Fox Burials and Elephant Bones**:**

The Possibility of Religion in a More than Human World, and Why it Matters to the Academic Study of Religion

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Abstract

Cognitive ethology has uncovered significant data to indicate the complexity and sophistication of non-human animal experience. These data challenge the assumption that "religion" is something only humans do or possess. A portrait of the contemporary and historical theoretical landscape in religious studies charts both how and why religion has been theoretically limited to humans, and what the challenges are for notions of animal religion going forward. Materialist theories of religion offer more intellectually fertile ground for the investigation of animal religion. The discipline of cognitive ethology, and initial ethological findings, are cited as potential case studies for animal religion. Additionally these data are deployed to undermine the credibility of conventional theories of religion which have depended on some of the Enlightenment's ontological dualisms which divide humans and animals. Commitment to these ontological dualisms limits the future possibilities for religious studies and its social relevance.

Dedicated to the memory of

Thomas Berry, to whom I offer the first fruits of my part in the Great Work.

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Introduction

The accounts by renowned ethologist Jane Goodall of chimpanzees "dancing" before a waterfall in the Kakombe Valley in Tanzania represent an initial pause for thought regarding the limits humans have placed on the possibilities of animal experience.[1] The effect has been a gathering momentum of interest into the lives of animals, and this has sent shockwaves across many disciplines. In religious studies, one course has been to use the scientific study of animals to critique the ethical behaviour of religious traditions towards the non-human. Such efforts can be characterized by a desire to address the ecological implications of anthropocentrism, which are present in almost all human traditions. Although they are useful, these efforts demonstrate a kind of re-inscribed anthropocentrism, to the extent that they maintain a distinction between humans as religious actors and animals as religious objects. In other words "religious" agency remains the preserve of the human. This essay seeks to problematize this particular re-inscription, which is predicated on a form of human-exceptionalism, the belief that humans "are an exception to nature both in kind and quality."[2] This kind of exceptionalist logic is evident in the way scholars of religion speak about "religion," which is often assumed to be something only performed or described by humans. However there is room for doubts about human exceptionalism, as demonstrated by Marc Bekoff when he recalls how Charles Darwin showed "that differences among species are differences in degree rather than kind."[3] This perspective offers an alternative to the exceptionalism view and lays the methodological and theoretical foundations for exploring the religious subjectivity of animals. In order to be able to ask what might qualify as "animal religion" it is necessary to critique some of the dominant theoretical influences in religious

[1]J Goodall and P. Berman, *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1999), 189.
[2]Roger Ames, "Human Exceptionalism versus Cultural Elitism," in *Communion of Subjects*, eds. Kimberly Patton and Paul Waldau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 311.
[3]Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, (Novato: New World Library, 2007), xviii.

studies that have historically precluded a thorough investigation of animal religion, as well as locate alternative perspectives.

Such critiques are implicit in materialist theories of religion such as those of Manuel Vasquez, who has attempted to map how religion works outside of language. Other materialist leaning scholars like Donavon Schaefer have attempted to use poststructuralist philosophies to argue that religion is a complex extension of multidimensional, affectively determined bodies. The materialist theories of Vasquez and Schaefer identify religion as something which emerges organically in evolutionary time, out of certain evolved, bodily capacities not unique to humans. This point is crucial, for whilst other scholars like Robert Bellah have already focused attention on the emergence of religion in evolution, scholars like Bellah still maintain a narrow focus on the human. The theoretical approach provided by Vasquez and others offers the best available way to engage the topic of animal religion within religious studies. What is more, cognitive ethology demonstrates that animals share complex forms of cognition with human beings. In so doing, cognitive ethology complements these materialist approaches. These discussions raise a number of possibilities for the discipline of religious studies. Whereas classical ontologies have proposed a human "nature," upon which various theories of religion have been built, the kinds of theoretical approaches taken by Schaefer and others underscore that religion emerges as part of a multiform arrangement of bodily technologies, linking organs, cells, circuits, and tissues. Rather than establish an arbitrary dichotomy between beliefs on the one hand and emotion on the other, theories like radical embodiment demonstrate the collaborative and interconnected way in which religion emerges as a complex bodily process. Beliefs and emotions feature as constituents of this complexity. Once religion can be understood in this way then cognitive ethology can provide additional data from which to develop possibilities for understanding religion as a shared evolutionary inheritance, rather than purely an ensemble of rational (human) mental activities.

By understanding religion as a complex of bodily processes, and as something thereby shared with other animals, it radically calls into question how religious studies can be understood in a human exclusivist paradigm.

Chapter One

Religious Studies and the Legacy of Human Exclusivism

Before any discussion of "animal religion" can take place it is important to recognize some of the complexity inherent in the term "religion." The academic study of religion is a humanistic endeavour, and not all disciplines outside of the humanities have a sophisticated understanding of the controversy which surrounds the term. Indeed some scientific observers of animal behaviour can potentially apply the term "religion" to phenomena under their observation, without a serious engagement with the categorization of religion.[4] Any interdisciplinary field (of which animals and religion is one) that claims to apply the term religion will require greater precision in the term's use. Therefore moving forward some recognition of both the historical and contemporary landscape of defining religion (within religious studies) is required. Indeed the historical emergence of the scientific study of religion is distinctly marked by Enlightenment humanism. In order to contribute new ideas without adding further confusion, what follows is a very brief description of the contemporary landscape of defining religion, complimented with a genealogy of human exceptionalism that courses through most religious studies scholarship. Human exclusivism or exceptionalism can be characterized by the notion that humans are not "a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies," and are unique (among other species) in this regard. [5] What is crucial about human exceptionalism is that, historically speaking, human exceptionalism "transformed into a foundational philosophy, [and] thus contributes not only to

[4]For instance Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy in their book, *When Elephants Weep* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), freely use terms like "religion" and "religious impulse" to describe animal behaviour that resembles human religious activity, and this is discussed in terms of emotion and morality. Yet it can be argued that these authors presuppose the extent to which an understanding of the term "religion" is limited to Western philosophical concepts of "soul," and they assume a certain reducibility of the "religious impulse" to emotional responses like "awe."

[5]Manuel Vasquez, *More Than Belief – A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 165. "Human exclusivism," and "human exceptionalism" both tend to be used interchangeably in a great deal of the literature dealing with these concepts.

the human/nature split, but the divide between the humanities and the natural sciences and between organic and inorganic life."[6] Historically, the construction of religion has been caught up in these divides, and from the outset this has disqualified the possibility of animal religion.

1.1 The Contemporary Context

However, evolution, ecology, environmental science, and biology, if taken seriously, challenge the construction of religion as an exclusively human phenomenon. Indeed it is increasingly necessary to be precise about what can be counted as unique to humans. Yet the first task is to highlight this common, inherent bias in the ways that religious studies approaches its subject from multiple perspectives, be they social constructionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and others.[7] Rather than locating a new reductionist definition of "religion," or engaging some universalizing strategy, the issue is to understand how religious studies arrived at a place where religion is thought to be exclusive to humans. This involves understanding the enterprise of Enlightenment humanism, and the particular kind of social constructionism that it produces. What follows is a portrait of what exactly this looks like.

In the contemporary context much of this bias, and the lack of consideration for the relevance of the natural sciences, has to do with the ascendency of social constructionism. Within religious studies today scholars such as Russell McCutcheon and William Arnal put forward a strong social constructionist critique of religion as an object of study. These scholars follow in the footsteps of Jonathan Z. Smith who states that religion "has no existence apart from the academy."[8] In other words, "there is no such thing as religion."[9] Following from Smith, McCutcheon and Arnal "see no reason to assume" that categories like religion "refer to actual

[6]Vasquez, *More*, 165.
[7]These three approaches are taken from Vasquez.
[8]Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.
[9]Rodney Stark, "Rationality," in *The Guide to The Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 32.

qualities in the real world, requiring us to align ourselves with one or the other."[10] Consequently it might appear that these scholars portend the collapse of religious studies into the study of *human* culture more broadly. To many scholars religion can seem an altogether inappropriate term to refer to aspects of the animal world because religion depends on faculties assumed to be available only to the human, such as rational thought and language. In this view religion and its products (art, liturgy, music, text…) might be seen to exist only as human constructed categories to describe dimensions of the human world.[11]

Importantly, social constructionist arguments sometimes hinge around an apotheosis of language. Karen Barad suggests that this represents a "linguistic narcissism," an inflated view of the importance of language in the discussion of religion.[12] Manuel Vasquez captures the stakes in this linguistic narcissism by stating that the social constructionist approach has become a "totalizing rhetoric that does not allow critique, since nothing (but itself) constrains and resists it."[13] So ultimately the human/nature split remains insofar as

> ...social constructionism, hermeneutics, and classical phenomenology of religion form a common anthropocentric front, re-inscribing Cartesian dualism. The secret of religion is always safely protected in the "human" side of the human-non-human divide, either in the irreducible inner life of the believer (Schleiermacher, James, and Otto), or in archetypes through which the sacred discloses itself to us (Eliade), or in culture as a system of symbols (Geertz), or in society, in the dynamics of human solidarity (Durkheim) or economic conflict (Marx).[14]

Crucially then, language becomes the central determinant of reality, and the power rests in the hands of those with language. Because animals lack language, they lack agency, they lack the

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[10]William. E. Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Sacred is The Profane – The Political Nature of "Religion"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 115.
[11]McCutcheon discusses this in relation to what he terms 'the private affair' tradition in religious studies, in *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 2013), 55.
[12]Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward and Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," in *Material Feminisms*, edited by Stacey Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 120-154.
[13]Vasquez, *More*, 170.
[14]Ibid, 170.

essential ability to determine their own reality. In a world dominated by social constructionism, humans determine animal reality because animals exist as part of "nature," which is itself an empty canvas upon which humans project "culture."

