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I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of animals in Epictetus's Stoicism has yet to be explored in detail. Yet Epictetus's views on nonhuman animals—or Nanimals, as I will call them—their traits, abilities, habits, and virtues, profoundly shape his view of what human beings are and what we ought to be. It is hardly surprising that Epictetus's texts on Nanimals have not been scrutinized by philosophers who write about animals,¹ by environmental ethicists, or by researchers in the emerging field of human-animal studies. This is in part because a common but superficial interpretation of the ancient Stoics holds that they summarily judged all Nanimals to lack *logos* (speech/reason) and so to fall outside the bounds of justice and morality, and therefore to be essentially irrelevant to the human art of living.² Yet I will argue that Epictetus's Stoic account juxtaposing beastly vices and animal virtues with monstrous, inhuman vices and humane virtues continues to be relevant. Finally, I will suggest that some aspects of his outlook on Nanimals resonate unexpectedly with the ideas of two quite different modern-day thinkers.

Some of the complex ways in which human beings conceive of Nanimals, how we relate to certain kinds of Nanimals, and how we use certain kinds of Nanimals, have changed little from Epictetus's day to our own. On the other hand, our much better scientific understanding of our kinship to them, the industrial complexes we have erected to bring huge numbers of select kinds of Nanimals into existence for a short time before disassembling them in order to gratify our conditioned tastes, the extent to which our ways of life recklessly exterminate billions of Nanimals every year, and the accelerated rate at which our unwillingness or inability to share this planet with other living things drives to extinction countless species of Nanimals, vastly distance our world from Epictetus's. The ancients domesticated, hunted, fished, and trapped animals, used them in religious sacrifices³ and agriculture,⁴ and used them for

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- 1 For example, Epictetus is entirely absent from Stephen T. Newmyer, *Animals in Greek and Roman Thought*. (Bibliographic information for all references can be found in the Select Bibliography at the end of this essay.)
 - 2 For a corrective to this superficial and oversimplified interpretation, see Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*.
 - 3 See Maria-Zoe Petropoulou, *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism, and Christianity*.
 - 4 Timothy Howe, *Pastoral Politics: Animals, Agriculture and Society in Ancient Greece*.

food,⁵ clothing, raw materials, labor, transportation, warfare, and sport.⁶ We continue to exploit nonhuman animals for nearly all of these purposes, but instead of ritually sacrificing them to the gods, we clone them, vivisect them, and genetically design them to be optimal experimental subjects and monstrously fast-growing but typically physically deformed protein machines to fuel our bodies. We routinely slaughter shiploads of bycatch.⁷ We kill millions of cats and dogs that aren't cute enough to adopt as pets in order to spare ourselves the costs of spaying and neutering their parents.

How might Epictetus the moralist evaluate the following statistics? Roughly 58 billion land animals worldwide each year are killed to become our food.⁸ In 2009, approximately 20 billion sea animals were killed in U.S. waters for human consumption. Unlike the ancients, we breed designer species to experiment on in laboratories in order to test new shampoos, soaps, cosmetic products, drugs, and biomedical instruments and treatments. Millions of rabbits, cats, dogs, and monkeys are sacrificed in such experiments. Estimates range widely, from 17 million to 100 million animals annually, because mice, rats, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates killed in experiments are unreported. Today we kill over 40 million animals a year worldwide for their fur. Over 200 million animals are reported killed legally by hunters in the United States each year. This number excludes those animals killed illegally by poachers, animals who are injured, escape, and die later, and orphaned animals who die after their mothers are killed. According to the Humane Society of the United States, three to four million cats and dogs are killed in animal shelters in the U.S. every year.

Today many of our activities and various aspects of the world we have constructed both directly and indirectly cause vast numbers of birds to die. Anywhere between 100 million and 900 million birds annually are estimated to die in the U.S. from flying into glass windows.⁹ The National Audubon Society estimates that 100 million birds fall prey to cats each year in the U.S. Between 50 and 100 million birds per year are estimated to be killed by cars and trucks on U.S. highways. Perhaps as many as 174 million birds die by colliding with power lines each year in the U.S. According to the Smithsonian Institution,

5 See Michael MacKinnon, *Production and Consumption of Animals in Roman Italy*.

6 See George Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome*.

7 Bycatch are the sea creatures we don't want to eat who are killed or lethally maimed because they have the bad luck of getting in the way as we fish and trawl for the marine animals we do like to eat.

8 The source of the statistics reported in this paragraph is <http://animalrights.about.com/od/animalrights101/tp/How-Many-Animals-Are-Killed.htm> (accessed July 13, 2012).

9 The source of the statistics reported in this paragraph is <http://www.currykerlinger.com/birds.htm> (accessed July 13, 2012).

pesticides may poison as many as 67 million birds per year. Communication towers, guy wires, electric power lines, livestock water tanks, oil and gas extraction, commercial fishing, logging, strip mining, airplanes, and fireworks kill perhaps between 5 and 12 million birds annually. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, more than 100 million ducks, geese, swans, doves, shorebirds, rails, cranes, and other birds are legally hunted and killed each year. How would Epictetus regard the fact that we directly and indirectly kill so many millions of birds every year as a result of what we decide to build, how we choose to travel, how we elect to produce our food and energy, and how we like to entertain ourselves? I will return to this question at the end of the paper.

Our contemporary understanding of the origin of all animal species was of course transformed by Charles Darwin.¹⁰ Yet as scientists continue to refine evolutionary biology, our attitudes about breeding, eating, wearing, hunting, owning, training, working with, experimenting on, domesticating, cuddling, and euthanizing nonhuman animals remain deeply ambivalent and ultimately, one could argue, incoherent.¹¹ So enticing is the convenient

10 For a lucid argument for the ethical lessons to be drawn from Darwinian evolutionism, see James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism*.

11 Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals*, 25, observes that “The French, who love their dogs, sometimes eat their horses. The Spanish, who love their horses, sometimes eat their cows. The Indians, who love their cows, sometimes eat their dogs.” We could add that Kashrut prohibits observant Jews from eating eels, lobster, oysters, clams, shrimp, crabs, cats, dogs, monkeys, pigs, rabbits, camels, hawks, eagles, owls, rodents, reptiles, and amphibians, while permitting them to eat properly slaughtered tuna, salmon, carp, herring, goats, sheep, deer, bison, cattle, chickens, ducks, and geese. There is some disagreement among Jewish communities about the permissibility of eating turkeys and locusts. Muslims may not eat pigs or any animal that has died from falling, being beaten, strangled, or suffocated, but may eat as Halal fish, sea animals, and properly slaughtered chickens, ducks, turkeys, deer, bison, goats, sheep, and cattle. Observant Catholics abstain from eating meat on Fridays, Ash Wednesday, and Good Friday, and during Lent. Some Catholics abstain from meat on Fridays year around, while others substitute a penitential practice or charitable practice for abstaining from meat on Fridays outside of Lent. This diversity of religious dietary rules and restrictions resists any scientifically informed philosophical justification. Consider: Americans train dogs to assist the physically disabled, guide the visually impaired, and provide therapy for those in emotional need. In 2009, Americans spent about 45 billion dollars on toys, accessories, and veterinary care for their pets (<http://www.dancingdogblog.com/2009/06/454-billion-spent-on-pets-top-5-categories-8-basic-annual-costs/> — accessed July 13, 2012). Yet Americans euthanize three to four million dogs and cats every year, and the corpses of many of these animals

belief inherited from Aristotle and the Stoics and re-affirmed in many of the world's religions that Nanimals are given to us by Nature Herself (or Zeus, God, Yahweh, Allah), and so belong to us as our property to use however we wish, that selfishness and self-deception seduce us into denying our post-Darwinian epistemically undeniable kinship with the other animals.¹²

The ancients disagreed about whether considerations of justice apply to the other animals. Even if we assume that justice excludes wild animals, might the beasts living among us in our community belong to the moral community? The Stoics believed that our rationality makes us superior to the other animals and that Providence gifts their bodies to us. The Epicureans believed that since Nanimals cannot make social pacts with us, they are unprotected by the constraints of justice. The Pythagoreans believed in the transmigration of the souls of all animals, both human and nonhuman, and they propounded a philosophy of vegetarianism. Dedication to empirical biology led Theophrastus, Aristotle's favorite pupil, to the realization that Nanimals can feel, sense, and reason just as human beings do. So, Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor as head of the Lyceum, rejected the practice of eating meat on the grounds that it robbed

are converted into protein pellets that become feed for poultry and cattle. Which Nanimals we love, which we hate, which we love to eat, which we hate to eat, which we fear, which we fondle, which we admire, which disgust us, and *when*, varies, sometimes widely, from culture to culture, religion to religion, place to place, profession to profession, social class to social class, and perhaps also from gender to gender. Though the period she covers ends three and a half centuries before Epictetus, see Louise Calder, *Cruelty and Sentimentality: Greek Attitudes to Animals, 600–300 BC*.

