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Richard Fry

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, rfry@siue.edu

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Smith and Hume on Animal Minds

PENULTIMATE DRAFT

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RICHARD J. FRY
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE
rfry@siue.edu

ABSTRACT: This paper situates Hume's views on animals in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment by contrasting them with the views of Adam Smith. While Smith is more central to the philosophical establishment of the Scottish Enlightenment, their views on morals resemble each other greatly and both think that the analogies between humans and non-human animals are useful for thinking about morals. Their estimation of the nature and extent of those analogies, however, differ widely from one another. This has been historically obscured by the fact that in no single work does Smith precisely detail what he thinks non-human animals are capable of. I argue that Smith thinks non-human animal minds are different in kind from human minds. This is evident from Smith's view of how language facilitates and co-creates certain aspects of human cognition. Hume, by contrast, seems to hold that non-human animal minds differ merely by degree from human minds. After reconstructing Smith's view, I contrast it with Hume's, providing historical context to show how Hume falls outside the mainstream on this issue and Smith within it. Their views on animals reflect, broadly, their standing with respect to the wider Scottish philosophical community.

KEYWORDS: Hume, David; Smith, Adam; animals; animal cognition; animal minds; Scottish Enlightenment; language; analogy;

INTRODUCTION

It is widely believed that Hume's views of the nature and status of animals were directly influenced by the skeptical thinkers that preceded him. This influence is usually located in Sextus, Montaigne, and Bayle, or some combination thereof.¹ But Hume's views on animals are also in dialogue with his more immediate context, the

¹ See, e.g., Kail (2012), Kemp Smith (2005, 325), Floridi (1997), Muckler (1963), and Seidler (1977). For an assessment of these claims of direct influence on Hume's arguments regarding animals, see Fry (forthcoming).

Scottish Enlightenment.² Adam Smith makes for an intriguing comparison with Hume on this issue. On morals, both Smith and Hume form their respective views in dialogue with Hutcheson, and both Smith and Hume think that examining the analogies between humans and non-human animals will enlighten our moral theorizing.

Smith repeatedly references the abilities of non-human animals in comparison with humans. Sometimes this is done to illustrate what the two groups share, sometimes it is done with an eye to illuminating what makes humans special. Unlike Hume, though, Smith never gives a direct accounting of animal mental capabilities: his overall view of non-human animal mentality is left largely implicit.

In this paper, I collate Smith's claims about non-human animal minds to show that they share some key capacities with human minds, on Smith's view. I then go on to argue that, despite this, Smith is committed to the view that human and non-human animal minds are different in kind. This is due to Smith's understanding of language's effect on human cognition: for Smith, language is a uniquely human capability that extends and produces many human cognitive abilities. Thus, ultimately, humans have radically different cognitive capabilities from non-human animals. I then contrast Smith with Hume, arguing that Hume has a view whereby human and non-human animal minds differ only by degree. I conclude by suggesting that Hume's comparatively more radical and Smith's comparatively more conservative view mirror their positions with respect to the Scottish Enlightenment's mainstream philosophical establishment.

I. SMITH'S CLAIMS ABOUT ANIMALS

At key points in Smith's major works, he draws analogies between human and non-human animal mentality. Early in *Wealth of Nations*, Smith identifies a 'propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another' as an aspect of human nature (WN I.ii.1, p.25).³ Smith says of this capability that we cannot be sure whether it is 'one of those original principles in human nature, of which no further account can be given; or whether, as seems more probable, it be the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech.' Examining the origin of this faculty is not Smith's task, he asserts, but he does note that

² Wolloch (2006) treats Hume's views on animals in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment, but does so primarily in relation to Scottish physician John Gregory, not Smith, though Smith, too, is addressed there.

³ *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* will be referenced as *Wealth of Nations* or WN throughout and cited by book, chapter and paragraph number, followed by page numbers, as is conventional. Page references are to Smith (1976).

