bloom, whereas Rabbi Eliezer holds that the world would have been created in the month of September, in which the trees and plants of the world bear fully formed fruit. Lyra’s familiarity with rabbinic sources has raised questions about his biography, but this intersection with rabbinic sources is important to understanding the ways in which later reformers navigate a field already dissected by both ancient Christian and Jewish authorities, and the degree to which they thought rabbinic scholars could be utilized within Christian thought.

While discussion of the creation narrative in Genesis is important for understanding these themes, another illustrative section about both the power of sin and its relationship to the boundary between humans and non-humans is Genesis 6. Lyra’s response to the biblical account of the Great Flood says much about sin, as well as human interaction with both animals and other creatures that may stretch the boundary between creatures. Lyra responds to the beginning of Genesis 6, which discusses the intermingling between the “sons of God” and humanity. Lyra’s interpretation of this puzzling passage and the reference to the Nephilim opts toward a more supernatural approach, clarifying first that this era of sin in the world began before Noah (”multiplicatio peccatorum non incipit tempore Noe sed ante”). But Lyra refers to the “sons of God” in a spiritual sense, viewing them as demonic creatures. These demonic creatures (fallen angels by tradition, although that is not clarified by Lyra) intermingled with human women, who

then gave birth to giants.\textsuperscript{30} To Lyra, such a suggestion is not irrational or odd, as it demonstrates how the world was flooded as a penalty for sin.\textsuperscript{31} Moreover, Lyra mentions how in this era, every lineage of flesh was corrupted, both in a general sense and in the tangible sense because of the intermingling of the “Sons of God” with the descendants of Cain, the byproduct of which was actual giants who populated the earth in both stature and firmness.\textsuperscript{32} This interpretation relates God’s judgment on humanity to a very specific, literal understanding of the text in this instance. Lyra avoids a strictly moralizing tendency to the discussion of this intermingling, using it to identify something deeper about God’s response to boundary violations (including God’s judgment for sin) rather than a strictly moral instruction about those violations.\textsuperscript{33}

Lyra also discusses humanity’s relationship to animals in commentary on the end of Genesis 6 and throughout Genesis 7. Lyra writes of God’s command to Noah to bring a male and female of each animal into the Ark, noting that this command varied depending on the type of animal. He elaborates that there was no inclusion of fish on the ark, because they were created for life in water, and thus were less threatened by the flood, and he even goes as far as to say that they are “saved in the waters.”\textsuperscript{34} In chapter 7, Lyra discusses the inclusion of animals and birds on the ark and separation of both clean and unclean animals onto the ark. His discussion of the nature of the inclusion of animals is more limited, opting instead for discussion of how God led

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid. Col. 138, note 2. “Unomodo quod per hoc intelliguntur daemones incubi, qui dicuntur filii Dei, propter naturam spiritualem...Satan fuisse inter filios Dei, et isti in specie humana commiserunt se mulieribus, et inde nati sunt gigantes, unde dicitur infra.”}
\footnote{Ibid. “Sed haec expositio non videtur irrationalibus, quia hic exprimitur causa diluvii. quod inundavit in poenam peccatorum.”}
\footnote{Ibid., 71. Col. 140, note 8. “Gigantes autem erant, id est proceri, excedentes homines in statura et robusti viribus, et incompositi moribus.”}
\footnote{During the sixteenth century, Luther connected this interpretative tendency to Lyra’s sympathy for the Jews. See Arnold Ages, “Luther and the Rabbis,” in \textit{Jewish Quarterly Review} 58.1 (July 1967): 63-68.}
\footnote{\textit{Postilla Nicholai de Lyra Super Genesim}, 75. Col. 147, note 1. “Ex quo patet quod pisces non erant ibi positi, quia salvati sunt in aquis peccata enim propter quae dominus adduxit diluvium super terram, facta fuerunt in terra et non in aqua, et ideo pisces no fuerunt mortui sicut alia animalia et aves”}
\end{footnotes}
Noah into the ark and closed the doors, punishing humanity. But his description throughout of
the impact on animals is sometimes very abrupt, including a reference that everything on the
earth died as simply being described as written.\(^{35}\) However, Lyra does go to great lengths to
describe the inclusion of both clean and unclean animals. Regarding Genesis 7:8, Lyra writes
that both clean and unclean animals are included on the ark for future use, but notes the inclusion
of this division before Moses, writing that this division was taken from the use in offering and
sacrifices; however, he does little to explicitly explain the need for inclusion of unclean animals.
But after the male and female of each entered the ark with Noah, Lyra discusses that the animals
were included not for the service of humans on the ark, but for reproduction and offering to
God.\(^{36}\) Interestingly, Lyra writes that while both clean and unclean animals are included, they are
also separated, at least in name, just as men and women are.\(^{37}\) Yet much of Lyra’s focus is not on
the inclusion of animals, but on God’s action throughout the flood and explaining various
aspects, including the construction of the ark, as well as on God’s renewal. But in the discussion
of Genesis 8 and the recession of the flood, Lyra notes that God’s admonition to leave the ark is
extended to Noah, but also includes that he bring the animals out from the ark, and that the
command that they leave the ark to multiply again, which had been prohibited or prevented by
God in the ark.\(^{38}\) Throughout this discussion, while Lyra dwells less on the actual inclusion of
animals and its implications on creation, he does dwell on the divisions of purity, both of clean

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 77. Col. 151-152, note 4. Throughout this section, there is also discussion of the different pairs God requires
of Noah—seven pairs of clean, seven pairs of birds, and a single pair of unclean animals, based on their needs for
reproduction, as well as for offerings.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 78. Col. 153, note 2. “Separatim nominantur viri a mulieribus ingrediendo arcam, et ex divino praecptio, ad
ostendendum quod quamdiu fuerunt in arca, fuerunt separati quantum ad thorum, sicut patebit magis infra.”
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 82. Col. 162, note 7. “Nec istud refertur ad homines tandem, sed etiam animalia et aves, quorum egressum
praecperat et sic patet quod etiam brutis tunc relaxatus est coitus qui ante fuerat prohibitus”
and unclean animals, and of behavior that while necessary is unclean and ought not to be included on the ark.

More could potentially be said about Nicholas of Lyra’s view of creation, but his ubiquity in early modern commentaries suggests the importance of his thought within Reformation-era commentaries. The most significant elements for our purposes from these passages are a few points that Lyra details the mechanics behind the creative process, the elements of the image of God, and the impact of sin on the image of God and the order of creation. Additionally, he is less prone to discussion of the specific importance of animals in Genesis 6-8, but he does give attention to various divisions of purity: between humans and animals, between types of animals, and between humans and spiritual creatures. These boundaries may be crossed, but that transgression is worthy of judgment for Lyra, and his clear view of boundaries between humans and non-humans is not merely moral and figurative, but very literal and related to species divisions. These themes are echoed and elaborated upon by Reformation commentators, yet their approach diverges in key facets from Lyra’s approach.

Reformation-era Commentaries

The commentaries of the Reformation-era on Genesis prove significant for early modern understandings of both the natural world and humanity’s place within it. In no small part due to the ubiquity of prior exegesis on Genesis from Nicholas of Lyra, as well as in early scholastic writers like Peter Lombard, Peter Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas, as well as with the preeminent place of Augustine to medieval theology, early modern exegesis on Genesis was quite common, with Cameron noting that while not every early modern theologian addressed the topic, a significant majority had at least some thoughts or reflections.39 While observations of the natural

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world sometimes occurred from a naturalistic perspective, the processing and understanding of those observations tended to require reference to Genesis as a text to make sense of the ordering of creation and humanity’s place within it. There are two sections of Genesis which prove important to understanding early modern perceptions of the boundary between humans and non-humans: the creation narrative in Genesis 1, and the account of the Great Flood in Genesis 6.

*Genesis 1: The Creation of the World*

Processing and understanding the order of creation certainly takes a dramatic shift in the early modern era towards a more naturalistic framing, but reformers tended to read and interpret the biblical texts with an explicitly theological sense and in light of Christian teachings. Johannes Brenz (1499-1570), one of Luther’s earliest followers and a reformer in Southwest Germany, approached Genesis in his commentary with an early emphasis on the importance of “repentance, by which we might escape the wrath that is coming upon the world.” Because Genesis details humanity’s fall into sin, as well as God’s mercy amidst destruction in the Great Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis is an important text to Brenz as it “teaches us the true way to pursue righteousness and holiness.” Other reformers and writers take similar approaches. Reformed theologian Wolfgang Capito (1478-1541) assesses the utility of Genesis’s creation narratives as illustrating to humanity its position as “part of the universe that in its entirety arises and abides through the power of the one word of God,” but with humanity also benefiting from the knowledge of God’s safekeeping of salvation and helping assure humans of

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their faith, as well as from the practical importance of knowledge of God. Other approaches include John Calvin, (1509-1564) who insists that Genesis contains the “whole Gospel of Christ,” and that of David Chytraeus (1530-1600) who states that Genesis covers the entire gamut of Christian theology and doctrine and “kindles in our minds the true and eternal light, righteousness, and life.” Reformed theologian Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562) states that Genesis represents the beginning of both God’s laws and promises. In short, Genesis is not merely significant as a lens to understand the natural world, but also as a means of understanding the entirety of the Christian story and connecting to God’s nature.

The treatment of Genesis by Protestant reformers and theologians is thus of critical importance, with the creation narratives illuminating much for authors about how God orders creation, from animals to humans, and about what that order says about humanity’s relation to God. Lutheran authors visit many of the same themes discussed in Augustine and Lyra, including the specific ordering and wisdom of God in creation, the power of sin, and the distinctive elements of the image of God. But the shift from theological to naturalistic views of Genesis is a gradual process, as the general bent of Genesis commentaries, which filters to natural reflections on the world, views the creation of the world as in large part for the utility of humanity. Johannes Brenz’s commentary on Genesis addresses this directly. Brenz suggests that the creation of animals in part depends on their gifts; however, their utility for humanity is comprehensive. For instance, in discussing the creation of birds and animals, Brenz suggests that while animals are

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given to humanity for physical and bodily purposes, including as food and sources of entertainment and delight (regarding the songs of birds), that animals are also created as a source of spiritual edification for humanity, so that “they might feed and delight people spiritually...so that they might incite people to know the true God and to pursue true and eternal salvation.”

Brenz also pushes back against other uses or interpretations of the significance of animals in the world, rejecting birds and fish as sources of prophetic insight or omens (practices referred to as ornithomancy and ichthyomancy), except insofar as animals are read as attesting to the “wondrous power of God...and the wisdom of God the creator.”

Meanwhile, John Calvin argues not only for animals’ utility for humanity, but for an intrinsic blessing to animals in themselves. To Calvin, God blesses animals actively, not passively, and “effects what men seek by earnest entreaty,” and that he “therefore blesses his creatures when he commands them to increase and grow; that is, he infuses them into fecundity by his word.” God’s blessing in this case is intrinsic; Calvin argues that “the force of the word which was addressed to the fishes was not transient, but rather, being infused into their nature, has taken root, and constantly bears fruit.”

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45 Ibid. Brenz’s comments on ichthyomancy and ornithomancy push back against their use by “pagans,” (“Ethnici”) suggesting in their place the importance of animals attesting to the Gospel, as with Jonah being swallowed by a fish as prophetic of Christ’s three days between death and resurrection, as well as the importance of the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove on Jesus at his baptism. “Haec est optima ὀρνιθομαντεία καὶ ἰχθυομαντεία, quae nos ad veram Christi filii Dei cognitionem ducit. Sed exponamus, in quem usum generaliter creati sint pisces & aves. Quemadmodum igitur ex creaturis, quae superioribus diebus conditae sunt, ita etiam ex piscibus & avibus, cognoscenda et admiranda potentia Dei. Deus enim non tantum dixit: Et creati sunt pisces & aves, verum etiam BENEDIXIT, & multiplicati sunt, ac conservantur & propagantur in suo quoque genere, usque ad extremum huius secularis diem. Deinde cognoscenda est ex his sapientia Dei creatoris.”

Theological framing of the natural realm is continually evident throughout the Protestant commentaries on Genesis. Johannes Brenz notes that the creation of humanity occurs last in creation, so that “guest quarters should be readied for them and fitted with every kind of furnishing.”

God’s creation of the world prior to the creation of humanity represents God’s plan that creation be a testament to God’s “majesty, power, wisdom, and goodness,” and would provoke a response of “joy, gladness, and delight” in Adam, and that “nothing could have kept him from admiring and loving his creator with his whole heart.”

The creation of humanity is thus treated by commentators such as Brenz as a culmination of God’s creation, not only as a finishing point, but also as the creation which requires and prompts the greatest degree of care. Common to the accounts of the creation of humanity is agreement on the Trinitarian nature of the image of God. Brenz affirms that God the Father’s statement, “Let us make humankind” is in conversation not with angels, but with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, “the holiest senate and most sacred of councils that was ever convened,” with the final resolution of that council to create humanity “in the image and likeness of God, and that they would be partakers of the divine blessedness and preside over all the other creatures on earth, in the sea and in the sky, and thus be like God on earth.”

This assertion of the Trinitarian character of the image of God is supported by most other commentators as well. Reformed author Wolfgang Musculus, also known as Meuslein, (1497-1563) emphatically asserts that the creation of humanity is a product

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48 Ibid. “Non potest autem vel humana mente comprehendi, vel humana lingua explicari, quanto gaudio, quanta laetitia, quanta voluptate perfusus sit Adam, cùm recens creatus, vidit subitò caelum & terram, hoc est, hospitium suum tam insigniter excultum & ornatum. Certè teneri non potuit, quin creatorem ex animo admiratus sit & amaverit.”

of the Trinity, and clarifies that the words “Let us make humankind” are spoken by God not to
the angels, but to the other persons of the Trinity, because angels are treated not as makers but as
“fellow servants” with humanity, and moreover because the implication of God requesting
assistance from the angels suggests God requiring assistance from “his own creatures!” He also
asserts that the process of creation affirms both the Trinity and the unity of God.50 Others are
even more derisive of the notion of angelic involvement with creation, with Calvin going so far
as to call authors suggesting this “wholly ridiculous when they imagine that God conducted a
conversation with the earth or the angels. Obviously, the earth was a most excellent advisor!”51
To Calvin, God is deliberate with the creative process, and any engagement is among the other
persons of the Trinity. Calvin writes that the creation of humanity in Genesis, while being
spoken of in the future tense, is one in which God is “deliberating,” and transitions from
“commanding...into consultation.” To Calvin, this was not strictly necessary, as God could have
brought about humanity with a single word; the fact that God enters into “consultation” is, to
Calvin, the “highest honor with which he has dignified us.”52 Calvin’s primary point is that
God’s sovereign nature means that no help is required in the acts of creation, but also that
suggesting that created beings contribute to the creative process is an affront to that sovereignty.
The broader consensus, then, is one that asserts God’s sovereignty against any attempts to
diminish it, and that seeks to define a firm, uncrossable boundary between God and God’s
creation. This suggests an initial firm boundary between created beings in reality, even if that

50 Wolfgang Musculus, In Mosis Genesim plenissimi commentarii, in quibus veterum et recentiorum sententiae
diligentur expenduntur (Basel: Johann Herwagen, 1554), 48. “Observatio I; Quaestio I- “sed necesse habuerit
creaturarum suarum accersere auxilium.” See also Thompson, “God was not speaking to the angels when making his
image.” 41-42.
51 John Calvin, Ioannis Calvini commentarii in primum librum Mosis, 4. “Ac omnino ridiculi sunt Iudaei, dum
fingunt Deum cum terra vel Angelis communicasse sermonem: terra scilicet optima consiliaria erat.” See also
Thompson, “‘Let us make’ refers to the Trinity, not the angels or the ‘Royal’ we,” 42.
52 John Calvin, Commentary on Genesis, Volume 1, 50. See also Ioannis Calvini commentarii in primum librum
Mosis, 4. “Hic summus est honos quo nos dignatus est.”

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boundary seems to be transgressed in the experiences of the era or in the ways in which Protestant reformers discuss later.

The commentaries on Genesis, moreover, align significantly regarding the nature of the image and likeness of God as not just pointing to God’s Trinity and unity, but also pointing to important aspects of human nature, as well as how that image is impacted by sin. Konrad Pellikan (1478-1556) writes that the image of God ought also to be thought of as the “law of human nature, by which one ought to be absolutely eager to do good to all,” an image which is “possessed neither by brute beasts nor by the impious and the unjust, but rather by those who cultivate righteousness and bear the character of God the Father by imitating Christ the Son of God.”

Zwingli’s description is similar, connecting the image and likeness of God not merely to humanity’s dominion over animals, but as something “inscribed and impressed on our hearts.” This inscription is lacked by “brute beasts,” but is found in all who “attend to justice, who seek God, who imitate God and Christ in innocence of life toward all as well as doing good to them in turn.”

Zwingli is explicit about the distinction, clarifying that animals are not created with a soul, “unless you understand soul as the force of living and breathing.” Calvin’s description of that image is somewhat distinguished by the degree to which he links the concept of “image” with that of “likeness.” Calvin engages Aristotle’s notion of substance and accidents, relating the

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54 Huldrych Zwingli, *Farrago Annotationum in Genesim, ex ore Huld. Zuingli per Leonem Iudae et Casparem Megandrum excerptarum*, ed. Rudolf Gwalther and Leo Jud (Zurich: Christoph Froschauer, 1527), 4. “Haec imago deis inscripta est & impressa cordibus nostris. Animalia enim bruta haec non habent. Animantium enim omni generi a natura tributum est, ut se, vitam, corpusque tueantur. Qui ergo iustitiam colunt, qui deum quaerunt, qui deum innocentia vitae,Christumque omnibus perinde atque sibi beneficiendo exprimunt, hi demum antiquum imaginem dei referunt, quae per Christum repurgata est ac instaurata.” See also Thompson, “Natural Law Connects God’s Image to the Golden Rule,” 44.

55 Ibid., 3-4. “Producat terra animam vivam...nam alloqui animalia animam non habent, nisi animam pro vivendi respirandique vi accipias.” A minor point of interest in Zwingli’s commentary regarding the creation of humanity, however, is a switch from Latin to German in discussing the creation of humanity. “Faciamus hominem. Genus pro numero. Nam in uno homine coepit totum genus humanum, Lassen uns menschen machen / das menschlich geschlacht.”
image to the “substance and the likeness to the “accidents,” meaning that the appearance and abilities are what are visible, but the fundamental character (including the capacity for reason and moral decisions) comprise the substance. But he also engages with Augustine’s theology of image, relating Trinitarian identity into humanity through a tripartite division of “intellect, memory, and the will.” Calvin defines the “image of God” as encompassing a “perfection of our whole nature...Adam was endued with a right judgment, had affections in harmony with reason, had all his senses sound and well-regulated, and truly excelled in everything good.” And while broken by sin, the image of God in humanity still reflects the “Divine order” of creation.

Other discussions of image focus on the need for restoration of that image following its corruption by sin. Brenz describes the difference between Adam and the rest of humanity as the difference between somebody born with sight but later blinded (Adam) and one who is born blind from birth (the rest of humanity). Because of sin’s corruption of the image of God, humanity must turn to Scripture and the Holy Spirit to explain that nature, “not to indulge our curiosity but rather...to excite our interest in its restoration.” That restoration is made possible through salvation in Christ, but Brenz’s perception of the image of God is clearly not just something to be understood through delineation of its aspects, but also of admiration of its beauty. Peter Martyr Vermigli also associates discussion of the image of God with questions of restoration, writing that humanity was created with aspects of the image and likeness of God, including “justice, wisdom, compassion, self-control, and charity,” and with the “capacity for

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54 John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis, Volume 1*, 52-53.
55 Johannes Brenz, *Explicatio Geneseos*, 22 “Non ut curiositati nostrae indulget, sed ut ostensa pulchritudine huius imaginis, sicut erat à principio, excitet nos ad eam recuperandam.” See also Thompson, “Discovering an Image We Have Never Seen,” 43.
understanding and divine perfections,” but that humanity cannot be restored to those attributes “without the help and example of Christ, who is the first and true image.”

Despite acknowledging sin’s impact on the image of God in humanity, though, these commentators differ somewhat as to the totality of that impact. As referenced above, most of the commentators suggest a holistic, total view of sin’s impact on the image of God, both explicitly and through emphasis on the need for restoration. However, several commentators suggest that God’s image may not be totally lost by sin, with Christ’s death and resurrection already starting the restoration of the image of God across humanity apart from salvation. Anabaptist reformer and theologian Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528), for instance, refers to sin as causing the “free and unbound” likeness of God to be held captive, while Christ’s life and actions remove the curse of sin, “insofar as we do not by our own wickedness make it damning again by rebelliously walking in it.” Hubmaier sees the image of God as restored, but obscured, comparing it to a “live spark covered with cold ashes,” which is still active, and may either be put out or raised back to a flame. In contrast, Luther views the corruption of the image of God as not only impacting humanity’s moral state, but as also impacting the humanity’s physical traits, including its eyesight and strength, as well as the nature of the world in general, including its harvest and the quality of its fruits.

These commentaries continue to evaluate the nature of the image of God, including the role of intellect, rationality, and justice. But the discussion of the image of God, for our purposes,

58 Peter Vermigli, In Primum librum Mosis, qui vulgo Genesis dicitur, 36. “In illis conditi fuimus, sed ad eas, nisi auxilio & exemplo Christi non possimus restitui, qui prima & vera est imago.” See Thompson, “How We Image God,” 44.
59 Balthasar Hubmaier, from “A Christian Catechism,” in Thompson, “God’s Likeness Remains in Us Like a Spark Covered with Ashes,” 45. Hubmaier notes that while the restoration was achieved fully in the church, the “spark” of God’s image resides in all, and is the source of the “conscience in the Jews, pagans, and Christians.”
60 Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” in Thompson, “The Image of God Represented the Pinnacle of Integrity,” 46. More on Luther is discussed below.
is especially interesting in its intersection with their conception of “dominion” over “every living thing.” The degree to which dominion is a part of the “image of God” is contested. Wolfgang Capito distinguishes between the essential and secondary elements of the image of God, identifying dominion as not part of the image of God, but as “an effect thereof.” In short, because the image of God includes obedience to God, animal submission to humanity serves as a replica of human submission to God, and human dominion over animals serves in the same way as “goodness, wisdom, and righteousness” do in God’s image.61 Similarly, Wolfgang Musculus asserts that dominion is a concession on God’s part for humanity to “provide for our needs,” but within reason. Musculus views a middle path between allowing animals unfettered liberty to damage human needs and full domination of animals “without order,” suggesting that “there are limits, laws, and boundaries by which the desire of mortals to exploit animals ought to be restrained, not only for the sake of the animals but also for the common benefit of humankind.”62 Moreover, sin impacts the nature and extent of human dominion over animals as well. Brenz describes true dominion as a prelapsarian feature of the world, with sin causing dominion to be “partly lost, partly disturbed and confused,” and necessitating external order and justice in the world, which serves as the source of all sorts of ordering principles.63 And Musculus also views human dominion over the earth as lost by sin, “so that the disobedience of beasts should prompt us to ponder the evil of having violated the divine precept.” However, “some relics of it

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61 Wolfgang Capito, Hexemeron Dei, 596-597. “Deinde constat exercendi in animalia utriusque elementi potestatem non esse imaginem dei, sed effectum illius.” See also Thompson, “Dominion is but a Secondary Part of God’s Image,” 58.
survive...that we might be led by them to a recollection of this lost authority.”

Moreover, the nature and extent of dominion is still contested by several authors. Peter Martyr Vermigli writes about wild beasts as not merely under human dominion, but as a source of God’s judgment and majesty, often used by God in scripture as judgment on humans, yet by God’s blessing “removed...to the wilderness and desert places,” and still under some degree of human dominion, being “terrified and tremble when they see us...they fear in him the image of that God.”

Yet this discussion of dominion is also accompanied by an acknowledgment of the limits of human dominion over animals. Wolfgang Musculus notes that while humanity enjoys dominion of the earth by “divine right,” that dominion is restricted to that which is given by God, and that the “ungodly claim for themselves authority over ever so much of the earth...as if that authority were clearly unrestricted and granted to human beings in such a way that God would retain no rights for himself over it but would possess authority only in heaven.” Calvin echoes this, saying that humanity should “enjoy nothing of God’s bounty but what we know he has permitted us,” while Konrad Pellikan writes that “we should use creatures but enjoy only God, that we might be his suppliants and be obedient to him.” The limitations of dominion are further confounded by sin’s impact on humanity. Calvin, for instance, continues to affirm the

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64 Wolfgang Musculus, *In Mosis Genesim plenissimi commentarii*,” 49. “Itaque sic statuendum esse iu dico, plenitudinem dominii huius esse per peccatum humano generi adep tam, ut per inobedientia bestiarum potestas ad cogitandum de malo violati praecepti divini admoneamur.” See also Thompson, “Manichaeans and Anthropomorphites- Both Err about the Image of God,” 49.

65 Peter Vermigli, *In Primum librum Mosis, qui vulgo Genesis dicitur*, 36. “Postremo hi mibi contempleris Dei bonitatem in nos, qui haec animalia noxia in deserta & solitudines relegavit, & noctu quammodo tantum vagari permittit... Non tamen prosrus ob peccatum ferae potuerunt iugum hominis excutere, pavent & tremunt illius conspectu, & praeitera videas puerum maximas beluas regentem, caedentem et minaritem, in quo illae Dei imaginem reverentur.” See also Thompson, “Were Wild Animals Meant for Dominion?,” 60.


67 Konrad Pellikan, *Commentaria Bibliorum* (1532), in Thompson, “Use Creatures, Enjoy God,” 61. See also John Calvin, * Ioannis Calvini commentarii in primum librum Mosis*, 6 “Magni enim refert nihil nos ex Dei bonis attingere quod non sciamus nobis ab eo permssum.”
importance of the divisions between humanity and animals, writing that “animals were created according to their species: for this distribution carried with it something stable.” But just as sin causes animal behavior to become accentuated by brutish behavior, it also obscures the division between humans and animals so that the capacity to exercise authority over animals is compromised. This happens practically (humanity’s inability to compete with the brute force of animals), but also happens morally. Calvin notes this in relation to Adam and Eve donning fig leaves and animal skins to hide their nakedness after partaking of the fruit. God designed animals for humanity’s use, but their sin necessitated the death of animals afterward, compromising humanity’s moral state. Humanity’s moral behavior and identity becomes degraded by sin to the point of appearing animalistic, yet is tinged by shame, with Calvin going so far as to say that there is “more comeliness in a dead animal than a live man.”

Reformation-era Catholic commentators express similar sentiments. Cardinal Cajetan, for instance, comments regarding human dominion over the earth that while many animals may remain wild and not subjugated, those wild animals are not exempt from the order of creation in which they are subject to humanity, assuming that “no animal is marked as exempt so that it couldn’t be subjugated by somebody, just as no part of the earth is released from subjection to humankind.”

Genesis 6: The Great Flood

The other notable other section of Genesis that intersects with the issues of sin, the image of God, and the boundary between humans and non-humans is Genesis 6, which recounts Noah

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68 John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis, Volume 1*, 50.
69 Ibid., 121.
70 Cardinal Cajetan, “Commentary on Genesis 1:28,” in Thompson, “Dominion did not extend to every individual animal,” 60.
and the ark. Genesis 6 recounts God’s judgment on the near whole of creation, including humans, animals, and creatures that blur that boundary explicitly, namely the offspring of angels and humans, or Nephilim. Discussions in Genesis commentaries regarding the Nephilim, the “sons of God,” address some of the technical questions of the “sons of God.” Past exegetical approaches to this passage treated the Nephilim with varying supernatural or moral approaches. Supernatural explanations suggested the “sons of God” were fallen angels or giants who were engaging in more fleshly behavior rather than embracing their spiritual nature. A more natural explanation suggested that the “sons of God” were merely from the lineage of Seth, the third child of Adam and Eve, and that they had intermarried with evil people from the lineage of Cain. And a more morally tinged suggestion interpreted the “sons of God” as neither fallen angels nor specific humans, but rather human leaders who had reverted to tyrannical behavior. Wolfgang Musculus’s commentary provides a valuable summary of these views, indicating that some interpret the “sons of God” as fallen angels, “that is, evil spirits that took visible forms and had relations with women, which the ancients called incubi and succubi,” while others identify them as “Seth’s offspring...because they were from the nation of the godly,” while the most likely to him is the explanation that the sons of God were “the sons of great and powerful leaders, who began to abuse the power of their elders, to the point that their lusts made them arrogant.”

71 This is not to say that other passages in Genesis or the Old Testament are not notable- those passages include the further discussion of the Fall, as well as other passages which will come into discussion in further chapters, including Balaam’s Donkey and the judgment of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. However, Genesis 6 poses particularly interesting issues for the convergence of issues surrounding how sin intersects with porous boundaries between humans and non-humans, as well as violations of the boundaries.

72 John Thompson, “6:1-7: God Grieves over Increasing Wickedness,” 231-232. Thompson provides a succinct overview of both the biblical issues and the range of Reformation views.

73 Wolfgang Musculus, In Mosis Genesim plenissimi commentarii, 179. “Hoc Moses veluti specimen quoddam commemorat eius corruptionis, quae multiplicatis in terra mortalitatis inualescere coepit. Exponuntur autem ista varië. Alii de angelis prolapsis, hoc est malis spiritibus exponunt, qui suscepta forma visibili congressi sint cum mulieribus quos vetustas vocat Incubos et succubos. Hos putat hic vocari vel angelos Dei, vel filios Dei, propter spirituallem naturam... Alii, etiam ex recentioribus exponunt de posteris Seth, quos volunt ob id vocatos esse filios Dei, quod essent de natione piorum... Alii, quorum mihi de sententia probabilior videtur, exponunt nec de posteris Seth, neque de natione Cain specialiter: sed in genere de filiis principum, potentum ac magnatum, qui maiorum
Zwingli, while not commenting specifically on the nature of the Nephilim, describes the “sons of God” as “captivated by concupiscence” and “thus knocked off course: they were guided more by the affections of the flesh than by the fear of God.”

The debates over the specific nature of the “sons of God,” however, should not obscure the greater points of consensus about them. First of all, Reformation commentators generally agreed that regardless of the specific origins of the Nephilim, the judgment from God was a result of humanity’s sin, but especially of the descent of righteous people into sin. Luther identifies the reason for the Flood as not due to the sin and corruption of the “Cainite race,” but “because the race of the righteous...had fallen into idolatry, disobedience of parents, sensual pleasures, and the practice of oppression.” Peter Martyr Vermigli also puts it effectively that the “sons of God” are spoken of as evil because “they had privately given up divine worship and pure religion,” and even goes as far as to divide humanity into two camps: one “descended through Cain, an earthly people, carnal, impious, and wholly estranged from God; the other derived from Seth, in which piety and divine worship flourished.” Despite the preference of Reformation commentators for a less supernatural, more moralistic approach to the origins of the Nephilim, it should be noted that perhaps the most common explanation in this era for the origin of monsters was as offspring from the line of Cain, who presumably managed to survive the

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74 Huldrych Zwingli, Farrago Annotationum in Genesim, 22. “Nam ea est vis, hoc ingenium carnis, ut etiam pii et filii dei concupiscentiis vincantur. Sic ergo exorbitabant filii dei, ut potius affectibus carnis ducerentur, quam dei timore.” See also Thompson, “Who were these ‘Sons of God’?”, 233.


76 Peter Vermigli, In Primum librum Mosis, qui vulgo Genesis dicitur, 76. “Iam ergo secundum istam opinionem vides orbum distinctum in duas congregationes hominum, altera deductur per Cainum, homines terreni, carnales, impii, prorsusque a Deo alieni, altera per Sethum derivata, in qua pietas et Dei cultus vigebat.” See also Thompson, “The Roots of Two Families and Two Worlds,” 234.
flood and populate the earth in certain numbers.\textsuperscript{77} Second, God’s judgment against humanity emerges in part from a description of intermingling of flesh and spirit. While discussion of the “giants” in Genesis 6:4 focused on their moral turpitude rather than their physical stature, the broader discussion circulated around the dichotomy of “flesh and spirit,” and of how the “sons of God” betrayed their spiritual nature for fleshly desire.\textsuperscript{78}

The account of Genesis 6 is important as well for linking God’s judgment of sin to the animal realm, and specifically to humanity’s relationship with non-human animals. Calvin dwells at length on the impact of human sinfulness on animals, which, despite being lesser than humans, are entrusted to the care of humanity. Calvin writes that animals, while created “for the sake of human beings” became “entangled in their ruin,” and that “once those humans fell, the animals were drawn into the same destruction.” Calvin’s assessment indicts humanity for its “crimes” which corrupted the world to its core, including the animal realm, despite their lack of participation in humanity’s sinfulness, which would cultivate in humanity a dread of its sinfulness.\textsuperscript{79} Yet that impact on the animal realm did not, for most of the commentators, detract from their duties as stewards of creation. Luther views the gathering of animals for the ark as part of not “wasting the products of nature,” and thus preparing food for the flood.\textsuperscript{80} Peter Martyr Vermigli discusses Noah in pastoral terms as a “minister of the church,” to whom animals came

\textsuperscript{77} This refers to a common notion among Christians as to the origin of monsters. Monsters were supposed to have come from the descendants of Cain, as Cain received a distinguishing mark on his face following the murder of Abel. See David Gilmore, \textit{Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and all Manner of Imaginary Terrors}, 43. See also Karl Steel, “Centaurs, Satyrs, and Cynocephali: Medieval Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human,” in \textit{Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous}, 266-267.

\textsuperscript{78} See John Calvin, \textit{Commentary on Genesis, Volume 1}, 172-173. See also Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” in Thompson, “These Giants were Notable for their Arrogance, not their stature,” 236-237.

\textsuperscript{79} John Calvin, \textit{Ioannis Calvini commentarii in primum librum Mosis}, 40-41. “Sed quae in hominis gratiam creat erant, & vivebant in eius usum, non mirum est cum eius interitu misceri. nihil promeriti erant asini et boves, nihil reliqua animalia: sed quia homini subiecta erant, ipso cadente, in eandem simul ruinam trahuntur.” See also Thompson, “The destruction of animals should make us dread sin all the more,” 239.

\textsuperscript{80} Martin Luther, \textit{Enarrationes in primum librum Mose} (Wittenberg, Saxony-Anhalt: Hans Lufft, 1535), 267-268. Et exigit a nobis quoque, ne organa naturae abiciamus (Id enim esset tentare Deum) sed ut mediis paratis, et a Deo oblatis cum gratiarum actione utamur. See also Thompson, “Noah had to Gather his own food,” 252.
for protection in the ark,81 while Wolfgang Musculus’s consideration of pragmatic considerations addressed questions of what carnivorous animals may have eaten on the ark, it also considered God’s potential role in mitigating those concerns, and considers that God may have “suspended their savagery for a while” so they could live together on the ark, even fulfilling “what Isaiah took from the kingdom of Christ and applied as a parable for his own people.”82

Reformation Commentaries: Martin Luther

Of the Reformation commentators, however, Martin Luther (1483-1546), the paradigmatic Protestant reformer and theologian, merits special separate attention, not merely because of his fame, but also because of his influence over the trajectory of Protestant theological development even after many of these commentaries had been written, particularly for his perspective on sin’s impact on both human and animal life. Martin Luther’s Commentary on Genesis, gathered in the last 3 years of his life,83 offers an important addition to the early modern Protestant approach to creation, blending engagement with ancient authorities with Luther’s own linguistic exegesis, theological exposition, and polemical juxtaposition of Scripture with his current events. Luther’s understanding of matter makes his engagement with the preeminent authorities of the era clear especially early on, mentioning within the first pages the importance of Augustine, Aristotle, Hilary of Poitiers, and Lyra. For instance, Luther explicitly responds to Augustine’s more allegorical, metaphorical interpretation of parts of Genesis, explicitly stating that “with respect to Augustine, we conclude that Moses spoke literally and

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81 Peter Vermigli, *In Primum librum Mosis, qui vulgo Genesis dicitur*, 83-84. “cum Nohe ecclesiae minister non ipse adducat oves ad ecclesiam.” See also Thompson, “Noah was like a Pastor to the Animals,” 252-253.
82 Wolfgang Musculus, *In Mosis Genesim plenissimi commentarii*, 196. “quo minus hanc illis feritatem ad tempus adimeret.” See also Thompson, “What did lions eat on the ark?,” 253. Moreover, commentators go to great lengths to discuss the inclusion of clean animals and exclusion of unclean animals on the ark. See passages from Zwingli, Pellikan, Musculus, and others in Thompson, 260-261.
83 Mickey Mattox notes Luther’s initial sermons on Genesis from 1519 may have been preserved, but are distinct from his sermons from 1523-1524, as well as from his massive lectures on Genesis, the *Enarrationes in Genesin*, which began to appear in publication in 1543. See Mattox, “Order in the House?”, 111-114.
plainly and neither allegorically or figuratively.” This becomes very important for Luther’s interpretation of how creation is ordered and oriented, with each of step of creation imbued with significance. Additionally, Luther takes a detailed, verse by verse approach to Genesis, analyzing not only the steps in the processes of creation, but also analyzing specific word choice in Hebrew to understand the meaning of the text.

Luther’s approach in Genesis to the creation of animals affirms the value of animals in the created order. For instance, Luther writes of Genesis 1, verse 20 that God saw that His creation “was good,” affirming that “the creature itself, thus newly created, could not stand unless the Holy Spirit should love it, and unless this complacency of God in his own work should preserve that work. For God did not thus create these things, designing to forsake them when created, but he approves them and loves them still.” Luther’s interpretation of the creation account in Genesis 1 affirms the value of animals as created deliberately and specifically by God for the good of humanity. Luther’s understanding of specific categories of creatures is puzzling at times, however. For instance, Luther responds to the creation of the “great sea-monsters (whales),” asserting that Moses specifies only the “great sea-monsters” here as a means of affirming that large creatures were not “unreal monsters,” but rather were created by God. Yet in this assessment of aquatic creatures, Luther expresses the opinion that mice seem omnipresent not only on fields, but in ships on the water, and thus “The mouse is therefore a creature of the

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85 Luther’s own insistence on the transparency of Scripture is accompanied here by a sense of the importance of critical analysis and exegesis.

86 Martin Luther, *Enarrationes in primum librum Mose*, 92. See also Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1*. 

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divine Word and power; and it is, as I believe of an aqueous nature.” While Luther’s broader point about how specific creatures generate either homogenously or heterogeneously should not be lost, it is worth noting how Luther still makes extensive room to laud the divine design inherent in nature, indicating that the animal realm, which generates in ways that reflect the Word of God, is both “good” and “blessed.” Moreover, his assessment of animal nature accounts for venomous and toxic creatures, and asserts that these creatures did not exist in that form, but “sprang from the earth as the punishment of sin, that they might afflict us and compel us to flee unto God in prayer.”

Luther is, in some ways, more ambiguous in his exegesis of the creation of humanity. Luther affirms that animal value in the created order goes beyond their practical utility for humans and exists as a reflection and medium for the Word of God to bless the world. And Luther, more evidently than some of the other commentators, establishes the ways in which humans are included in the broad spectrum of creation with animals. Luther states explicitly that while humanity is not created “that he might fly with the bird nor that he might swim with the fish,” that humans do have a “nature common to all other animals in this respect, that he is designed to live upon the earth.” And Luther explains why God does not in the account provide different blessings for animals and humans, saying that while the author indicates that humanity is created by a “peculiar design and contrivance of God,” Luther thinks that God adds his

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87 Ibid., 93.
88 Luther’s example here is of how the chicken reproduces. He argues that while philosophers are right that a hen’s heat provides necessary elements for an egg to hatch, that the heat can be understood as the “heat of the Word of God.” See Martin Luther, Enarrationes in primum librum Mose, 94. “Hoc verbum gallinae et omnibus animantinibus in ipso corpore praesens est, et calor, quo fovet ova Gallina, es ex verbo divino, quia si absque verbo esset, calor ille esset inutilis et inefficax.” See also Martin Luther, Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1.
89 Ibid., 94. “Sed postea in poenam peccati ex maledicta terra esse procreatas, ut nos affligere tint, et cogerent ad invocandum Deum.”
90 Ibid., 95. “Neque enim est natus, ut volaret cum avibus, aut cum piscibus nataret, sed habet commune naturam, quod ad hanc partem attinet, cum aliis animantibus, ut vivat super terram.”
blessing after the creation of humanity because “it embraces all the creatures mentioned in these verses, when it is afterwards pronounced on man...It was sufficient therefore for Moses to say in this place, ‘And God saw that it was good.’” That Luther accepts a shared nature between humans and animals, as well as a shared blessing in their creation, is not a denunciation of a strict order of creation, but it is a broader inclusion of animals in human nature and life. 91

But Luther also very clearly asserts how human life differs drastically from animal life, at least in God’s created intent. While humans are a part of the created order, they also are created differently from non-humans in that they are created in the “image of God.” Luther defines this creation of humanity as incorporating a few key distinguishing factors. First, he differentiates previous creative acts in Genesis from the creation of humanity, saying that in previous acts, God takes a passive voice (“Let the sea be moved” or “Let the earth bring forth grass”) with humanity, he takes an active approach, saying, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” implying to Luther a “manifest deliberation and counsel.” 92 Luther makes a key point of this distinction from animals, saying that while “Beasts do indeed greatly resemble man in many particulars,” including in a common life, consumption patterns, and need for sleep, that Genesis “affirms that man was created by the peculiar counsel and providence of God, whereby he signifies that man is a creature far excelling all other animals, which live a corporeal life; which excellence was more especially prominent while nature was as yet unfallen and uncorrupted.” 93 That deliberation and creation of humanity in the “image of God” differs from

91 Ibid., 94-95. “God’s Work on the Sixth Day;” Just after this discussion of humanity’s link to the earth, Luther refers to the creation of terrestrial animals, invoking the Hebrew distinctions between “Behemah” (“beasts of burden”) and “Haieto Erez” (“beasts of the earth”). Yet he still affirms that the earth is the mother “which brought them all forth from herself by the word.”
92 Ibid., 96. “Hic iterum nova Phrasi Moses utitur. Non dicit, Mare agitetur, herbescat, Homo aut producat tera, sed FACIAMUS. Ergo includit manifestam deliberationem et consilium.”
93 Ibid., 96. “Ac significat, hominem esse creaturum longe excellentem reliqua animalia, quae vivunt corporalem vitam, praesertim cum adhuc natura esset incorrupta.”
the common appetites and physical desires that both humans and animals experience, in that it indicates in humanity a “twofold life: an animal life and an immortal life.” The animalistic, corporeal desires and behaviors would coexist with a spiritual nature, that Luther in part describes as an “illumined reason, a knowledge of God, and a will the most upright to love God and his neighbor.” And Luther goes on to say that while other animals represent “traces of God,” humans alone represent the “image of God.” So Luther’s understanding of the image of God is more broadly part of the early modern Protestant approach that views that image of God as coexisting alongside a physical, animal nature. In other words, corporeal nature is not a bug of human existence, but a feature alongside the spiritual nature, even if sin significantly corrupts that nature (a facet to which we will return shortly).