- 12 Does our kinship with the other animals *entitle* us to exploit them, or does it give us a good *prima facie* reason *not* to exploit them? Some argue as follows: (1) Nanimals use, kill, and eat other animals; (2) It is not wrong for Nanimals to do so; (3) Human beings are animals too; (4) Hence, it is not wrong for human beings to use, kill, and eat Nanimals. This argument seems to assume that (a) no Nanimals are moral agents with obligations to each other or to us, and so (b) no human beings are moral agents with any obligations regarding Nanimals. Yet most recognize that some human beings—normal adults, for example—are moral agents with various kinds of obligations. Interestingly, this moral status is invoked by some to argue as follows: (1) Human beings are moral agents and Nanimals are not; (2) Hence, human beings are superior to Nanimals; (3) Therefore, this superiority provides moral justification for human beings to use Nanimals however we choose. Arguments like these have been cogently criticized by more than a few philosophers who write on animals. See, for example, Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*; Steven F. Sapontzis, *Morals, Reason, and Animals*; Evelyn B. Pluhar, *Beyond Prejudice: The Moral Significance of Human and Nonhuman Animals*.

Nanimals of life and so was unjust. The most extensive catalogue of arguments for and against the permissibility of killing, ritually sacrificing, or eating animals that survives from antiquity is *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, written by the philosopher, religious critic, opponent of theurgy, and music theorist Porphyry of Tyre.¹³ Porphyry, born to Phoenician parents about a century after Epictetus's death, studied with Cassius Longinus in Athens and with Plotinus in Rome. Porphyry edited Plotinus's *Enneads* and authored the monumental and highly influential fifteen-volume polemic *Against the Christians*,¹⁴ which, along with the commentaries on it, was condemned by the imperial church in CE 448 and burned. The Latin translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge* became the standard textbook on logic throughout the medieval period. A very learned intellectual, philologist, and historian, Porphyry was a scathing wit, a vegetarian on spiritual and philosophical grounds, and a staunch defender of animals.

Born into slavery as a slave woman's son in Hierapolis, Phrygia, Epictetus may well have had a fair amount of firsthand experience interacting with and observing Nanimals. When Epictetus relocated to Rome, his familiarity with Nanimal behavior was adumbrated by the philosophy he learned from the great Stoic teacher Gaius Musonius Rufus. But instead of beginning my analysis of Epictetus's account of Nanimals by situating it among the other major philosophies of Nanimals in antiquity, for my purposes in this paper it should prove more instructive to compare Epictetus's zoology to a common contemporary view of animals.

Today, many sort Nanimals into five basic categories: (1) valuable resources we are free to generate, modify, destroy, and consume however we wish; (2) entertainers who provide us sport, spectacle, or amusement; (3) companions; (4) useless, benign bystanders who do not impede our activities; and (5) noxious threats to our health, hygiene, or safety. Note that from this contemporary perspective, these categories are permeable. We can move any particular Nanimal or collective group¹⁵ of Nanimals from one class to another as our attitude shifts or the setting changes.¹⁶ Few people today regard Nanimals as (6) virtuous role models or moral exemplars. Animalitarianism is the view

13 See Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*.

14 For the extant fragments, see Porphyry's *Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*.

15 Bevy of quail, cloud of flies, drove of asses, earth of fox, fold of sheep, gang of deer, herd of horses, kine of calves, litter of puppies, murder of crows, nest of vipers, pride of lions, rout of wolves, sounder of swine, team of oxen, etc.

16 For example, mice in the basement are pests to exterminate, a mouse in the field can be ignored, and a talking, hat-wearing mouse on the movie screen is an entertainer. A wild turkey in the woods could be shot with a camera, shot to death with a rifle, or both. A deer in a meadow could be hunted, while a deer on the highway can instantly become a car-damaging accident and roadkill.

that Nanimals are more natural, happier, and more admirable than human beings. Was Epictetus an animalitarian? I will argue that the answer is yes and no. Yes, Epictetus judges certain dispositions and traits of certain Nanimals to be admirable compared to the deficient conduct of vicious human beings. And no, Epictetus believes that certain wild animals are less happy than human beings and that Nanimals are not more natural than human beings, insofar as we are as capable of living in agreement with nature as they are. However, Epictetus scolds his students for failing to use their natural ability of reason properly, that is, in such a way as to be happy no matter what. Thus, Epictetus seems to think that certain Nanimals are happier in some respects than many human beings, but he insists that this is the fault of those human beings themselves and not ill fate imposed by nature.

II. US, THEM, AND SPECIFIC STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

The range and sophistication of animal examples in Epictetus far surpass those in the sparse remains of his teacher Musonius Rufus and Marcus Aurelius's *Memoranda*,¹⁷ whose Stoicism was strongly influenced by Epictetus. The protreptic roles that such numerous *exempla* play in Stoic ethics are little appreciated, yet philosophically weighty.¹⁸ Moreover, since Epictetus is the only Roman Stoic who speaks from an animal's own perspective, his use of *prosōpopeia* in key texts in the *Discourses* marks a significant advance in the pedagogical use of animal examples. In these discourses, Epictetus deploys specific Nanimals as normative models for his students to emulate. In doing so, he wavers between two very different traditions about Nanimals: the Stoic tradition that denies Nanimals reflective intelligence, and the popular Aesopic tradition that readily acknowledges animals as "persons" with various thoughts, feelings, cleverness, and other admirable traits.

17 For a brief defense of why this title of the collection of philosophical writings left by Marcus is better than *Meditations*, see William O. Stephens, *Marcus Aurelius: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 2.

18 While it is true that Epictetus identifies Socrates as the master of cross-examination (elenctic), Diogenes as the master of kingship and castigation (epiplectic), and Zeno as the master of teaching and formulating doctrine at 3.21.19, I interpret Epictetus's Diogenes as protreptic as well because I think Epictetus appreciated how well Diogenes perceived, admired, and trained himself to model, the sturdy self-sufficiency displayed by dogs, mice, and other animals. The plausibility, or at least possibility, of the connection between the epiplectic and the protreptic in Diogenes's case is suggested by the parallel connection of the protreptic and the elenctic at 3.23.33, and by Socrates's being credited with mastery in both protreptic and elenctic at 2.26.4–7. See Malcolm Schofield, "Epictetus on Cynicism".

Though Epictetus grants that there are many things that human beings have in common with other animals, he too holds that we are rational and they are not.¹⁹ He says that all animals are capable of using sense-impressions (*phantasiai*), but only human beings have the power to *understand* how to use our sense-impressions.²⁰ Epictetus contrasts the principal cognitive ability of animals with the more sophisticated cognitive abilities of human beings in the following text, worth quoting at length.

God had need of animals as beings who use sense-impressions, and of us as beings who understand that use. Therefore, it is sufficient for them to eat and drink and rest and procreate and perform other such functions as belong to each of them; but for us, to whom god has granted also the power of understanding, these functions are no longer sufficient, for if we do not act properly and in an orderly way, and each in conformity with his nature and constitution, we shall no longer achieve our own ends. For of beings whose constitutions are different, their works [*ta erga*] and ends are also different. So for the being whose constitution is adapted only to use, use alone is sufficient; but for the being who also has understanding of the use, unless what is proper is added to this, his end will never be attained. What then? Each of the animals God made so that one is to be eaten, another is

19 *Disc.* 1.6.12. On this discourse see Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book 1, 107–109. See also A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies*, 276 for a discussion of this text as it relates to Epictetus's account of the correct use of *phantasiai*, and 262, where Long quotes 1.6.20 to support his suggestion of how the Stoics reconcile continuity and difference between human and nonhuman animals. While Long is not incorrect that Epictetus was “open to the thought [...] that animal behaviour can teach us something about ethics and the common needs of all animal species, including ourselves” (261), I would go further. I contend that Epictetus's analysis of virtues and vices is grounded in the habits and patterns of behavior of all animals, human and nonhuman. For a comparison of the Stoics' account of human and animal psychology, see Adolf Bonhöffer, *Epictet und die Stoa*, 67–76.

20 2.8.4–8; 2.14.15. Urs Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch im Denken der Antike*, 229–230 writes: “Eine solche Freiheit gegenüber den Vorstellungen hat die Stoa den Tieren offenbar nicht zugestanden. Bezeichnend ist in diesem Zusammenhang, was Epiktet mehrfach als grundlegenden Unterschied zwischen Menschen und Tieren hervorhebt: Auch die Tiere haben Vorstellungen und machen Gebrauch davon, aber sie begleiten diesen Gebrauch nicht wie der Mensch mit verstandesmäßigem Urteil”, and in his note quotes from *Disc.* 2.8.6, cites 1.6.12–22 and 2.14.14, and refers for comparison to 1.28.20, 3.1.25, and 4.7.7.

to serve in farming, another is to produce cheese, and the others are for some other comparable use; for these purposes what need do they have to understand sense-impressions and to be able to distinguish between them? But the human being has been introduced to be a spectator both of Him and of His works, and not only a spectator, but also an interpreter of them. Therefore, it is shameful for a human being to begin and end just where the non-rational animals [*ta aloga*] do, but rather he ought to begin there, but end where nature has fixed our end. And it ended in contemplation and understanding and a way of life harmonious with nature.²¹

When Epictetus says that “a human being ought to begin” where the non-rational animals do, this beginning point might mean the biological, developmental beginning of life as an infant, or it might mean the first step toward achieving our proper end. This first step would include exercising our animal, non-rational constitution by eating, drinking, resting, procreating, using sense-impressions, and the like. But Epictetus insists that in addition to these functions, human beings are also endowed with the power of understanding sense-impressions, acting in an orderly way, in conformity with this constitution, and properly understanding that this is our distinctive human nature. God (Zeus) has made some Nanimals to be our food, some to make our food (cheese), and some to help us farm. Epictetus does not suggest in this text or elsewhere what service wild Nanimals might provide for us. But none of the other animals can be spectators or interpreters of Zeus or of Zeus’s works. Only human beings, with the power of understanding the world, can fulfill this role in nature. Therefore, only by both using and understanding sense-impressions, distinguishing between our sense-impressions, being spectators of Zeus, interpreting His works, contemplating the world, and thoughtfully, knowingly living a way of life harmonious with nature do we attain our proper, God-given end as the kind of animals we are. Epictetus concludes that to fall short of attaining this end by living the way of life