It is common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals, which seem to know neither this nor any other species of contracts. Two greyhounds, in running down the same hare, have sometimes the appearance of acting in some sort of concert. Each turns her towards his companion, or endeavours to intercept her when his companion turns her towards himself. This, however, is not the effect of any contract, but of the accidental concurrence of their passions in the same object at that particular time. Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog. Nobody ever saw one animal by its gestures and natural cries signify to another, this is mine, that yours; I am willing to give this for that. When an animal wants to obtain something either of a man or of another animal, it has no other means of persuasion but to gain the favour of those whose service it requires. A puppy fawns upon its dam, and a spaniel endeavours by a thousand attractions to engage the attention of its master who is at dinner, when it wants to be fed by him. Man sometimes uses the same arts with his brethren, and when he has no other means of engaging them to act according to his inclinations, endeavours by every servile and fawning attention to obtain their good will. He has not time, however, to do this upon every occasion... In almost every other race of animals each individual, when it is grown up to maturity, is intirely independent, and in its natural state has occasion for the assistance of no other living creatures. But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren... (WN I.ii.2, p.25-6)

Here Smith makes several comparisons between humans and non-human animals. First, he identifies the propensity that he has noted for ‘truck, barter and exchange’ is unique to human nature, and supposes that it is a ‘necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech.’ Thus, on Smith’s estimation, non-human animals do not have reason, or they do not have speech, or they do not have either; if they did, he could not suppose that the human propensity to barter is a ‘natural consequence’ of possessing those two faculties.

Smith goes on to give his reasons for thinking that the propensity for barter is related to reason and speech and also his reason to think that this propensity is unique to humans. He notes first that, though there appears to be action orchestrated toward shared ends in non-human animals—as when two greyhounds chase prey, each coursing it toward the other—this is a result of the ‘accidental concurrence of

their passions' not any pre-existing agreement between the two.⁴ Further, no gesture or speech-equivalent was ever observed that indicated that animals had notions of ownership and/or trade.⁵

That non-human animals do not engage in exchange is not a failure of intelligence, though, as Smith's description of related phenomena in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* shows. There, Smith says of barter:

The brutes have no notion of this; the dogs, as I mentiond, by having the same object in their view sometimes unite their labours, but never from contract. The same is seen still more strongly in the manner in which the monkeys rob an orchard at the Cape of Good Hope.—But after they have very ingeniously conveyd [sic] away the apples, as they have no contract they fight (even unto death) and leave after many dead upon the spot. They have no other way of gaining their end but by gaining ones favour by fawning and flattering. (LJ ms.iv.57, p. 352-3)⁶

The monkeys described here are 'ingenious' at robbing the orchard of apples but still fail to form a contract because they lack language (and can only gain each other's favor through fawning). Smith again locates the difference between these animals and humans in the ability to speak, which is what enables humans to form contracts and act in concert.⁷ Elsewhere Smith makes clear that he takes speech to be unique to humans, though, interestingly, perhaps not foundational:

The desire of being believed, the desire of persuading, of leading and directing other people, seems to be one of the strongest of all our natural desires. It is, perhaps, the instinct upon which is founded the faculty of speech, the characteristical faculty of human nature. No other animal possesses this faculty, and we cannot discover in any

⁴ For a comparison with the similar passage in Hume, see Henderson (2006, 31-4).

⁵ Smith also makes this analogy with the greyhounds and lack of exchange in dogs in *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (LJ) ms.218-221 (p.492-493.) Throughout, Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence* will be cited by manuscript page as is conventional with page numbers in Smith (1978) following.

⁶ Smith summarizes these points again at LJ ms.222, p.494.

⁷ Schleisser (2017, 30) reads the passage in much the same way: Smith here is indicating that animals are intelligent, but lack speech and cannot form contracts.

other animal any desire to lead and direct the judgment and conduct of its fellows. (TMS VII.iv.25, p.397-8)⁸

For Smith, then, speech—and not reason—is the ‘characteristical’ faculty of humanity. This matches what we saw above. The use of speech to create contracts and bonds, for Smith, is tied to the fact that humans are (nearly) unique insofar as they are not entirely independent of one another in adulthood.⁹ Compared to humans, non-human animals have different economic, social and political arrangements amongst themselves because they lack speech. This lack means that they are not able to associate for mutual benefit by anything other than accidental confluence of passions.

But as the passages above show, the problem is not that animals lack intelligence. Smith thinks that humans and non-human animals are both capable of a kind of means-ends reasoning: humans and non-human animals share the ability to seek their ends, both through their direct actions and through ‘servile and fawning attention.’ The latter provides a clear case of both humans and non-human animals framing a goal and executing on a plan to achieve it, as they both ingratiate themselves to others in order to ‘gain the favour of those whose service’ they require.

