

# Swallows and Hounds: Defoe's Thinking Animals

STEPHEN H. GREGG

## Sagacious Brutes

KINGS act as madmen and fools, Defoe argues in *Jure Divino*, because they have ignored the “mighty Dictates” of reason:

*Reason's the Sovereign Guide of Humane Things,  
Which Leads the Subject, and Commands their Kings;  
The Pole-Star and the Pilot of Mankind,  
The Soul of Sense, and Optick of the Mind;  
The Arbitrator of the Grand Dispute,  
Betwixt the ... Humane Nature and the Brute.* (3.105–111, *SFWS* 1.130)

Reason is “the Gift that distinguishes Men from the Brutes,” he clarifies in a footnote. However, Defoe proceeds to complicate matters: “tis observable that where a Man is depriv'd of the Use of his Reason, the sensitive Life that remains in him is less sagacious than in Common Brutes.” Twenty years later, Defoe returns to examine the notion of the human as *animale rationale* in *Mere Nature Delineated: Or, A Body without a Soul* in the topical story of Peter, the “wild boy” discovered in Germany in 1725 and brought to England by George I. In debating the extent to which Peter may have a soul, Defoe discusses the relationship between the soul and reason and makes an almost conventional comparison with animals:

[H]e has a Soul, though we see very little of the ordinary Powers of a Soul acting in him, any more than are to be discerned in the more sagacious Brutes; Now we deny the Capacities of a Soul, such as Reflection and Retention, Understanding, Inquiring, Reasoning, and the like, to the Brute Creatures; and we say, That to allow it them, would tend to destroy the Principles of natural Religion, and to overturn the Foundation of the Divine Sovereignty and Government in the World.  
(23)

Amplifying this statement, and echoing the language he used in *Jure Divino*, Defoe adds that Peter “is a ship without a Rudder, not steer’d or managed, or directed by any Pilot; no, hardly by that faithful Pilot called Sense, that Guide of Beasts” (24). Defoe finds himself debating an ostensibly impossible being: one that on outward appearance is human and so—according to the logic of orthodox belief—must possess a soul; but one whose behavior shows no evidence for the possession of such a soul and so must dictate that he is an animal.<sup>1</sup> However, the use of the first-person plural in this passage creates an odd distancing effect, rather as if Defoe has no faith in the arguments being put forward (disallowing brutes a reasoning soul, the dire consequences for the foundations of civilization). Defoe is performing an ironic ventriloquization of the theologians and philosophers of the previous century who argued for the incommensurable difference between humans and brutes: it is, moreover, a rhetorical performance that suggests an acute awareness of a more fluid border between “sagacious Brutes” and humans than others might care for.

Beyond emphasizing the point that the human hold on reason is precarious, why does Defoe introduce these complications? In a conventional sense, Defoe uses the figure of the animal to discuss the nature of humanity. As Keith Thomas points out, “brute creation provided the most readily-available point of reference for the continuous process of human self-definition. . . . It was as a comment on human nature that the concept of animality was devised” (40). More recently, Jacques Derrida’s exploration of animals examined the disavowed co-dependency between humans and animals implicit in the rhetoric of “animality” and emphasized the discursive othering of non-human animals: “the animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature” (392). However, Defoe’s keenness to probe and push at the distinctions between human and the “Brute” suggests he is interested in more than merely shoring up the definition of the human. What may appear striking is his suggestion that non-human animals have a degree of natural sagacity. These passages on the brute in *Jure Divino* and *Mere Nature Delineated* are deeply embedded in the contentious debate concerning the human – animal divide after the publication of Descartes’ theory of the beast-machine in his *Discourse on Method*. Responses to Descartes’ ideas on animals appeared within and crossed over religious, philosophical, scientific, classical and literary works in the next century; as Thomas argues, the “Cartesian view of animal souls generated a vast learned literature, and it is no exaggeration to describe it as a central preoccupation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European intellectuals” (35). Indeed, Defoe’s own Dissenting Academy tutor, Charles Morton, had entered the debate in his unpublished teaching notebooks, as evidenced in a section entitled “Appendix of the Soules of Brutes” (Morton is skeptical about the beast-machine). The reference in *Jure Divino* to “*the Grand Dispute*” is particularly telling. Defoe had been writing this poem since at least 1704 (Novak 219) and in the years between 1690 and 1704 there had been a

