The Animal/Man That Therefore I Am

By

Stephen Blake Ervin
Abstract

Grant Morrison’s *Animal Man* could be argued to worry the man/animal boundary. Using close readings of the comics against the backdrop of Jacques Derrida’s and Martin Heidegger’s theories on the boundary between man and animal, I explore the following ideas which seem common in the discourses on that which separates humans from animals: intelligence vs. instinct, the human hand vs. the animal’s paw, humanity’s richness-in-world vs. animal’s poorness-in-world, and language.

In *Animal Man*, Morrison gives voice to animal characters by giving them personalities, which seems a romanticizing of the real state of affairs. Alongside all the depicted animals, there are many hybrid characters, which take on the characteristics of both humans and animals. The use of hybrid characters such as the Coyote and Animal Man problematize the boundary between man and animal. This study of *Animal Man*, most importantly, shows that the differences as well as similarities between humans and animals are based on ideologically produced discourses, and this includes Morrison’s own philosophy on animal rights and his activism. I argue that Morrison both worries the boundary between humans and animals, and keeps it operative in order to make the reader perceive animals in more anthropocentric terms.

Keywords: animal; human; Animal Man; animal rights; comics; Derrida; Heidegger; Agamben; human-animal boundary; hybridity; intelligence; language; work; rich-in-world; poor-in-world; tools; powers.
We are at once scared and confronted by animals, while at the same time we are aware that many of the ways that we treat animals are in fact harmful to them. As a result, animals have become ‘controversial’ in contemporary society. They are at once *harmers* and *harmees*.

– O’Sullivan and Bennison
Introduction

While humanity has relied on non-human animals for centuries—and strives to understand the thought processes and emotional intelligence of said animals—there has always been a division between humans and animals. Notwithstanding the work of Carl Linnaeus (Systema Naturae) and Charles Darwin (Origin of Species), this division is still operating. It imposes a hierarchy and serves to maintain the uniqueness of human beings. The subject of liminality regarding this boundary, though spoken through various theoretical texts such as Jacques Derrida’s The Animal That Therefore I Am, is rarely allotted a literary representation in modern literature that treats this issue as the core issue of the narrative.¹ For this reason, I have chosen to examine the twenty-six-issue run of Animal Man, written by Grant Morrison, which allows a particular imaginative perspective on humanity’s relationship to animals. A further reason for this selection is that there has been no real academic examination on Morrison’s run of Animal Man. Researchers seem more drawn to Morrison’s more innovative and genre-breaking works such as The Invisibles and Filth and the Animal Man series do not seem to generate the kind of interest that I think they deserve. My aim is therefore to open up some important venues of thought on this work through a dialogue with the philosophical discourses of Derrida, Martin Heidegger, and Giorgio Agamben.

Animal Man’s content focuses primarily on the way that humans interact with animals, and displays a fascinating character trying to find his place in both sections of the binary human/animal. Within this thesis, I wish to examine the ways in which Animal Man posits the human/animal binary both as an ideological and ethical problem and the way Morrison struggles with certain understandings of human beings in relation to animals. I argue that despite Morrison’s clearly stated ideology of animal rights, his dramatizations of human/animal relations often end up reinforcing the already established divisions which he seems to be critiquing.

The Animal Man series was created in 1988, after an event in DC Comics known as the Crisis on Infinite Earths.² Following the Crisis, the heroes, villains, and other characters of all DC

¹ The best-known example of a character transcending the limitations is Gregor Samsa, from Kafka’s The Metamorphosis. Although Gregor does blur the liminal zone of animal and man by retaining his human intelligence while losing the voice to project it, he also tends to lose his agency through the progression.
² The Crisis on Infinite Earths spanned a large portion of the DC titles. Within the Crisis, DC set out to compress their fifty-year history of comics, so that the origins of major characters would be streamlined. There was also a multiverse set up before the Crisis, which allowed each of the previous incarnations of superheroes to exist independently. The Crisis dissolved the multiverse, and set up a singular universe for all characters of DC.
³ The Crisis on Infinite Earths spanned a large portion of the DC titles. Within the Crisis, DC set out to compress
comics were retooled, and outdated characters were mostly removed from the chronology. DC comics also used the Crisis to fix any continuity issues that occurred during the fifty years of publication. It was after this event that writers were given the ability to take lesser known heroes and recreate them as they saw fit, as long as they worked with the continuity the Crisis had set up. Animal Man was one of the heroes who was reformed, and was subsequently given his own series. Before the Crisis, he was only seen in a few pages of comic collections such as *Strange Tales* and as a member of the team known as the Forgotten Heroes. Although he inherits the character from a series of writers and artists before him, as the sole writer of *Animal Man*, Morrison took the opportunity to turn Buddy Baker, the alter ego of the hero Animal Man, into a type of avatar of his own political ideology. In fact, Animal Man has been used as an icon of animal rights activists within the DC comic world during Morrison’s run of the series.\(^3\)

While *Animal Man* contains many highly fascinating subjects, I will only examine the sections that explore the binaries of man and animal. Generally speaking, animals are seen as lacking in a way to express themselves or contribute to greater purposes other than reproduction, whereas humanity is seen as the standard by which all creatures are judged. The character of Animal Man is used as a mediator between animals and humans, as he represents both the strength of animals and the ingenuity of humanity. Morrison’s use of non-humans, ranging from dogs to bird-men, signifies and reflects the way that humanity treats and reacts to animals in reality.

