Violence, Animals, and Egalitarianism: Audubon and the Intellectual Formation of Animal Rights in America

Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis presents an intellectual microhistory of John James Audubon and his peculiar conceptions of humans and animals. Instead of making the images found in his *Birds of America*, *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* and *Ornithological Biography* the object of study, this thesis examines Audubon’s journals for his penned descriptions of nonhumans. This thesis argues that while Audubon, at first glance, may seem to have held contradictory conceptions of nonhumans, he, in fact, found consistency through an egalitarian worldview based on an animus for social power. Audubon recognized the biological differences that separated humans from nonhumans and that distinguished all species of organisms from each other, but these biological differences did not determine the rhetorical stances that he took toward animals. Audubon’s rhetorical stances toward humans and animals depended on whether he perceived these creatures gaining or losing agency from power structures. Audubon’s ethical principle was simple. If an organism advanced itself in the order of things by utilizing social institutions and exercising social power, this organism deserved moral condemnation. If an organism was controlled or victimized by these institutions, this organism deserved sympathy.

The following examination will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will examine Audubon’s egalitarian stance toward human society and how he conceived
of humans in relation to power structures. The second chapter will delve into Audubon’s apparent rhetorical inconsistencies towards animals, specifically animal death, showing how he both narrowed and lengthened the rhetorical distance between himself and other creatures in ways that may appear to be incongruent. The third chapter will make sense of these inconsistencies by demonstrating that Audubon’s ethical system fully incorporated (and, in fact, originated with) nonhumans. The final chapter will show how Audubon and his ethical system should be viewed within the larger picture of nineteenth century animal activism. This section will cast John James Audubon as a window into the development of both animal and human rights discourses. Before Americans could speak against animal cruelty and advocate for animal rights, they had to first think about animals differently. They had to cease perceiving nonhumans monolithically. This thesis argues that Audubon represents and prefigures an intellectual transition in animal rights discourse, a transition between an animal activism based around human utilitarian concerns to an animal activism based around egalitarianism. This thesis not only advances the history of animal rights, but it also contributes to the history of nineteenth century reform ideologies, showing how egalitarian thought could, and did, stem from interactions, violent and otherwise, between humans and nonhumans. This final chapter will also address some concerns regarding the acknowledgement of the unconscious and subconscious dimensions of individuals like Audubon for the larger pursuit of intellectual history.
Dedication

To Nicole and Emerson for their patience and encouragement
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I am indebted to the work of William Cronon, Donald Worster, Aaron Sachs, Harriet Ritvo, Dominick LaCapra, and Slavoj Žižek. The fingerprints of each of these scholars can surely be found between and behind the words of this thesis.

Thank you to Nicole for her unceasing support.

Thank you to Emerson for causing me daily to ponder my own animality.
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Introduction: Pretty Polly and the Man of the Woods

The good man produced a very small cage, and I saw two sweet little Wood Larks, full of vivacity, and as shy as prisoners in custody. Their eyes sparkled with fear, their little bodies were agitated, the motions of their breasts showed how their hearts palpitated; their plumage was shabby, but they were Wood Larks, and I saw them with a pleasure bordering on frenzy. . . . I so admired the dear captives that for a while I had a strong desire to open their prison, and suffer them to soar over London towards the woodlands dearest to them; and yet the selfishness belonging to man alone made me long to keep them. Ah! man! what a brute thou art! – so often senseless of those sweetest feelings that ought to ornament our species, if indeed we are the “lords of creation.”

- - John James Audubon, 1828

Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: “the Animal,” they say. And they have given themselves this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of; those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal.

- - Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am”

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When John James Audubon was a child, growing up with his stepmother in the French city of Nantes, along the Loire River, he witnessed a murder that changed his life forever. This “incident,” he recalled in an autobiographical sketch found in his journals, “is as perfect in my memory as if it had occurred this very day.” He had thought of this murder “thousands of times since” and admitted that it was “one of the curious things which perhaps did lead me in after times to love birds, and to finally study them with pleasure infinite.”

Audubon described this formative moment:

“My mother had several beautiful parrots and some monkeys; one of the latter was a full-grown male of a very large species. One morning, while the servants were engaged in arranging the room I was in, “Pretty Polly” asking for her breakfast as usual, “Du pain au lait pour le perroquet Mignonne,” the man of the woods probably thought the bird presuming upon his rights in the scale of nature; be this as it may, he certainly showed his supremacy in strength over the denizen of the air, for, walking deliberately and uprightly toward the poor bird, he at once killed it, with unnatural composure. The sensations of my infant heart at this cruel sight were agony to me. I prayed the servant to beat the monkey, but he, who for some reason preferred the monkey to the parrot, refused. I uttered long and piercing cries, my mother rushed into the room, I was tranquillized, the monkey was forever afterward chained, and Mignonne buried with all the pomp of a cherished lost one.”

It is not surprising that a violent scene such as this could leave a traumatic mark on a child’s psyche. Witnessing one childhood pet kill another could shock any young boy for the rest of his life. However, the “man of the woods’s” killing of “Pretty Polly” did not

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simply imprint itself within Audubon’s memory as a disturbing scene of animal violence. The specific language that Audubon used to recall this earliest of memories, makes it clear that this violent act permanently shaped his conscious and subconscious view of both humans and animals.

The monkey’s killing of the parrot was not simply traumatic—it was “unnatural.” The man of the woods killed the “poor bird” with “unnatural composure.” First, it is important to ask why Audubon described the monkey as the “man of the woods” rather than as an “orangutan” or a “chimpanzee.” “Man of the woods” was a shortened version of “wild man of the woods,” the English translation of “orangutan.” In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this English translation was commonly used to describe both orangutans, specifically, and various chimpanzees, generally. Therefore, the specific type of monkey that killed “Pretty Polly” must remain uncertain. However, although “man of the woods” was a common name for primates in popular parlance, Audubon still curiously chose to name the primate that killed “Pretty Polly” with this phrase rather than with the more precise taxonomical species name that he would have usually used. At the beginning of the scene Audubon referred to both his mother’s parrots and monkeys as if they both belonged in a similar category—his mother’s pets. He began the incident with the simple statement: “My mother had several beautiful parrots and some monkeys. . .” However, when describing the monkey as the “man of the woods” and the parrot as “Pretty Polly,” Audubon created a distinction between these two creatures.

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5 Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 31. Ritvo’s work is one of the pioneering works in an interdisciplinary field now referred to as “animal studies.” In this book, Ritvo is concerned with the rhetorical animal of Victorian England. Ritvo examines how humans used and exploited other creatures, both literally and figuratively. This thesis is indebted to the work of Harriet Ritvo and others in “animal studies.”
By referring to the monkey as the “man of the woods” Audubon distanced both
the parrot and himself from this domesticated primate. Audubon used a colloquial term
rather than the anthropomorphized name that was surely given to the creature, just as the
names “Pretty Polly” and “Mignonne” were given to the parrot. By using the generalized
term “man of the woods” instead of a more specific Latin-based species name, Audubon
not only denied the monkey the affectionate human sentiment usually given to a pet
through the human process of naming, but he also denied the creature the respect of a
naturalist by not utilizing the neutral Linnaean system of classification. To further
distance Pretty Polly from the monkey, Audubon broke apart the category of “his
mother’s pets,” in which both creatures found themselves at the beginning of the story, by
attaching the word “man” to the monkey. Although both the monkey and the parrot were
domesticated pets, Audubon quickly discounted any similarities between these creatures
when he likened the monkey to “man.” Audubon did not harness the monkey with an
anthropomorphic and affectionate name as he did Pretty Polly. Instead, the monkey
broke out of the human-controlled category of the pet and was placed by Audubon into
the realm of the human. Referring to this primate pet, a creature domesticated by and for
human purposes, by a “human” name was a symptom of how Audubon subconsciously
viewed this man of the woods and its killing of Pretty Polly.

The monkey was not only given a “human” name to distance the man of the
woods from the parrot, but it also allowed the man of the woods to obtain agency in
Audubon’s story. That agency allowed Audubon to consider the monkey “guilty” for the
violence committed, and it allowed Audubon to consider the violence committed as
unnatural. As the monkey walked “deliberately and uprightly toward the poor bird,” it
resembled a human both in posture and intention. The anthropoid not only walked on
two feet, but it walked with a purpose. Audubon suggested that when Pretty Polly
requested breakfast, reciting in French, “Some bread with milk for the parrot Mignonne,”
the man of the woods felt threatened and thought “the bird presuming upon his rights in
the scale of nature.” The man of the woods retaliated by showing “supremacy in strength
over the denizen of the air,” restoring what it thought was its appointed position in the
hierarchy of creatures. Audubon described the monkey as possessing intentionality,
jealousy, and an ability to ponder the metaphysical questions of natural “rights.”
Audubon anthropomorphized the man of the woods in a way that allowed him to
condemn both the primate and the primate’s actions, transforming what some would
consider as a natural killing into an unnatural murder.

How Audubon depicted both the man of the woods and Pretty Polly was
determined by his detestation of the killing, specifically the unnaturalness of it. What
about this killing made it unnatural in Audubon’s weeping eyes? What caused Audubon
to utter “long and piercing cries?” Why was the primate given human agency and human
characteristics? Why did this scene “lead” a young Audubon “in after times to love
birds?” How may this traumatic scene from Audubon’s childhood shape, or, in the very
least, act as a window into his conception of humans, animals, and morality?

John James Audubon was born on April 26, 1785, on his father’s plantation in Les
Cayes, Saint-Domingue. After the threat of slave rebellions on the island, Audubon was
sent to Nantes, France, where he spent his childhood from 1788 to 1803. Then, to avoid
conscription into Napoleon’s army, he went to Philadelphia, where his father owned an
estate called Mill Grove. In 1808, Audubon married Lucy Bakewell, a neighbor of the Mill Grove estate. Lucy and nature were the two passions that consumed the rest of his life (although nature seemed to consume more of his time). Throughout his life, Audubon could most often be found in the woods, where he pursued his hobbies of nature study, hunting, and drawing. These hobbies eventually morphed into his career, although often a financially unstable one. In 1820, Audubon worked for the Western Museum in Cincinnati. There, he taught drawing classes and sold portraits. For the next nine years, Audubon traveled, drawing birds, selling pictures, and meeting artists. His travels led him through the Mississippi Valley, to Philadelphia, and across the Atlantic to England, France, and Scotland. It was not until 1829 that Audubon returned to America to be reunited with his wife, who did not accompany him on his travels. Audubon did not settle down, though. He returned to England, with Lucy these times, from 1830-1831, 1834-1836, and 1837-1839. For a period between 1831 and 1832 he drew birds in Florida. In 1833, Audubon drew birds while in South Carolina and while on a Labrador cruise. He continued drawing birds in Houston in 1837 and in the Missouri River Valley in 1843. Audubon’s career culminated in his *Birds of America*, first published in 1827, and in his *Ornithological Biography*, first published in 1831. He also created *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, first published in 1845.6

John James Audubon is remembered for his images of animals, yet his penned descriptions of these animals, scattered throughout the journals he so devotedly kept throughout his life, are full of ambiguities. Audubon took inconsistent rhetorical stances

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6 Alice Ford, *John James Audubon* (Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1964), 424-429. These “first” publication dates do not indicate when the respective works were “first” published in their “complete” and “final” forms.
toward his animal objects, the creatures that he drew, hunted, and interacted with, blurring typical nineteenth century understandings of “human” and “animal.” At times, Audubon obscured the conceptual divide that separated the human from the animal by either anthropomorphizing the animal or imagining the human with animalistic qualities. In these moments, Audubon passionately identified with nonhuman creatures. The language that this Audubon used to describe the world of organisms prefigures an animal rights discourse that did not begin to take shape until a generation after his death. At other times, though, Audubon otherized these creatures, distancing himself from them, and making the distinction between human and animal as stark as ever. Both of