Smith clearly thinks that non-human animals possess intentions and desires and, further, can represent what needs to change in the world to fulfill those desires, as they can take actions meant to achieve the ends they represent to themselves. Humans and non-human animals, on Smith’s view, share a basic ability to suit means to ends. Thus, while humans and non-human animals differ widely from one another, on Smith’s view, they share much cognitively in common.

II. SMITH’S ARGUMENTS ABOUT ANIMALS

But how does Smith arrive at these conclusions? That is, by what reasoning does Smith come to think of non-human animals as having these capabilities in particular?

⁸ *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* will be cited (as convention dictates) by TMS with part, section and paragraph numbers (along with chapter numbers where appropriate). Page numbers referencing Smith (2002) follow.

⁹ Later Smith argues that though there is a strong and consistent human nature, the differences humans have from one another contribute to their well-being precisely because they are not independent of one another as other animals are; see WN I.ii.5, p.29-30. Smith makes this same comparison elsewhere with the same context (LJ ms.vi.47-49, p.348-9). In that exposition, though, the claim of a strong and consistent human nature is made more forcefully, as is the claim of mutual benefit among differently-endowed humans.

Smith does not say. Because Smith does not offer a direct or comprehensive account of animal cognition (like, e.g., Hume does across *Treatise* 1.3.16, 2.1.12, and 2.2.12), one must look to his philosophical methodology generally and the other explicit arguments that draw on claims about animals.

The one place that Smith makes explicit and direct arguments about animal mental capacities is his essay ‘Of the External Senses.’¹⁰ In the essay, Smith considers each of the five senses and examines whether its use would require representations of something external or apart from us. In the concluding section, ‘Of the sense of seeing,’ Smith examines the evidence for the claim that the human tendency to identify objects seen as being external to oneself must arise from habituation alone.¹¹ Smith will reject this claim, and will do so on the basis of arguments that prominently feature non-human animals.

Here, Smith gives scientifically informed arguments by analogy when considering animal capabilities. Smith argues that non-human animals must have some innate ability to navigate the world and that this would require them to be able to innately identify visual stimuli as depicting something external to them. He then argues by analogy that this must be the case for humans as well.

Smith builds his case by considering the habits and capabilities of the young of several different sorts of animals:

That, antecedent to all experience, the young of at least the greater part of animals possess some instinctive perception of this kind, seems abundantly evident. The hen never feeds her young by dropping food into their bills... Almost as soon as her chickens are hatched, she does not feed them, but carries them to the field to feed, where they walk about at their ease, it would seem, and appear to have the most distinct perception of all the tangible objects which surround them... The young of the partridge and of the grouse seem to have the same early period... The young partridge, almost as soon as it comes from the shell, runs about among long grass and corn; the young grouse among long heath, and would both most essentially hurt themselves if they had not the most acute as well as distinct perception of the tangible objects which not only surround

¹⁰ Cited throughout as ES with paragraph numbers, followed by page numbers in Smith (1980). There has been some suggestion that ‘Of the External Senses’ is a juvenile work and thus not worthy of serious consideration, but Brown (1992) gives a convincing rebuttal. For a discussion see Glenney (2011, n.2), who concludes that Smith at least returned to and edited the work well into his career.

¹¹ For a complete discussion of Smith’s arguments and goals in discussing the external world, see Glenney (2011) and Glenney (2007).

them but press upon them on all sides. This is the case too with the young of the goose, of the duck, and, so far as I have been able to observe, with those of at least the greater part of the birds which make their nests upon the ground. (ES 70, p.161-162)

Similarly, birds who roost in bushes and on cliffs, though they ‘come blind from the shell,’ just as soon as they are granted the power of sight at all, they

evidently enjoy all the powers of Vision in the most complete perfection, and can distinguish with most exact precision the shape and proportion of the tangible objects which every visible one represents. In so short a period, they cannot be supposed to have acquired those powers from experience, and must therefore derive them from some instinctive suggestion. The sight of birds seems to be both more prompt and more acute than that of any other animals. (ES 71, p.162)

Smith assess quadrupeds similarly, arguing that the same patterns are found in them. Like ground birds, the young quadruped ‘seems to enjoy from the beginning,’ the power of sight ‘in as great perfection as he ever does afterwards’ (ES 73, p.163). Smith gives several examples, and then notes that while some are born blind, they acquire their sight in full immediately on the reception of it in any degree, just as with birds that nest up high.