The final way in which humanity is distinguished from animals in Luther’s thought is in Luther’s conception of dominion. Luther writes that Adam and Eve were “made rulers of the earth, sea, and air,” and that dominion is not only made by God’s design, but also by God’s “expressed command.” This express command indicates that dominion in an absolute sense, and that “Here, therefore a naked man without arms, without walls, nay, without any vestiture of his own body, but standing alone in his own naked flesh, finds himself lord over all birds, all wild beasts and all fishes.” To Luther, dominion means not only a place of authority, but in its initial, untainted form, indicates a purer ability and sense of command over animals, in which human ability matches and equals that of animals. In discussing how Adam and Eve reflect the

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94 Ibid., 96, 99 “Habuit igitur Adam duplicem vitam, animalem et immortalem, sed nondum revelatam plane, sed in spe..caetera animalia dicuntur vestigial Dei, solus autem homo est imago Dei.”
95 Luther goes on to describe the specifics of that physicality by discussing the creation of humanity as male and female. In this section, some of Luther’s anti-Jewish sentiment is apparent, as he refutes a tale by Nicholas of Lyra referring to the idea that God created man in both sexes, but divided them at the spine, which he refers to as the “lies of the Talmud.” Ibid, 102-104.
96 Ibid., 100. “Fiunt Adam et Heva rectores terrae, maris, et aeris.”
97 Ibid. “Ergo nudus homo, sine armis et muris, imo etiam sine vestitio omni, in sola sua nuda carne, dominatus est omnibus volucribus, feras, et piscibus.”
beauty and of the true “image of God” in Genesis 1:26, he writes that humanity’s dominion over animals is a part of that image of God and beauty. He says, “Who can express in words the excellency and majesty of this “dominion?” For my belief is that Adam could by one word command the lion as we command a favorite dog. He possessed a freedom of will and pleasure to cultivate the earth, that it might bring forth whatever he wished.”98 For Luther, dominion over animals seems not only a part of God’s design and command, but also a facet of the image of God.

Luther’s argument to this point is varied and nuanced. First, Luther presents a picture of a creation in which humans and animals do not just possess similarities, but in fact share a common nature and life. Luther here presents this in a matter of fact notion without any seeming judgment or assessment of that animal nature, beyond the fact that it is a common part of life and a key part of human creation as corporeal, physical beings; in other words, physicality for humanity is not an incidental part of their creation, but a key facet of creation, to be accepted to an extent as a part of life. However, Luther also emphatically argues that humanity is created specifically and consciously different in the scheme of creation, and as the pinnacle of a hierarchy in that they hold dominion over the animal realm. Humanity is not only designed in this way to have dominion over animals, but they are also commanded to do so and to exercise that stewardship responsibly. The crucial node or changing point here, then, is not a question of the nature of human creation, but of the degree to which sin corrupts the evident distinction between humans and animals. Sin blurs the boundary between humans and animals beyond what God intended, which manifests in several ways.

98 Ibid., 98. “Nam ego credo, Adam ita potuisse uno verbo imperare Leoni, sicut nos imperamus assuefacto cani.”
First, Luther argues that sin and the fall of Adam and Eve corrupts the image of God in all of its spiritual, mental, and physical dimensions. Luther actively uses the language of disease to clarify the ways in which sin corrupts the image of God in humanity, referring to its impact as the “leprosy of sin.” Luther argues that prior to the fall into sin, the “image of God created in Adam was a workmanship the most beautiful, the most excellent and the most noble, while as yet no leprosy of sin adhered either to his reason or to his will.” His senses were heightened both internally and externally, his intellect was clear and commanding, and most importantly, “accompanied with the most charming security, without any fear of death and without any care or anxiety whatever.”

To Luther, though, the image of God is accompanied by a physical dimension, including a body that was “so beautiful and so excellent that he surpassed all other animate natural creatures.” This includes an aside which Luther believes, which is that prior to the Fall, human eyesight surpassed even that of the lynx, and that human strength permitted humans to “handle lions and bears...as we handle the young of any animal.” However, after the Fall, Luther argues that “death crept in like leprosy over all the senses. So that now we cannot comprehend this image of God by our intellect.” Sin corrupts the image of God so that it is not only less intelligible to humanity, but that it also ruins the innocence and lack of fear within humanity.

The second way in which sin affects humanity is in the corruption of physical beauty, abilities, and desires, both in humans and in nature. After the Fall, Luther points out that the earth, which had before been perfectly suited to human life, began to produce all sorts of thorns,

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99 Ibid., 98. “Quare imago Dei, ad quam Adam fuit conditus, fuit res longe praestantissima et nobilissima, cum scilicet nulla lepra peccati, neque in ratione, neque voluntate haesit…Intellectus fuit purissimus, memoria optima, et voluntas sincerissima in pulcherrima Securitate, sine omni metu mortis, et sine sollicitudine ulla.”

100 Ibid., 97-98. “Plane enim existimo ante peccatum, Adae oculos ita fuisse acuto, et claros, ut lincem et aquilam superaret, Leones autem et ursos, quorum maximum robur est, ipse fortior tractavit non aliter quam nos catulos tractamus…Sed post lapsum irrepit mors, tanquam lepra in omnes sensus, ita ut ne intellectu quidem imaginem istam possimus assequi.”
thistles, and other dangerous elements. In fact, it is not just the problems of the earth that emerge, like thorns and thistles, but even the “ferocity of beasts” which are a result of sin.

But all these thorns and thistles, and this ferocity of beasts, are the consequences of original sin, by which all the rest of creation contracted a corruption and a loss of its original excellency. Hence it is my belief also that before the sin of Adam, the sun was more bright, the water more pure, the trees more fruitful and the earth more productive than since he fell. But through that dreadful sin and that horrible fall, not only are the soul and the body deformed by the leprosy of sin, but all things we use in this life are corrupted.\textsuperscript{101}

Thus, sin’s impact is widespread after the fall, and impacts humans, animals, and nature itself. It includes “thorns and thistles,” “noxious reptiles,” the introduction of disease that infest food, body, and the earth, and other elements of human life that remain corrupted by sin.\textsuperscript{102}

The final element of sin’s corruption is the disruption of human dominion over animals and the earth. Luther’s discussion of sin’s wide reach demonstrates that its impact must be complex and variegated as well, affecting humans not only in a vacuum, but also through humanity’s relationship to the rest of the world. Because sin impacts animals as well as humans, sin robs animal life of something as well. Whereas before sin, one might consider the shared animal nature between humans and animals as common, stating that “there is no difference between the man and the ass,” the animal life in both humans and animals is impacted.\textsuperscript{103}

Following Adam and Eve’s sin, God also punishes the Serpent, indicating not only a punishment of Satan, but also of animal life “because of the sin of the devil...for the Serpent and Satan were intimately connected in the sin of the fall, though Satan was the principal actor and the serpent only the instrument...the serpent however bears a corporal punishment only.”\textsuperscript{104} Thus,
humanity’s sin impacts animal nature as well, exacerbating the pain of reproduction, provoking animal hostility and “ferocity,” and reducing human ability to manage or transcend its animal life. Whereas Adam once held dominion over animals and expressed great wisdom and insight in naming and exercising power over animals, postlapsarian Adam no longer possesses those qualities, and indeed humanity is unable to transcend the animal life within it. To Luther, God designed the spiritual life to be entered into “at the time determined in the mind of God, out of the animal life into the spiritual and eternal life,” whereas after the fall, humanity only enters into the spiritual life by death in the animal life, and humans are “not translated out of this animal life, except by death.”

Death deprives humanity of the full enjoyment of the spiritual life on earth, and yet also deprives humanity of the “felicity of the animal life by sin.” Before sin, animals were “put absolutely under a state of obedience to the voice of God when Adam and Eve were commanded by that voice to have dominion over them.” While for Luther the image of God, and thus this full dominion, may be restored by the Gospel, the dominion exercised by humans over animals after the fall is only an imitation of the original intent of dominion. But regarding the postlapsarian form of dominion, Luther says, “This dominion however is very trifling indeed, and far, very far, beneath the original dominion.”

Thus, both animal and human nature were drastically different prior to sin. Part of Luther’s argument here regarding animals is not that animals are inherently inferior to humanity (although Luther is antagonistic to beastly ferocity and desires), but rather that the boundaries between humanity and animals are brought on by design (primarily as a demarcation of authority rather than any fundamental difference between the shared animal nature between humans and

105 Ibid., 108. “Nos ex animali vita in spiritualem non nisi per mortem.”
106 Ibid., 106. “Nunc miseri istam felicitatem animalis vitate amisimus per peccatum.”
107 Ibid., 100. “Sed id perexiguum est, et longe inferius illo primo dominio.”
animals). But Luther is so radical as to say that little, if anything, remains of the true image of God in humanity because of sin, an impact which fundamentally obscures and corrupts that image of God, and as a result obscures the distinction between humans and animals. Luther does not do away with an anthropocentric hierarchy, but rather acknowledges the ways in which sin impacts humanity’s capacity to exercise authority over animals and to transcend its own animal nature. The fact that animal nature is found “in humans and brutes” helps underscore the ways in which humans and animals, both by design and by the fall, are similar.108

Importantly, Luther participates in an extensive discussion of the impact of sin not only on animals and humans, but also on non-human spiritual beings, such as angels. While Luther distinguishes between the creation of humanity and that of angels, he also finds a “certain similarity” between the two. That similarity does not extend to actual reproduction or generation, but also clarifies that both humans and angels were created “in a kind of middle, or labile or pendent state, so also angels when first created were not so confirmed in their natural standing that they could not fall.” Luther contends that while there are good and bad angels, God created all angels as initially good. But while he affirms the reason for the fall of Satan and his angels, he also affirms a common nature and potential to fall between angels and humans that lies just short of including angels in the natural realm, yet also views a commonality between the two.109 And yet Luther regards this discussion as an aside, saying, “This is all I have to say. Now let us return to Moses.”110

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108 Luther’s stance on animal life is complicated in some ways. David Clough argues that Luther’s stance is difficult to glean from his writings to the point where it comes across as nonsensical; while perhaps too forcefully put, it is accurate that Luther’s perspective presents diverging pictures of his love of animals and his disdain for animalistic behavior. See David Clough, “The Anxiety of the Human Animal” in Creaturely Theology, 41.

109 Martin Luther, *Enarrationes in primum librum Mose*, 120. “Sicut enim de homine, constituo quasi in medium, dixi, ita quoque Angeli, cum primum sunt conditi, non sunt ita constabili in sua natura, ut non possent peccare.” See also Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1*.

110 Ibid.
Luther’s view on Noah and Genesis 6 is similarly forceful regarding the power of sin, particularly in its impact on the division between people and animals. Luther is clear that the destruction of the entire world by a flood is horrifying in concept, especially because he viewed the world before the Flood as a “golden age.”¹¹¹ Luther is emphatic that the degree of punishment for the world and humanity is in part due to the high esteem offered to humanity, in the same way in which God punished spiritual creatures, including angels. To Luther, “Whatever is most exalted he particularly overthrows and humiliates...the more highly they were blessed with gifts, the more sternly he punished them when they began to misuse his gifts.”¹¹² This point is important, as Luther suggests that the core sin at the heart of the fall of humanity and angels alike is pride, which he deems the sin of “the angels who fell,” the ”primitive world, in which the grandest people of the race lived,” “the greatest kings,” and “nearly all the first-born.” Yet Luther does not blame people’s gifts for their fates, but writes that God does consider the misuse of those gifts and takes them away, writing, “God is a dialectician and judges the person by the thing, meting out destruction to the thing or gift as well as to its possessor.”¹¹³

Remarkably, Luther’s perspective of the prelapsarian world (and even the immediate postlapsarian world) is relatively positive. Despite his acknowledgment that sin fundamentally corrupted humanity and broke the image of God in humans, Luther waxes poetic about the “preeminence of the old world, that perished in the flood.”¹¹⁴ The people of the old world were the “best, holiest, and noblest men,” with the “tyrants and giants” of that time a mirror for Luther’s contemporary perspective of the papacy and political structures supporting the papacy.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 234. “Cum tamen id vere aureum seculum fuerit.”
¹¹² Ibid. “Non primogenitis omnium temporum, quanto homines maioribus donis ornate fuerunt, tanto in eos gravios animadvertit, cum donis coeperunt abuti.”
¹¹³ Ibid. “Deus autem talis Dialecticus est, ut arguat a coniugatis, et simul possessorem cum re seu dono possesso destruat.” The logic of this seems to imply a view of animals as property or items, as they are punished for the sins of humanity.
¹¹⁴ Ibid. “Cogitemus igitur de mundo isto originali, qui in diluvio periti, fuisse praestantissimum.”
This is a rare instance in which Luther’s description of sin makes ample room for some good in human nature, although that good is corrupted by sinful pride. Yet Luther mentions that Cain’s lineage included “good and wise men, who, nevertheless, before God were most wicked, for they prided upon their gifts and despised God, the author.”115 For Luther, the sin of the postlapsarian world was not an immediate collapse into depravity, but a gradual descent wrought by pride, which eventually (and inevitably) led to disdain for God and other vices.116

Luther proceeds to provide a line-by-line discussion of Genesis 6. Having assessed the fall of the world into sin, Luther discusses the meaning of Genesis 6:2 and the references to the “sons of God” and the Nephilim. Luther does not deny the presence of sin in the world before this period, yet he emphasizes that the specific nature of sin in Genesis 6 has to do primarily with dramatic violations of boundaries in the world and disregard for the strictures established by God against the abuse of procreation, writing that “when men, in possession of these blessings, fail to reverence the first table, and by means of these very gifts do violence to it, such wickedness merits punishment.”117 Luther views the violation of commandments regarding humanity’s relationship to God (the “first table,” or the first four commandments) as inevitably leading to violation of strictures against one’s neighbors (the “second table,” including the remaining commandments). The violation against God’s commands and forsaking of God’s gifts (in this case, his gift of the process of procreation) leads to unbridled lust, and that “After despising God they despised also the laws of nature and, as they pleased, they married whom they chose.”118

115 Ibid. “Fuerent inter posteros Cain hominoptimi et sapientissimi, coram Deo autem fuerunt pessimi, quia superbiebant donis, et Deum donorem autorem contemnebant.”
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., 236. “Sed quod homines- um [sic] his donis proruunt extra primam tabulam, et contra primam tabulam, hisce donis- structi [sic], pugnant, deinde etiam secundam tabulam licentius violent, haec impietas est di-a [sic] quae damnetur.”
118 Ibid. “Contempto Deo, iam leges naturae contemperunt, et duxerunt pro arbitrio Uxores, quas vellent.”
Luther does not go so far as to say that these violations were to the degree of non-Israelite nations, and that they did not include incest or other illicit forms of sexual immorality. But he does say that they violated the “legal trammels” set by the patriarchs and recognized in their matrimonial alliances no law but that of lust, selecting only as passion directed and against the will of the parents. But Luther is clear that the sin of the “sons of God” had to do explicitly with the violation of moral boundaries. Luther forgoes a literal interpretation of the “sons of God” as angels, opting for a more metaphorical interpretation (to be discussed below). Yet the fact that Luther embraces a metaphorical interpretation of the Nephilim does not stop him from taking a more literal approach to the nature of the violation. Luther affirms that the lineages of Adam and Cain “were separate,” and that the violation of the sons of God at least in part included the intermingling of lineages that had before been separate. Because the patriarchs had "strictly forbidden to contract alliances with the offspring of Cain,” the sin of the “sons of God” to embrace lust, marry whomever they chose from the Cainite line, and taking as many spouses as they chose proved especially appalling to God.

As mentioned previously, Luther embraced a more metaphorical approach to the notion of the “sons of God.” Luther identifies the descendants of the initial patriarchs as the “sons of God who had the promise of the blessed seed and themselves belonged to the blessed seed.”

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119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., 236-237. “Videntur autem Patres singulari severitate interdixisse, ne cum Cainitis contrarent, Sicut postea lex extitit, ne Judaei cum Cananaeis miserentur. Etsi autem non quomodo sint, qui scribant incestuosas nuptias ante Diluviumuisse, nulla reverentia sanguihabita, Tamen quia Petrus primum Mundum Laudat, puto illa incestuum monstra...Sed peccatum primi Mundi fuisse, quod contempta partum autoritate, ex Cainitis duxerunt quot et quas voluerunt, dominante scilicet illis libidine, Duautem verbum est, quod dicit, Quas elegerunt. Supra autem aliquoties ostendi, istas duas generationes seu Ecclesias fuisse separant filii Adae et Cain. Expulit enim, sicut Moses clare testatur...Sine dubio igitur posteros quoque suos horatus est Adam, ut malignantium ecclesiam caverent, et non miserentur cum maledicta generatione Cain, Ac parverhuic consilio, seu mandato posteri aliquandiu.”
121 Ibid. “Cum autem Adam mortuus esset, et reliquorum Patriarcharum authoritas vileret, etiam impiae generationis nuptias et affinitatem filii Dei (hoc est, illi qui habepromissionem Seminis benedicti, et pertinebant ad benefictum Semen)... Hi scandalis Cainicae Ecclesiae cedentes, indbant ipsi quoque carni, et accipiebant Uxores ex generatione Cainica, item pellices, et quas volebant.”
identifies the “sons of God” as from the lineage of Adam, yet having “yielded” to the
“corruptions of the Cainite church.” Luther says that the idea of the “sons of God” as those of
the “blessed seed” relates specifically to that lineage of Adam, which engendered God’s
judgment by falling from “true worship” of God into “idolatry, disobedience to parents,
sensuality, oppression.” In falling into this violation, primarily the violation of the patriarchal
stricture against intermingling with the lineage of Cain, the “sons of God” hastened God’s
judgment.

However, Luther makes an emphatic rejection of more supernatural readings of the “sons of
God” as angels. Luther rejects this reading not only as foolish, but as an overly physical, material
reading of the Nephilim. Luther associates such a reading with Judaism, derisively stating that
“the Jews fancy foolish things,” and that they “interpret the sons of God to signify demon-lechers
by whom that impious generation was begotten, and that they were called the sons of God by
reason of their spiritual nature.” Here, Luther invokes Nicholas of Lyra as having disproved
this notion, for the “punishment of the deluge befell, not alone the mighty, but all flesh.”
Luther does not reject the possibility of demonic or angelic involvement in the world, and even
accepts that spiritual creatures may be incubi and succubi, as he has “heard men cite their own
experience.” He even accepts the reality of “monstrous births of demon-like features,” and
even claims to have seen some! However, he forcefully rejects the notion of demonic or angelic
reproduction. He accepts that people may be “deformed by the devil, but not begotten; or that

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 237. “Iudaei hic quoque varie ineptiunt, Exponunt filios Dei daemones incubus, ex quibus sit illa impia
generatio, Ac dicunt vocari filios Dei propter spiritualem naturam.”
124 Ibid. “Id quoque Lyra non inerudite refellit, fuit enim poena haec Diluvii non tantum potentum posed [sic] omnis
Carnis, sicut etiam erit poena novissimi diei.”
125 Ibid. Luther references Augustine as also having heard accounts of incubi and succubi from sources whom he
trusted. “Ac Augustinus quoque dicit, idem se audivisse a fide dignis hominibus, (ex Diabolo et homine nihil posse
generari) coactus sit credere.”

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they are real devils with a human body either simulated or purloined. For if the devil, by divine permission, may take possession of the whole man and change his mind, is it strange that he may disfigure also his body, causing men to be born sightless or cripples?"\textsuperscript{126}

That Luther rejects the spiritual interpretation in favor of the metaphorical interpretation regarding Nephilim is thus somewhat curious. Luther clearly accepts the possibility of spiritual activity in the world, and even that demonic or diabolical activity may have an impact on humans, causing monstrous births, deformities, and even disabilities. Yet he rejects spiritual interpretations of such activity in the era of Noah to be misleading, irrelevant, and nothing more than “Jewish babbling.”\textsuperscript{127} Moreover, Luther’s critique of this interpretation is not only limited to Jewish thinkers, but also extends to Christian theological authorities. Throughout his commentary, Luther clearly expresses some reverence for Nicholas of Lyra’s contribution; however, he is emphatic that much of Lyra’s work is demeaned by his acceptance of Jewish interpretations of the passages. For instance, Luther notes the rabbinical interpretation that Enoch’s assumption into heaven is a sign that the “curse of sin” would be ended soon, with the notion that physical labor would become easier and less toilsome. Luther labels the rabbinic authorities as the “pestilent corrupters of the Scripture.”\textsuperscript{128} Luther questions Nicholas of Lyra’s relationship to the rabbinic authorities, wondering that Lyra is “satisfied with this interpretation, and follows it.” Luther adds that Lyra ought to have been familiar with the “unchanging practice of the Jews to pervert Scripture by substituting a material meaning for a spiritual one, in order to

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid. “Quod autem ad incubus et succubus Daemones attinet, non nego, sed credo po-fieri [sic], ut Daemon sit vel succubus, vel incubus, audivi enim multos recitantes sua ipso exempla…Quod igitur de monstrosis partibus Daenum similimis dicitur, quorum aliquos ego vidi, eos aut Diabolo deformatos, non item a Diabolo gene [sic] generatos esse sentio, aut sunt veri Diaboli, habentes carnem vel fictvel [sic] aliunde furatum. Si enim Deo permittente, Diabolus totum hominem potest podere, et mentem mutare, quid mirum est, si etiam deformat corpus? Si vel coecos, claudos nasci faciat?”

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid. “Sed desino, nam ad praesentem locum nihil faciunt, et Iudaecorum futilitate hunc sermonem lapsi sumus.”

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 230. “Rabini igitur, pestilented depravatores Scripturae, digni odio sunt.”
gain glory among men." Similarly, Luther suggests that other perceived errors he makes, as in contending that birds and animals also intermixed beyond what was licit occurred “under the influence of rabbinic interpretation.”

Clearly, many of Luther’s critiques of Lyra or other Christian theological authorities revolve around their relationship to Judaism, and he finds ample opportunity to critique or denigrate Jewish thought. Notably, and perhaps most bizarrely, he critiques them for supposing that the raven sent out by Noah to survey the earth did not return because it had “fears concerning his mate, and that he even suspected Noah concerning her. Shame upon those impure minds!”

However, clearly in Luther’s mind, there is a division between spiritual interpretations, which he views as the purview of true Christianity, and material interpretations, which he associates both with Judaism and the Roman church. Luther distinguishes his own interpretation of the Nephilim from approaches that emphasize the potential reality of their giant status. Yet interestingly, Luther’s aversion to material explanations or the material realm is not entirely consistent. In discussion of Noah leaving the ark after the flood, Luther states that Nicholas of Lyra’s interpretation of cohabitation and sexual activity being prohibited on the ark is foolish, and that “such thoughts belong to monks not to God, who plans not sinful lust, but propagation.”

The logic is counter-intuitive, but Luther seems to be implying that in this case, the material explanation assumes all sexual activity as illicit, and thus assumes that it did not occur on the ark. In contrast, a truly spiritual explanation allows for sexual activity and cohabitation on the

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129 Ibid. “Miror autem Lyrae quoque placere hanc sententiam et sequi.” Luther does not appear to be consistent on his preference for spiritual over material explanations. However, the prevalence of spiritual explanations may help to inform Christian attitudes toward Jewish people, as the response to materialistic behaviors becomes a common accusation against Jewish communities.
130 Ibid., 259. “Lyra forte ex Rabinorum sententia disputant hoc in loco.”
132 Ibid., 285. “Tales Monachorum cogitationes sunt, non Dei, qui non libidinem, sed propagationem spectat, ea enim est Dei creatura, Libido est venenum Sataper peccatum in naturam infusum.”
ark, so long as it is between those who are married and are following God’s ordained plan for reproduction. Counterintuitively, then, Luther argues that sexual activity on the ark is a sign of a more spiritually infused interpretation than one that assumes its absence.\(^{133}\)

Again, this predilection for spiritual or metaphorical interpretations plays out in Luther’s interpretation of the Nephilim. After rejecting the supernatural explanation, Luther describes the true meaning behind the reference to the “sons of God” as referring to those with the “promise of the blessed seed,” referring to true believers in the New Testament sense; that is, those who refer to God as “father” and “whom God, in turn, calls sons.”\(^{134}\) Again, running counter to expectation, Luther takes the presence of sin in the world as a given, but blames the fall of righteous people into sin as the cause of God’s judgment through the Flood.\(^{135}\) True to form, though, Luther connects the sin of the antediluvian world to polemic against the Roman church, stating that the “last day shall be hastened, not by the profligacy of the Gentile, Turk, and Jew, but by the filling of the Church with errors through the pope and fanatical spirits.” Just as with his sentiments against Jewish authors, though, Luther connects Catholic sentiment with a material sense of the world, castigating them for their “sensuality, lust, and oppression.”\(^{136}\)

Again, Luther adopts a literalist approach with a spiritual interpretation, which he ultimately applies to the Nephilim. Luther introduces the section with a description of the sin which

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 306.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., 236.

\(^{135}\) Ibid. “Vera igitur sententia est, Quod filios Dei Moses vocat, homines qui pertineban [sic] promissionem Seminis benedicti…Non ideo Diluvium venit, quod Cainica generatio esset corrupta, sed quod iustorum gratio, qui crediderant Deo…in idolatrium, bedientiam [sic] Parentum, voluptates, tyrannidem prolapsi sunt.”

\(^{136}\) Ibid. “Sicut etiam novissimdiem [sic] properabit, non hoc quod Gentes, Turcae, Iudaei, sunt impii, sed quod per Papam fanaticos Spiritus ipsa Ecclesia erroribus repleta est.” Luther goes on to note that the “greatest gift” is to be a “member of the true Church.” He accuses the Roman Church of falling from the glory given to it by God due to pride, which caused a departure from the Gospel. This pride led to “carnal pleasures” and a dramatic fall. Again, here we see how Luther combines his literal reading of the text with a penchant for adherence to a spiritual meaning, going on to connect the Roman Church with both Jewish abandonment of God’s promise and, ultimately, Lucifer’s fall from heaven.
provoked the flood. In short, the “sins of the old world” consisted primarily of the intermingling of pure and impure lines; that is, the lineage of Seth with the lineage of Cain. Luther describes a view of how sin spreads through the family structure. He argues that historically women have been the “occasion for the overthrow of the strongest kingdoms,” referring to Helen, Eve, and arguing that the prohibition of marriage between the lines sought to prevent theological impurity, for “daughters bring into the houses of their husbands the views and manners of the fathers.”\footnote{Ibid., 244.} While he is careful to ascribe blame and guilt to both the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men,” he singles out the “daughters of men” for being joined to the “sons of God.” This intermingling leads to a prevalence of sin, and that the progression of sin was of sin against God, then against parents, and finally against neighbors. He summarizes that the sin of the world was “an upheaval of all established order.”\footnote{Ibid., 246. “Ergo peccatum istius originalis Mundi fuit perturbation omnium Ordinum.”}

Once Luther does turn to the Nephilim, however, he connects the meaning of Nephilim as “giants” to the context described in Genesis. The descent of humanity into impurity and sin is total, stretching to the family, church, and the state. In this context, Luther defines “giants” to mean not literal physical giants, but in terms of power and reputation. That is, giants are “bold men who arrogated to themselves at the same time both government and priesthood.”\footnote{Ibid, 248. “Sed Gygantes, hoc est, homines arrogantes, qui simul et regnum et Sacerdoti sibi vendicarunt.”} This is not sinful in itself, except that they do not use that power for godly purposes, but for “idolatry, for a warfare against sound doctrine, and for purposes of oppression even in the state.”\footnote{Ibid. Luther here invokes the papacy, yet again, arguing that this type of tyranny, in which somebody claims both spiritual and temporal power, is what the papacy has done; this is not a problem except that the Pope uses his power for the purposes of oppression and idolatry.} In using this definition, Luther disputes a literal interpretation of the Nephilim as literal giants, arguing that the Hebrew Naphal, which signifies “to fall,” indicates either the fear of others
before them or their own fall from the normal stature. Yet Luther is not convinced that this
passage itself refers to huge stature. He sees no overt reference to stature in the text, whereas in
the prooftext of Numbers 13, he accepts reference to large bodies. Thus, Luther makes a
distinction; he does not dispute the possibility of the existence of giants, but he does view it as
unlikely and, more importantly, not elaborated in the text. Luther interprets the text through the
lens of sin and power, with the literal meaning of Naphal referring to the ways in which rulers
“fall and prey upon those beneath them.” “Giants,” to Luther, indicates men who are abnormally
“violent and oppressive; as the poets depict the Cyclopeans, who fear neither God nor men, but
follow only their desires, relying upon their strength and power.”141 Luther’s reference to the
Cyclops is an important comparison; while he rejects the literal idea of giants in this text, he still
references the monsters who populate classic myth and poetry, but elaborates the qualities which
contribute to this monstrosity.

Luther’s insistence that the Nephilim resemble tyrants is not far out of step with the
perspectives of other Reformation commentators. Luther is emphatic about this interpretation of
the Nephilim, particularly in light of his own perception of his context. But Luther openly
compares the corruption of the Nephilim to the pope, cardinals, and other figures of the Roman
Church, and views the abuse of power by the Nephilim to resemble the behavior of the Roman
Church. As such, Luther very clearly reads this entire section with an apocalyptic sense of his
own time, writing that the “famous” or “notorious” men are augurs of the apocalypse. He even
goes so far as to say, “So is it now with us. Christ testifies in Matthew 24, 37 that the last times
resemble the times of Noah.”142 Moreover, as noted, Luther does not reject the possibility of

141 Ibid. “Ad hunc modum expono hoc in loco Gygantes seu Niphlim, non homines vasta… sicut in Numeri loco,
Sed violentos et injurios, quales poetae pingunt Cyclopes.”
142 Ibid., 249. “Nam ipse Christus Matth. 24 testatur, similitudinem fore inter postretempora, et tempora Noah.”
physical giants, and he is quite comfortable with invoking popular portrayals of monsters who fall outside of the human category. While these are literary references, he clearly ascribes something more to them than just literary relevance, referencing the “sin of the Cyclopeans, who, possessing everything in the world, possessed also a famous name and were renowned throughout the world.” Elsewhere, Luther identifies the “Cyclopeans” as those who “oppose the Word of God and proclaim their freedom of will and their own powers.” This spiritual reading of Nephilim identifies the crux of the Nephilim issue not as literal gigantic size, but relates to the enormity of their violence and abuse of power. This abuse of power leads humanity into deeper sin, and leads humans away from God’s covenant. Luther identifies that God’s covenant with Noah likely applied to others, including the “giants;” however, their abuse caused them to fall from that covenant.

Luther’s discussion of Noah also crucially includes assessment of human relation to animals in light of the flood, as well as the implications of the flood on human dominion over animals. Luther’s initial assessment of the relation of animals to humans reinforces the notion of an anthropocentric hierarchy and intrinsic difference between humans and animals. As noted earlier, Luther rejects the idea that birds and other animals intermingled with other species. However, his rejection is not merely that this is rabbinic teaching, but also elaborates a clearly delineated division between people and animals. To Luther, animals are not sinful, as they are “fashioned for this bodily life alone,” and thus do not concern themselves with spiritual matters.

143 Ibid. “Tangit autem hic quoque peccatum istorum Cyclopum Mosquod [sic] cum haberent omnia, quae sunt in mundo, etiam nomen clarum habuerunt, fuerunt per totum mundum celebres.”
144 Ibid., 251. “Curandum itaque est sermon studio, ne inveniamur inter Cyclopes istos repugnantes verbo Dei, et praedicantes suum liberum arbitrium et vires suas.”
145 Ibid., 265. “Illud pactum habuerunt Gygantes, sed cum eo abutentur ad suerbiam [sic] et impietatem, exciderunt ab eo.”
146 Ibid., 259.
while animals did not fall into sin, they also bear the punishment of sin with humanity, because the total destruction of humanity includes “the possessions and dominion which were his at creation.” Because humanity was placed with stewardship over creation, animals died in the flood as well, as they existed as “man’s property and chattels.”\textsuperscript{147} The clear delineation between humans and animals propels a view of animals that sees them as fundamentally interlinked with humanity as part of humanity’s responsibility, with humanity as part of the broader created order.

However, Luther’s description of animal activity is much more nuanced in practice. While animals themselves did not fall into sin, Luther is clear that sin still impacts them in the same way that it impacted humans and the rest of the natural world. Animals may not have the capacity for sin, but the fall into sin caused the nature of animals to become “completely altered.” Before sin, animals were “gentle and harmless,” yet after sin’s entry into the world, they became “wild and harmful.” But Luther’s identification of this state, and suggestion that the world pre-sin included “concord not only among men but also between animals and men” meant that some definition of the prelapsarian life is subject to conjecture, as “since our loss of that state of innocent existence it is easier to venture a guess than to reach a definition of that life.”\textsuperscript{148} This suggests that Luther is open to a greater degree of similarity between prelapsarian humans and animals, with the power of sin both reducing the positive similarities and heightening the negative similarities between humans and animals. Moreover, Luther identifies similarities in animals and humans as both being bound to God. To Luther, divine intervention aids Noah in corraling animals onto the ark, but this divine intervention interacts with the fundamental nature of animals. Luther writes that divine injunction helped Noah bring the animals into the ark. He

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid. “Nam homini, bestiae agri, et volucres Caeli sunt conditae, hae sunt opes et facultates hominum. Perieunt itaque animalia non quod peccarint, sed quia Deus voluit perire hominem.”

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 266. “Haec mea sententia quanquam [sic], postquam statum istius innocentis vitae amisimus, opinari verius quam definire de illa vita possimus.”
writes that animals coming into the ark by “twos and sevens” attests that the animals entering the ark had a “premonition of the wrath of God and the coming terrible disaster.” Luther acknowledges that animals can sense impending calamities and “often as if prompted by a certain sense of compassion, they will manifest distress for a man in evident peril...as a matter of fact it is not rare that wild beasts in danger seek refuge with man.”149 Luther identifies this as an “intelligence,” with animals being “divinely aroused to a sense of coming danger, “and the text expressing that they came to Noah “voluntarily.”150 It is remarkable that Luther here identifies not only that animals are not sinful, but that they even possess remarkable similarities with human intelligence, and even are open to such intelligence and premonitions from God.

Moreover, human sinfulness’s impact on their relation to animals for Luther obscures the ways in which human interaction with animals existed before the Fall. Luther identifies after the Flood that animals are again entrusted to humanity, saying that man’s dominion over animals seems to be increased “for his greater consolation.”151 Yet sin destroys the relationship between humans and animals by allowing animals to become food. Luther identifies this as a divine permission, but not as something intrinsically ordered in creation. Luther says that in contrast to the “heathens,” who believe that “the custom of slaughtering animals always existed...beasts could not have been killed without sin if God had not expressly permitted it by his word.” Luther explicitly attributes sin’s impact to the establishment of the butcher’s trade; he is careful to clarify that this is not sinful, but is rather permitted by God as a result of sin and as an innovation permitted by God for the benefit of humanity, within a viewpoint that animals are available for human use. Yet this permission should not overshadow that Luther views meat-eating as an

149 Ibid. “Quin etiferae bestiae non raro in periculis ad hominem confugiunt.”
150 Ibid. “Hic igitur sensus cum aliqui in brutis naturis sit, quid mirum est, si hoc quoque tali modo divinitus ad imminens periculum excitate, volentes se cum Noah coninxerint?
151 Ibid., 292. “In abundantiam consolationis videtur hic dominium hominis.”
innovation after the initial created order and says that “Adam would have been averse to killing even a small bird for food.”152 While it is true that Luther frames this as indicative of God’s love for humanity, this notion also says something clear about how Luther views the envisioned order of the world. Human reason enables humans to kill animals, as reason is “more powerful than any beast.”153 While this does delineate clearly between humans and animals, the overall thrust of Luther’s discussion of Noah clarifies that to Luther, dominion before the fall and the flood was much less violent, more wholesome, and left a much closer dynamic between animals and humans.

One of the final important elements concerns Luther’s definition of humanity’s relation to sin. Luther identifies humans as ultimately defined as “a rational being, with a heart given to imagination.” However, human imagination leads humanity to “evil” outcomes, for “holy Scriptures ascribe to man a reason that is not idle but always imagines something.”154 As generally established, Luther gives less credence to human rationality, especially after sin, because of its propensity to draw away from faith. Sin caused humanity to turn from God, and as a result impacts humanity’s natural gifts. But Luther goes on to identify the shortcomings of human reason, and its ability to fall into sin. Luther resolves that reason “of itself does not decide upon the right nor does the will, of itself, strive after the same.” In short, Luther argues that one of the primary constituent elements of humanity’s differentiation from animals may revolve around the issue of capacity, yet he also identifies the ways in which animals are able to exhibit something close to human behavior and values, including compassion.155 Moreover, Luther

152 Ibid. “Nam Adae abominatio potuisset occidere aviculam ad cibum.”
153 Ibid, 293. “Norunt homine instructum ratione, quae praevalet omnibus bestiis.”
154 Ibid., 287. “Si igitur Hominem voles vere definire, ex hoc loco definitionem sune, quod sit rationale, habens cor fingens. Quid autem fingit? Respondeit Moses, malum, extra Deum scilicet seu legem Dei et homines. Tribuit igitur Scriptura sancta homirationem non ociosam, sed semper aliquid fingentem.”
155 Ibid., 289. “Igitur ratio non dictat recta per se, nec voluntas per se recta vult.”
throughout clearly thinks that sin has degraded human capacity and the human state, as his
description of the humanity since the rise of the Roman Church is that since “the time that the
popes ceased to rule among us...sound doctrine has been despised, and men have degenerated
into all but brutes and beasts.”\textsuperscript{156}

\textit{Conclusions from the Commentaries}

Despite some differences amongst them, a broad reading of these commentators reveals
some important findings in their readings of Genesis. First, while there is somewhat of a
distinction between image and likeness, with image referring to human rationality and likeness
referring to humanity’s moral likeness to God, humanity is created in both God’s image and
likeness, and the preconceived divisions between likeness and image were either untenable or
flexible. Second of all, dominion over the animal realm is a part of humanity’s creation, but not a
primary component of the image of God in humanity. Commentators view the creation of
animals primarily in terms of utility to humanity, although that utility is broadly conceived
beyond mere physical utility and includes moral utility (how animals spiritually edify humanity).
Third, these commentators demonstrate that sin’s corruption of the image and likeness of God
was all-encompassing, and the primary consideration of salvation is Christ’s restoration of the
image of God in humanity, and depending on the commentator, elements of the image of God are
already restored at the time of Christ’s death and resurrection. Fourth, while sin impacts the
image of God in humanity, it is not so all-encompassing that it diminishes the boundary between
humans and animals. These commentators broadly still view the division between humans and
animals as distinct enough that it is not entirely removed by sin. But despite the distinction
between humans and animals and the human injunction to dominion and stewardship over

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 223. See also Martin Luther, \textit{Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1}. 
animals, the ordering of creation is also accompanied by a Trinitarian character to all of creation in which God’s unique presence infiltrates the entirety of creation, including the animal realm. This places our commentators squarely aligned with Augustine and Lyra, but also raises questions for the nature of the division between humans and non-humans, a question to be raised further on. Finally, while commentaries on Genesis veer toward the literal exegetical approach (that is, assessing by the words of the text sentence by sentence and passage by passage), the actual interpretations of Reformation theologians tend to avoid extrapolation about physical realities, opting more for moral realities that impact the physical world, including moral approaches to the Nephilim, but most notably the idea that sin introduces both moral and physical corruption to humanity, non-human creatures, and the world. This pastoral tendency in some ways complicates our efforts to understand the approach of early modern theology toward the boundary between humans and non-humans, as it tells us less about what they thought about the physical nature of the world and the degree to which they begin to accept naturalistic formulations of the world. However, it also helps to understand how the primary approach to the world was both ordered and soteriological, seeing grace active in and throughout all of creation, but ordered and within set bounds.

One potential further conclusion to be made from commentaries on Genesis helps to illuminate the boundaries between humans and forms of non-humans. Humans exist as the pinnacle of God’s creation, with the world created in great part for the comfort and utility of humanity. But animals and monsters differ in dramatic ways. While animals are often read in symbolic ways outside of commentaries, notably in medieval bestiaries, numerous commentators are careful to specify that animals can be read symbolically in certain ways, even if all readings must ultimately be theocentric or Christocentric. However, readings of animals are not limited to
those omens or prophetic truths, as animals provide both spiritual and physical edification for humanity. In contrast, readings of monsters (to be discussed more in-depth in a later chapter) are mostly limited to the etymology of their names. Monsters, ranging from exotic creatures of faraway lands to misbirths and birth deformities, are demonstrative of the power or judgment of God, and whereas animals should generally not be read through prophetic lenses (such as with Brenz’s discussions of ichthyomancy and ornithomancy), monsters almost by definition must be read through a theological lens. A tacit premise of this may be that while animals are made to be more holistic in their purpose (participating both physically and spiritually in the world), monsters and creatures straddling the boundary of creation are more considered in the spiritual sense, and in that way participate in the divine in a way more common for monsters than animals.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to discuss the early modern theological landscape regarding the boundary between humans and non-humans. Crucial to understanding the perception of this boundary are theological perceptions of the very nature of creation itself, as well as the factors and events that impact the nature of creation. The most notable events for this to the early modern theological mind are the accounts of creation, the Fall into sin, and God’s judgment of sin with the Great Flood. From the commentaries on Genesis emerging from the Reformation, we see a few essential points surrounding perception of the boundary. First of all, theological commentators define the nature of humanity in roughly similar terms to each other, and view animals as blessed in creation, both for the physical and spiritual benefit of humans. Second, they

¹⁵⁷ For more on the theological and spiritual dimensions of monsters, see Timothy Beal, Religion and its Monsters, (New York: Routledge, 2022).
define the image and likeness of God with reference to the innate rationality, intellect, and desire for justice and mercy that is present in God. Most of these commentators agree that the image of God is corrupted and lost due to the Fall, either in part or in total, and that part of Christ’s salvific work theologically was about partial restoration of the image of God to humanity. Third, while most of these commentators agree that sin caused a corruption of the image of God, they still hold that enough of the image of God persists in humanity despite the power of sin, and as a result, while human dominion over animals is obscured, it still exists. More than that, theological commentators generally keep with a firm anthropocentric tradition in Christian thought, viewing humanity as the pinnacle of God’s creation.

