

A Correct Understanding to Humans' Higher Status

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Introduction

Since the very existence of human civilization, the question of whether humans are superior to animals has been hotly debated. While there is still no concluded answer, in this essay, I purport to analyze and compare the views on human natures from the perspectives of *The Bible* and “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” (hereafter “1844”). I will also proceed to explain why despite reaching the same conclusion, the route adopted in “1844” is more persuasive. Ultimately, I will argue that humans are of higher status.

On Humans Nature

Needless to say, *The Bible* is based on the foundation of God's existence. While both humans and animals were created by God, humans, however, were created on God's own image on a day different from that of marine animals (Gen. 1.20–1.27). At the same time, humans were expressly classified into male and female, and they were given souls (Gen. 2.7, 2.18–2.25). It should also be noted that the fundamental purpose of humans' creation was to administrate and name other species (Gen. 2.19–2.20).

In contrast, animals' lives were taken relatively lightly in that they could be used to deal with ghost (Marks 5.1–5.20). Thus, it can be said that the whole creation of humans and animals were, to a large extent, distinct.

On the other hand, clearly, “1844” was not founded on any religious belief. Rather, it described the relationship between humans and God as “[t]he more man puts into God, the less he retains within himself” (Marx 171). “1844” firmly stated that man is a “species-being” and possesses “universality”. Humans were regarded the same as animals only to the extent that they both lived from inorganic matter and natural products (174–175). Thus, it followed that humans are part of the nature and should not be estranged from it. Unlike animals, however, humans lead a conscious life and produce things according to the laws of beauty but not merely to their immediate needs (175–176).

It can therefore be seen that both *The Bible* and “1844” come to the same conclusion: humans are of higher status than animals. However, their foundations and routes through which the conclusion was reached are indeed different. The basis of *The Bible* is that we have the power to control and administrate over other animals. In contrast, the basis of “1844” is that we have conscience life that animals do not possess. Thus, the former stresses on humans' dominance over another and in that sense lifts up humans' status by relatively derogating the status of animals. The latter emphasizes on the similarities and differences between humans and animals, but does not assert any authority over another.

While I am of the view that humans are of higher status, the mode of thinking in “1844” is much more persuasive and appreciated.

***The Bible*—Right Conclusion, Incorrect Rationale**

The basis of *The Bible* is, in my view, over-simplified and complacent.

Indeed, such route has neglected the fact that humans' administrative powers are not limitless and that humans are not freer than animals as it seems to be. From the very beginning, the power of ruling other species was not inherent but given, or better described as granted, by God. At the same time, though humans were given the freedom to eat most of the fruits, such freedom was limited and with exception (Gen. 2.16–2.17). Thus, it clearly follows that, humans are subject to God and that God owes the ultimate authority to redistribute and delimit any conferred power.¹ As both humans and animals are constrained by an overriding authority, in this sense, I do not see any justifications for concluding they are different in status.

As such, one may argue that mathematically and theoretically, humans are subject to one constraint only, namely God; animals are subject to two constraints, namely God and humans. Then, given a relatively higher freedom of humans, shouldn't it be that animals are still inferior? Also, what if there is no God? In reality it seems that we still administrate other species without proving or witnessing the existence of god, then could it be argued that humans are not constrained by such an overriding authority?

These two counter-arguments can actually be dealt as one. As I have contended, the relationship between humans and animals are far more complex than administration. As Marx recognized in "1844", humans do need foods and inorganic matters to maintain their livings (Marx 174).² Like animals, humans are equally subjected to physical conditions like air, water and foods. In other words, they are therefore dependent on animals for survival. Thus, having such a relationship, it follows that the

1 Indeed, God exercised the power to punish humans after discovering they had eaten the prohibited apple (Gen. 2.14–2.24).

2 In Genesis (other parts of *The Bible* not taken into account), however, humans were allowed to eat fruits only but there was no mention of allowing humans to eat animals (Gen. 1.29).

word “dominance” is inappropriate and the word “administrate” is oversimplified. Here, an analogy can be drawn between such a relationship and the relationship of citizen-government: A government “administrates” its citizens on one hand, but on the other it needs the support of the citizens, both financially and non-financially³, for proper functioning in a legitimate way (Rousseau 75; bk, II, ch. IV). As such, no one would describe the government as having a higher status than the citizens because they simply need each other. With that being said, the human-animal relationship is more like inter-being (一行禪師 142). Furthermore, the degree to which humans depend on animals may well be larger than the degree to which animals are “controlled” by humans. As humans are not cannibalistic beings, they do not eat one another. Animals, in contrast, are not restricted by such moral standards. Even though some animals do not eat their own species, they can still feed on other species. Thus, humans badly need animals as a whole for survival but animals may survive equally well without humans.