A counter-approach should avoid the risk of polarizing matters in an opposite direction. The goal is not to surmount social constructionism but rather to chasten it.[15] Indeed the crucial insight of social constructionism remains essential, namely that the world as humans experience it is at the very least constructed by shared webs of significations. Scholars such as McCutcheon conclusively show how religion scholars have historically manufactured religion as an "autonomous reality, independent of the historical, social and biological processes" and these insights are critical to the arguments that follow.[16] The aim of Vasquez and other similar scholars is to find better ways to explore how "ecology, biology, psychology, culture, language, and history interact to give rise to particular ways of being religious."[17] In so doing they seek to overcome the kinds of dualistic thinking that divide between things like nature and culture; dualisms within which social constructionism is situated.

1.2 The Historical Context

These dualisms are not unique to the academic study of religion and are deeply imbedded in the humanistic discourse since the time of the Enlightenment. These dualistic approaches to religion arise from a distinctly Cartesian subjectivism, in the particular sense that religion is thought to be apprehended solely by a human, thinking mind. What is vital is that Descartes' *cogito* elevates the self-conscious, thinking mind as the central determinant of reality. In Descartes' schema

[15]Anna Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 209-211.
[16]Vasquez, *Belief*, 8.
[17]Ibid, 150.

humans are the *only* possessors of this thinking capacity, and this fact (for him) is empirically evidenced by language.[18]

By contrast Descartes famously termed animals *automata* because "he saw no reason for attributing mental abilities to animals, because all of their motions, or actions, can be accounted for by mechanical considerations alone."[19] Decisively in Descartes' philosophy there is a double effect that disqualifies the possibility of animal religion. Firstly religion requires language which only humans are thought to have, and secondly language requires conscious, self-reflexive, subjective thought which animals cannot have because they are entirely subject to their materiality. These assumptions underlie dominant ideas in the psychology and sociology of religion, approaches that have loomed large in religious studies over the past century. What is critical is that historically, from Descartes onwards the construction of religion was implicated in an anthropological enterprise which sought to define the human in direct contrast to animals.

1.2.1 Psychology of Religion

Historically in the psychology of religion there existed a distinction between "mentalist" and "behaviourist" psychology. These distinctions can be understood with reference to the distinction of Ivan Strenski, between two historically different ways of *doing* psychology in the context of studying religion. Firstly there is what Strenski calls "mentalism."[20] According to Strenski, Freud is among the "mentalists" and for them "psychology is about the 'mind' or 'mental states.'"[21] Indeed, according to Merkur, for Freud religion "functions primarily to offer consolation for

[18]For example in Descartes letter to Henry More in 1648, he stated that Animals "have not indicated by voice or other signs anything referring to thought alone, rather than to movement of mere nature." The letter can be found in René Descartes, and Anthony Keny, *Descartes: Philosophical Letters*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
[19]Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser, *Philosophy – History and Problems* (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2003), 233.
[20]Ivan Strenski, "Freud and the Psychoanalytic Origins of Religion," in *Thinking About Religion – An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion*, ed. Ivan Strenski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 235.
[21]Ibid, 235.

human helplessness."[22] Since Freud also regarded religion as neurosis, for him religion principally becomes a set of *beliefs* which comfort and console humanity in the midst of the adverse conditions of life in the natural world.[23] In this way of thinking, religion allows humans to sacrifice an understanding of the world as it actually is, for the comfort of beliefs projected onto it. According to Freud, those beliefs reach their decisive expression in the Judeo-Christian God, whose father-like persona "will not suffer us to become a plaything of the over mighty and pitiless forces of nature."[24] Once more one observes how religion, from this Freudian perspective, does not take place *in* nature, but *over* and *against* it. Religion is established as something distinctly human, and something which obfuscates nature.

The approach of the "mentalists" has been heavily criticized in academic psychology, largely due to the inference that mental states are private phenomena, and as such "cannot be studied scientifically."[25]This "mentalist" approach is contrasted with "behaviourist" psychology which dispenses entirely "with all talk of intentions, motives, and other introspectively derived entities."[26] Behaviourists are concerned with explaining the observable phenomena of peoples' actions, and their models have been regarded as more scientifically rigorous, given the kinds of data they use, namely external stimulus-response.[27] For behaviourists the investigation of external stimuli and behavioural response are "sufficient to explain, predict, and control all aspects of behaviour."[28] Remarkably, behavioural psychology has not played a large role in the academic study of religion.

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[22]Dan Merkur, "Psychology", in the *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, (New York: Routledge, 2011) 167.
[23]Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices," in Standard Edition, 9: 1907, 126.
[24]Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion", in Standard Edition, 21: 1927, 19.
[25]Colin Allen and Marc Bekoff, *Species of Mind* (Cambridge: MIT, 1997), 53.
[26]Strenski, "Freud," 237.
[27]I want to make note of the fact that for the sake of brevity, I have characterized these distinctions in the simplest terms possible.
[28]Bekoff and Allen, *Species of Mind*, 67.

Instead, as Merkur states, the Freudian paradigm, represented by the "mentalist" approach, has arguably enjoyed a long duration in the study of religion, not least of all because religion itself has been (and still is) often referred to as a *private* affair. For instance Timothy Fitzgerald recounts how historically in the West, with "the category of religion, there developed an influential notion that the truly religious consciousness is private, that religion is defined in terms of some special kind of experience had by individuals, and that institutional forms of ritual, liturgy, and Church are merely secondary social phenomena that are either not in themselves religious or are religious in a secondary, derivative sense."[29] Critically, this notion "can be found well established in the writing of many of the founding fathers of comparative religion, including Max Mueller (1878, in Turner, 1997); William James (1902); Rudolph Otto (1932); and Joachim Wach (1944,1951)."[30] The nature of this *privacy* is often conceived of as *mental*, owing to the idea that the content of religion is primarily beliefs. What this amounts to historically is an almost total isolation of "religion" from any natural setting, regardless of the variations on how "natural" is constructed. This results in an exaggerated wide gap between humans and animals in the context of religion, as understood from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

This gap is widened when one considers the precise manner in which animals exist on both the "natural" and "behaviourist" side of these arbitrary divides. The assumptions about animals which are often at play in studies of animal behaviour are the same as those which purport that "the social sciences are supposedly unlike the natural sciences."[31] What these and other assumptions contain is the idea that "human beings differ from mere natural phenomena. Where natural phenomena "act" [behave] merely in response to a cause, human beings act for a

[29]Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28.
[30]Ibid, 28.
[31]Robert A. Segal, "Assessing Social-Scientific Theories of Religion," in *Reinventing Religious Studies - Key Writings in the History of a Discipline*, ed. Scott S. Elliot (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 72.

purpose as well."[32] However to simply say that animals can be understood with reference to their external actions is not a simple thing at all. Once the surface is scratched "there is no simple answer to the question 'what is behaviour.'"[33] Indeed just as there is no answer to the question, what is religion, there are only classifications, similarly there are only classifications of behaviour. Thus it is the way in which behaviours are classified that is crucial to questions concerning *both* animals and humans. Both animal behaviour and "behaviourist" models in general have traditionally been seen as governed by internal, bio-computational mechanisms that are hardwired for common instinctual drives such as survival, food, or reproduction. Yet this is inadequate.

Bekoff and Allen introduce the distinction between *stimulus bound* behaviours and *stimulus free* behaviours.[34] Stimulus bound behaviours refer to behaviours that occur almost invariably in response to some external stimulus. Stimulus free behaviour on the other hand refers to behaviour "where internal factors predominate over external stimuli."[35] Bekoff and Allen suggest that these two types are ends on a spectrum. Stimulus bound responses are seemingly more predictable and would appear to follow the patterns associated with the more mechanistic behaviourist model. Yet a continuum model allows for the fact that even the response to external stimuli can be governed by very complicated internal processes, which require reference to factors outside the survivalist logic. In other words "an organism's response to a given stimulus may change as a result of a single experience with an entirely different

[32]Segal, "Assessing," 72.
[33]Bekoff and Allen, *Species of Mind*, 48.
[34]Bekoff and Allen, *Belief*, 57.
[35]Ibid.

stimulus at a different time and location."[36] In these scenarios an organism can acquire new behaviour on the basis of "no direct reward."[37]

What this demonstrates is two-fold. First is that complex psychology is not the preserve of humans, nor is there a radical distinction between animal and human psychology. Secondly this complexity challenges any radical distinction between a "mentalist" and "behaviourist" model of psychology which depends on an equal separation of bio-mechanical stimuli and internal (mental) stimuli. The reason Bekoff and Allen place these on a continuum is because they continually interact with one another. Rather than conceiving of mental stimuli merely as abstract conceptions of a conscious mind (following Cartesian subjectivism), one can see them as subjective mental patterns that interact with external stimuli in complicated ways that are conditioned by an almost infinite number of factors. A closer look at animal psychology, as demonstrated by Bekoff and Allen, helps to undermine the belief that humans possess a unique kind of psychology. In so doing, it is also shown that conventional distinctions between behaviourist and mentalist psychology require nuancing, such that these explanations are seen as interactive. Both of these points (that animals and humans share complex psychology, and that behaviourist and mentalist explanations exist on a continuum) at the very least problematize the way in which the psychology of religion has historically understood religion. More specifically it is revealed that the particularly Freudian construction of religion as a mental activity makes use of, and is based upon, the radical distinctions between humans and animals.