21 *Disc.* 1.6.13–21. Translations of Epictetus are mine. Johannes Haussleiter, *Der Vegetarismus in der Antike*, 270 quotes *Disc.* 1.6.18 to add support to Bonhöffer’s reasons for thinking that Epictetus was not a vegetarian like his teacher Musonius Rufus. Haussleiter adds: “Hier sehen wir deutlich, wie Epiktet auf dem Standpunkt des Chrysippos steht, daß die Tiere nur um des Menschen willen geschaffen sind.” Dierauer (*Tier und Mensch*, 240) writes: “Auch wenn der Anthropozentrismus nicht überall in der Stoa gleich extrem formuliert wird, so gehört doch die Behauptung, die Tiere seien um der Menschen willen geschaffen worden, zu jenen Sätzen, die praktisch für alle Stoiker bezeugt sind”, citing, among other sources, 1.6.18.

of mere animality is shameful for a human being. Humans are indeed the only animals that blush and know shame (3.7.27).

Epictetus maintains the anthropocentric view—as popular in antiquity as it remains today—that Zeus provides Nanimals for the service of human beings (1.16.1–8),²² and so Nanimals are not of primary importance (2.8.6–7). He argues that if the ass had been granted the power to understand its use of sense-impressions, it would no longer be subject to us, nor would it have provided these services to us, but it would be equal to and like us (2.8.8). Since Nanimals lack this power, however, they are works of the gods (*theōn erga*), but not parts of the gods (*merē theōn*) (2.8.10). Human beings differ from storks, for example, in understanding what they do, their sociability, faithfulness, self-respect, steadfastness, and intelligence (1.28.20).²³ Epictetus emphasizes that reason separates human beings from wild beasts and sheep, and as rational beings, we, unlike Nanimals, are capable of understanding the divine governance of the world and of reasoning out what follows from this divine governance. This special capability makes us citizens of the world and leading parts of it, not subservient parts of it (2.10.2–3). Nanimals lack the capacity to understand god's governance, and so they are much further removed from the divine than human beings are (4.7.7).

Nonetheless, Epictetus believes that nature equips every organism with its own particular nature and its own functional tendencies. So, each plant or animal does well when acting in accord with its peculiar nature, and does badly when acting contrary to it. He notes that the dog²⁴ ought not to be criticized for lacking an excellence characteristic of the horse (3.1.3–6; cf. *Ench.* 6). The dog's talent is at following the scent (4.5.13–14), yet not all dogs are equally good at tracking (1.2.34). Though the natural ability of the horse is to run (4.5.14), not all horses become swift (1.2.34). So, when Epictetus is careful, he recognizes that the excellence characteristic of one species of animal, say, the dog, ought not to be applied as the standard for evaluating the excellence of a different species of animal, say, the horse. The dog's talent is at following the scent and he is miserable not when he is unable to fly, but when he is unable to track. The horse's talent is to run and he is miserable not when he is unable to crow, but when he is unable to run (4.5.13–14). The excellent dog follows the scent well, while the inferior dog follows the scent poorly. The excellent horse runs swiftly, while the inferior horse runs slowly. Epictetus applies this standard of infra-specific Nanimal excellence to human beings as well. Though all people are naturally endowed with the capacity to become as great in rationality, virtue, and mental freedom as Socrates, not all—indeed, not

22 See Dobbin, "Commentary", 103–105.

23 See Dobbin, "Commentary", 225.

24 For a fascinating study, see Catherine Johns, *Dogs: History, Myth, Art*.

many—will realize this potential.²⁵ Few human beings will be excellent (virtuous). Most will not be.

But why should it be the case that only a few human beings will excel in rationality and become virtuous? If reason is a natural endowment of all human beings, why do only a few realize this potential? The explanation Epictetus offers is that human nature is essentially dual. He insists that we are chiefly the offspring of God (Zeus),

but since in our birth we have these two things mixed within us, the body, on the one hand, in common with the animals, reason and intelligence [*gnōmē*], on the other hand, in common with the gods, some of us incline towards the former kinship, which is the unfortunate and mortal one, while some few towards the divine and blessed one.²⁶

Human nature is a mixture of a bestial body and a godlike mind. Our bodily kinship with the other animals is mortal and unfortunate. Our kinship with the gods in rationality and intelligence is divine and blessed. Yet Epictetus notes that our divine and blessed rationality and intelligence fail to steer most of us away from our animality. Because of our kinship with the flesh, he explains, some of us incline towards the body and become like wolves, faithless, treacherous, and harmful. Others incline towards the body and become like lions, wild, savage, and untamed. But most of us incline towards the body and become like foxes, which Epictetus judges to be the sorriest of living creatures. “For what else is a slanderous and malicious human being than a fox, or something even sorrier [*atukhesteron*] and more rascally? Take care, then, and see to it that you do not become one of these wretches [*atukhēmatōn*].”²⁷

25 But what is great and exceptional perhaps befits others, Socrates and those like him. Why, then, if we are by nature born for this, do not all, or many, become like him? Well, do all horses become swift? Are all dogs keen to follow the scent? What then? Because I am naturally ungifted, shall I on that account give up my diligence? Far be it! Epictetus will not be better than Socrates; but if I am not worse, that is enough for me. For I shall never be a Milo, and yet I do not neglect my body; nor a Croesus, and yet I do not neglect my property; nor, simply, do we abandon diligence in any area because we despair of attaining the highest perfection in it. [1.2.33–37]

26 1.3.1–3. This view of the divine-animal duality of human nature seems consistent with the account given in 1.6.13–21.

27 *Disc.* 1.3.7–9; cf. 2.4.11. For comments on this discourse see Dobbin, “Commentary”, 86–88; at 8 he does well to translate *en zōiois atukhēmata* “the sorriest of the lot”, but then blunts the emphatic repetition by translating

Is Epictetus carelessly violating his own standard of infra-specific excellence by faulting members of one species—rapacious human beings—for acting like members of other species—wolves, lions, and foxes? Consider the many other examples he cites. To fail to listen to reason is to act like an ass (4.5.21). To fail to practice whole-hearted commitment is to foolishly imitate like an ape (*Disc.* 3.15.6 and *Ench.* 29.3). Epictetus urges his students to persevere and not to act frivolously as quails do.²⁸ He cautions against living in social isolation like flies.²⁹ The hypocrite who merely mouths many Stoic maxims without living by them displays the depravity of a worm.³⁰ Superficial camaraderie and veiled greed are exposed by means of a canine example. When a piece of land comes between a son and a father, their feigned friendship disappears, just like pups fawning on and playing with each other when a scrap of meat is thrown between them (2.22.9–11).

Epictetus is not carelessly forgetting his standard of infra-specific excellence by illustrating what counts as vice in a human being by comparison with the mimicking of apes, the “frivolity” of quails, the asociality of flies, the “depravity” of worms, or the greedy hunger for meat of pups. The power of reason, Epictetus believes, enables us to know better than the ass, who has no ability to listen to reason. We can know better than to ape many pursuits half-heartedly. We can know better than to be diverted from serious goals by frivolous distractions. Flies do not act viciously when they live as isolated individuals, but human beings are not flies and we *do* act viciously when we live in social isolation. Dogs do not act viciously when they fight over a scrap of meat, but human beings are not dogs. Father and son do betray their familial relationship when they fight over a piece of real estate. Epictetus’s concern is to educate his students about *human* vice and virtue, but it’s no accident that Nanimals provide a wealth of vivid lessons for his pedagogical aims. So, while

atukhesteron as “less dignified” in the next sentence. It is interesting that Epictetus portrays lions only negatively here. Lions are also symbols of good and noble qualities in other authors, and Epictetus himself greatly respects their untamed freedom (4.1.25). In Aesop, though not in Epictetus, even the wolf can be a symbol of freedom. Epictetus sees the fox as a wretched rascal, without also admiring its intelligence.

28 *Disc.* 3.25.5. For a disappointingly unclear description of the sport of *ortugokopia* see Julius Pollux, *Onomasticon* 9.108–9. See Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, for a literary exploration of Stoicism and manliness, and 3–15 for Wolfe’s description of a quail hunt.

29 1.23.6; cf. 4.11.32. See Dobbin, “Commentary,” 194–199.

30 4.1.142. Epictetus also uses the negative worm example when he rebukes Epicureans for supposing that the *ousia* of the good is pleasure: “For if this is so, lie down and sleep and lead the life of a worm, of which you have judged yourself worthy; eat and drink and copulate and defecate and snore” (2.20.10).

his standard of infra-specific excellence saves him from foolishly faulting a dog for lacking the virtue of a horse, it does not bar him from faulting a human being for having a certain trait that (he believes) resembles a particular trait of a wolf, lion, fox, ass, ape, quail, fly, worm, or dog. Epictetus finds this latter set of traits of Nanimals repugnant because they are vices in *human beings*, that is, because they conflict with the better part of *human* nature.