Another possible rationale of *The Bible* may be that humans have a deep and fundamental strong desire to be free and to know how to distinguish good or bad, this desire is one that animals do not possess, which is reflected by the story of the prohibited apple (Gen. 2.16–2.17). While this interpretation may not be correct, assuming it is right, it still does not distinguish humans from animals. Humans do have a strong desire to be free, but so do animals. The best example to illustrate the point is that if you put a bird in a cage, when you open the door, it is without doubt that the bird will escape and fly away. The fact is that every single type of animal has equally deep and strong desire to live without any restrictions. Thus, this rationale is not persuasive.

3 In the case of human-animal, both physiologically (foods) and non-physiologically.

In my opinion, therefore, the basis in *The Bible*, which leads to the conclusion that humans are of higher status, is to some extent flawed. The alleged administrative power shall not be conclusive in deciding whether humans are superior or not. “1844”, on the other hand, has fairly and humbly explained why humans are superior.

“1844”—Right Conclusion, Correct Rationale

This first feature that distinguishes humans from animals, as “1844” has pointed out, is that humans pursue things outside the sphere of survival. Humans produce not only one-sidedly but universally, and not solely to the minimum standard required but a step further. They do not eat, drink and procreate solely because of need of the continuity of life but also of the linkage with other human activities (Marx 184–186). This inherent nature indeed applies similarly to aspects other than production. It is this fundamental nature that humans debated the essence of love and beauty in *Symposium*, that humans cared about morality and code of conducts in *The Analects*, that humans established an organised and legitimate society in *The Social Contract* and *Waiting for the Dawn*. The success of civilization and the superior status of human hinge on the fact that humans concern not just “living” but “life”.

The second reason why humans are superior lies on the fact that humans strive to improve the existing system they have built through repeated self-reflection, as shown throughout “1844”. True, humans are psychologically and emotionally weak especially compared to animals, they sometimes lose confidence, betray others and are tempted to do something that they should not do (Mark 6.45–52, 14.10–14.11). True, humans are physically weak in that they cannot do all the livings by their own selves (Smith 137). Humans do acknowledge these weaknesses and so they rely on religion and establish

a mutually beneficial capitalist system to solve these problems respectively. That is wonderful, but not the end of the story. Humans understand that the systems they have established can be imperfect and may have put the cart before the horse, and thus they meditate on how the world should proceed. Humans like Marx keep reminding themselves of what humans and their natures are. Humans are there to criticize their own from different points of views and to improve. Animals are essentially different. Bees build nests (Marx 175), but the nests they built remain the same throughout their lives. Bees divide themselves into different kinds of bees, but they neither question why some bees are workers and some are queens, nor do they try to doubt the system and its division, let alone to overturn it.

Most importantly, humans are superior because of their attitudes toward other animals, which are reflected in “1844” but not in *The Bible*. Humans are of higher status not only because they can identify their similarities and differences when compared with other animals, but also because they have the ability and intelligence to learn the need to respect other species, despite the fact that we are of higher status. Our higher status is inherent from our very fundamental nature. It is established on our self-confidence and our firm belief in human dignity and autonomy, as shown in “1844”. It needs not to be built, nor be lifted up by derogating or stressing our control over animals.

One may argue “1844” is based on the assumption that only humans have morality and civilized acts, but at the end of the day, we are not “fishes”, how can we know animals do not possess the above features? The response to this argument is not because “you are not me” (“Autumn Flood”; see also “Humans Are Not Smarter”) but the words “rationality” and “reasonableness”, which are also something that make humans different. It is true that hardly can we understand animals fully, but given

the present scientific research and rudimentary observation, including all the above examples mentioned, it is at all reasonable to presume, unless proven otherwise, that animals have not demonstrated such morality and civilization, at least not to the extent that humans do.

Conclusion

In short, although both *The Bible* and “1844” reach the same conclusion that humans are of higher status, I am of the view that the rationale adopted by “1844” is much more persuasive. At the same time, while believing that humans are of higher status, let us not forget that animals’ natures are equally respectable and that we should keep questioning ourselves to make improvements and maintain our uniqueness.

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Teacher’s comment:

Many students who answer the question like this one (Do you agree
 that humans have a higher status than animals?) will always try to find all
 the relevant texts to support his/her position *descriptively*. The result is

of course either, yes, humans have a higher status or, no, humans do not. Like all other students, Kwong Hang has his own position that humans have a higher status than animals. However, he goes deeper. Instead of simply citing the texts, he analyses the rationales of the texts to support his position. He also tries to connect his arguments with all other texts in our textbook. It is not an easy task since a student needs to have a very good understanding of the whole course in order to do it beautifully and, in my opinion, Kwong Hang does it very well. All these features make his essay more outstanding than the others. (Yu Chi Chung Andy)