However, it is worth assessing further whether this firm boundary between humans and non-humans is a matter of possibility, or simply one of propriety. Clear divergences exist between Reformation commentators and medieval commentators like Nicholas of Lyra regarding engagement with supernatural creatures. Examination of the discussion of the Nephilim in Genesis 6, for instance, demonstrates a propensity among Reformation theologians to interpret passages moralistically, even when engaging in literal commentary. While intermingling between fallen angels and humans is treated as a remote possibility, the overwhelming response to this issue is one that emphasizes a moral interpretation; that is, that Nephilim are neither evil angels nor giants, nor are they the literal descendants of Cain, but that they are metaphorically of a sinful lineage, and that their “giant” status refers more to their stature as leaders turned tyrants. And while Reformation theologians surely would not have rejected the possibility or idea of angelic engagement in the world, they do respond negatively to the notion, supposed by Lyra, that God talked to the angels at the creation of humanity. Creation is a Trinitarian endeavor, but
there seems an emerging tendency toward rejecting theological ideas that are overly steeped in supernatural mingling with the natural when there is a clear alternative.

Thus, while Reformation theologians embrace the heritage of eminent theologians such as Augustine and Nicholas of Lyra, they diverge sharply from certain of their tendencies, and even relate those tendencies in sharp terms, laden with critiques not only of the findings, but of the potential origins of those findings (notably, when it comes to Lyra, his affinity for rabbinic scholars and Jewish thinkers). Reformation theologians start to deviate from reliance upon authorities to reliance upon their own interpretations of Scripture. Yet exegeses of biblical texts, while saying much about what Reformation commentators perceived was the truth of the world, becomes much more complicated as commentators, theologians, and demonologists seek to reconcile the basic tenets they describe in commentaries with the experience of daily life. One might expect even nontraditional theological sources to stand in contrast to established convention; however, in practice, we shall see how nontraditional theological sources often inevitably circle back to reinforcing orthodox teachings. The process of reconciling Christian teaching with people’s lived experiences, particularly those experiences between human and non-human creatures, is messy in practice. However, that process seemed to ultimately come back to reaffirm orthodoxy. To illustrate this through case studies, we turn to the perplexing figure of Paracelsus.
Chapter 3: The Boundary Considered in Practice: The Case of Paracelsus

The theologies of sin discussed above illuminate for us that the early modern stance, and particularly the Protestant stance, toward the human/non-human boundary was complicated. Theological commitments tried to simplify issues, emphasizing the importance of human stewardship and dominion of creation, aiming to simplify the boundary as a solid division, and yet articulating a shared common nature between humans and animals that, while exacerbated by the Fall, was not entirely due to the fall. While these commentaries do affirm the power of sin in corrupting and complicating creation, these authors themselves do very little in these commentaries to deviate significantly from their paradigm. While they view nature with some complications, they largely accept the binary between human and non-human as uncomplicated, with some exceptions. But complications do arise in several cases, which challenge theological understandings of the era, including questions regarding creatures that threaten the boundary through human characteristics, and especially the question of whether the image of God in human beings is threatened by mental defect.¹ This section will present case studies, demonstrating how theological figures in the era both pushed back on static notions of the human/non-human binary and how they attempted to reconcile perceived discontinuities between theological exegesis and lived experience.

¹ Carlos Smith, “The Image of God and Cognitive Disabilities: Dignity, Dominion, and Dependence,” (PhD Diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 61-75. Smith provides a thorough discussion of the position of the Reformers on their views of sin and the image of God. Smith presents the Reformers as viewing the “image of God” as located in the heart and mind, yet is broken by the Fall into sin. As a result, humanity must be skeptical of its own mind, and of human reason; however, mental defect points to that brokenness of the image of God, even if the image can still be reflected in the body. Luther notably sees the postlapsarian image of God as a shell of its former self, and views humanity as incomplete until Christ’s return. Smith notes an incident in the Table Talk in which Luther suggests that a child with special needs who “devoured as much as four farmers did, and did nothing else than eat or excrete” should be drowned because he is “simply a mass of flesh without a soul,” and because the Devil himself could be responsible for the young man’s constitution. See Smith, 67-68. See also the referenced incident in Martin Luther, “Table Talk Recorded by John Mathesius,” 397.
For such a discussion, it is important to explore a figure who, due to his eccentricities, challenges traditional approaches to understanding the natural world and the relationship between humans and non-humans. The Swiss theologian and physician Theophrastus von Hohenheim, more commonly known as Paracelsus (1493-1541), is historically known for his interest in alchemy and his unorthodox medical practices which ultimately set the stage for much of modern medical practice. This is not to say that he was a modern thinker or practitioner; rather, his emphasis on the natural sciences and the combination of knowledge and empirical observation with his unique understanding of the world set precedent for later medical and scientific developments, even though his methods were admittedly unorthodox. However, as a prominent lay theologian, Paracelsus offers a unique lens into early modern theological approaches to the boundary between people and non-people. Paracelsus is crucial for understanding the tension even among groundbreaking thinkers. Paracelsus was more open to challenging anthropocentric norms and blurred established categories of personhood; however, in some instances, he also returns to orthodox formulations in his theology, and his perception of the natural world, while populated with non-adamic creation and addressing transgressions of the image of God in humanity, returns to assertions of fundamentally ordered differences between humans and non-humans. This chapter will explore this tension—how Paracelsus pushes the boundary of the image of God in humans and addresses questions of that boundary, while also eventually seeking to reassert the initial boundaries.

**Paracelsus: Biography and Identity**

Paracelsus’s historic role and identity are complicated to discern for the early modern historian. He was ensconced in the realm of physical, discernible knowledge, noted for his contributions to toxicology, chemistry, and medicine; at the same time, however, he was
entrenched in the realm of the esoteric, exploring philosophical and theological ideas outside mainstream theological discourse and blending his philosophical ideals, alchemical experimentation, and medical discourse into a broader body of work that was complex, eccentric, and polarizing. As Philip Ball notes early in his biography, Paracelsus represented a series of contradictions, simultaneously a “humble braggart, a puerile sage, an invincible loser, a courageous coward, a pious heretic, an honest charlatan, fueled by profound love and spiteful hate, dining with princes and sleeping in the ditch, both personifying and challenging the madness of his world.”

Paracelsus was born in 1493 in the Swiss town of Einsiedeln as Theophrastus von Hohenheim, to father Wilhelm von Hohenheim and his wife. While we know that Wilhelm was a learned man, a physician, and a graduate of the University of Tubingen, we know comparatively little about his mother. However, while his father was a chemist and physician, his own pedigree remained sketchy. As Ball notes, while his last name, von Hohenheim, implies some degree of nobility, Wilhelm was illegitimate and, despite notions of descent from the famous Conrad Bombast, a Swabian noble, remained of lesser means (Ball’s exact description is a man of “paltry means”). Yet despite these inauspicious beginnings, Paracelsus’s parentage proved influential on his upbringing, as his father’s learned status gave him access to and knowledge of Latin, Greek, medicine, botany, and theology. In fact, Ball suggests that the prefix Philippus, often added to Paracelsus’s name, emerged from his father’s appreciation for Greek and love of classical learning, although such a claim may be spurious. Nevertheless, Wilhelm’s

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3 Ibid., 20-23.
4 Ibid., 23.
5 Ibid., 24. The moniker “Paracelsus” would come later in life. Its origins are unclear—Paracelsus’s tendency toward German over Latin in some instances makes his taking a Latin name odd, and it may have been a name ascribed to
background surely contributed to Paracelsus’s own early education. However, his mother’s status, while less attested to, may prove of some import as well. What we know with certainty is that she died in 1502, and her absence had an impact on Paracelsus’s upbringing and education.

Following his mother’s death, Paracelsus and his father moved to the town of Villach in the mountains of Carinthia, a region known for its mining of precious metals. Paracelsus was educated here at the Bergschule, where his father began teaching, as well as at local convent schools like St Andrae in Lavanttal. In these schools and from his father, Paracelsus not only received an education in scholastic disciplines and theology, but also in mineralogy and sciences. And it is likely here that he was exposed to alchemy for the first time, considering notions of natural history and the transmutation and transformation of metals. Yet his education throughout and after his childhood also included numerous travels, including Basel, Vienna, Ferrara, and elsewhere across Europe throughout from 1517 to 1524 after receiving his medical doctorate around 1516. Following his travels, he returned to Basel to work as a physician and found success, healing the humanist printer Johann Froben, developing a personal relationship with the Dutch humanist Erasmus. At the same time, he continued to give medical lectures at the University of Basel (in German rather than Latin), as well as to write and publish both medical and philosophical works. His medical work adamantly opposed the dominant Galenism of medical authorities, and classical and medieval authorities more broadly, opposing humoral theory and engaging in public displays, including a public burning of Avicenna’s *Canon of Medicine*. In contrast, Paracelsus pushed the importance of physicians having knowledge of the

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6 Ibid., 25, 30.
natural world, including chemistry and material elements. In place of humoral theory, Paracelsus advanced Aristotelian notions of the four elements, utilizing and integrating them into both his medical and philosophical work. Beyond that, Paracelsus endeavored to push the bounds of experimental medicine by utilizing the occult and magical forms of healing and protection. His efforts earned him contempt from other physicians of the Reformation era, including from Johann Weyer, Thomas Erastus, and Johann Georg Godelman. All of these figures pushed back against the occultic method that emerged in his work and his use of “superstitious remedies and magical cures.” Yet his unorthodox approach to medicine often ran up against opposition from more traditional physicians who, despite their own varied religious opinions, pushed back against Paracelsus’s unique methods of experimentation. Following protracted conflict with medical authorities in Basel, he eventually left and took up an occupation as a traveling doctor.9

As a theological figure, Paracelsus was eccentric. As a writer, his style is frequently described as “coarse,” and he often opted for German rather than Latin, with many existing translations of his work coming from original German, and others coming from Latin translations of his German work. And he gained a reputation as being a bombastic personality, often garnering comparisons with Luther, as both were reformers in their own right, disillusioned with the Roman Church, and prone to polemical, coarse outbursts. Yet he also advanced a theology that was broadly rooted in both theological authorities (to an extent) and experiences of the natural world, even to the point of heterodoxy.10


The historiographic treatment of Paracelsus ultimately varies. It is difficult to speak of his importance during his lifetime; while he wrote voluminously, most of his material remained unpublished until after his death in 1541, when admirers published them. And while it is difficult to separate certain aspects of his work from others, the general tendency among scholarship has been to focus on his role as an eccentric scientist, whose theological commitments and suppositions, while infiltrating his work, contributed to a proto-empiricism and represented a transition to observation-based modes of knowledge. By far the most common fields still discussing his work and legacy are medical fields; primarily, he is studied as a toxicologist, pharmacologist, and physician, with scholars assessing how his work in the study of animals relates to the understanding of various animal toxins, as well as disease and infection.\(^\text{11}\)

Moreover, recent scholarship has addressed Paracelsus as a prophetic figure, with various scholars noting how Rosicrucian adherents in the 17\(^{th}\) century utilized Paracelsus’s “\textit{Prognosticationes}” to help unveil an esoteric, mystical order to the world, with the goal of a “universal reformation of mankind.”\(^\text{12}\)

Yet scholars who study his work outside of the medical realm (both toxicology and history of medicine) have focused less on his role as a lay theologian in his own right than his

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\(^{11}\) The most influential concept attributed to Paracelsus is the dictum \textit{Dosis sola facit venenum}, or “Only the dose makes the poison,” which emphasized that anything in a high enough amount can be toxic. What is important is the amount of a substance to understanding its effect. See Joseph Borzelleca, “Profiles in Toxicology: Paracelsus, Herald of Modern Toxicology;” 2-4; Brendon Evans, “Paracelsus- Father of Toxicology, brother of general practice,” \textit{Australian Journal of General Practice} 52.6 (June 2023): 333; Philippe Grandjean, “Paracelsus Revisited: The Dose Concept in a Complex World,” \textit{Basic and Clinical Pharmacology and Toxicology} 119.2 (August 2016): 126-132; Martin Wilks, “Bringing Chemistry to Medicine: The Contribution of Paracelsus to Modern Toxicology,” \textit{Chimia} 74.6 (June 2020): 507-508.

role as an eclectic philosopher and alchemist, with much of the literature focusing on the role of alchemy in his theology, or the role of his theological ideas in his alchemical work.\textsuperscript{13} Somewhat less scholarly attention is paid to Paracelsus’s role as a theologian in his own right, with some attention paid to the theological implications and presuppositions of his medical thought. To the extent that attention is paid to Paracelsus as a theologian, it tends to focus on his heretical tendencies, eccentricities, and role as an esoteric figure. However, it is worth examining Paracelsus’s role as an explicitly theological thinker first rather than as a scientific thinker, and to examine how his scientific and physical views impact his understanding of the spiritual realm. He was certainly capable of hostility toward theologians, and may not have even considered himself primarily a theologian; but that self-perception is a different matter entirely. Moreover, the priority given to his views on nature distract from the ways in which his theology undergirds even his scientific perspective. Thus, this chapter will focus on Paracelsus’s role as a theologian, and how his views of the natural world and even some of his medical texts function as theological texts that examine humanity’s role in the purview of God’s creation.

However, it would also be disingenuous to try to completely distinguish between Paracelsus’s medical and philosophical/theological work. Paracelsus’s philosophical and theological thought is ultimately wound into the fabric of his medical work, and his affinity for alchemy and astrology attests that for Paracelsus, it was crucial to emphasize the interplay of the microcosm and the macrocosm: that every human is a microcosm and is connected with the broader world, the macrocosm.\textsuperscript{14} For Paracelsus, medicine was a much smaller part of the broader overall world and of his duty to God. Thus, Paracelsus sought for his work to go beyond

\textsuperscript{14} Dane T. Daniel, “Invisible Wombs: Rethinking Paracelsus’s Concept of Body and Matter,” \textit{Ambix} 53.2 (July 2006): 129-142.
examination of minor details to understanding how those details served as part of the world. While Paracelsus emphasized the importance of observation and of knowledge of chemistry, for instance, he did not divide between his knowledge of science and theology, but rather integrated his philosophical and theological teachings into his medical writings. While this view is certainly unique for the modern reader, it is not completely unheard of for premodern writers; however, it does prove more challenging for the modern scholar seeking to distinguish his scientific teachings from core theological values and principles.

Moreover, the fact that Paracelsus’s theology is intermingled with his medical and scientific writings makes him a crucial figure for understanding the development of the boundary between human and non-human in early modern thought. Beyond the tenuous nature of such divisions in premodern thought generally, Paracelsus serves as a particularly useful case study, as he attests to the practical implications of theological exegesis in early modern thought. Scriptural study not only impacted elites, but also influenced the treatment and understanding of myriad forms of human and non-human life outside of elite circles. Theological understandings of scripture, sin, and the image of God affected medical thought and naturalism in nuanced, variegated ways; while Paracelsus is not the only figure to demonstrate this, he is perhaps the figure who most clearly integrates theological ideas with practical impact in the world (albeit from a premodern view of medicine and the natural world). Moreover, Paracelsus is important as an unorthodox (and in fact heterodox) thinker for understanding how even the most unorthodox thinkers still interact with established boundaries, and in many instances return to those established paradigms. To understand this, we will explore a few case studies which illuminate Paracelsus’s role in exploring both the qualities attributed specifically to humanity, as well as creatures which obscure the boundary between humans and non-humans.
Case Study 1: Paracelsus and the “Begetting of Fools”

Our first case study addresses the question of how to conceive of human beings who, despite being on one side of the human/nonhuman divide, lack some of the constitutive elements articulated in commentaries as belonging to the “image of God.” The question of mental illness and defect in the early modern era posed a clear conundrum for theologians and non-theologians alike. Scholars have addressed elements of mental defect or disorder in early modern life, most notably Erik Midelfort’s study of madness and the emergence of hospitals for the mentally ill in Reformation Germany. He recounts how theologians encountered and understood specific mental illnesses. His examples are wide-reaching, and do encompass the curious texts of Paracelsus, including “On the Generation of Fools.” While he focuses in his overview on the alchemical elements of Paracelsus’s conclusions, this section will discuss the challenge of “fools” to the theological notion of the “image of God” in practice. The degree to which early modern theology responds to the power of sin in humans with diminished mental capacity occurs in different ways with different emphases, and figures like Paracelsus differ from other prominent figures, like Luther, in balancing the practical interpretation with a symbolic interpretation.15

Efforts to discuss “natural fools” (people born with mental or cognitive impairments) certainly existed amongst early modern theologians, albeit not in any systematic way. Preachers grappled with the issue within their sermons, in part through discussions of how people with impairments, such as the blind and the deaf, managed to understand and respond to Christian teachings. Luther regularly discussed those with impairments within his sermons and commentaries, and included those with mental impairments within these considerations. In his

“Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass,” he argues that the sacrament of Communion should not be refused to people with impairments due to diminished rational capacity, arguing that, “Christ had the children come to him and would not allow anyone to hinder them. In like manner he withheld his blessings neither from the dumb nor the blind nor the lame.”16 In his notes on Ecclesiastes, he asserts that scriptural condemnations of fools refer not to those who are “stupid or silly” but rather “one who is wicked and good-for-nothing.”17 However, most theologians or authors only treated diminished mental capacity within broader sermons or discourses on other topics rather than in a systematic way; moreover, most scholars treated not the dimensions of “folly” on human dominion or anthropocentrism, but as types and stand-in categories for sin, weakness, or vice. Narrenliteratur from humanists such as Erasmus and Sebastian Brant discussed less coherently the role or origins of “natural fool” than the role of the “natural fool” as a warning against sin. For them, drawing on folly would have been recognizable to their audiences, even as they used folly as a metaphor for the ways ordinary people slip into ridiculous ways of behavior when not paying attention to their own absurdity. Moreover, as Midelfort details, many chronicles describe practical encounters with “natural fools” as figures with clairvoyance and increased perception of the supernatural world.18 However, Paracelsus’s “On the Generation of Fools,” as well as his “On Lunatics” are some of the most concerted efforts to understand diminished mental capacity in a coherent, systematic way (albeit tinged by Paracelsus’s own eccentric tendencies). Other efforts, like that from Swiss

Felix Platter and Thomas Willis, also intervene in this, and even identify potential demonic origins for diminished mental capacity.\textsuperscript{19}

In the Preface of “On the Generation of Fools,” Paracelsus starts with a bold statement: “It is astonishing that God, who redeemed man through the great price of His death and blood, lets men be born unwise and unable to understand His name, His death, His teaching, His signs, His works, and His benefactions bestowed upon mankind; devoid of all the reason and wisdom appropriate to that purpose.”\textsuperscript{20} He goes on to question how a human, as a “likeness of God,” could be afflicted with a “fool, a simpleton, a stupid and ignorant one,” so that fools may be in the likeness of God, yet stand “debased before all creatures.”\textsuperscript{21} Yet Paracelsus is careful not to contradict Christian theology and soteriology at that time by arguing that Christ’s atonement does not apply to such figures, saying that Christ’s death “surely did redeem all of these.” Yet he acknowledges at the outset the difficulty of determining a theological cause for the existence of “fools and simpletons among men,” and saying that it is a “great mystery” which is hidden in nature, and for some reason only exists among humans.\textsuperscript{22} Paracelsus’s use of the word “arcanum” is curious here for its dual metaphysical and medical meanings; it could refer to a metaphysical secret, or to a hidden medical cure.\textsuperscript{23} However, even without discussion of this specific word choice, this piece’s attempt to uncover the origin and cause of “fools” offers a specific challenge for early modern Christian understandings of the “image of God.”

Paracelsus attempts in this piece to place the existence of fools in context. While the cause is difficult to understand, this potential exists in all humans, and is ultimately a matter of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 57.
\end{itemize}

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perspective. While humans are made in the image of God, human wisdom pales in comparison to God’s wisdom, and “all of us in our wisdom are like the fools.” Paracelsus seems to indicate that human reason is comparable to animal reason, regularly referring to the things people do in their “animal reason” and placing humanity in comparison to all other creatures, whom God does not redeem through Jesus but which lack fools. But it is difficult to understand whether he indicates this as a relative statement (human wisdom in relation to God’s wisdom) or whether he intends it as an objective statement. He states that human reason by nature is a form of “animal reason,” and that “Christ alone must be our helper, otherwise all of us are fools. Therefore the fools, our brethren, stand before us; likewise as we are kinsmen and one in the blood, thus we are of the same blood also in our reason with our wisdom before God.” And even more bluntly, he states, “And He who redeemed the intelligent one, also redeemed the fool, as the fool, thus the intelligent one.” 24 Paracelsus’s preface here asserts an initial conception that affirms fools as created in the image of God, but admits the difficulty of explaining how this functions; in short, the odd challenge of Paracelsus is to affirm how fools can both exist as debased beyond all creatures and elevated in the image of God. This issue is a key part of the challenge to early modern notions of anthropocentrism and a stark boundary between humans and non-humans—that is, the question of why natural fools exist and how natural fools still receive salvation from God. 25

After the preface, however, Paracelsus engages in his own attempt to explain the origin of the fool. To Paracelsus, the cause of humans with diminished mental capacity is, as is the case among most of our thinkers, original sin. Paracelsus’s explanation is in keeping with most of early modern commentaries of Genesis in identifying sin as the crux of challenges to the image

24 Ibid., 60.
25 Ibid.
of God, yet his explanation in its logistics is more complicated. To Paracelsus, Adam and Eve were created pure when placed in the Garden of Eden, yet temptation by the Devil (as Paracelsus identifies him, Leviathan)\(^26\) ruined their innocence. Paracelsus here uses the metaphor of “maidenhood,” comparing Adam and Eve to an innocent, naïve woman who is ignorant of the world and gives into temptation without fully understanding the consequences. He says that “the Leviathan, since within Eve and Adam there were marvelous natures, tempts them and ruins them.”\(^27\) From that temptation, Adam and Eve “lost their freedom and their properties, and turned into a world man, turned out into the world, burdened with all the worldly things unto the last man.”\(^28\) Upon being turned into the world, humanity became corruptible and susceptible to the power and downfall of sin, including an awareness of the “misery of the world.” Sin both deprives humans of the image of God and corrupts humans so that all sorts of sin and fallenness enter the world, including “the murderers, the warriors, the thieves...debauchees...gamblers...robbers...there crooked children came into being, there blind ones, there mutes, there cripples, there such as are afraid, there fools, there monsters, there misgrowths and the like.”\(^29\) The corrupting power of sin is such that “the world’s manner, property, and substance begets these things every day pell-mell in plenty and abundance,” and that the “children of the world become the reverse of Ebron.”\(^30\)

\(^{26}\) The use of the term “Leviathan” here is a curious choice, as it typically referred to a sea monster. However, it has been compared with the Devil, with biblical commentators connecting it as dragon-like, and connected with the sin of Pride, a thread which would later be taken up by William Blake and responses to his Illustrations from the Book of Job, where God looks down on the Behemoth and Leviathan. See Kelly Murphy, “Leviathan to Lucifer: What Biblical Monsters (Still) Reveal, Interpretation 74.2 (April 2020): 149-154.


\(^{28}\) Ibid.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 60-62. Paracelsus explains that by Ebron, he is referring to the Garden of Eden and the sinless, paradisiacal state of being of humanity in the beginning.
From this point, though, Paracelsus’s explanation discusses the origin of fools not just in sin, but in sin’s disruption of the “image of God” as a creative process. The fall into sin deprives humans of the continuing process of the image of God, not the very creation in the first place. For “we do say that we have been made in the Divine image, but we do not say we still are being made in the Divine image as it was created.”31 Had humans remained in the Garden, Paracelsus reasons that “we should have been standing in the Divine image, which would have been eternal, without death, without suffering, without fear, without poverty, and without any affliction.”32 Sin subjects humans to the corruption outside the image of God, and subjects humans to “all the elements,”33 but in part contributes to diminished mental capacity by disrupting the creative process of the image of God. Paracelsus’s explanation for that creative process, though, refers to the vulcanus (the patron deity of alchemy) and the “immature master craftsmen” (which I explain further below).34

Paracelsus’s thought merges Christian and alchemical ideals in an odd way. To an alchemist like Paracelsus, Vulcan refers to the alchemical manipulation of fire, literally a mythological patron deity for human capacity to manipulate and transform matter (humanity’s “creative potential”). As a deity, Vulcan is considered the figure who shapes and crafts human life, and serves as an interface between divine and human, himself crossing boundaries between categories of matter.35 Yet with regard to the fool, Paracelsus writes that Vulcan does not himself

31 Ibid., 62.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 63.
34 Ibid.
craft the fool; rather, the fool, as a “marred statue...malformed and malproportioned” is made by “apprentices.”\textsuperscript{36} The Vulcans engage in highly differentiated, specific forms of creation. Paracelsus’s intermingling of Christian doctrine and alchemical ideas is eccentric, but the ultimate underlying point reiterates the same gist as most of the Genesis commentaries: that while prelapsarian humanity is perfectly in the image of God, postlapsarian humanity “must suffer what nature makes out of us, be it crooked, crippled, blind fools, dolts, and none the less praise God that it turned out thus.”\textsuperscript{37}

Paracelsus embraces the details of how fools challenge the boundary between human and non-human. Sin’s corruption of humanity and deprivation of the image of God from humanity has both moral impact as well as physical impact. The “misgrowths” and “goiters” often found on fools, to Paracelsus, are a sign and visual attestation of the removed image of God and of how humans intersect with animal nature. To Paracelsus, humans “carry an image in which all the animals’ manner, nature, also blood and flesh, combines and is, inasmuch as we let precede within us that which is animal.”\textsuperscript{38} Thus, misgrowths and abnormalities, whether physical or mental, are a sign of the degeneration of humanity brought on by sin. While the “animal body” would have been an “instrument of the true body” had sin not entered the world, the presence of sin in the world instead subjects the human body to the instruments of the vulcani which affect human reason, and which explains why “one man becomes a fool, another one does not...for everything that is committed to corruption corrupts also.”\textsuperscript{39} Yet this folly, while a sign of the degrading power of sin, is also generally benign and harmless. While both diverge from the

\textsuperscript{36} Paracelsus, “The Begetting of Fools: An Annotated Translation,” ed. and transl. Paul Cranefield and Walter Federn, 64.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 66-67.
“wise” in being subject to the animal body, Paracelsus distinguishes between “fools,” or 
stulti, and the “insane,” or lunatici, namely that the fools “are of a benign star, having degenerated out
of weakness, while the insane have been begotten out of too much of the animal reason.” While
fools are benign enough, the insane are those whose innate natures end up being altered.40
Moreover, in his study of “Diseases that Rob of Reason,” Paracelsus identifies that the loss of
human reason tends to have natural causes which can be cured, in some cases through alchemical
means. The study presents an inquiry into the origin of insanity and deprivation of reason in
natural reasons; however, while Paracelsus focuses on natural issues, he does seem to imply that
natural deprivation of reason can impinge on one’s innate nature, particularly when it comes to
“truly insane people,” whose condition is a permanent feature of their being.41

Yet Paracelsus also seems to indicate that sin’s power, while corrupting, does not prevent
the action or intent of God in creation from proceeding. He writes somewhat glowingly about
fools and their lessons for the rest of humanity. Following a discussion of the “two moistures” of
creation, and the fools who do not digest liquid, but possess a “fixed wine” and remain “crazy
and drunk,” Paracelsus indicates that the moisture of the earth is important for the development
of the brain. What the fool does is “drunkenness’ work,” because the wine, rather than being
digested, remains in the brain and corrodes it, and ultimately results in the degeneration of the
fool. But Paracelsus also argues that the fools possess an inherent wisdom, which “bursts forth,
like as a light shines through a horn, obscure and dim.” Paracelsus distinguishes between the
mind and the body being foolish; while the animal body can be corrupted as a fool, the soul

40 Ibid., 67.
41 Paracelsus, “The Diseases that Deprive Man of His Reason, Such as St Vitus’s Dance, Falling Sickness,
Melancholy, and Insanity, and Their Correct Treatment,” 1567, in Paracelsus: Four Treatises, transl. Gregory
Zilboorg, 152-157.
cannot. He says, “Even if the animal body is a fool, yet the soul, his spirit, etc. is no fool…For there is nothing as a fool with them but only the mortal body…that which is eternal within him is without any folly and simplicity.”

Wisdom comes from the “true man,” but is demonstrated with the animal body, and the wise man who has a reasonable animal body trusts and puts it “before the true body.” But whereas a wise man with a reasonable animal body is compelled to “cover up his wisdom,” the fool, lacking power over the animal body, is more responsive to the desires of the inner body, lacking the capacity to control or separate the body and soul, and must be considered “more than the wise man” for “he does not resist the true man with the animal body.”

The wisdom of natural fools is unimpeded by the resistance of the body, and results in the fool being more blessed, “for they are nearer [to God] in the spirit.”

What is especially remarkable is that this blessedness to Paracelsus is not merely symbolic or revelatory. Natural fools exhibit this wisdom for their own sake and as a result of their own design. While early modern Narrenliteratur to this point had tended to read and interpret the existence of fools in terms of their lessons for the rest of humanity, much in the way monsters and monstrous bodies are interpreted as signs of God’s power and moral lessons, Paracelsus’s key concern here is the actual nature and blessedness of the fool. His assessment eventually results in lessons for non-fools, and an acknowledgment that the impact of sin and the distinction between animal body and human reason is such that “no one ought to be regarded as simpleton or fool,” but his overall approach to fools is affirming of them in their own right rather than as simple lessons for those of sound mind.

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43 Ibid., 70.
44 Ibid., 70-71.
46 Ibid., 74.
The key interrelation here is between the body and reason, or between the body and soul. One of the key metaphors employed by Paracelsus is that of horse riding. Those with functioning mental capacity act in a way so that their reason governs their actions, whereas fools and lunatics are subject to the animal body and urges. Human reason’s coexistence with the animal body is similar to a human who rides a horse and controls the horse’s actions and movement, and “although the horse also has ascendants and is governed by heaven, yet lo, this time man, and not heaven is master; man breaks heaven and is above heaven. Thus he may also train his animal body like that so that it must not be otherwise than as a little dog is in relation to its master, and show itself without any resistance, obedient and in leash.\(^47\) The human is to “train his body” to be obedient to the “inner man as an instrument;” that is, to be subject to the human capacity for reason and to be attuned with the image of God.

For a figure as eccentric as Paracelsus to be so tied to canonical authority seems counterintuitive. Yet despite all the alchemical elements at the borders of his thought, the core of Paracelsus’s response to challenges to God’s image is Augustinian. As Paul Cranefield and Walter Federn note, Paracelsus exhibits broad parallels from Augustine’s ideas on the image of God, the fall, and diminished mental capacity. Augustine also associated the fall of Adam with the existence of “fools,” arguing for the necessity of grace in overcoming the power of sin.\(^48\) Cranefield and Federn also convincingly connect Paracelsus’s use of the term \textit{limbus} with Augustine’s own commentary on Genesis, in which Augustine discusses the concept of shapeless matter as the “seed of heaven and earth,” prefiguring Paracelsus’s concept of “prime matter.”\(^49\) Paracelsus’s own perspective invokes angels less than Augustine, and is more optimistic about

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1]{Ibid., 67-68.}
\footnotetext[3]{Ibid., 164.}
\end{footnotes}
what can be learned from fools, but Cranefield and Federn furthermore make a compelling comparison between Paracelsus’s vulcani and Augustine’s frequent references to angels.\textsuperscript{50} Where Paracelsus is more optimistic, he seems given to other traditions, as with the ancient tradition of folly as promoting a form of wisdom.\textsuperscript{51} Yet while Paracelsus’s overall perspective is more positive toward fools than Augustine, and the influences on Paracelsus are myriad, it is still hard to consider such a perspective on sin’s power in depriving humans of the image of God without an Augustinian basis, both for Paracelsus and more broadly in the era. But Paracelsus’s influence from Augustine does raise the question of how Augustine’s broader influence comes to wane over time. The next case study elaborates on a case in which Paracelsus deviates from the Augustinian norm in discussion of non-Adamic creation.

\textit{Case Study 2: Paracelsus and Spiritual Creatures}

The final case study with Paracelsus deals less with his medical expertise’s intersection with his theology and more with his theological anthropology and understanding of creatures in the world writ large. Paracelsus’s tract “De Nymphis, Sylphis, Pygmaeis, et Salamandris et de Ceteris Spiritibus” explores Paracelsus’s views on created beings and creatures in the world. While the text was not published until after Paracelsus’s death in 1541, it offers valuable insight into Paracelsus’s theology and personality during his lifetime in a lens distinct from his views on medicine. I argue that in this text, Paracelsus demonstrates a primary tendency within his theology. On the one hand, his rebellious spirit is evident as he challenges the prevailing tendencies within Christian thought, never falling neatly into the camp of reformed or engaged in the project of Reformed Christianity. On the other hand, in many ways, his challenge still circles

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 165.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
back to fundamental tenets of Christian theology. Clearly, his views were unorthodox, but the
dergee of his heterodoxy on this particular issue was in some ways overstated.

The tract “De Nymphis,” while known by its Latin name, was originally written in
German, as were many of Paracelsus’s other writings. The style of the text, as Henry Sigerist
notes, is “unpretentious” and even has an air about it of a fairy tale. Yet accompanying the style
is a unique view of creation that addresses one of the consistent elements of premodern European
culture: the existence of creatures unaccounted for by the creation narratives in Genesis. While
Genesis and other scriptural texts identify the creation of humanity, animals, and the existence of
spiritual beings such as angels, they do not explicitly discuss this category of creatures that
abounded in and throughout premodern European folklore.52

Paracelsus’s thought on humanity and the human-non-human boundary is broadly
situated in a view of the macrocosm and microcosm. To Paracelsus, God is active and present in
the world, and distinguishes between the broader expanse of nature and the smaller individuals.
In the Astronomia Magna, he writes, “God is moved by such a love to reveal the secrets of the
stars, that He created the microcosm, not just to reveal the secret of the stars...but to reveal all
natural mysteries of the elements.”53 Paracelsus relates the microcosm to the macrocosm,
embracing the broader creation of the world by God with the secrets inherent within nature. To
Paracelsus, part of the distinction of humanity is as God’s chosen tool for elucidating the secrets
of nature. To Paracelsus, God’s creation of humanity is imbued with a desire that humanity
“work continually to discover what God has given him,” and that Christians work to “make

manifest that which He has put in us.” Paracelsus says that the stars “need an agent through which to work, and this agent is man and man alone.” This is a key element of humanity’s purpose, which emerges from the distinct nature imbued in humanity by God. Paracelsus writes in a similar vein regarding the human-non-human boundary, distinguishing between human and animal nature, for it is “endowed with divine wisdom, endowed with divine arts. Therefore we are justly called gods and the sons of the All Highest. For the light of Nature is in us and this light is God. Our mortal bodies are vehicles of the divine wisdom.”

It is important to note that Paracelsus’s views on humanity remain controversial, and were in fact held by many to be outright heretical. Dane T. Daniel, for instance, notes that starting in the decades following Paracelsus’s death in 1541, scholars and “Paracelsus enthusiasts” have explored Paracelsus’s “idiosyncratic theology” in depth, including his sacramental theology, Mariology, and broader approach to biblical exegesis. Daniel hones in on Paracelsus’s unique “two-flesh” concept, which is important toward understanding Paracelsus’s views on human nature. Throughout his thought, but particularly in the Astronomia Magna, Paracelsus argues that the human body consists of two fleshes. Several of his texts argue for a dual approach to flesh, with Christians possessing both a corporeal body and a resurrection body, with both bodies existing in the world, but only the resurrection body expected to survive into eternity; in general, this aligns with the astrological differentiation between the sidereal and the elemental. Paracelsus makes reference in the Astronomia Magna to the two bodies, saying that God created humanity not “out of a nothingness,” but “from a substance...the limus terrae...they

54 Ibid., 119.
55 Ibid., 118.
56 Ibid., 119.
prove that man is ashes and powder, dust and earth.” He goes on to say that God made humanity by taking “each of the four elements and also extracted the essence of wisdom, art, and reason from the stars. And then he combined both natures, the elemental and the astral, with a massa which is known as the limus terrae in the Scriptures. Thus two bodies have arisen from this massa, the sidereal and the elemental.”

Paracelsus goes on to say that the convergence of these two bodies is called the “fifth essence according to the light of nature; that is to say, the massa is extracted and both the firmament and the elements have been combined into one.” Thus, the creation of humanity connects humanity uniquely between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Humanity becomes a unique creature created from the fundamental elements of the world: “what has been extracted from the four elements makes the fifth...moreover, the fifth essence is the whole basis and core of all essences and properties of the whole world; the hand of God held all Nature, virtues, and properties and essences in the upper and lower regions and formed man out of these in His image.” Paracelsus goes on to say that man receives its various characteristics, including “heavenly wisdom, reason, and art and such from the stars, and flesh and blood from the elements”. But humanity is the “fifth essence, the microcosm and the son of the whole world, because he has been created as an extract of all creation by the hand of God.” Daniel notes explicitly how Paracelsus links his cosmology and anthropology to his sacramental theology; however, it is important to expand upon how Paracelsus’s cosmology and anthropology are linked. Paracelsus embraces a view in which humanity’s role is not just hierarchical over the

59 Ibid., 116-117.
60 Ibid., 116-117. The idea of the fifth essence was common in alchemical thought and went beyond Paracelsus. See Philip Ball, The Devil’s Doctor, 339.
animal realm, but is also part and parcel of the broader macrocosm. Paracelsus also addresses this elsewhere in *De Natura Rerum*, where he argues that God created all natural things, including “not only that lives which moves and acts as men, animals, worms in the earth birds under the sky, fishes in the sea, but also all corporeal and substantial things.” Paracelsus links humanity together with all of creation and argues for the spiritual nature underlying all things.

This is crucial for us to understand not just how he views humanity, but for how he views humanity’s relationship to the boundary between humans and non-humans more broadly, particularly in *De Nymphis*.

*De Nymphis* begins with Paracelsus’s acknowledgment of both the unity of nature and the importance of the natural realm. Paracelsus writes that all are “familiar and well acquainted with the creation of all and every natural object that God has brought into existence” with every person possessing a “cognizance of himself.” The introduction to this text describes his broader view of the unity and order of the created realm, writing that through that cognizance “nothing is concealed that man did not or would not know. That does not mean that all knowledge is in one...but each his own field. When they all come together, then everything is known.” But all of that knowledge comes back to a final conclusion that “everything is subservient and subject to man.” However, Paracelsus’s description of what that means is multifaceted, and interlinks

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
with an esoteric, multifaceted view of nature itself. Paracelsus mentions that there are “more things, however, than those which are comprehended and recognized in the light of nature,” but that can only be understood in the “light of man which is above the light of nature.”

Paracelsus’s description in this text of human nature relates it not initially to scriptural discussions of *imago Dei*, but rather to a broader sense of the supernatural within humanity. Paracelsus writes that “in man there is also a light, outside the light born in nature...by which man hears, learns, and penetrates supernatural things.” He goes on to say explicitly, “For man is more than nature. He is nature. He is also a spirit. He is also an angel. He has the qualities of all these three.”

However, this description of humanity is a preface to transition into the topic of creatures outside the specific bounds of nature. Humanity’s nature is important to understanding creatures that exist outside the “cognizance of the light of nature.” Paracelsus seeks to describe the “creatures that are outside the cognizance of the light of nature” as a means of understanding and untangling God’s works. And while Goodrick-Clarke and others have described this text as having a fairy-tale quality, Paracelsus himself disputes that intent, writing that he is “not writing about lovely matters and nice stories, but about supernatural matters that do not require nice stories.” This specific text revolves around the question of these spiritual creatures which are attested to in premodern European culture, but which exist outside the bounds of scriptural creation accounts. This section will discuss the “spirit-men” which he describes, as well as what they have to say about Paracelsus’s view of the world and of humanity’s relationship to that world.

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 223-224.
68 Ibid., 224.
69 Ibid., 225.
Paracelsus’s discussion of spiritual creatures argues for the existence of marvels and monsters. However, while both marvels and monsters attest to messages from God, monsters exist outside the order of nature, whereas marvels exist as intermediate beings between the spiritual and physical worlds and serve to remind people of God’s creative power. Paracelsus divided these creatures according to the elements, arguing that they live within the various elements of the world. He describes the “water people, the mountain people, the fire people, and the wind people,” among whom are the “giants, the melusines, the Venusberg and what is similar to them.” Yet the identity of these creatures is complicated, as Paracelsus argues that they are “men, but not from Adam, but other creatures, apart from man and all other animals, in spite of the fact that they come among us and children are born from them, although not of their own kind, but of our kind.” Paracelsus clearly believes in the importance of discussing these creatures, and feels justified arguing for their role in the world, for despite the absence of these creatures from Scripture, “their exploration is justified by the fact that they appear and exist.” Paracelsus compares his role as a theologian and philosopher to his role as a physician, writing, “We have the power to travel in all the works of God, the physician in the natural remedy, the apostle in the apostolic remedy. For, as a sick man calls for a physician, things call for a philosopher, and a Christian for his Redeemer, and every work for his master. Such creatures are also necessary and also represent their condition, and they have not been created in vain.”

But in this text, Paracelsus also discusses the elements that make up creation of humanity. Paracelsus holds here as well to his two-flesh theory. He writes that the flesh must be understood

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71 Sigerist, 226
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 227.
as the “flesh from Adam and that which is not from Adam. The flesh from Adam is a coarse flesh, for it is earthen...The other flesh which is not from Adam, is a subtile [sic] flesh and cannot be bound nor grasped, for it is not made from earth.”\textsuperscript{74} However, this two-flesh theory applies to spiritual creatures as well. While spiritual creatures have “flesh, blood, bone, and so on, whatever belongs to a man, and in their whole nature they are like man’s,” they also have a ”double origin like two cousins; they are in equal way like a spirit and a man.”\textsuperscript{75} This very description of these creatures makes clear that, at least in principle, Paracelsus’s view of the boundary between people and non-people is fungible. The spirit creatures described by Paracelsus resemble humans in various ways, including their ability to “bear children, talk and eat, drink and walk,” yet they remain like spirits in other ways, including their “speed...gestures, figure and eating, so that they are people who have the character of spirits and also that of man, and both are one in them.”\textsuperscript{76} While this description applies to this specific category of non-Adamic spiritual creatures, the fact that Paracelsus’s description of spiritual creatures adheres so closely to his two-flesh theory in humanity somewhat elides the distinction between humans and spiritual creatures.