7 For biographical information, there are many sources to turn to. First and foremost, one must read the short “autobiography” written by John James Audubon himself. This brief 72-page biographical sketch can be found in *Audubon and His Journals*, volume 1. He wrote this biographical sketch for his children. For more information on his journals, see the footnote below. For secondary biographies written about Audubon, first read Alice Ford’s *John James Audubon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964). This work is the only biography that is written by a professor of history. It is well-written, and Alice Ford is the foremost expert on Audubon, publishing many works about him. One should also read Richard Rhodes’s *John James Audubon: The Making of an American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004). This biography, obviously, by its title, written for a popular audience, is the most recent biography of Audubon. Rhodes is a great storyteller, and this biography is a page-turner. There are many other biographies on Audubon. The other biographies that I read for this project include: Francis Hobart Herrick’s *Audubon the Naturalist: A History of his Life and Time* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938), Mary Durant and Michael Harwood’s *On the Road with John James Audubon* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1980), Claude Chebel’s *Audubon: The Man Who Loved Nature* (London: W.H. Allen, 1987), and Shirley Streshinsky’s *Audubon: Life and Art in the American Wilderness* (New York: Villard Books, 1993). These, however, do not constitute all of the biographies of Audubon. As is evident, this man has been the focus of much popular attention, and there are many sources by which one can find the basic narrative of his life. For works connecting Audubon to the larger issues of natural history and American identity read Daniel J. Herman’s dissertation *American Natives: The Farmer, The Naturalist, and the Hunter, in the Genesis of an Indigenous Identity* (University of California, 1995), Michael Edmonds’s “Birds and People in the Old Northwest,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 83, no. 3 (2000), 154-179., and Michael George Buckley’s thesis *Green Passages: Literary Natural History in Pre-Darwinian America* (Pennsylvania State University, 2004). For information concerning the influence of John James Audubon and his artistic style and its influence on art history one should read Linda Dugan Partridge’s "By the Book: Audubon and the Tradition of Ornithological Illustration," *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 59, no. 2/3 (1996), 269-301., Albert TenEyck Gardner’s “John James Audubon and Campephilus Principalis,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 21, no. 9 (1963), 309-316., and Linda Dugan Partridge’s dissertation *From Nature: John James Audubon’s Drawings and Watercolors, 1805-1826* (University of Delaware, 1992).
Audubon’s seemingly contradictory selves, though, found consistency in his larger moral vision. 8

Audubon possessed an egalitarian worldview that encompassed all creatures—whether human or nonhuman. He consistently expressed antipathy towards institutions that allowed individuals with wealth, mobility, and advantage to safeguard their privileged positions from others. Audubon pondered the influence that such institutions held upon society when confronted with abundant affluence, mobility, and advantage or when confronted with widespread poverty, captivity, and disadvantage. He found the vast gulf separating the privileged from the underprivileged as unnatural. Therefore, he scorned the individuals who benefited from such an unnatural social system. Audubon saw an implicit power structurally encoded into many social institutions, allowing the elite to ensure the endurance and longevity of the social system from which they benefited. Audubon, then, could view both individuals as wielding and institutions as storing power. 9

8 The journals of John James Audubon were collected, in two volumes, by his granddaughter Maria R. Audubon. They are entitled Audubon and His Journals. The editions I used for my research are John James Audubon, Audubon and His Journals, ed. Maria R. Audubon, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897) and John James Audubon, Audubon and His Journals, ed. Maria R. Audubon, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1960). While Audubon kept journals throughout his life, the ones presented here are the only journals that are not lost. Maria Audubon explains that a fire destroyed many of her grandfather’s writings. In these two volumes, we have “The European Journals, 1826-1829,” “The Labrador Journal, 1833,” “The Missouri River Journals, 1843,” and his “Episodes.” The letters that I read are from two volumes entitled Letters of John James Audubon, 1826-1840, edited by Howard Corning. The specific edition that I read, which combined both volumes, was Letters of John James Audubon, 1826-1840, ed. Howard Corning, vol. 1 (New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1969). For the purpose of this thesis, though, I will be focusing on his journals.

9 In this paper, I will often employ the term “social power” (abbreviated “power”). I realize that such a term, like “animal,” may be an empty signifier. “Power” has surely been a catchphrase of the Humanities for a long time, and narratives about “power” have their limitations. The traditional institutional and political histories that were first popular in the historical profession describe a hierarchical and elitist power, telling stories about how kings, presidents, and governments shaped the past. Marxist histories revised these narratives, locating a proletarian power amidst “the people,” the “working class,” and the subjugated. After the anthropological and cultural turn, scholars continued locating “power” in nonelitist groups, but by then “power” was not simply one-directional. “Power” was not just being exerted
Audubon’s abhorrence for social power drew him closer to both the human and nonhuman victims upon which this power was exercised, causing him to sympathize consistently with the subjugated, with the social others, of all species. On the surface, Audubon may have appeared to be depicting animals in contradictory ways; however, once it becomes apparent that Audubon’s moral vision was based around his enmity for social power, the human-animal dichotomy, at least as it was used by most nineteenth century Americans, dissolves. This does not mean, though, that Audubon refused to use the terms “human” and “animal,” for the deconstructive implications created by his egalitarian worldview operate on an unconscious and subconscious level. While the words “human” and “animal” appeared in Audubon’s vocabulary, they acted as empty signifiers. The meaning that each concept possessed and the sentiment that each word evoked, in any given instance, remained different from the meanings and sentiments either from the top-down or the bottom-up. It was understood that “power” could be bidirectional, from the top and bottom. It could also be multidirectional—coming from the “sides” too! The story of “power” was quickly becoming chaotic. To add to this confusion, the linguistic (poststructural) turn made “power” abstract. Michel Foucault located power encoded structurally into the everyday “institutions” normally taken for granted—sexual norms, medicine, law, prisons, language, etc. Only an “archaeologist” could unearth the “power” that had been encoded so subtly and abstractedly into these systems. Now, “power” was a tangible and abstract, multidirectional (if not infinitely directional) “force” that had shaped the past. I employ the term “social power,” then, understanding the term’s capaciousness, and I believe that all the above usages of “power” within the last fifty years of historiography are important. All of these usages of “social power” hold something in common, though—they all require “institutions.” Kings and presidents require governments. The “people” require “classes.” Groups of individuals require culture and identity. Foucauldian structures require language. And the list goes on. No matter what type of “power” historians refer to, institutions are essential for both storing and exercising that “power.” A president can exercise “power” by veto. The presidency stores and enables the president to exercise that veto “power.” My use of “social power” in this paper can refer to any of the above manifestations or interpretations of “power.” John James Audubon was surely not worried about the theoretical limits of “power.” In fact, he never even uttered the word. However, his journals demonstrate an early understanding of what we have been calling “power” for the last fifty years. Giving “social power” a precise definition would not serve a purpose in studying a man who did not even use the word to describe his conception of what would be called “power” today. Audubon may recognize “social power” symbolically inscribed into the walls of a prison or into the stone walls that divide the landscape. He may recognize “social power” behind a starving child. He may see “social power” embodied in a rich gentleman of London. Or he may see “social power” in the word “beast.” In any case, “social power” requires some sort of institution. Whatever that institution may be, though, it surely could not have been an institution built by “animals”…
signified in previous instances. Audubon used these terms inconsistently because he did not perceive the organisms around him, first and foremost, through the *animal-human* lens. The manner in which Audubon described either humans or animals did not depend on any fixed, inherent, or transcendent understanding of humanity or animality; instead, it relied on the degree to which creatures benefited, or not, from social power.

For Audubon, humans and animals were not necessarily creatures separated by inherent difference. Possessing an egalitarianism and moral vision that hinges on an animus for social power enabled Audubon to sympathize with both humans and nonhumans. Audubon recognized the biological differences that separated humans from nonhumans and that distinguished all species of organisms from each other, but these biological differences did not determine the rhetorical stances that he took toward animals. His rhetorical stances depend on whether Audubon perceived other creatures gaining or losing agency from social power. Audubon’s ethical principle was simple. If an organism advanced itself in the order of things by utilizing social institutions and exercising social power, this organism deserved moral condemnation. If an organism was controlled or victimized by these institutions, this organism deserved sympathy.

While Audubon sympathized with both humans and nonhumans, he never admonished nonhumans, for nonhumans never played a role in the construction and utilization of social power. Audubon’s ethical system, then, initially caused the *human-animal* dichotomy to disintegrate by replacing a simplistic conceptual framework based on the assumptions of human ascendancy with a new conceptual framework based around power. The irony, though, is that Audubon’s ethical system ended with the reconstruction of a previously deconstructed *animal-human* dialectic. This new *human-
animal framework, though, contained an “animal” that was incapable of moral wrong. These “animals” were crucially important for the development of animal rights discourses in the nineteenth century.

The following examination of John James Audubon’s thoughts on animals will be divided into four parts. The first part will examine Audubon’s egalitarian stance toward human society. Audubon’s egalitarianism hinged on a hatred of what can be anachronistically called social power. This section will develop an understanding of Audubon’s ethical system as it related to humans. The second section will delve into Audubon’s apparent rhetorical inconsistencies towards animals, specifically animal death, showing how he both narrowed and lengthened the rhetorical distance between himself and other creatures in ways that may appear to be incongruent. The third section will make sense of these inconsistencies by demonstrating that Audubon’s ethical system fully incorporated (and, in fact, originated with) nonhumans. The final section will show how Audubon and his ethical system can be viewed within the larger picture of nineteenth century animal activism. This section will cast John James Audubon as a window into the development of both animal and human rights discourses. Furthermore, this section will address some concerns regarding the acknowledgement of the unconscious and subconscious dimensions of individuals like Audubon for the larger pursuit of intellectual history.
One October morning while outside Liverpool, John James Audubon arose before the autumn sun, as he routinely did, to begin his day. As the hour approached four o’clock, he left his room and “stepped into the fresh air” for one of his regular dawn jaunts into nature. As he described the “timid birds” that flew from “bush to bush,” Audubon decided that for this particular morning’s peregrination he would head toward the Mersey, where he could listen “to the voice of the Quail, here so shy” and watch “the Solan Goose in search of a retreat from the destroyer, man.” As Audubon allowed this retreat and its avian inhabitants to assuage the anxiety created by a hectic tour of Britain, its tranquility was suddenly interrupted. Audubon captured the source of the disruption in great detail:

“Suddenly a poorly dressed man, in somewhat of a sailor garb, and carrying a large bag dashed past me; his movement suggested flight, and instinctively I called, “Stop thief!” and made towards him in a style that I am sure he had never seen used by the gentlemen of the customs, who at this hour are doubtless usually drowsy. I was not armed, but to my surprise he turned, fell at my feet, and with

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1 In the above scene, Audubon was in the midst of a three year tour of Britain to showcase his drawings and cultivate a future interest in his forthcoming *Birds of America*. Margaret Welch, through her dissertation entitled *John James Audubon and his American Audience: Art, Science, and Nature, 1830-1860* (University of Pennsylvania, 1988), examines the “relationship between Audubon, his subscribers, and the American public in order to explain Audubon’s success.” She argues that the publications of Audubon were meant for both a general and a scientific audience. After an analysis of newspaper and magazine articles about Audubon and his publications, Welch explains that “…editors and their readers enjoyed Audubon’s written and pictorial depictions of birds and animals engaged in dramatic scenes loaded with moral significance for man and fostered his image as a brave woodsman and interpreter of Nature” (v-vi). Throughout his life, Audubon constantly sought patronage to support his art, and this patronage came from many sectors of American and European society.
eyes staring from his head with apprehension, begged for mercy, said the bag only contained a few leaves of rotten tobacco, and it was the first time he had ever smuggled. This, then, was a smuggler! I told him to rise, and as he did so I perceived the boat that had landed him. There were five men in it, but instead of landing and defending their companion, they fled by rowing, like cowards, swiftly away. I was astonished at such conduct from Englishmen. I told the abject creature to bring his bag and open it; this he did. It was full of excellent tobacco, but the poor wretch looked ill and half starved, and I never saw a human being more terrified. He besought me to take the tobacco and let him go, that it was of the rarest of quality. I assured him I never had smoked a single cigar, nor did I intend to, and told him to take care he did not offend a second time. One of my pockets was filled with the copper stuff the shop-keepers here give, which they call penny. I gave them all to him, and told him to go. He thanked me many times and disappeared through a thick hedge.”

When the man rushed by, Audubon instinctively exclaimed “Stop thief!” His reaction was to halt an absconding defalcator; his natural inclination was to stop a thief from escaping with his “large bag.”