1.2.2 The Sociology of Religion

Sociological approaches to religion have been foregrounded in the discipline of religious studies throughout the twentieth century. Most vital is that the historical trajectory of the sociology of

[36]Bekoff and Allen, *Belief*, 57.
[37]Ibid.

religion is informed by "basic assumptions about Western modernity, the course of history, and the place of human beings in the world."[38] Unpacking this latter aspect is critical to understanding the exclusion of animals in the construction of religion.

Durkheim "championed the central importance of society, of social structures, relationships and institutions, in understanding human thought and behaviour."[39] And for him, society "determines, while religion is the thing that is determined."[40] Contained within these axioms are the linchpins of how Durkheim, and the sociology of religion that succeeds him, come to radically distinguish between humans and animals at the level of the "social." For Durkheim, sociology was a discipline *sui generis*, and this was because for him there exists certain social facts, specific "social" phenomena that have the same ontological facticity as natural phenomena and are thus knowable in like ways and methods.[41] Durkheim attests to this himself when he says,

> ...a science can be established only when it has for its subject matter facts sui generis, facts that are different from those of other sciences. If society did not produce phenomena which are different from those observable in the other realms of nature, sociology would be without a field of its own. Its existence can be justified only if there are realities which deserve to be called social and which are not simply aspects of another order of things.[42]

Immediately there is a separation of the social and the natural, and "Durkheim's sociology depends at some point upon making an essential distinction between humans and animals."[43] Durkheim justifies this incommensurability of animals with humans in concepts of consciousness and self-determination. Humans are socially determined, while animals are

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[38]Pals, *Eight*, 126.
[39]Ibid, 85.
[40]Ibid, 113.
[41]Anthony Giddens, *Durkheim* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), 35.
[42]Emile Durkheim, "Sociology and Its Scientific Field," in *Essay on Sociology and Philosophy* (New York: Harper Row, 1964), 363.
[43]Richie Nimmo, "The Making of the Human," in *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments*, ed. Rob Boddice (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 74.

biologically determined.[44] Durkheim regards human desires as unlimited, because they are socially (as opposed to biologically) derived. Whereas animal possibilities are limited by instinctual desires, humans have transcended these limitations; they can both imagine and affect their fortune. Take for instance Durkheim's quote:

> In short, society, through the moral regulation it institutes and applies, plays, as far as supraorganic life is concerned, the same role that instinct fills with respect to physical existence. It determines, and it rules what is left undetermined. The system of instincts is the discipline of the organism, just as moral discipline is the instinctive discipline of social life.[45]

Ultimately Durkheim's sociology "is thoroughly predicated upon the interconnected dualisms of human/animal and society/nature, leaving little room for non-anthropocentric reflections of any kind."[46] Critically, "our instinctive social view of the world is an index of just how thoroughly successful Durkheim's revolution in thought has turned out to be."[47]

Karl Marx also has a pivotal role in these distinctions, in terms of how they have affected the course of the sociology of religion. Marx's "emphasis on economic realities has now made it impossible to understand religious life anywhere without exploring its close ties to economic and social realities."[48] In other words Marx, like Durkheim, binds religion inexorably to the realities of "the social" and "the economic." Yet just as the "social" for Durkheim is caught up in the humanistic dualisms of nature/culture and human/animal, so too is Marx's "labour." For example Marx states that "what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax."[49] Marx distinguishes human labour from animal labour on the basis of mental activity and prior design. Both Marx and Durkheim

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[44]Emile Durkheim, *Socialism* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 241. It should be noted however that this arguably represents a later Durkheimian perspective, one that is distinct from some of Durkheim's earlier work.
[45]Ibid, 244.
[46]Nimmo, "The Making," 75.
[47]Ibid, 86.
[48]Pals, *Eight*, 139.
[49]Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin, 1976), 284.

define human society and labour in terms of conscious and intentional thought. In contrast, according to Marx and Durkheim, animals are determined by realities that are instinctive and mechanistic. As Nimmo says "the distinction between human and animal labour in Marx is actually based upon the postulation of an essential difference between humans and animals on the grounds of culture itself: humans possess it, animals do not."[50] In this way Nimmo argues that Descartes is being invoked "in order to legitimize the human/non-human distinction."[51] Once again it becomes clear that the construction of concepts like "society" and "labour" are based on an underlying assumption that there is an essential difference between humans and animals. These distinctions are taken by Marx and Durkheim to be self-evident.

Marx famously describes religion as "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people."[52] For Marx religion becomes a tool of the powerful, used to supress the masses and retard social progress. For Durkheim religion is a system of beliefs and moral prescriptions, relative to localized cultural value systems which buttress social unity. In the economic with Marx or the social with Durkheim, in either setting, religion, though fully manifest in the social world, is something to be understood and analyzed from the perspective of human ideology rather than evolutionarily determined factors. Thus, once again religion becomes isolated in realms that are radically separated from animals.

1.3 Conclusion

Although the content of Marxian and Durkheimian thought has been critiqued and re-critiqued *ad infinitum*, these critiques have typically been within reference to human content, still

[50]Nimmo, "The Making," 71. See also Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press), 1974.
[51]Nimmo, "The Making," 70.
[52]Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Religion*, Introduced by Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 42.

operating within that artificial realm of the human as radically distinct from the animal. These critiques have typically taken place within the framework of the Enlightenment mentality and have not sought to undermine the underlying assumption that humans are radically distinct from animals. This is because, as Tu Weiming states, "we are so seasoned in the Enlightenment mentality that we assume that the reasonableness of its general ideological thrust is self-evident."[53] This helps to explain why the existing landscape in religious studies is historically unfavourable to the question of animal religion. It is because the Enlightenment mentality from Descartes to Durkheim assumes a radical distinction between humans and animals, particularly at the level of subjective, conscious thought and behaviour. However this ideological distinction is increasingly hard to justify. Indeed "rational thought, consciousness, self-cognisance, art, culture, language, tool use and manufacture can no longer be used to separate 'them' from 'us.'"[54] Recent scientific explorations into animal behaviour arising from the Darwinian perspectives that differences in evolution are by degree rather than kind, have revealed that "there is not a real dichotomy or non-negotiable gap between animals and humans."[55] All such dichotomies are the product of systems of classification. For instance primatologists have identified wide cultural variation in chimpanzees, relating to tool use, grooming habits and courtship.[56] If these discoveries come as "surprises" that is only because of the Enlightenment assumption that humans are essentially, absolutely and radically distinct from animals. Evolutionary science calls these distinctions into question and this will certainly have an effect on how religion is to be

[53]Tu Wei ming, "The Enlightenment Mentality," in *Worldviews and Ecology*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 21.
[54]Marc Bekoff, "Animal Passions and Beastly Virtues: Cognitive Ethology as the Unifying Science for Understanding the Subjective, Emotional, Empathetic, and Moral Loves of Animals," in *Human Ecology Review*, Vol 13. No. 1, 2006, 45. It should be noted however that not all animals possess these qualities, and not all animals possess them equally. Consequently it is necessary to avoid potentially re-inscribing anthropocentrism through extolling qualities limited only to certain species, particularly mammalian ones. The simple point being made here is to undermine the most basic idea that there are particular qualities unique to humans, not to suggest that *all* animals possess them.
[55]Ibid, 45.
[56]See Franz de Waal, *Our Inner Ape* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005).

understood. Although the domains of psychology and sociology have shed enormous light on religion as a human construct, in so doing they have made it impossible to imagine religion as a non-human activity. As the distinctions between humans and animals become problematized so too should the basic assumptions of psychology and sociology, as they concern religion.

In order to move forward, it is important to acknowledge the backdrop of the Enlightenment's historical dominance and continued influence. Indeed one cannot simply introduce new concepts or cite new data without first recognizing the forum into which these ideas enter. As Donald Wiebe states, "knowledge of the debate over the use of the term is essential before proposing one use of the concept over another."[57] Additionally Wiebe states that in order "to understand a concept it is important to be familiar with its history."[58] These principles apply to what I am characterizing as religious studies, itself a term sometimes as vacuous or elusive as "religion" can be. Upon reflection, what is clear is that an anthropocentric and human exclusivist bias underwrites much of the historical trajectory of religious studies. Peter Berger stated in 1969 that religion "is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant."[59] The question that post-Darwinian science raises is whether this significance should be confined simply to the human, which leads to the question of animal religion.

[57]Donald Wiebe, "Religious Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 98.
[58]Ibid, 99.
[59]Peter Berger, *The Sacred Company: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 89.

Chapter 2

Addressing the Question of Animal Religion

2.1 The Importance of Animals and Religion

There are two important ways to frame the work of scholars in the field of animals and religion. The first is to note how greater attention to animals is part and parcel of changes in wider social consciousness regarding the place of the human in relation to the planet. These changes are in large measure precipitated by the impact of ecological crisis. The second is to see the internal implications of these changes in social consciousness for the academic study of religion. These implications are most especially relevant at the level of understanding religion in an evolutionary context void of dualistic thinking.