This distinction in Paracelsus is further elided by his description of other characteristics typical of humans but not of spiritual creatures. He writes that these creatures are distinct from humans due to their spirit-like behavior, yet they are also not spirits due to their physical attributes and behavior. Thus, they are a “creation of their own, outside the two, but of the kind of both, a mixture of both, like a composite remedy of two substances...although they are spirit and man, yet they are neither. Man has a soul, the spirit now. The spirit has no soul, but man has

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 227-228.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 228.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
one. This creature, however, is both, but has no soul, and yet is not identical with a spirit...it is not like man, it has not the soul; it is a beast, yet higher than a beast.” Paracelsus thus distinguishes spirit creatures from humanity and classifies them among animals, but also makes clear that they are more like humans than animals through their behavior, yet they lack constituent elements that would classify them among human beings. Their existence is miraculous, yet he seems to indicate that they are essentially men, yet without a soul.

While the specific descriptions of some of these creatures and related experiences or accounts are worth exploring, particularly the case of giants, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that no matter how much Paracelsus seems to elide or transgress the boundary between humans and non-humans, he ultimately affirms some form of strict boundary between the creatures. At the outset of his description, he notes that these spirit creatures are similar to humans in numerous ways, and “resemble us in every way.” But humans are created in the image of God, and he notes that the same case applies with spirit creatures, as “they are not men because they are made after his image but remain the same creatures as they have been created, just as man remains the same as God as created him.” He goes on to affirm a stricter boundary than we might anticipate, writing that God “wants every creature to remain at the place where it has been created...man lacks that he is not God. And the wild people lack the soul...Thus God alone is God, and man alone is man.” And these creatures, despite their human-like customs and behavior, consequently “have not the judgment to serve God, to walk in his path, for they have not the soul.” Indeed, throughout De Nymphis, Paracelsus describes accounts of creatures

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 229-230.
79 Ibid., 230.
that in all but innate qualities resemble humanity, yet by his description neither they nor their descendants stand the likelihood of becoming human.

Paracelsus clarifies that while these creatures resemble humanity in certain ways, they differ not only in what they lack (a soul), but they also differ in their explicit purpose. Paracelsus writes that spiritual creatures like nymphs, sylphs, salamanders, and pygmies seek “love with man, so as to be in union with men.” They also retain knowledge of “future affairs, present affairs, and the past,” in order that they can “serve man, protect, warn, guide him, and such like.”\textsuperscript{80} The gifts of these creatures are thus designed for the good of humanity, and God reveals them to humanity for the purpose of increasing humanity’s knowledge of both the world and of God.\textsuperscript{81} But these creatures, including giants, serve a prophetic purpose as signs. Specifically when discussing the “monsters of the fire people,” Paracelsus writes that they “predict and indicate something new.” Each creature signifies some imminent portent, with sirens indicating the downfall of political authorities, dwarfs signifying poverty, and giants signifying “great impending destruction of that country and land or some other great disaster.”\textsuperscript{82} Paracelsus here plays into the etymological meaning of a “monster” as a creature which shows or signifies, something which he is more explicit about in his discussion of the production of sirens as signifying divine warning or meaning.\textsuperscript{83}

While these creatures might pursue relationships with humans for the desire of a soul, Paracelsus makes clear that while neither spiritual beings nor their offspring will be able to gain a soul, spiritual beings may yet benefit from union with humanity. In fact, those that involve a human father may even produce a soul in the child, and even such women creatures “receive

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 239. Scholastic theologians rejected this notion.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 252.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 242.
souls by becoming married, so that they are saved before God and by God like other women.”84 Yet despite their reception of a soul, they appear to retain their spirit-characteristics as well, with Paracelsus noting that a man who marries a nymph ought to keep her away from water and should not offend her while they are on water, lest she disappear.85

While it may seem as if this text is primarily theoretical, it should be noted that Paracelsus draws from recorded experiences among premodern Europeans and communicates stories and accounts passed along by word of mouth of these creatures. One of the most well-known is the account of the Nymph of Stauffenberg. Paracelsus recounts a nymph who “sat on the road in all her beauty and served the lord she had chosen.”86 Paracelsus writes that she promised herself to her lord, von Stauffenberg, and stayed with him until he married and “took her for a devil.” Because he broke his promise to the nymph, she “gave him the sign” at his wedding, resulting in his death three days later.87 Paracelsus addresses several potential critiques of this account. First, he criticizes theological authorities who would dismiss this potential creature as lacking understanding, writing, “It is quite correct that to the theologians such a being is a devilish ghost, but certainly not to the true theologians.”88 He argues that the nymph in this account was not merely a devil or a ghost, because she had both taken on flesh and blood and had sought out union with a human. As a result, she is better described as a “woman and a nympha,” and a “woman in honor...and this is why she wanted duty and loyalty to be kept.” God allowed her to pass judgment on the man because von Stauffenberg broke his vow to her.”

84 Ibid., 238.
85 Ibid., 241.
86 Ibid., 244.
87 Ibid., 244-246. Paracelsus differs from the theological norm in arguing that spirit creatures can have physical relations with humans, resulting in offspring. Euan Cameron provides a brief summary of the heritage of accounts of corporeal creatures like these, including sylphs, the Nymph of Stauffenberg, the Venusberg, and the Melusine, as recounted by Burchard of Worms in the Corrector, as well as fifteenth century preacher Johannes Nider. See Euan Cameron, Enchanted Europe, 45-46.
88 Ibid., 244.
granting this judgment is important as it attests to her status not as a spirit, but as a woman scorned.  

A key element of Paracelsus’s view of these spirit beings goes beyond his actual arguments to his perspective of the governing theological authorities. More than once, he intimates that established theological authorities who reject the corporeal nature of these creatures are not merely mistaken but are also unintelligent and ignorant. In this passage specifically, Paracelsus distinguishes between “theologians” and “true theologians,” arguing that theologians who reject the corporeal nature of these beings have “little understanding of these beings,” and that they neglect the important duty of theologians to “despise nothing, to ponder everything in mature understanding and judgment, to explore all things and dismiss nothing without previous exploration.” He goes on to implicitly associate theologians with the rest of humanity by noting that the nymph is granted the ability to render this judgment because she is rejected by most humans as a spirit or a devil, to which Paracelsus responds that “Many more such things have happened that are despised by men, badly so and it is a sign of great stupidity.” Paracelsus’s attitude is crucial here; as Cameron notes, his explanation of the Nymph of Stauffenberg, as well as the account of Melusine, are perfunctory at best, and takes less pains to justify or explain them more broadly in a way that satisfactorily fits into his theological framework. But the clumsiness of his explanations is at odds with the surety of his thought, and his high valuation of understanding these creatures rather than explaining them away is important. More than one scholar has compared Luther to Paracelsus in his polemical

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89 Ibid., 245.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 245-246. Paracelsus refers to this account of a nymph who, possessed by a spirit, would turn partly into a serpent at specific times of the week.
nature and his denigrating of Catholic theologians, but more important here is Paracelsus’s approach. Paracelsus allows for the power of the devil here, writing that he does “transform these beings into different shapes, as he also does with the witches, transforming them into cats and werewolves, dogs, etc.” But he implicitly argues for a method that does not reject popular experiences or accounts of transformations, but rather incorporates them within a framework without immediately resorting to sin as the explanation. Regarding Melusine, for instance, Paracelsus responds to the notion of the nymph being seduced by superstitio, writing that the Roman Church is among the worst offenders of those “bewitched in superstitionibus.” He argues that focus on the creature diminishes the role of God in these creatures. Not only are these experiences signs and warnings to humans, but they also fall under the sovereignty of God, for “wherever we are, there is also God who redeems those who are his, in all places...It is holding God’s works in low esteem to assume that they are rejected because they have superstitiones.”

Similarly, Paracelsus relates the origin of giants. In contrast to the more metaphorical approach of Reformation commentaries, Paracelsus accepts the physical existence of giants, both in and apart from Adam. Related to the Adamic creation, Paracelsus references the Golden Legend’s notion that Saint Christopher was a giant. Apart from the Adamic creation, though, Paracelsus notes the stories of “Bern, Sigenott, Hiltbrant, Dittrich, etc” who are referenced as giants. Again, Paracelsus makes belief in giants a question of faith in God’s providential plan

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93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 246.
95 Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend, or, Lives of the Saints, as Englished by William Caxton, vol. 4, transl. 1483, (London: J.M. Dent and Co, 1900), 111-119. The Golden Legend presents the 3rd-4th century St Christopher (literally, the “Christ Bearer” as According to de Voragine, St Christopher was an outcast giant from the land of Canaan who, after his conversion, set up a hut by a river to assist travelers in crossing. One day, he helped Christ himself cross the river, bearing him over the river. De Voragine describes Christopher as 12 cubits long (about 18 feet).
for the world, comparing the inclination to deny their existence to those who deny Christ. He explicitly states, “The beginning of theology is the enlightenment of man,” arguing that those who are enlightened to the realities of nature “cannot take Christ and the Scriptures lightly, but, from the necessity of the inborn light, he must esteem them more highly and interpret them more broadly than the others, who see nothing but letters.”

Paracelsus pushes for a spiritual approach to reading scripture over a literal one just focused on the text. It is notable that Paracelsus argues for a broader approach to Scripture; while Reformation commentators certainly adopt a literal approach to Scripture, they embrace broader approaches in certain areas, notably in the metaphorical interpretation of Nephilim and giants. To Paracelsus, a broader approach is not only found in the actual text, but in connecting the text to the reality of the world and accepting a literal meaning in places where one might be inclined to reject a literal meaning.

Regarding giants, much that Paracelsus notes here is similar to his discussions of other spiritual creatures. Giants are creatures of the forest people, and are *monstra*, indicating that they come from divine order to “signify something.” They are strange in their origin, but similarly to the creatures described previously, have no soul of their own, as their parents “have no soul, yet they are human,” despite their nature in “performing good deeds, works, etc... For just as the parrot can talk and the monkey imitate man and many such things occur, their innate nature is equally able to perform and accomplish such things.”

It is not impossible for them to obtain a soul, just as with nymphs, but their purpose is not related to a quest for a soul or salvation, but to performance of good works and the greater glory of God. But Paracelsus’s potential opinion of animals is alluded to here, as he writes, “Truly, if a fox or a wolf could speak, they would not be

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98 Ibid., 248.
very different." Paracelsus clearly commits to the notion that human-like behavior or even capacities are not tantamount to human nature or creation in the image of God. He maintains this same standard for spiritual creatures, animals, and even *homunculi*, which he describes in both *De Nymphis* and *De Natura Rerum*. In the case of the *homunculus*, Paracelsus goes so far as to write that this creature, which is made artificially through alchemical means (involving the mixture of human semen with warm, fermenting horse manure), serves as an artificial servant despite its capacity to develop human-like intelligence and strength.  

Paracelsus goes on to discuss the origin of giants as being miraculous, resulting from the intercourse of the forest people “just as a conjunction produces a comet, an earthquake, or similar happenings.” Their birth does not follow typical natural rules, but is permitted by divine providence, producing monsters. In a similar way, the production of dwarfs mirrors the production of giants, as they are born from the earth people in the mountains, also as monsters permitted by divine providence. Yet their capacity for reproducing themselves is limited, as Paracelsus argues that male monsters are generally by nature infertile, with only “one seed available.” Yet just as with nymths and sylphs, the sex matters immensely. If the seed of the mother prevails, the child will fall into the species of the mother, whereas if the father’s seed predominates, it becomes a “beast like the father,” and if it were one seed “it would have to be qualified by the one partner who gives the soul.”

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99 Ibid., 249.
102 Ibid., 250.
103 Ibid., 251.
Finally, Paracelsus relates the causes of these creatures to more than just a signifying purpose, but also to an eschatological sense. When the final judgment occurs, “all things will be revealed” and “everything that is in the world will come to light.”\textsuperscript{104} This includes the revelation of “fake scholars...who are highly learned in name only but know nothing by experience.” Paracelsus writes that the genuine and the false will be separated, and that “he who now cries, will be quieted, and he who now counts the pages will have his quills taken away.”\textsuperscript{105} Again, Paracelsus relates the importance of experience to true knowledge and attempts to elevate the role of experience in true theology.

Two main conclusions are notable from Paracelsus’s work. First, Paracelsus is more than willing to bend and blur the boundaries of what is theologically orthodox and accepted when it comes to spiritual creatures. Rather than rejecting the accounts of popular experience or explaining them away through a lens of sin, Paracelsus embraces the existence of these creatures as miraculous and permitted by God as signs of God’s providence over the world. He elevates experience as a crucial lens for understanding the natural world, rejecting an overly textual approach to understanding the world. Second, however, despite Paracelsus’s propensity for blurring and pushing the boundaries between humans and non-humans, and even in some instances transgressing them to the point of heterodoxy, Paracelsus still makes it a point to reaffirm the structure and order of creation. Human nature is affirmed not because of inherent behavior or abilities, but by the soul and (implicitly) the specific creation in the image of God.\textsuperscript{106} In that structure, humanity remains the pinnacle of God’s creation, and the very purpose of the non-Adamic creation is for both God’s glory and the benefit of humanity. Moreover, the

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 253.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Paracelsus here does not use the language of the \textit{imago Dei}, but by distinguishing humans from spirit-creatures primarily by the soul, he seems to equate the soul with the image of God as the distinguishing feature of humanity.
posthumous publication of most of Paracelsus’s works becomes important here; had he intended to publish these texts in his lifetime, one imagines that he would not have been as forthright about his unorthodox views. The fact remains that even though Paracelsus challenged boundaries in some respects, Paracelsus accepts the strong power of the hierarchical structure of creation, which the posthumous publication of his teachings confirms. We are thus left in a landscape in which any challenge to the boundaries between human and non-human still does not generally permit the explicit violation or rejection of those boundaries.

Conclusion

The case of Paracelsus is an important one for understanding the parameters of the boundary between humans and non-humans. While the boundary was theoretically firm, in practice in the sixteenth century, this boundary remained messy and blurry, and the established paradigms left much room for questions about the structure as it was envisioned scripturally and theologically, as well as how that structure related to real world experience and accounts. Paracelsus helps to illuminate just how strong the existing paradigm was. Paracelsus demonstrates the propensity among some early modern Christian thinkers to grapple with the difficult questions underlying prevailing theological suppositions about the natural world, and indeed to move beyond metaphorical interpretations of natural experiences both relayed in scripture and communicated in premodern society. In addressing these questions, he is willing to move past a notion of sin as wholly central to understanding abnormal experiences in the natural world, and of mitigating the all-encompassing nature of sin in humanity. As with the natural fool, sin clearly impacts the human, but also interacts with nature. In contrast, in his discussion of non-Adamic creation, he discusses sin less than he does God’s intervention for wonder and miracles over and within nature. In both cases, but particularly in the case of non-Adamic
creatures, Paracelsus transgresses established boundaries of personhood and blurs what would typically have been understood about such creatures.

However, while he certainly blurs those boundaries and skirts closer to views that emphasize humanity’s role as a part of the natural realm more broadly, he also remains a strong proponent of the theological ordering of creation. Paracelsus’s work, mostly written during the 1530s, demonstrates a strong tendency toward affirming Christian anthropocentrism, even while blurring the boundaries within creation. In some cases, he achieves this balance with reference to established authorities, but broadly he speaks derisively of theological authorities of his day, emphasizing rather that authorities and experience should align. Reconciliation with tradition is less important people’s accounts of their lived experiences of the world, but it is important at some level to Paracelsus, and broadly important to most of those thinkers who comprise the theological milieu of the early sixteenth century. Thus, while the boundary is messy, obscured, and blurry, it does have some staying power. As we continue, we will begin to examine the boundary between human and non-human outside of the explicitly theological concept, addressing how theological exegesis and ideas intersect with sources and perspectives outside theological traditions, and we will discuss how the theological notion of the boundary between humans and non-humans develops regarding developments in related experiences of the natural world.
Chapter 4: Popular Culture and the Human-Nonhuman Boundary

Thus far, this dissertation has sketched out and sought to understand the contours of the theological boundary between humans and non-humans in the sixteenth century. As we have seen, the contours of the theological landscape initially set by ancient theologians and thinkers, most notably Augustine, permeate and last throughout the sixteenth century, forming a strict boundary between people and non-people. However, the mixture of influences from Christian, Jewish, and Greco-Roman thought also sets a landscape in which potential violations of a strict boundary are not only present, but somewhat expected, with treatment of the strict boundary in practice more malleable than the strict rhetoric might suggest.

Moreover, as discussed, theological authorities in the sixteenth century reify and reinforce a strict boundary between people and non-people, steeped in notions of theological anthropocentrism, humanity as uniquely created in the image of God, and a specific ordering and hierarchy to creation. Yet transgressions of the boundary are permitted, and usually explained with reference to the fall of the world into sin and the corruption of both human and animal nature. As we discussed, theological thinkers of all stripes, ranging from the most orthodox and influential to the most unconventional and heterodox had broadly the same approach. While pushing against the boundary and even questioning it in their writing, they ultimately still reaffirm the boundary, establishing clear delineations and order to creation between humans, animals, monsters, and other non-human creatures (what Paracelsus labeled under the non-Adamic creation).

However, the theological landscape of the sixteenth century must also account for various accounts of popular experience and life, in which the boundary between human and non-human is regularly violated or pushed against within a Christian context. The nature of the boundary,
again, is not as simple as a strict division between human and non-human. However, as we will discuss here, it is also not accurate to say that there is no perceived boundary between human and non-human, nor that there is no sense of order of species within popular culture. Case studies of popular experience among theologians, folklorists, physicians, and jurists suggest that the dominant mode of thought surrounding the boundary was more open to transgressions of the boundary between human and non-human, yet still affirming of a basic anthropocentric ordering of creation.¹ Broadly, early modern popular culture seems less entrenched in a hard and fast boundary than theological culture, yet remained entangled with a theological establishment that insisted on fitting hard and fast divisions on their experiences. Moreover, the importance of popular experience and observation would become significant as physicians and scientists grappled with them without forcing a theological framework.

One question worthy of consideration is the nature of the sources used to understand popular culture. While it is true that things understood as “popular” could also involve learned and literate laypeople, and that many “popular” ideas might proliferate around well-educated people, it is also true that the vast majority of the early modern population was uneducated and possessed varying degrees of literacy.² As a result, the means by which we approach and seek to

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¹ It is important to acknowledge that there is some difficulty in understanding popular opinion through decidedly non-popular sources. However, the very parameters of questions about popular culture necessitate creative use of popular sources. Moreover, use of these sources provide not only some sense of the common experience, but also a lens for understanding whether education played a role in dividing popular and elite experience. Moreover, the use of the term “folklore” proves controversial, but does capture something specific about the types of sources being used being part of a collective culture, even if it is too far to identify folk culture as distinct from elite culture altogether.

² Robert Houston’s work is helpful for understanding the limited utility of the term “literacy” in the early modern era, as people possessed varying degrees of literacy, from being able to sign one’s own name to reading print, rote memorization (which might involve being able to copy or write without fully understanding, a skill that might indicate vernacular comprehension), learning from new texts as well as familiar ones, and interpreting broadsheets and pamphlets, which indicated high levels of comprehension. Different levels of literacy might involve different skills, including listening skills- to a sermon or friend reading, and thus being able to engage in discussion, as well as with numerical proficiency. These steps existed in a “hierarchy of skills,” aimed at practical and religious skills. See R.A. Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education, 1500-1800 (London: Pearson Education Ltd, 2002), 4-9.
understand popular mentalities is complicated, and the sources which we are left to use are problematic. Texts by legal jurists or medical writers, for instance, are written by educated men, far from common to the general populace. However, use of case records and legal or medical treatises offer a window through which to understand events within popular culture. Trial records sometimes offer direct statements from individuals who took their issues to the courts, whereas medical records offer a perspective of various issues faced by common people as articulated by doctors. Similarly, while the creators of broadsheets themselves would have been learned, their broad spread and notoriety among the general public as the intended audience makes them a useful lens into understanding popular culture. While the documents used to understand popular culture are learned documents, they still offer windows which can refract a non-learned way of thinking.  

It is also worth giving brief attention to the use of the term “popular culture.” While the term and its accompanying terms (folklore, popular religion, lived religion, traditional religion) have been roundly critiqued, the term “popular culture” also is helpful in its breadth, as it encompasses cultural productions that would have been encountered by both elite and non-elite people.

This chapter will explore the contours of the popular depiction of the boundary between human and non-human. We will discuss both how popular culture pushed back on the boundary without breaking it and how theologians who affirmed theological anthropocentrism failed to adequately grapple with how popular culture undermined the boundary. Yet, as we shall find, theologians remained generally happy to accept violations of the boundary so long as the

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3 For an introduction to this approach in practice, see the work of R.W. Scribner. His metaphor of the historian studying popular religion as an “ethnographer in the swamp” is helpful, as we can only escape the swamp of the lost world “with the help of the natives themselves...whenever we hear cries of help from the swamp, the historian is at work.” See R. W. Scribner, Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), xii-xiv, 275.

4 The term “inherited tradition” is also useful, but somewhat more limited and does not convey some of the innovation that can occur over time within public life.
fundamental shape of the hierarchy of creation remained in place. This interplay between theological authorities and popular culture is nuanced, but important. In order to explore this dynamic, we will discuss several cases that demonstrate popular perception of animal status, humanity’s relation to animal beings, and humanity’s status as a creature or sign within the purview of creation. As we shall see, there is an inherent tension in early modernity between acknowledging life as experienced and the bolstering and upholding of inherited wisdom, a tension that is maintained with a degree of paradox until factors of the Reformation prompted a broader reckoning with that tension.  

**Historiography: “Popular Culture” and Folklore in Early Modernity**

However, to understand the importance of popular accounts and to assess the understanding of the boundary among popular culture, we must understand the nature of folklore and popular culture in early modernity. Scholars differ on the very nature of medieval and early modern society heading into the sixteenth century. Older scholarship tends to presuppose the notion of a strong, hierarchical church as a governing authority and presence over medieval life, struggling to rein in the excesses of a premodern culture transitioning into a Christian culture. Such a hierarchical view results in a broader perception of a strict division between elite culture and popular culture, a view propelled by J.C. Schmitt, who pushed for a stricter division between elite culture and folklore. In contrast, Raoul Manselli emphasizes the unity between learned and popular religion, even while he makes a distinction between “la religion populaire” and “la religion savante” and between folklore and religion. The alternative to this is the notion of Latin
medieval Europe as a unity, without clear divisions between popular and elite or learned culture. John van Engen’s “The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem” still looms large in medieval studies and proposes just this kind of unity. Similarly, Robert Swanson’s work accommodates this kind of a unity more effectively than does Schmitt, arguing that rather than understanding medieval culture as in decline or rigidly attempting to regulate life, we ought to understand the medieval church going into the early modern era as actively seeking to incorporate a broad degree of localisms, practices, and experiences within a broader, unified ecclesiastical culture.⁷

There is clear room for both perspectives within an understanding of the landscape preceding the early modern era. On the one hand, the notion of clear divisions between popular and elite is problematic and obscures the ambiguous and interwoven nature of daily life in the early modern era. While most people were not as learned as theologians, lawyers, or physicians, the culture of early modern Europe was far more diverse than a small percentage who could read and write and a broader illiterate population. Different types of literacies permeated the early modern landscape, so assessing the very nature of daily life is a challenge in itself. Moreover, as we have already seen, literacy itself was no guarantor of orthodoxy. The “common folk” could adhere to orthodox theological formulations, while the learned people, ranging from judges to theologians to physicians, often broke from typical orthodox formulations. The nature of the early modern landscape was varied, and assessing what people thought and how they practiced is

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a fraught practice. As the debate has progressed, scholars have remained indebted to the earlier framing of the elite-popular divide, but have also provided their own contributions, mostly focusing on the idea of “lived experience” or “everyday magic” in daily life as a more helpful terminology than the divide between folklore and religion, with religion considered just as much a cultural as a social phenomenon. 8

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that while a strict division between popular and elite is problematic and obscures complexity in medieval and early modern Europe, the complexity of the early modern landscape also necessitates divisions between popular and elite culture in certain instances. This is important when it comes to perspectives surrounding spiritual creatures. Divisions may not be as strictly delineated as proposed by figures like Schmitt, but it is crucial to understand the degree to which theologians perceived and argued for strict divisions between species and types of being. As we have established, early modern theologians on the spectrum from orthodoxy to heterodoxy all generally agreed on a strict division between human and non-human, even as they were comfortable pushing against and exploring transgressions of the boundary. Yet the contrast also applies to popular culture as well. While popular culture generally accepted transgressions of the boundary between human and non-human, they were

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8 R.W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Scribner discusses the perspective of how the Reformation ideals won over popular culture through in-depth examination of the propaganda pamphlets of the Reformation, and examining the way sin which seeing was just as important as reading in early modern culture and discusses how written and visual culture drew on established ideas and motifs within popular culture. In more recent scholarship, Kathryn Edwards has offered the idea of “everyday magic” as bridging and integrating a number of perspectives on magic and religion in the “magical universe,” while Kaspar von Greyerz has defined religion as revolving around “socially constructed symbols” (echoing Geertz’s view of religion). Yet religion is a “fundamental cultural phenomenon” which involves the “concurrency of non-contemporaneous elements” that sometimes “transcended social strata.” See Kathryn Edwards, “Introduction: What Makes Magic Everyday Magic?,” in *Everyday Magic in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1-10; Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, transl. Thomas Dunlap (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-5. It is also worth mentioning that more recent historiographical treatment of the elite-popular divide in early modernity (and the Reformation more broadly) has emphasized the global impact of Reformation teachings. See *Global Reformations: Transforming Early Modern Religions, Societies, and Cultures*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (New York: Routledge, 2019).
also concerned with understanding how such transgressions fit into the shape of their overall lives, even if they were less convinced that such anomalies threatened the boundaries between human and non-human. Moreover, there appeared to be a discernible rift between elite and popular culture on the “invisible creatures of the world.”  

This chapter, then, will explore the myriad ways in which popular culture explained and understood the boundary between human and non-human, within humanity, between humans and animals, and between humans and monsters.

Perhaps the main question we must address along the way is how people perceived and understood the shifting boundaries between human and non-human. In other words, can we understand why theologians were open to actively exploring the parameters of the boundary, yet still sought to assert the firmness of the boundary? Can we potentially understand why theologians could accept a moral judgment of animals in trials without fully embracing them as moral agents in the same way as humans? How do we understand the ways in which bestiaries spoke about animals with anthropomorphic qualities, yet still reinforced their status as a part of the created order? Likewise, what does it tell us that a popular culture comfortable with potential transgressions of the boundary still seemed to stay within that boundary? Is this a case in which, as discussed before, theologians “plundered the Egyptians” without breaking their boundaries, or a case in which popular culture offered itself up to staying within orthodox theological formulations? This chapter will explore the contours of this problem.

**Popular Culture: Humans, Animals, Monsters**

Understanding how popular culture in premodern Europe understood the boundary between people and non-people and the degree to which popular culture diverged from

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9 Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 41-49.
theological anthropocentric standards requires us to consider a few factors. First, we must understand how popular culture understood animals in their own right. The boundary between theological and popular religious understanding of animals is certainly complicated, but broadly, we can say that the body of culture surrounding treatment of the boundary was more open to transgressions or violations of the boundary without connecting how they threaten theological anthropocentrism. This impacted views of human relations with animals and spiritual beings, as well as changes within the human body itself. Popular culture treated animals and spiritual beings with a much higher estimation than did the strictly theological landscape. For instance, legal, medical, and folkloric texts communicate ways in which animals are elevated as inherently connected to the spiritual realm.

However, these same texts also portray a view of the human body that is more in flux than supposed by the theological elite. Despite understood theological divisions between people and non-people, popular culture tended to view and treat animals as important in several ways that were more open to animal cognition and agency than the anthropocentric hierarchy would allow. This heritage is well established by the early modern era in ancient and medieval sources across Europe, but also requires attention to the various factors of treatment of the boundary between humans and nonhumans, including treatment of animals, treatment of spiritual creatures and monsters, and treatment of changes within the human body itself. We find that broadly, popular responses to the boundary between people and non-people varied but identified ways in which animals acted and transgressed the boundary, without acknowledging violations of the boundary. In short, we might suppose that select denunciations or exceptions to the boundary served for popular culture to prove the rule of a division between human and nonhuman life. The
question is just how select or rare these exceptions were. We turn now to premodern popular
treatment of animals.

**Popular Culture and Animals**

The first element we shall discuss involves the treatment of animals in popular culture. Despite what most theological commentaries on Genesis would suggest about a strict ordering of creation, animals are treated not only with a high degree of reverence, but also with an acknowledgment of their openness to the divine in world affairs. This is prominent in popular culture, but is also evident in theological circles. Commentaries on Genesis prominently mention the role of animals in connection with humanity, acknowledging the speech of the serpent as only one of two cases in Scripture with talking animals. Patristic and medieval commentators alike grapple with discussion of Balaam’s Donkey in Numbers, focusing more on the role of Balaam than the donkey, yet also acknowledging the ability of God to use other bodies to enact the will of God.  

Demonological commentary on Moses and Aaron’s miracles before the Pharaoh in Exodus point to God’s ability to play with boundaries between species, contrasting them with the false delusions of Pharaoh’s sorcerers, who used demonic powers to transform staffs into snakes. Other engagement with animals point not to the use of animals by God or angels, but to animal perception of the divine. Animals are invoked as being involved in the praise of God, demonstrating the importance of animals as created for the greater glory of God, including the admonition that God’s mercy falls upon all of creation, and “all your creatures shall praise you, O Lord, and your faithful ones shall bless you.”

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11 Exodus 7:8-13 (NRSV)  
12 See Psalm 145: 9-10.
the Canticle of the Three Young Men, include calls for everything and everybody in the world to sing God’s praise, including “whales and sea creatures…all birds…all cattle and wild animals, sing his praise and honor him forever.”

At the same time, passages in the Hebrew Bible also acknowledge the fluidity of species and the importance of animal behavior as a judgment on humans. The prophet Elisha’s invocation of God’s judgment against passersby who insulted his baldness (in which Elisha summoned a bear to attack the passersby) received some attention from commentators as a sign of animal judgment. Also in the book of Judges, God delineates between those who drank water with their hands as comprising the worthy army, as opposed to those who drank water like dogs, debasing themselves. So there is a degree to which animal behavior, while lauded, is viewed in demeaning terms in Scripture. Yet even when there is a negative assessment, there is some acknowledgment of fluidity and similarity between humans and non-human animals, notably in discussions of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation in Daniel. Thus, the treatment of animals in medieval and early modern theology is suitably complex and torn between treatment of animals as engaging in human activities, and denigration of animals as less than human. Early modern commentators walk the line of acknowledging the value of animals while also striving to maintain a vocal assertion of the anthropocentric ordering of creation.

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13 This prayer is presented in the middle of the fiery furnace by Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego. In versions of the Bible that include this text, it occurs just after Daniel 3:23. See Canticle of the Three Young Men, 57-59.
14 2 Kings 2:23-25 (NRSV).
15 Judges 7:4-8.
16 Among modern scholars, the debate over the “madness of Nebuchadnezzar” seems to mirror the discussion amongst early Protestants. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, modern scholars seek an analog for his transformation among various forms of mental illness rather than accepting as a possibility belief in physical transformation. Yet more recent scholarship also acknowledges that physical transformation would have been considered a legitimate occurrence amongst ancient and premodern people. See Hector Avalos, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Affliction: New Mesopotamian Parallels for Daniel 4,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133.3 (2014): 497-507; Jared Beverley, “Nebuchadnezzar and the Animal Mind (Daniel 4),” *Journal for the Study of Old Testament* 45.2 (2020): 145-157.
The treatment in medieval and early modern Christian Europe is no less complex. Literary and folkloric texts in medieval culture establish a view of animals that allows for a fluidity between species, connection between animals and the divine, and even animal treatment in human ways. The Irish poet Gerald of Wales (1146-1223), for instance, in his *Topographia Hibernica* relays an account of a man and woman who straddle the boundary between person and animal, yet interact with and make a plea of a priest to receive the Eucharist.\(^{17}\) Gerald of Wales clearly built upon a Celtic heritage in which texts like the Taliesin and the Táin remained prominent and promoted fluid views of both the boundary between people and animals and the very role of animals in society and religious life, with bulls embodying incarnations of prophets and animals frequently taking the incarnations of human figures; however, he also wrote in a Christian era and sought to connect the fluidity between species without contradicting Christian teaching regarding the boundaries between species.\(^{18}\)

*Experiences and Saints’ Lives*

Other folkloric accounts similarly seek to establish and identify patterns of mystical or miraculous experience that fit within both a premodern European and Christian framework. Perhaps the most notable figure whose accounts fit into this framework is Caesarius of Heisterbach (1180-1240), a monastic whose *Dialogus Miraculorum* recounts hundreds of miraculous accounts related to spirits, demons, and the Eucharist. Various of these miracle stories relate incidents in which animals demonstrated awareness and veneration of the sacred. Perhaps the most famous account is one in which a woman steals the eucharistic host for use in

\(^{17}\) *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, containing the Topography of Ireland, and the History of the Conquest of Ireland*, transl. Thomas Forester (London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), 79-81. We will revisit this account when we discuss lycanthropy.

\(^{18}\) For selections from both the Tain Bo Cuilange and the Taliesin, see *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, volume 1, ed. David Damrosch, Christopher Baswell, Anne Howland Schotter (New York: Longman, 1999), 95-113, 139-143.
gardening, placing it in a beehive for later use. Upon returning, however, she finds that bees have reverently created a tabernacle to hold the host.\textsuperscript{19} Folkloric accounts like these are especially useful relaying how explicitly Christian elements of medieval culture interacted with and perceived animal behavior around them. Despite their hagiographical nature, these accounts are important because they articulate a perspective of how a Christian ordering of creation does not preclude involvement from the animal realm; instead, a Christian ordering of creation is less strict in practice and provokes spiritual responses from even an animal realm which, in theory, lacks the ability to relate to God. The popularity of Caesarius of Heisterbach among medieval sermons moreover speaks to how such accounts related in and among both religious and lay culture.\textsuperscript{20}

Similar accounts permeate medieval culture from the tradition of saintly hagiography, which account for the duality of animal recognition of God and judgment of humans, both of which point to a potentially more malleable view of the place of animals in the order of creation. Just as with earlier traditions, the tradition of animals in saintly literature reflects the intersection of cultures, dating back to fourth and fifth century Egyptian Fathers, but extending into medieval European hagiography, demonstrating the adaptation of the genre for European society.\textsuperscript{21} Saints are regularly recorded as engaging in miracles or acts involving animals that reflect the elevation of animals and their redemption along with the rest of the created order. For instance, the hagiography of Saint Anselm recounts him as having once saved a hare that was fleeing from hunters. Anselm petitioned God for intervention, and prevented the dogs from catching the hare,

\textsuperscript{21} Dominic Alexander, \textit{Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages} (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2008), 3.
comparing the hare’s state to the state of the soul after death, “surrounded by demons, and desperately needing heavenly aid.” Protection and peaceful interaction with animals becomes a clear sign of holiness among medieval saints, most notably in the example of Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). Francis was said to have built a nativity scene at Greccio, where he cured animals of illnesses. However, a clear sign of holiness is also the protection of the self or others from the excesses of bestial behavior, as in that same account, Francis also freed the town of Greccio from wolves and hail. In other accounts, though, he struggles against common mice who nibble at his blanket overnight, preventing him from both sleep and prayer. As Joyce Salisbury notes, the prevailing miraculous interaction in early medieval saints’ lives has the power to either suspend or combat the bestial nature of animals or to enhance animal behavior to become more human. The saint either lives in harmony with nature or, through their holiness, transforms and elevates animals to a more spiritual state. The duality between animals as elevated and animals as a source of spiritual conflict is crucial to medieval and early modern popular culture.

However, while understanding of interactions with animals in hagiography focuses on saintly interactions with creatures, it also extends in some cases to the actual holiness of animals themselves. The most notable example of this is the cult of the dog saint Guinefort. Etienne de Bourbon writes about a case in Lyons in which a greyhound defends a baby’s cradle from a snake by killing the snake. However, after seeing the bloody scene, the nurse believes that the dog has killed the baby and has the dog killed. Upon realizing their mistake after the fact, the nurse and knight have the dog thrown down a local well. But when the reputation of the dog

22 Ibid., 1-2.
23 Ibid., 170.
24 Ibid., 161. See also Joyce Salisbury, The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages (London: Routledge, 2011), 50-51. Other examples permeate the older medieval tradition, especially among the British Isles and Ireland, including Columban and Cuthbert, whose interactions include remaining unharmed by bears and wolves in the forest, as with Columban, and receiving assistance from animals, as with Cuthbert, whose feet are dried and warmed by sea otters.
spread, local inhabitants began to visit and frequent the well to venerate the dog and petition him for healing. Etienne de Bourbon’s account is less praising of the canine, however, viewing the cult as “contemptible superstitions, some of which are an insult to God, others to our neighbor.”

Yet the local popularity of the cult of Guinefort not only demonstrates the regular divide between elite and lay culture on the spiritual role of animals, but also illustrates the ways in which popular culture often accepted animals as spiritual icons beyond the traditional ordering of creation.

Moreover, the persistence of the tradition, despite attempts at suppression, would give this thirteenth century account relevance into the sixteenth century, as Protestant reformers pointed to the veneration of Guinefort as a sign of Catholic abuses.25

Animal Trials

That animals are treated with a degree of agency is not merely a part of the tradition from specifically religious writers, but also extends to literary and legal culture. From roughly the thirteenth through the sixteenth century, courts sometimes conducted trials and other proceedings against animals for a variety of offenses, including denigration and destruction of crops, as well as other crimes, including murder in one extreme case. While these cases would appear eccentric to the modern reader, numerous scholars contend that these cases were treated with seriousness as real trials, not as show trials or mock trials.26

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Moreover, animal trials retain special significance for understanding popular treatment and understanding of animals for their implications on the animal-human boundary. In the case of animal trials, jurists and courts do not explicitly violate the supposed order of creation, and still strive to maintain an anthropocentric hierarchy. However, the categories which delineate human behavior from animal behavior (most notably, human perception of morality and capacity to relate to God on a spiritual and moral level) become blurred by such trials as judges seek not only to hold animals practically, morally, and ethically accountable for their actions. Whether through exorcism, excommunication, or execution, animal trials imply a view of animals as capable of moral judgment. If one accounts for such actions by suggesting that animal trials respond to animal behavior prompted by demonic or diabolical activity, we still must acknowledge that animal trials imply an early modern view of animals as just as morally culpable for their actions as humans, and of the trials as serious proceedings.27

This is not to say that these trials were not noted as cause for amusement or interest by some; many of these cases provoked satirical or bemused responses by scholars or legal jurists, in ways that will be discussed below. However, these trials usually treated animal infractions with seriousness, holding animals in the same jails as human culprits and following through all the legal processes applied to humans, with deviation from adherence to these norms evoking serious consequences. For instance, in a case in 1576, a hangman in Franconia executed a pig for injuring a child before hearing the court’s final judgment, for which he was expelled from the city.28 But many of the cases discussed by E.P. Evans illustrate that while the cases were taken

28 Emre Koyuncu, “From animal trials to the animal advocacy movement: A Foucauldian reflection on the animal question (PhD Diss., Purdue University, 2014), 51. See also E.P. Evans, The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals, 147.
seriously, there was also a sense of some of the silliness surrounding the proceedings. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the rats of Autun.

The case of the rats of Autun is a curious, possibly apocryphal, yet utterly enthralling case. In 1508 in Autun, the barley harvest suffered from a plague of rats, endangering the town as winter approached. As a response, the town chose to put the rodents on trial. The bishop in charge of the trial appointed the lawyer Bartholomew Chassenee (1480-1541) to represent the rats in their excommunication trial. The rats were scheduled for trial for having “feloniously eaten up and wantonly destroyed the barley crop.” Chassenee proceeded to undertake a serious defense of the rats. He argued before the court that as this was a trial of many rats, each individual rat deserved to attend court to answer the charges. When the court scheduled a trial and desired to issue a summons, Chassenee informed the court of the difficulty of the summons, seeing as the rats were dispersed over the county and of “no fixed abode.” A subsequent citation, to be read from all the parishes where the rats were active, prompted Chassenee to defend the non-appearance of his clients due to the “length and difficulty of the journey and the serious perils which attended it,” including potential attacks by their “mortal enemies” (that is, the cats that might attack them on the way to the court) and defended the rats’ right of appeal and refusal to answer the summons.

Chassenee’s prominence grew as a result of this case; notably during the upheaval of the Reformation in France, he defended a group of Waldensians in Provence, arguing that if even animals deserved a defense, so did the Waldensians. Esther Cohen notes that the flexibility allowed by ecclesiastical courts flowed from an ingrained sense of the

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30 Ibid., 18-19.
31 The veracity of this case is in dispute, and may have represented a blending of his own cases with others which were related to him, but which he did not participate in. Nevertheless, the Consilia provides detailed information about citing and excommunicating animals and demonstrates the gravity with which such cases were treated. See Peter Dinzelbacher, “Animal Trials: A Multidisciplinary Approach,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32.3 (Winter 2002): 414-415.
importance of justice and due process, which fostered a sense of anthropomorphism.\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, lest we dismiss his defense of the rats as making a mockery of the court, Chassenee’s later work articulated a legal philosophy surrounding the trial of animals. In his \textit{Consilium Primum} in 1531, Chassenee argued broadly that with notable exceptions of capital offenses, animals ought to be tried by ecclesiastical tribunals, with animals being treated as laypersons.\textsuperscript{33} The degree of care and thought exercised suggests that while the logistics might be comical, they were generally treated seriously by early modern jurists.