veritable surge of publications both old and new in England that were disputing or amplifying the theory of the beast-machine, by, among others, Lucretius, Plutarch, Montaigne, the writer-entrepreneur John Dunton, naturalist John Ray, Cartesians Antoine Le Grand and Malebranche, and heterodox religious thinkers William Coward, John Toland, and John Norris.<sup>2</sup> In 1705—at exactly the same time Defoe had been writing *Jure Divino*—he had been rehearsing “*that Grand question of the Rationality of Brutes*” in the *Review* (1.735).

In the past decade or so, there has been a burgeoning number of eighteenth-century studies of human/animal interactions in eighteenth-century literature and culture (broadly located within and across animal studies, animal rights, and ecocriticism).<sup>3</sup> A handful of studies have also begun to consider Defoe’s writings in this light, focusing, perhaps understandably given its novelistic menagerie of human/animal interactions, on *Robinson Crusoe*. Richard Nash, via a close reading of Crusoe’s cats, argues that these are exemplary of Defoe’s attitude to non-human animals: all are located relative to the Protestant Georgic’s ideology of use-value (51). While offering a detailed analysis of Crusoe’s sympathetic identification with and instrumental domination of the animals he encounters, Philip Armstrong concedes much the same. Situating these ambivalences against the wider forces of capitalism, pet keeping, and husbandry, Armstrong argues that “Crusoe’s compassionate sensibility is ultimately contained by the demands of modern enterprise” (44).

Such studies conceive of Defoe’s writings as passively imbricated within larger discursive and ideological structures and also tend to emphasize Defoe’s conservative attitude toward human/animal difference.<sup>4</sup> However, as I have written elsewhere, Defoe is highly conscious of the inherent instability of the human/animal divide.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Defoe clearly returned to the question of animal rationality in the 1720s, in *Mere Nature Delineated* and in a small, but significant, scene in *Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–1725). The explorations in *Jure Divino*, *Mere Nature Delineated*, the *Review*, and the *Tour* demonstrate that Defoe was highly skeptical of the essential and incommensurable distinction between animal and human proposed in Cartesian theories. These scenarios— although brief— illuminate a Defoe very willing to argue for animal rationality and much more radical in thinking through the question of the non-human animal than has been previously granted by studies that focus on *Robinson Crusoe* alone. More importantly, as I will argue here, Defoe’s conception of the rational beast is ironically enabled by his anthropocentric empiricism. In what follows, I will explore the precise context and significance of Defoe’s attention to, and defense of, “sagacious Brutes.”

## The Mystery of Swallows

That Defoe was attracted to blurring the human/animal distinction while having a side-swipe at materialist philosophy is clear in a small aside in *A Tour Thro’ the*

*Whole Island of Great Britain*. Early in the *Tour*, describing the town of Southwold during the first circuit up the East coast, Defoe offers this “trifling” digression: “At this Town in particular, and so at all the Towns on this Coast, from *Orford-Ness* to *Yarmouth*, is the ordinary Place where our Summer Friends the Swallows, first land when they come to Visit us; and here they may be said to Embark for their Return, when they go back into warmer Climates” (1.83). Defoe then describes a previous visit “some Years before...about the beginning of *October*,” when he saw “an unusual multitude” of swallows flocking for migration (1.83). He recounts a conversation he had with a “grave Gentleman” who explained that the birds are waiting for the right wind: “you must then understand first, that this is the Season of the Year when the Swallows, *their Food here failing*, begin to leave us, and return to the Country, *where-ever it be*, from whence I suppose they came; and this being the nearest to the Coast of *Holland*, they come here to Embark” (1.84).

Given that at this time no one knew for certain the swallows’ ultimate destination, it is understandable that Defoe presumed that if they are gathering on the coast they are about to fly over the nearest stretch of sea. In fact, rather than cross the North Sea from Suffolk to Holland (and then, he would assume, to a hotter country), it is likely that the swallows were gathering to fly further south to cross the English Channel since their route would take them over France on their journey to Africa. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the mysterious disappearance of birds in winter was an active topic of debate amongst natural historians. Defoe’s aside, then, is not an idle one, but evidence of a keen interest in natural history and, as we shall see, natural philosophy.