2.1.1 Changes in Consciousness and the Place of Concern for Animals

Mary Evelyn Tucker states that "the world's religions, while grounded in foundational beliefs and practices, have never been static, but have always both effected change and been affected by change in response to intellectual, political, cultural, social and economic forces."[60] Increasingly religions are responding to growing concern about ecological crisis. Cumulatively, climate change, waste, chemical and heavy metal build-up, loss of top soil, diminishing biodiversity, loss of wilderness, devastation of indigenous people, unsustainable consumption, and the effects of insufficiently tested genetic engineering all represent a crisis of such a magnitude that it is the biggest humans have yet faced.[61] Moreover the crisis is undeniably of human origin, and so a collective soul-searching is underway in many quarters of human life. Changing human attitudes is part of addressing the more malignant effects of human activity on the planet. Religions are engaging these processes because there is a sense in which the "varying perspectives which

[60]Mary Evelyn Tucker, *World Wonder – Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase* (Illinois: Carus, 2003), 12.
[61]This list is gleaned from another list in, Roger S. Gottlieb, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-5.

seemed more or less adequate to the first fifteen thousand or so years of human history have been rendered, if not irrelevant, then clearly insufficient."[62] Animals are intrinsic to these discussions, of "nature," "environment," and "ecological crisis." Thus, attention to the other than human is relevant to both religion and society at large in the context of ecological crisis. What is at stake is that "because both religious commitments and religion-originated views of the world are integral parts of so many humans' worldviews and life-ways today, the development of a critically sophisticated study of religion and animals can be crucial to the spread of a healthy, historically informed and culturally sensitive forms" of religious studies.[63] The scholar of religion, conversant in the interdisciplinary work of animal studies, can provide valuable critique at this intersection.

To demonstrate the need for this critical sophistication one can look at what the ethical implications are for religious worldviews and cosmologies as they concern animals. On the surface there can be much that appears positive. Take the Jain tradition for instance, which distinguishes 8,400,000 different species of life forms.[64] Jains proclaim a "biological and psychological continuity between the animal and human realm" and they "seek to uphold and respect animals as being fundamentally in reality not different from ourselves."[65] The place of animals in Jain cosmology is central, and radical non-violence is practiced towards animals according to a sophisticated hierarchical differentiation between animals of lesser and greater sensory complexity. Hinduism and Buddhism also have a great deal to say about animals. Ivette

[62]Gottlieb, "Introduction," 4.
[63]Waldau, *Animal Studies*, 174.
[64]Christopher Chapple, "Inherent Value without Nostalgia: Animals and the Jaina Tradition," in *Communion of Subjects*, eds. Kimberly Patton and Paul Waldau (New York: Columbia University Press), 241.
[65]Ibid, 247-248.

Vargas states that for Indian and Tibetan Buddhism "animals are key players, transmitters, and transformers."[66]

Yet it is important not to generalize. For example, assessing the extent to which various religious traditions are "friendly" or "unfriendly" to animals depends on a complex arrangement of considerations. Firstly, religious adherents can often times not actually practice the "official" teachings of the tradition as they relate to subjects like animals. Also, some religious traditions can be deeply committed to "preserving the Earth," yet be indifferent to individual animals themselves. Even in the case of Christianity where one could argue as Lynn White Jr. did, that "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen,"[67] there are important figures like Francis of Assisi, who "put into practice altogether more positive responses to animals."[68] The point is that religious attitudes towards animals are highly nuanced and overgeneralizations are to be avoided.

The need for greater attention to detail becomes more apparent at the physical level of interaction between humans and animals, such as ritual. Take the Jewish practice of Kaporos for example, where on the eve of Yom Kippur chickens are swung over the heads of practitioners in a symbolic atonement and then slaughtered for food. It is not merely the suffering of the animal endured during the ritual which represents the only ethical concern. The cognitive-emotional capacity and needs of a chicken are undermined by the conditions in which these chickens are raised and contained prior to sacrifice. Given this, combined with the ecological impact of the farming scale it takes to produce the chickens, a scholar may ask: does this represent sound "Jewish" ethics under the terms of the religious tradition itself? Another example would be found

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[66]Ivette Vargas, "Snake-Kings, Boars Heads, Deer Parks, Monkey Talks – Animals as Transmitters and Transformers in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Narratives," in *Communion of Subjects*, eds. Kimberly Patton and Paul Waldau (New York: Columbia University Press), 232.
[67]Lynn White Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", in *Science* 155 (1967): 1205.
[68]Waldau, *Animal Studies*, 173.

in Kerala state, India, where elephants are used in Hindu temple worship. On the one hand it may appear as though the elephants are treated quite well, given that some even live in an elephant palace. Yet they are migratory, social, animals and endure a great deal of suffering during *any* kind of captivity. Therefore their "sacredness" to the Hindus of Kerala on its own does not amount to good ethics when you consider the elephants' experience in the matter. However the animals' experience can only be addressed with attention to interdisciplinary animal studies involving scientifically rigorous disciplines like cognitive ethology. The more that can be known about animals' experience, the more humans realize that understanding their needs goes beyond addressing superficial responses to issues of mere "sentience." The complexity of animal experience demands a complexity in ethical consideration and critique. The ethical dimensions of the religion scholar's work become clearer when there is greater sophistication in the kind of consideration animals themselves receive. When combined with the scholar's existing knowledge of a given religious tradition itself, these tools help to develop critical theories that attend to animal experience as well as pay close "attention to assumptions, value structures, and the role of ideologies" in various religious responses.[69]

2.1.2 Extended Implications for Religious Studies

James Miller succinctly states that "anthropocentric humanism of the European Enlightenment mentality is beginning to clash profoundly with the findings of contemporary holistic sciences."[70] Consequently, "this anthropocentric worldview, whether conceived in religious or secular terms, we now know to be untrue; that is, it does not correspond to the reality of the physical universe as understood by science."[71] It is clear then that scholars need to begin from a place that corresponds to the way in which people are increasingly experiencing and

[69]Waldau, *Animals Studies*, 178.
[70]James Miller, "Daoism and Nature," in *The Oxford Handbook to Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger Gottlieb (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 220.
[71]Ibid, 221.

understanding the physical universe. Recovering a sense of place in the universe, a sense of identity as animals ourselves, and a sense of belonging to the long history of evolution, does not only have spiritual and religious implications for religious practitioners, it has implications for the religion scholar also. These implications are revealed in what an evolutionary consciousness tells us about ourselves as humans in relation to animals.

For instance Paul Waldau posits that "a full acknowledgement of our primate-hood, indeed our ape-hood, but especially our animal-hood is…important well beyond the scientific facts that connect our species not only to primates and mammals, but to all life."[72] In other words, understanding humans as animals has deep implications for the humanities, including religious studies. Take Matt Cartmill's point that "if something is truly unique it is inexplicable, because explaining something means showing that it isn't unique but fits some recurring pattern."[73] The historical constructions of religion have obviously developed recurring patterns which render religion explicable in the human world, but have yet to explain its emergence in comparison to even our closest co-evolutionary cousins. By accepting Cartmill's point, the origins of religion, however constructed, remain arguably inexplicable in an evolutionary context without further exploratory comparison with other species. In this sense animal religion is also poised to assist in better understanding the origins of religion that is profoundly relevant for the humanities. As Thomas Berry once said, "we cannot be truly ourselves in any adequate manner without all our companion beings throughout the earth, the larger community constitutes our greater self."[74] Our identity as humans is shaped by our diverse ecological vicinities, replete with other creatures

[72]Paul Waldau and Kweli ndugu yanga, "The Religious Horizons of Humans Are Primates," in *Worldviews* 11 (2007): 103-123.
[73]Matt Cartmill, "The Probability of Human Origins," in *When Worlds Converge – What Science and Religion Tell Us about the Story of the Universe and Our Place in It*, eds. Clifford N. Matthews, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Philip Hefner (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2002), 96.
[74] Thomas Berry, "Prologue: Lonliness and Presence," in *Communion of Subjects*, eds. Kimberly Patton and Paul Waldau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), xvii.

with whom we share the planet. Within a cross-species framework, religion is on the cusp of being understood with innovative clarity. Interdisciplinary approaches that take account of the scientific study of animals provide analytical tools which are socially and ethically relevant.

Ultimately the global perspectives which continue to emerge from an increasingly complex understanding of evolution radically undermine a human-exclusive or anthropocentric worldview. Whether in the context of providing ethically sensitive critiques of religious responses to forces like ecological crisis, or in the context of understanding religion itself in an evolutionary context, it is reasonable, germane and necessary for the scholar of religion to consider studying other-than-human life.