Additionally, animal trials extend beyond trials of animals en masse, extending into two important categories. The first category is of animals being tried for individual crimes on their own, typically of greater impact. Whereas trial of vermin or rodents en masse usually related to the destruction or degradation of crops, the trials of individual animals typically related to more violent crimes, including attacks or murder of individuals. For instance, fifteenth century French jurist Guy Pape wrote in the \textit{Decisions of the Parliament of Grenoble} on the question of whether an animal that commits a violent crime ought to receive capital punishment, with the answer being affirmative, writing, “If a dumb animal commits an offense, just as pigs have done by devouring young boys, should they be killed? I say yes.”\textsuperscript{34} A number of jurists and courts echo these sentiments both in theory and in practice. While one might consider the modern mindset of execution as a means of prevention of crime, many of these sentiments go further than that. Patrick Phillips notes how another French jurist, Jean Duret, writing that in the case of violent crimes resulting in death, the offending animal ought to “pay the forfeit of their lives and be

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Bartholome Chassenee, \textit{Consilium Primum de Excommunicatione animalium, in Concilia D. Bartholomaei a Chasseneo, Burgundi iurisconsulti} (Lyons, 1588), fos 8-16; Patrick Phillips, \textit{Medieval Animal Trials: Justice for All}, 12; E.P. Evans, \textit{Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals}, 32-33.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Patrick Phillips, 15-17. “Si animal brutam delinquat, sicut quandoque faciunt porci comedunt pueros, an debeat mori? Dico quod sic.”
\end{itemize}
condemned to be hanged and strangled, in order to efface the memory of the enormity of the deed."⁵ Such sentiments align with the viewpoint of retributive justice for crimes among humans as well, in which executions fulfill a public role in constraining and forming the public cultural memory. In both categories, executions served in the public consciousness as a testament against the crime, as well as a means of eliminating the offender from collective memory.⁶

Moreover, records of such trials persisted into the eighteenth century, with Evans noting that a jailer in Pont de Larch in 1708 kept a pig as a prison inmate for over a month on account of killing a child.⁷ Philips even points to a case as late as 1864 in Slavonia (modern day Croatia) in which a pig was found guilty of biting off the ears of an infant and sentenced to death.⁸ The longevity of such cases of animals being put on trial underscores the mixed views about the degree to which animals themselves should be held morally responsible, even when it is not clear that societies considered them capable of moral judgment.⁹ And yet the cultural imprint of animal trials would remain for centuries, as reflected in later works, including the nineteenth century Book of Days by Robert Chambers, which consisted largely of trivia about European history, including a record of a pig on trial in Lavegny.

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⁵ Ibid.
⁸ Patrick Philips, Medieval Animal Trials: Justice for All, 15-17.
⁹ It ought to be noted that modern society still exercises some degree of legal judgment of animals in cases of animal misbehavior or violence, with courts determining whether animals should be euthanized following violent incidents. While the context is different and revolves more around the question of animals as property rather than morally culpable actors, the similarity is unique.

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The final category of animal trials is that of bestiality. As Paul Friedland notes, these cases fall under an infamous category of crimes classified as *offensa cuius nominatio crimen est* (an offense whose very utterance is a crime). In France and the Holy Roman Empire, bestiality was included along with homosexuality under a broader category of sodomy, but might also be associated with other violent crimes, especially those that held strong connotations of animalistic behavior. As Friedland discusses, the punishments meted out for such crimes occurred not in a subdued manner, but in the same manner (if not more spectacularly) than crimes for humans. He points to an example from 1470 in Amiens of a man named Simon who was convicted of sexual relations with a mare. His execution drew five to six thousand spectators, and both he and the

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41 This is especially important to understanding the lycanthropy trials of the sixteenth century, which we will return to later in this chapter.
mare were condemned to be publicly burned to death “and consumed into dust so that never shall there be memory of said Simon nor of said mare.”

Countless other examples also attest to the same treatment of bestiality, with animals executed alongside humans for their crimes. Yet it is also important to note that some scholars dispute the findings surrounding animal trials. Piers Beirne argues, for instance, that while animals may have been executed alongside humans who were convicted for bestiality, the animals were never tried and convicted themselves. Moreover, Beirne seeks to distinguish between the broader legal systems on the European continent, where Roman law was influential, and England and Scandinavia, where animal trials were less prevalent. Beirne argues that in the British context, while animals could be executed, they were never defendants in their own right. As a result, Evans’ 191 cases are far fewer in actuality, and in the British context, may have been more ad hoc, impromptu, or even the urban legend, as with the case described in nineteenth century Durham in which a monkey was hanged on suspicion of espionage. However, Beirne’s claim may be a distinction without true significance. Impromptu and ad hoc trials indicate a similar level of culpability ascribed to animals, especially for crimes typically attributed to humans. What Beirne describes as “informal popular justice” may even be more important, as it demonstrates popular opinion toward animal behavior seeping out of the typical institutional means and into popular behavior.

Legal scholars have generally concluded that the use of these types of punishments speaks to the various strategies employed by early modern jurisprudence. Punishment was not

43 Piers Beirne, “A Note on the Facticity of Animal Trials in early modern Britain, or, the curious prosecution of farmer Carter’s dog for murder,” 370-371. The famed “Monkey of Hartlepool” served less as a trial record than as a story to make fun of the people in Hartlepool.
44 Ibid., 372.
45 Ibid.
only employed as a deterrent against crime, but was also utilized to enact both God and society’s judgment against crimes which poisoned the *corpus Christianum* and the body politic. Punishments enacted societal disapproval of criminal acts. With more minor offenses, punishments still allowed the possibility of reintegration and rehabilitation, but for capital offenses, the crime was considered so severe that punishment removed any chance at reintegration either physically or spiritually. Punishment aimed to remove them from the collective memory of society.\(^46\)

Regarding animals, then, such treatment of animal culpability is important to understanding the perception of the boundary between humans and animals. On the one hand, the punishment for bestiality is in part a response to the transgression of the boundaries between people and animals and an attempt to reify the boundaries. Yet in punishing both the human and the animal, punishments for bestiality affirm an equivalence to their behavior, likewise affirming the impact of sin on both and the importance of punishing animals alongside humans. Moreover, punishments even happened in the absence of humans; as Friedland notes, a 1606 case involving a man and a dog convicted of sodomy saw only the dog physically punished, with the human being burned in effigy in absentia.\(^47\) As we see, then, with animal trials and punishments being conducted in same way as those of humans, and with punishments of animals being permitted even in the absence of the human as the offending party, it matters less whether, as Friedland says, the punishment stemmed from historic factors that separated the offense from intent. Early modern society regularly meted out punishments with consideration for the status of the

\(^{46}\) Friedland notes that such punishments functioned as a form of closure, overcoming the horrifying nature of the crime with a more horrifying punishment that, despite the potential for the spectacle to advertise the crime, ultimately granted closure and the ability for the town to proceed. Instead, everything about the crime would be destroyed, sometimes including the very minutes of the trial record, which raises a point Friedland makes about Evans- that his numbers of animal trials must have represented an undercounting due to the fact that so many records of bestiality trials must have been destroyed. See Friedland, 110-111.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
offending parties, as with children. The retention of punishment of animals signifies the tension with which society held the boundary between humans and non-humans- as important to affirm, yet also belied by regular experiences.

Bestiaries

The final significant category of texts which offers some insight into perspectives on the place of animals in the human-animal boundary is bestiaries. While these texts are admittedly learned in origin, they speak to and echo popular perspectives on animals embraced throughout Christian history, offering insight into perspectives on animal importance in terms of symbolism, moral lessons, and animal cognition. Moreover, we can attest that the symbolism and ideas surrounding animals worked their way into a variety of contexts, reflecting popular experience and understanding of the significance of animals, including in sermons, which served as a common means of religious instruction for medieval and early modern Christians. Moreover, bestiaries held immense popularity in the Middle Ages, with the moral and figurative stature of animals being embraced widely not only in sermons, but also in art and literature, with the allegorical and symbolic use of animals for moral lessons.48

However, it would be shortsighted to simply attribute to the animals in bestiaries a solely symbolic status. Animals were certainly utilized in ancient and medieval bestiaries as moral imagery for the benefit of Christians seeking guidance on behavior. But that moral symbolism is not necessarily simply just viewed as a model for human morality, and in fact, should be read as critically pointing to views of animal actions having actual moral valence. In other words, animals imply moral lessons due to their behavior, but their behavior is also viewed in moral

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terms that then become projected onto the animal, implying some sense of morality (or immorality) in the animals. Humans may learn moral lessons from animal behavior not because of similarity that can be read morally, but rather from genuine understanding of animal behavior as innately moral or immoral behavior, which is used to characterize the animal itself. This is attested to through the historical treatment of animals. For instance, cats gain a reputation as being witch familiars, leading to a specific reputation as immoral.\footnote{For instance, in his encyclopedic treatment of animals, Thomas de Cantimpré describes cats as “a dirty and hateful animal,” prone to fighting, vanity, and some affection for humans expressed in purring. Thomas de Cantimpré, Liber de Natura Rerum, 1228 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1973), 136. Also see The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages, ed. David Badke, accessed November 1 2022. \url{https://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast213.htm} “Feles bestia est, ut dicit Plinius, que licet parva sit corpore, militia tamen ingens valde.”} Similarly, as we discussed with animal trials, punishment of animals happened not because their behavior was being compared to human behavior, but because it was being viewed in its own terms as violation of moral standards and law, with punishment serving to eliminate the threat from society. Thus, the writers of bestiaries and other sources regarding animals in the medieval and early modern era are writing from a perspective that animals are not mere imagery for the use of humans, but carry their own moral valence, and that certain species possess moral characteristics or traits, a fact which creates further ambiguity and erosion to the human-animal boundary. We turn now to the specific role of bestiaries in this ambiguity.

**Ancient Bestiaries**

Going back to the ancients, bestiaries embrace a view of animals that is open not only to Christian authorities, but also to the classics. Most medieval bestiaries explore commentaries and discussions of Genesis from figures like Augustine and Aquinas for moral understanding of animals, but for practical understanding of animal behavior and nature, many writers of bestiaries draw from and relied upon Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and Pliny the Elder (~23/23-79 AD).
Pliny’s first-century *Natural History*, and specifically books 8 through 11 of his *Natural History*, deal with his notions of zoology and animal relation to humans. The entries in Pliny’s *Natural History* demonstrate an expansive understanding of nature, attempting to present a universal picture of animal life. Pliny extended beyond just the Greco-Roman world, presenting creatures from outside its bounds. Book 8 addresses terrestrial animals, book 9 addresses the aquatic world, book 10 addresses birds, and book 11 addresses various insects; in each of these cases, however, his examples are numerous and involve dramatic detail. For instance, in Book 8 alone, Pliny addresses elephants, serpents, the bison, elk, the lion, the ox, the Egyptian apis, and many others. His discussion of the elephant and the dragon includes a section which addresses not only physical details about them, but also their “cunning” in addressing their potential weaknesses in interactions with other creatures.50

It is also notable that despite his aims at providing a comprehensive view of the animal kingdom, Pliny is aware that many creatures are unfamiliar to his audience. In book 8, he addresses the first appearance of the “cameleopard” at a series of games in Rome.51 He also notes the appearance of the hippopotamus in Rome, which served as a source of medical knowledge. These creatures, while introduced in Rome, had their origins outside of Roman territory, attesting to Pliny’s desire to communicate about animals beyond the Roman world, as well as his desire to think more holistically about the animal realm.52

Another fascinating element of Pliny is his use of more seemingly fantastical animals in his text. Pliny writes regarding several animals since identified as imaginary. For instance, Pliny discusses a creature known as the yale, described as being horse-sized with the tail of an elephant

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51 Ibid., 8.27.69, 52-53.
52 Ibid., 8.40.96, 68-69.
and long, adjustable horns.\textsuperscript{53} Scholars have contemplated whether the yale was simply an imaginary creature or whether Pliny was describing a different creature, such as the gnu or mountain goat, while other suggestions point to it as being the Indian water buffalo.\textsuperscript{54} Similarly, Pliny’s description of the basilisk as a small but deadly snake with a lethal stare points to potential origins among cobras or other lethal snakes, but is generally accepted as an imaginary creature.\textsuperscript{55} Gravestock is important in this description in understanding the trajectory of such imaginary animals in the history of bestiaries. While a rationalist approach is a logical tendency and seeks to make some sense of odd creatures, an approach that seeks to rationally explain bestiary entries with corresponding animals denigrates the human imagination and ignores the creative ideas of the writer. As Gravestock points out, many of the animals in Pliny or other bestiaries (like the \textit{Physiologus}) were envisioned as originating in India or Ethiopia, to which the authors had less personal exposure. Broadly, the inclusion of such animals reflects the importance of far-off creatures as ideas rather than actualities; as a result, seeking to explain such animals is ultimately rendered anachronistic.\textsuperscript{56} What is important, though, is the legacy which the inclusion of such creatures has on subsequent bestiaries, especially in medieval and early modern Christian thought. The basilisk, for instance, takes on a greater life throughout the writing of Isidore of Seville, Albertus Magnus, Geoffrey Chaucer, and even Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), who writes that the basilisk “is so cruel that, when he does not succeed in killing animals with his poisonous stare, he turns it upon plants and herbs, causing them to dry up.”\textsuperscript{57} Whether or

\textsuperscript{54} Gravestock, “Did Imaginary Animals Exist?”, 122
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 123.
\textsuperscript{57} Leonardo Da Vinci, “Selections from the Bestiary of Leonardo Da Vinci,” transl. Oliver Evans, \textit{Journal of American Folklore} 64.254 (Oct-Dec 1951), 394. Oliver Evans’ translation is of a bestiary written by Da Vinci to amuse himself, but it still follows the bestiary format and includes fictional creatures like the basilisk.
not they existed in reality is beside the point; the extensive nature of bestiaries and the inclusion of more fantastical creatures served a purpose for medieval and early modern authors and readers, expressing a broad view about creatures that challenge understanding of what animals are. Thus, the inclusion of “fantastical creatures” indicates that medieval views of animals revolved less around what necessarily actually existed than their understanding of what could be. What was important was not necessarily whether a given creature existed in reality, but rather, what the possibility of such animals had to offer in the way of moral instruction for Christians and guidance about the structure of the world.58

Of similar interest and importance is the Physiologus, which served as a primary source for medieval and early modern bestiaries. The origins of the Physiologus lie in the second century in Alexandria and have been attributed to several different authors59, but also exists in many versions and consists of animal lore, accompanied by moralization and interpretation of the significance of various animals. Existing copies of the Physiologus are rare, but the text survived into the Middle Ages and enjoyed widespread use as a source of exempla and a school-text.60 Moreover, the Physiologus is significant for its status as a bestiary with Christian authorship. While Pliny and Aristotle served as key sources for medieval understanding of animals, the Physiologus’s approach of moralizing animals survived as a standard feature of the bestiary

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58 The discussions about moral guidance of seemingly fantastical creatures provides a similar understanding to that applied to monsters, who are viewed literally as signs from God. Monsters were often understood to exist in the world in various forms, but even fantastical monsters had lessons for the world from God regarding divine judgment of sin or misdeeds. We will visit this in depth in chapter 5.
genre precisely because it offered a moral, theological means of processing and engaging with the animal realm. For instance, the discussion of the lion in the *Physiologus* focuses on the lion as the “king of beasts,” but in theological terms. The author describes the lion as a symbol for Jesus. For just as lions cover their tracks with their tails to hide their scent, so also Jesus, “The spiritual lion of the tribe of Judah…having been sent down by his coeternal Father, hid his intelligible tracks (that is, his divine nature) from the unbelieving Jews.” He also refers to the lion’s tendency to sleep with open eyes as a symbol for Christ’s sleep on the cross, yet his “divine nature always keeps watch at the right hand of the Father.”

Similarly, he refers to the example of the nature of the viper with reference to Jesus calling the Pharisees a “brood of vipers.” The author explains that “just as the viper’s brood kills its father and mother, so this people, which is without God kills its father, Jesus Christ, and its earthly mother, Jerusalem.”

Medieval Christian followed this approach to animals and focused less intently on understanding specific details naturalistically, and instead emphasized the importance for the moral life of the Christian. The impact of this moralizing tendency is clearly felt outside the bestiaries, stretching to saints’ lives and other popular accounts. It is not merely that saints demonstrate their exemplary character in their interactions with animals, but also that animals demonstrate their own nature and propensity to act as part of God’s activity on earth in their interactions with saints. Moreover, other ancient writers who utilized bestiaries exemplify in part the balancing act played between relying upon received tradition about animals and insisting on other sources to supplement knowledge beyond moral depictions of animals. While ancient

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62 Ibid., 16.
64 Ibid.
attempts to moralize animals influenced medieval and early modern moralizations of animals, they also did not encompass the entire perspective of the place of animals in the world, especially in relation to a vision of humans being made specifically in God’s image.

*Medieval Bestiaries*

Broadly, then, we should consider how the purpose and order of animals relates to their symbolic value. Medieval bestiaries in particular offer an important venue for understanding medieval and early modern popular views of animals, despite their learned origin. Bestiaries became especially valuable for many reasons in popular culture. First, bestiaries became utilized not primarily for specific natural information, but for moral understanding of the place of animals in creation. Bestiary writers observed and recorded various facets of animals, ranging from their behavior to their appearance to understanding of how they relate to the world. For instance, Debra Hassig, noting that medieval interest in animal behavior served to learn more about God’s plans for both humans and animals in creation, wrote about animals as reflecting or communicating specific messages about sexuality and licentiousness. Animal behavior and characteristics helped to demarcate animals as either moral exemplars or moral warnings, with some serving as a contrast with the expectation for Christian adherence to monogamy.  

On a spiritual level, medieval bestiaries were important for their efforts to frame even the animal world in terms of spiritual struggle. One notable example comes from “The Book of Beasts,” a twelfth century Latin bestiary translated by famed medievalist T.H. White. While the specific text in question is elusive, White’s translation provides an accessible insight into the

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66 T.H. White was known as a novelist as well, authoring *The Once and Future King*, a revision of his own novels, based on the legends of King Arthur, which eventually inspired both the musical *Camelot* and the Disney film *The Sword in the Stone*. As Frazier notes, White’s translation was one of the first English translations of a medieval bestiary and offers an important reminder of the popularity of bestiaries, which Frazier describes as “second only to the Bible.” See T.H. White, *Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*, ii-iii.
world of the medieval bestiary and its influence on the public imagination of animals in medieval Europe. For instance, popular imagery of the Devil is associated with a variety of animals, including the serpent, the goat, and the fox. In White’s translation, the fox, also known as “Vulpis,” receives his name from the “person who winds wool (volupis), for he is a creature with circuitious pug marks who never runs straight but goes on his way with tortuous windings.”  

The fox is described as “fraudulent” and “ingenious,” using deceptive means to hunt birds, feigning death to lure birds into a false sense of security before grabbing and eating them. The author compares this means of hunting to the Devil, who “feigns himself to be dead until he gets [humans] in his gullet and punishes them.” The same description is reflected in both the image and text of the Aberdeen Bestiary (c. 13th Century), which notes the comparison between the Devil and the fox and includes a description of how humans should spiritually die to sinfulness and refuse the work of the Devil.  

Countless other examples from this bestiary serve similar purposes, to elucidate a divine example of either God or the Devil’s character. Such imagery would be spread widely throughout medieval literature, and even survives to modern depictions, with foxes in popular modern media still associated with being sly, cunning, and tricksters.  

Thus, on a broad level, medieval bestiaries strove to depict animals as symbolic of spiritual warfare, and to a lesser degree, actual participants in the spiritual battle over the world.

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67 Ibid., 53.
68 Ibid., 54. See also Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Library MS 24, fol. 16r. Accessed via Aberdeen University on April 10, 2024. [https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f16r](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f16r)
69 For a recent example of the fox as trickster, see the character Nick Wilde in the animated film *Zootopia*, who begins the film as a con artist. See *Zootopia*, directed by Rich Moore and Byron Howard, (2016: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures).
Moreover, the use of animal examples in medieval and early modern popular culture, through stories, sermons, and other texts, speaks broadly to animal purpose through the use of moral attributes and characteristics. Medieval sermons regularly utilized animals as didactic tools to help parishioners understand spiritual points. John Friedman in particular discusses Marcus of Orvieto’s *Liber de moralitatibus*, a preacher’s handbook from the late thirteenth century, authored by a Franciscan friar. As Friedman notes, the *Liber de moralitatibus* arranged moralized science in an attempt to facilitate sermon composition. The text’s use of animal examples, however, relates specific spiritual topics with their animal equivalent; for instance, an

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70 Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Library MS 24, fol. 16r.
entry on Antichrist links the concept to chapters on puppies, the wolf, and the basilisk.\(^{71}\) This
text also reinforces the reliance upon received authority, as Marcus of Orvieto (~13th Century
CE) typically turns to Aristotle or Pliny rather than personal observation to attest to occasional
descriptions of animal habits or behavior.\(^{72}\) Marcus of Orvieto regularly then utilizes details of
natural history to illustrate moral points, as he does when he describes the beautiful feathers of
the peacock to illustrate the “deceptive vanities of the devil and his ministers, who transfigure
themselves into angels of light and apostles of Christ.”\(^{73}\) This preacher’s manual reinforces the
very point in the previous paragraph: the purpose of moralizing animals was not only didactic for
guiding people’s personal actions, but instructive for understanding the spiritual warfare present
in the world around people, and the ways in which Christians were expected to follow God
through that conflict.

This also worked in more overtly spiritual ways modeling God’s love and example for
the world. Bestiary writers certainly observed animal behavior and characteristics, but they also
observed those behaviors as offering spiritual and moral inspiration. The use of animals
repeatedly in medieval sermons points to a popular culture that embraced animals as relevant for
their own moral development. Animals served as important symbols or ways to explain key
concepts of the faith, and thus served a key function for popular culture. One popular example
included the honeybee, which was used in medieval sermons as a sign of Christ. While the
honeybee makes honey (a sign of Christ’s love and forgiveness), it also possesses a stinger (a
sign of Christ’s judgment of sin in the world). Moreover, the honeybee exhibited a number of

\(^{71}\) John Friedman, “Peacocks and Preachers: Analytic Technique in Marcus of Orvieto’s Liber de Moralitatibus,
Vatican lat. MS 5935,” in Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages, 182-184.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 184.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 188. See the text of the Liber in Marcus of Orvieto, Liber de Moralitatibus, 13th CE, 3 volumes, ed. Girard
Etzkorn (St Bonaventure, NY: St Bonaventure University Press, 2015).
qualities that help to model the ideal community, including a central leader and loyal subjects working together in harmony, a trait which Thomas of Cantimpré (1201-1272) attempts to convey to and teach his Dominican peers, and which appears in the Aberdeen Bestiary, which describes the bee as “industrious,” “loved,” and “strong in terms of its vigorous good sense and love of virtue.” 74

![Figure 3: “De Apibus,” from the Aberdeen Bestiary](image)

Moreover, the perception of animal importance stretches across traditions. The role of animals in the Jewish tradition, for instance, is attested to throughout Jewish approaches to

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75 Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Library MS 24, fol. 63r-64v.
bestiaries. Bestiaries retained a similar popularity in Jewish circles as in Christian circles, albeit less frequently in the form of specific compiled bestiaries than in more dispersed narratives of animals throughout rabbinic and haggadic literature. Mark Podwall’s intervention in the realm of medieval Jewish approaches to animals, *A Jewish Bestiary*, compiles Jewish examples of animals from a variety of texts, speaking to the broad importance of animals as moral symbols throughout Jewish literature. Moreover, specific examples abound of crucial texts to understanding medieval Jewish views of animals. “The Birds Head Haggadah,” for instance, so named for its use of birds heads and faces in place of human heads and faces, is an illuminated Passover Haggadah from early fourteenth century Germany. Art historians have varied interpretations of the significance of the bird heads, ranging from an attempt to keep from violating the second commandment against graven images to a view of the birds as actually griffins, signifying a deeper connection between the Jewish people and God. The overall importance of this text points to the moral symbolism carried by animals across traditions in the Middle Ages.

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At the same time, one key difference between the traditions comes in the broad focus of Jewish texts toward both the question of animal status before God, as well as intense introspection about human duty toward animals in response. Various passages from the Hebrew Bible point to a perception of animal status before God, including Psalm 145, which indicates that all of God’s creatures engage in worship of God (“All your creatures shall praise you, O Lord”), that they are considered before God in his judgment (as in Jonah 4:11, which

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indicates that God considers not only the people, but the cattle in his judgment of Ninevah), and that broadly, humanity and animals are equal, for “both have the same lifebreath; man has no superiority over the beast, since both amount to nothing” (Ecclesiastes 3:19). Medieval philosophers clearly engage with the importance of animals, including Berekhiah ha-Naqdan (~12th-13th Century CE), whose animal fables in Mishle Shu’alim (Fox Fables) would be paralleled by non-Jewish authors like Marie de France. Berekiah used animal fables to illustrate important philosophical points about animals. For instance, in his “Wolf at Grammar School,” Berekiah presents the story of a teacher who instructs a unique student (a wolf) in Hebrew. The wolf learns to speak, but instead of following the Hebrew alphabet, he says, “Hinneh haseh (Behold, the sheep)” Berakhiah explains that the wolf is a metaphor for “wicked people whose appearances deceive but whose speech betrays the evil lurking in their heart,” and identifies him as a parallel for Esau, the “paradigmatic Other, the archetype of wickedness and physical violence.”

But even medieval rabbinic figures pointed to human duty toward animals in ways that seemed to go beyond Christian theological figures. Abraham Ibn Ezra notably exhorted Jews to include animals in the command to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Other rabbinic scholars point to the question of animal suffering (tzaar baalei hayyim) as operative for guiding Jewish perception of and response to animal life, whether in commentaries (as with Joshua Falk Cohen) or legal codes (as with Joseph Caro). Moreover, the broader thrust of Jewish ethics points to human compassion and kindness toward animals as exemplifying the righteous person, with the Midrash Tahnumah identifying Noah and Joseph as righteous in part because they

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“nourished creatures.” While the Midrash Tahnumah dates to the early medieval era, its sixteenth century recensions point to its continued relevance for early modern Jews.\(^82\)

In contrast, Christian texts in this era tend to subsume animals under questions of human stewardship and focus less on human duty toward animals than on ontological questions about their status or personhood before God. This is not to say that medieval Christian thinkers were cruel toward animals; rather, while they encouraged kindness to animals as godly and even viewed that kindness as a key element of saints’ lives, medieval theological and popular cultures were less emphatic about the human duty toward animals and were more open about the nature of human relations toward animals. Where Jewish thought focused on human duty toward animals, Christian thought focused on the question of human difference from animals, the degrees of that difference, and human relations and conflicts with animals. So the difference is not necessarily in the behavior toward animals, but in the root of the behavior.

Yet engagement between medieval Christians and Jews further illustrates the view of medieval Christians of a world in which animals help to illustrate or participate in spiritual warfare. Christian bestiaries often engaged in forms of anti-Semitism; for instance, in the “Book of Beasts,” the owl’s daytime blindness is used as a symbol of “the Jews, who repulse Our Savior when he comes to redeem them...They value darkness more than light.”\(^83\) While not quite


\(^83\) T.H. White, *Book of Beasts*, 133-134. Other comparisons include the Synagogue to a “dirty animal,” as well as a contrast with the Ants, as the Jews “attend only to the letter, and scorning the spiritual meaning, have been killed with hunger.”
extending into violent invective, the use of animals to distinguish between true Christian doctrine and false Jewish doctrine implicitly compares Jewish people themselves to animals, reinforcing their place on the diabolical side of spiritual warfare.

At the same time, while bestiaries did not offer strictly naturalistic observations, they did provide useful insight into medieval perception of natural issues, with observations of the animal penchant for social behavior or forms of cognition. While some of these observations proved more anecdotal, the structure of medieval bestiaries provided a basis for fifteenth and sixteenth century protozoological works which provided case by case treatment of animals. Moreover, bestiaries remained important for how they reflected an expansive view of the natural realm. While transgressions of the boundary between human and non-human tended to be the target of skepticism, this skepticism did not extend to the expansive view of just what was entailed or included in the realm of “non-human.” Neither bestiary writers nor the popular figures who received the information through sermons and other experiences seem to indicate a skepticism that figures like unicorns, basilisks, or other creatures could exist in reality. Rather, bestiaries point to a view that went beyond what was immediately observed in Europe to creatures theorized around the world or only encountered in travelogues. Even fictional animals were included in bestiaries and helped to illustrate spiritual truths for adherents. More importantly, if


85 For one of the most prominent of these travelogues which discusses customs around the world regarding both animals and monsters, see The Travels of John Mandeville, ed. David Price, 1900 (New York: Macmillan, 2014). For a discussion of the significance of travel writing in medieval and early modern Europe, see Sally Abed, “Wonders and Monsters in ‘The Travels of John Mandeville and in Abu Hamid al-Gharnati’s Tufat-al-Albab,”’ in Imagination and Fantasy in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2020), 490-498.
fantastical animals could be accepted as important for moral lessons, they could also be accepted as evidence of a more fluid understanding of how far nature extends. Without rejecting received tradition about animals or the place of humans in the natural world, bestiaries suggested a world with broader boundaries and an animal realm that, despite the impact of the Fall, still possessed great power. As a result, the animal realm could stretch beyond traditional expectations of animals into the untraditional (and even monstrous), which even overlaps with perceptions of nonhuman monstrous creatures, in some cases providing substantial treatment of monsters or exotic animals. For instance, the medieval tradition of *mappae mundi* showed races of people on the far edges of the world with as much seriousness as it discussed sea creatures, with an attempt to understand humans in exotic regions as bizarre and other, and worth understanding as *monstra.*

Finally, medieval bestiaries help to emphasize moral values and special behaviors and characteristics as not necessarily just instinctual, but as connoting a greater degree of morality or immorality, thus placing them in spiritual warfare. The idea of animals as actual participants in spiritual warfare may appear to be overstated. However, the long-term influence of the moralization of animals clearly extends beyond the realm of the bestiaries into popular culture and religious propaganda. The significance of broadsheets as conveying or shaping popular sentiment has been well documented, but less dissected is the importance of animals in these propagandistic portrayals. The moral portrayals of animals, however, have a lineage and impact on popular culture which enable such portrayals. For instance, while bestiaries pointed to these negative moral traits of animals as engrained, sixteenth century religious propaganda, detailed by

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Scribner, used the negative traits of these animals to describe religious opponents. Scribner’s focus on animal masks helps to illustrate the ways in which animals figure into spiritual warfare. He describes how sixteenth century Lutheran propaganda utilized animal masks to signify Luther’s theological opponents, with the polemical applications of animal characteristics being similar to the use of animals in other medieval literature. \(^87\) Luther’s opponent Johann Eck’s portrayal as a pig emphasizes his perception as spiritually engaging in dirty, unethical practices. Similarly, the portrayal of Pope Leo X as a lion intended to describe him as savage, and later portrayals of the pope as an ass playing the bagpipe served to emphasize the pope as brutish and stupid. \(^88\)

Elsewhere animal allegory is employed to connote specific religious messages. As Scribner demonstrates, animals could be used as stand-ins for immoral religious figures, as in the 1522 pamphlet “The Wolf’s Song,” which was used to identify “spiritual wolves” and alludes to medieval allegory and proverbs to identify political and religious opponents as engaging in the same immoral behaviors as animals, including the tricks and cunning of wolves (which the author compares to priestly deception of congregants) and the hypocrisy and slyness of foxes, which is used to depict hypocritical attempts at reform in the church. \(^89\) More explicitly, we might look at the portrayals of Luther’s opponents as well as his patrons as demonstrating how animals were utilized in forms of religious and spiritual warfare. Scribner also refers to a woodcut depiction of Duke Christoph of Wittenberg as a Christian prince, along with a prayer of protection against the forces of the Roman church, depicting members of the Catholic hierarchy as various beasts, including a dragon, a lion, a tiger, and a fox. \(^90\) This imagery would have called

\(^87\) R.W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 75.
\(^88\) Ibid., 74-75.
\(^89\) Ibid., 76-77.
\(^90\) Ibid., 76.
to mind for readers the animals used in Daniel 7, also used to imply empires and political power. Luther’s own commentary on the book of Daniel included a Dream Map, which included an allegorical map of Europe, Africa, and Asia with four headwinds represented by a lion, a leopard with four heads, a goat with iron teeth, and a bear (the same creatures referenced in Daniel’s dream). The conscious attempts to associate political and religious opponents with specific animal traits plays on both a learned culture of bestiaries and a popular culture in which bestiary portrayals of animals became commonly known and used for rhetorical purposes.

Figure 5: Daniel’s “Dream Map,” c. 1530

92 Ibid.
Popular Culture: Nonhuman Nonanimals and the Human Body

Monsters, Marvels, Spiritual beings, and the Monstrous

While the perception of nonhuman animals in the boundary is important, we must also consider the relevance of nonhuman nonanimals, which we will term “monsters” for ease of terminology. Broadly, this side of the boundary has been neglected until the recent rise of critical monster studies. Prior to the rise of critical monster studies, many approaches to monsters tended to focus specifically on literary depictions of monsters or on genre theory, focusing on them specifically as literary devices. Yet historical understandings of monsters and depictions of the “Other” have received attention over the last three decades, and scholars like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen have offered important analysis of monsters as an historical, cultural, and literary phenomenon. Cohen’s theses include such observations as the monster as a “harbinger of category crisis” and as “policing the boundaries of the possible.”93 The emerging field of critical monster studies has, as a result, helped to reframe scholarly attention of monsters as not merely a feature of premodern Christian culture, but as a constituent element of it.

Theologically, as alluded to in the prior discussion of Paracelsus, monsters bear a theological valence in early modern culture. Monsters were typically understood in light of Latin etymology: monstrum, indicating a sign, or something showing or revealing to humanity.94 Monsters indicated some form of physical or spiritual creature which did not neatly fit into the boundary of the created order, but which occupied a signifying presence in the lives of people. Greco-Roman authors paid great attention to monsters, including in the Odyssey and the Aeneid, but stretching further outside epic poetry and into travelogues and compendia of the natural world. Certain Greco-Roman authors, like Pliny, wrote compendia regarding the natural world.

93 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 6-7, 12-16.
which touched on the presence of monsters in the world, while authors like Gaius Julius Solinus are regarded as having simply repackaged Pliny’s descriptions.95 Yet both of them pointed to the notion that the unexplored sectors of the world, especially the Far East, were teeming with notions of unknown, bizarre creatures. These observations and postulations lent themselves to the development of the travelogue. Elsewhere, numerous other authors discuss monsters, yet typically reserve them for specific sections of their work rather than entire texts, including Augustine’s discussion of monstrous races in *City of God*, in which Augustine writes that monstrous races are either “completely unfounded, or if such races do exist, they are not human; or if they are human, they are descended from Adam.”96

By the medieval and early modern era, monsters were viewed in light of their potential divine meanings. Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, for instance, point to monsters as emerging from three separately provoked feelings and emotions, “horror, pleasure, and repugnance.”97 Yet monsters were also viewed apart from emotional response in terms of divine judgment and messages. As Surekha Davies points out, monsters were regularly invoked from classical antiquity through the early modern era as signs of divine judgment, wrath, or displeasure. As the Reformation developed in the sixteenth century, however, views of monsters turned from being general portents of judgment to specific judgment.98

Yet later medieval authors treat monsters in more considered length and seriousness, including the thirteenth century *De Naturis Rerum* by Thomas of Cantimpré, which seeks to

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98 Surekha Davies, “The Unlucky, the Bad, and the Ugly,” 52-3.
offer a history, origin, significance, and place for an ordered universe of monsters. For the third book of his work, Cantimpré writes specifically on *De Monstruosis Hominibus Orientis*, borrowing copiously from other popular figures, including Pliny and Augustine, but also from Jacques de Vitry and others, discussing the question of whether or not monstrous men descend from Adam. His later elaboration of this book after the initial *De Naturis Rerum* focused on monsters and included illustrations and a greater degree of moralization. The beginning of his book on monsters begins with a discussion of whether centaur-like creatures are actually encountered by Saint Antony in Jerome’s *Life of Saint Paul*. Cantimpré cited Jerome and Augustine in navigating what to make of these creatures, but pointed especially to Augustine’s reticence to accept such creatures as human due to their apparent lack of rationality. In the image below, the illuminated page from Cantimpré depicts monstrous humans, including a giant and a cyclops (who is eating somebody).

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Figure 6: Thomas de Cantimpré, “De Monstruosis Hominibus” 101

Yet Cantimpré goes on to discuss not only monstrous animals, but also other races of humans, who are ultimately far uglier and monstrous than other humans and characterized by hybrid qualities with animals. 102 Cantimpré goes on to emphasize God’s favor on human creation, writing not only that God has made humans “handsome beyond all other creatures, according to

102 Ibid., 160-165.
his image, “but also pointing to a deeper significance, with monstrous races providing divine signs for humans, for “God has made nothing in vain.””\textsuperscript{103}

Other texts also point to the popularity of monsters in medieval and early modern culture. One of the most popular texts, the fourteenth century \textit{Travels of John Mandeville}, relate the purported travels of a British knight, who describes his experiences traveling the world.\textsuperscript{104} In chapter 24 of his book, the author points to Ham, the third son of Noah, as cursed by God for scorning his father’s “privy members;” he describes Ham as a great and mighty ruler, but as taking some degree of sway through his descendants in the East. During his rule, “the fiends of hell came many times and lay with the women of his generation and engendered on them diverse folk, as monsters and folk disfigured, some without heads, some with great ears, some with one eye, some giants, some with horses’ feet, and many other diverse shape against kind.”\textsuperscript{105}

However, in his section on Egypt, the author is more positive about potential monsters. He describes the encounter of a “holy hermit” with a monster, which he describes as a “thing deformed against kind both of man or of beast or of anything else, and that is clept a monster.”

He describes that the monster was “as it had been a man, that had two horns trenchant on his forehead; and he had a body like a man unto the navel, and beneath he had the body of a goat.”

Yet the monster told the hermit that he was “a deadly creature, such as God had formed,” and

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. See also John Block Friedman, “Forward,” in \textit{The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous}, xxix.
\textsuperscript{104} There is ongoing debate not only the identity of the author of John Mandeville, but whether Mandeville was a real person at all. Ian McCleod Higgins goes so far as to argue that the work was a forgery “insofar as it claims to be something it is not,” arguing that while the travel described may have happened, it likely happened by others, with the travels serving as a construct for the author to present a critique of the moral state of Christians. But he also notes that even if the work was a fiction, there is no evidence that it was read as fiction See \textit{The Travels of John Mandeville}, ed. David Price, 1900 (New York: Macmillan, 2014); \textit{The Book of John Mandeville with related Texts}, ed. Ian McCleod Higgins (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2011), 8-28.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 145. This recounts the origin of monsters according to John Mandeville.
requested prayer from the hermit, expressing some degree of faith and knowledge of the
Christian message and the Virgin birth.\textsuperscript{106}

A more specific case in which monsters traverse the boundary between human and
nonhuman exists in the phenomenon of monstrous births. Especially from the late medieval era
onward, Christian culture paid special interest to understanding misbirths or monstrous births as
signs of divine displeasure, whether generally against society or against specific sins or
institutions. Most notably, Luther and Melanchthon interpreted monstrous births, including the
“Monk Calf” as divine disapproval of monastic institutions and the institutional Roman church.
In the case of the monk calf, a child had been born with a malformation on their head that looked
similar to a monastic tonsure, a sure sign of disapprobation of the abuses of monasticism. \textsuperscript{107}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{monk_calf.png}
\caption{The “Monk Calf of Freyberg,” c. 1522\textsuperscript{108}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 32. Higgins’ translation is the monster describing himself as a “mortal creature.” See Higgins, 59.
\textsuperscript{107} Ottavia Niccoli, 	extit{Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 123-
127. See also Surekha Davies, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{108} Philip Melanchthon, “The Monk Calf of Freyberg,” c. 1522, accessed via Pitts Theology Library on April 11,
2024. \url{https://dia.pitts.emory.edu/image_details.cfm?ID=3509}
Theological debate over such creatures extended to discernment of whether animals offered an important topic of discussion in the early modern era. The fact that misbirths occurred did not automatically imply judgment, but instead could convey a more positive message from God, complete with a marvel of his creation. Thus, the question of whether such a birth was a prodigy or a misbirth relied on careful discernment. Caspar Peucer (1525-1602) pointed to emotional response at the moment of seeing the misbirth as instructive for understanding how monsters invoke judgment and terror, but marvels can be interpreted as signs of judgment evoking curiosity and wonder. The prevalence of discussion of misbirths and marvels in the sixteenth century is a topic to which we will return, as its continued popularity points to shifts in the early modern mindset.¹⁰⁹

More relevant to this chapter, however, is the popularity of monstrous births among the public in Christian Europe. The rise of the printing press spread news of monstrous births quickly and widely, with interest spiking quickly. As Soergel notes, pamphlets and broadsheets advertising monstrous births appeared to be verified and were often labeled as “true” or “truthful.” Moreover, parents of such infants often would place the bodies on display for those who wanted to see and experience the divine marvels, a frequent occurrence in Reformation-era Germany, with local officials and nobles coming to visit. The popularity of these prints among the general populace is certainly degrading and dehumanizing, but points to a way in which distinctions were made regarding human figures who transcend the nonhuman boundary

¹⁰⁹ Caspar Peucer, Commentarius de praecipuis divinationum generibus, (Wittenberg: Johannes Crato, 1560), 442r-443v; Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, Wonders and the Order of Nature, 193. We see this tendency in other writers as well, including Nicole Oresme, Goldwurm, Christoph Ireneaus, Fincel and Lycothenes. See Philip Soergel, Miracles and the Protestant Imagination: The Evangelical Wonder Book in Reformation Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
physically. The inherent disrespect of these bodies conveyed specific ideas about what constituted humanity. What is notable is that for the general public, the capacity for reason mattered, but it seemed to matter less overtly than the grotesqueness of the body. An inherent discomfort exists somewhat less with impairment than with the type of impairment. The question of physical impairment impacted popular culture somewhat more than theologians and writers. Theologians took physical form in concert with capacity for reason, but with a tacit notion that both physical and mental impairment pose threats to the established vision of what it means for humans to be made in the image of God.