Smith then analogizes humans and these non-human animals, saying ‘It seems difficult to suppose that man is the only animal of which the young are not endowed with some instinctive perception of this kind’ (ES 74, p.163). Thus, Smith argues, because of the overwhelming similarities between humans and non-human animals, we should accept that when humans come to have sight, they immediately come to represent external objects as being external. Thus, such representations are instinctual and not learned, even in humans.

Smith then addresses the objection that nature ‘never bestows upon any animal any faculty which is not either necessary or useful,’ and that human children’s long state of dependence on adults allows time for mere mental association or habituation to do the work that instinct does in other animals. Smith’s response is to appeal again to observation:

Children, however, appear at so very early a period to know the distance, the shape, and magnitude of the different tangible objects which are presented to them, that I am disposed to believe that even

they may have some instinctive perception of this kind. (ES 74, p. 163)

This is the case even though, as Smith allows, it may be to ‘a much weaker degree than the greater part of other animals.’ Smith then focuses on other observations of infants, leaving non-human animals behind.¹²

In sum, Smith argues by analogy that because the power of vision is evidently coupled from a very early age with representing external objects as external in non-human animals that it must also be so in humans. He is willing to give up or mitigate a well-worn principle (that nature does not give animals any extraneous capabilities) to square this account with his observations of human infants and non-human animal young. Smith’s reasoning is analogical and responsive to scientific observation. He sees humans and non-human animals as similar enough in other respects to underwrite claims about cognitive similarities.

Smith is part of a long tradition in deploying arguments of this sort.¹³ Smith, though, is in some ways the best suited of all of these thinkers to make use of this mode of reasoning, given the importance he places on analogy in scientific reasoning. In his *History of Astronomy*, he makes analogy the key to philosophico-

¹² For the role that analogies with children play in Smith’s conjectural history elsewhere, see Swearingen (2013, 169).

¹³ Most thinkers in the period argue for claims about the mental capabilities of non-human animals by analogizing them to humans. That is, many thinkers—including, but not limited to, Montaigne, Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, Bayle, and Hume—note similarities between human and non-human animal behavior and use these similarities to argue analogically for claims about the cognitive capacities of one or both groups.

For primary texts, see Montaigne’s *Apology for Raimond Seybond* (2003, 15-47), Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1994) ch.1-6, Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1976) Book II, ch.ix-xi, the corresponding sections of Leibniz’s *New Essays on Human Understanding* (1996), the entry for ‘Rorarius’ in Bayle’s *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, and Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* 1.3.16, 2.1.12, 2.2.12 and *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 9.

For analysis, see Fry (forthcoming) and also Kail (2007). As a survey, Wilson (1995) is also useful. Note that Descartes’s mode of reasoning is also analogical, though he weights the differences and disanalogies between the groups as most important (*Discourse on Method*, AT 55-60).

scientific reasoning.¹⁴ Reducing to a bare minimum the number of principles and kinds of hypotheses that are required to connect together the observed phenomena is both the fundamental goal and good-making feature of analogical reasoning. Smith's arguments about animals display the implicit premise that because human and non-human animal behavior can be explained largely with the same principles, it ought to be. Differences in underlying cognitive capabilities should be posited only when they are absolutely required to account for observed differences, and the differences in cognitive capability should be as minimal as possible while maintaining empirical adequacy.

Smith's claims about animals' 'fawning attention' above illustrate just this form of reasoning: the same strategy is common to both humans and non-human animals and is given the same diagnosis in both. Differences are posited only when required to explain why humans do not do this on some occasions. The ability to speak is the underlying difference in this case, but it is appealed to only to explain higher level differences.

This explains why Smith thinks humans and non-human animals share cognitive capacities: because analogy is the fundamental mode of philosophico-scientific reasoning and because humans and non-human animals share behaviors associated with, e.g., means-ends reasoning, we ought to, on Smith's understanding, attribute the underlying capacities required for those behaviors to non-human animals.

However, there are still differences between the two groups: humans and non-human animals are both cognitive beings, for Smith, but linguistic ability is a key difference between them. While much of our behavior is analogous, and thus we should attribute similar underlying cognitive causes for that behavior, humans are linguistic and animals are not. This, I argue in the following section, shows Smith to think of the difference between human and non-human animal minds as a difference in kind, not a difference of degree. Though we are both minded, thinking beings for Smith, humans and non-human animals have different sorts of minds.