In some texts (3.1.3–6 and 4.5.11–14), it serves Epictetus's didactic purpose to recognize that the beauty of an animal derives from the abilities, habits, and behaviors distinctive to its species. In other passages (e.g. 1.3.7–9), however, Epictetus is not concerned to (or perhaps able to) realize that if the wolf's nature is to be faithless, treacherous, and harmful to its prey, if the lion's nature is to be savage, and if the fox's nature is to be rascally, then these animals act beautifully as excellent specimens when they act in these ways and conversely act badly precisely when they act *contrary* to their own distinctive traits. Epictetus explicitly affirms that a good dog tracks well and a good horse runs swiftly. Of course hunting dogs and domesticated horses serve anthropocentric ends. But probably because neither wolves, nor lions, nor foxes, nor snakes, nor wasps, nor any wild animals are useful servants of human beings, Epictetus does not reflect that a good wolf is treacherous, a good fox is rascally, and the like. Consequently, Epictetus missteps when he brands foxes "the sorriest of living creatures" due to their slanderous and malicious ways. That foxes have a nature distinct from other Nanimals does not make them unfortunate, sorry wretches. Indeed, how could a fox hurl slander? Epictetus nearly recognizes his mistaken condemnation of foxes when he remarks that a slanderous and malicious human being is something even sorrier and more rascally than a fox (at 1.3.8). Nevertheless, inasmuch as he judges foxes to be sorry, unhappy wretches, Epictetus is certainly not an animalitarian with respect to foxes.

Good hygiene is another norm for which Epictetus uses Nanimals instructively. He states that humans are specially distinguished from Nanimals by our instinct of cleanliness (4.11.1), which derives from the gods (4.11.3). Epictetus explains: "When [...] we see some other animal cleaning itself, we are in the habit of saying in surprise that it is acting 'like a human being'. And again, if one criticizes some animal, we are in the habit of saying immediately, as though apologizing, 'Well, it is not a human being'" (4.11.2). This apology is prompted by understanding of the standard of infra-specific excellence. Yet as this discourse unfolds, Epictetus's comparisons of hygiene among different Nanimal species are simply aimed at inculcating good habits in his adolescent pupils. "It was impossible that some dirt from eating should not remain on our teeth. Therefore, nature says, wash your teeth. Why? That you may be a human being, and neither a wild beast nor a little pig" (4.11.11). He praises the relative cleanliness³¹ of horses and purebred dogs, while decrying the filthy habits of

31 Epictetus also gives an argument by analogy that just as it is necessary to care for,

pigs, geese, worms, and spiders, which, he claims, are animals furthest removed from association with humans (4.11.31–32). He knows that wallowing in the mud is natural behavior for pigs, but his aim is to circumscribe proper *human* hygiene when, in one text, he appears to ignore the standard of infra-specific excellence and applies a human standard of cleanliness to pigs in judging them to be unclean.³² However, elsewhere Epictetus is more careful to recall explicitly the standard of infra-specific excellence as it applies to cleanliness.

Is one's body to be unclean? — By no means, but keep yourself clean as you are and as you were born to be, so that a man is clean as a man, a woman as a woman, and a child as a child. No, let us pluck out the mane of a lion, so that he not be

clean, and groom a horse that nature has given to you, it is also necessary to wash and groom the body that you have been given in order to avoid social impropriety (4.11.17). He expands this analogy of care for a horse and physical hygiene with the simile of an ass and treatment of the body and its equipment in general:

You ought to treat your whole body like a poor overburdened ass, as long as it is possible, as long as it is allowed; and if it be commandeered and a soldier lay hold of it, let it go, do not resist or grumble. If you do, you'll get a beating, and lose your poor little ass just the same. When this is the way in which you should conduct yourself with regard to your body, consider what is left for you to do about the things that are procured for the sake of the body. Since the body is a little ass, those other things become little bridles, little pack-saddles, little shoes, barley, fodder for a little ass. Let these go too; dismiss them more quickly and cheerfully than the little ass itself. [4.1.79–80]

The body is a preferred indifferent, according to Stoic ethical theory. Epictetus regards it as a tool for living virtuously, so it has only instrumental value. Food, drink, clothing, toiletries, and the like can then be seen as even more trivial—even less instrumentally valuable—than the body itself.

- 32 4.11.29: “Do you want me say to him, ‘Beauty [*to kalon*] consists not in being covered with manure, but in reason?’ For does he aim at beauty? Does he show any sign of it? Go and argue with a pig, that he should not wallow in the mud.” Given Epictetus’s belief that pigs are dirty animals, we are left to wonder how he would answer the question he poses about whether eating pork is holy or unholy (1.22.4); see Dobbin, “Commentary”, 192. Would their filth make pigs worthless objects beneath contempt and so ethically edible, or would their flesh be so tainted and disgusting that it would be ungodly to make a meal of them?

unclean; and the comb of a cock,³³ for he too ought to be “cleaned up”. Yes, but clean as a cock, and the other clean as a lion, and the hound as a hound. [3.1.45]

Interestingly, here Epictetus not only invokes the standard of infra-specific excellence, but even differentiates within our species subtypes of standards of cleanliness by gender and age. He recognizes that what counts as cleanliness for one species, for example, a pig, does not count as cleanliness for other species, say, a sheep or a human being. Since hair is quite natural in men,³⁴ lions, and hounds, none of these is cleansed by depilation. Nor is a cock’s comb grime to be removed. So, while Epictetus regards cleanliness as characteristic of a civilized, sociable, excellent human being, he does not regard depilation as a civilized practice.

A human being is a *hēmeron zoon*, a tame animal,³⁵ according to Epictetus, not a wild beast (2.10.14; 4.1.120). This wild/tame dichotomy distances human beings from some Nanimals more than from others. Savage beasts (*thēria*) and submissive sheep mark out opposing animal temperaments—vivid extremes between which Epictetus locates the “tameness” of human virtue. Among the tame animals, sheep (*probata*) are one of Epictetus’s favorite choices for normative instruction because he sees them as fine exemplars of gluttony, sexual indulgence, filthiness, randomness, and heedlessness. He artfully describes certain ovine habits for his students to avoid. For instance, the Stoic must be ever mindful of his mortality, Epictetus insists, and so collect externals—whether a shellfish or little onion to eat or a wife and child—while on the temporary shoreleave of life without thinking that he can take them with him when the ship of death sails. Epictetus teaches that the Stoic’s thought must be fixed on the ship and that he should constantly pay attention to it lest the Captain (Zeus) should call, in which case the Stoic must quickly give up all the externals he collected so as to avoid being thrown on board all tied up like the sheep (*Ench.* 7). A sheep, we are meant to imagine, would keep grazing heedlessly and would have to be forced back aboard. The Stoic must not think only of filling his stomach like the sheep does, but must be ready to drop at once all the externals he has collected and depart from life when Zeus signals it is time to die. Here Epictetus attributes to sheep a stubborn desire to eat. Elsewhere he characterizes sheep not as stubborn, but as acting too compliantly and lacking backbone, whereas wild beasts act destructively (3.23.4). In another text, Epictetus remarks that

33 Clearly borrowed from Musonius Rufus, *Lectures* xxi. 128.5–8; Epictetus glorifies the beard over the comb and the mane in 1.16.13–14.

34 Epictetus sees the beard not only as the hallmark of the philosopher (1.2.29; 2.23.21; 3.1.24; 4.8.12; 4.8.15), but also as a salient differentiation of the sexes (1.16.9–14). Consequently, he regards pogonotomomy as unnatural for men.

35 4.5.10 and frag. 25 in W. A. Oldfather, *Epictetus*.

a man with a deadened sense of self-respect (*to aidēmon*)³⁶ is worthless, a sheep, anything but a human being, whereas someone looking for somebody to kick or bite is some kind of wild beast (4.5.21). We act like sheep when we act for the sake of the belly, or the genitals, or at random, or in a filthy way, or heedlessly. We act like wild beasts when we act pugnaciously, injuriously, angrily, or rudely. To act like a sheep or a wild beast, Epictetus reasons, is to degrade ourselves, to destroy our humanity or our “profession as a human being” (*tou anthrōpou epanggelia*).³⁷

Sheep, then, are particularly useful for Epictetus’s ethical instruction because their host of repulsive traits include gluttony, sexual indulgence, randomness, spineless timidity, filthiness, heedlessness, and lack of self-respect. Despite this, sheep should not be regarded as the most contemptible of Nanimals, according to Epictetus, because they and all domesticated animals are of some use to human beings.³⁸ It is the “useless” creatures that Epictetus maligns the most because he judges them to fall outside nature’s providential scheme of utility.³⁹ Wasps, for example, are not liked, and neither are useless human beings.⁴⁰ Epictetus declares that “the most pitiful and shameful fate is that of becoming a wolf or a viper or a wasp instead of a human being” (4.1.127).

36 In rendering *to aidēmon* and *aidōs* as “self-respect”, I follow R. Kamtekar, “ΑΙΔΩΣ in Epictetus”.

37 2.9.2–7. Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch*, 204 writes: “Stoische Moralisten wie Epiktet rufen dem Menschen eindringlich zu, er solle nicht wie die Tiere handeln, da er als vernünftiges Lebewesen grundsätzlich von ihnen geschieden sei”, citing 2.9.1–5 and 1.6.20 in his note, where he adds, “In ähnlichem Zusammenhang kann Epiktet allerdings auch wieder auf die Analogie zwischen menschlichem und tierischem Leben hinweisen” and quotes 4.1.121 and part of 4.5.13–14.