A few key points should emerge from the medieval treatment of monsters. First of all, treatment of monsters in these encyclopedic works generally viewed nonhuman nonanimals as a broader part of the created realm, and typically included monstrous races in the same category as animals. In fact, medieval and early modern writers included monstrous races in the broader purview of creation, and thus as an intrinsic part of the debate over the human-nonhuman boundary. Second of all, a crucial part of discussion over monsters focuses not on creatures nearby, but on creatures far away from Christian Europe, specifically in the East. The Orientalizing tendencies are undeniable, as Cantimpré and other writers view non-Christian people and places in dehumanizing, “othering” terms. But the desire to picture monsters as “Other” lends to the ambivalence within popular culture, which possessed intense curiosity about monsters, yet did not wholly write off their human characteristics as completely animal. The popularity not only of Cantimpré, but of other medieval travelogues like the fourteenth century Travels of John Mandeville, points to a broader desire to explore and understand the world, and

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to bring figures of profound ambiguity into brighter light. And just as with animals, monsters
occupy both a physical space in the world and a spiritual place in the God’s overall picture and
plan for the world. In short, monsters carried signifying power and messages, but existed in the
public imagination as more than mere symbols, but also as real creatures.111

**Boundary and Spiritual Warfare: Lycanthropy and Bodily Transformation**

Perhaps the clearest category which demonstrates the popular perspective of the
human/non-human as a ground for spiritual warfare is the category of lycanthropy. Lycanthropy,
the medical diagnosis in which one either physically turns into a wolf or perceives oneself
becoming a wolf, has a long legacy in Western Christian culture. Notions of a transgressed
boundary between people and animals go back into the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the case of
the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, whom God judged by making him take a human-animal
hybrid form. For seven years, Nebuchadnezzar walks on all fours, grows thick and unruly tufts of
hair all over, and chews grass from the field like an animal, in a case often pointed to as a
biblical example of lycanthropy. While recent scholarship on Daniel has focused on potential
medical explanations of this account, other scholars have moved toward acknowledging the
importance of this transformation narrative for the populations being studied, as well as the
significance of the association with bestial nature as a form of punishment. Just as with animals
from bestiaries, for premodern Christians, such transformation narratives had staying power
beyond the question of whether they were possible and had specific moral valence for those who
encountered these narratives.

Meanwhile, Augustine himself wrote regarding the ontological issues inherent in the
issue of transformation. In *City of God*, he expands on the notion of a contract with demons as

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the source of various supernatural powers in humans. Augustine identifies the source of human supernatural powers as typically demonic in nature, in which a human, through a deal with either Satan or his demons, gains certain “powers” in exchange for obeisance to Satan. But he also points to examples in the Greco-Roman world of transformation narratives in practice and, rather than refuting them outright, points to potential explanations. In chapter 16 of book 18 in City of God, Augustine writes following the destruction of Troy that the return of Diomede to Greece was prevented by a “punishment divinely imposed upon him,” and that the “transformation of his companions into birds is regarded not as a lying fable...but as an historical fact,” and that despite his divine status, he was not “of himself able to restore his companions to their human condition.” Similarly, he points to the example of the sorceress Circe who “transformed the companions of Odysseus into beasts.” In this account, Augustine writes of the “Arcadians, who, chosen by lot, swam across a certain lake, were there changed into wolves, and lived in the desolate parts of that region in the company of similar wild creatures.” The surname given to these men, which he attributes to the author of the story, he claims can be “due to no other reason than this transformation of men into wolves, which, it is supposed, can only be brought about by divine power.”

Yet Augustine also tends to attribute notions of transformation to demonic delusion rather than actual physical transformation. For instance, he points to accounts of transformation of men into wolves as an example of a “great mockery perpetrated by the demons.” Augustine points to instances from regions of Italy in which female innkeepers (stabulariae) were said to administer drugs to unsuspecting travelers, who were “thereupon turned into beasts of burden and used to

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carry articles of all kinds, returning to their original form only when they had finished their tasks. Yet their minds did not become bestial, but were kept rational and human.”

Much can be learned from Augustine on narratives of bodily transformation, but these transformation narratives, while not solely revolving around lycanthropy, communicate specific details that help us to frame lycanthropy, as well as bodily transformation more broadly. First, in Augustine’s framework, transformation is used not merely for demonstrations of power, but for practical, tangible ends. Second, transformation is possible by divine power, but typically occurs through some illicit means of power, and is typically a pale imitation of God’s true power over matter and bodies. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Augustine views bodily transformation as part of a broader picture of spiritual warfare between divine and demonic forces. While Augustine does not identify an explicit spiritual warfare between God and demons, he is very clear that demons play a role in promoting such narratives of spiritual transformation, and that the initial step involved in gaining the capacity to transform— that of a contract with the devil— involves the promise of one’s allegiance to the Devil. Demonologists and other theologians consistently argued that demonic activity’s purpose in the world was not merely to cause chaos, but to undermine God’s will by pushing humans away from God and inducing humans to sin. Thus, because demons use animal transformation as a means of pushing people away from God, we can see examples of animal transformation as means of promoting spiritual conflict and

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113 Ibid., 843.
114 This account is brought up additionally by sixteenth century physician and demonologist Johann Weyer, who addresses similar accounts from William of Malmesbury, in which two innkeepers on a road to Rome would transform solitary travelers into animals and sell them into labor. See Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De Praestigiis daemonum, trans. by John Shea (Binghamton, NY: Medieval Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), 192-193.
115 The pact with the Devil in the case of lycanthropy would usually involve the recipient of the powers pledging allegiance to the Devil, but receiving an external agent (a belt buckle, fur pelt, or type of ointment) that would enable transformation. Dirk Gibson, Legends, Monsters, or Serial Murderers? The Real Story Behind an Ancient Crime (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 59-60.
warfare, just as medieval preachers pointed to animals as theological symbols and exemplars to help people in their daily moral struggles.

This notion of lycanthropy as a ground for spiritual warfare recurs historically in both implicit and explicit ways. For instance, the infamous canon law text, the *Canon Episcopi*, rejected the notion of bodily transformation as contrary to Christian teaching, for anybody who “believes that anything can be made, or that any creature can be changed to better or worse or be transformed into another species or similitude, except by the Creator...is beyond doubt an infidel.” The writers of the *canon Episcopi* reject the notion of bodily transformation for a number of reasons, including the potential loss of humanity’s capacity for reason, but most notably that the notion of demons possessing creative power implies a diminishing of God’s power.116 The association of lycanthropy with witchcraft specifically connects directly to the notion of bodily transformation as a setting for spiritual conflict between God and demonic forces, in which demonic forces continually seek to rebel against God and divert humans from following the Gospel into sin. In associating lycanthropy with sorcery, the canonists set the tone for later fifteenth and sixteenth century demonologists to reject lycanthropy not on grounds of probability, but on grounds of theological perspective.117

Yet it is true that some theologians and authors accepted the possibility of lycanthropy as physical transformation within God’s purview. The most notable figure who describes this, Gerald of Wales, affirms the ecclesiastical teaching that transformation must occur in God’s

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purview, and that all other accounts derive from demonic delusions. However, he puts forward a number of accounts in which God permits people to change their outward appearance while retaining their fundamental human capacity for reason. In one tale, he specifically links bodily transformation with the Eucharist. Gerald describes a tale in the *Topographia Hibernica* in which a priest, wandering in the words on the borders of Meath, encountered a wolf who approached and addressed him. The wolf informed the priest that he and his wife have been cursed “every seven years to put off the human and...assume that of wolves.” However, because the wife was near death, the wolf implored the priest for the viaticum and, to prove their worthiness and human nature, “using his claw for a hand, he tore off the skin of the she-wolf...thus, she immediately presented the form of an old woman.”

While Gerald of Wales is most immediately seeking a compromise position between the hard ecclesiastical position regarding transformation and the more fluid cultural expectations of such experiences, he is also navigating the ways in which transformation is used to imply something greater about the forces involved. Because God can use physical transformation for “vindicating his judgments or exhibiting his divine power,” it forms a specific contrast with the traditional approach to lycanthropy as rooted in delusory power. Moreover, considering the typical approach of the church regarding lycanthropy was to reassert the firm boundary, Gerald of Wales’ attempt at compromise proves the broader debate around lycanthropy as revolving around this key tension between ecclesiastical teachings which rejected lycanthropy and a popular perspective which was open to magic and ambiguous spiritual activity. This tension raised the issue of whether actions were taken by either God or demons in a broader scheme of spiritual warfare.

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118 The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, containing the Topography of Ireland, and the History of the Conquest of Ireland, 79-81.
119 Ibid., 84.
Thus, the overall tenor of the debate over lycanthropy, while ostensibly about the source of power behind accounts of transformation, more explicitly revolves around the notion of physical transformation, and indeed the boundary between humans and animals more broadly, as a ground for spiritual battle between the forces of God and the Devil. The debate ultimately seemed to revolve around the question of the source of power, with the source (God or demonic) lending itself to the nature of the transformation (delusional or actual physical). But even those who reject the notion that it happens in practice did not deny the possibility that it could happen within a purview of God’s design, but they simply denied that God acted in that way anymore.¹²⁰

In the early modern era, the theological response to lycanthropy ultimately revolved around these questions of the source of the power and whether God was acting in that specific way. Because most responses doubted the notion of God acting in this specific way, most demonological responses focused on the idea of lycanthropic experiences as both demonic in origins and delusory in their reality. This debate among theologians informs the broader response to lycanthropy. The emergence of the *Canon Episcopi* as the central canon for addressing lycanthropy in the Middle Ages was accompanied by an outgrowth in the theological sphere, including in the *De Universo* of William of Auvergne (1190-1249), in which he argued that demons were capable of making people think that demons could coopt and manipulate matter. Yet despite their great power, demons could not actually transform anything; they merely used their knowledge of natural processes to deceive people into believing they possessed creative power.¹²¹

The broader popular response, however, incorporated personal experiences of those who believed they had transformed into wolves. Trial and medical records especially pointed to a tradition in which people believed in their own capacity to perpetrate horrific crimes in the guise of wolves, prompting responses from jurists, physicians, and theologians. In the *Preceptorium Divine Legis*, theologian and demonologist Johannes Nider (1380-1438) insists that in response to the question of “whether it is true that witches are able to truly make animals by their own skill” that such transformations only occur with “God permitting,” and that such transformations only occur in an imperfect fashion, with demons manipulating preexisting matter into a delusion of human senses, not creating new matter.122 Meanwhile, the records of lycanthropy trials in the early modern era point to the degree of seriousness with which the issue was treated even in the sixteenth century. Between 1540 and 1620, over 30,000 accusations of lycanthropy surfaced in France, and trial records continually pointed to both its treatment as a malevolent event and its consideration as a real experience.123

At the core of these responses lay a few key elements. First of all is the belief that lycanthropy demonstrates a binary between people and animals specifically, and that it demonstrates human difference from animals. Lycanthropy remained a threat not only for its demonic implications, but also because it blurred the boundaries between human and animals in a way that served as an affront to the image of God in humanity. Second, as we see in trial records, the boundary is treated as something that is to be firmly enforced, but not as something that is inviolable in practice. Finally, lycanthropy models spiritual warfare, as demons attempt to

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122 *Preceptorium divine legis venerabilis fratris Johannis Nider de ordine predicatorum*. Basle: Berthold Ruppel, c. 1470), image 67 Precept 1, Ch 11, Q 7. [http://eeb.chadwyck.co.uk.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/search/displayItemFromId.do?ItemID=fra-bnf-rlr-00001231-001&DurUrl=Yes]

deceive people out of hatred and enmity for God and a desire to lead people further from God. The broader shift to a more naturalistic view, and the emergence of medicalized views of lycanthropy among critics of lycanthropy in the latter part of the sixteenth century must be viewed against the backdrop in which accounts of lycanthropy had dramatic stakes. We will return to the emergence of medical treatment of lycanthropy in chapter 5.

Conclusion

As we have discussed, the various areas in which popular culture intersected with a more learned, theological elite prompted early instances of conflict surrounding the human-non-human boundary. But what are we to make of the broader approach to animals within early modern popular culture? There are a few key lessons for us as we seek to understand the contours of the boundary in popular culture.

The first major point is to acknowledge the degree to which both theologians and non-theologians were indebted to inherited tradition on matters involving the boundary between people and non-people. While thus far I have emphasized the degree to which theological authorities of the early modern era relied upon Augustine, Aquinas, and others, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which popular culture also inherited an understanding of what their popular experiences of the spiritual realm looked like. For instance, the notion of the demonic contract became popular in lycanthropy accounts and was not unknown to early modern popular culture, a testament to Augustine’s prominence throughout early modernity. Augustine’s work stood situated as a fixture of early modern theological culture, and thus helped to form the framework in which early modern popular culture understood and related their experiences.

However, the second major point is to acknowledge the ways in which reliance on received wisdom and tradition both reified the divide between people and non-people while also
helping to challenge it. It is true that reliance on authority asserted a stricter boundary between people and non-people, pointing to animals as simply a broad part of creation, subject to human stewardship. However, the reliance upon a Christian framework did not reduce the reality for early modern practitioners of their actual experiences or of the experiences of their family members. The oft overlooked aspect of “folklore” is that it is not only a recollection of people’s current experiences, but it also relates family and cultural history; thus, an insistence of reliance on received wisdom would necessarily put popular culture and theological culture in some degree of tension, in which early modern Christians sought to embrace the theological structure without rejecting their family, culture, or broader heritage.

Thus, a key part of this whole crux of the issue over the boundary is the response to a culture which received dual visions of the boundary. Moreover, the institutional response of the Church, which sought to accommodate varieties of religious expression while also rejecting ideas that went contrary to established doctrine or thought, ultimately did little to address a popular culture which sensed an ambiguous boundary between people and non-people, but affirmed a strict division with little opportunity for transgressions of the boundary. In addressing popular experience, people tested the limits of the anthropocentric model without necessarily rejecting it, even though addressing that tension would become more challenging in the sixteenth century.

Ultimately, the importance of popular perception of the boundary between people and non-people is integrated into popular culture and Christian theology in a myriad of ways. As discussed, perception of the animal boundary emerges in both broad and specific ways across society, including in legal discussions, as well as in discussions of Christian saints and bestiaries. From these sources, we glean a perspective of animals that is more fluid than the theological
perception. While popular culture is open to the Christian formulation of animals as occupying a strict place in the hierarchy, it ultimately presents a more fluid picture of the role played by animals in the Christian life. Similarly, early modern popular culture’s acceptance of a more fluid boundary was both influenced by popular experience of fluid boundaries, and also made popular culture more likely to accept scenarios in which strict boundaries between human and non-human were transgressed. German popular culture illustrates this with the abundance of broadsheets about monstrous births. Moreover, Christian demonological writing offers us a lens of popular perception of that boundary through accounts of lycanthropy. Christian demonologists’ broadly strict response to the human-non-human boundary reveals a society more likely to accept public cases in which lycanthropy was claimed.

However, by the end of the sixteenth century, perception of the boundary had begun to intersect with the presence of naturalists and proto-zoologists. While impacted by Christian theology, such naturalists and encyclopedists, as well as theologians, early modern perceptions of the boundary became more solidified and defined in both theory and practice. The rise of a more objective, non-metaphysically oriented way of discussing animals helped to define a stricter boundary in which transgressions of the boundary through monsters, bodily transformation, and the trials of animals became less accepted. At the same time, clear remnants of the culture of bestiaries survived into the early modern protozoology and theology, particularly in the form of moralizing animals offering lessons for humanity.

In the final chapter, we turn to the ways in which the ambiguity of boundaries between people and animals began to shift during the sixteenth century.
Chapter 5: Proto-Naturalism and the Human-Nonhuman Boundary

To this point, this dissertation has focused on elaborating the complexity of early modern understanding of the boundary between people and non-people. As we have discussed, theologians overstated the parameters of the boundary in practice. They adamantly affirmed a strict boundary between human and non-human that related to the intrinsic natures of human beings as created in the image of God, which also contrasted with non-human animals and spiritual intelligences alike. Moreover, the strictness of the boundary undergirded a firmly asserted hierarchy of creation- not only did humanity stand separate from other created beings, but humanity stood as greater than non-human creatures. The anthropocentric hierarchy of creation remained a key facet of the early modern theological picture, even amongst those who most tested its boundaries, including Paracelsus, who pushed the boundary through non-Adamic creation, but still observed a formal boundary between humans and non-humans.

At the same time, the theological landscape also represented the boundary not merely as actual, but also as aspirational. Humans were not only upheld as a part of the hierarchy but were also expected to distinguish themselves in their behavior from non-human creatures. Sin and unseemly behavior, it was argued, diminished the degree to which humanity manifested the image of God. While God created the world with an order and a structure, human participation in animalistic behavior degraded humanity and approached transgressions of the boundary. While humans could not change their physical nature, they could behave in ways that undermined the image of God in humanity. Transgressions of the boundary were thus technically possible, but only in one direction.

Yet the insistence of the strict nature of the boundary frequently intersected with potential transgressions that raised this tension between the boundary as actual and aspirational. As
theologians and thinkers tested the boundary, they not only raised assertions of the boundary’s strictness, but they also put the issues associated with the boundary into stark relief. That tension is summarized by two features—first, a knowledge among theologians and scholars that God has structured creation not only as anthropocentric, with humanity made in the image of God, but also as distinct and strictly divided; and second, an awareness within both popular culture and nature of cases which stretch and seem to transgress that boundary. So theologians and scholars were forced to engage with issues that tested the boundaries and navigate how to affirm the anthropocentric order of creation in the face of these transgressions.  

This underlying tension remained unsettled into the sixteenth century. However, the tension began to be more openly addressed following the rise of humanism and naturalism. This chapter will explore the rise of naturalism in the sixteenth century and its intersection with the boundary, specifically the impact of humanism and naturalism on theological notions of the human and the boundary. I will argue what finally clarifies the boundary in a substantial way is the growth of naturalism, which firmly elaborates the hierarchy of creation (of humans over animals), but also affirms the place of humanity within creation (as part of the overall created order). At the same time, the rise of naturalism gradually begins to present physical and theological knowledge as discrete, separate but complementary forms of knowledge. Proto-naturalists still engage with existing authorities, but begin to value empirical observation over received authorities, and thus physical forms of knowledge over moral forms of knowledge (at least regarding the boundary between human and non-human). The rise of naturalism affirms the distinctions between physical and metaphysical claims, which, while not new, became emphatically increased. Moreover, the rise of proto-naturalism helps to reify the boundary

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1 For more on the anthropocentric view of creation, please see chapter 2.
between human and non-human, and belief in transgressions of the boundary began to shift from being physically possible while not threatening the boundary to being physically impossible. The rise of naturalism and proto-naturalism thus begins to resolve the tension of the boundary between human and non-human, as well as how to interpret transgressions of the boundary in a way consistent with the overall understanding of the boundary.

This chapter will discuss the role of the rise of naturalism on theological and cultural understanding of the boundary between human and non-human. Theologically, the boundary remains affirmed as a reflection of the hierarchy of creation, while the rationale behind that boundary begins to shift. The seeming resolution of the tension helps to stoke the conflict between physical and metaphysical modes of thinking, fracturing any holistic notions of creation. Thus, in resolving the blurred lines of the boundary, the rise of proto-naturalism creates other issues. I will first describe the rise of Renaissance humanism and its impact on the beginnings of naturalism. Then, I will discuss how proto-naturalists like Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) and medical thinkers like Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), Johann Weyer (1515-1588), and Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) figure in the intersection of naturalism and theology. I will demonstrate how these figures manifest the transition from theology and science as holistic to understanding them as separate spheres of knowledge. I will address naturalistic views of animals and humans alike, as well as notions of the monstrous body and of transgressions of the boundary through bodily transformation. Finally, I will provide some summary thoughts of the impact of proto-naturalism on the boundary itself. Throughout, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which the rise of proto-naturalism prompts a broader transition from considerations of boundary transgressions from “marvel” to “medical.”
The “Naturalistic Turn” of the sixteenth century

The importance of humanism in the rise of the Reformation is certainly not a new notion. Scholarly inquiry into the development and role of humanism in fueling of the Reformation has a long history. Scholars such as Paul Kristeller and Charles Nauert convincingly trace and chart the development of humanism as an intellectual and academic movement emerging from specific cultural contexts in Renaissance Italy, and convincingly argue for its importance in the development of the Reformation, especially its insistence on the role of the individual, the importance of critical inquiry, and the importance of consulting sources in their original languages rather than only receiving them from established authorities. Erika Rummel, meanwhile, disputes whether humanism was truly crucial in the Reformation’s development, arguing that humanism was used by Reformation theologians, but was more coopted than embraced in the early Reformation. However, even Rummel, with her view that the impact of humanism was less profound, still acknowledges its importance, in the growth of Reformation ideals and key avenues of critique of the papacy and the Roman church.2

Similarly, scholarly dialogue surrounding the rise of naturalism is diverse and multifaceted. The rise of philosophical and scientific naturalism is a long and drawn-out process, with varieties of permutations and contributions from scientific and philosophical authorities alike, including the importance of Newton’s mechanistic views of the world in the seventeenth century, as well as the rise of philosophical materialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth

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centuries. Scholars tend to understate the impact of humanism on naturalist modes of thought, yet the importance of the individual is closely related to the elevation of empiricism over established authorities. As mentioned, the emergence of naturalism is not a direct effect of humanism, yet the broader trajectory of early modern thought and culture, including the importance of naturalism in art, speaks to the growing desire to incorporate and utilize direct observation of the world rather than focus on received authorities and received knowledge.³

But it goes too far to say that naturalism itself emerged in the Reformation because of humanism. Naturalist modes of inquiry would not assume their fully-developed character until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, those thinkers most akin to naturalists in the sixteenth century still tended to embrace modes of thought and inquiry that valued and integrated previous sources of authority. Rather than discarding prior sources, these figures tended to both embrace established forms of knowledge and attempt to integrate and elevate new findings. As a result, as their scholarship developed, they addressed different endeavors and questions than what came before, even if some of their results looked similar. It would be more appropriate to say that in the sixteenth century, those thinkers who developed the boundary between humans and non-humans cultivated an attitude of proto-naturalism, in which emerging scientific inquiry remained somewhat distinct from theological concerns, yet was also not wholly divorced from it either. Proto-naturalists and early modern medical thinkers embraced modes of thought that elevated both direct observation and a version of common sense. Accordingly, they rejected supernatural explanations for things for which they could find natural explanations. At the same

time, these thinkers continued to embrace the importance of the spiritual in their observations, affirming the created order and providing a stronger, firmer response to perceived transgressions of the boundary. In other words, we may be able to speak of a naturalist “turn” not in the sense of a person turning themselves in a new direction; rather, we may talk about a turn in the same way that we talk about a boat shifting direction- slowly and seemingly imperceptibly at first, but with a clearly new direction.\footnote{The idea of a naturalist turn in early modern scholarship exists already, but has been used in a few varying ways. Primarily, it has referred to the rise of empiricism and the views of a mechanical universe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the accompanying shifts in the philosophy of science. The same idea still assists us conceptually, however, with the rise of proto-naturalism. For more about ideas of a “naturalist turn,” please see Robert Westman, \textit{The Copernican Question}; Catherine Wilson, \textit{Kant and the Naturalistic Turn of 18th Century Philosophy} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Jonathan Tsou, “Philosophical Naturalism and Empirical Approaches to Philosophy,” in \textit{The Cambridge Handbook of Analytic Philosophy}, ed. Marcus Rossberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Werner Callebut, \textit{Taking the Naturalistic Turn, or How Real Philosophy of Science is Done} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).}

We will explore a few different pioneers of proto-naturalism and natural philosophy that emerge in the sixteenth century, and examine how they each contribute to the development of the boundary between human and nonhuman. Those thinkers and figures include Conrad Gessner, Andreas Vesalius, Johann Weyer, Ambroise Paré, Caspar Peucer (1525-1602), and Lycosthenes (1518-1561). Their contributions include proto-zoology, interventions surrounding human vivisection, medical interventions regarding bodily transformation, and contributions to understanding monstrous creatures and misbirths. Each of these figures speaks to the growing consensus in the early modern era that despite the acceptance of previous authorities, scientists and natural philosophers should prioritize direct empirical observation.

**Humans and Animals: Conrad Gessner and Andreas Vesalius**

To address the gradual shift in the understanding of non-human beings, we must first start with the explicit shifts in approaches to animals among the early forerunners of naturalism and zoology. The broader general shifts contribute not only to theological modes of thought, but also
more broadly to naturalistic modes of thinking about animals. Over the course of the sixteenth century, consideration of non-human animals broadened from creatures to be learned about from previous authorities to a broader, documentable part of nature requiring direct and comprehensive observation, with importance after the Reformation that crossed confessional boundaries. The first key figure to consider in this respect is Conrad Gessner.

Conrad Gessner

Gessner’s background and broad circle of contacts in life help us to understand his influence. Gessner was born in Zurich in 1516. While born into poverty, his family sent him to live with his great uncle for schooling and for greater opportunities to hone his evident talents. His education spanned not only natural history and the sciences, but included stints in Bourges, Paris, Strasbourg, and Basel studying theology and ancient languages. Moreover, his studies and work took him about broadly, as his scholarship included travel and direct observation of flora and fauna for his copious scholarly contributions. While his work took him to various locales, however, the most consistent place which might be considered home for him was Zurich, where he not only taught Aristotelian physics at the Collegium Carolinum, the predecessor to the University of Zurich, but where he also served as the city physician and practiced medicine. This course of education was the more formal rolling seminar for theological and philosophical education, established under Zwingli. Like other natural philosophers, including Paracelsus, Gessner taught and lectured not only on the theoretical, but also the practical, influenced by observation and practice.

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Gessner’s contribution to the animal boundary can be felt in a few key areas. First of all, it is important to note that Gessner did not merely focus on the study of animals in a natural lens. Rather, Gessner challenged the boundary by providing a broader approach to universal knowledge. Where others before him focused on knowledge as universal insofar as it is holistic, Gessner pioneered the field of bibliography, suggesting specific divisions between areas of knowledge and fostering patterns to organizing knowledge distinct from his predecessors. Early twentieth century scholarship about library science even praises Gessner’s importance for library science. Christian Bay hailed Gessner as the “founder and father of the art [of bibliography]”, describing him as “by temperament and education a scientist,” and praises his Bibliotheca Universalis for elaborating the principle “nullus enim liber tam malus est quin aliquando conducat aliqua ex parte, quod etiam Plinius visum est.” Gessner pioneered the field of bibliography, writing a broad assortment of works in which he categorized ideas, figures, and creatures, essentially creating large, well organized lists. Anja-Silvia Goeing specifically identifies apart from the Bibliotheca Universalis that Gessner in his later years wrote De Anima, a work on the soul that served as a textbook, somewhat in the tradition of loci communes (commonplace books), but with an emphasis on copious citations not in alphabetical order, but according to specific divisions of knowledge. De Anima is a crucial example of Gessner’s approach. It is functionally a textbook, meant to be read from front to back and detailing the five senses of the human body. It also incorporates copious lists of references and assumes that

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7 J. Christian Bay, Conrad Gesner (1516-1565), the Father of Bibliography, 54. “For no book is so bad but that it may sometimes offer something useful in some part, as was evident even to Pliny.” Bay references how Gessner carries forward the work of Pliny, the first naturalist, into the sixteenth century, in part through the inner life of humanism propelled by the Reformation.)
students may read material apart from the textbook, making the reading of the original Aristotle not strictly necessary to gain a sufficient introduction to Aristotle’s teaching on the soul.8

Gessner advances the conversation about natural philosophy, and indeed about broader fields of knowledge, closer toward a modern notion of empiricism. Sixteenth and seventeenth century thinkers like Paracelsus and other natural philosophers often tended to align their observations with a preconceived metaphysics (sometimes in alignment with received wisdom) rather than crafting a metaphysical framework based on eyewitness observation. Gessner’s approach is not only about describing, but also about the forms of classificatory knowledge that help to identify and craft new metaphysical and empirical models of nature. This approach toward classificatory knowledge signals a shift from the old guard of natural philosophers and begins to identify empiricism for its own sake rather than empiricism feeding into a preexisting framework.9

Gessner was not alone in this approach, as his circle of colleagues included humanists like Theodore Beza, as well as other proto-naturalists like Crato and Pier Andrea Mattioli,10 but his instinct toward classifying knowledge is the most evident of his circle and pushes along

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10 Hubert Steinke and Martin Stuber, “Medical Correspondence in Early Modern Europe: An Introduction,” in *Gesnerus* 61 (2004): 139-160. While letter writing is an important aspect of understanding early modern scientific exchange, we will leave examination of those letters to other scholars who observe the preexisting scholarly networks of medical correspondence. See Fred Kim, “Avoiding Plague;” Hubert Steinke and Martin Stuber, “Medical Correspondence in Early Modern Europe;” Hannah Marcus, *Forbidden Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and Censorship in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).
toward the importance of reproducible observation. Gessner was a prodigious letter writer and wrote to his patients as well as other natural philosophers. As Fred Kim details, in one letter in particular, Gessner lambastes Paracelsus for various forms of heresy and immorality. While the current focus is on his views on animals, his letters clearly offer a lens into his theology that indicates a devout Christian faith. He expresses his discomfort with Paracelsus’s ideas. Important for our purposes, Gessner objects to Paracelsus’s theology not solely from his theological works, but rather from the implications of his scientific writings. As Fred Kim writes, Gessner viewed Paracelsian medicine as driving a wedge between Christ’s spiritual and physical beings, which led to a rejection of Christ’s divine nature.11 This theological attitude helps to inform our understanding of Gessner’s overall project regarding the classification of knowledge and the understanding of animals. Gessner does not consciously embrace the project as a way of challenging the established order of creation, and in practice, his theological positions are in the mainstream. Gessner affirms not only Christ’s divinity, but also the broader created order, in which humans are still the pinnacle of God’s creation, albeit not the only creatures capable of attesting to the glory of God. 12

Gessner’s epistolary communications are informative about his personal views regarding theology, and help to understand how he understood himself and his own work. Despite being

11 Fred Kim, “Avoiding Plague: Medical Debates on Plague and Contagion in Early Modern Europe,” (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2019), 163-164. Gessner essentially accuses Paracelsus here of engaging in Nestorianism; this was primarily in response to Paracelsus’s medical writings and not regarding animals, but important nevertheless.
12 James Fujitani, “Simple Hearts: Animals and the Religious Crisis of the Sixteenth Century,” (PhD Diss., University of California-Santa Barbara). Fujitani convincingly argues about the role of the Reformation in advancing a challenge to the anthropocentric order; however, his work overstates the general theological landscape of Reformation theology regarding the image of God and views the challenge as far more abrupt than it emerged in practice. Regarding Gessner, however, Fujitani addresses the concept of the hierarchy of animals with some strength. Yet Fujitani’s argument about how small creatures for Gessner and others reflected the broader glory of God’s creation only impinges upon the hierarchy among animals, but does not impact the anthropocentric order. Fujitani anticipates the acceptance of challenges to anthropocentrism, but overstates its importance for sixteenth century theologians.
firmly ensconced in the Reformed milieu of Zurich, Gessner did not write for the broader public about his theological ideals. While his theology animated his response to figures like Paracelsus, his writings on natural history did not stray outside of the mainstream in any obviously heterodox ways. While his work would later end up on the Index of Prohibited Books, it was not due to his own heterodox ideas per se, but more the inclusion on his classificatory lists of books that were also on the Index. The inclusion in Historiae Animalium of a long list of both Catholics and Protestant sources was in part a reason for its official condemnation and ban. However, despite his inclusion on the Index, Catholic scholars as well as Protestant scholars made use of his approaches to classification of knowledge. The use of Gessner by figures across the confessional divide is attested to in scholarship. Copies of Gessner are found in the libraries of various Jesuit scholars, and in one instance identified by Hannah Marcus, includes an anonymous Roman censor from 1590 who used woodcuts and information from Historiae Animalium, but blotted out Gessner’s name from the top of the page by pasting a printed slip with the words pietate doctrina cut out from another text. In this case, the image was of a moose, and the censorship of Gessner’s name reoriented the focus to the image on the page. Similarly, while ending up on the Index, the Biblioteca Universalis remained on the anonymous Roman censor’s list of books that would be appropriate post-expurgation of heretical authors. The Biblioteca Universalis remained on a list of books to be purchased for the Secretary of the Congregation of the Index at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1601.

Historiae Animalium

The next key way in which Gessner contributed to the shift in the human-animal boundary was in his actual observations and approach to writing about animals in Historiae

13 Hannah Marcus, Forbidden Knowledge, 31. Gessner faced skepticism as a result of his affiliation with Zwingli.
14 Ibid., 55-57.
Animalium. Gessner’s distinctive feature as a writer and pioneer of Protestant natural philosophy lay in his attempt to organize all of nature through direct observation and evidence. His efforts were certainly among the first to consider this as a comprehensive project; however, he did not directly observe each species that he described, with several entries remaining brief and without images, indicating his lack of direct observation. However, when he lacked personal direct observation, he supplemented his entries with copious research from existing sources. For instance, while he likely never saw a giraffe in person, he built his descriptions of giraffes and camelopardalis on the most recent and reliable written sources. In fact, it may be more accurate to describe Gessner’s approach as not about his own direct observation, but about direct observation more broadly construed, as Gessner regularly sought to attribute images of animals to witnesses and correspondences, yet also retaining texts with contradictory or false textual descriptions as part of a broader “depository of knowledge.”

His proto-zoological work, Historiae Animalium, demonstrates this approach. Historiae Animalium is a monumental undertaking, representing an attempt to complete a universal history of animals, compiling everything ever written about the animal realm. It consists of four volumes: the first volume discusses viviparous quadrupeds, the second discusses oviparous quadrupeds, the third discusses birds, and the fourth discusses aquatic animals. The resulting work was massive, with over 1000 pages in the first volume alone. Yet as Gessner makes clear, the purpose of the work was not narrative, but referential. Gessner viewed his work as a library.

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15 Sophia Hendrikx provides an example of this, in which Gessner obtained accounts of observation of fish from external written sources and accounts of fishermen. See Sophia Hendrikx, “Gessner’s taxonomical skill exhibited in his discussion of Felchen,” in Conrad Gessner (1516-1565): Die Renaissance der Wissenschaften/The Renaissance of Learning, eds. Urs Leu and Peter Opitz (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 607-614.
16 Ibid., 558.
17 Sachiko Kusukawa, “The Sources of Gessner’s pictures for the Historia Animalium,” in Annals of Science 67.3 (July 2010): 303-328; see 303.
18 Ibid., 304. Gessner began a fifth volume on serpents, which was published posthumously.
reference book, to be perused from time to time, and for easy access to information. Entries were
grouped by the type or family of animal, and each section was alphabetically ordered for easy
access. But in seeking a comprehensive approach to the knowledge of animals, Gessner’s work
encompassed not only natural elements of animal behavior and physiology, but also moral and
literary significances, including etymology, names, epithets, proverbs, and symbolism. This
distinguishes Gessner from the older bestiaries, whose focus was primarily moral and didactic,
and not to provide accurate information about the animals. Yet the work was also not intended as
solely a sort of textbook; rather, Gessner aims to relate everything ever written about animals,
including potentially exotic or fictional creatures from both ancient and recent sources. 19
Kusukawa also notes that the result of this variety of approaches means that, as Brian Ogilvie
says, the field of natural history “developed in the Renaissance out of humanist, philological
investigations.” 20

As a result, the work itself was comprised of a variety of different sources, but with the
goals of comparing findings from sources over the ages and demonstrating the reliability of some
knowledge. Conflicting accounts were not a problem for Gessner, who explains in the preface
that broad agreement among different sources from different eras testified to their reliability.
Gessner’s preface lays out the rationale behind the Historiae Animalium, stating clearly that the
goal was not to provide specific explanations about animals, but to provide all of the available
evidence about animals in one place for easy reference. 21 Gessner seeks to draw from all and any
manner of sources to support his research, including ancient sources, recent sources, and his own

19 Conrad Gessner, Historiae Animalium, volume 1, (Zurich: Apud Christ. Froschoerum, 1551), 1v-2r. Accessed through Hathitrust. See also Kusukawa., 305.
20 Kusukawa, 306.
21 Conrad Gessner, Historiae Animalium volume 1, 2v.
observation. Gessner embraces the wide variety of available sources, including all sources old and new: philosophers, doctors, philologists, poets, historians, and any other authority, whether Latin, Greek, German, Italian, or Gallic. Personal observation may be important to Gessner, but its importance does not undermine the significance of written sources for him. Both Pinon and Kusukawa adamantly emphasize that Gessner’s attempt at a comprehensive study of animals was inconceivable in a world without printed books. Moreover, Gessner emphasized the importance of utilizing images for the study of animals, but his preference was to supply all pictures \textit{ad vivum}, or “as from the life,” by either having drawn them himself or accepting pictures from trustworthy sources and friends. Still, at the end of the preface, he acknowledges the difficulty of his undertaking, but notes that in spite of its difficulty, it is also a beautiful project, which he hopes to leave to posterity as a work in itself, not as something which is remembered for any specific doctrines or teachings, which are scant in the text. Gessner’s own conception of the work and of his own role is not as a teacher of new ideas, but as a presenter of existing evidence about animals; in short, Gessner is engaged in the art of observation rather than speculation.

Moreover, Gessner’s preface clarifies that in orienting his focus on recent and direct observation where possible, and not automatically prioritizing ancient authorities, he is not

\begin{itemize}
  \item Gessner, \textit{Historiae Animalium} volume 1, 1r-1v. “Primum igitur non mirum est magnum evasisse Volumen, in quod omnia omnium, quotquot haberi potui ante nos de animalibus scripta summo studio referre conatus sim; veretum inquam et recentiorum, philosophorum, medicorum, grammaticorum, poeta, historicorum, et cuiusuis omino authoru generis; nec eorum duntaxat qui Lateine aut Graece, sed quorundam etiam qui Germanice, Gallice aut Italice lucubrationes suas aediderunt.”
  \item Sachiko Kusukawa, “The Sources of Gessner’s Pictures for the \textit{Historia Animalium},” 307; Laurent Pinon, “Conrad Gessner and the historical depth of Renaissance Natural History,” 251.
  \item Gessner, \textit{Historiae Animalium}, vol 1, 1r-v. See also Kusukawa, 307.
\end{itemize}
claiming any sort of broader reflection on final causes of animals. Gessner’s work is a sharp break with the Aristotelian philosophy of final causation of animals, in which animals exist for specific purposes rather than simply existing in an organic fashion. In breaking from any reflection on final causes, Gessner propels a vision of the natural world that allows room for the diversity of species to abound in a fashion more interesting than their simply existing for the benefit of humanity in an anthropocentric structure. While Gessner does not overtly challenge the anthropocentric model here, he does plant the seeds to challenge it by removing animals from discussion or categories of final causes, allowing them to exist without particular reason or final cause; in this sense, Gessner is not Aristotelian, even while he is open to parts of Aristotle’s method. Moreover, Gessner’s work is in some ways animated by his view on the human soul, which he used to challenge Aristotle’s hylomorphic view of the soul. Gessner’s commentary *De Anima* provided commentary on the engagement between the human senses and the soul, proposing his own priorities and views on the soul in a way aligned with the Reformed Swiss tradition, with a focus on human experience of senses as linked to the soul and an emphasis on classification and comparison. Gessner’s focus in this instance on the function of human organs and senses is a solid indication of the approach he takes toward the created realm.

However, Gessner does use other sources to point to his view of God’s role in the animal realm immediately prior to the copious animal entries of *Historiae Animalium*. Gessner includes a small section from the book of Job, from the end of chapter 38 into chapter 39, on the care and providence which God extends to animals. In the passage, God finally intervenes to explain to

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27 Gessner, *Historiae Animalium*, 1r-1v. See also Kim, Pinon. Gessner avoids reflection on final causes and moves toward a method that values both authority and personal observation. The humanist method allows the discarding of certain elements while retaining the overall method.

28 Anja-Silvia Goeing, “Reading Books in Natural Philosophy: How Conrad Gessner’s Commentary on ‘De Anima’ (1563) was Annotated and Interpreted,” 69-74.

Job the source of his suffering, and to address the calamities which have been visited upon Job’s life. God’s revelation comes in the form of a long speech, in which God points out to Job the limits of his knowledge. The passage included by Gessner entails God questioning Job about the mysteries of the animal realm. God questions Job about whether he can answer how God provides for and cares for all his creatures, from the lion to the raven to the ostrich, horse, hawk, and goat, and other creatures. In one verse, God questions the role of the unicorn, asking whether Job will entrust the wild ox to serve him and labor the earth.\textsuperscript{30} The inclusion of Job certainly reflects that it is one of the richest passages in the Hebrew Bible regarding animals. However, the inclusion of the passage also tells us much about Gessner’s view of God’s sovereignty. The inclusion of Job implies that despite the expansive nature of his project, Gessner did not consider everything as necessarily able to be known or understood. He is pointing to God’s overall sovereignty over the world, including the animal realm. While Gessner still endeavors on this project helps to emphasize this project as theologically inflected, he is not engaged in the notion that everything can be known about these creatures either physically or theologically. He does not reject God’s involvement in the world or his power in the world, but places even the study of the natural world as a theological task (even when he does not comment theologically on it). This helps to illustrate an important element of his preface: that natural history promotes a greater understanding of God and admiration for God, and that his project emphasizes natural history as a religious act that places humanity back in the role of classifier of nature, in the vein of Adam, Noah, and even Pliny.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. Voletne MONOCEROS tibi servire,a ut morari ad praepepe tuo? An loro insum vincies, ut sequendo te sulcosatraro imprimere, aut glebas frangere velit? Ausisne illi credere, tantoque roboare praeestante tuum permittere labor? Sperabisne messem tuam ab eo convenenda, ut condatur in horreum.” The term MONOCEROS has been translated as “unicorn” or “wild animal,” but has typically been translated in the context of this passage as “wild ox.” It literally translates to “one horned,” and has been used to describe fabulous creatures.

\textsuperscript{31} Gessner fol. A 4v. See also Karl A.E. Enenkel, “The Species and Beyond: Classification and the Place of Hybrids in Early Modern Zoology,” in Zoology in Early Modern Culture: Intersections of Science, Theology, Philology, and
Gessner even goes on to pair the selection from Job with a separate writing from Theodore Gaza (CE 1398-1475), a Greek humanist and notable translator of Aristotle. The passage paired with Job details various thoughts about the usefulness of the study of animals, not only for doctors or scholars, but also for the cultivation of character and poetry. In pairing Job with an Aristotelian, Gessner both pays homage to a foundational figure and asserts the importance of his project without necessarily adhering to the ultimate perspectives of Aristotle. Gessner is not approving Aristotle’s view of final causes so much as simply acknowledging the broad utility and beauty of the project. The process of understanding animals undeniably helps one to understand being human as well, and to live better, which includes not only the larger animals, but even the smaller animals, which are not to be despised or ignored. Gessner clearly situates his work not only in the long tradition of attempts to catalog all animals, but also in the theological and philosophical project of comprehensively understanding creation as spiritually edifying.