When the crook “fell” at Audubon’s feet and “begged for mercy,” however, Audubon’s disposition toward the criminal changed instantly. Noticing that the thief looked “ill and half starved” and stating that he “never saw a human being more terrified,” the “thief” began to lose the villainous qualities that Audubon first perceived him as possessing. The pilferer instead appeared as an “abject creature” and a “poor wretch” in Audubon’s eyes. Audubon expressed sympathy towards this man and took

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pity on him, especially after watching his accomplices abandon their fellow crook in a 
get-away rowboat, an act that Audubon found surprisingly cowardly for Englishmen. 
Audubon not only extended mercy toward this “thief” along the Mersey, but he allowed 
him to keep his bag of stolen goods, what turned out to be fifty pounds worth of tobacco.³
In addition, Audubon emptied his pockets, giving the thief all the coin he possessed.

In this drama, Audubon experienced a transformation of affect. The rhetorical 
position that Audubon took in relation to the “thief” quickly shifted, and the adjectives 
that he used to describe the physical appearance of the man reveals the cause of his 
transformation. Audubon described the man as on his knees, pleading for mercy, as 
“abject,” “ill,” “half starved,” and “terrified.” It was apparent to Audubon that this crook 
was a man who lived on the lowest rung of the social ladder. Obviously, because of his 
want of food, the man possessed no power or wealth, and the man’s servile manner, 
demonstrated for Audubon that not only was this man completely destitute, but he was 
aware that he possessed nothing. The man’s reaction was not one of an arrogant and 
selfish thief attempting to swindle helpless citizens meandering next to the river; his 
reaction, instead, exuded shame, a reaction of an outcast with few options. Audubon 
could no longer view the man before him as a crook who had exercised an illegitimate 
power to exploit and rob the innocent. Instead, this man was transformed in Audubon’s 
presence into a poor man of the lower class who had to steal to survive, a pariah 
jettisoned from Liverpool’s social hierarchy. Even the tobacco in the man’s bag 
symbolized the innocence of the theft. Audubon, who proclaimed himself “temperate to 
an intemperate degree;” had always despised smoking. A man who commonly asked 
himself “why should not mankind in general be more abstemious than mankind is?”

³ Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 131.
could not have held a strong moral detestation towards a half-starving man who stole tobacco, a luxury item Audubon would have viewed as a symbol of a wasteful and self-indulgent elite.  

Audubon’s distaste for social power and hierarchy enabled him to extend mercy toward the thief along the Mersey. For Audubon, the man’s social status transformed, and in fact redefined, both the man’s theft and the man himself. It was clear that Audubon would usually condemn the unlawful act of thievery, otherwise, he would not have instantly chased after the man when he suspected him a crook. However, when this crook turned out to be a part of the lower class, his actions no longer warranted moral condemnation. In fact, once Audubon realized this man’s position in the social hierarchy of Liverpool, he extended sympathy toward him. Audubon reevaluated both the man and his actions according to social status. If the man, by stealing, would have been exercising unwarranted power against the innocent, Audubon would have surely castigated him. This thief, though, possessed no power to exercise against another; he was stripped of all he had by an overly hierarchical society, and the social power enacted against him placed him in his respective position on the social ladder, causing him to steal in the first place. Audubon realized that the true thief, the true moral wrong, did not lie within the man kneeling before him, but in society at-large. Audubon’s enmity for social power consistently shaped how he viewed the humans around him.

During his time in Liverpool, social power seemed to especially trouble him. Two days after the incident with the thief, Audubon took a tour of the Liverpool jail, also “near the mouth of the estuary that is called the river Mersey,” a river whose name serves

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4 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 27.
as an almost perfect homonym to describe the merciful stance Audubon took towards the human beings near its banks. Audubon described this visit in the following manner:

“[The jail] is built almost circular in form, having gardens in the court in the centre, a court of sessions on one side and the main entrance on the other. It contains, besides the usual cells, a chapel, and yards in which the prisoners take exercise, kitchens, store-rooms, etc., besides treadmills. The treadmills I consider infamous; conceive a wild Squirrel in a round cage constantly moving, without progressing. The labor is too severe, and the true motive of correction destroyed, as there are no mental resources attached to this laborious engine of shame. Why should not these criminals—if so they are—be taught different trades, enabling them when again thrown into the world to earn their living honestly? It would be more profitable to the government, and the principle would be more honorable. It is besides injurious to health; the wheel is only six feet in diameter, therefore the motion is rapid, and each step must be taken in quick succession, and I know a quick, short step is more fatiguing than a long one. The emaciated bodies of the poor fellows proved this to my eyes, as did my powers of calculation. The circulation of air was much needed; it was painful to me to breathe in the room where the mill was, and I left it saddened and depressed.”5

Detestation toward institutions that divide society into those with and without advantage presents itself even more straightforwardly in this passage than in the account of the tobacco thief.

Audubon believed that within this prison’s walls the “labor is too severe” and “the true motive of correction destroyed.” Audubon frustratingly pondered, “Why should not

5 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 133.
these criminals—if so they are—be taught different trades, enabling them when again
thrown into the world to earn a living honestly?” Through this interrogative, Audubon, once again, extended his mercy, this time a rhetorical, not literal, mercy, to individuals rejected by society, expressing skepticism toward the criminal statuses attached to the individuals held in the jail, as well as calling into question the systems of justice utilized by a hierarchical society. Audubon also criticized the function of the jail. He suggested that prisons should do more than hold social “miscreants”; they should assist these “miscreants,” whether they deserve such a title or not, to shed this stigma and help them to contribute to society after their release. By reforming criminals into useful members of society, jails could help lessen the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged and could escape its function as a storehouse for power. In any case, whether Audubon was skeptical about the criminal statuses of the “criminals” held within the walls of the Liverpool jail or skeptical about the function of that jail itself, Audubon’s true skepticism lay in the larger society and the social power it constructed through its institutions.

The treadmills of Liverpool’s jail particularly held Audubon’s attention; he considered them “infamous.” Although these treadmills gave prisoners exercise, Audubon believed that they harmed their users because their diameter was not great enough to allow the prisoners to take long, healthy strides, only “quick, short” steps. The prisoners could not control the pace of the treadmill either; the treadmill was powered by an external source, forcing them to keep up with the rapid pace. However, Audubon’s objection to the treadmills stemmed from more than the design of the equipment and its negative consequences on human health. For Audubon, the idea of a treadmill was simply incomprehensible. He likened those who had to run on these treadmills to “wild
Squirrel[s] in a round cage constantly moving, without progressing,” a type of animal-human metaphor, that, as will be shown in the next section, was commonly used by Audubon. For a man who received exercise by taking regular morning retreats into nature, the idea of replacing this exercise with an exercise wheel must have been revolting. Two days earlier, when he had begun his morning jaunt, Audubon relished the “fresh air” and the “calm, serene skies,” in essence celebrating his freedom to traverse space, a freedom that, as will be shown, Audubon believed should be accorded to all creatures, human and nonhuman. The idea of “constantly moving, without progressing” was in critical tension with meandering under open skies. While the treadmills may have provided exercise for the prisoners, they denied these prisoners the opportunity to exercise in nature, in effect, denying the prisoners’ natural inclination to move freely. Treadmills, then, not only embodied the social power and control inscribed into the institution of prisons during the nineteenth century, but they also served as symbols of a more tangible manifestation of this abstract power. They paradoxically provided exercise while denying the freedom to move.

Two months earlier, when taking another “long walk,” this time with his good friend Miss Rathbone, Audubon became frustrated with the stone walls that demarcated the landscape, preventing him and his walking partner from strolling where they wished. He described his frustration:

“. . . this afternoon I took a long walk with Miss Rathbone and her nephew; we were accompanied by a rare dog from Kamschatka. How I did wish I could have conducted them towards the beech woods where we could move wherever fancy led us; but no, it could not be, and we walked between dreary walls, without the
privilege of advancing towards any particular object that might attract the eye. Is it not shocking that while in England all is hospitality within, all is so different without? No one dare trespass, as it is called. Signs of large dogs are put up; steel traps and spring guns are set up, and even eyes are kept out by high walls.”

Like the prisoners held behind the walls of the Liverpool jail, whose movement was restricted to the controlled and mechanized exercise provided by the treadmills, Audubon was similarly restricted by the larger society. Not being able to move freely across the English landscape “towards any particular object that might attract the eye,” perplexed him. While Audubon lauded the hospitality of English genteel society, during his afternoon stroll with Miss Rathbone he expressed his resentment toward the superficial nature of this hospitality. How could England be so hospitable “within,” but be “so different without”? Through the visible symbols of walls, signs, dogs, traps, and guns, Audubon saw the divisive power that existed behind a hospitable façade. For Audubon, a truly hospitable society would not strictly divide the landscape, would not erect barriers, and would not attach the institutions of ownership and power to the beech woods.

The resentment that Audubon expressed toward the division and ownership of the landscape was not simply a reaction to not being able to approach the beech woods that he so longed to saunter through. Instead, this frustrated desire aroused a deep-seeded resentment that Audubon already possessed toward institutions that allowed individuals to unnaturally amass affluence, property, and advantage. Immediately following the above passage, Audubon revealed this deeper antipathy. “Everywhere we meet beggars,” Audubon lamented, “for England though rich, has poverty gaping every way you look, and the beggars ask for bread, -- yes, absolutely for food. I can only pray, May our

Heavenly Father have mercy on them.”7 Within one paragraph, Audubon expressed a desire to walk toward beech woods, explained how “dreary walls” frustrated this desire, berated the walls and their hypocrisy, and articulated discontentment with the widespread poverty in England. Through these rapid transitions, it becomes clear that Audubon believed, at least on an unconscious level, that the social power displayed through the partitioning of landscape was the same social power displayed through England’s construction of class hierarchies, evident in its impoverished lower class. Audubon viewed social power, using Derridean terminology, as the silent other of poverty, of otherness itself; he otherized and rejected this power and the symbols through which it manifested itself. Behind the “thief” along the Mersey, the prisoners held in the Liverpool jail, and the general poverty of England, Audubon could see social power at work—this power inscribed, or at least was inscribed upon, both the human faces and the landscape around him. Audubon’s understanding of and hatred for social power transformed his perception of humans. Individuals were not simply as they as appeared to be; they either utilized or were utilized by social power—they were rarely ever natural, meaning naturally themselves.

The “dreary walls” that divided the English landscape into individual properties disturbed Audubon frequently. When in Bakewell, England, Audubon attributed the “superabundance of stone walls cutting the hills in all sorts of distorted ways” to making him a “very unsocial companion.”8 Similarly, he extended this stance toward trespassing signs. One day, he wrote, “I walked back to Liverpool, and more than once my eyes were shocked whilst crossing the fields, to see signs with these words: “Any person

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7 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 114.
trespassing on these grounds will be prosecuted with the rigor of the law.” This must be a mistake, certainly; this cannot be English freedom and liberty, surely.” Audubon seemed to consider the right to move freely as the preeminent natural right and restrictions placed on this freedom of movement, whether literal or figurative, stifled the natural tendencies of humans, and as will be shown later, of animals as well.

Being restricted in his travel proved disheartening for a man who often identified with squatters, and in many times throughout his life actually was one. Audubon eulogized the life of a squatter—“The squatter is rough, true, and hospitable; my friends here polished, true, and generous. Both give what they have, freely, and he who during the tough storms of life can be in such spots may well say he has known happiness.” To assuage the anxiety that poverty and disadvantage caused him, Audubon passionately embraced an egalitarian worldview, a worldview based on generosity. Audubon believed, as he demonstrated by emptying his pockets for the “thief” along the Mersey, that generosity could combat the artificiality of social power. One morning in Scotland, when Audubon was admiring the “fine and beautiful” sun, “burnished gold,” over Edinburgh, he “dwelt on the power of the great Creator who formed all, with a thought of

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11 Aaron Sachs, *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism* (New York: Viking, 2006), 346. Sachs describes a similar type of egalitarianism which he calls “Humboldtianism,” named after the German explorer and scientist Alexander von Humboldt. “Humboldtianism inevitably constituted a social vision of nature. It started internally, in the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual realms: humanity was linked to the world through perception, and connectedness brought comfort and sometimes even joy. But then the Humboldtian explorer always had to make a full acknowledgment of the external, the Other, that which he could never fully see or understand. Still, though, he remained engaged: knowing the world was out of reach, he nevertheless reached out to it, in the hope of experiencing unity in diversity.” The egalitarianism that Sachs describes is similar to Audubon’s egalitarianism. However, I will argue that Audubon’s egalitarianism stemmed from his perception of social power more than from an abstract desire to see “connectedness.” In this case, “connectedness” is a consequence of allowing a rhetorical stance toward social power to govern how one conceives of both humans and animals.
all man had done and was doing, when a child, barefooted, ragged, and apparently on the verge of starvation, altered my whole train of ideas.” This child:

“complained of want, and, had I dared, I would have taken him to Sir William Jardine [a Scotland academic and possible patron that Audubon was meeting with that day], and given him breakfast at the hotel; but the world is so strange I feared this might appear odd, so I gave the lad a shilling, and then bid him return with me to my lodgings. I looked over all my garments, gave him a large bundle of all that were at all worn, added five shillings, and went my way feeling as if God smiled on me through the face of the poor boy.”