Since the classical period, the debate about bird migration had veered between the conception of migration as we now understand it and the notion that birds, in a condition of “torpor,” hibernate inside trees, in rock crevices or even under water. While by the mid-eighteenth century natural philosophers were increasingly likely to dismiss the idea of torpor and underwater hibernation, these theories persisted and the debate rumbled on over the course of the century. But, as Tim Birkhead comments, it was during the seventeenth century in particular that “the view that swallows, along with swifts and martins, spent their winters under water became increasingly entrenched. Sucked into the debate, some claimed to have witnessed the phenomena and seen swallows taken from their watery resting place” (144).

From the period most relevant for Defoe’s writing and reading habits—the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—there were just a few tracts debating the question of bird migration, including those by John Ray, William Derham and Charles Morton. The move from theories of torpor and submersion to migration can be seen in the work of John Ray: in his 1678 work, *The Ornithology of Francis Willughby of Middleton*, he acknowledges both possibilities for the Swallow: “To us it seems more probable that they fly away into hot Countries, *viz. Egypt, Æthiopia, &c.* then that either they lurk in hollow trees, or holes of Rocks and ancient buildings, or lie in water under the Ice in Northern Countries” (212). But his later *The Wisdom of God* focuses upon the idea of the

“migration of Birds from an hotter to a colder Country, or from a colder to an hotter, according to the Seasons of the Year” and he suggests, though without any confidence, that birds are reacting to either changes in temperature or food supply (149).<sup>6</sup>

William Derham’s slightly later tract *Physico-Theology* (1714) also posits that changes in temperature are “great Incentives to those Creatures to change their Habitation,” though Derham, like Ray, is still baffled as to exactly why (358). Most surprising of all is the argument put forward by Defoe’s old Dissenting Academy tutor, Charles Morton. Morton clearly dismisses the theories of submersion and torpor, but only to offer the theory that “it is not impossible that divers of these *Fowls*, which makes such Changes, and observe their Seasons, do pass and repass between this and the *Moon*” (18). By the time the first volume of Defoe’s *Tour* appeared, *The Wisdom of God* was in its eighth edition and *Physico-Theology* in its sixth, and Defoe may also have been aware of his old tutor’s tract on the subject. Defoe’s “grave Gentleman” echoes these tracts in that the disappearance of the swallows is explained without reference to torpor but rather to migration; although the notion that this is driven by failing food supply was only proposed by Ray, and even then, only doubtfully.

However, the gentleman’s explanation for their migration is then significantly amplified by Defoe:

Certain it is, that the Swallows neither come hither for warm Weather, nor retire from Cold, the thing is of quite another Nature; they, *like the Shoals of Fish in the Sea*, pursue their Prey; they are a voracious Creature, they feed flying; their Food is found in the Air, *viz.* the Insects; of which in our Summer Evenings, in damp and moist Places, the Air is full, they come hither in the Summer, because our Air is fuller of Fogs and Damps than in other Countries, and for that Reason, feeds great Quantities of Insects; if the Air be hot and dry, the Gnats die of themselves, and even the Swallows will be found famish’d for Want, and fall down dead out of the Air, their Food being taken from them: *In like manner*, when cold Weather comes in, the Insects all die, and then of Necessity, the Swallows quit us, and follow their Food where-ever they go; this they do in the manner I have mention’d above; for sometimes they are seen to go off in vast Flights like a Cloud; And sometimes again, when the Wind grows fair, they go away a few and a few, as they come, not staying at all upon the Coast. (1.85)

Defoe’s theory of the swallow’s migration carefully modifies the explanation most favored by Ray and Derham: that they migrate simply in response to changes in temperature. Instead, Defoe proposes a more complex explanation: that their migration is based upon feeding habits which in turn, and only secondarily, are dependent upon the weather. Despite the ample evidence of Morton’s influence on Defoe’s world view, there is a satisfying significance that, on this subject, Defoe clearly breaks ranks with his old tutor. While Defoe does not offer an accurate account of the swallows’ journey, it is important to note that he does offer a substantially more refined explanation of migration than can be found in the

writings of the leading natural historians of the day. Moreover, the scene of the Southwold swallows is not to be found in the most famous of his sources for the *Tour* material, Edmund Gibson's 1695 edition of Camden's *Britannia*.<sup>7</sup> So, while Tim Birkhead relegates Defoe to a footnote (380), and the scene is a mere diversion in the epic *Tour*, Defoe's "trifling" digression is a forthright and carefully thought-through intervention in a small but significant debate in eighteenth-century natural history.