2.2 Materialist Approaches in the Study of Religion

2.2.1 The Importance of Taking a Non Reductive Approach

Vasquez describes materialism as a "turn" in the field of religious studies, which sought to address "religion as it is lived by human beings, not by angels."[75] Vasquez partially accounts for this turn as a reaction to the popular conception of religion as concerned primarily with the metaphysical and the transcendent. According to Vasquez materialist theories correspond to Bruce Lincoln's appeal to "insist on discussing the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices, and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine."[76] Yet many attempts have been made to address the temporal and physical dimensions of religion. What distinguishes Vasquez's materialism is that it is co-terminous with a *non-reductive* approach. This approach is summed up when Vasquez states that: "whilst recognizing the material constraints and possibilities entailed by our being in the world through our physical

[75]Vasquez, *Belief*, 5.
[76]Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 1996, 8 (3): 226.

bodies, [this] does not reduce all experiences and cultural productions to the dynamics of the brain, genes, or evolutionary biology."[77] In this way Vasquez is clear that he is not anti-reductive, as he acknowledges from the outset that humans are compelled to "select, condense, name, break down, and categorize phenomena in order to be fully able to act effectively in the world."[78] Nevertheless he rejects the "strong reductionist" model which seeks to expose religion in a downward direction, such that it can be explained "in terms of people, people in terms of organs, organs by cells, cells by biochemistry" and so on further down.[79]

Reductionism of the strong kind still exists in some quarters of religious studies. For example the cognitive sciences are beginning to empirically demonstrate, albeit in a basic way, shared underpinnings to greater sums of phenomena labelled "religious." The cognitive science of religion is doing so largely by using neuroscientific methods to locate basic cognitive apparatus at play in the formation of "religious" ideas.[80] This work is producing some ground-breaking results. Aside from limiting the terms of religion more generally, what is at stake for animal religion in the top-down character of strong reductionist approaches is that they begin with the human (often the human mind) and work their way down. Animals inevitably exist on a lower end of the spectrum. Thus, there exist approaches which are material in the sense that they deal with aspects of physical embodiment, yet remain highly anthropocentric in terms of the direction of reduction. In strong reductionist approaches religion starts as more complex, more sophisticated and more human.

Animal religion benefits from a non-reductive materialist approach because these approaches do not pretend "that religion has a fixed point of origin, a moment where the pin of

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[77]Vasquez, *Belief*, 7.
[78]Ibid.
[79]Stuart Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 10-11.
[80]By ideas I refer primarily to belief. It is belief, and specifically belief in supernatural agency that provides the primary object of study for scholars in the cognitive science of religion.

the term 'religion first punctuates the butterfly of religion as such and sticks it to a board.'"[81] Non-reductive materialism is decidedly agnostic about any essential/fundamental characteristics to religion, and likewise relativistic about the number of possible approaches there are to study it. Although Vasquez himself still refers primarily to the human context, in principle these aspects of a non-reductive approach avoid fighting an uphill contest for animal religion. This is because a non-reductive approach allows for the kind of cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches to religion that would combine to produce theories of animal religion.

2.2.2 Emotion, Religion, and the Cross-Species Bridge

In the opening chapter of *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretations*, John Corrigan describes how scholars of religion have historically been reluctant to address issues of emotion because of their long association with "a wide range of figures, from mystics to psychologists, theologians to artists, scriptural exegetes to literary and social structuralists and poststructuralists."[82] Notably because of the entanglement of emotion and theological discourse in particular, some religion scholars have found it too problematic a topic for discussion. However additional reasons for this reluctance can be located in the point that emotions themselves have also been historically caught up in Enlightenment dualisms. For instance the most basic feminist observations regarding the operation of hierarchical dualisms would likely identify "emotion" as the binary opposite of "reason," and as it happens, something more prevalent in females.[83]

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[81]Schaefer, "Do Animals," 174.
[82]John Corrigan, "Introduction: Emotions Research and the Academic Study of Religion," in *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretations*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.
[83]The dichotomy of reason and emotion, the correlation of reason with "maleness," and the gendering of emotion is discussed by Raia Prokhovnik in her the chapter "Reason and Emotion" in *Rational Woman: A Feminist Critique of Dichotomy* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 50-103.

What these dichotomies fail to address "is that both emotion and reason are forms of intentional behaviour embedded in a biological and social context."[84] This is not to deny the necessary distinctions between cognition and emotion, but rather to understand how they are interrelated. Indeed "emotions contain information, the biological substratum of which is non cognitive, but the effect of which is to provide cues for cognition and action."[85] In other words emotions can be seen as self-organizing systems of interactions that inform certain types of intentional behaviour.[86] Emotions are strategies, "they are decisions to act a certain way."[87] The American philosopher Robert Solomon suggests that through our emotions "we constitute our (subjective) world, render it meaningful and with it our lives and Selves."[88]

If one is able to regard emotions as the organizing principles around which both mind and body collaboratively constitute our subjective, personal and social selves; then one is better able to see why other scholars have commented on the importance of emotions to religion. William James for instance, suggests that religion is based in humans' "passionate nature" and that "feeling is the deeper source of religion."[89] Some scholars who are influential in the cognitive science of religion have made similar claims. Pascal Boyer identifies how religious ideas are interconnected with emotional structures.[90] Harvey Whitehouse references the emotionally intense character of religiosity in its "imagistic mode."[91] Robert McCauley and Thomas E.

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[84]Hanz Schilderman, "Religion and Emotion – Notes on Their Relationship," in *Journal of Empirical Theology*, January, 2001, 87.
[85]Ibid, 87.
[86]See Izard, C.E., Psychology of Emotions (New York: Plenum, 1991).
[87]Robert A. Segal, "William James on Religion and Emotion," in *Emotions and Religious Dynamics*, eds. Douglas J. Davies and Nathaniel A. Warne (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 153.
[88]Robert Solomon, The Passions: The Myth and Nature of Human Emotion (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976),169. I have referred to "emotion" here primarily in scientific terms, and this can ironically appear to be sort of reductionist. However I want to stress that these are partial explanations for what counts as "emotion," and they have been selected because their scientific character helps to better situate human/animal comparisons.
[89]William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 329.
[90]Pascal Boyer. *Religion Explained – The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001)
[91]Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons – Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Lawson have labelled religious rituals as uniquely placed to invigorate human emotions."[92] Additional psychological research indicates that religious norms "have a strong influence on emotional regulation."[93] Mariette Frederique Baanders offers four types of regulatory emotional norms which include: firstly describing the exhibition roles (who can show what emotions to whom); secondly, prescriptions about the appropriate type and intensity of emotion in a given situation; thirdly, coping patterns which deal with how to appropriately address certain emotional encounters; and finally concern significance which address the level of time, attention and importance certain encounters ought to be afforded.[94] It is not difficult to see how religion can both define and be defined by such emotional structures. Emotions play a key role in social and cultural organization, and religion is not a likely exception.

One way to understand emotion, according to Corrigan, is as the result of "engagement of highly complex social codes governing such things as status, authority, relationality, life passages, and contact with outsiders." [95] Accordingly, by seeing emotions as inherently structured and as subjectively, socially, biologically and intellectually conditioned, it becomes easier to grasp what materialist theories of religion are attempting to do more broadly, which is to narrow the gaps between discursive and non-discursive frameworks for religion. For instance materialist approaches like those of Vasquez avoid the older tendencies to reduce "emotion" to a sort of universal descriptor caught up in dualisms of "rational" and "irrational." Materialist approaches are keen to develop a deeper understanding of the interplay between the cultural and biological, and this offers one way into a more fruitful discussion of animal religion. This is because emotion can feature as a cross species comparative framework. Put simply if we can accept that

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[92]Thomas E. Lawson and Robert McCauley, *Bringing Ritual to Mind-Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[93]Schilderman, "Religion and Emotion," 92.
[94]M.F. Baanders, *The Rules of the Game, Emotional Norms in Daily Life* (Thesis: Amsterdam: 1997), 15-26.
[95]Corrigan, Emotion, 12.

emotion is critical to religion (and this can be evidenced using a variety of approaches that take account of complex embodied life ways), and emotion is a shared evolutionary phenomenon (that humans share in common with other species), it becomes reasonable to query in what ways animals organize social strata on emotional lines that mirror or parallel what is termed "religious" in the human context.

Some scholars have already taken up this line of thinking in a number of interesting ways. For instance Donovan Schaefer in his essay "Do Animals Have Religion? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religion and Embodiment," cites the cognitive ethology of Marc Bekoff. Schaefer suggests that "rather than thinking of religion as inexorable from belief, we must begin to explore the emotional patterns that make up religion among animals, human and non-human."[96] To demonstrate this Schaefer looks at animal responses to death as recounted by Marc Bekoff. Bekoff relates watching a vixen bury her mate in the back garden of his Colorado home. The vixen would "kick dirt, stop, look at the carcass, and intentionally kick again."[97] This process would continue until the body of her mate was completely buried. Wolves have also been observed performing this rite, particularly when it involves a mate, and additionally they have been observed travelling great distances over new territory to acquire solitude in order to mourn. Even their howling rhythms and sounds change.[98] Schaefer argues that where complex animal "reactions include a response to death, these forms can seem to overlap with recognizably religious human forms" and it is reasonable to explore these dynamics with reference to other complex and multiform ranges of emotions.[99]

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[96]Donovan Schaefer, "Do Animals Have Religion? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religion and Embodiment," in *Anthrozoos* 25 (2012): 173.
[97]Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (Novato: New World Library, 2007), 64.
[98]Bekoff, *Emotional*, 62.
[99]Schaefer, "Do Animals," 183.

Ultimately materialist theories help to limit the totalizing attempts of social constructionism and biological reductionism. Indeed "multiple materialities are not just the product of iterative discursive practices but rather of the interaction between these practices and matter, including biology and ecology, which is dynamic, agentic, and polymorphously productive, matter that makes possible the production of discourse about it in the first place."[100] Emotion is a site where these limits are being worked out in a way that makes cross-species comparison possible, given the emotional complexity which other-than-human animals exhibit. Once again, given how emotion can be demonstrated to serve as integral to the social functioning of what is often termed religion, then perhaps animals organize their own systems of meaning in like ways. The vixen on Bekoff's lawn suggests so.

[100]Vasquez, *More*, 169.