38 Cf. 2.20.11–12, where Epictetus asks the Epicureans why, if their own pleasure is all that matters, they would care about what other human beings think: “Do you care about sheep because they supply themselves to us to be shorn, to be milked, and finally to be butchered? Would it not be desirable if human beings might be enchanted and lulled to sleep by the Stoics and allow themselves to be shorn and milked by you and your kind?”

39 No remark like Chrysippus’s, that the flea is useful to prevent oversleeping and the mouse is useful to prevent carelessness in leaving out cheese (Porph. *Abst.* iii. 20 [SVF ii. 1152]; Plu. *Mor.* 1044C–D [SVF ii. 1163]), is to be found in the extant *Discourses* of Epictetus.

40 2.4.6. Adolf Bonhöffer, *Epiktet und das Neue Testament*, 353n writes: “Die tierhaften Menschen sind allerdings den Tieren nicht ganz gleich, sondern rangieren noch unter diesen: denn während diese sind, was sie sein können und sollen, und irgend einen Nutzen bringen, ist der Unsittliche zu nichts nütze, höchstens dazu, wozu die schädlichen oder lästigen Tiere da sind, den Menschen Geduld zu lehren.”

Medea deserves our pity, not our anger, “because, poor woman, she has fallen into error on the most important points, and, instead of being human has become a viper” (1.28.9). Medea is not acting *like* a viper, Epictetus asserts, she has in fact *transformed* herself into one. This might strike us as simple (or silly) hyperbole, but Epictetus means to emphasize the monstrousness of Medea’s *prosōpon*, the kind of person she is. She has become a subhuman *beast*. This demonstrates the horrific power of human vice. We are the only species of animal that can morph, morally speaking, into a member of a different species by choosing to abandon our proper “profession” (*epangelia*). For Epictetus, one’s humanity does not consist in, nor is it established by, what one’s body looks like. We can destroy our humanity by exercising our *prohairesis* (volition) contrary to our humane nature. Our immoral acts replace our humanity with the worst, nastiest kind of animality, namely, brutality. No wasp, sheep, fox, wolf, or viper can betray its own animal nature in this way.

III. ANIMALS AS MORAL EXEMPLARS

What makes Epictetus’s philosophical treatment of animals most fascinating is neither the wide range of species he mentions,⁴¹ nor the great number of such examples he rehearses, nor even the pedagogical artistry he displays in illustrating the *repulsive* traits and habits of Nanimals he teaches his pupils to avoid at all costs. Rather, I contend that it is Epictetus’s several instances of Nanimals as moral exemplars and positive role models for his students to emulate that is most striking because he is a Stoic committed to the position that Nanimals are by nature nonrational, inferior to us, and providential gifts for our use.

Consider the sad fact that some people abandon their children. Epictetus is the only imperial Stoic who explicitly remarks that no Nanimals abandon *their* offspring. He notes that neither sheep nor wolves ever desert their offspring, so, in this respect, these beasts are superior parents (1.23.7–8). This observation sharply contrasts with the texts in which Epictetus points to the despicable traits of sheep and wolves that count as vices in humans. Despite his judgment that wolves are faithless (1.3.7 and 2.4.11), Epictetus also upholds

41 Mammals he discusses include the ape (*pithēkos*), the mouse (*mus*), and various quadrupeds, such as the ass (*onos*), the horse (*hippos*), the mule (*hēmionos*), the ox (*bous*), the calf (*moskhos*), the bull (*tauros*), the pig (*hus*, *sus*, *khoiros*), the sheep (*probaton*), the deer (*elaphos*), the fox (*alōpēx*), the lion (*leōn*), the wolf (*lukos*), the dog (*kuōn*), and the hunting hound (*kunēgos*). Epictetus’s birds range from the cock (*alektruōn*), the quail (*ortux*), the raven (*korax*), and the crow (*korōnē*), to the nightingale (*aēdōn*), the swallow (*khelidōn*), the stork (*pelargos*), and the goose (*khēn*). The fish (*ikthys*), the shellfish (*kokhlos*), the viper (*ekhis*), the serpent (*ophis*), and the worm (*skōlēx*) are also instanced. Insects featured are the wasp (*sphēx*), the bee (*melissa*), the fly (*muia*), and the spider (*arakhnēs*).

sheep and wolves as faithful parents. Therefore, he recognizes this trait of faithful nurturing as an *aretē* (excellence) of sheep and wolves.⁴²

Epictetus also seems to be of two minds about the stubbornness of an ass. An ass is rigidly immobile when it does not want to move. Physical stubbornness is one of the ass's natural talents, an invincibility characteristic of its species. The natural invincibility of a human being, however, Epictetus regards as quite different. So, on the one hand, he insists that a human being ought not to be invincible like an ass is (1.18.20). Human invincibility lies in the rational judgments of the *prohairesis*. Similarly, Epictetus criticizes the boasting pancratiast: "If you tell me, 'I kick mightily', I shall say to you in reply, 'You take pride in an ass's act'" (3.14.14). Epictetus is impressed not by physical athleticism, but by discipline of the mind, by rigorously training one's desires and decisions to be rational. Yet a different kind of asinine invincibility Epictetus respects so much that he upholds it as a strength that the Cynic must emulate. He observes that anyone can beat to death an ass (3.7.32). The ass is, after all, commonly regarded as one of the lowliest of domesticated animals.⁴³ So it is remarkable that Epictetus declares that the Cynic must *withstand* being flogged like an ass (3.22.54), since the Cynic's calling is to calmly endure, and be strengthened by, all such hardships. This is a particularly dramatic animal example given Epictetus's high esteem for the Cynic.

Consider food. Epictetus knows that the need to eat can cause anxiety in members of our species, but it never seems to in other animals. Epictetus wonders: "And must our philosopher, when he travels abroad, put his confidence in others and rely on them and not take care of himself, and must he be inferior to and more cowardly than the non-rational animals, each of which is self-sufficient, and lacks neither its proper food, nor the way of life appropriate to it and in accord with nature?"⁴⁴ Epictetus tries to dispel his student's cowardly worry about finding food. If mere, nonrational Nanimals can fend for themselves, following a way of life appropriate to their species and in accord with nature, Epictetus wonders, why can't a human being, armed with the added and superior faculty of reason, do just as well? No Nanimals fear starvation, Epictetus thinks,

42 Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch*, 232 remarks: "Doch auch bei Stoikern wird gelegentlich der Begriff Arete auf Tiere angewandt, womit allerdings bloß die Vollendung der je eigenen Leistungsfähigkeit der Tiere, also eine relative, aber nicht absolute, auf Vernunft gegründete Vollkommenheit, gemeint ist."

43 Epictetus belittles "playing and braying" with an ass at 2.24.18.

44 1.9.9. Dobbin, "Commentary", 124 characterizes this text as Cynic in spirit, but it also lies in an established Stoic tradition. Cf. 1.16.1: "Do not be surprised if other animals have all things necessary to the body ready provided for them, not only food and drink but a place to lie down in, and that they have no need of shoes, or bedding, or clothing, while we need all these things." See Dobbin, "Commentary", 159.

and so in this respect, despite being *alogon* (nonrational), they are better off than Epictetus's fretful philosopher. More generally, nonrational animals don't seem to worry about anything, so why can't rational animals like us achieve the same freedom from anxiety and confidence in self-sufficiency? Even the much maligned sheep can discriminate suitable from unsuitable objects of food, and is thereby self-sufficient in nourishing itself (2.24.16). Moreover, Epictetus draws a positive allegorical lesson from what sheep do with their fodder. He observes that sheep don't bring their fodder to the shepherds to show how much they have eaten. Rather, sheep simply digest their food internally and produce wool and milk externally. Epictetus instructs his students that likewise, they ought not to boast about their Stoic principles to laymen, but rather display to laymen the actions that result from these principles once they have been digested (*Ench.* 46.2). Though Epictetus often describes ovine traits and habits as instances of how *not* to be and how *not* to act, the ease with which they convert what they consume into wool and milk symbolizes how Epictetus's students should behave. It is easy to propound Stoic principles to laymen. The challenge is to internalize those principles and display them in practice, in one's actions.⁴⁵ The biological self-sufficiency of sheep and other Nanimals is ready-made by nature, whereas human beings must work hard to attain self-sufficiency through the disciplined exercise of their natural reason. That few people ever achieve this self-sufficiency is frequently emphasized by Epictetus.

In the lengthy discourse "On the Cynic Calling," Epictetus looks to the herd and the hive to discern the hegemonic dynamics from which to derive a human norm. He argues that a real Cynic is neither a busybody nor a meddler. As a true authority on human affairs, a friend to people, and a servant to the gods, the real Cynic legitimately criticizes and instructs others. In contrast, one who merely poses as a Cynic and criticizes others while hiding a stolen cake in his pocket has no such authority. Epictetus challenges the poser, asking him what he has to do with other people's business. Is he the bull of the herd or the queen of the bees? Epictetus demands to be shown the tokens of the poser's supremacy, like those that the queen bee has from nature. If he has no such tokens and is instead a drone that lays claim to the sovereignty over the bees, doesn't he think, Epictetus asks, that his fellow citizens will expel him, just as

45 Cf. 3.21.1–3: "Those who have learned the principles and nothing else are eager to throw them up immediately, just as persons with a weak stomach vomit up their food. First digest your principles, and then you will surely not vomit them up this way. Otherwise they are mere vomit, foul stuff and unfit to eat. But after you have digested these principles, show us some change in your ruling principle [*to hēgemonikon*] that is due to them; as the athletes show their shoulders as the results of their exercising and eating, and as those who have mastered the arts can show the results of their learning."

the bees do the drones (3.22.99)? A pseudo-Cynic will no more be tolerated by his fellow citizens than a pseudo-queen bee is by the other members of the hive.