¹⁴ See HA II.12, p.45. Smith's *History of Astronomy* will be cited, as is conventional, by section and paragraph number. Page references to Smith 1980 follow. Analogy reduces the riot of seeming irregularities, confusions and distractions by introducing order by systematizing phenomena. By 'smoothing the passage of the imagination' systematization renders unfamiliar or seemingly discordant sets of phenomena in terms of transitions which the mind naturally accepts, that is, connections between events with which it is familiar (HA II.12, p.47). When analogy was deployed well and consistently, it 'became the great hinge upon which every thing turned' (HA II.12, p.46-7). All philosophico-scientific reasoning, according to Smith, is analogical. On this point, see Thomson (1965, 225-6).

III: FOR SMITH, A DIFFERENCE IN KIND

To consider the question of difference, we first must assess the role that language plays in human cognition for Smith. Fortunately, there is already work on this topic. Schliesser (2011), for instance, argues that, for Smith, ‘language and mind co-develop.’ Looking at Smith’s ‘Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages’ shows this.¹⁵ There Smith gives a conjectural history of the way that language developed, starting first with names of events and objects, then kinds and adjectives, and so on.¹⁶

Smith believes that, e.g., naming of particular objects generates the cognitive need—and the cognitive capacity—to use general names. The use of general names then requires distinguishing individuals within kinds, bringing online new cognitive capacities, which then facilitate further language growth. The process repeats for qualities, relations, *etc.* For Smith, language enables cognitive capacities that would otherwise not be present, and those capacities go on to sharpen the linguistic tools available, which in turn enable further cognitive capacities and so on. Fundamentally, some of our cognitive capacities depend on our language. The capabilities enabled by speech include, e.g., the ability to think about kinds, qualities, relations, numbers as abstracted from concrete quantities, the ability to think of the self as an individual, and the greater part of metaphysics.¹⁷

Human and non-human animal behavior and its causes (on Smith’s estimation) are very similar.¹⁸ Given those similarities and Smith’s commitment to analogy, we should expect that human and non-human mentality will be explained in very similar ways. But remember that Smith’s commitment to analogy can be

¹⁵ Originally published as a free-standing essay, Smith later thought it so important that he appended it to the 3rd edition of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. ‘Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages’ will be cited as *Languages*, with page numbers referencing Smith (1853).

¹⁶ For thorough consideration of the structure, argumentation and context of this essay, see Land (1977) and Swearingen (2013).

¹⁷ See *Languages* p.515-21, p.529.

¹⁸ Further analogies than those already discussed include, e.g., that both have propensities fit to their self-preservation and the propagation of their species (TMS II.i.v.10, p.90). Both strike out at things that injure them (TMS II.iii.i.1, p.110). Smith notes that we rank non-human animals as similar enough to us to be suited to punishment, or, at least, more similar than inanimate objects and so more deserving (TMS II.iii.i.3-4, p.111-2). (On this point, see also the related passage at LJ ii.177 (p.139), see also LJ ii.118-9 (p.116).) We work similarly, and deserve similar appellations: Smith, for instance, identifies both farmhands and cattle as ‘productive labourers’ in the field. (WN II.v.12, p.363-4). For a discussion of this passage, see Pesciarelli (1999).

overridden or mitigated by difference in the capacities that are needed to explain the observed behavior. This is what we saw with the passages from *Wealth of Nations*, where Smith attributes enough underlying capacity difference to explain the difference in observed behavior.

Despite their similarity, in ‘Of the External Senses’ Smith says that humans are indeed superior to non-human animals, and that this is by nature’s design:

...and [a human] at no time takes any further concern in it than he is obliged to do by that fellow-feeling which Nature has, for the wisest purposes, implanted in man, not only towards all other men, but (though no doubt in a much weaker degree) towards all other animals. Having destined him to be the governing animal in this little world, it seems to have been her benevolent intention to inspire him with some degree of respect, even for the meanest and weakest of his subjects. (ES, p.136)

Humans and non-human animals are ‘destined’ by nature for different ends. As such, they have different capacities. While human nature may develop over time as a result of social and linguistic activity, for Smith, it has within it the capacities that (inevitably) bring about the dominion of humans over the other parts of nature: since humans are *destined* to govern, according to Smith, they are given the capacities suitable to doing so (including, in this case, a catholic sense of fellow-feeling).¹⁹ Human superiority is thus rooted in differences of capacity, and at least some of the relevant differences are linguistic and cognitive.²⁰ These cognitive differences produce human minds that are uniquely suited to dominion over the inferior parts of nature.