In the midst of these observations, Defoe asks a more philosophical question:

How those Creatures know that this Part of the Island of *Great-Britain* is the Way to their Home, or the way that they are to go; that this very Point is the nearest Cut over, or even that the nearest Cut is best for them, that we must leave the Naturalists to determin, who insist upon it that *Brutes cannot Think*. (1.84)

The compliment to the natural philosophy is, at best, back-handed. Defoe's characterization of their argument as a blunt and irrefutable insistence inserts a note of irony. This may have specific targets. Derham characterizes migratory birds as 'unthinking Creatures' (*Physico-Theology* 358); Ray, in the section leading up to the discussion of migration, dismisses an animal's "Instinct" as "nothing but a kind of Fate upon them" before admitting "not how to give an account" of bird migration (*Wisdom* 149). Defoe's direct observation in Southwold enables him to critique the limitations of natural philosophy while suggesting that animals are capable of something beyond mere instinct, and can even, potentially, think. The question on swallow migration inserts Defoe's aside into the wider contentions concerning the boundaries between human and non-human animals in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. In this respect, Defoe is returning to an idea he had engaged with more fully in his earlier journalism.

## The Fable of the Thinking Hound

In the *Review* of 27 March 1705, in the "ADVICE from the Scandal CLUB" (the section reserved for letters from – ostensibly – the public) "R.S.T" asks "Whether a Dog may not properly be said to THINK on Things past and to come." Defoe's reply acknowledges "that the Effects of what we call Natural Powers in Brutes, Determine them to be under some Powerful Conduct, which must Exceed mere Instinct" (2.61). He then offers the following vignette:

The Story of King *James's* Hounds forming a Syllogism upon the Course of the Hare, at four Cross Ways, is, tho' a familiar, yet a strange Operation.

The Dogs coming to four Ways, and being at a Fault, they Beat the Head of one Lane, and find no Scent; then of the second, and so of the third; an Old Staunch Hound stands at the Corner, tosses up his Nose one Way, *She is not gone that Way*; then the second, *Nor that Way*; then the third, *No, nor this Way: Βοω, ωοω, ωοω*,

(says the Hound) *She must be gone this Way then*; and away he leads the Pack open-mouth'd the fourth way, and there they found the Hare. (2.61–62)

Defoe also goes on to instance dogs finding their way home unaided, hiding food for later, responding to their name and commands, and helping their master when in danger. He concludes that “If all this is not Thought but Instinct, then that Instinct is Equivalent to Thought in its degree” (2.62). In this brief sentence, Defoe erases the difference between reason and instinct and in effect establishes a continuum between human and non-human animal. Together, the questioner, Defoe, and a subsequent correspondent “*J.S.*” are clearly responding to “*that Grand question of the Rationality of Brutes*” (1.735) vociferously debated in the numerous publications circulating in the 1700s.<sup>8</sup> While both Wallace Shugg and Philip Armstrong briefly placed Defoe’s *Review* piece in the context of the Cartesian arguments, neither drew out the full significance of Defoe’s anti-Cartesianism. Moreover, neither they nor John McVeagh, the most recent editor of the *Review*, has identified the precise texts on which Defoe relies.