The bull has corresponding tokens of supremacy over his herd. The bull/herd analogy is a commonplace in ancient political philosophy, but it receives interesting variations at the hands of Epictetus. He observes: “For no ordinary ox dares to confront the lion himself; but if the bull comes up and confronts him, say to the bull, if you think fit, ‘Why, who are you?’ ‘What do you care?’ Man, in every species nature produces some superior individual: in oxen, in dogs, in bees, in horses” (3.1.22–23). This text reiterates the standard of infra-specific excellence and adds a novel twist: Epictetus dares his interlocutor to address the bull directly, because the Stoic pedagogue knows what the bull would say! Epictetus clearly respects bulls. He likens non-Stoics to calves and Cynics to bulls: “*You* are a little calf: when a lion appears, do what is expected of you, or else wail your regrets. *You* are a bull: step up and fight, for this is expected of you, you are fit and able to do it” (3.22.6). The calves in a herd greatly outnumber the bull that rules it. Non-Stoics greatly outnumber Cynics in the human herd. But how is one of Epictetus’s students to know whether he is a calf sort of person or a bull sort of person?

Someone asked, “How then shall each of us become aware of what befits the kind of person [*prosōpon*] he is?” How is it, he replied, that when the lion attacks, the bull alone is aware of his own resources and leaps forward to defend the whole herd? Or isn’t it clear that along with the possession of the resources the awareness of them comes directly too? And so whoever of us has such resources will not be unaware of them. But a bull does not become a bull all at once, any more than a human being becomes noble, but he must undergo a winter training, must prepare himself and not jump recklessly into what is inappropriate for him.⁴⁶

The bull must battle other bulls to hone his skills and ultimately win supremacy over the herd. Such competition and practice over time realizes the excellence potential in, and distinctive of, its species and sex. Attainment of human excellence requires the same extended program of rigorous training. Thus neither does the bull mature all at once into a real bull, lord of the herd, nor does a human being become a fully realized, self-mastered human being overnight. One kind of self-knowledge provides the impetus to gradually develop one’s inborn capacities. Once those capacities have been realized, another kind of self-knowledge triggers the immediate readiness, whenever the opportunity arises, to exercise those capacities. Epictetus explains that a bull is not ignorant of his

46 1.2.30–32. See Dobbin, “Commentary”, 85.

own nature and resources when some wild beast appears, nor does he wait for someone to encourage him before he acts. Neither does a dog hesitate when he sees some wild animal. So, Epictetus muses, if he has the resources of a good man, why should he wait for someone else to equip him for his own proper work (4.8.41)? One might wonder whether Epictetus's belief is overly optimistic that such self-awareness is innate in us.

Birds display several traits and dispositions that Epictetus praises and urges his students to emulate. He teaches his students that they have a radical choice to make about how to live. They must choose *either* to concentrate on their “internals” and discipline themselves to perfect their rationality into virtue regardless of what happens, *or* to pursue “externals” and fully embrace slavish dependence on them as a consequence. These two types of lives are illustrated by two types of cocks.

For when you subject what is your own to externals, submit to slavery from then on, and do not be dragged back and forth and at one time willing to be a slave, at another not willing, but simply and with the whole of your mind be either this or that, either free or slave, either educated or uneducated, either a noble cock⁴⁷ or a lowborn one,⁴⁸ either endure being beaten until you die, or surrender at once. May you not receive many blows and yet submit in the end.⁴⁹

Why the harsh dichotomy? Epictetus constructs a kind of hypothetical imperative: If you want to be free, a *real* human being, then serious consequences follow. He is also reiterating his point about human elitism: that only a few will excel in virtue and prevail as Stoics. Only some cocks win their fights, some dogs track better than others, few horses are exceedingly swift, only one bull rules each herd, and so on. Epictetus recognizes that the willingness to fight to the death is found only in the rarest, most stalwart cocks. He challenges his students once and for all to commit to being Stoics, or to submit to being slaves, but not to waffle.

47 The Greek is *gennaïos alektruôn*. Robin Hard, *Epictetus: The Discourses*, 80, renders it “a fighting-cock of the true blood”; Oldfather, 227, “a spirited fighting cock”.

48 Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 164c: “We appear to be behaving like a base-born fighting-cock, jumping away off the theory, and crowing before we have the victory over it”.

49 2.2.12–13. Cf. 4.1.124: “Just as you do not say that the victorious cock, even if cut up, does badly, but rather the one defeated without a blow. Nor do you call a dog happy when he is neither hunting nor toiling, but when you see him sweating, in pain, gasping from the chase.”

IV. NANIMAL INTERLOCUTORS AND PARAGONS OF FREEDOM

Epictetus displays noteworthy pedagogical creativity in his protreptic use of Nanimals when he enters into the mind of a Nanimal to instruct his imaginary interlocutor. Consider this technique at work as a clever means of articulating the standard of infra-specific excellence.

‘I am better than you, for my father is of consular rank.’ Another says, ‘I have been a tribune, and you have not.’ If we were horses, would you say: ‘My sire was swifter than yours,’ or, ‘I have plenty of barley and fodder,’⁵⁰ or, ‘I have pretty neck-trappings’? What then, if, when you were talking like this, I said, ‘Granted all that, let’s run a race’? Come now, is there nothing in the case of a human comparable to a race in the case of a horse, by which the worse and the better

50 In a related and conceptually complex passage, Epictetus likens the multitude’s obsession with externals to cattle’s exclusive interest in their fodder:

Our situation is like that at a fair. Cattle and oxen are brought there to be sold, and the majority of people are buyers or sellers; but there are a few who come only to behold the fair, see how it goes and why and who set it up and for what purpose. So it is too in this fair of this world; some, like cattle, busy themselves with nothing but fodder; for as to all you who concern yourselves with possessions and lands and slaves and some public office or another, these things are nothing but fodder. Few are the people who attend the fair because they are fond of the spectacle. ‘What, then, is the cosmos?’ they ask, ‘who governs it? No one? And how is it possible, when neither a city nor a house can remain even a short time without someone to govern and take care of it, that this great and fine structure should be kept in such an orderly state by accident and chance? There is, therefore, one who governs it. What sort of a being is this governor and how does he govern? And what are we, who have been created by him, and created for what task? Do we have some connection and relation with him or none?’ This is the way these few are affected; and from then on they have leisure for this one thing only, to study the fair before they depart. With what result? They are laughed at by the multitude, as the spectators too are laughed at by the traders; and if the cattle had any understanding, they would laugh at those who admire anything but the fodder. [2.14.23–29]

will be known? Isn't there such a thing as self-respect, trustworthiness, justice? Prove yourself superior in these points in order to be superior as a human being.⁵¹

By assuming the horse's perspective, Epictetus strips away all accouterments irrelevant to equine excellence. Notice that he makes his philosophical point about the standard of infra-specific excellence neither from the holistic perspective of providential nature, nor from the usual anthropocentric perspective, but rather from the perspective of the particular Nanimal itself. This rhetorical technique of *prosōpopeia* is not employed in the Nanimal examples of the other imperial Stoics, so Epictetus's use of this Aesopic device marks a significant innovation in this topos. In this example, Epictetus contends that, despite lacking reason, horses know their distinctive excellences, just as asses do. Consequently, for his students to recognize and live in accordance with their human excellences ought to be no more difficult than for colts to learn how to run. Unfortunately, the vast majority of people fail to live virtuously, while virtually all colts learn to run.

Epictetus follows other Stoics in holding that Nanimals lack *logos*, are inferior to human beings, and are providential gifts for us to enjoy. This is why it is remarkable that at the same time he glorifies certain Nanimals as paragons of freedom. For Epictetus, the freedom that matters is neither the unrestrained exercise of political rights or privileges nor power over one's physical surroundings, but rather the power to be free from exploitation, coercion, dependency on people or possessions, and twists of fortune. Epictetus's aim as a Stoic teacher is to train his students to achieve freedom of the mind rather than to escape the legal institution of slavery, or, much less, to abolish it.⁵² This freedom of the *prohairesis* is the supreme goal of Epictetus's philosophy.⁵³ Therefore, he can offer no higher praise than to declare that lions,⁵⁴ birds, and fishes are truly free because they prefer death to captivity, and to glorify them as moral exemplars for his pupils to model themselves after. He drives home this lesson by again using the rhetorical technique of *prosōpopeia*.

Consider now how we apply the concept of freedom with respect to animals. People rear lions as tame animals in

51 3.14.11–14. Cf. Oldfather frag. 18 (Schweighäuser frag. 16; Stob. iii 4, 92).

52 See C. E. Manning, "Stoicism and Slavery in the Roman Empire".

53 For discussions of Epictetus on freedom see scattered remarks in A. A. Long, *Epictetus*, and Susanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, 330–357. For an extended study see J. C. Gretenkord, *Der Freiheitsbegriff Epiktets*.