This scene perfectly illustrates the importance of generosity to Audubon’s worldview.

While enraptured in a spiritual moment facilitated by a magnificent sunrise, Audubon was forced to again deal with the unnatural, with poverty. This particular morning, as many previous mornings like it, Audubon was drawn towards nature. Audubon was naturally inclined to begin each day outdoors, for the natural allowed Audubon to contemplate the divine. Although as a child in France, Audubon was confirmed a Catholic to appease his devout stepmother, he was “indifferent” toward Catholicism. In fact, throughout his entire life, Audubon expressed indifference to denomination, doctrine, theology, and, at times, even church. Yet Audubon remained a spiritual person, not hesitating to recognize God’s glory. This morning, in Scotland, though, the appearance of the child “altered” his “whole train of ideas.” The child, “barefooted, ragged, and apparently on the verge of starvation,” was simply unnatural; this poor child, for Audubon, was the opposite of the “burnished gold” sun. This child

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12 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 190.
13 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 15.
was forgotten by society, but once Audubon gave to the child what he needed, Audubon
was able to proclaim confidently that “God smiled on me through the face of the poor
boy,” for he transformed, if only partially, the *unnatural* back to its *natural* state. He
defeated, if only momentarily, poverty and the social power that created it.

Audubon disagreed so strongly with ideas of social class and power, as well as
everything they appropriated, that he could proclaim, despite having “parted with every
particle of property I held to my creditors, keeping only the clothes I wore on that day,
my original drawings, and my gun,” that “With her [his wife Lucy Bakewell] was I not
always rich?”14 Audubon consistently rejected the world of money, wealth, and value.
When his business in Louisville failed, he without regret stated that “I could not bear to
give the attention required by my business, and which, indeed, every business calls for,
and, therefore, my business abandoned me.”15 When Audubon first met Mr. Rathbone,
who would become a close friend and treat Audubon “as a brother,” he explained that
“He did not give *his card* to poor Audubon, he gave his hand, and a most cordial
invitation to be at his house at two o’clock, which hour found me there.”16 Audubon not
only found happiness when he was without money and when he was distanced from the
world of business, but at times he detested having money at all. When touring England,
he tried to avoid pay for displaying his art. When the Committee of the Royal Institution
asked Audubon to “exhibit” his “drawings by ticket of admission,” Audubon responded,
“This request must and will, I am sure, take off any discredit attached to the tormenting
feeling of showing my work for money.”17 When one of his paintings was stolen,

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14 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 35.
16 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 100.
17 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 112.
Audubon responded humbly, “Gladly would I have painted a bird for the poor fellow, and I certainly did not want him arrested.” Audubon did not draw and paint birds for a living; he did not practice his art for money. He drew and painted, as evident in this story, for a higher purpose, to create if only momentarily a human world not fully dependent on power, wealth, and class. And those entrepreneurs who operated businesses that created such a world, that either treated workers unfairly, as in the case of cotton mills and mines, or consumers unfairly, as in private coaches, consistently earned Audubon’s castigation.

Money and wealth, like the stone walls that cut across the landscape, like the treadmills in the Liverpool jail, and like the rigid social hierarchies that create both thieves that steal tobacco and barefooted children in want of food, are manifestations of social power, constructed and utilized by humans to organize society. Audubon found these manifestations of power unnatural. Indeed, as he mourned the mutual decimation of Labrador Indians and their food supply caused by the “white man’s” obsession with “the dollar which . . . skins bring in,” Audubon lamented, “Nature herself seems perishing.” While Audubon never fully articulated the unnatural quality of social power into a coherent philosophy and obviously did not possess an early nineteenth century Foucauldian lexicon that could explore the nuanced construction of this power, he was aware unconsciously of how social power layered the human world around him. The rhetorical stance that Audubon implicitly took toward the individuals of human society depended on how he viewed them in relation to social power. Audubon’s ethical principle was simple. If a human advanced itself in the order of things by utilizing social

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institutions and exercising social power, this individual deserved moral condemnation. If a human was controlled or victimized by these constructions, this individual deserved sympathy. This rule provided the basis for Audubon’s egalitarianism. This egalitarianism was not peculiar for the period between 1820 and 1850, a time when social activism, in many forms, accelerated. How Audubon unconsciously created his egalitarian ethic around conceptions of social power, however, had unique implications for Audubon’s stance towards nonhumans, a stance that might provide a window into the intellectual development of animal rights in the nineteenth century.

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Chapter 2: Audubon and Animal Violence

On April 26, 1826, John James Audubon packed up more than three hundred of his drawings, left his wife and son, and traveled to New Orleans, where he would board the *Delos*, bound for Europe to showcase his drawings. While onboard the *Delos*, as he noted in his journal entry dated May 18th, Audubon encountered “beautiful Dolphins that glided by the vessel like burnished gold by day, and bright meteors by night.” These creatures captivated Audubon, and the passionate prose he used to capture the power, beauty, and complexity of these birds of the sea draws attention to the important role that animals played in his ecological imagination. Audubon described the dolphins with a naturalist’s attention to detail. He paid close attention to the animals’ length and the texture of their skin, comparing it with the skin of other types of fish. He explained that “[t]heir flesh is firm, dry, yet quite acceptable at sea. . . . The skin of the fish is a tissue of small scales, softer in their substance than is generally the case in scaley fishes of such size; the skin is tough.” Audubon examined and described his dolphin subjects with a naturalist’s precision, yet he did not dissociate these subjects from their environment.

Audubon studied the dolphin as it related to other types of animals, placing this marine mammal in the larger ecological picture of natural interconnection. For Audubon, this larger ecological picture was largely defined by predator-prey relationships. Audubon described how the dolphins prey on flying-fish, chasing them through the water,

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1 Rhodes, 237-239.
2 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 82-83.
3 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 82-83.
a predator after its prey. However, while the dolphin was the “antagonist” in the eyes of the flying-fish, Audubon made sure to emphasize that the dolphin was by no means without enemies. Just as it hunted the flying-fish, he explained, the “Barracouta” hunted the dolphin. Beneath the waves of the sea, Audubon observed the struggle between the hunter and the hunted. Audubon did not describe this struggle with the same removed and scientific language he used to describe the skin of the dolphin. Audubon used passionate prose to paint a picture of violence. He could have noted objectively how a “Barracouta” cut off a segment of a dolphin’s tail. Instead, he described a “Barracouta” that “cut off upwards of a foot of a Dolphin’s tail, as if done with an axe, as the Dolphin made for a baited hook.” By using the imagery of the axe and the “baited hook” to describe the wound that the Barracouta inflicted on the dolphin, Audubon revealed the sympathy he held for the “Barracouta’s” victim. In the next line, Audubon wrote of a “degree of sympathy existing between Dolphins quite remarkable,” but one cannot help but wonder if Audubon was describing his own emotional stake in the scene, a scene that concluded with the injured dolphin being finally caught by one last predator—the sailors aboard Audubon’s ship. Although an avid hunter himself, Audubon did not triumph in the sailors’ catch; he somberly concluded that the “. . . unfortunate is hauled on board.”

The natural world in Audubon’s eyes was filled with myriad creatures, linked by a series of violent predator-prey relationships, relationships that elicited sympathy from Audubon for its victims.

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4 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 82.
5 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 83.
6 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 83.
7 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 83. This theme of “violence in nature” may instantly bring Darwin to mind. For information regarding Audubon’s impact on Darwinian thought take a look at the following book: Gerald Weissmann, Darwin’s Audubon: Science and the Liberal Imagination (New York: Plenum Trade, 1998), 10. Gerald Weissman is not an historian. He is a professor of medicine and director of New
A few days later, Audubon once again had an experience with dolphins. This time, though, Audubon did not just observe the violence between predator and prey; he had now become the dolphin’s predator. This change of role reveals something peculiar about how Audubon viewed both violence and nonhuman creatures. Once again, he did not just describe the dolphin as a naturalist would; he was not simply an observer taking notes on animal behavior. The interconnection that Audubon described took on an even more passionate tone than the scene previously illustrated. His language captured an affective attachment between the hunter and the hunted, between Audubon and the dying dolphins.

This day has been calm; my drawing finished, I caught four Dolphins; how much I have gazed at these beautiful creatures, watching their last moments of life, as they changed their hue in twenty varieties of richest arrangement of tints, from burnished gold to silver bright, mixed with touches of ultramarine, rose, green, bronze, royal purple, quivering to death on our hard, broiling deck. As I stood and watched them, I longed to restore them to their native element in all their original strength and vitality, and yet I felt but a few moments before a peculiar sense of

York University’s Division of Rheumatology. While his primary research is in cell biology, he has also published essays in cultural history. While he may not be an historian, this book’s first chapter successfully underlines the scientific mind of Audubon. The extent to which he pushes his argument may be questionable, though. In the first chapter of Darwin’s Audubon: Science and the Liberal Imagination, Gerald Weissmann argues that the scientific work of Audubon is critically important to the science of Charles Darwin. In his research, Weissmann has “. . . come across a real link between the work of Audubon and Charles Darwin, a link in that long chain of genetic reasoning that extends from Buffon to Lamarck to Audubon and to Darwin.” This chapter illustrates how Audubon’s writing had influenced Darwin and many other scientists like Baron Cuvier and Geoffroy St. Hilaire, and it reminds the readers that Audubon did have a scientific mind. In fact, in 1830, Audubon was nominated a Fellow of the Royal Society of London, an honor given to two antebellum Americans—Benjamin Franklin being the other. In the Royal Society, Audubon joined names like Newton and Boyle. There is no doubt that Audubon possessed a strong rationalistic and scientific-thinking mind. With this mind, Audubon was able to see the complex relationships of the sea life surrounding the Delos with the astuteness of other scientific naturalists, yet, as shown above, Audubon’s description is not always “scientific” in nature.
pleasure in catching them with a hook to which they were allured by false pretences.\textsuperscript{8}

In this passage, Audubon’s words still depicted nature with the intricate description of a naturalist, yet Audubon, once again, was not writing as a neutral observer taking notes on the creatures around him. He was emotionally invested in the event taking place. Audubon had now committed the act of violence, had now become the dolphins’ predator, yet the language he used did not remove him from the animal objects that he had acted violently upon. His language did not \textit{otherize} the dolphins; instead it brought him closer to the death he had caused. He did not “watch” while the dolphins’ lives expired, instead, he “gazed “at these beautiful creatures.” The dying dolphins, in “their last moments of life,” drew Audubon towards death. He could feel the violence he had committed. He could imagine himself as the dolphin.

Contradiction saturated this scene. Audubon longed to “restore them to their native element in all their original strength and vitality,” but, at the same time, had a “sense of pleasure” in luring the dolphins to their death. Audubon’s “sense of pleasure” derived from “catching them with a hook to which they were allured by false pretences.” Audubon outsmarted these dolphins, and he relished in his victory. He was capable of catching these large mammals, creatures that he admired for their “beauty,” “strength,” and “vitality,” with only a small hook. Audubon recognized the suffering of his prey, yet took pride in his kill.

As Audubon “gazed” upon the dolphins, he paradoxically embodied a set of opposites. He took pleasure in his kill, embraced his role as predator, yet he longed to undo what he had done. He relished in his power to end life and longed for the power to

\textsuperscript{8} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1, 91.
restore life. This contradiction was an emotional manifestation of an implicit contradiction embedded in the subtext of the bird drawings that he carried to England, the bird drawings that had and would make him famous. Noteworthy for their accuracy and their ability to “restore” the life of the birds they depicted for their viewers, it must be remembered that the drawings were not of living birds but were of dead birds. Audubon had made a career of restoring life to the dead, to the creatures he had killed, yet on the Delos, he realized that he did not possess at the fishing pole the Christ-like power that he wielded at the easel.