¹⁹ On human nature as not fixed for Smith, see Schliesser (2011).

²⁰ These differences would seem to be ultimately rooted in biological differences for Smith—see Phillipson (2013, 32)—but exploring Smith’s views on biology and its relation to mental capacity is outside the scope of this paper. What is clear is that there are fundamental cognitive differences in predisposition for linguistic activity, and whatever the ultimate origin of those differences, those differences act to create separation between humans and non-human animals, which ramify to create further cognitive and linguistic differences.

Smith takes speech to be the key difference between humans and other animals and as the trait most fundamental to understanding humanity.²¹ This, combined with the extremely important role speech plays in our more sophisticated cognitive capacities, suggests that human and non-human animal minds are different in kind for Smith. So, while the explanations for the analogous parts of their behavior are shared, the very different (e.g., linguistic, economic, moral) behavior puts a difference in kind between human and non-human animal minds, for Smith.²²

The question of difference in kind is, of course, a thorny one, particularly as the question must itself be disambiguated before it can be answered. ‘Difference in kind’ is traditionally contrasted with ‘difference in degree’: identifying minds as different in kind is meant to assert that they differ by more than just the *extent* to which they have certain shared capacities. It is, in short, to claim that they are disjoint in their capabilities: some minds must have capacities that the others do not. The greater the number of unshared capacities, the better the case for difference in kind. Further, how important the shared (or not shared) capacities are to the execution of a typical life by those creatures also matters: if the behaviors related to or enabled by the different capacities are extraordinarily important for the creature in question, then, *ceteris paribus*, the case for difference in kind is stronger.

On this understanding, Smith would qualify as taking human and non-human animal minds to be different in kind as there are fundamental differences in capacities between the two groups and those fundamental differences ramify to produce very sophisticated mental abilities in one group that are not present in the other.

Further, these cognitive capacities produce human society and the division of labor, on which all of human economic activity is founded. They would also seem to be implicated in, e.g., ability to assess and place blame, culpability for blameworthy

²¹ This is the case even though speech and the attendant reasoning capabilities might not be fundamental; recall that Smith speculated that ‘the desire of being believed ... seems to be one of the strongest of all our natural desires’ in humans, and ‘perhaps, the instinct upon which is founded the faculty of speech, the characteristic faculty of human nature’ (TMS VII.iv.25, p.397-8). While reducing the number and kind of basic cognitive differences between humans and animals to a minimum by here attributing only a difference in desire to be believed—which then goes on to produce the differences in language, *etc.*—he still identifies speech as the more important faculty for contrasting humanity with non-human animals.

²² In claiming a difference in kind, I am arguing *contra* Wolloch (2013). Wolloch argues that Smith sees humans and non-human animals as differing merely in degree. Wolloch’s account acknowledges many of the same comparisons and contrasts that I have pointed to here. However, it does not consider, as this paper does, the extent of difference in cognitive capacities that the differences in the propensity to speak introduce.

actions, how well we imaginatively place ourselves in the situation of others and sympathize with them—in short, all of the capacities relevant for morality.

In sum, radically different institutions and forms of life are eventually brought about by the basic differences in capacities that Smith identifies, and those institutions and forms of life are incredibly important to even average members of the human species. Smith holds that human and non-human animal minds are, ultimately, different in kind and that language enables and facilitates this difference. This is not surprising for a professor who devoted much of his lecturing to rhetoric and *belles lettres* because he had thought that ‘the best method of explaining and illustrating the various powers of the human mind, the most useful part of metaphysics, arises from an examination of the several ways of communicating our thoughts by speech.’²³