54 Note Epictetus's comment that the shipwrecked Odysseus "begged" for food like a mountain-bred lion (3.26.33). When your ship wrecks and you're washed ashore naked and hungry, a bashful plea for food would be as silly for a model of Stoic conduct like Odysseus as it would be unimaginable for a bold lion.

cages, and feed them, and some even take them around with them. And yet who will call such a lion free? Is it not true that the more softly he lives, the more slavishly he lives? And what lion, were he to acquire sense and reason [*aisthēsin kai logismon*], would wish to be one of *those* lions? Come, and the birds, when captured and brought up in cages, what do they suffer in seeking to escape? Some of them starve themselves to death rather than endure such a life; while even those that survive barely do so, and waste away, and escape the instant they find any opening. Such is their desire for physical freedom, and to be independent [*autonoma*] and free of restraint. And what evil is it for you to be here in a cage? — ‘What a thing to ask! I was born to fly where I please, to live in the open air, to sing when I please. You rob me of all this, and ask, “What evil is it for you?”’ Therefore we shall call free only those animals which are unwilling to submit to captivity, but escape by dying as soon as they are captured. So too Diogenes says somewhere that the one sure way to freedom is to die cheerfully,⁵⁵ and to the Persian king he writes, ‘You cannot enslave the city of the Athenians any more than you can enslave fishes.’ ‘How so? Shall I not catch them?’ ‘If you do catch them,’ says he, ‘they will leave you immediately, and escape like fish. For if you catch a fish, it dies.’⁵⁶

Epictetus recognizes that to tame a lion,⁵⁷ to strip it of its wildness, independence, and physical liberty, is to ruin it by making it soft, to corrupt its proud, ferocious, awesome leonine nature by making it dependent on its human master and thereby enslaving it. A lion degraded in this way is a very sorry specimen, and no lion who acquired sense and reason would want to suffer such victimization. Though he certainly appears to pity lions robbed of their freedom in this way, Epictetus stops short of judging it wrong—indeed, judging it contrary to

55 Epictetus accepts the usual Stoic view that under some circumstances suicide is permissible, and under other circumstances it can even be mandatory.

56 4.1.24–31. For a brief discussion, see Long, *Epictetus*, 172–175. Cf. Cicero, *De finibus* v. 56: “Even the wild animals that we keep caged up for our amusement find their captivity irksome [...] they miss their natural birthright of free and untrammelled movement” (457).

57 When, at *Disc.* 4.5.37, Epictetus likens himself and his students to lions when they roar out Stoic doctrines in the classroom, but (mere) foxes when skulking through their lives outside the classroom, he treats all lions as interchangeable tokens of a fearless type.

nature—to tame, and thereby to enslave, a lion. If it is contrary to the nature of a lion to be held captive, tamed, and domesticated into a servile pet, then wouldn't it be a failure to live in agreement with nature for a human being to subject a lion to such treatment? Since Epictetus clings to the orthodox Stoic view that all Nanimals are gifts of nature to us that we are entitled to use (exploit) however we wish, his pity for the tamed lion does not provoke the question of whether some ways of interacting with Nanimals are contrary to *our* living in agreement with nature.

Pity for tamed lions who are made slavish is paired with admiration for those birds whose love of physical freedom and independence is so strong that they choose to starve themselves to death in order to escape life in captivity. Epictetus's admiration is expressed neither for providential nature in general nor for freedom-loving caged birds as replaceable instantiations of that cosmic providence. He remarks that rather than endure life permanently imprisoned in cages, birds will starve themselves. Some will escape the moment they find any opening, while the others, presumably unable to find an escape route, will starve themselves to death. But would it be incorrect to describe the latter birds as *choosing* death by starvation instead of life in captivity? Epictetus admires the strength of their *desire* for physical freedom and a life of independence and freedom of restraint. But if these birds are to serve as positive models for his *human* students, then the birds would have to have the faculty of volition (*prohairesis*) in order to choose one course of action (death by starvation) over another (life in captivity).

In having the caged bird decry its imprisonment, Epictetus again employs the rare technique of *prosōpopeia* in a poignant animal example. Dialogue is integral to Epictetus's philosophical method in the *Discourses*, but naturally his interlocutors, whether imagined or real, are nearly always human beings. In this extraordinary text, however, Epictetus imaginatively enacts an *elenchus* with, ironically enough, a speechless (*alogon*) Nanimal, a caged bird. The captive bird directly and forcefully declares its ardor for physical freedom, the ability to fly wherever it wants to, live in the open air, and sing when it wants to. Thus, this use of *prosōpopeia* by Epictetus helps his students cathect both the imprisoned bird and the idea of freedom. If Epictetus can imagine what a caged bird would think about being robbed of its liberty, then why doesn't he go ahead and ascribe to such a bird some nonnegligible degree of rationality (*logos*) and mentality? In this fascinating text, Epictetus's ability and didactic desire to enter the minds of a tamed lion and a caged bird strains against the orthodox Stoic doctrine that Nanimals lack *logos*.

From the examples of the tamed lions and the caged birds, Epictetus draws the lesson that only those Nanimals who are unwilling to submit to captivity, but escape by dying as soon as they are captured, should be called free. Epictetus notes that as soon as a fish is caught (removed from the water), it dies. In this way, fish escape being enslaved and serve as role models for the Athenians.

“Live free or die” is the motto fish teach Epictetus’s students. Therefore, the lesson learned from caged birds and caught fish in this text is that, as Diogenes knew,⁵⁸ any captivity we humans experience is revocable, because we can always free ourselves by choosing to die cheerfully. Circumstances in life can never trap us, since our mortality always furnishes us an escape route—“a sure way to freedom”, as Diogenes says. Therefore, this insight of the Cynic is that suicide is a *cheerful* option, according to Epictetus. Death is the final free act available to us all. Thus, the mortality we share with Nanimals is not a curse, but a boon that underscores our freedom and theirs.

Notice that these examples of lions, birds, and fishes relate the physical liberty to move and live without interference to the kind of freedom he upholds for his students, namely, freedom of the *prohairesis*, freedom from enslaving desires, and peace of mind. Avian freedom is the ability to fly, to live, and to sing wherever and whenever one likes. Human freedom, in contrast, cannot be stolen by incarcerating the body. Epictetus’s conception of human freedom includes the ability to live happily in agreement with nature (that is, to live virtuously) anywhere and everywhere. Consequently, he scolds his students for slavishly whining and pining for familiar persons and places by pointing to crows and ravens.

58 See A. A. Long, “The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics”, 39:

Diogenes would invoke animal behavior, which became a favorite device for illustrating the superiority of the natural to the conventional. The notion that humans have something to learn from animals does not imply, as has been supposed, that Diogenes wished to reduce human nature to that of beasts. [...] At the same time, he evidently insisted that human beings are animals, and as such share many properties with beasts. Civilized and conventional humanity, he probably reasoned, has lost sight of this fact. Animals, living in their natural way, fend effectively for their needs and have no needs that they cannot fulfill. They are trained by nature, as it were. But human nature, under current living conditions, is not equipped without training to live a comparably satisfying life. Human nature, which is essentially rational, demands rigorous training in order to attain the self-sufficiency that is the appropriate condition of every animal.

In the same volume see also 8 and 24.

And now you sit crying because you do not see the same persons, nor live in the same place.⁵⁹ Indeed, you deserve to be so affected, and thus to become more wretched than ravens or crows, which, without groaning or longing for their former home, can fly where they will, relocate their nests, and cross the seas. — ‘Yes, but they are affected that way because they are non-rational beings.’ — Was reason, then, given us by the gods for misfortune and unhappiness, so that we may live in misery and mourning? Or should everyone be immortal and never leave home and stay rooted in the ground like plants? [3.24.6]

Humans are bipeds naturally impelled to move about. Therefore, Epictetus reasons, being emotionally attached to any one locale is plantlike. To bemoan one’s human mobility (or mortality) is thus irrational, contrary to our nature, and pathological. Humans are born to be happily free. Human freedom, Epictetus says, includes the ability to move about and be happy anywhere. This is the vital lesson we learn from ravens and crows. So he scolds his students for slavishly whining and pining for familiar persons and places. Crows and ravens are free of homesickness, so his students can and ought to train themselves to be free of it too. His interlocutor tries to dismiss the fact that ravens and crows relocate their nests without suffering by appealing to their lack of rationality, but Epictetus rejects this. If these birds, *despite* being nonrational, are not unhappy moving from place to place, then he reasons that it must be *possible* for human beings, with the superior power of rationality, to be happy living anywhere. The gods did not give us reason to make us miserable, but to enable us to live happily. Yet Epictetus’s students *are* in misery and mourning. Therefore, this text reveals Epictetus to be an animalitarian about ravens and crows. His students who groan and long for their former homes are more wretched—make themselves more wretched—than these birds. Ravens and crows are happier than homesick humans.