There is no doubt that tension and contradiction dominates this scene, but what is its source? Does this tension simply spring from the contradiction of life and death? Or does this tension arise from an identity crisis within Audubon? Could Audubon be questioning his own humanity, or is he simply realizing an animality that exists at humanity’s core?

Rhetorically and affectively drawn toward both predator and prey, Audubon possessed a fragmented self, a fissure that he was, at least partially, conscious of. This affective fragmentation produced deep-seated anxiety within Audubon as he gazed upon animal death, and this anxiety saturated both his writings and drawings. Audubon, like all naturalists, understood on an intellectual level the importance of the unceasing struggle for life among all creatures, yet on an emotional level, he could not easily accept the death that he knew was both natural and necessary.

Almost two decades later, onboard another vessel traveling down the Missouri River, Audubon came across a buffalo shot dead in the water by a man onshore.
From the deck I saw a man swimming around the animal; he got on its side, and floated down the stream with it. The captain sent a parcel of men with a rope; the swimmer fastened this round the neck of the Buffalo, and with his assistance, for he now swam all the way, the poor beast was brought alongside; and as the tackle had been previously fixed, it was hauled up on the fore deck. Sprague took its measurements with me, which are as follows: length from nose to root of tail, 8 feet; height of fore shoulder to hoof, 4 ft. 9 ½ in.; height at the rump to hoof, 4 ft. 2 in. The head was cut off, as well as one fore and one hind foot. The head is so full of symmetry, and so beautiful, that I shall have a drawing of it to-morrow, as well as careful ones of the feet.”

Once again, while floating upon a watery surface, Audubon gazed upon death. Even more meticulous than on the Delos, Audubon described the specific dimensions of the buffalo with intricate detail. Audubon, again, evaluated a dead animal with the objective professionalism of a naturalist. However, contradiction complicated Audubon’s objective stance in relation to the buffalo, the “poor beast.” The severing of the buffalo’s head inspired Audubon. The severed head, “so full of symmetry,” represented beauty in the eyes of Audubon and gave him the desire to draw the decapitated head and feet the next day. He did not say that the symmetrical nature of the severed head gave it a beautiful quality. The head’s beauty did not depend on its symmetry. Audubon stated that the buffalo’s head was both symmetrical and “so beautiful.” Audubon appreciated the bloody remnants of death for its scientific and aesthetic value. Only in death, could

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Audubon study the animal for its scientific value, and, only in death, could Audubon bring the buffalo, at least its head and feet, back to life through drawing.

Whether dolphin or buffalo, Audubon took a paradoxical stance towards dying animals. He received a “sense of pleasure” in the death of these animals, but at the same time longed to “restore them to their native element.” The death of both the dolphins and the buffalo occurred at Audubon’s feet, or by his hand. In both situations, Audubon had either been responsible for causing death or had been in close proximity to those who were responsible for killing. In either case, whether the dying dolphins or the dead buffalo, death closely situated itself to Audubon, and he could reap the reward of death—an object to study and draw. However, when Audubon gazed upon the death of buffalos from a distance, death caused by floods, he could only express sorrow. Earlier, floating down the Missouri River, Audubon lamented:

“We have seen floating eight Buffaloes, one Antelope, and one Deer; how great the destruction of these animals must be during high freshets! The cause of their being drowned in such extraordinary numbers might not astonish one acquainted with the habits of these animals, but to one who is not, it may be well enough for me to describe it. Some few hundred miles above us, the river becomes confined between high bluffs or cliffs, many of which are nearly perpendicular, and therefore extremely difficult to ascend. When the Buffaloes have leaped or tumbled down from either side of the stream, they swim with ease across, but on reaching these walls, as it were, the poor animals try in vain to climb them, and becoming exhausted by falling back some dozens of times, give up the ghost, and
float down the turbid stream; their bodies have been known to pass, swollen and putrid, the city of St. Louis.”

In this description Audubon extended sympathy toward dying animals. He expressed no satisfaction, nor enjoyment, in watching these animals die. He painted a sad picture of a watery dirge of floating carcasses, “putrid” and bereft of life. Despite their struggle, the buffalos, “the poor animals,” succumbed to the mercy of floodwaters.

Audubon winced at the thought of buffalos attempting desperately to escape flooded rivers. But despite these moments of desperation, buffaloes maintained an agency in death that Audubon did not grant the creatures that died on deck. In Audubon’s description, buffalos that died in floods gave “up the ghost,” implying both that buffaloes possessed some type “spirit” and that they could choose to let that spirit depart from the animal body in which it dwelled. The sympathy extended to the dying animal, in this circumstance, is not juxtaposed to a paradoxical “sense of pleasure.” Audubon received no delight in death—only sorrow. Similarly, Audubon extended sympathy when he expressed frustration that “thousands multiplied by thousands of Buffaloes are murdered in senseless play.”

Ironically, though, Audubon did not express this same frustration when examining the severed head of the buffalo, a time that seems appropriate to renounce this very “murder.” Instead, Audubon cherished the victim’s severed head, for, through drawing, he planned to bring this head back to life.

When Audubon gazed upon the death of animals from a distance, he mourned for animal victims. When he watched sailors kill dolphins, Audubon could not help but sympathize with those hunted. When he watched buffaloes die in a flood, Audubon

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could not help but sympathize with the drowned. However, the more responsibility Audubon possessed in the killing of animals, the less he mourned. Audubon sympathized with animals when distanced from their death, yet when he caused their death, sympathy came into conflict with triumph, as well as a utilitarian sense of “pleasure” received from examining and drawing the lifeless body that death provides. In his “Labrador Journals,” Audubon bemoaned a scene of mass slaughter where fishermen killed seagulls “until fatigued or satisfied. Five hundred and forty have thus murdered in one hour by six men. The birds are skinned with little care.”12 He sympathized with these gulls as “the birds, alarmed, rise with a noise like thunder, and fly off in such hurried, fearful confusion as to throw each other down, often falling on each other till there is a bank of them many feet high.”13 He also mourned over a scene in which seals were “driven into nets one after another, until the poor animals become so hampered and confined that, the gun being used, they are easily and quickly dispatched.”14 But, Audubon forgot his antipathy towards animal death when he killed mammals and fowl himself. When he came across a “little green Kingfisher,” Audubon “longed for a gun to have stopped him, as I never saw one fresh killed.”15 In one instance Audubon sympathized with seagulls “murdered” by sailors, but in another instance, he longed to shoot the kingfisher simply because he had never seen one dead. The difference, though, was that Audubon’s imagined kingfisher victim would have been carefully preserved, stuffed, and drawn, gaining a new life, carefully sketched on paper, whereas the seagulls and seals were thoughtlessly “skinned with little care” for no purpose other than profit.

13 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 361.
14 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 408.
15 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 261.
Despite Audubon’s aesthetic purpose for killing, and despite the sympathy that he held for the creatures he killed, the process of killing gave him a “sense of pleasure” that often trumped sympathy. Audubon listened to a “melodious” “Ruby-crowned Wren,” a “strange,” “beautiful” “musician,” but then he shot it.\(^\text{16}\) He met a “Spruce Partridge” whose “looks claimed . . . [his] forbearance and clemency, but the enthusiastic desire to study nature prompted . . . [him] to destroy her.”\(^\text{17}\) Audubon captured a baby “Woodcock” and then was “sorry for this evil deed.”\(^\text{18}\) Audubon killed a rabbit, and then exclaimed, “I have it now hanging before me; and, let me tell you, that I never before saw so beautiful an animal of the same family.”\(^\text{19}\) Yet, when he walked into the store of a Mr. Leadbeater, “the great stuffer of birds,” Audubon could only comment, “He was very cordial, and showed us many beautiful and rare specimens; but they were all stuffed, and I cannot bear them, no matter how well mounted they may be.”\(^\text{20}\) Audubon was a man divided.

Of course, Audubon utilized the conceptual categories “human” and “animal.” He did not believe these terms were faulty constructions; he recognized that there were biological differences between “humans” and “animals.” He published books and articles that provided images and information about the “animal,” about the “other,” to humans around the world, books that strengthened the human-animal dichotomy within the American imagination. Audubon not only understood traditional taxonomical methods of organizing the natural world, but he used the taxonomical Latin to describe creatures throughout his journals and publications. Audubon was not ignorant of the traditional

\(^{16}\) Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 381-382.
\(^{17}\) Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 401.
\(^{18}\) Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 494.
\(^{19}\) Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 2, 22.
\(^{20}\) Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 279.
biological boundaries that separated the “human” from the “animal.” However, these conceptual boundaries did not inform his rhetorical stances toward other creatures.

Audubon obsessed over death. The predator-prey, killer-killed, dichotomy informed his animal perception. When viewing a violent struggle between creatures from afar, Audubon sympathized with the loser of this struggle. He sympathized with dolphins caught by fishermen, with buffalos shot by hunters, with creatures drowned in floods. Audubon commiserated with the killed. However, when he became an intimate part of the struggle, when he became the predator, he felt an emotion that was absent when he viewed this struggle at a distance. Audubon felt a “sense of pleasure” derived from the power to take a life. This did not mean that he no longer held sympathy for his “animal” victim—he did, and this sympathy usually manifested itself within his drawings that would resurrect the life he had taken. This sympathy, though, was obfuscated by the presence of another emotion, a satisfied sense of victory. The way Audubon described encounters with organisms did not depend on common understandings of what it meant to be “human” and what it meant to be “animal.” Instead his description of the interaction of organisms depended on violence, on the predator-prey relationship. Many of Audubon’s drawings and paintings captured this violence, whether through a scene of a “Hawk pouncing on seventeen Partridges,” of a “Whooping Crane devouring alligators newly born,” of “two cats fighting like two devils over a dead Squirrel,” or of “three most beautiful Pheasants. . . attacked by a Fox,” Audubon expressed fascination through the very violence that sparked contradictory emotions and anxiety within him.21

While Audubon recognized biological differences between humans and nonhumans, humans and “animals,” the rhetorical stances that he took toward nonhuman

21 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 156, 188, 192.
creatures did not depend on static understandings of these concepts. Audubon may have been consistent in how he viewed animal death, extending sympathy toward animal victims when witnessing their death from afar and experiencing both satisfaction and sympathy when causing this death himself. However, this consistency was only consistent in as far as it was paradoxical. Audubon was a contradictory killer, at least in the act of killing. Despite contradictory emotions, though, Audubon rarely caused an *unnatural* death. He rarely killed immorally. To understand why, Audubon’s grander worldview concerning nonhumans and social power must be examined.
Chapter 3: Audubon, Nonhumans, and Power

Throughout his writing, Audubon complicated the human-animal dichotomy. This was most clear when he either explicitly described himself as an animal or anthropomorphized nonhuman creatures. Audubon blurred the line separating “human” and “animal,” illustrating the plasticity of these two concepts within his lexicon. In many instances, Audubon either desired to become or directly took on the identity of a nonhuman. Audubon comically described his hair standing on end when in the presence of Lord Stanley, the renowned translator of Homer’s Iliad and a famous cultural figure and orator. To describe himself, Audubon employed a simple simile when he joked, “I have not the least doubt that if my head had been looked at, it would have been thought to be the body, globularly closed, of one of our largest porcupines; all my hair—and I have enough—stood straight on end, I am sure.”¹ At other times, Audubon described himself “panting like the winged Pheasant,” as a “bee gathering honeyed stores for future use,” or standing “motionless as a Heron.”²

He not only appropriated animal metaphors to describe himself; he also used them to describe other humans. Audubon described waiters as “skipping about with the nimbleness of squirrels.”³ He compared a “full grown man with a scarlet vest and breeches, black stockings and shoes for the coloring of his front, and a long blue coat

² Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 101, 135, 162.
³ Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 145.
covering his shoulders and back” to a “summer red bird (Tanagra rubra)”4 And the only physical description of the Earl of Kinnoul, who considered Audubon’s work “a swindle,” was that he possessed “a face like the caricature of an owl.”5 These similes abound in Audubon’s writing.