IV. HUME, CONTEXT, COMPARISON

This puts Smith in stark contrast with his countryman and friend, David Hume. Hume goes out of his way in his sections on non-human animal minds (*Treatise* 1.3.16, 2.1.12 and 2.2.12 and *EHU* 9) to emphasize continuity between humans and non-human animals, identifying the fundamental capacities relevant for navigating the world (associations and causal reasoning) and engaging with others (the passions and sympathy) as being shared.²⁴ Hume is silent as to whether non-human animals share with humans the capacities for some more sophisticated sorts of reasoning (namely demonstrative and intuitive reasoning), but Hume also systematically downplays the importance of such reasoning, playing up instead the importance of the kinds of (causal) reasoning shared between humans and non-human animals.²⁵

It is thus fair to say of Hume that he sees humans and non-human animals as having minds that are of the same kind: Hume gives no account of humans and non-human animals as having disjoint capacities, the capacities that may or may not be shared (e.g., demonstrative reasoning) do not comprise a large proportion of the mental faculties that humans have, nor are they important, on Hume’s estimation, for leading a typical human life. Smith, remember, sees language as facilitating more

²³ Millar, a pupil of Smith’s, attributes this view to him (see Stewart 1853, p.xvi). These lectures are presented in Smith (1983).

²⁴ I follow convention in citing Hume’s *Treatise* (Hume 2000) by section and paragraph number. For instance, a reference to *Treatise* Book I, part 3, section 7, paragraph 5 would appear as ‘T 1.3.7.5.’ Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hume 1999) and *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Hume 1998) are cited by section and paragraph as EHU and EPM respectively.

²⁵ See Driver (2011) and Beauchamp (1998).

abstract and metaphysical thinking. Hume, by contrast, sees the sort of thinking enabled by these abstract and metaphysical terms as useless or, worse, completely empty.²⁶

Nothing more strongly underscores how human and animal minds are comparable for Hume than the fact that Hume's arguments regarding animal cognition are tightly wedded to his arguments about human cognition.²⁷ Hume's key argument for the conclusion of *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 9 rests on the claim that while 'Animals are not guided in these inferences by reasoning: Neither are children: Neither are the generality of mankind: Neither are philosophers themselves, who, in all the active parts of life, are, in the main, the same with the vulgar' (EHU 9.5).²⁸

Further, Hume spends the long footnote to *Enquiry* 9.5 explaining why it is contingent differences in mental acuity—and not differences in mental powers *per se*—that explain the observed differences between individual humans with respect to their abilities in this area and also the differences between humans and non-human animals. Notably, language use is implicated only in passing in his final point about testimony. The vast bulk of differences in reasoning ability, Hume takes it, can be explained without any recourse to language.

There are two places in Hume's wider corpus where he seems to compare human mental faculties favorably to those of non-human animals. The first is in his discussion of justice in the second *Enquiry*, where Hume says that considerations of justice do not apply to human interactions with non-human animals (EPM 3.19). However, this is not because they are not rational, nor even because their minds are different from ours: like the imagined creatures of the thought experiment in the previous paragraph, it is because weakness of body and mind makes it so that they could 'never make us feel the effects of their resentment' (EPM 3.18). This speaks to difference of degree. That degree of difference between humans and non-human animals has consequences, but it alone does not make for a difference of kind. Whereas Smith sees human dominion over animals as inevitable, given human faculties, for Hume it is contingent on animals' infirmity of reasoning and body. This is a clear example of Smith seeing a difference of kind where Hume sees a difference of degree.

²⁶ One might have thought that language plays a crucial role in our cognition of objects, for Hume, but this would require denying to non-human animals things Hume explicitly attributes to them. See Butler (2010).

²⁷ On this connection, generally, see Boyle (2003) and Fry (forthcoming).

²⁸ This same point applies, though less directly, to *Treatise* 1.3.16 as well.

The second is his essay, ‘Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature.’ There, Hume evaluates the case for the conclusion that human nature is ‘mean’ or base. In doing so, Hume gives a short catalogue of ways human thought surpasses non-human animal thought. Many of the differences that Hume notes are comparable to the differences that he gives in the long footnote cited above from the first *Enquiry*, suggesting a difference in the strength of the cognitive powers between the groups. Hume does go further, though, when he says that human thought is ‘not limited by any narrow bounds, either of place or time,’ but that non-human animal thought is ‘limited in its observations and reasonings to a few sensible objects which surround it’ (DM 5).²⁹ However, this difference does not make for a difference in kind because, as Hume goes on to note, the quality of human and non-human animal reasoning forms a spectrum; it is because we are able to selectively compare only bits of that spectrum that humans sometimes come out looking sophisticated (and sometimes not). This is all consistent with the connected hierarchy of reasoning ability that Hume elucidated in *Enquiry* 9.5, where animals are comparable to children and people leading their everyday lives. If we do not wish to saddle Hume with the view that children’s minds are different in kind from adult humans’ minds—for which there appears to be scant evidence in Hume’s texts—then we should take non-human animal minds to be similar in kind as well.