The specific story of hunting dogs pausing at cross-roads has a long and complex philosophical history. As L. Floridi explains, the origins of this lie in an elucidation on syllogism by the Greek philosopher, Chryssipus; the exemplum eventually became part of the philosophical debate about the differences between human and non-human animals and appears across a number of seventeenth-century writings that popularized that debate in the English language. Chrysippus’ dog, then, functions akin to Laura Brown’s concept of a “cultural fable”: a “sustained trope” that is “generated collectively in many texts over a period of time” and that has a “narrative trajectory that moves beyond the local” (2). Indeed, Chrysippus’ dog was also used in a philosophical debate performed in the presence of King James I between John Preston and Matthew Wren at Cambridge. Clearly, Defoe’s use of “the story of King *James’s* hounds forming a syllogism” draws upon this specific iteration of the fable, one that only occurs in Samuel Clarke’s seventeenth-century biography of John Preston.<sup>9</sup> In this story, Preston asked “*Whether Dogs could make Syllogismes,*” and then gave the example of “an Hound who hath the major Proposition in his mind, namely, *The Hare is gon either this or that way*; smels out the *minor* with his nose; namely, *She is not gon that way*, and follows the Conclusion, *Ergo this way with open mouth*” (80). Defoe’s elaboration on the basic story in the *Review* is small but significant: the sympathetic and homely colloquialism—“*Bow, wow, wow*, (says the Hound) *She must be gone this Way*”—anthropomorphizes the “Old Staunch Hound,” rhetorically underlining the continuity between hound and human reasoning. In this, Defoe was following the arguments of both Montaigne and Plutarch, who had cited Chryssipus’ dog as positive evidence for animal rationality, and both were willing to concede significant likenesses between human and animals. Moreover, both appeared just a handful of years before Defoe’s piece: Montaigne’s “Apology for Raymond Sebond” appeared in Cotton’s 1685 translation of the *Essays* and had reached a third edition by 1700; and a dialogue in Plutarch’s *Morals*, “Which are the most

crafty; Water-Animals or those Creatures that breed upon the Land” had first appeared in translation in 1691 and subsequently in 1694 and in 1704.

The third work published in those years to cite Chryssipus’ dog was Richard Blome’s 1694 translation of Antoine Le Grande’s influential propagation of Cartesianism, *An Entire Body of Philosophy, According to the Principles of the Famous Renate Des Cartes in Three Books*. Unsurprisingly, it dismissed such claims of animal reason. It is clear that the subsequent letter in the *Review’s* Supplement for January 1705, signed “J.S.,” is a riposte to Defoe’s ideas and represents the Cartesian argument that “*Brutes are made up of Matter only*” (1.735) and are nothing but “*Machines*” (1.737). Indeed, “J.S.” cites the same examples of machines that mimic animal vitality as Le Grande does. As part of his argument for the beast as machine, Le Grande asks, “who can be so bold as to deny that the Great Creator of all things, upon whose beck all Created Beings do depend, could have created such sort of *Machins* as might resemble the same motions, and exert all manner of actions exactly like those which we see performed in *Brute Animals*?” He then enumerates a number of examples of such machines, including, “the *Wooden Pigeon of Archytas the Tarentin*, ... Most wonderful also is that which Historians report of the *Norimberg Eagle*, which was so framed by *Athanasius Kircher*, that it flew to meet the Emperor *Maximilian*, and hovering with its *Wings* over his *Head*, accompanied all the way in his return to the *City*” (235). The pro-Cartesian correspondent in Defoe’s *Review* says this:

*You have heard I suppose, of some of the wonderful Machins, made by the art of Man, as the Wooden Pigeon of Archytas, that flew about like a living Bird. The Normiberg Eagle, made by Kircher, that flew to meet the Emperor Maximilian, and returned with him to the City, and many more. If such wonderful Operations proceed purely from the Figure and Order of Parts adapted by meer Man, who can deny but this God can form Machins of such exquisite Art that might resemble the same Motions, and exert Actions, exactly like we see those performed by Brute Animals. (1.735)*

The wording is extremely close to Blome’s translation of Le Grande.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is clear that “J.S.” draws upon Chryssipus’ exemplum as it occurred in Le Grande. He argues that animals’ “tricks” are evidence of training and custom, or “*Assuefaction*” (1.735), a borrowing from Le Grande (259-60). Similarly, “J.S.” argues that the example of the dogs “*forming the Syllogism*” is not evidence of rationality but of “*a much better Guide, ... the Scent*” (1.736-37); in short, that it is a kind of machine. Again, this follows Le Grande who dismissed the evidence of a dog exhibiting “*Cognition*” or “*Ratiocination*” and explains that the dog’s motions are purely a response to the sense of scent (257).