Chapter 3

Cognitive Ethology and the Case for Animal Emotions

3.1 The Roots and Current Trajectory of Cognitive Ethology

Cognitive ethology can be "broadly defined as the evolutionary and comparative study of nonhuman animal (hereafter animal) thought processes, consciousness, beliefs, or rationality."[101] Cognitive ethology has its beginnings in areas such as comparative psychology, classical ethology, laboratory experimental psychology, and philosophy of science.[102] Donald Griffin launched the field in 1976 with his book *The Question of Animal Awareness: Evolutionary Continuity of Mental Experience*. Griffin and his contemporaries struggled to establish what Marc Bekoff refers to as "what we intuitively understand: that animals feel, and their emotions are as important to them as ours are to us."[103] Bekoff usually cites the example of pets, particularly dogs, to illustrate the point that many people instinctively know that animals live rich emotional lives. Providing an empirical basis both to substantiate and explain this intuition represents the core impetus for cognitive ethology. This stands in contrast to the behaviourist-centric research of classical ethology and other animal studies, namely the research into the strictly bio-mechanical functioning of animals, within a purely "physical stimulus/physical response" paradigm.

Cognitive ethology takes its lead from anecdotal cognitivism, which was first championed by Charles Darwin. In describing the anecdotal cognitivist approach Bekoff and Allen state:

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[101]Marc Bekoff, "Cognitive Ethology and the Explanation of Nonhuman Animal Behavior," in *Comparative Approaches to Cognitive Science*, eds. J.A. Meyer and H. L. Roitblat (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 119.
[102]Carolyn A. Ristau, Preface, in *Cognitive Ethology, the minds of other animals – Essays in honor of David Griffin* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), xi.
[103]Bekoff, *Emotional*, 1.

> Their [Darwin and his contemporaries] approach incorporated appeals to evolutionary theory, interests in mental continuity, concerns with individual and intraspecific variation, interests in the mental worlds of animals, close associations with natural history, and attempts to learn more about the behaviour of animals in conditions that are as close as possible to the environments in which natural selection has occurred or is occurring.[104]

This helps to demonstrate how cognitive ethology differs from classical ethology not only in what it seeks to elucidate, but the manner in which it does so. Collective anecdotes play a key role in the presentation of cognitive ethological research and this has positive and negative dimensions vis-à-vis the animal science community. Additionally, conventional animal studies are, and have been, conducted in a laboratory. For instance Marc Bekoff cites that in 2001 American laboratories "conducted research on about 690,800 guinea pigs, rabbits, and hamsters, in addition to 161,700 farm animals, 70,000 dogs, 49,400 primates, 22,800 cats, and 80 million mice and rats."[105] For cognitive ethologists there is a direct relationship between what they see as the ethical and scholarly problems represented by the modern laboratory.

The ethical concern can be exemplified by the experience of Pablo, otherwise known as CH-377, who lived out his days in a New York University Laboratory. A cognitive ethologist might ask: how (assuming it were possible) can a scientist *know* the range of Pablo's experience when he is caged, and subjected to being darted 220 times, undergoing 28 liver, two bone marrow and two lymph node biopsies, enduring four injections for an experimental hepatitis vaccine, and lastly receiving 10,000 times the lethal dose of HIV?[106] The rhetorical answer from cognitive ethology is: not much, and not enough. The scientific limitations of laboratory research into animal behaviour, sharply contrasts with the work of Jill D. Pruetz and Thomas C. LaDuke who have conducted studies among chimpanzees in Senegal to build a case for understanding the

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[104]Colin Allen and Marc Bekoff, *Species of Mind* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1997), ix.
[105]Bekoff, *Emotional*, 138.
[106]The case of Pablo is recounted by Marc Bekoff in: Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (Novato: New World Library, 2007).

evolution of human response to fire. Chimpanzees are close to human lineage and this makes them "phylogenetically relevant to the study of hominid evolution."[107] Additionally the similar ecological location of these chimps to that of the "savanna mosaic thought to characterize much of hominid evolution, makes these apes ecologically important as a *living* primate model."[108] The conclusions these two scientists draw are that these apes' "ability to conceptualize the behaviour of fire" can tell us something about the origins of how humans ultimately gained use and control of this element.[109] Without conducting research in the specific ecological location in which these chimps live, these fascinating conclusions could not have been reached. Moreover these studies tell us as much about ourselves as about the chimpanzees, and this represents the 'spirit' of cognitive ethological work. Classical laboratory studies into animal behaviour could never have enabled this kind of research to be conducted.

Yet the lingering preference for the laboratory remains in animal research disciplines because the scientific method principally demands controlled environments for often repeated experimentation. Cognitive ethology is not yet on the dominant side of this debate and criticism of the field has been substantial.

For cognitive ethology, "the major problems are those that center on methods of data collection, analysis, and on the description, interpretation, and explanation of animal behavior."[110] The criticism levelled at cognitive ethologists can be best characterized by three particular groups described by Marc Bekoff as "slayers," "skeptics" and "proponents."[111] Slayers are represented by those would deny any possibility for the success of cognitive ethology. Such

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[107]Jill D. Pruetz and Thomas C. LaDuke, "Brief Communication: Reaction to Fire by Savanna Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes verus*) at Fongoli, Senegal: Conceptualization of 'Fire Behaviour' and the Case for the Chimpanzee Model," in *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 141 (2010): 646-650.
[108]Pruetz and LaDuke, "Brief," 646.
[109]Ibid, 646.
[110]Bekoff, "Cognitive Ethology," 119.
[111]Ibid,121.

views are represented by the evolutionary biologist George C. Williams who states "I am inclined merely to delete it [the mental realm] from biological explanation, because it is an entirely private phenomenon, and biology must deal with the publicly demonstrable."[112] Williams and others object to the very notion that animals' mental experiences can be known at all. Bekoff contends that this view bases its objection on non-empirical, philosophical grounds, and does not actually address the empirical work cognitive ethology puts forward, specifically in terms of what it is designed to show. Bekoff argues that "slayers" often object to cognitive ethology not because they actually believe they cannot know animal mental states, but because they simply refuse to know. This unwillingness is arguably predicated on certain philosophical dispositions which harken back to Descartes.

Beneath many of these objections to cognitive ethology is the same dualistic human exceptionalism that grounds traditional approaches to animal research. Here, Descartes' dualisms of mind versus matter, and human versus nature and his characterization of animals as *automata*, has had a lasting influence. For a considerably long time, animal sciences buttressed the view that only humans were truly conscious and that animals were biologically conditioned automata. At the very least the feeling among scientists described as "slayers" can be characterized by a view that cognitive ethology is "too vague a subject for scientific investigation because we lack objective criteria by which to judge whether an animal is conscious."[113] Yet often the standard criterion for determining consciousness is predicated on a Cartesian exceptionalist model. Even when cognitive ethology attempts to look at emotion specifically, some scientists maintain that "more than any other species, we are the beneficiaries and victims of a wealth of emotional

[112]G.C. Williams, *Natural Selection: Domains, levels, and Challenges* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4.
[113]Donald Griffin, "Progress Toward a Cognitive Ethology," in *Cognitive Ethology, the minds of other animals – Essays in honor of David Griffin* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 4.

experience."[114] As Bekoff points out, there is absolutely no way to substantiate such a claim. What can be observed from such quotes is that purportedly hard-nosed empiricist scientists rather hypocritically in some cases depend on purely philosophical perspectives to deny the work of cognitive ethology. Ultimately Bekoff and Allen "think it worth pointing out that arguments against cognitive ethology appear to operate at the level of the paradigm"[115] That particular paradigm tends to be a behaviourist one, one that favours human controlled clinical environments which investigate animals in a way that assumes to varying degrees a Cartesian perspective, which regards animals as exhausted by their biological materiality. Behaviourists, notably those doing behavioural psychology, have favoured learning by association and coincidence to explain changes and adaptations in animal behaviour. Bekoff believes such attempts go to great lengths to stretch the limits of common sense when it is in fact seemingly more apt to describe certain behavioural patterns as the result of a thinking animal that is capable of personal intention. Bekoff contends that "the best way to learn about the emotional lives of animals is to conduct non-invasive comparative and evolutionary ethological, neurobiological, and endocrinological research" and this is outside the laboratory and beyond the behaviourist paradigm.[116]

Cognitive ethology is thus distinguished from more conventional studies in animal research by the locations and starting points of its work. Cognitive ethology seeks to rupture the bonds of the modern laboratory and likewise the limited perspective of what is possible in other-than-human experience. The worldviews, scientific theories and philosophies which inform that

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[114]This quote is attributed to Professor R.J. Dolan and was published in the Journal 'Science' it is cited by Marc Bekoff in *The Emotional Lives of Animals*.

[115]Marc Bekoff, and Allen, C. "Cognitive Ethology: Slayers, Skeptics, and Proponents." In *Anthropomorphism, Anecdotes, and Animals: The Emperor's New Clothes?*, edited by R. W. Mitchell, N. Thompson, and L. Miles, 313-334. New York: State University of New York Press, 1997.

[116]Marc Bekoff, "Wild Justice, Social Cognition, Fairness and Morality: A Deep Appreciation for the Subjective Lives of Animals," in *Communion of Subjects*, eds. Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 473.

limited perspective represent a cultural legacy also common to religious studies; in so far as some of the same characteristics of human exceptionalism are present, and preclude a more thorough investigation of other-than-human animal experience.