V. CONCLUSION

I have argued that the traits and habits of Nanimals are indispensable tools for Epictetus’s normative instruction. In insisting that human beings are the only rational animals, and that rationality is a power superior to the powers of all other animals, Epictetus in principle believes that we *can* be happier and more fortunate than nonrational beasts. In this respect, he is not an animalitarian. However, insofar as we often fail to use our reason rightly, we make ourselves more wretched and sorrier than Nanimals who effortlessly live

59 Cf. 4.4.37–38, where Epictetus compares missing the beauty of Athens to acting like a burdened donkey.

in agreement with nature. Therefore, people who live miserably rather than die cheerfully (as birds and fish do) and people who are homesick (unlike crows and ravens) prompt Epictetus to hold an animalitarian position. Despite the conventional Stoic view that Nanimals cannot have virtues because they lack *logos*, Epictetus relies on numerous instances of the traits, habits, and behaviors of various kinds of Nanimals to illustrate vices for his students to avoid. But does Epictetus believe that Nanimals have vices? He clearly holds that various traits and habits of different kinds of Nanimals count as vices when those traits and habits are present in human beings. For a human being to act like a savage wolf, a filthy pig, or a heedless sheep is an aberration of human reason, and so a human vice. But is it a vice for a wolf to act like (be) an aggressive predator? Is it a vice for a pig routinely to wallow in mud? Sometimes Epictetus's eagerness to uphold Nanimal traits and habits as negative examples for his students to avoid push him into criticisms of the Nanimals themselves. Those Nanimal behaviors furthest from civilized, virtuous human behavior sometimes strike him not as vicious just *for human beings*, but as vicious—savage, repulsive, disgusting, and ugly. On the other hand, Epictetus also extols certain traits, habits, and behaviors of select Nanimals as virtues for his students to pursue. Consequently, Epictetus's philosophical zoology identifies beastly virtues and brutish vices so as to explicate and locate humane virtues and inhuman vices. We can choose to be filthy pigs, bloodthirsty pups, foolish apes, frivolous quails, asocial flies, depraved worms, faithless, treacherous wolves, spineless, heedless, gluttonous sheep, rascally foxes, savage lions, or stubborn asses. The case of Medea demonstrates that with the power of rational choice, human beings are capable of deforming themselves into inhuman monsters, destroying their very humanity, and becoming vipers. With that same power of rational choice, on the other hand, human beings can instead affirm the divine part of their nature and train themselves to be invincible asses, faithfully parenting wolves, quietly self-sufficient and self-nourishing sheep, sovereign queen bees, protective bulls, trusty guard dogs, stalwart fighting cocks, self-confident racehorses, untamable lions, unenslavable birds, cheerfully dying fishes, and ubiquitously content ravens and crows.

Since Epictetus believes that various Nanimals represent virtuous role models or normative exemplars manifestly relevant to our own moral progress, what would he think of our contemporary treatment of Nanimals? What would Epictetus the moralist say about the incredible scale of our factory farming of chickens, turkeys, pigs, and cows? How would he evaluate the vast scale of the biomedical experimentation and vivisection we perform on mice, rats, rabbits, cats, dogs, and monkeys? What would he opine about the hundreds of species and millions of individual marine animals annually killed and discarded, not eaten, as bycatch? What would Epictetus think of the hundreds of millions of Nanimals killed in recreational hunting each year? Would he be troubled by the millions of dogs and cats euthanized every year? Would Epictetus be bothered by

the hundreds of millions of birds that die yearly as a result of what we build, how we travel, how we produce our food and energy, and how we entertain ourselves? I imagine that Epictetus would probably be quite ambivalent about how casually, how thoughtlessly, how indifferently human beings exterminate these unlucky Nanimals today. On the one hand, he may reassert that they are gifted to us by the Providence of Zeus to serve us, that they are not our equals, and that they are not of primary importance. On the other hand, if Epictetus were to learn Darwinism and be educated in evolutionary biology,⁶⁰ he might well reconsider our close kinship with all animals. Would he abandon his view that no Nanimals have rationality or intelligence⁶¹ and consequently change his ethical judgments about them? Would Epictetus judge that nothing that we do to Nanimals today is wrong? One could object that these sorts of questions serve merely to invite empty speculation. So, if it turns out that we cannot answer these questions with confidence, then how relevant are Epictetus's remarks about Nanimals to our philosophical concerns today?

I suggest that Epictetus's account of vices and virtues in both Nanimals and human beings remains relevant because human beings are not the only animals that strive to achieve their good. One instructive way to establish the set of traits constitutive of an excellent human being—those qualities that make it a fine specimen of *Homo sapiens*—is first to identify the set of traits that make any animal an excellent specimen of its kind. Epictetus recognized that specifying and illustrating human vices and virtues can be facilitated by identifying both the repulsive and the admirable traits of various Nanimals. Some traits, habits, and behaviors of Nanimals conform to nature's norms for the flourishing of their species, but conflict with nature's norms for us, and so these traits, habits, and behaviors count as vices for us. Our humane virtues steer us away from these beastly vices. Yet other traits, habits, and behaviors of Nanimals stir our admiration, because we recognize that we lack them but need them to live well. Such animal virtues inspire us, or even amaze us, and call for our emulation. Epictetus's ability to see virtues in various Nanimals challenges us to look for still more virtues in other Nanimals and to strive to be more thoughtful than he was in forming our ethical judgments about them.

Finally, Epictetus's perspectives on Nanimals also resonate with those of an unlikely pair of modern-day thinkers, one an ecologist-poet, the other a philosopher. The ecologist-poet is the late Paul Shepard (1925–1996).

60 For an argument that had Stoicism survived as a continuous school of philosophy to the present day, contemporary stoics would have long ago abandoned their theology, their geocentric model of the universe, and their anthropocentrism, embraced the best, current theories of the sciences, and understood “living in agreement with nature” as “living in agreement with the facts” (e.g. the post-Darwinian fact of natural selection), see Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism*.

61 For a study of animal intelligence see Donald R. Griffin, *Animal Minds*.

Shepard, an eloquent, imaginative, and erudite environmentalist, theorized that “the human species emerged enacting, dreaming, and thinking animals and cannot be fully itself without them”.⁶² Shepard contended that, in the human imagination, the resolution of all oppositions of nature and culture, body and spirit, god and nature, human and animal, are incarnate in animals (324). This contention echoes Epictetus’s conviction that virtue and vice, good and evil, are identified and vividly illustrated in the canny juxtaposition of the characteristic traits, habits, and ways of life of all animals, human and nonhuman. Though the mythic sensibilities of Shepard are a far cry from the Stoic worldview, the prominent role of Nanimals in Epictetus’s moral pedagogy resonates with texts like this:

Midway between ourselves and the colossal events in the sky, the great beasts become interlocutors, whose lives sift the forces of wind and water and fire, seeming to say that all such phenomena ultimately are purposeful and ongoing expressions of a meaningful world. The big animals are momentary embodiments of the atomic vitality that energizes nature itself. [*The Others*, 330]

As we’ve seen, some of Epictetus’s beasts become actual interlocutors in his *Discourses* and bespeak a world steered by cosmic reason and rich in meaning. Hence, Epictetus and Shepard seem to share the view that Nanimals, in all their many forms, profoundly shape what human beings are and what we ought to be. Both would agree that Nanimals dramatically and concretely enact what it means “to live in agreement with nature”.

The philosopher congenial to another aspect of Epictetus’s zoology is Cora Diamond. Diamond has remarked on “a sense of astonishment and incomprehension that there should be beings [animals] so like us, so unlike us, so astonishingly capable of being companions of ours and so unfathomably distant”.⁶³ Epictetus’s reflections on the caged bird, the tamed lion, the captured fish, and the homeless crows and ravens reveal a sense of companionship with these wild animals. Yet his inability to recognize that domesticated animals are at least as capable of being companions of ours underscores a sharp dichotomy in his thought between wild and domesticated animals. The latter, he thinks, have a purpose instilled in them by nature: their purpose is to serve us. As our servants (slaves), they cannot possibly be our companions, from his perspective. Yet insofar as Epictetus can empathize with the captive lion forced into domestication, the caged bird robbed of its freedom, and the caught fish, he *can* see them as fellow captives of circumstance, fellow physically embodied beings,

62 *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*, 4.

63 Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy”, 61.

fellow sufferers, and fellow mortals.⁶⁴ One lesson we might draw from Epictetus's treatment of the virtues and vices of animals is that he failed to *see* domesticated animals as capable of being companions of ours. Can we *eat* beings who we *see* are capable of being companions of ours? Diamond observes:

A sense of its being impossible that we should go and *eat* them may go with feeling how powerfully strange it is that they and we should share as much as we do, and yet also not share; that they should be capable of incomparable beauty and delicacy and terrible ferocity; that some among them should be so mind-bogglingly weird or repulsive in their forms or in their lives. ["The Difficulty of Reality", 61]

Epictetus emphasizes both what we share with the other animals—a bodily nature, mortality, and various traits—and what we don't share with them—the divine nature of reason and a sense of shame. Moreover, he was certainly blind neither to the beauty of dogs, horses, and nightingales, nor to the ferocity of wolves and lions. Epictetus insisted that the beauty of any animal consists in the presence of that animal's *aretē* (excellence/virtue) (*Disc.* 3.1). This *aretē* is displayed when an animal lives in agreement with its nature. The Stoics believed that living in agreement with nature is the goal of all living things. We today should pause to consider whether our bogglingly vast exploitation, terribly casual endangerment, and repulsively wholesale destruction of Nanimals are anywhere near ways of living in agreement with nature.

64 Recall that Epictetus observes that we share both a bodily nature and mortality with the other animals at *Disc.* 1.3.3.

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