As previously stated, Gessner’s project represented an attempt at providing a universal accounting of the knowledge surrounding the entirety of the animal realm. However, Gessner’s actual classificatory methods evolved over time. The first volume of Historiae Animalium listed his animals in alphabetical order, while dividing the creatures between different types (quadrupeds, reptiles, fish, birds). He does not use any sort of classificatory system comparable to a Linnaean division. That Gessner used alphabetical order was not necessarily new; as Enenkel points out this was common also to Albertus Magnus and Isidorus of Seville. The first

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33 Gessner, Historiae Animalium, R4-V4
34 Ibid.
edition organized the entries alphabetically, which clearly seems geared toward utility of the book as a reference.\textsuperscript{35} However, by the second edition of his work in 1560, he did pay more attention to classification.\textsuperscript{36} His influence spread throughout Europe, as attempts to translate and spread entries about animals persisted, most notably in the German \textit{Thierbuch} and the English \textit{History of Four-Footed Serpents and Beasts}.\textsuperscript{37}

The importance of Gesner’s approach is illustrated most effectively through examination of entries from the \textit{Historiae Animalium}, which serve to demonstrate his view of animals not as symbols, but as physical organisms. Gesner’s entries about animals throughout the four volumes of the \textit{Historiae Animalium} demonstrate a shift from the approach of bestiaries, which viewed animals primarily for their symbolic and moral significance, to a new approach aimed primarily at understanding animals through observation. One creature we can see this clearly with is the giraffe. The giraffe, also known as the \textit{camelopardalis}, was well known in antiquity, but somewhat less known in Europe during the Middle Ages, with medieval sources about the giraffe being quite rare.\textsuperscript{38} Gesner drew his sources on the giraffe from a wide variety of figures, with the bulk of its origin dating to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century with Thomas of Cantimpré, Vincent of Beauvais, and Albertus Magnus.\textsuperscript{39} However, Gesner seeks to encompass all known references to the giraffe, starting with the book of Deuteronomy, which includes the camelopard among the creatures permissible to eat. As Buquet notes, a large part of Gesner’s entry on the giraffe

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{35}] Ibid., 85-87.
\item[\textsuperscript{36}] Karl A.E. Enenkel, “The Species and Beyond,” 86.
\item[\textsuperscript{37}] Edward Topsel, \textit{The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents. Collected out of the Writings of Conradus Gesner.} London, 1658; Conrad Gesner, \textit{Das Thierbuch} (Zurich: Christoph Froschauer, 1583).
\item[\textsuperscript{38}] Thierry Buquet, “Notes on Gessner’s Giraffe. Bible, Sources, and Iconography,” in Conrad Gessner (1516-1565): Die Renaissance der Wissenschaften, 557-558. Buquet notes that the name of the giraffe comes from the Arabic \textit{zarafa}, and arrives in Italy in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. However, medieval commentators used multiple names for the giraffe, including \textit{camelopardalis}, \textit{anabulla} (a corruption of \textit{nabun} from Pliny), \textit{oraflus} or \textit{orasius} (a transformation of the Arabic \textit{zarafa}) and \textit{seraffa} (Albertus Magnus,) and eventually \textit{giraffa} by the end of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.
\item[\textsuperscript{39}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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involves philological investigation about the translation of the term *zemer* from Hebrew to Latin, siding with Hebrew scholars and against Luther’s interpretation of the *zemer* as an elk.

Following this, Gessner draws from a wide variety of sources to comment on puzzling issues with the giraffe. Gessner notes with some confusion the lack of unanimity as to whether the giraffe is edible, owed in part to the complex and contradictory translations of the very term *camelopardis* to mean either giraffe or mountain goat. Thierry cites Konrad Pellikan’s commentary and translation, noting Gessner’s reluctance to use Pellikan’s work and a preference for using his own translation and reasoning, based largely in geographic reasons related to the word *zemer* and the typically chosen Latin words used to translate it like *alces*.40

![Figure 8: Conrad Gessner, “De Camelopardali”](image)

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40 Ibid., 558-560. See also Gessner, *Historiae Animalium*, 1551, vol. 1, r/v 160-162.

Gessner’s philological inquiry is just one clue into the growth of his inclinations toward direct observation. As indicated by the philological debate, consensus surrounding the giraffe in medieval and early modern Europe was not a given in part due to the scant nature of sources and observation. Regardless, Gessner incorporated the relatively scarce amount of medieval sources alongside a broad array of classical sources, as well as records of medieval pilgrims and travelers, including the accounts of Marco Polo.42 Gessner aims as much as possible for direct observation of the giraffe over mere postulations, including efforts to provide observation even in cases where he was not the observer. Thus, the Historiae Animalium includes images copied from other sources in many instances. The giraffe was copied from Bernard von Breydenbach’s Die heyligen reyssen gen Jherusalem, a travel record from 1488. Gessner aimed to include his images made ‘ad vivum’ rather than from imagination. But in cases where he did not have a full image of an animal, he made composites from multiple images and offered descriptions and a record of ownership of the sources of the images.43 Ultimately, though, most of Gessner’s contribution is in the way of compiling and coordinating established sources on the giraffe, yet offers room for his own investigations and assessments as well. Yet absent from his observations are any major moral judgments on the animal’s symbolic value; what concerns Gessner is the question of what is and how to understand both terms and images of the giraffe.44

Gessner on Sea Creatures

Another example of Gessner’s approach can be seen in his discussion of sea creatures and serpents. In volume 4 of the Historiae Animalium, Gessner discusses the distinctions and blurred lines between a variety of sea creatures. Gessner raises the issue of sea creatures which blur the

42 Ibid., 566.
lines between animal and monster. Throughout volume 4, Gessner discusses these creatures regarding their physical characteristics, that is, whether they are similar to land creatures “because they conceive and give birth in the same manner, and have lungs, kidneys, a bladder, testicles, and a penis, and the females a womb, ovaries, and teats.” However, Gessner also includes creatures that do not count under those qualities, including turtles, whales, and sea-monsters. Gessner balances a desire to be fully inclusive of all information available with a desire to operate from direct observation; as a result, he does include animals whose veracity is disputed. Gessner is willing to depart from the traditional taxonomical features he describes when potential observation or discussion would include reference to the creatures; thus, as Hendrikx notes, Gessner’s reliance on sources like Rondelet and Olaus Magnus (1490-1557) results in the inclusion of the accounts of sea monsters and whales. Gessner’s inclusion of these accounts was not uncritical; rather, Gessner’s engagement with Olaus Magnus’s work included both direct quotations and Gessner’s own comments, in which he critiqued features in the images and speculated that the images were devised from the description of potential observers and not strictly made ad vivum. Hendrikx notes here that Gessner’s criticism of Magnus is much harsher than his criticism elsewhere, and he is clear to identify Magnus’s images as important from a literary sense and not a strictly scientific sense. At the same time, Gessner also includes references to sea monsters which he learned about from popular culture and folklore, which supposed that they emerge as monstrosities from the sea and as counterparts to earthly creatures. In the case of the sea lion, for instance, other authors in addition to Gessner, like Paracelsus and Jacob Ruf, view the folklore as testament to the “plasticity of nature” and as an addition to

natural observation. Gessner tends to avoid focusing on symbolism. However, he does not completely dismiss folklore, but subordinates it to empirical observations. It plays a potential contributing factor to taxonomical distinctions, albeit not a determinative one.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{Figure 9: Conrad Gessner, “De Monstro Leonino”}\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Gessner on Serpents}

Similarly, in volume 5 of the \textit{Historiae Animalium} (published posthumously in 1587), Gessner’s discussion of snakes and serpents makes an overt argument for the existence of dragons. The German edition of the volume, the 1589 \textit{Schlangenbuch}, includes both attempts at direct observation and incorporation of folklore about dragons. Gessner traces the evolution of the dragon from classical literature to the early modern era. His inclusion of both classical and medieval sources contributes to his overall perspective, in which he applies the term dragon to

\textsuperscript{48} Gessner, vol. 4, 519-520. See also Sophia Hendrikx, “Monstrosities from the Sea,” 133.

\textsuperscript{49} Gessner, vol. 4, 558.
both quadrupedal and bipedal snakes attested to by travelers and taxidermists.\textsuperscript{50} Gessner also agreed with classical sources regarding the existence of winged Egyptian snakes, which he identified as dragons, and which contributed to the notion that dragons breathed fire.\textsuperscript{51} Gessner directly states that winged dragons arrive in Egypt from Arabia, and that they “poison the country and cause much damage.”\textsuperscript{52} Gessner identifies not only a wide variety of witnesses, but also potential specimens, including Girolamo Cardano, who wrote that he had “seen in Paris five dried-out flying snakes that were found at different times but were similar in shape. They had two feet and such small wings (he says) that in his estimation they would have barely been able to fly…No human could have created or cut these figures so identically.”\textsuperscript{53} Gessner’s work became crucial and influential for later encyclopedists and set the stage for the focus on attempts at including sightings of dragons.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
Gessner’s simultaneous critique and inclusion of Magnus regarding sea monsters is important to understanding Gessner’s method, which aims at elevating direct observation over modes of description without excluding other modes entirely, so long as they are rooted in some form of observation. Similarly, Gessner’s discussion of dragons does not discount the potential of their existence, even as he seeks to prioritize potential observations regarding a more fantastical creature. Gessner does not discount folklore or reference to established authorities.

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entirely, but does subordinate them to direct or eyewitness observation, and provides his own critiques in cases where observations are not rooted in direct observation. In this way, Gessner’s views can be viewed as an important variation on the medieval bestiary. Where bestiaries advanced a specifically moral and symbolic view of animals accompanied by some direct images, Gessner represented the movement of early modern proto-naturalists focused on prioritizing direct observation over moral explanation, but without completely eliminating the utility of moral symbolism from the broader scope of knowledge. Moreover, while Gessner’s attempts at prioritizing direct observation are not always convincing (as his discussion of dragons), he does attempt to put these creatures into their overall context and does not accept folklore uncritically or without an attempt to verify the actual existence of creatures.55

In summary, Gessner’s approach does not actively seek to diminish humanity’s role so much as to affirm the place of animals within the created order. Gessner attempts to affirm the place of animals in their own right, not as symbols, but as actual physical organisms. As a part of this come his subtle attempts to emphasize humanity as both unique and a key part within nature. Gessner’s extensive observations on animals undermine the boundary between people and animals in some ways by emphasizing the links between humanity and animals, but he still affirms a certain order of creation in which humans have a special place.

Gessner’s Influence

Gessner’s far-reaching influence can even be observed after his death in the reflections of his colleagues. In a poem published in 1565 as an obituary poem, famed humanist and Reformed theologian Theodore Beza laments Gessner’s death, writing that his death was accompanied by the mournful songs of birds and the growls of ferocious beasts. He writes that the flora and the

55 Ibid.
fauna mourn Gessner: “Wild snakes mourn you with heartbroken hissings, and as many as earth’s hidden creatures dwell underground in the deepest caves. And the vigorous plants mourn you…and the bright flowers mourn you.”\textsuperscript{56} Beza extols Gessner’s contribution as filling an almost spiritual function, writing that “nature in its entirety weeps for the faithful priest of its rites.” Much can be gleaned from this poem. Most evident is that Beza views Gessner primarily through the lens of his contributions to natural philosophy, with the implicit addition that he tends toward an argument in which humans are a broader part of the created realm, even while the hierarchy of creation persists. Additionally, the sheer breadth of creatures included in Beza’s obituary poem makes an implicit argument about what Gessner considered the scope of nature. Beza writes that animals of sea, air, and land mourn Gessner, but also earth’s hidden creatures. Gessner’s quest to document all of creation (similar to his quest to document all books in his \textit{Bibliotheca}) provides a framework in which even less documented creatures must be observed in order to write and understand them, making received sources not enough. But the inclusion of the hidden creatures of the world opens up to monsters and monstrous creatures being considered less as separate from the rest of the animal realm and more as animals capable of observation.\textsuperscript{57}

The overall impact of Gessner on the naturalist turn within early modern thought is thus quite significant. While Gessner affirms the created anthropocentric order, he still poses new challenges to the division between humans and animals. Gessner illuminates the potential glory of God in and throughout all creation, elevating the importance of even the smallest creature. At the same time, he also focuses on the mundane and practical details of animals, undermining and equating some of the specific differences between human and animal natures.\textsuperscript{58} Gessner’s unique

\textsuperscript{56} Anja Silvia-Goeing, “Conrad Gessner in Verse: Renaissance Natural History and the Swiss Reformation,” \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas Blog}.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. See also Pinon.
\textsuperscript{58} Fred Kim, “Avoiding Plague, 173-174.
method combined received sources with direct observation, helping to undermine the previously established reliance on received sources and metaphysical speculation, instead pushing forward broader approaches that used direct observation to craft metaphysical ideals. His desire to catalogue all of creation ends up supposing creation as something which can be comprehensively catalogued, rather than something that also retains a sense of mystery. And Gessner’s focus on direct observation over postulating about final causes of animals helps to propel a view of animals as residing within God’s creation, but as primarily natural beings who are significant both in their own right, and for their contribution to human history. Additionally, the incorporation of images functioned in a new way, allowing witnesses to take priority, with the combination of Latin names and documentary images helping to define a new natural order for the animal world. Gessner’s elevation of observation results in Gessner also more firmly emphasizing the theological and cultural context of humanity’s place within the created order. This approach serves to break down the holistic approach to knowledge, and as animals become more classified apart from humans, the boundary between humans and non-humans becomes sharper, even as the broader created order grows to emphasize humanity’s place within it.

*Andreas Vesalius*

Gessner’s work captured the notion that animals existed as organisms and not merely as signs for humans. At the other end of the spectrum, Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) offered a similar perspective and approach toward humanity as organisms within nature.

Vesalius’s background offers some indication of the contributing factors toward his work. Born in Brussels (at the time a part of the duchy of Brabant in the Habsburg Netherlands),

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Vesalius’s education began in Louvain in the arts in 1529. In 1533, he left Louvain for Paris to study medicine and pursue a career in the military. Paris proved formative to his education, offering the chance to study Galen while also pursuing a growing interest in anatomy, which involved constructing skeletons and examining bones from local cemeteries. However, due to progression of hostilities between France and the Holy Roman Empire, Vesalius returned to Louvain to complete his studies. Following this, he took up a post in surgery at the University of Padua, which necessitated a continued interest in anatomy. As a result, Vesalius pursued dissection of human cadavers, for the goal of understanding the human body.\(^\text{60}\)

Vesalius’s emphasis on human dissection was doubly notable because of his focus on direct observation. Vesalius conducted dissections of human cadavers himself. Moreover, as a teacher, Vesalius encouraged direct observation and dissection for his students as well rather than solely relying on the work of Galen or other scholars. His work was not intended as a direct repudiation of Galenic medicine, which revolved around humoral theory, yet his work helped to overhaul the entire edifice of early modern medicine through direct observation of human dissection.\(^\text{61}\) His findings prompted him to publish a textbook in 1543 on human anatomy including his discoveries, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (*On the Fabric of the Human


Body in Seven Books). The massive undertaking examined all parts of the human body and included illustrations of his observations and work.⁶²

Vesalius represents an Erasmian, Renaissance spiritualizing tendency, but applied to human anatomy and medicine. Inherent in Vesalius’s work and method is a humanist project, emphasizing empirical observation over the established authorities of a topic without aiming to explicitly reject those established authorities. His writing emerged at a very different cultural moment than had even been encountered by Erasmus in the late fifteenth century, yet was clearly influenced by his approach and style. Yet his work, despite being utterly transformative for early modern medicine, was not undertaken with any intent of forceful repudiation of Galen or of confronting established medical authorities.⁶³

The preface to the Fabrica is especially useful for understanding Vesalius’s positioning and role. Vesalius addresses the preface to Charles V, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Vesalius argues that education has not only been hindered, but has also been the victim of “excessive scattering…that serve the demands of each art,” as well as a wide distribution of skills among practitioners so that “those who have set themselves goals of competency embrace one part of their art to the neglect of others…never attaining their proposed goal, they constantly fall short of the true construction of their art.”⁶⁴ Addressing this perceived issue with regard to medicine, Vesalius argues that his project represents a continuation of the heritage of learned physicians and surgeons such as Hippocrates (~460-370 BCE) and Galen (129-216 CE). Whereas current generations have lost the skill of working to advance the art of healing, figures

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⁶² Jacqueline Vons, “Sous l’autorité d’André Vésale ou l’écriture de la science,” in Toward the Authority of Vesalius; 55-64.
like Galen and Hippocrates boasted of their enjoyment of “working with [their] hands and how zealously [they] did so.” Vesalius indicates that despite his challenge to Galenic medicine, he views himself not as a break from ancient physicians, but as a continuation of their overall project.

However, this does not mean that Vesalius was hesitant to address the shortcomings of Galen or of established medical authorities. Vesalius addresses head-on the conflict with Galen. Vesalius writes that based on his own observation and knowledge of received medical authorities, it seems that, “By Jove, to a serious dissector, there is nothing they seem less likely ever to have done than dissect a human body.” Vesalius openly states that most surgical authorities based their anatomical designs on Galen, and that they even go so far as to add to their own books “the claim that their writings are completely patched together out of the opinions of Galen and that everything of theirs is Galen’s, even going on to say that if anyone should find fault with their views, he would thereby be judging Galen himself guilty of error.” Yet Vesalius’s criticism is just as much about the established authorities that received Galen as it is about Galen himself; Vesalius notes that Galen regularly corrected himself. Vesalius doubts that Galen failed to dissect humans himself, but he takes greater issue with surgical authorities who put extensive effort into defending Galen, to whom “they have all so entrusted their faith that no doctor has been found who believes he has ever discovered even the slightest error…much less that such a discovery is possible.” Vesalius attempts to carefully thread the needle between not offending doctors who esteem Galen and attempting to correct his work.

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 3v
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
states, “I have decided not to criticize the false doctrines of Galen,” but actively implores doctors to “gradually soften their position out of a love of truth, and let them trust their not ineffectual eyes and powers of reason more than the writings of Galen.” Thus, Vesalius situates himself as beholden to Galen’s influence and example and as in the same continuum as Galen; at the same time, he rejects unfettered loyalty to established authority, explicitly arguing for empirical and direct observation.

Moreover, Vesalius makes his goal and his esteem of his project explicit. He responds directly to the controversy over his use of detailed illustrations of his human dissections, and the worry that his inclusion of the images would dissuade or deter medical students from conducting dissection themselves. His response is that the decline of teaching dissection to young students necessitated his inclusion of pictures and commentaries on medical dissection. At the same time, he acknowledges that the pictures are helpful for those who will lack the opportunity to engage in human dissection, and that the goal of the pictures is to “be of use to as many people as possible in an extremely abstruse and no less arduous enterprise.”

Vesalius hints at his spiritual and religious convictions in his final plea for the book. Little is known about Vesalius’s religious convictions. There is no indication that he followed any of the Reformed confessions, and his studies traversed both Protestant and Catholic regions. But at the end of the preface, Vesalius implores Charles V to receive his book and to allow his efforts, despite his young age and his break from Galen, as a way of allowing himself to “ponder the construction of the most perfect of all creatures, and take pleasure in considering

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 4r.
the lodging place and instrument of the immortal soul—a domicile which, because it admirably resembles the universe in many of its names, was fitly called a microcosm by the ancients.”

Thus, Vesalius not only affirms the benefit of his project for education, but the worthiness of his project because of the unique place of humanity in creation. Vesalius implicitly places himself well within the Christian tradition by affirming the importance of humanity as the pinnacle of God’s creation. At the same time, he also positions himself as affirming the distinction between the macrocosm and microcosm as important in understanding nature. Moreover, it merits mention that Vesalius chose Johannes Oporinus (1507-1568), a Protestant printer with reputed Lutheran sympathies, to publish the Fabrica, a choice that resulted in the ecclesiastical censorship and control of the Fabrica and points to Vesalius’s own willingness to buck established authorities.

Several key examples illustrate how Vesalius transforms human anatomy to revolve around direct observation of the human body, and in doing so moves humans closer to animals in status. One key way that he does this is his discussion of the human brain. Vesalius titled the seventh book of his work “Devoted to the brain as the seat of the animal faculty and to the sense organs,” and in it he disputes ancient medical thought on the brain.

73 Andreas Vesalius, On the Fabric of the Human Body, 4v.
75 Daniel Margocsy, Mark Somos, and Stephen N. Joffe, The Fabrica of Andreas Vesalius: A Worldwide Descriptive Census, Ownership, and Annotations of the 1543 and 1555 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 121. The Fabrica underwent some degree of censorship primarily due to its depiction of sexual organs and its publication by Oporinus; yet the censorship on the basis of its publication was partial and typically involved expurgation of the publisher’s name and broadly controlling the circulation of the work rather than outright bans. See Margocsy, 121-130.
In the chapter titled “The brain was constructed for the soul-in-chief, for our senses, and for movement dependent on our own whim,” Vesalius disputes ancient thought that placed “the animal principle in the heart or saying that the nerves take origin from the heart.” He argues that one still has to consider the “source of sensation, of voluntary movement and of the soul-in-chief (by means of which we imagine, reason, and remember).” Brinkmon notes that Vesalius’s concept of the “soul-in-chief” comprises the basic parameters of what humans now know as cognitive control, or the “ability to actively create an information picture that guides behavior.

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76 Andreae Vesalii Bruxellensis, scholae medicorum Patauinae professoris De humani corporis fabrica libri septem (Basil: Johannes Oporinus, 1543), 605. Accessed via Hathitrust on April 12, 2024.
based on experience and knowledge.” Vesalius describes how his medical training, steeped in Aristotelian thought, described the varying functions of the regions of the brain; however, he characterizes these descriptions as a “figment of the imagination of the people who had never seen the brilliance of our creator in the fabric of the human body.” In correcting the findings, Vesalius compares the human brain to the structure of animal brains, and writes that he finds “virtually no difference from the human brain in respect of the conformation of parts…We do, however, know that there is a difference in size according to the amount of reason they seem to possess: man’s brain is the largest, followed by the ape’s, the dog’s, and so on, corresponding to the amount of rational force that we deduce each animal to have.”

While Vesalius does not dispute human superiority to animals, he does make clear that he views humanity through an empirical, natural lens. Vesalius’s observations indicate that he views the distinction between humanity and animals as not necessarily one of kind, but one of degree, especially visible through the size of animal brains. Yet as Brinkmon demonstrates, he does not go so far as to say that animals possess the capacity for reason but goes up to the brink of saying that animals possess reason by simply demonstrating the similarity between human and animal brains. Again, Vesalius does not dispute the uniqueness of the image of God in humanity, and also does not really address the uniqueness of the image of God or the soul. But in making the physical comparison between human and animal anatomy and hinting at the possibility of animal cognition and rationality, Vesalius does break with established scientific authorities and implies potential alternate meanings of human distinctiveness from animals, a major shift from locating humanity’s distinctiveness solely and primarily in its capacity for reason. Vesalius is aware that

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 1592.
his findings could imply a degree of animal cognition not understood before, and indeed could threaten established belief.\textsuperscript{82}

Notably, in this section, Vesalius consciously distinguishes between scientific questions and theological questions. The issue is how he positions himself in relation to the established theological authorities regarding the relationship of humans to other animals. Vesalius indicates an awareness that his questions can threaten faith. However, he is careful to say that despite the clear similarities between human and animal brains, and despite the “degree of impiety that my description of the function of the cerebral ventricles (so far as the powers of the soul-in-chief are concerned) will bring to beginners whose minds are not yet strong in our most holy faith: this point can be pondered by those who have learnt that the brains of quadrupeds closely resemble human brains in every respect, despite the fact that, on the basis of the teachings of theologians, we deny to the animal brain all power of reasoning and indeed a rational soul.”\textsuperscript{83} Vesalius argues this case very pointedly, indicating the disconnect he perceives between theological authorities and his own personal observation. Vesalius is clear that he does not think it is logical to deny the results of direct observation, and he scorns theologians who make much of themselves, even going so far as to say, “I cannot say anything about the areas in the brain occupied by the faculties of the soul-in-chief (though the people who nowadays like to be called theologians and consequently think that there are no limits to their powers allot these as well).” But beyond the pointed rhetoric about theologians is a more fundamental element of his approach: Vesalius consciously distinguishes between the theological approach, which is reliant upon authority and

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 1592.
convictions about the soul, and the empirical approach, which is focused strictly on observation and less concerned about any threats to doctrine.\textsuperscript{84}

This consciousness of approach, coupled with his reticence to outright dispute theological findings, to some degree explains Vesalius’s avoidance of discussion of the soul itself. Conducting human vivisection aims at comparing brain function between humans and animals, but inherent theological and doctrinal problems mean that to actually perform vivisection would risk heresy and theological controversy. Vesalius says that the student who is “well versed in dissection of the dead and not infected by any heresy well understands what a mess I should get myself in if I were to say anything about vivisection of the brain, much as I should like to do so.”\textsuperscript{85} Vesalius centers his approach in empirical observation and distinguishes it from the findings of theologians. However, he does not back away from the fact that his empirical observation itself sometimes challenges established precedent from non-scientific thinkers. In challenging the notion of humanity’s uniqueness in cognition, he also challenges the notion of human uniqueness in the animal realm more broadly.

However, despite his own reticence to address the issues of the soul, Vesalius impacts the theological discussion through his use by other theological writers, especially Reformed and Protestant writers. David Cellamare in particular notes Vesalius’s extensive appropriation and use by Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560). In his \textit{Commentarius de anima} and \textit{Liber de anima}, Melanchthon includes anatomical material from Vesalius, and seeks to integrate anatomy into the theological discussion. For Melanchthon, including anatomy in his work is important to help determine the scope of psychology, and to help define the soul and the extent of the Aristotelian

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid. Vesalius also demonstrates a degree of anti-clericalism in his work, which seems to point to sympathies with the Christian humanist project (and potentially to Reformation critiques of the clerical class).
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
division between body and soul. Melanchthon embraces Luther’s view that it is important to understand humanity in both body and spirit, and while the Gospel reveals God’s nature, so does philosophical knowledge, and the nature of the soul is observable “once the organs of the body are described.” While Melanchthon originally embraced an Aristotelian vision of the soul as well as Galen’s vision of the relationship between soul and bodily functions, he revised the *Commentarius* as the *Liber de anima*. Utilizing the findings in the *Fabrica*, Melanchthon pushed for a new view in which the body’s parts worked for the sake of the operations of the soul. His descriptions in the *Liber de anima* centered discussion on the human body, and he utilized Vesalius’s anatomical findings to produce his understanding of human nature, and (less successfully, to Cellamare) to describe the soul’s operations in terms of the body. Thus, Vesalius’s project proved instrumental to furthering the broader humanist project by prompting new theological consideration of the nature of the soul.

Ultimately, Vesalius’s massive undertaking had broader ramifications beyond discussion of the human soul. Vesalius’s work undermined Galen as the authority for medical practice while reviving consideration of surgery and medicine as linked and emphasizing the importance of direct observation in medicine. But underlying his challenge to medicine is an implicit consideration of the human body as another organism within nature, with comparisons to animals as normal and informative for medicine. Such descriptions for Vesalius do not undermine the unique status of humanity, but they do call into question what specifically is unique about humanity (albeit Vesalius declines to describe what precisely that is). Vesalius represents the

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87 Ibid., 409.
88 Ibid., 410.
other end of the spectrum from Gessner; whereas Gessner emphasizes the place of animals as worthy of knowledge in their own right and not merely as symbolism (i.e. important as biological creatures), Vesalius emphasizes the degree to which humans also exist beyond the symbolic realm and can be considered alongside animals in the physical realm. Vesalius puts humans and animals quite literally on the same operating table and illuminates how the distinction between humans and animals is primarily ontological rather than biological because humans exist as a part of nature.

The next portion of this chapter discusses how the boundary is addressed from the perspective of transformation, as medical thinkers unravel the notions of animal transformation and lycanthropy.

**Humans and Transformation: Johann Weyer on Lycanthropy**

The second element to consider regarding changes to the boundary between human and non-human involves the specific intersection between human and animal through bodily transformation. If the tendency to consider humans and animals on somewhat more equitable lines (albeit not entirely as the same) emerges concretely through Conrad Gessner, then the tendency to reject a fluid boundary between human and nonhuman creatures in theological discourse emerges concretely through physician and demonologist Johann Weyer.

**Johann Weyer**

The background of Johann Weyer, the famed physician and demonologist, is complex, and thus makes assessment of his personal theological views somewhat complicated. While Weyer was born into a Lutheran family in Grave of the Netherlands, his education occurred in Latin schools in Leuven and Antwerp, and he would eventually work for a Catholic Duke in Düsseldorf. Moreover, despite living in Germany for most of his life, he always affirmed his own
Dutch heritage, retaining both the influence of his heritage and of the Reformed Protestantism that remained ascendant in Dutch Protestant circles. He is described throughout scholarship as a Lutheran, a Catholic, an Erasmian Protestant, and a Spiritualist; however, he is undoubtedly at the least remembered for adopting a reformed position consistent with Protestant critiques of superstition, and is emblematic of this rationalizing metaphysic that would become common among Protestant critiques of superstition.  

The major work for which he is known, *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, is encyclopedic in its scope, and represents Weyer’s efforts to refute the physical reality of witchcraft, arguing for alternate, natural and medical explanations for experiential accounts of witchcraft.

Weyer’s skeptical attitudes emerge from a Reformed perspective and critically inform his views on both animals and physical transformation. Weyer himself establishes a clearly divided boundary between people and animals in and throughout *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, drawing this perspective from a sense of God’s sovereignty and worthiness of worship. In Book One, Weyer addresses idolatry among ancient people. He identifies several groups as a part of what Virgil called the “monstrous gods of every sort”. He identifies animals as a part of this worship, listing the objects of worship for ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Ethiopians, and many other groups. The key element of these idolatrous practices was the worship of animals or of gods with animal characteristics. He writes that the ancient Egyptians worshipped several animals collectively, including the ox, dog, cat, hawk, ibis, and scaly fish; however, he also identifies

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91 It is worth noting explicitly the *prima facie* similarities between Gessner and Weyer, who both, in addition to embracing the naturalist view, also adopt methodologies that aim for comprehensive treatment; while Weyer does not operate in the same classificatory mode, *De Praestigiis Daemonum* is encyclopedic in scope and exhibits copious references to both contemporary and ancient examples throughout to make its conclusions.

animals worshipped by specific groups, including the Cynocephalus by the Hermopolitans, the
eagle and the sheep by the Thebans, and an image of Mithras in the likeness of a lion by the
Persians.\(^93\) Weyer identifies the worship of these creatures as idolatry and an affront to God, and
identifies the ways in which the Devil is active and powerful in leading people from God.
However, his main objection is not the horror or the worship of something other than God;
rather, the key element animating his critique is twofold. First of all, Weyer writes that the
worship of all of these gods by the “uncivilized peoples,” including the ancient pagans, Slavs,
Vandals, Goths, and Turks, is actually worship of demons.\(^94\) These “monstrous and detestable
forms of idolatry” spread from pagan groups to the people of God. Weyer views the worship of
animals and the notion that they possess some sort of divine status as participation in demonic
idolatry.

However, the second element that animates his rejection of a special place for animals is
a motif that pervades Weyer’s work: a mockery of the stupidity of these practices. Many of the
practices he references are laughable, including the practice of making offerings to Apollo
Parnopaeus to protect cheese and foods from mice, “for in the Boeotian tongue ‘Parnopion’
means mouse.”\(^95\) But Weyer also refers to the idolatry of the Greeks, “whose foolishness and
superstition are second in notoriety only to that of the Egyptians.”\(^96\) Weyer’s vehemence that this
idolatry is appalling to God and leads away from worship of God coexists with a sense that these
practices are just as foolish as they are dangerous. He highlights the danger of these practices by
discussing the ancient practices of human sacrifice, which emerge not from the “eternal mind,”
but from “the demons who from the beginning of the universe, in hatred of the true God, raged

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{94}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., 15
\(^{96}\) Ibid.
monstrously against the minds and bodies of men at every opportunity and took their greatest
delight in killing numbers of human beings.” But he also highlights how these practices are
used by the Devil and demons to delude foolish people, writing that while these practices are
bestial and barbaric, they ultimately represent tricks by demons to harass humanity, and are
therefore ultimately foolish. He writes that similar efforts are used on people in Christian Europe,
as demons use tricks to convince people of silly things. Weyer lists among the “mocking tricks”
of the Devil how “the simple are convinced that, unless tower bells are purified and sanctified by
holy baptism…and by exorcisms…then those inanimate, dead objects will be removed from the
towers by the Devil.” There is an underlying bemusement to Weyer’s writing, referring to the
ancient practices of idolatry as essentially the same as those employed by the Roman church, in
which foolish people are convinced of things that go contrary to basic sense. Weyer also uses the
example of the sound of bells. Common sentiment holds that the sound of the bells referenced
above ring at the Ember Days (the twelfth hour of night during the solemnity of the Nativity), but
that those who hear them die. “So it happens that the foolish are on their guard against the sound
and no one is found who has heard it; and if anyone should hear it, it would doubtless be a case
of his being deluded by the demon because of his impiety. And yet, in the meantime, the people
are held back by these mockeries of our religion.” Without diminishing the actual power of
demonic entities, Weyer mocks these practices as superstitious and ridiculous.

Weyer extends this critique to notions of animal intelligence. Weyer does not outwardly
dispute the notion of animal intelligence; however, he does implicitly critique notions that animal
intelligence extends to the level offered by humans. In response to the “marvels” of animal

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97 Ibid., 20.
98 Ibid., 23.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 60-61.
behavior that “sometimes appear to be of demonic origin,” Weyer is hesitant to attribute to demonic ability that which can be explained by natural ability, training, or trickery. For instance, in response to the case of Egyptians who “teach camels to dance to special musical measures,” Weyer explains that camels are conditioned to associate the sound of music with the experience of being forced to walk over heated floors of a bathhouse or steamroom. He describes a similar trick perpetuated involving an account of Muhammad training a dove to peck at food in his ear in order to pretend that the dove was the Holy Spirit “announcing to him the secret counsels of God.” Weyer attributes the success of the trick to demonic delusion on the crowd, and identifies a similar account in which Muhammad trains a bull to bring the Koran through a crowd directly to Muhammad’s hands as a way of elevating the divine status of his teachings.101 In both of these cases, Weyer’s overall point is clear: while demons have power to delude or deceive people, they do not have the direct ability to cause feats of animal intelligence, which are better explained as feats of delusion perpetuated by humans. Moreover, it is far more sensible to find natural or practical explanations for such deceptions rather than to resort to supernatural explanations.102

A key part of understanding how Weyer’s views challenge and change the contours of the human-nonhuman boundary is his view of physical transformation; in particular, we must consider his views on lycanthropy. Weyer participates in a broader discourse on accounts of

101 Ibid., 61. Weyer’s association of Islam with demonic elements is not out of character for this era, but it is worth noting that Weyer identifies Islam directly with both idolatry and demonic delusion. This reference is especially odd, however, as Weyer only makes one further reference to Islam, identifying the Islamic rejection of divination, writing that “Mohammedan law…condems every divining art and states that God alone knows the future and that which is hidden. Those who follow this discipline of divination are therefore arrested from time to time and put in chains by Mohammedan inquisitors.” See Weyer, Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance, 489.

102 Weyer’s skepticism is so pervasive that some scholars suppose he did not even believe in the demonic feats he discusses; rather, he argues for demonic influence as a way of exculpating those accused of witchcraft by offering other sources. Weyer clearly prefers explanations involving human behavior or medical problems rather than resorting to explanations of demonic intrusion; it is not a question of the reality of demonic ability, but rather a question of whether demonic entities actively interfere in the world.) See Hans de Waardt, “Witchcraft, Spiritualism, and Medicine: The Religious Convictions of Johan Wier,” Sixteenth Century Journal 42.2 (Summer 2011): 369-391.
people claiming to transform into wolves. In these accounts, the subjects claimed to have met the Devil and, in exchange for offering obeisance and worship, received either a special belt or an ointment which, when used, enabled the user to transform into a wolf. That person then, in their new lupine state, committed all manner of violent crimes, including assault, rape, murder, and cannibalism. This phenomenon of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries resulted in numerous criminal prosecutions of individuals who claimed such transformations, with the trials garnering great attention from the public and prompting public pamphlets. One particular case in Germany, that of Peter Stubbe, involved a man accused of lycanthropy, and who confessed to making such a deal. He claimed to have terrorized a local town, committing acts of cannibalism, and eventually being sentenced to a gruesome death on the wheel. His case resulted in a corresponding pamphlet, which received great attention in the British pamphlet market.

Weyer participates in a vigorous debate over the nature of lycanthropy, divided among several perspectives. The first perspective is that of Catholic demonologists who reject the notion of physical transformation out of ecclesiastical tradition and theological strictures. Figures including Nicholas Magni (1355-1435), Jakob of Juterbogk (1381-1465), and Heinrich Kramer (1430-1505), reject the notion of physical transformation as counter to theological truth because it supposes that the Devil, who proposes these transformations, has creative power over matter. These figures draw especially upon the *Canon Episcopi*, the medieval canonical text which served as a formal statement against witchcraft and sorcery. The *Canon Episcopi* rejects the notion of physical transformation as delusory, stating;

103 This does not include the accounts of witches who claimed status as familiars and claimed to transform into cats as familiars. One famous account in the *Malleus Maleficarum* discusses a case in which a day laborer was attacked by three large cats while chopping wood. He repelled the cats and was arrested afterward for wounding three women, whom he later realizes were the cats. See *Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and transl. by P.G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 156-157.
When [Satan] has captured the mind of a miserable woman and has subjugated her to himself by infidelity and incredulity, immediately transforms himself into the species and similitudes of different personages and deluding the mind which he holds captive and exhibiting things, joyful or mournful, and persons, known or unknown, leads it through devious ways, and while the spirit alone endures this, the faithless mind thinks these things happen not in the spirit but in the body.  

Such creative power is under the sole purview of God. Rather, these authors suppose that the experiences of these physical transformations represent not actual physical transformations, but delusions perpetrated by demons. Drawing on the Augustinian heritage to explain the parameters of demonic power, this perspective explains that physical objects cannot be actually transformed by demons, but that the appearance of transformation is a delusion, as “the Devil sets himself in motion in front of people in a body he has taken from elsewhere.” Kramer in the Malleus is insistent that accounts of people transforming into animals are most likely cases in which workers of harmful magic use delusion to trick people into believing they have transformed into animals. He references the account by Gervaise of Tilbury in which a day laborer, while chopping wood, was attacked by three large cats. In his attempt to repel them, he struck one cat with some force; however, three days later, the man was arrested for “inflict[ing] wounds on three highly respectable women of this city.” Kramer explains that these three women were witches who, upon being pushed to do this by spirits, allowed themselves to be carried by evil spirits, who created the illusion of transformation and “obliged to attack the laborer.” Such

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107 Ibid., 158. This account from the *Malleus* is also cited later by the Italian demonologist Silvestro Mazzolini Prierias; See also Hammett, “Animals, Transformation, Agency, and the Elite-Popular Divide: The Centrality of Augustine and Tradition in Christian Beliefs about Transformation from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era,” 47.
accounts underscore the nature of late medieval objections to lycanthropy as physically impossible, but experientially very real and prompted by demonic power. Protestant preacher Geiler von Keysersberg (1445-1510) goes even further, referencing both fifteenth century demonologist Johannes Nider and the *Canon Episcopi*. Keysersberg rejects physical transformation as outside the power of demons, meaning that the solution to the problem was either illusory transformation or rapid local motion.\(^{108}\)

The second perspective is somewhat more limited, but argues for the possibility of physical transformation even within an Augustinian framework. The most famous of these authors is sixteenth century demonologist and jurist Jean Bodin (1530-1596). In response to the question of “Lycanthropy and Whether Spirits can Change Men into Beasts,” Bodin writes that lycanthropy and witchcraft trials historically proved the reality of witchcraft and lycanthropic transformations.\(^{109}\) Bodin reinterprets the *Canon Episcopi* to allow the reality of physical transformation, so long as the transformation is limited to the person’s physical appearance and does not touch the inner reason, which is the essence of the *imago Dei*. He suggests that there is no evidence that God “did not give this power to Satan…the power He gives to the Devil is unknown to men.” Maryanne Horowitz points out that part of Bodin’s acceptance here relies upon a fundamental misinterpretation of Augustine, accepting his reference to Apuleius in *City of God* as proof that demons can transform humans into animals; but Bodin is so opposed to the


notion of transformation as merely delusory that he utilizes tradition in favor of transformation.\textsuperscript{110}

Weyer’s contribution to this debate represents an adjustment and a corrective to the first perspective. Weyer rejects the notion of physical transformation, but points to the experiences themselves not as demonic delusion, but rather as a product of medical illness. Weyer responds to the notion of the “imaginary transformation of man into beasts” with benign amusement.\textsuperscript{111} Without outright rejecting the possibility or reality of demonic power, Weyer argues that such experiences of lycanthropy or physical transformation into animals are better explained as disease. Weyer argues for lycanthropy not as physical transformation (which he eyes with something between benign amusement and outright disdain), but instead argues for an explanation of lycanthropy by humoral theory. Weyer argues that lycanthropy is the product of an excess of melancholy bile in the humors.\textsuperscript{112} Weyer accepts the possibility of people truly believing that they have been transformed into wolves; however, his explanation of what actually occurs in these cases is quite different. Weyer argues that rather than interfering with physical matter, the Devil might interfere with the humors and spirits. People relating accounts of their own physical transformation might “believe themselves transformed into wolves,” but may be “found lying somewhere immersed in deep sleep by the efforts of the devil.” In these cases, the

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 128. See also Johannes Dillinger, “‘Species,’ ‘Phantasia,’ ‘Raison’: Werewolves and Shape-Shifters in Demonological Literature,” in Willem de Blecourt, “ in Werewolf Histories, ed. by Willem de Blécourt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Michael Hammett, “Animals, Transformation, Agency, and the Elite-Popular Divide,” 53-54. The perspective described here is somewhat separate from the perspective described in chapter 4 of Gerald of Wales, in which physical transformation is held as possible and as testimony to God’s power in the world. See the Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, containing the Topography of Ireland, and the History of the Conquest of Ireland, transl. Thomas Forester (London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), 79-81.