3.2 The Contributions of Marc Bekoff

Marc Bekoff's contributions have been unique in terms of the questions he asks, the tools he champions and the dialogues he engages. For instance Bekoff is not concerned with questions of whether animals have emotions, for him this is self-evident. Bekoff wants to understand *why* animals have emotions. Consequently Bekoff situates his research within a comparative and evolutionary framework. Bekoff believes, like Darwin, that the gap between humans and animals is widely exaggerated and that humans are still living with a Neolithic brain that was at one time capable of enjoying more mutually enhancing relationships with animals. There is a sense for Bekoff that humans have lost some of their evolutionary way, or at least forgotten about it. This is why Bekoff believes strongly that we have more to learn about ourselves through learning about animals, allowing us to ask and answer questions of why similarities and differences between us have evolved the way they have.

In terms of his research Bekoff is unapologetic for his use of anecdotal evidence. He concedes that the anecdote (singular) does not equate to evidence, but that anecdotes (plural) do. However Bekoff also points out that the kind of anecdotal evidence cognitive ethology puts forward, whilst taking inspiration from anecdotal cognitivism, moves beyond its limitations through the acquisition of more rigorous methods. For example, "Cognitive ethologists are now able to exploit techniques like experimental playbacks of vocalizations to conduct controlled studies under field conditions; the range of experiments made possible by such techniques means that there can be no easy dismissal of modern cognitive ethology on the grounds that it is

anecdotal or lacks empirical rigor."[117] Granted there is work still to be done in developing 'harder' methodologies, but out of hand dismissals of cognitive ethology as "unscientific" are no longer defensible. Yet there remains the important work of shifting the ground for how existing data is interpreted. In this regard certain philosophical commitments remain a challenge. Yet for Bekoff, philosophical commitments to anthropocentrism should no longer be afforded a normativity that allows 'fuzzy' ideas to trump innovative suggestions by cognitive ethology.

In terms of Bekoff's engagement with religion, perhaps the most significant has been his contribution to Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton's *Communion of Subjects*, a book of collected works by various authors engaged with animals, and with religion, inspired by the cosmological vision of Thomas Berry. As part of developing a vision for human actions in the natural world, Berry had stated that the Earth is a communion of subjects and not a collection of objects. Mary Evelyn Tucker who contributed a chapter on the heritage of the volume states that the intention of the book was "to suggest the movement outward of ethical concerns exclusively from the human sphere to encompass other species…just as religions played an important role in creating socio-political changes in the twentieth century through moral challenges for the extension of human rights, so too now, in the twenty-first century, religions are contributing to the emergence of a broader ethics based on diverse sensibilities regarding the sacred dimensions of the 'more than human world'."[118] Bekoff's own chapter was entitled "Wild Justice, Social Cognition, Fairness, and Morality – A Deep Appreciation for the Subjective Lives of Animals." Of course much of the chapter is devoted to outlining his work in general, much as I have done above, yet

[117]Bekoff and Allen, "Slayers", 330. For more examples of the studies Bekoff refers to see: Seyfarth. R. M., Cheney, D. L., & Marler, P., "Vervet monkey alarm calls: Semantic communication in a free-ranging primate," *Animal Behaviour* 28 (1980): 1070-1094, and Allen, C. & Hauser, M. D, "Concept attribution in nonhuman animals: Theoretical and methodological problems in ascribing complex mental processes," *Philosophy of Science* 58 (1991): 221-240.

[118]Mary Eveleyn Tucker, Heritage of the Volume, in *Communion of Subjects*, edited by Paul Waldau, Kimberly Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

what is strikingly relevant is Bekoff's use of descriptors like 'spiritual' to describe animal sensibilities.[119] Bekoff holds the view that much of what constitutes our popular understanding of religious virtues, for instance love, altruism and compassion, spirituality, a sense of the sacred, are well documented in animal behaviour. It is appropriate to highlight this, as this paper is extending the limits of these notions a little further into the discipline of religious studies.

3.3 The Beginnings of Data

Turning to case studies in cognitive ethology underscores the kind of available data for animal religion. Yet it is important to recall the lenses through which to explore these case studies, and there are two significant points to note. The first is to recall the discussion of theories of embodiment, which understand religion as something emergent from physical-material processes. Given this, the second point is to see these case studies from an evolutionary perspective. It is from this vantage point that pre-linguistic, other-than-human capacities for religion are better observed. By recalling Darwin's idea that differences among species are by degree rather than kind; the closer this conversation of religion is to both embodiment and evolutionary origins, the closer it is to effective cross-comparison with non-human animal species.

Firstly it is important to understand that other-than-human animals possess emotions, but they "do not all have the same emotions, any more than humans do."[120] Just as behaviours are different so are feelings. This too is important to notice because a similar temptation is to overgeneralize at the species level, for example to state things like "swans (as in all swans) mate for life." Whilst most swans do mate for life, it is not accurate to universalize the trait. Just as this paper will subsequently demonstrate anecdotal accounts of "positive" animal affect, there are also many anecdotes that would seem to contradict these. For example, just as one animal can

[119]Bekoff, *Wild Justice*, 474.
[120]Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson & Susan McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep – The Emotional Lives of Animals* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), 7.

opt to show compassion and save the life of an orphaned member of another species, another of the same species could opt to abandon it. Just as some humans can show love and compassion, others can show hatred and contempt. What follows are three cursory glimpses of preliminary evidence that could prove fertile for further investigation into animal religion.

Much cognitive ethological research has been conducted on primates, but this first study is one conducted with dolphins. The reason for this is that language is often thought to be exclusive to humans, and likewise an integral component of religion. Yet L.M Herman and his colleagues set out to conduct an intensive training program designed to access "the degree to which they [the dolphins] can understand not only individual signals but combinations of signals that are related to one another in a manner resembling the grammatical rules of English."[121] What was at stake was to challenge the widespread conviction that combinatorial productivity based on the use of "rule governed combinations of words constitutes an essential feature of human language."[122] The way in which this was tested was to train the dolphins to perform various combinations of commands such as "place bottom pipe in surface hoop."[123] The success rate was astounding, yet the dolphins' effective completion of these commands was diminished almost proportionally to the added number of words issued in the command. Nevertheless "these two dolphins had learned not only the meanings of the individual commands but the sequence rules governing which was direct and indirect object, and which modifier applied to a given object name."[124] Thus if dolphins "think in terms of these rules, they must be capable of thinking in correspondingly complex terms about the relationships between signals and the actions and objects for which they stand. It would be unwise to allow our preoccupation with the quantitatively unique capabilities of human language to obscure the fact that these experiments

[121]Donald Griffin, *Animal Minds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 215.
[122]Griffin, *Animal Minds*, 215.
[123]Ibid, 215.
[124]Ibid, 216.

reveal at least part of what the dolphins were thinking."[125] Indeed many animals have the ability to conceptualize. Chickens for example can conceptualize different communication signals related to food and danger, and this in itself is ground-breaking. Yet for dolphins to exhibit the kind of communicative complexity described above, leaves open the possibility for the *production* of such complex communication as it relates to various forms of social meaning making, one particular aspect of religion that is tied to emotions.

Another form of communication worth examining is play. Sam D. Gill states that "play is a common root of so much… symbol, metaphor, language, humour, art and religion."[126] Indeed play has become an interesting location for theorists in the study of religion, and its emergence. One of the most useful applications of theories of play to various religious rituals is notably in the context of what Gregory Bateson calls "meta-communication."[127] Meta-communication is the ability to denote that certain actions are not what they otherwise appear; their meaning changes. For instance when a Catholic priest washes the feet of a parishioner on Maundy Thursday he is not *really* washing the person's feet. This seeming paradox is communicated through symbols in a form of meta-communication. Members of the congregation will be aware that the priest is symbolically repeating and invoking the Christian call to servitude, modelled by Jesus of Nazareth, which is recounted in the biblical recording of an historical event where Jesus communicated this message by performing the same ritual action. Although this example speaks to quite a range of communicative complexity, it demonstrates how humans are able to navigate the paradox that "this" is not "this", because at the moment "this" is now something else.

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[125]Griffin, *Animal Minds*, 216.
[126]Sam D. Gill, "Play" in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun &Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Continuum, 2000), 452.
[127]Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), 184.

What is striking is that some animals also possess this ability at a fairly sophisticated level; and how meta-communication manifests in play is a key focal point in cognitive ethological research. Play "involves communication, intention, role playing and cooperation."[128] Bekoff and Allen focus on play because it "occurs in a wide range of mammalian species and in a number of avian species, and thus it affords the opportunity for a comparative investigation of cognitive abilities extending beyond the narrow focus on primates that often dominates discussions of non-human cognition."[129] Once again moving away slightly from primate-centric study, Bekoff contends that we have much to learn about the evolution of *human* morality from canid play. For one thing, play among these animals has "rules of engagement that must be followed, and when these break down, play suffers."[130] Indeed Bekoff goes on to say that "animal play appears to rely on the universal human value of the Golden Rule do unto others as you would have them do unto you."[131] Bekoff argues that animals are moral, but not necessarily in the way humans are moral. His contention is that "the phenomenon to which 'morality' refers is a wide ranging biological necessity for social living."[132] There are many complexities to what Bekoff is proposing, which include a discussion of terms, notably the distinction he makes between morality and ethics. Nevertheless, the basic point is that animals possess the ability to organize their social behaviour around conceptual frameworks of right, wrong, fairness, and justice, according to their own species differentiation, and that these are often learned and expressed through play and regulated by emotions. Once again there would appear to be some basic ingredients for the scholar of religion to take a closer look at.