In his reply, Defoe is careful to avoid the heterodox implication “that Brutes had *Mens Rationalis*, or a Soul,” and emphasizes that by allowing animals “some equivalent Power to that of Thinking ... we are not oblig’d to own, to think that a Brute has a soul consequently be Immortall” (1.738, 1.739). But the insistent idea of Defoe’s reply is clear (echoing the point he made in the first piece of March 27th):

that there is something equivalent to the reasoning Faculty, which acts the Brute, which for want of a better Word, we call Instinct; ... that the Difference in the Operations are great, but still this Instinct serves the Uses in the Beast, the Reason serves in a Man, in a suitable Proportion to the Ends of either; and actually reasons for him in his Degree, as regularly as ours. (1.738)

The argument that the difference between humans and animals is one of degree rather than kind appears in both Montaigne's *Essays* and in Plutarch's *Morals*. But Defoe's focus on "Instinct" is significant. As we have seen, Ray, in his *Wisdom of God*, had argued that animals' "Instincts ... are nothing but a kind of Fate upon them" (*Wisdom* 149). The comment must have set Defoe thinking for the 1705 *Review* piece, since in his response to the original question he reasoned that animals are "under some Powerful Conduct, which must *Exceed mere Instinct*" (2.61, my emphasis). When Defoe comes to respond to the Cartesian "*J.S.*," he modifies Ray's disparaging notion of instinct as "a kind of Fate" and draws upon the argument of degrees of difference that Ray himself had made earlier in the very same book: "I should rather think Animals to be endu'd with a lower Degree of Reason, than that they are meer Machines" (*Wisdom* 59); significantly, Ray's example is the behavior of dogs. Defoe's argument about rationality, dogs and animal / human association owes much to Ray, but Defoe clearly produces something that is distinctively his own.

Defoe's frustration with language is clear when he grapples with terminology: "something equivalent ... which for want of a better Word, we call Instinct." As in the earlier passage from *Mere Nature*, the first-person plural signals the inadequacy of conventional thinking. Defoe's criticism of the normative use of "Instinct" to describe distinctive non-human behavior, in effect places humans and dogs in a contiguous relation, as he later summarizes: "I must be allow'd that the Similitude between the Actings of a Dog, and the Operations of the reasoning Agent, are such that no Philosopher can give Reasons for" (1.738). In addition, here Defoe is following an implication in the debate before King James I: as Erica Fudge has pointed out, while Preston and Wren were thinking about dogs figuratively, King James was thinking about his actual hounds (104). For Defoe, seeing the "Actings" of a dog—the empirical observation of actual behavior—is superior to philosophical rationalization: "As for the Mathematical or Philosophical Account given in this Letter of the Machine of the sensitive Body and Life, 'tis own'd, 'tis fine spun by School men's Art, but seems very empty of Demonstrations, and little more than the Collection of words into Mathematical Order" (1.738). So Defoe's frustration also extends to rationalistic method: his rhetoric couches the Cartesian's letter in terms of its refined theorization, in contrast to demonstration and his own home-spun empiricism.

## Things We Daily See

It was precisely such an observation that the Cartesians dismissed: from their point of view, the process was susceptible to the projection of human attributes onto something essentially different. This is “a generall and maine error,” warned Sir Kenholm Digby, author of the first English Cartesian work, *Two Treatises*, in 1644, “that what subject soever they speculate upon, ... they are still apt to bring them to their own standard, and to frame such conceptions of them, as they would do of themselves” (qtd. in Fudge 153). Seeing an actual dog or a horse act like a human was no proof at all: as Fudge points out, Descartes’ method relies upon a rejection of anthropomorphism (152–54). As a student of the Baconian Charles Morton, it should come as no surprise that Defoe prefers empiricism over theory. In fact, Morton himself flatly rejected Le Grande’s support for the beast-machine and in doing so also emphasized the power of observation: “I Deny utterly ... (Against Le Grande) that Brutes are wholly voyd of True Sens, Motion, Memory etc, which things we Daily see manifestly to be in them,” before going on to exemplify this by reference to the behavior of dogs (118). Defoe’s observations of the Southwold swallows and what must have been a daily interaction with dogs are entirely within this empiricist and also anthropomorphic tradition.<sup>11</sup>