Back on the Delos, on July 9, 1826, Audubon pondered, “thousands of large Petrels displayed their elegant, aerial movements. How much I envied their power of flight to enable me to be here, there, and all over the globe comparatively speaking, in a few moments, throwing themselves edgeways against the breeze.”6 Audubon often admired and fantasized about flight. For a man frustrated by stone walls and the restrictions they place on movement, flight captivated him, allowing him to imagine the literal transcendence of physical boundaries and the metaphorical transcendence of abstract social boundaries. Audubon “envied” the “large Petrels’” “power of flight,” for this “power” superseded any other that may attempt to limit their mobility. The “large Petrels” could fly “all over the globe.” Not even wind currents could halt their flight, for they would simply “throw” “themselves edgeways against the breeze.” Audubon fantasized about the apparent freedom of birds. Whether he was drawn towards flight because of his transitory character, whether he cultivated a transitory character due to a subconscious admiration or wonder for avian flight as a young child, or whether both his transitory character and his fascination of flight sprung from another formative life

4 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 104.
5 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 284.
6 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 92. A passage very similar to this one appears later in his journal, on page 300 of volume 1. Audubon pens, “Just as we were leaving London and its smoke, a man begged I would take a paper bag from him, containing a Carrier Pigeon, and turn it out about five miles off. The poor bird could have been put in no better hands, I am sure; when I opened the bag and launched it in the air, I wished from my heart I had its powers of flight; I would have ventured across the ocean to Louisiana.”
circumstance is of no matter. It is clear, though, that Audubon was drawn toward avian creatures because they possessed a natural ability that he desired—the ability to rise above and escape the institutions that so deeply control and were so deeply engrained into human societies.

Although he fantasized about flying, Audubon did more than just wish to be an animal. He did more than simply employ simplistic animal similes; he also attempted to cast himself as *animal*, that is, cast himself as possessing qualities that were typically associated with nonhumans. In the following passage, Audubon described the bewildered reaction of a man who saw him walking through the rain, coat in-hand.

“The man was quite surprised I did not make use of a great coat which had been placed at my disposal. How little he knew how often I had lain down to rest, wet, hungry, harassed and full of sorrow, with millions of mosquitoes buzzing round me as I lay awake listening to the Chuckmill’s Widow, the Horned Owl, and the hoarse Bull-frog, impatiently awaiting the return of day to enable me to hunt the forests and feast my eyes on their beautiful inhabitants.”

In this passage, Audubon described himself as though he was one of the creatures of the woods, a peer to the “Chuckmill’s Widow, the Horned Owl, and the hoarse Bull-frog.” He refused to use the “great coat,” as if there was something *unnatural* about doing so. By rejecting the “great coat,” a luxury item created by humans, he enabled himself, if

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7 For his entire life, Audubon traveled incessantly, often as a squatter, drawing birds, selling pictures, and meeting artists. His travels led him around North America, the Caribbean, and around the Atlantic world. A Freudian argument could be made that his movement as a young child shaped his psychological state in such a way that predisposed him to embrace movement, in all its rhetorical manifestations, later in life.
only momentarily, to cross the line separating humans from animals. By refusing to wear the coat, he did more than reject an article of clothing; he was rejecting human convenience, human luxury. Without the coat, Audubon left himself to his own “animality,” a humanity devoid of privilege and convenience. Without the coat, he could be as much himself as the mosquitoes, the “Chuckmill’s Widow,” the “Horned Owl,” and the “Bull-frog” were themselves; he could lie down as their equal. Furthermore, he distinguished himself from the man in the scene, describing the man’s reaction as if from a nonhuman perspective, as if the man’s reaction was curious and strange. In juxtaposing himself and the man, Audubon seemed to place himself at the animal end of the human-animal dialectic. He had crossed the conceptual gap between human and animal. Audubon could not describe himself without thinking of nonhumans; he could not separate himself from the creatures in his drawings.

As often as Audubon used the qualities of nonhumans to describe humans, especially himself, he just as often projected “human” attributes, or attributes typically perceived as such, onto nonhuman creatures, thus anthropomorphizing the animal and further confusing the already problematic animal-human dichotomy. Passionate prose penned in Scotland in 1827 typified Audubon’s tendency to anthropomorphize the nonhuman. “Captain Hall called to speak to me about my paper on Pigeons; he complained that I expressed the belief that Pigeons were possessed of affection and tenderest love, and that this raised the brute species to a level with man. O man! misled, self-conceited being, when wilt thou keep within the sphere of humility that, with all thy vices and wickedness about thee, should be thine.”

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9 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 212.
Audubon’s anthropomorphizing tendencies, tendencies that did not just appear within his journals but also appeared in his official publications. Audubon, however, defended himself by renouncing Captain Hall’s complaint, castigating Captain Hall and the epistemological assumptions surrounding human-animal discourses common to the nineteenth century. Audubon did not deny the claim of anthropomorphization; instead, he embraced it. He believed that anthropomorphization, in this case, describing pigeons as possessing “affection and tenderest love,” did not indicate a lack of intelligence and professionalism on the part of himself, the artist. If anything, it represented a nuanced and qualified view of all species of life and their interconnectedness. Audubon did attribute “self-conceitedness,” “vice,” and “wickedness,” to Captain Hall for considering anthropomorphization as inaccurately and unjustly depicting the natural order of ascendant “man” and the “brute species” of nonhumans. It became clear, through this passage, that Audubon held little regard for such notions, finding them only illusory and arrogant.

Audubon opened this passage by vaguely and briefly utilizing the conceptual categories of human and animal. While he did not directly use these two terms, the dialectic he created with the terms brute species and man initially created a rhetorical distance analogous to the gulf separating human from animal. It quickly became apparent, though, that Audubon was only sarcastically referring to this dialectic, using it simply for mockery. He rebuked Captain Hall by proclaiming, “O man! misled, self-conceited being, when wilt thou keep within the sphere of humility that, with all thy vices and wickedness about thee, should be thine.” This attack was more than an admonition of Captain Hall; it can also be read as a critique of common human (mis)understandings.
of biological life, both human and nonhuman. Captain Hall’s complaint of Audubon’s anthropomorphizing tendencies sparked a reciprocal, berating response for “self-conceitedness,” specifically for suggesting that “the belief that Pigeons were possessed of affection and tenderest love” was somehow inane or false, and generally for treating the rhetorical gap between human and animal as representative of an absolute truth embedded in natural world of organisms. Audubon believed that the superiority of humans over nonhumans, over the “brute species,” over the animal, was an illusory perception created by humans’ “self-conceited” nature. The only superiority that humans possessed over nonhumans was their superior “vices and wickedness.” Only in their ability to perform immoral acts was humanity able to differentiate itself from nonhumanity. Audubon rhetorically attached himself to the animal and wished he could renounce his humanity.

For Audubon, the belief that humans were somehow removed from other creatures, from the “brute species,” that humans possessed some type of natural ascendancy atop a dichotonic hierarchy, was simply a constructed fiction. While he obviously could not have articulated such a view using the language of semiotic and post-structural theorists from the latter half of the twentieth century, his sentiments demonstrate at least a partial understanding of the constructed nature of both human language and ideas, as well as a recognition of the social power built into these constructions. When having dinner with Mr. Cross, the keeper of a menagerie, Audubon stated simply, “Mr. Cross by no means deserves his name, for he is a pleasant man, and we dined with his wife and himself and the keepers of the BEASTS (name given by men
to quadrupeds).” Through this short passage, Audubon revealed the way in which his social ethic encompassed both humans and nonhumans. He realized that humans, through the act of naming, transformed nonhumans into “beasts,” describing creatures, not as they were, but as humans wanted them to be—subordinate to human society.

Audubon fantasized about flight, for if he possessed wings, like the birds in his drawings, he could not only conquer the restricted mobility of his bipedalism, but he could soar above the boundaries of fences and walls imposed on landscape by human societies. With wings, not even the power of the wind could halt his movement—he could fly “edgeways against the breeze.” Audubon refused the coat offered him, preferring to lie down in the rain, “wet, hungry, harassed and full of sorrow,” because by rejecting the coat, he could symbolically and subconsciously reject the luxurious, hierarchical, and constructed society, the human society, which the coat exemplified. For Audubon, lying coatless in the rain was natural, allowing him to listen to “the Chuckmill’s Widow, the Horned Owl, and the hoarse Bull-frog” as if he was their peer. By rejecting the coat, Audubon momentarily traversed the divide between human and animal, a transference experience he needed as he “impatiently await[ed] the return of day to enable [him] to hunt the forests and feast [his] eyes on their beautiful inhabitants.” When reprimanded for anthropomorphizing pigeons, he could only cry, “O man! misled, self-conceited being!” Audubon abhorred social power and the hierarchy that it created.

As with humans, Audubon felt sympathy for those nonhumans otherized by social power. By including nonhumans and humans equally into his social ethic, Audubon dissolved the rhetorical gap separating human from animal, essentially blurring the

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typical bipolarity of these two terms. Audubon believed that humans were animals, and this notion had large repercussions for his social ethic.

Although an avid hunter, Audubon practiced a peculiar type of vegetarianism, “rarely touching meat, except game.”\textsuperscript{11} Audubon only consumed meat when derived from wild game; he refused to eat the meat of livestock or domesticated animals, a habit that often made him feel uncomfortable at the dinner tables of his patrons and fellow artists and scientists. His justification for this practice was simple:

“I looked on the Hares, Partridges, and other game with a thought of apprehension that the apparent freedom and security they enjoyed was very transient. I thought it more cruel to permit them to grow tame and gentle, and then suddenly to turn and murder them by thousands, than to give them the fair show that our game has in our forests, to let them be free and as wild as nature made them, and to let the hunter pay for them by the pleasure and work of pursuing them.”\textsuperscript{12}

Audubon refused to eat meat that he believed to be “highly tainted.”\textsuperscript{13} Later in his life, Audubon became more reluctant to eat any sort of meat at all, including game, writing in 1836, “I am not a meat-eater, as you know, except when other provisions fail.”\textsuperscript{14}

As shown in the previous section, Audubon did not object to the killing of animals. While he may have expressed contradictory emotions in the act of killing, this contradiction of affect was not symptomatic of an underlying epistemological contradiction concerning how Audubon conceptualized the animal; the affective

\textsuperscript{11} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1, 115.  
\textsuperscript{12} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1, 116.  
\textsuperscript{13} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1, 115.  
\textsuperscript{14} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 2, 22.
contradiction was, instead, indicative of his consistent egalitarian conception of the nonhuman. He did, however, object to the commodification of the nonhuman. Audubon maintained, as is evident through the morally charged word “murder,” in the above passage, that it was “cruel” for humans to allow nonhumans to “grow tame and gentle, and then suddenly to turn and murder them by thousands,” that is, for humans to domesticate other creatures in order to kill them.

Through domestication, humans exercised social power upon other creatures, altering both their behavioral nature (personality, if this word dare be uttered) and physical bodies so that they could be more easily appropriated for human use. Through this justification of his vegetarianism, Audubon hinted at the not-quite-articulated core of his social ethic and moral philosophy—his conception of the “good life,” which seems to be a life free of coercion and otherization, a life not shaped by an overly-structured, hierarchical, and power-wielding human society. Audubon “looked on the Hares, Partridges, and other game with a thought of apprehension” because the “apparent freedom and security they enjoyed was very transient.” These creatures could not be as “free and as wild as nature made them” because human power, as exercised through the human process of domestication, controlled these creatures, preventing nature from giving them their freedom, from birth. Audubon believed animals controlled by human institutions were just as much victims as humans controlled by human institutions. Therefore, animal victims deserved sympathy equal to human victims. Humans did not have to kill domesticated creatures in order to earn Audubon’s sympathy. When
Audubon viewed horses that were “quite exhausted, panting for breath, and covered with sweat and the traces of the blows they had received,” his “heart ached.”\textsuperscript{15}

Audubon sympathized with animals that were caged and trapped in the human world. Audubon commiserated with the “Lark” who was a “prisoner in a cage hanging by a window.”\textsuperscript{16} He frequently sympathized with caged birds. By otherizing the animal, by placing it behind bars, by implicitly constructing the animal-human dichotomy, and then displaying this construction through the power-saturated cage, humans renounce their interconnectedness with other creatures and begin living with that false arrogance that there is something about the nature of “humans” that cause them to be innately different from other types of creatures, transcending the natural world of biological organisms. Humans who trap and deny animals agency are selfish. At the sight of caged “Wood Larks” Audubon lamented, “Ah! man! what a brute thou art! – so often senseless of those sweetest feelings that ought to ornament our species, if indeed we are the “lords of creation.””\textsuperscript{17} Previously, in his diatribe against Captain Hall, he used the terms “brute species” and “man” to create a rhetorical dialectic analogous to that created by “human” and “animal.” Now, in the exclamation, “Ah! man! what a brute thou art!” these opposing terms collide. Both signifier and signified blurred, thrusting the human into the animal and the animal into the human. As Audubon gazed upon the winged life of “Wood Larks” held prisoner in the human world of domestication, simply extending sympathy no longer could satisfy Audubon’s egalitarian desire to respect the lives of animals. Sympathy could not make the wrong right. Instead of gazing upon the “Wood

\textsuperscript{15} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1, 268.
\textsuperscript{16} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1, 98.
\textsuperscript{17} Audubon, \textit{Journals}, vol. 1, 284-285.
Larks” with sympathy, rhetorically lifting the animal up from its subjugated position, Audubon had to denigrate the human and human arrogance, obliterating the distance separating human from animal in a passionate plea for egalitarianism. When it came down to it, Audubon viewed humans as simply another “species.” If humans were, in fact, “lords of creation,” they were evidently pathetic lords.