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[128]Marc Bekoff, Colin Allen, *Species of Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 88.
[129]Bekoff, Allen, *Species*, 88.
[130]Bekoff, *Emotional*, 87.
[131]Ibid.
[132]Ibid.

The last case study is that of African elephant behaviour, as observed by Cynthia Moss and described by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson. Moss recalls in detail how African elephants "have a concept of death" which is displayed in a "ritual meaning we do not yet comprehend."[133] These elephants will often walk sullen with their heads down as they circle around a dead or dying member of the herd. Once their herd mate is finally dead the elephants form a circle facing outward, with their trunks on the ground. Occasionally individuals will reach backwards with one leg and touch the motionless body. After a while the elephants gather what scrub brush, grass or branches they can find and they drop these on or around the carcass. Elephants are also fascinated by elephant bones, indeed *only* elephant bones. Elephants will walk significant distances out of their way towards food and water to be with and touch other elephant bones. Moss recalls how once she studied the jaw bone of a particular female herd member and when her family passed by they came into the camp to be with the jawbone. One elephant who happened to be the seven year old calf of the elephant whose jaw bone it was, stayed behind from the herd for a long time afterward, caressing and feeling the bone.[134] It may be speculation to suggest that the calf remembered its mother and was remembering her in this encounter, but increasing opinion even among scientific researchers is that it is very likely.

In terms of what can be made of this behaviour, scientific researchers and observers are clearly using terms like "ritual." Yet scholars of religion might be quick to remind them that like almost all analytic categories in religious studies "ritual is a provocative notion, not a precisely delineated analytic category."[135] As such, like any key term it will "expose its fictive nature after being run through the mill of cross-cultural comparison and having sustained analytical attention

[133]Masson and McCarthy, *When*, 96.
[134]Ibid.
[135]Ronald Grimes, "Ritual" in, *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun &Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Continuum, 2000), 259.

focused on to it."[136] Yet it is hard to deny that there could be something there, if only one would entertain the idea.

3.4 Conclusion

Animal researchers and scholars in religious studies may share in common a skeptical exasperation with this project as regards the production of "hard" evidence in service of a definition of "animal religion." Yet as Bekoff and Allen point out, satisfactory definition is an endpoint of investigation and does not have to be a starting point. They cite the example of early chemists who could not define gold correctly. Putative examples of gold were initially identified using a "working definition" that made use of the appearance of a "soft, yellow, metallic substance."[137] It was not until much later that an atomic structure was revealed and samples could be identified against these criteria. As far as animal religion is concerned, hard and fast definitions are not in the offing, but working definitions might be possible.

Ultimately how we view animals informs how we treat them and this represents the ethical stake that is subtle yet integral to this paper. Religion may be an increasingly problematic category in our human world, but it may hold the preliminary theoretical and conceptual framework to understand dimensions of other-than-human experience that we have yet to evaluate. What we do know is that the world is a meaningful place for the other-than-human, as it is for the human.

[136]Grimes, *Ritual*, 261.
[137]Masson and McCarthy, *When*, 91.

Chapter 4

Final Conclusions

4.1 The Consequences for the Study of Religion

Religious studies like other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, is facing significant challenges in the current university environment, including how to envision religious studies as a discipline, understanding its place in the academy, and defining the object of its study. A discussion of animal religion helps to highlight the fault-lines for what is at stake for the discipline in these terms, at this moment in time. Indeed the viability of animal religion is dependent on some of the same constraints as the discipline of religious studies itself. Animal religion is poised to help draw out some of the toxic residue of the Enlightenment which hampers both animal religion and religious studies from moving forward.

4.1.1 Human Exclusivism

The first residue is human exclusivism which until now has been discussed only in terms of how it precludes the possibility of animal religion. Yet human exclusivism also imposes harmful limitations on the discipline of religious studies itself.

Rodney Stark points out that typically social scientists are trained to prefer one particular methodology, and will usually identify themselves accordingly as either "survey researchers, participant observers, or demographers" and so on.[138] However Stark states that this is also the cause of so much pointless research. The appropriate order of things is for the research question to precede the methodology. As Stark puts it "*how* to find it depends on *what* you want to know."[139] What is at stake is that when "one's primary commitment is to a particular

[138]Rodney Stark, "On Theory-Driven Methods," in *The Craft of Religious Studies*, ed. Jon R. Stone (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 175.
[139]Ibid.

methodology, one's ability to pursue important questions is severely limited."[140] Stark's insight is critical because it is analogous to the way human exclusivism in religious studies almost functions as a meta-method to which so many are unquestionably loyal.

Not only does human exclusivism limit the ability to pursue important questions, it also affects the discipline in an even more foundational way: it is a false starting point, a bad foundation that could undermine the integrity of the discipline.

For instance other disciplines which religious studies uses for its own (given that the discipline has no tools of its own) construct their work on foundations that assume relevance for cross species and evolutionary comparison. This should likewise inform the work of religious studies so that when scholars of religion apply labels to religious phenomena such as "cultural," or "psychological," there is mindfulness of the fact that other-than-human animals possess culture and psychology, and therefore evolutionary comparisons are not just required in the domains of cultural studies and psychology, but also religious studies as well. Ultimately I take Paul Waldau's point that:

> When there is no deep commitment to comparative work regarding humans' inevitable intersection with other-than-human animals, both formal and informal education are at a great risk. Among the most debilitating of the risks is the possibility that education about the non-human inhabitants of our shared world will remain human-centered in ways that continue to produce harms to other living beings and dysfunctions for humans in our local and global communities.[141]

So what animal religion reveals for the discipline in terms of human exclusivism, are faulty start lines and limited possibilities, combined with the prospect of social irrelevance and ethical indifference. This leads into the next issue of social engagement.

4.1.2 Social Engagement

[140]Stark, "Theory," 175.
[141]Paul Waldau, *Animal Studies*, 162.

Animal religion requires a deeper social engagement on the part of scholars. This is quite simply because animal religion would represent a general shift of focus toward the non-human in wider society. Greater attention to animals is an inevitable consequence of greater understanding of ecology and evolution. The place of the human in the universe is being questioned almost everywhere, and some would suggest this represents a vast shift in consciousness. Yet some scholars are still wedded to the traditional ideals of the cloistered academy; where the scholar is free to be disinterested and question what they like in the pursuit of knowledge, without interference or the contamination of other outside pressures. Questions like animal religion, and phrases like "shifting consciousness" inevitably invoke a deeper social engagement, and under the *ancien regime* this can make some scholars "who are content with a sort of monastic scholarship," uncomfortable.[142] However religious studies is not alone in this, and to see the limitations of the "Ivory Tower" is to witness part of wider challenges in the academy "that have more to do with whether or not the entire system of higher education needs to be radically rethought, and whether we can play a role in making a case for the importance and effectiveness of higher education in the humanities."[143] Indeed "religion departments are by no means the only departments that are scurrying to defend their continued existence in the university."[144]

Still, religious studies needs to accept the coming discomfort with intrepid optimism, or risk certain irrelevance in the long run. Even "old guard" scholars like Robert Bellah have seen the coming changes. As he points out "many students feel that there is probably more of importance in primitive shamanism than in all the cut and dried rationality that college professors

[142]Brian E. Malley, "Toward and Engaged Religious Studies," in Reinventing Religious Studies, ed. Scott S. Elliot (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 219.
[143]W.G. Frisina, "Religious Studies: Strategies for Survival in the 90's," in CSSR *Bulletin* 26, 29.
[144]Russell T. McCutcheon, "Late Capitalism Arrives on Campus – Making and Re-Making the Study of Religion," in Reinventing Religious Studies, ed. Scott S. Elliot (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 207.

serve up to them."[145] This statement points to a disconnect between the Enlightenment humanism at the core of the university curriculum and the popular cultural acceptance of a more than human world. Yet as Brian Malley says of his own experience with a more socially engaged religious studies: "I anticipate the rewards of this sort of work will be comparable to its discomfort and its difficulties."[146] One opportunity for the discipline is that "the development of a critically sophisticated study of religion and animals can be crucial to the spread of healthy, historically informed and culturally sensitive forms of Animal Studies."[147]

4.2 The Importance of Focusing on Animals

Given all that has been said here, scholars can no longer reasonably deny, ignore, obscure, reduce, or relativize the experience of animals in our work as scholars of religion. To put it simply:

> ...whatever escalator we clambered aboard some millions of years ago, a great deal of what defines our human-ness is identifiable in a nascent form amongst other animals, and notably in groups that extend beyond the mammals. Indeed the differences that serve to separate us from the rest of animal creation are in one sense utterly profound, but in nearly all other respects seem less than a hair's breadth away.[148]

Understanding animals is essential to understanding ourselves, and there is much to learn. Increasingly to understand something in isolation from ecology, biology, environmental science and evolution is to understand more about human imagination than about reality. The core assumption that is being called into question is an essential, radical distinction between humans and animals. Animal religion is not about sentimentalizing different animal behaviours. It is instead about ushering in the next wave of understanding religion in a post-Enlightenment period,

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[145]Robert N. Bellah, "Confessions of a Former Establishment Fundamentalist," in *Reinventing Religious Studies*, ed. Scott. S. Elliot (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 91.
[146]Malley, *Engaged*, 219.
[147]Waldau, *Animal Studies*, 175
[148]Simon Conway Morris, "Evolution and the Inevitability of Intelligent Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion,* ed. Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 150.

and underlying what the implications are for ethics, ecological crisis and many other socially relevant challenges facing humanity today.

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