Hume and Smith, then, despite both seeing animals as having basic capacities for reasoning, have notably different views on the ultimate status of non-human animals. Neither position is unique in the time period, though the two positions are affiliated with radically different cohorts. Though it is not possible to do justice to the question of these other thinkers’ views here, seeing non-human animals as different in kind from humans is the mainstream position, occupied by, e.g., Descartes, Leibniz, and Locke, to name a few. Hume’s position is more closely affiliated with the skeptics; Montaigne and Bayle, for example, both seem to be skeptical of attempts to draw a difference in kind between human and non-human animal minds.³⁰ So neither Smith nor Hume have views that are unprecedented, though Hume’s are notably more outside the philosophical mainstream than Smith’s.

²⁹ This echoes some of Locke’s discussion of non-human animals in *Essay* II.xi. Fully exploring this echo, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. Hume’s ‘Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature’ is cited here by paragraph. Quotations are from Hume (1995).

³⁰ Though on the differences of Hume’s arguments and conclusions from Montaigne and Bayle, see Fry (forthcoming). Spinoza, another philosophical outsider in the period, is often interpreted as thinking of human and non-human animal minds as fundamentally the same, but then again, they are also fundamentally the same as, e.g., rocks, making him a tricky case, comparatively.

This mirrors their positions with respect to the philosophical establishment of the Scottish Enlightenment: Smith was much closer to the philosophical establishment of the time than Hume was and had a more direct impact within it. Smith was trained at Glasgow and then at Oxford; Hume, after his brief studies at Edinburgh, where he did not take a degree, was largely self-taught. Smith went on to hold, for a period, the Chair of Logic at Glasgow University before occupying the prestigious Chair of Moral Philosophy. This chair had been previously held by Francis Hutcheson and later went on to be held by Thomas Reid. Hume, by contrast, was famously rebuffed for professorial positions at universities in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Smith had students (e.g., Dugald Stewart) that went on to hold chairs and professorships; Hume did not. By any measure, the formal philosophical establishment of the time in Scotland counted Smith as one of their own while it excluded Hume.³¹

It is surprising that Smith and Hume differ so radically from one another on this issue, though. Both Smith and Hume develop their moral system in response to Hutcheson, building on and embroidering that system in similar ways.³² Further, both authors make extensive use of associationist psychology and both found their picture of morality on the passions. Both authors take these associative abilities to be shared between humans and non-human animals. But it is difference in speech ability and the extensive story Smith has about the relationship of speech to cognition that ultimately put a stark difference between human and non-human animal minds for him. Given that both Smith and Hume think that animal cognition will be useful for our thinking about morals, their starkly different views on the status of animals is surprising, especially in light of their other agreements.

In no way do I mean to make a causal claim here, but it is clear that Smith's relatively more mainstream philosophical opinion is consistent with his relative sociological positioning, and Hume's more heterodox view is consistent with his location outside that mainstream philosophical establishment. Further, Smith, who evinced eagerness with respect to engaging publicly on matters religious, also presented a view that was at least largely consistent with commonly held religious tenets: humans and non-human animals are different in kind and humankind's

³¹ Rasmussen (2017) provides a panoptic view and comparison of Smith and Hume's standing and reception in the period; it also provides a view into the *informal* clubs and circles of the Scottish Enlightenment, of which Hume, like Smith, was very much a fixture.

³² Both regularly cite Hutcheson as an influence, but for more, on Hutcheson's influence on Hume, see Kemp Smith (2005, ch.2); on Smith, see Pesciarelli (1999); and see Vandenberg and DeHart (2013) generally.

dominion over animals assured.³³ Hume's view on animals, by contrast, was associated with skepticism and irreligion, two charges consistently leveled at Hume more generally. Their positions on animals set them apart from each other and reflect how they are positioned with respect to the philosophical enlightenment of Scotland at the time.

³³ On Smith's caginess, see Rasmussen (2017), especially chs. 3, 5 and 10.

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