During an excursion in the Labrador Islands, the diving practices of wild geese led Audubon to again contemplate the human in relation to the nonhuman, and sparked him to again denigrate human arrogance. These geese used “many beautiful stratagems to save its brood, and elude the hunter.”

“They will dive and lead their young under the surface of the water, and always in a contrary direction to the one expected; thus if you row a boat after one it will dive under it, and now and then remain under it several minutes, when the hunter with outstretched neck, is looking, all in vain, in the distance for the stupid Goose! Every time I read or hear of a stupid animal in a wild state, I cannot help wishing that the stupid animal who speaks thus, was half as wise as the brute he despises, so that he might be able to thank his Maker for what knowledge he may possess.”

In calling the deluded hunter by the very name which the hunter labeled the goose that fooled him, —“stupid animal”—Audubon again sarcastically mocked the human-animal dichotomy by ironically attaching the subjugated and power-saturated names typically given animals to humans. He again underlined the arrogance of humans in thinking they were ascendant to nonhumans, this time by showing how a “stupid Goose” fooled a

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hunter arrogant enough to call a goose “stupid.” Audubon used the term “brute” in a sarcastic manner, for he seemed to find this word offensive.

Later, in the same journal entry, Audubon lamented all the unborn birds that were “destroyed” by “eggers,” humans who collect the eggs of birds by the thousands. He told the story of how four men from Halifax the previous spring stole forty thousand eggs in two months, repining this “rascally” act. “In less than half a century,” Audubon predicted, “these wonderful nurseries will be entirely destroyed, unless some kind government will interfere to stop the shameful destruction.” Here, Audubon prefigured the language of animal activism that would not begin to emerge until a generation after his death. This is the only instance in his journals that Audubon clearly suggested that the duty to protect nonhumans fell upon government, that animal citizens, like human citizens, make moral demands on society. Audubon did not claim that government needed to protect birds and their eggs because humans needed these resources, and that the exploitation of these resources would quickly cause this important supply to diminish. Audubon’s suggestion for governmental protection did not stem from the utility of birds and their eggs. Instead, Audubon called for governmental protection to halt “shameful destruction,” to prevent eggers from “destroy[ing] all the eggs that are sat upon,” from “robbing” birds “regularly,” and from “exhaust[ing]” “nature.” Audubon believed that it was immoral for “eggers” to exterminate species of birds, and, therefore, it was government’s responsibility to prevent this immorality. This unique statement by Audubon shows that he did not only have an early conception of animal rights and animal protection evident through rhetoric and emotion, but that he could articulate, if only

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20 Audubon, *Journals*, vol. 1, 374.
briefly, this conception within the language of political philosophy and animal activism. Audubon conceived of nonhumans differently through a worldview based on an aversion toward social power; and through this statement concerning governmental protection, it is evident that his often unconscious and partially-articulated rhetorical stances toward nonhumans could and did directly lead the language of animal activism.

One day, once again while traveling on the Delos, a large hen flew overboard. This hen, though, was not an ordinary hen. “[S]he had been hatched on board, and our cook, who claimed her as his property, was much attached to her, as was also the mate.” As soon as the hen was seen flying off the ship, “[t]he yawl was immediately lowered, four men rowed her swiftly towards the floating bird that anxiously looked at her place of abode gliding from her; she was picked up, and her return on board seemed to please every one.” Audubon, then, in an insightful statement, a glimpse into his worldview, related, “and I was gratified to see such kind treatment to a bird; it assured me, had I needed that assurance, that the love of animals develops the better side of all natures.”

Audubon’s love for animals not only enabled him to sympathize with animals and humans equally, but he believed that this love for the nonhuman also improved his relation to the human; it “developed,” as he explained, “the better side of all natures.” This simple statement reveals something important and unique about Audubon’s egalitarianism. His egalitarianism was not, first and foremost, grounded in Enlightenment social philosophy. Rhetoric concerning moral activism, feminism, temperance movements, or urban reform did not provide the ballast for his egalitarianism.

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21 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 94.
Instead, his egalitarianism naturally arose from and was shaped by a simple disposition—his tendency to love animals.

The *animal* revealed, for Audubon, the *lack* in the *human*.22 The nonhuman creatures around him served as windows into the human world of power, a power that was very different than the violence a barracuda could commit against a dolphin. The violence committed against animals through domestication, commodification, and *otherization* was simply not *natural*—it was constructed. Simple messages of morality manifested themselves through the lives of animals. In his autobiography, Audubon penned the following, “The many birds I had collected to take to France I made free; some of the doves had become so fond of me that I was obliged to chase them to the woods, fearing the wickedness of the boys, who would no doubt, have with pleasure destroyed them.”23 At another time, he wrote:

“I begin to feel most powerfully the want of occupation at drawing and studying the habits of the birds that I see about me; and the little Sparrows that hop in the streets, although very sooty with coal smoke, attract my attention greatly; indeed I

22 Slavoj Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989). Any discourse is necessarily structured around an elusive, inexpressible core. Slavoj Žižek, using Lacanian parlance, calls this gaping hole at the center of discourse the *Real*. The *Real* represents the primary epistemological assumption on which knowledge, language, experience, identity, or any human construction is built around. Žižek asseverates that the *Real* is “. . . just a void, an emptiness in a symbolic structure marking some central impossibility.” The *Real* is “a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order—it is the lack around which the symbolic order is structured” (2). Above, I am using “lack” in two ways. On one level, I believe Audubon is approaching the “lack” described by both Žižek and Lacan, that is, and understanding of the constructed nature of *human* and *animal* as concepts. As I have shown above, he treats the gap separating these two terms as fictional. On another level, though, Audubon seems to have an understanding of the “symptoms,” to use another Lacanian term, of the constructed nature of the human—and these “symptoms” are the complete *otherization*, victimization, of the nonhuman. Understanding the reasons for the victimization of the nonhuman allows him to understand the reasons for the victimization of the human. Audubon may not be able to express these attitudes using the language of psychoanalytic and (post)semiotic theory, but he displays an intuitive understanding (evident through his rhetorical and affective stances as well as partially-articulated ethical statements) of the issues tackled head on by theorists in the 1970’s – 1990’s.


51
watched one of them to-day in the dust of the street, with as much pleasure as in far different places I have watched the play of finer birds.”

Animals allowed Audubon to see the results of human power. Doves allowed Audubon to contemplate the “wickedness” of boys, and how easy it would be for boys to gleefully kill these birds for no purpose other than “pleasure.” Sparrows covered with soot, hopping through the “dust of the street,” held Audubon’s fascination despite the extensive pollution of urban spaces. Animal victims captivated Audubon; they required his sympathy, a sympathy that he expressed through drawing. Only by drawing an otter caught in a trap was Audubon able to free that creature from the jaws of human power.

As the previous section demonstrated, Audubon held contradictory emotions when in the act of killing other creatures. His language indicated that the killing of animals necessitated both compassionate affect and self-indulgent pride, and the degree to which he expressed the latter depended on the distance, both physical and causal, between himself and the dying animal. However, these responses to animal death only contradict if killing is conceptualized monolithically, as statically signifying the “purposeful ending of another’s life.” For Audubon, though, how an animal was killed made all the difference. As revealed above, Audubon believed that animals must remain as “free and as wild as nature made them” and that the “hunter [had to] pay for them by the pleasure and work of pursuing them.” In this way, Audubon believed that humans could kill nonhumans naturally, giving them a “fair show.” This enabled humans to kill other creatures as other creatures would kill each other.

24 Audubon, Journals, vol. 1, 112.
If humans utilized social power to take the lives of nonhumans, though, the killing of the animal became murder, for in this circumstance, humans did not kill in the manner that all creatures kill each other. Instead, they utilized their human power to weaken (through rhetorical and literal domestication, commodification, or *otherization*) and subsequently kill the animal. Audubon believed that killing animals in this manner pointed to the “self-conceited” notion that humanity possessed a natural ascendancy in relation to nonhumanity, a notion that Audubon denounced as arrogant. Audubon’s egalitarianism required humanity to deal with both humans and nonhumans on equal ground, without the interference of social power. Therefore, Audubon’s ethical principle was simple. If an organism advanced itself by utilizing social power, this organism deserved moral denunciation. If an organism, on the other hand, became controlled or victimized by social power, this organism deserved sympathy. In this way, Audubon’s ethical system, then, initially facilitated a blurring of the *animal* and the *human*, by replacing a simplistic conceptual framework based on the dualistic assumptions of human ascendancy and nonhuman inferiority with a conceptual framework based around social power.
Chapter 4: Audubon and the Intellectual Formation of Animal Rights

Audubon never uttered the words “animal rights.” He never conceptualized the *human* and the *animal* within a clearly articulated and self-consciously constructed ethical worldview. The closest he came to presenting an “animal rights” or an “animal activist” stance, at least in the political sense, was when he pointed out that only government intervention could halt the decimation of birds and their eggs in the Labrador Islands. The rhetorical stances he took toward both humans and nonhumans were largely unconscious; they were not consequences of a fully-formed metaethical principle concerning animals. When confronted with any creature, though, whether human or nonhuman, Audubon was consistent in his affective response. He intrinsically sympathized with the suppressed.

Examining and acknowledging conscious and unconscious layers of John James Audubon and his writing could be perceived as a controversial pursuit for an historian. Exploring the unconscious, or subconscious, dimensions behind Audubon’s writing may elicit the charge by some that such a pursuit denies him of agency, a complaint that could carry hefty weight in a profession so focused on restoring agency to the individuals of the past. In response to this charge, it will first be admitted that exploring the unconscious dimensions of Audubon’s language does, in fact, alter standard conceptions of human agency. It does not, however, deny Audubon *of* agency; it only redefines typical understandings of this term. The pursuit of the historical profession has largely been to
uncover agents of the past, to demonstrate how individuals have willfully negotiated with their surroundings, influencing their present and future. In the post-war profession, historical agents were found in the leaders of past societies, in those who wielded political, financial, and institutional power. After the cultural turn, agents were discovered in those denied of power in previous histories, in the subjugated and repressed. No matter the historical subject, though, *agency* was viewed monolithically, as a singular, willful purpose, rising out of the depths of the individual.

Demonstrating that any historical person possessed agency was equivalent to proving that she or he possessed “humanity.” By the twenty-first century, the concept of agency served to equally unite all humans of the past as worthy subjects of historical analysis, for it was believed that all humans possessed, on some level, a degree of this *human* attribute of agency.¹ In this way, the simplistic notion of agency served an important role for the historical profession, specifically, and society, generally. Complicating this idea, though, may serve another purpose. Viewing the language of historical persons as both a component of intentional expression and as a symptom of unconscious and subconscious affect may add fresh insight into intellectual history. Such an approach, though, does not imagine historical persons as fully intentional, rational, and willful beings, but, instead, as only partially these. By embracing the unconscious and subconscious lives of historical individuals, historians can more fully embrace the inconsistency of their language, rooting the agent in her or his context. In the case of Audubon, if one were to assume that each time he uttered the words *human or animal*, he did so with the full intention of expressing consistent and specific meanings, that person

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¹ I am not suggesting that “agency” is truly an attribute restricted to “humans,” only that this is how “agency” is usually described.
would be left with an assumption that Audubon was only consistent in the contradictory manner that he employed these words.² However, if one approached Audubon’s use of *human* and *animal* as attempts (either conscious, unconscious, subconscious, or a mix of these) to express different meanings at different times, then that person could free the utterances of *animal* and *human* from both dialectical and Kantian-transcendental fallacies, the assumptions that both utterances are bipolarities and that both signal a clearly delineated transcendental form. In doing so, Audubon’s perspective of *human* and *animal* can be seen in a new light. By examining the multiple rhetorical functions and meanings given *animal* and *human*, one is able to see the limits of and the anxiety surrounding these signifiers within Audubon’s lexicon.³

Acknowledging unconscious and subconscious dimensions to Audubon’s rhetorical and affective stances toward the *human* and the *animal* serves an important function in uncovering the intellectual roots of animal rights discourses. Again, Audubon never uttered the words “animal rights.”Yet, he evaluated both humans and animals

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² When I first began this project, this is the first rudimentary thesis I formed. I concluded that Audubon was purely contradictory, that he was guided by no consistent ethical principle and that he possessed, in fact, a bipolarity when dealing with nonhumans.