\textsuperscript{112} This explanation is also adopted by other figures, including Reginald Scot in Britain and Martin Delrio among Catholic demonologists. Delrio himself is the only Catholic demonologist to outright use Johann Weyer (that is, quote extensively without acknowledgment), although he critiques him for his skepticism on witchcraft overall. See Martin Delrio, Disquisitionum Magarum Libri Sex, 3 vol., 6-7. See also Investigations into Magic, ed. And trans. By P.G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 36-37 173; See also Hammett, 57-59.
Devil might be more active in impacting one’s physical health, for “the task is not difficult for the Devil when he sets in motion the humors and spirits suitable for these illusions, especially in the case of persons whose brains are oft impaired by mists of black bile.”

The implications of Weyer’s perspective are dramatic. His discussion of lycanthropy as deriving from medical origins is not wholly unique, nor is his disdain and amusement at arguments for physical transformation, as Reginald Scot (1538-1599) had also expressed this skepticism in Britain. As we see in and throughout *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, Weyer’s perspective is one inflected by Reformed skepticism and early naturalism in the sense that he looks for natural over supernatural answers. Weyer gives explicit explanations of the logical repercussions of his views on the trials of people for lycanthropy, and his critique even implicates classical accounts of lycanthropy. Where many scholars had presumed ancient authors to be writing about actual events, Weyer explicitly refers to ancient literary accounts as “fictions and poets’ lies,” and identifies stories of transformation as referring not to actual instances of transformation, but the “mores of the people involved,” with violent people being described as descending into “depraved behavior.”

However, where he distinguishes himself from his peers in this perspective is in delineating the legal ramifications of this perspective. Despite not being a jurist, Weyer weighs in on the ramifications of his ideas. If the crime of lycanthropy is not actually possible, then logically it should not be punished, because the confession for such a crime is by its very nature

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113 Johann Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De Praestigiis daemonum*, 193. Martin Luther also contributes somewhat to this perspective on transformation. While he is not a skeptic, Luther writes about witchcraft as primarily illusory, and says that illnesses caused by witchcraft are themselves illusions. Luther points to the account of St Macarius, and forcefully rejects the notion of animal transformation, for “an ox must remain an ox, a man must remain a man.” Yet the story of Macarius illuminates that the saint is immune to the delusions of the demon who prompts the “transformation.” See *Luther's Works*, “Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4, 1535, vol. 26, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 190.


115 Johann Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance*, 341-342. See also Hammett, 57.
illegitimate. The same implication goes for witchcraft and any other crime explained by demonic intervention rather than actual physical observation of a criminal act. Inherent in this critique is a repudiation of the dominant legal approaches to witchcraft in the sixteenth century. While Weyer holds that demonic ability may be a part of the background of such crimes, he argues that demonic intervention is not the direct cause or factor to consider. If demonic delusion is limited primarily to the impact on the human body via the humors, then holding people accountable for their actions while ill from humoral imbalances does not make sense. This argument serves as a critique of the Malleus Maleficarum, not only regarding the mere existence of witches, but also regarding the required punishment for crimes. Weyer depicts Kramer as out of the mainstream of theological authorities regarding these punishments, which would allow repentant heretics the opportunity to be reintroduced into the Christian fold.

Weyer is emphatic about ensuring that the punishment for crimes resulting from humoral imbalance be mitigated. He makes extensively emphatic arguments against the death penalty for witchcraft. Weyer spends a significant portion of book six of De Praestigiis arguing against the death penalty for witchcraft as both cruel and nonsensical. He first spends a large section detailing the arguments of the Church Fathers against the death penalty for heretics, arguing that despite some willingness to employ the death penalty, figures as disparate as Augustine, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, and St Martin did not wish for the death penalty to be applied to heretics, but that “we should censure and condemn. But we should spare the individuals involved and pray for their salvation.” He does the same with Erasmus’s views on the punishment of heretics, demonstrating that Erasmus opposes the “aid of Caesar” in responding to heretics, and

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117 Ibid., 535.
118 Ibid., 524-528.
even thinks that “one should examine whether monarchs possess the right to decree the death penalty, no matter what the transgression.” To Weyer, the death penalty for heresy is prone to abuse, allowing monarchs and authorities to pursue potential errors in trial and decide verdicts arbitrarily. He writes, “It is much harsher to consign a man to the flames because of rubrics which the monks compose at will…so that there is nothing which is not open to slander at some point.” Such a trial ends up being “conducted insincerely and illegally by informants, prosecutors, and judges who are all monks; sentence is pronounced in the prison by three priors, with two monks as witnesses, and the funeral pile is prepared. The prince whose law is alleged as pretext…is unaware of these things.” He concludes by pointing out that “Christ did not quench the smoking wick nor break the bruised reed.”

Weyer further burnishes his argument for medical treatment of lycanthropy through reference to the account of the Italian legal expert Andrea Alciati (1492-1550), who points to lycanthropy as among the problems of the “superstitious, the love-stricken, and the fantasy-prone, along with the ‘werewolves’ and the ‘dog-men’- all of whom are still cured by medications.” Alciati rejects notions that ascribe such cases solely to demonic activity without considering the delusion of the mind and the propriety of medical treatment, and even goes so far as to push beyond the Canon Episcopi, writing, “I myself would certainly assign more importance to Pontifical law and to the common interpretation made by the scholars of our country, than to those theologians, especially on a matter decided by the synod at the Council of Ancyra, when it says that such imaginings are imposed upon their minds by an evil spirit.”

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119 Ibid, 533.
120 Ibid., 533-534.
121 Ibid., 535.
122 Ibid., 537-538. Alciati is an Italian jurist; consulted on witchcraft by a bishop; writes in Paraerga for proper prosecution, but against witch’s sabbath and in favor of medical treatment if prosecution not used.
Weyer holds firmly that people who are plagued by such infirmities should be “informed with sounder doctrine, so that they may repudiate the demon’s delusions and pledge allegiance once more to Christ,” with the goal of restoring the offenders back into the “fold of Christ.”\(^{123}\) While acknowledging that he is not a judge or a jurist, and that many will disagree with his conclusions, he seeks to place himself within the mainstream of the argument. He does not reject that people should be punished for their crimes, only that the nature of the “crime” requires compassion, given the nature of the crime as impacting only the deluded and not harming any. He seeks a way out of the “usual atrocity connected with punishment…which has been practiced all too indiscriminately without a fair investigation into the truth and a careful weighing of the circumstances.”\(^{124}\) Yet Weyer also backs out of any potential future conflict over the issue, inviting those who “delight in such altercations devise nothing else against me in the future…they can expect no further response from me.”\(^{125}\)

Weyer’s perspective on the punishment of lycanthropy and witchcraft is a crucial element of understanding his perspective on the boundary between people and non-people. His insistence that lycanthropy is a medical issue, and not a spiritual one, speaks to his overall premise that the order of creation is clear, with a clearly delineated boundary between species. Weyer’s intervention is an attempt to offer a clearer explanation of accounts of violations of the boundary. Essentially all of the demonological writers on lycanthropy in particular align themselves within the Augustinian heritage on transformation and the human-animal boundary, with each seeking to take up the issue without explicitly discarding or opposing Augustine. Yet in proposing his medical explanations, Weyer propels a discourse that encourages more natural, common sense

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 541.
\(^{124}\) Ibid., 557
\(^{125}\) Ibid.
explanations, minimizing the role of the demonic or the supernatural within the natural realm. The boundary between species is created by God, and violations of that boundary are rejected because they are simply not possible within the purview of the world God has created. In that sense, Weyer emphasizes that while humans are created differently from animals, they are still emphatically a part of the natural realm, a detail often overlooked when considering the implications of violations of the boundary. Weyer affirms the power of past authority on the boundary while rearranging the order of importance, elevating direct observation to be at least on par with theological authorities. And in elevating observation to the power of authority, Weyer also highlights the potential impact of naturalism on consequences for people, taking the boundary from aspirational (guiding humanity to reject animalistic behavior) to just descriptive of the state of the world.

In short, Weyer is instrumental in pushing forward a more inflexible boundary between humans and non-humans, as well as a greater sense of the implications of the boundary (at least insofar as it regards transformation and witchcraft accounts). The third element of the impact of proto-naturalism on the boundary involves not human interactions with animals (whether through observation of animals or of transgressions of the boundary), but the idea of the monstrous human. We turn to the notion of marvels and misbirths as a manifestation of the naturalist turn.

**Humans and Monstrous Misbirths**

The final element of the boundary challenged by proto-naturalism deals with the relationship between the human body itself and the boundary. This is not so much a question of humanity within the boundary as a creature similar to animals (as with Gessner and Vesalius), nor is it a question about the fluidity or malleability of the boundary between species (as with
Weyer). Rather, this element of the boundary deals with instances in which the human body deviates from what would typically be understood as human—the category of monsters. Humans who were born resembling hybrid creatures or animals (so-called “misbirths”) or creatures who deviated from the norm in this way were often understood as monsters or marvels. Yet the understanding of monsters and marvels evolved over time, from one almost wholly oriented around their theological valence to one that defused much of the theological valence and replaced it with physical explanations. The key figure to understand in this regard is Ambroise Paré.

The view of sixteenth century thinkers regarding the notion of monsters was driven by two different factors. First, explorers and navigators accepted monsters as a part of the created world, striving to attest to and identify exotic creatures from around the world in travelogues and monstruaries. Sebastian Munster (1488-1552), for instance, the cartographer behind the seminal *Cosmographia*, included a wide variety of monsters and exotic creatures in his map of the world, including images of sea creatures and other monsters on a portion of the work published in 1545. To cartographers, the notion of actual monsters made some degree of sense in understanding the variety of creatures in the world beyond Christian Europe, but also proved a draw for their readership, who longed to see previously unseen creatures. The drive to explore in the early modern era thus not only opened new trade and navigation routes, but also opened up new knowledge of exotic creatures and monsters to the public.126

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In contrast, theologians broadly accepted monsters as a part of the world insofar as they existed by God’s power and purpose. However, while humans and animals enjoyed explicit purposes in Scripture, theologians made sense of monsters through specific interpretive strategies. Monsters existed in the world to communicate divine messages from God regarding both the state of the world and God’s overall desire for humanity.¹²⁷ This was especially relevant regarding monstrous births or misbirths, as they were known, with theologians echoing popular accounts of misbirths and providing interpretation in light of the concerns of the day.¹²⁸ Theologians often interpreted misbirths as positive exhortations for humanity to admire God’s sovereignty and offer praise, or they could function as warnings and portents against sin. This was especially relevant in the early decades of the Reformation, in which Protestant and Catholic theologians employed monstrous births, misbirths, and deformed animals as signs of divine disapprobation of the other side. One such example, the monk calf, was discussed by Martin Luther. He identified the image of a calf born with a formation on its skull resembling a monastic tonsure as a divine warning against the corrupt institution of the monastery within the Roman Church.¹²⁹

Moreover, theologians accepted monsters as real in ways that they did not initially accept boundary transgressions like lycanthropy. Similar logic applied, however, as theologians often accepted the existence of monsters as possible within (and a testament to) the limits of God’s power. Theologians often interpreted accordingly, with monsters accepted as an attempt to convey divine messages to people. In short, monsters were typically interpreted not as creatures

¹²⁷ Surekha Davies, “The Unlucky, the Bad, and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,” in The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous, 52-54.
¹²⁸ Ibid., 58.
¹²⁹ Surekha Davies, “The Unlucky, the Bad, and the Ugly,” in The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous, 52-54.
in nature, but as symbols and messages, serving as signs and portents. The emergence of
monsters in early modern publications often intersected not only with local medical events, but
also with the broader world. Monsters and monstrous races were thought to originate outside of
Europe, and to reach Europe as exotic beasts. For instance, Natalie Lawrence discusses how
exotic creatures reached Europe as decaying specimens or skeletons and were “made” into
monsters in European natural histories. The presentation of new creatures as monsters allowed
them to retain greater commercial value while also explaining potentially problematic
characteristics. Yet their status as primarily symbolic did not negate their very real existence
in the world. The source of monsters, however, was usually linked by theologians to explicit
notions of sin’s entry and lineage in the world. As described in chapter 2, theologians pointed to
monsters as emerging from and being derived from the lineage of Cain, whereas the rest of
humanity derived from the lineage of Seth. However, the lineage and source of monsters was
generally overlooked in favor of their theological and symbolic importance.

If we revisit the work of Paracelsus, we can see an important example that illustrates this.
Paracelsus’s discussion of nymphs, pygmies, and sylphs is important not only for expanding
what he viewed as possible within creation, but also as providing teachings about the divine
source of these creatures not in natural terms, but in theological terms. Paracelsus demonstrates
the ways in which non-Adamic creatures still fit within the purview of God’s sovereignty and
creation, not as supernatural creatures, but as creatures within nature according to elemental
theory. This tendency within Paracelsus is critical because it shows Paracelsus attempting to

130 Natalie Lawrence, “Making Monsters,” in Worlds of Natural History, ed. Helen Curry, Nicholas Jardine, James
Secord, Emma Spary, 94-111.
131 David Gilmore, Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and all Manner of Imaginary Terrors (Philadelphia:
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 47-52. Gilmore traces the lineage of this concept to Augustine, but also
untangles how discussion of monstrous creatures emerges in Europe between 900 and 1000 CE in the Liber
Monstrorum.
balance between viewing creatures as theologically significant, yet also viewing them as comprehensible within the natural world (however oddly Paracelsus defined the natural world). This contrasts significantly with the idea of humanity being created in the image of God.\textsuperscript{132}

Thus, the critical element of monsters prior to the seventeenth century was largely the interpretive traditions that formed surrounding them. The literature surrounding monsters in the sixteenth century was voluminous, focusing on German \textit{Wunderzeichen}, or miracle books. The proliferation of monster tracts and \textit{Wunderzeichen} incorporated monstrous births and misbirths typically being incorporated as part of the overall list of divinely influenced events meant to communicate specific messages. Moreover, it interpreted a perceived rise in monstrous births and monsters in Europe (as opposed to from abroad) as communicating divine pronouncements. Even beyond the confessional divides, in which Luther and Melanchthon’s Monk Calf and Papal Ass saw divine disapprobation of the Roman church, or of bishop Arnaud Sorbin’s (1532-1606) interpretation of misbirths as proliferating following Luther’s rise.\textsuperscript{133} Yet even apart from confessional opinions, authors of wonder books regularly interpreted not only misbirths, but also other natural phenomena as carrying divine implications. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park go to great lengths to demonstrate the importance of misbirths and miracle books as prompting an emotional response in the reader. Where this dissertation diverges is in revisiting Daston and Park’s initial viewpoint; while the broad tapestry of emotional resonance and response to monsters is important, it is also important to note the overall trajectory in which humanism


The division between monsters as prodigies or marvels permeated much of the literature, with typically Lutheran and Reformed theologians discussing how to interpret and understand the difference between the two categories. Christoph Irenaeus (1522-1595) wrote extensively in his tract \textit{De Monstris} about the meanings of the Latin word \textit{monstrum}, defining the term to mean “an unnatural, highly unusual, abnormal, horrible and abhorrent wondrous birth that issues either from a human or an insensate animal through God’s punishment and permission.” Soergel notes that Irenaeus draws from previously published monstrous births from other Lutheran theologians, including Job Fincel, Caspar Goltwurm, Lycosthenes, and Casper Peucer.\footnote{Philip Soergel, \textit{Miracles and the Protestant Imagination}, 148 fn 75.}

Conrad Lycosthenes and Caspar Peucer are especially notable among these figures. Lycosthenes, in his \textit{Wunderwerck} was one of the first to discuss the issues of etymology and philology that underlay monstrous births. He distinguished among omens, portents, prodigies, and wonders, affirming that misbirths fundamentally inhabit the realm of boundary
transgression. Yet he also affirmed that the actual experience of these events and figures was of little importance given the divine importance of monstrous births and misbirths. Soergel noted that while many misbirths had natural causes, it was difficult to ascertain the actual causes or rationale, but was important to focus on the effects and the significance. The effects include the emotional response divinely prompted by these creatures, whereas their utility included divining the future and anticipating the end times.  

Meanwhile, in his *Commentarius de praecipuis divinationum generibus*, Caspar Peucer postulates on the distinction between a monster as something showing God’s wrath and a misbirth that was merely a rare birth, but which carried no divine message. Peucer’s conclusion was that true monsters, having rare causes, “have always terrified human minds, overcome by presages of sad and calamitous events, and affected them with wonder and fear.” Peucer proposed that the distinction between prodigies and misbirths lay in the emotional response provoked, as prodigies not interpreted as warnings would provoke a sense of wonder rather than horror. Thus, Peucer leaves open the possibility that some misbirths are natural and not meaningful, and thus are less open to the sort of theological interpretations applied to other misbirths. However, others offer visions of transgressions of the boundary between people and animal and bear divine meaning into the human world. In the final chapter of his *Commentarius*, Peucer discusses the causes of prodigies, with the first cause related directly to God’s will and glory. However, the second cause comes at least in part from nature, in which the Devil meddles. Again, while Peucer tends toward a viewpoint of divine significance in these misbirths, he

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136 Ibid., 78-80.  
138 Ibid. See also Davies, “The Unlucky, the Bad, and the Ugly,” in *Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, 58-59.
affirms that at some level, there can be natural causes for some of these misbirths, which locates them away from transgressing the boundary. The transition on focusing from effects to causes helps to understand the transition toward a naturalist approach to monsters.\footnote{Caspar Peucer, Commentarius, 435-438.}

Both Peucer and Lycosthenes are significant in propelling these facets of understanding monstrous births. First, they affirm some natural causes for monsters. Second, they affirm that some monsters, in having primarily natural causes, have less divine significance and do not serve as meaningful. Moreover, in affirming that such cases are less meaningful, they divest them of the significance that a potential boundary transgression holds and locate them firmly in the natural realm as human, yet with animal characteristics. The theological questions about the connection of these misbirths to God is significant, though, as the sense that a human could be irreducibly disconnected from God illustrates the ways in which the human-nonhuman boundary is permeable. Yet these tendencies, while also peppered with emphases on the divine significance of most monsters, anticipate a more naturalist orientation toward monsters that affirms some level of divine influence, but prioritizes natural causes. This is especially prominent in the work of Ambroise Paré.

\textit{Ambroise Paré}

The French surgeon Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) is perhaps the key figure to understand the transition of early modern thought toward something starting to resemble the naturalism of the seventeenth century and beyond. Paré is generally accorded a place in the history of science for his contributions to medicine in military surgery, and as Kathleen Perry Long writes, he is regarded as an early adopter of empirical science.\footnote{Kathleen Perry Long, “Evil and the Human/Animal Divide: From Pliny to Paré,” \textit{Dialogue and Universalism} 1 (2014): 104.} Moreover, his own status as a respected
barber-surgeon of his day is attested to by his advance in 1554 from barber-surgeon to surgeon, his admission into the confraternity of Saint-Cosme, the Royal College of Surgeons, and by his eventual service for Charles IX and Henri III. But the totality of his contribution lies not only in his discoveries in early modern military surgery, but also in his adoption of a form of humanism and empiricism. Despite his lack of facility with languages (Pallister writes that he learned Galen from a French translation), Paré writes and conducts his work with an emphasis on direct observation and specimens. At the same time, Paré’s work also exudes a spiritual and theological quality. This quality is especially important for understanding this proto-naturalism as not necessarily having shed theological commitments yet Paré’s own theological commitments are unclear, as he was baptized and married in the Roman Church, but regularly made references to involvement in a Huguenot church. Ultimately, however, the specifics of his confessional ties are less important than his broader alignment with the humanist, proto-naturalist approaches (which are often accompanied by a less stringent, more Reformed approach to religious confession).

Ambroise Paré contributes to the discourse on monstrous births and misbirths in his 1573 book *Des Monstres et Prodiges*. The book serves as the second part of a two-part series of books on surgery, of which the first concerned childbirth; as such, it presents a valuable picture of Paré’s humanist tendencies and care for humanity. Moreover, his own value of empirical observation becomes evident throughout *Des Monstres*. While he acknowledges and argues for theological explanations as part of the overall picture, he clearly links and views monsters and

142 Ibid., xvi.
misbirths as fundamentally tied to biology and values natural and medical explanations over the theological. He ties monsters and misbirths to human reproduction and “questions of ‘scientific’ inquiry.”\(^{145}\)

Paré’s definitions of monsters and marvels manage to be rooted both in theological and natural reasons, but also connect these concepts due to their apparent opposition to the natural order. Paré defines monsters as appearing “outside the course of Nature (and are usually signs of some forthcoming misfortune),” while marvels happen “completely against Nature.”\(^ {146}\) However, Paré goes even further and identifies the distinction between monsters or marvels and “maimed persons”, including:

- The blind, the one-eyed, the hump-backed, those who limp or [those] having six digits on the hand or on the feet, or else having less than five, or having them fused together, or having arms too short, or the nose too sunken... or those who have thick inverted lips or a closure of the genitals in girls... or because of a more than natural amount of flesh, or because they are hermaphrodites; or those having spots or warts or wens, or any other thing that is against nature.\(^ {147}\)

Paré divides these categories as contrary to nature, but clearly makes gradations of that opposition, with monsters and marvels being completely opposite to or outside of nature, while “maimed persons” are clearly against nature (behaving or developing outside of typical processes), but occur more regularly or commonly and naturally. The distinction between “against nature” and “completely against nature” may be a fine one, but it is an important distinction for understanding Paré’s approach.\(^ {148}\)

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\(^ {146}\) Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, 3.

\(^ {147}\) Ibid.

\(^ {148}\) A brief aside about disability theory is important here, as the terms monstrosity and disability carry very specific meanings depending on the era. The importance of physical difference as delineating or implying difference of character, whether good (marvels or the exceptional) or bad (lame, deformed, misshapen). Categories of physical difference and disability often became conflated with monstrosity. Early modern understandings of disability often assumed a theological valence to the existence of the impaired person, a tendency which monster studies and disability studies scholars alike have begun to utilize and acknowledge. See Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman, “Embodied Difference: Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman,” in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the*
To illustrate of the kinds of malformations discussed by Paré, we can examine chapters 10 and 11, which both refer to misbirths which occur through some issue with the mother. In chapter 10, Paré refers to monsters which may be created “through the extreme narrowness of the womb.” The example he uses is that of a plant which grows in the ground near a rock, which “causes the plant to be twisted, thick in one part and thin in another: likewise, infants come out of the womb monstrous and deformed.”149 Chapter 11 presents the example of monsters that form as a result of the “mother having remained seated too long, having had her legs crossed, or bound her belly too tight while she was pregnant.” Paré is clear that this is an accident, and often occurs among women who work as seamstresses or weavers, and results in a child born “bent, hunchbacked, and misshapen, some having their hands and feet twisted.” He then proceeds to provide a description of a baby retrieved from the body of a dead woman, “she being sixty-eight years old and having carried it in her womb for the space of twenty-eight years. Said child was almost completely gathered up into a ball.”150 Paré’s descriptions here are matter-of-fact, and present these cases as physical abnormalities with physical causes.

Paré identifies a variety of potential causes for monsters, with three broad categories of causes- theological, demonic or diabolical, and natural. The first causes he lists are the explicitly theological reasons, which include the “glory of God” and “his wrath.”151 Paré identifies one of the causes of monstrous births, marvels, and physical disabilities as the advancement of the glory of God or a sign of God’s wrath. However, of the reasons listed in Paré’s book, these two

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149 Ambroise Paré, On Monsters and Marvels, 42.
150 Ibid., 43.
151 Ibid., 3.
reasons only take up the first two, and take a relatively small portion of the book. While Paré’s discussion of the wrath of God incorporates contemporary examples, in both of these cases, Paré’s coverage is brief and focuses primarily on Scripture. In chapter 2, “An Example of the Glory of God,” Paré refers to the account in the Gospel of John of the man born blind. In the account, Jesus is interrogated by his disciples as to whether the man’s blindness was caused by his own sin or that of his parents, with Jesus answering that it was “in order that the works of God might be magnified in him.”

Meanwhile, in chapter 3, “An example of the wrath of God,” Paré refers to monstrous and marvelous creatures which proceed from the “judgment of God, who permits fathers and mothers to produce such abominations from the disorder they make in copulation, like brutish beasts, in which their appetite guides them.” Paré then goes on to describe how various texts, including Esdras and Leviticus, detail the cause of monsters in the wrath of God against mothers and fathers who dishonor or disrespect God’s laws. Yet in placing the causes of monsters in “women sullied by menstrual blood,” Paré also integrates a biological element to his theological explanation. This intent is clear that Paré means to break from any purely theological view and desires to include specific physical factors which cause monstrous births. Paré mentions that ancient writers “estimated that such marvels often come from the pure will of God, to warn us of the misfortunes with which we are threatened, of some great disorder, and also that the ordinary course of Nature seemed to be twisted in producing such unfortunate offspring.” As a contemporary example, he points to the famed winged monster of Ravenna of 1512, identifying a

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152 Ibid., 4.
153 Ibid., 5.
154 Ibid., 6.
monster born with a “horn on its head, two wings, and a single foot similar to that of a bird of prey, at the knee joint an eye, and participating in the natures of both male and female.”

While theological elements do recur regularly throughout his work, Paré’s two primary chapters on theological reasons for monsters take up a paltry amount of the book and highlight Paré’s potential discomfort with orienting his conversation primarily around divine intervention.

Figure 12: Ambroise Paré, “The Monster of Ravenna”

The second category of reasons for monsters, occurring later in the book, is similar to the first, but allows for demonic and diabolical intervention. Paré incorporates demons as a potential cause of monsters in many respects, listing how people are possessed by demons, waylaid by their habitation of mines or quarries, and given to perpetrating deception and illusion on humans. Yet present in this explanation is an undercurrent of skepticism about the extent of demonic

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155 Ibid., 6-7.
156 Ibid.
involvement in the production of monsters. Paré is clear that he does think of demons as being able to prompt the production of monsters, even relating and affirming the idea of the Satanic pact. He writes that there are “sorcerers and enchanters, poisoners and venom-dealers, wicked men, sly men, deceitful men, who carry out their fate through a pact they have made with demons.” Paré affirms the reality of sorcery, arguing that nobody should deny that sorcery exists and pointing to accounts of people renouncing God and pledging themselves to the Devil. Moreover, Paré writes that sorcerers and enchanters can, though “subtle, diabolic, and unknown means corrupt the body, intelligence, life, and health of men and of other creatures.” That Paré points to the existence of laws punishing sorcery as proof for sorcery is somewhat perplexing, even if it served as a common argument in the sixteenth century; the explanation that “one does not make a law for a thing that was never seen or known” makes some sense, but perhaps overstates the existence of witches. However, at the very least, it is a testament to the power the notion of magic and witchcraft held in the early modern imagination. But Paré’s acceptance of witchcraft is broadly aligned with the orthodox demonological explanation of demonic power. Paré identifies demonic power as based in delusion and deception. Demonic power exists outside of sorcery, as Paré identifies how the Devil prompted Judas to betray Jesus (among other examples). But Paré explains the purpose of such delusion as opposition to and hindrance of humanity. In the same way, demonic deception surrounding animals or creatures also serves to hurt humanity, as demons “suddenly assume whatever form pleases them,” for the goal of impeding “natural operations.”

157 Ibid., 85.
158 Ibid., 86.
159 Ibid., 87.
160 Ibid.
Regarding monstrous births, however, Paré demonstrates skepticism about the ability of demons to affect monstrous births. Paré focuses on how demons can take the form of *incubi* and *succubi*, or demons which “transform themselves into the guise of men and copulate with women sorceresses” and “demons that transmute themselves into the guise of women.” Paré addresses accounts of *incubi* and *succubi* utilizing the “seed of a dead man” to birth a child, which he responds to with natural explanations- that seed transported outside of the body is “immediately corrupted and altered, and consequently its force is completely extinguished.” Paré attempts to inject non-theological ideas into his understanding of demonic power, rejecting some typical demonological ideas with a relatively normal rejection of *incubi* and *succubi*. Yet where Paré goes further is in connecting this skepticism to the causes of monstrous births; while Paré theoretically accepts the power of demons to impact misbirths, he projects a vast skepticism about them, for a variety of reasons. *Incubi* and *succubi* cannot reproduce because they are spirits and lack a body, lack reproductive parts, and lack any desire or use for reproduction. Paré outright states that he believes that the acts of *incubi* and *succubi* to be “imaginary, proceeding from an illusory impression of Satan.” The realm of the Devil and demons is in delusion, not in actual creation, for “as Cassianus said, what absurdity, repugnance, and confusion there would be in Nature, if it were legitimate for devils to conceive by humans…How many monsters…the devils would have brought forth through the whole human race, casting their seed into the wombs of animals, thus creating, through perturbations of seed, an infinity of monsters and

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161 Ibid., 91.
162 Ibid., 92.
163 For a brief description of early modern views of incubi and succubi, see Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 112-114.
Again, Paré diminishes the non-natural and non-scientific causes for monsters and marvels while elevating the medical explanations.

The third category of causes is far broader than the explicitly theological or demonological and focuses on Paré’s tendency to focus on medical explanations. Most of Paré’s reasons for monsters involve some sort of biological or scientific occurrence, or at least one involving some physical interaction with the body. Paré identifies physical or medical causes as including “too great a quantity of seed, the “narrowness or smallness of the womb,” “hereditary diseases,” “mixture or mingling of seed,” or “corruption and putrefaction.” Paré prioritizes physical explanations over theological ones regularly. Regarding the presence of “too much seed,” Paré utilizes copious examples to illustrate how, per a variety of established sources (including Augustine and Lycosthenes), an abundance of male seed can cause not only multiple children, but multiple limbs emerging from the body.\(^{166}\) The examples he cites include all manner of conjoined twins. Paré relies on established authority here to understand these creatures, citing Aristotle as saying that the birth of conjoined twins can be caused by “a fault of matter…or a defect in the womb.”\(^{167}\) Paré regularly refers to these births as “monsters,” but does not engage in any theological speculation or reflection their births. Additionally, in Chapter 12, Paré describes how monsters are sometimes created through physical injury to a pregnant woman, for when a mother “receives some blow over the womb or when she falls down from a certain height, the infants can have their bones broken, thrown out of joint and twisted, or receive some other defect, such as being crippled, hunchback, and misshapen.”\(^{168}\) The same effect can be caused by dietary issues and the consumption of “foul and filthy foods that women eat, or want

\(^{165}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{166}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{167}\) Ibid., 14.
\(^{168}\) Ibid., 46.
to eat, or that they abhor looking upon just after they have conceived, or that someone may have tossed something between their teats…that can render infants monstrous.”

Paré also identifies the possibility of monstrous births and misbirths occurring as a result of “hereditary diseases,” for “it is rather manifest that a hunchback gives birth to a hunchbacked child.” Some of this he arrives at by simple logic; for instance, he writes that small or short mothers and fathers will likely have small children or dwarves. Yet he also allows for the birth of animals and other beings or items in men, women, and children. The conception of scientific

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169 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid., 47.
thought encompasses not just the individual body, but also the broader world. Paré embraces the idea of the microcosm and macrocosm\textsuperscript{173} to explain how the human body can be connected with the affairs of the world. He identifies women as having given birth to frogs, toads, snakes, lizards, and harpies alongside their children.\textsuperscript{174} Paré explains this as and the emergence of strange creatures in women’s wombs as “accomplished through corruption and diverse alteration,” for “Nature has proportionately in the excellent microcosm every sort of matter in order to make it resemble and be like a living image of the big world.”\textsuperscript{175}

Finally, Paré’s focus on the natural world emerges in his inclusion of various exotic animals in his work. Paré includes observations and images of specimens in his chapters, including the ostrich, whale, elephant, and giraffe.\textsuperscript{176} Particularly with regard to the ostrich, Paré claims to have seen ostrich bones as the surgeon for King Charles.\textsuperscript{177} After providing a lengthy physical description and images of its skeleton, Paré describes the ostrich as an example of an “almost monstrous thing.” Paré describes how an ostrich was brought before Charles, but being unable to travel to Charles, died; additionally, throughout the description, Paré describes other creatures which were brought before Charles, including a toucan.\textsuperscript{178} Paré’s inclusion of exotic animals is important as an example of his method in practice; Paré views these creatures, unseen to most of his area, not as monsters, but as a part of the overall created order, meriting natural observation and description and focusing on their existence over their meaning.

Paré’s emphasis on observation and natural instead of supernatural responses is critical for understanding the nature of the proto-naturalism of the sixteenth century. Paré is not the only

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 53-54.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 56.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 60.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Ibid.; 135, 137, 144-145.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 136.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 140.
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figure to favor natural explanations over supernatural ones, but he is among the first to attempt to naturalize monsters and locate them more fully into the realm of the created order. The thoroughness and specificity of his response to causes of monsters locates his thought broadly within the medical realm, but is important for theological discourse for its attempts to abandon fundamentally theological rationales for monsters. As Pallister puts it, Paré is concerned not about the meaning of monsters, but about their very existence; because of his focus on their very existence, he is less convinced by theological explanations which fail to address the mechanisms which prompt the emergence of monsters in the world. None of this should imply that Paré completely ignores any questions of meaning, but it does mean that Paré prioritizes natural and scientific explanations and only utilizes theological or demonological explanations in order to more fully critique them, and to even reject them. In focusing on the importance of the existence of monsters, Pallister notes the importance of monstrous births and misbirths as celebrations of variation and diversity within creation, and part of a broader attempt to “naturalize monsters.”

This attempt to bring monsters and misbirths firmly within the scope of nature is emblematic of the overall trend which this chapter has observed. Without negating any theological significance, authors like Gessner, Weyer, and Paré reorient the framing of their questions from being about meaning to existence, resulting in a focus on empirical observation over theological speculation.

The naturalist turn’s intersection with notions of the monstrous body is crucial because it reorders discussion of the boundary between human and non-human from primarily theological to primarily physical, but with theological undertones. Observation-based inquiry takes priority, helping to define the monster within a human paradigm. Misbirths become firmly oriented in the

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179 It is difficult to read his response to *incubi* and *succubi* and not think of Johann Weyer’s casual and bemused skepticism toward witchcraft.
human realm as well, clarifying the boundary issue by removing misbirths as truly human. Moreover, it removes omens and portents as the primary interpretation of monsters while also shifting marvels to the realm of the medical.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this chapter should not indicate by any means that the boundary between people and non-people had collapsed by the seventeenth century. The answer is far more complicated. In fact, the boundary to some extent survives theologically; theologians continue to adhere to an ordering of creation, in which the anthropocentric ordering of creation guides questions about human duties to the world and to nature. Theologians continue to think about and consider what it means for humans to be stewards of creation, as well as the limits of what is possible in the world. The rise of naturalism does not practically remove perception of a theological boundary between people and non-people.

However, the rise of naturalism does facilitate the growth of different modes of thinking with respect to the boundary. In other words, whereas before the boundary between people and non-people was functionally the same theologically and naturally, the rise of proto-naturalism begins to move away from strictly moralistic ways of perceiving animals. While figures like Vesalius illuminate the considerable similarities between people and animals, nobody in the sixteenth century is radical enough to argue for a full embrace of humans as part of the animal realm. But the rise of proto-naturalism encourages broader thought about what is possible in the world, opening up the frequency of non-theological answers where before questions received primarily theological answers. In short, the “naturalist turn” does not result in an immediate consideration of humans as part of the animal realm, but it does prompt more immediate rejection of transgressions of the boundary from naturalist rather than theological grounds.
The resulting framework both resolves and further complicates the theological landscape. While the reaffirmation of the boundary from a theological lens is certainly clearer, the rise of naturalist responses to such questions helps to articulate the growing divide between physical and metaphysical forms of knowledge. While animals still communicate moral lessons, those lessons are diminished in favor of consideration of the physical properties and realities of animals and non-humans. Moreover, the anthropocentric hierarchy remains in the naturalist worldview, but contingently. Humans are distinguished from animals insofar as the evidence of similarity is limited, but as more similarities are observed, naturalist delineation between the species becomes more frayed. Perhaps most significant, however, is the growing rejection not only of supernatural explanations, but also of supernatural modes of thinking. For instance, whereas at the beginning of the fifteenth century, theologians and scholars rejected lycanthropy as physically impossible because of the theological implications (that Satan retained creative power over matter), by the end of the sixteenth century, rejections of lycanthropy revolved around strictly physical responses, namely that lycanthropy was physically impossible because it posited the physical transformation of human into animal. This shift from theological to medical explanations more significantly represented a shift from integrated modes of thinking of the physical and metaphysical to a more separated approach which ignored the theological implications.

Monsters still stood as a threat to the boundary; however, the rise of natural responses also prompted reexamination of those physical beings who threatened the boundary. Human “fools” remained human by their physical properties, but monstrous births and misbirths began to receive physical explanations from the likes of Ambroise Paré and others. Explanations of monstrous beings as demonstrating signs from God fell out of favor, whereas physical
explanations rose and gained favor. This is not to say that theological explanations had no role; however, overall, we see a rise in scholars favoring physical explanations of the boundary over explanations that prioritized theological or moral truth.

In short, the rise of proto-naturalism, empiricism, and Christian humanism did not shatter Christian assumptions of the world, nor did it result in the abandonment of the anthropocentric hierarchy. However, to say that humanism and naturalism strengthened the boundary goes too far, as does the notion that such affirmation of the boundary helped to resolve the ambiguity of debate over the boundary. The “muzziness” continued apace, but received a variety of possible explanations. The tension of the boundary was dispelled by proto-naturalist explanations, and the boundary begins to experience less of an aspirational quality in favor of a more grounded, realistic nature. Moreover, the encounter of the early modern world’s theological rigidity with the contours of proto-naturalism result in a more ambiguous nature of the boundary even as the boundary becomes firmer. As we wrap up this study, we will consider the implications of this complex ideological landscape.
Conclusion

Early modern theologians and thinkers certainly faced a conundrum regarding the boundary between human and nonhuman. On the one hand, the normative theological perspective embraced a notion of human difference and distinctness from the rest of creation. Theologians embraced the notion of an anthropocentric hierarchy, accepting humanity as being uniquely made in the “image of God,” imbued with special characteristics and responsibilities toward the rest of creation. Moreover, the theologians who broke from the Roman church still accepted many of the fundamental authorities, like Augustine, who helped to construct the boundary.

At the same time, theologians interacted with a culture that, influenced by premodern Europe and foundational texts, challenged the assumed primacy of humanity. Popular culture presented a more fluid view of how humans, animals, and monsters coexisted. The popular view did not dispute human uniqueness in theory; however, it did not yield to the logical consequences of that primacy, holding that crossings of the boundary did occur. Animals could exhibit characteristics and traits speaking to their own personal moral benevolence, attested to in accounts of miracles, saints’ lives, and bestiaries. Animals also demonstrated the capacity for violence or destruction, which was not merely dismissed as animal instinct, but which was often treated with a sense of moral culpability and resulted in legal punishment. Meanwhile, people themselves sometimes crossed the boundary, either through activity (as with those engaging in lycanthropy) or through their very existence (as with monstrous misbirths and natural fools). Theologians did not summarily reject these instances, but rather held them in tension as occurring or explainable even within the overall anthropocentric framework.
Protestant theologians managed to hold these two ideas in tension without resolving them into the sixteenth century, but the significance of the tension eventually required different treatment. Theologians and popular figures especially struggled to grapple with the perceived experiences related within the boundary, as well as with the growing knowledge about the similarities between humans and animals. The resulting tension posed an uncomfortable reality, in which theology and culture affirmed an explicit boundary between human and nonhuman creatures, illustrated by concrete ontological differences. At the same time, theologians faced the complexity of culture and experiential accounts that suggested a fluid boundary, and they had to regularly account for violations of the boundary.

This study has explored and sought to untangle the nature of this tension. However, it is clear that the threads of that tension were ultimately undone by a few significant factors. First, the rise of Christian humanism promoted means of thinking that challenged established authorities and elevated forms of knowledge. Second, the rise of Christian humanism also facilitated the growth of early forms of naturalism and empiricism, with proto-naturalists and proto-empiricists valuing both established authorities and personal, direct observation. The new emphasis on direct observation helped provide a response to experiential accounts in which the boundary was violated, as direct observation coupled with an emphasis on knowledge in the world led to more skeptical readings of accounts of lycanthropy, a sense of animal moral agency, and observation of monstrous infants. As a result, the initial boundary would hold firm, as a division between human and nonhuman would remain. However, the rise of these forms of thinking brought a fundamentally similar result: the affirmation of a division between human and nonhuman creatures, with a rejection of events or occurrences that challenged the boundary. Yet the rationale undergirding the support of the boundary shifted. Where the rationale before had
affirmed the boundary based on theological bases, the affirmation of the boundary shifted to revolve around naturalist bases. The anthropocentric order was reoriented, with humanity no longer completely distinct from the rest of creation. Rather, humanity existed as a part of the natural realm. In this way, the shift of the sixteenth century both resolved the fundamental tension while also raising new issues revolving around the fluidity of difference between human and nonhuman, including the degree to which humans possessed similarities to nonhuman creatures and the extent of animal cognition and moral agency.

Two additional shifts accompanied this reorientation of the boundary between human and nonhuman. First of all, the new paradigm surrounding human and nonhuman creatures and the rise of proto-naturalism resulted in a more mixed notion of the role of established authorities. Theologians still relied on established authorities like Augustine, Pliny, and Galen to inform their thought, but deviated and challenged their findings by relying on direct observation. Secondly, the rise of proto-naturalism and proto-empiricism prompted and facilitated the differentiation of fields of knowledge and the separation of theology from other modes of inquiry and thought. While theological considerations were not entirely divorced from thought at this point, they started to become an afterthought over the course of the sixteenth century.

At the end of this study, we arrive in a similar place to where we began: with an established boundary dividing human and nonhuman creatures and a sense of difference between the two; however, as a result of the journey to that result, proto-naturalism and proto-empiricism emerged with vastly different paradigms and justifications. However, new paradigms clearly bring new challenges to conceptions of human relationships to animals, as well as challenges to theological considerations of the image of God. Future studies about post-Reformation Europe ought to explore the continued emanations from the shift of the sixteenth century view of
animals. Beyond early modernity, scholars should continue to consider how historical
scholarship and inquiry informs the continuities and differences between humanity. This study
has hopefully helped with this endeavor to present a fuller picture not only of the evolution of the
boundary between human and nonhuman in early modernity, but also of how the extent and
limits of current challenges to human and animal difference today.
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