Defoe’s ability to think through the contiguity of human and animals—those equivalences and similitudes—leads me to think through the nature of his anthropomorphism. Rather than follow what Lucinda Cole has called the Cartesian “disarticulation of the world soul (and the principle of resemblance it implied),” his willingness to see reason in animals and resemblances between the human and animal is a refusal to see anthropocentrism as a delimiting distinctiveness (4). This kind of anthropomorphic imagination might be termed a “critical anthro-pomorphism,” a term employed by some recent ethologists who oppose it to the rational mechanomorphism of Cartesianism (Garrard 157). “In this way,” Greg Garrard notes, “ethologists align themselves with the views of animals that are commonplace outside science, whilst emphasising the value of a cautious approach ... [C]ritical anthropomorphism is prepared to consider [the] homology of both the valued and the despised tendencies of our species with those of dogs and primates” (157–58).

As we have seen in *Jure Divino* and in *Mere Nature*, Defoe is keen to consider the resemblances between humans and animals as running both ways. The Cartesian debates in the 1690s and early 1700s provoked Defoe to voice his doubts about the limits of theorization regarding such questions in natural philosophy. In this he was following his mentor Morton (although not as far as the swallow’s migration to the moon); but he was also drawing upon a tradition of thinking—most powerfully articulated in the seventeenth century through the writings of Plutarch and Montaigne—that was alive to the animal within and without.

I began by suggesting that Defoe “uses the figure of the animal to discuss the nature of humanity.” But as these examples show, Defoe’s discussion of swallows and hounds does not actually construct these animals in quite the passive way that that verb “use” suggests, since these animals possess a discursive agency

that disturbs our normal conception of the human as an autonomous agent. In these episodes of the swallows and hounds, moreover, the animals become more than mere figures: they become particular species, individuated within their own environments and with their own behaviors. Defoe's representations of animals, then, are more than merely products of a mercantile value-system on the cusp of capitalist modernity that a narrow focus on just *Robinson Crusoe* would suggest. Defoe's "critical anthropomorphism" is no reductive simplification of the animal but rather one that enables a radical position: it doubles back on itself to destroy the anthropocentric notion of the human as *animale rationale* just as it destroys the idea of animals as humans' essential other. These small but telling scenarios reveal Defoe's combative, perceptive and self-conscious imagination that is alive to the animals—both human and non-human—that he sees before him.

Bath Spa University

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> As Michael Newton suggests, "Peter exists in terms of the thing which he does not fully possess" ("Bodies Without Souls" 206). For other discussions of this text, see Novak (1972), Nash (2003), and Gregg.
- <sup>2</sup> For valuable commentary on the key texts that constitute the debate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Shugg, Thomas, and Fudge. For a selection of these texts with a brief commentary, see *The Daniel Defoe Blog*: <http://danieldefoeblog.com/2013/07/03/defoe-and-descartes-beast-machine-a-brief-bibliography-2/>
- <sup>3</sup> For a useful overview, see Cole.
- <sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, Nash sees a glimpse of sentimentalism in Crusoe's relations to his pets ("Animal Nomenclature" 101–118). Armstrong briefly acknowledges Defoe's *Review* piece as a "challenge to the separation of human rationality from brute mechanical instinct" (17).
- <sup>5</sup> See Gregg, "Defoe's 'Horse-Rhetorick.'" In this sense I am following Carol Houlinhan Flynn who argues for Defoe's keen awareness of the "problem of the [human] body" (6).
- <sup>6</sup> The first edition was in 1691, although the swallows were not discussed until the enlarged third edition of 1701 and in subsequent editions.
- <sup>7</sup> For the *Tour's* sources, see Rogers (61–118) and Vickers (151–76).
- <sup>8</sup> The reply by "J.S." appears in the "Supplement for January 1705" which appeared *after* the March 27th edition.

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<sup>9</sup> The detail of the “open mouth” does not appear in any other version of this fable I have been able to find.

<sup>10</sup> John McVeagh suggests that for Archytas and Kircher “Defoe’s correspondent is perhaps drawing upon two entries in Collier” (Collier’s translation of Moréri’s *Dictionary*, 1701) (*Review* 1.740).

<sup>11</sup> For an ingenious and suggestive reading of eighteenth-century thinking on the nature of sympathy between humans and animals via J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* and, in passing, Defoe’s realism, see Lamb.

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