³ The disciplines of psychoanalysis and history both study the past. Typically, the historical profession frames the past as events, transcending the psyche, that have occurred within a time distinct from and prior to the present. The psychoanalytic profession, on the other hand, typically frames the past as events, shaped in the psyche, that have occurred in an indistinct time (blurring the lines between past, present, and future). Psychoanalysis and history are disciplines both centered on studying the past, and a theoretical dialogue needs to exist between these two fields, for the human experience, especially the intellectual experience, is intricately shaped by both the internal and external. Psychoanalysis has much to offer historical studies. Some thought-provoking work discussing history and psychoanalysis (both clinical psychoanalysis and literary psychoanalytic theory) include: Karl Figlio, "Historical Imagination / Psychoanalytic Imagination," *History Workshop Journal* (1998); Roger Kennedy, *Psychoanalysis, History, and Subjectivity: Now of the Past* (East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge, 2002); Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). Also, while Slavoj Žižek does not directly call for a blending of historical and psychoanalytic methods, his theories of discourse as presented in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, in my opinion, has much to offer the intellectual historian. I have certainly kept his work in the back of my mind as I examined the writing of Audubon.
consistently in an unspoken and unarticulated worldview hinging on his antipathy of social power. Audubon does not directly reveal this worldview in his writing, for he did not consciously adhere to or construct a guiding ethical principal for his life. Nonetheless, he was almost always consistent in adhering to the ethical stance appropriated to him in this paper, a worldview assembled from various and disjointed traces scattered throughout the journals penned by his hand.

Across the Atlantic, in Britain, the history of animal activism began half of a century before respective movements in the United States. In 1800, the first animal protection bill, seeking to put an end to the sport of bull baiting, was brought before the House of Commons, only to fail, as a bill that, in the words of historian Harriet Ritvo, “was beneath the dignity of Parliament.”4 The first successful animal protection bill, introduced by Richard Martin and advocating for the prevention of cruelty to cattle, passed the House of Commons and Lords in 1821. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was founded in 1824 as the first society in history dedicated to animal protection, and in 1840 Queen Victoria allowed the society to attach “Royal” to its name, transforming the SPCA into the RSPCA.5 The history of animal activism in America began later than its respective movement in Britain, with Henry Bergh in 1866, when he founded the ASPCA, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. This group, obviously inspired in name by its British forerunner, was the first American organization dedicated to animal protection, and shortly after Bergh founded this organization in New York, similar societies popped up in Philadelphia, Boston,

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4 Ritvo, 125.
5 Ritvo, 127, 129.
Washington, D.C., Providence, San Francisco, St. Louis, and twenty other cities. A history of animal activism in America, therefore, usually begins in the post-Civil War era, and rightly so, for during this time period a coherent discourse of animal activism emerges for the first time.

Nevertheless, how did a coherent discourse of animal activism emerge? Where do notions of animal rights first germinate? There have been very few historical works that examine the intellectual precedents to animal rights discourse. Histories concerning animal activism and animal rights begin with the first animal protection legislative acts or the formation of the first animal protection societies and then use these historical moments of the nineteenth century as points of departure for a thorough history of animal activism in the twentieth century. Besides a few exceptions, human ideas of animals prior to the commencement of animal activism have received scant attention by historians.

Diane L. Beers, through her *For the Prevention of Cruelty: The History and Legacy of Animal Rights Activism in the United States*, published the most recent and thorough historical monograph concerning animal activism in America. She begins her narrative of animal rights in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the beginning of her second chapter, she briefly outlines some intellectual antecedents preceding the animal rights discourses that emerge in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but she only deals with these intellectual roots in a tangential manner. She mentions two statutes passed by the General Court of Massachusetts in 1641 that were concerned with “the welfare “Off the Bruite Creature.”” Beers notes a few articles published in the

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7 Beers, 20.
eighteenth century that condemn violent animal sports like cockfighting. She acknowledges a 1776 work published by Dr. Humphrey Primatt entitled *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, and she briefly recognizes the work of utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham who “directly applied the concept of rights to animals.” However, her account of the intellectual roots of animal rights prior to the 1850’s fill only a few pages.

The history of animal rights and animal activism has only been traced into the past as far as such terms make sense historically. Several histories, including Beers’s, have reconstructed praiseworthy narratives of animal rights and activism. However, these histories are always dependent on finding legal acts, writings, movements, and individuals that explicitly advocate for the protection of nonhumans. The larger question, though, is what precedes and produces this explicit desire to protect animals? How did an animal rights discourse form? Few histories have sought answers to these questions, and even fewer have sought answers as they pertain to America. In general, literary scholars, critical theorists, and philosophers have more fully embraced the “question of the animal” than historians, yet their works are often lacking broad historical context, usually either dealing with the animal entirely in the realm of metaphysical philosophy or examining the role of animals in specific literary works. John James Audubon, and

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8 Beers, 21.

9 The following list is a compilation of works by historians concerning animals, generally, or animal rights and activism, specifically. All the books in this list have a chronology that deals with the 19th century or before. The most useful work ever produced on this topic, as previously noted, is Harriet Ritvo’s *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. Ritvo’s work is a fantastic intellectual and cultural history of animals in Victorian England. In my opinion, it is the most thorough, groundbreaking, and suggestive intellectual history of animals ever produced. Other histories include: Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Gerald Carson, *Men, Beasts, and Gods: A History of Cruelty and*
surely many individuals like him, offers an opportunity to answer these questions concerning the intellectual precedents of animals rights discourses, for Audubon surely did not maintain an explicit stance of animal rights and, for that reason, has not been picked up on the “animal rights” radars of historians. At first glance, Audubon seemed only contradictory about nonhumans, yet maybe the seeds of animal rights are planted in such apparent contradictions. John James Audubon, therefore, can be used as a window into the intellectual development of animal rights discourses prior to the typical institutional, legal, and social histories already written.

An intellectual microhistory that explores Audubon’s conception of human and animal sheds light, if only a glimmer, onto the formation of animal rights discourses. Before Americans like Henry Bergh could speak against animal cruelty and advocate for animal rights, Americans had to first think about animals differently. They had to cease perceiving nonhumans monolithically. As demonstrated above, John James Audubon did not view the animal as a static category encompassing all nonhuman others. Audubon did not banish all nonhumans into the category of the animal. He, instead, perceived both

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*Kindness to Animals* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972); Moira Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780-1900: Patriots, Nation, and Empire* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001); Charles D. Niven, *History of the Humane Movement* (London: Johnson, 1967); Roderick F. Nash *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Kathleen Ketes, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). While all these books are useful, they all do something different than what I am attempting to do in this paper. They are either social histories that do not fully delve into intellectual conceptions of the animal, they are intellectual histories that have either very broad subjects (as Nash’s work does) or broad chronologies (as Keith’s work does), they primarily focus on Europe, or they only briefly deal with events prior to the twentieth century.

10 Lisa Mighetto, *Wild Animals and American Environmental Ethics* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1991). Audubon was picked up by the “animal rights” radar of Lisa Mighetto; however, he only received a few sentences in a chapter entitled “Wilderness Hunters and Bird Lovers: Early Motivations for Wildlife Protection.” This chapter argues that wilderness hunters’ and bird lovers’ support for animal protection was primarily motivated by anthropocentric utilitarian concerns, an argument that, in the case of Audubon, does not hold true. Such an argument, in my opinion, oversimplifies what nonhumans meant to these humans.
humans and nonhumans through an egalitarian lens. The rhetorical stances Audubon held toward both humans and nonhumans did not depend on notions of a natural order of moral ascendancy, but, instead, on a consistent antipathy toward social power. Audubon consistently extended sympathy toward those otherized by social power, whether those others happened to be human or not. It has been demonstrated that Audubon united both humans and nonhumans into an egalitarian ethic. Ironically, though, after the collapse of the animal-human dialectic, the same dialectic reformed along new lines. For Audubon, humans did not distinguish themselves from animals because the former possessed a natural ascendancy to the latter; humans distinguished themselves from animals because the former could exercise social power against the latter. For Audubon, humans could do moral wrong—animals could not. Reconstructing the animal as morally superior to humans in their incapability of doing wrong by exercising social power against others, creates an animal much more worthy of rights than the animal of previous conceptions. This new, yet unarticulated, dialectic allowed Audubon to approach animals in a nonutilitarian manner, making nonhumans worthy of human affect. Audubon, then, may represent and prefigure an intellectual transition in animal rights discourse, a transition between an animal activism based around human utilitarian concerns (an activism that worries about the welfare of animals because doing so benefits humans) to an animal activism based around true egalitarianism.\(^{11}\)

Audubon blurred typical understandings of human and animal by evaluating both types of creatures according to their relation to social power instead of by the qualities

\(^{11}\) Audubon represents a transition that would not occur for nearly a century later. During Audubon’s life, even an utilitarian animal activism was new. Protecting animals for the sake of human interests was new in Britain, and it had hardly begun to form in America. Audubon, then, demonstrates the formation of an animal ethic that was not encoded into animal discourse until a long time after his death.
usually given their respective ends of the *animal-human* dialectic. Audubon neither intended to blur these conceptual categories nor was always conscious of this blurring. Instead, this amalgamation of *human* and *animal* occurred on an unconscious and subconscious level, leaving the self-conscious Audubon with only traces of this blurring, with an *animal* and *human* saturated with affect and anxiety.

This is where discourses of animal rights and animal activism are born. Individuals consciously engage in discourse. They choose to take part in a discourse on states rights. They choose to contribute to a discourse on slavery. Individuals choose to debate independence. However, to examine the intellectual formation of discourse, the historian cannot only examine what historical agents intended to say. They must also look into and behind intentionality to examine the affect, emotion, frustration, and desire which sparks and fuels discussion.

John James Audubon serves as a window into the intellectual formation of animal rights. The above analysis of his writing hopefully demonstrated how Audubon perceived humans and animals differently than most Americans. He managed to find a new way of conceiving the human and the animal without perfectly articulating this new approach. He approached animal rights, though, from an ironic position—from the position of a hunter. How ironic was this, though? As Harriet Ritvo explains, “Many of the society’s [RSPCA] most distinguished members were also, for example, enthusiastic fox hunters or grouse shooters and perceived no incongruity between their humane and their sporting avocations.”\(^\text{12}\) There is no doubt that many hunters were often the first to support animal protection, yet the irony or hypocrisy underlining Ritvo’s statement only

\(^{12}\) Ritvo, 134.
holds true if these hunters truly did perceive “no incongruity” in their actions and beliefs in animal protection.\textsuperscript{13} Audubon, then, serves as a case study. To truly understand the formation of animal rights, it must first be understood how individuals thought about animals before the rise of animal activism. Audubon is only one individual. Many more need examined. It could turn out that Audubon was unique for possessing an egalitarian ethic with animals, not humans, at its core. Maybe he just happened to be the only child at the end of the eighteenth century to witness a domesticated orangutan murder a caged parrot, the perfect trauma to instill lessons about violence, animals, and social power deep into the recesses of a child’s mind.

\textsuperscript{13} Thomas L. Altherr and John F. Reiger, “Historians and Hunting: A Call for More and Better Scholarship,” \textit{Environmental History Review}, 19, no. 3 (1995), 39-56. Altherr and Reiger call for historians to examine hunting and hunters throughout American history. I agree with their contention that hunters offer many possibilities for research.
Bibliography


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