The discourse of man and his relation to animal has been discussed by a spectrum of philosophers such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and René Descartes, who have typically viewed their fifty-year history of comics, so that the origins of major characters would be streamlined. There was also a multiverse set up before the Crisis, which allowed each of the previous incarnations of superheroes to exist independently. The Crisis dissolved the multiverse, and set up a singular universe for all characters of DC Comics. The event was composed of twelve main issues and over fifty crossover issues, which allowed for the set up and resolution of the Crisis. I had originally planned to write about Animal Man regarding the first incarnation of the super hero in relation to Grant Morrison’s revival. Animal Man was originally created in 1965 by Dave Wood and the late Carmine Infantino for the DC comic *Strange Adventures*. However, I was unable to obtain any copies that included the 1960s Animal Man. Animal Man appeared briefly, and was a straight laced, everyman sort of character. His depiction in Grant Morrison’s Animal Man was radically different from the first appearance, something that is alluded to in Morrison’s comics. Three issues handle the concept of Animal Man’s origin story. One displays the origin as it was in the *Strange Adventures* comic, another version of the origin story was retooled to work with Morrison’s Animal Man, and the third was a meta-fictional adaptation of the origin story. This cross of origin stories were used to show the difference between the original Animal Man and the Animal Man of the 1980s. I believed that it would be fascinating to examine the original version of Animal Man, and show how he lacked the animal aspects shown in Morrison’s version.

\(^3\) Morrison mentions his personal beliefs regarding animal rights and a vegetarian lifestyle during his cameo in the comic series. He addresses the reader and lectures about animal rights, activism, and PETA.
animals as being an inferior creation to humanity. While several other philosophers have set out to understand the relationship of man and animal, to examine the series, I will mainly use the Derrida’s analyses. His view of animals can be put in a fruitful dialogue with Animal Man. Derrida stresses the importance of animals as fellow creatures. In The Animal That Therefore I Am, he investigates and critiques the subjugation of animals through history. Derrida refrains from preachy-ness and sheer moralizing, in hopes to address the problems that human beings face, rather than propose a solution to such problems. The political aspects of his speech are toned down and the philosophical character of the investigations is made distinct. While Derrida transgresses the typical political agenda of those who fight for animal rights, and instead addresses the core issues with the way that humanity interacts with animals, Morrison’s work is politically informed. “Animal” is a loaded term used in this subjugation of non-human life, as it is a descriptor for all creatures which are not human. This is a problem that, according to Derrida, many philosophers face when they question what differentiates animal from man.

Not that all philosophers agree on the definition of the limit presumed to separate man in general from the animal in general (although this is an area that is conducive to consensus and is no doubt where we end the dominant form of consensus). Despite that, through and beyond all their disagreements, philosophers have always judged and all philosophers have judged that limit to be single and indivisible, considering that on the other side of that limit there is an immense group, a single and fundamentally homogeneous set that one has the right, the theoretical or philosophical right, to distinguish and mark as opposite, namely, the set of the Animal in general, the Animal spoken of in the general singular. It applies to the whole animal kingdom with the exception of the human. The whole animal kingdom has been reduced to a single entity in the minds of people who use the term ‘animal’ as such. (Derrida 40)

There is a problem with the way that all non-human creatures are lumped into a category. Rather than outright saying that man and animal are equals, Morrison instead tried to see how far he could keep reimagining the typical distinctions between humans and animals thus problematizing human superiority over animals.  

4 In an anecdote early on in The Animal That Therefore I Am, Derrida describes a moment shared between him and
Furthermore, in “Heidegger’s Hand,” Derrida discusses Heidegger’s concept of *Geschlect*, and how it accompanies the way humans view each other and the animal. Within this essay, Derrida speaks about Heidegger’s idea of the hand. To Heidegger, man is capable of having a hand, since man can think and use it to give. Animals, such as apes, while being of similar design, are only equipped with organs that can grasp. Derrida remarks that such a viewing of animal to man creates not some differences but an absolute, oppositional limit (Derrida 41). I find this idea of animals not being able to perform the same actions as humans to be an important factor in the treatment of animals in the series. Once again, all animals are reduced to a singular noun, and a divisive line is drawn between humans and every animal. This line is set by how man’s hands create signs and work while the hands, talons, and paws of animals have functions that do not seem open to radical change and creative use.

Besides the focus on the notion of work, I will draw on Heidegger’s idea from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* that humans are rich-in-world and animals poor-in-world, and problematize it through Morrison’s series. In this theory, “world” stands not only for the physical environment, but also the ability to interact with and shape the environment, to create meanings and social contexts, and communicate with other people as equally sentient creatures. In contrast to Heidegger, I explore how the animals in *Animal Man* are used as characters and how they perceive the world. Rather than truly being poor-in-world, a majority of the featured animals are shown having human-like sense of world. They recognize other beings as separate entities, and think carefully on their actions. Though this is personification of each animal character, it allows the audience to view them as something more than objects.

In addition to the discourse between Heidegger and Derrida, I will use a section from Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, the chapter titled “The Ban and the Wolf,” which describes the medieval and ancient views of the bandit and outlaw, and how they were punished by exile from

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his cat. He assures the audience that this is, in fact, a living, breathing cat and not a stand in for all cats. There is no higher metaphor for the cat. The anecdote is as follows: Derrida encounters his cat while he is nude, and the cat looks at him. Although the idea of nudity is foreign to the cat and all other creatures, Derrida feels shame for having been nude before his cat. And it is after that that he feels a secondary shame for feeling shamed. And with this knowledge of his shame, Derrida questions the view that creatures like his cat must have on humanity, if they have any view of their own at all. This is a highly interesting take on non-human capability and the world that non-human creatures live in. The idea of the animal seeing that which the human sees, but in a different way plays a strong role in the way animals are treated. As we cannot ask them directly for their opinion on matters, we can only speculate what opinions—if any—non-humans might possibly hold. Morrison plays with this idea in his comics, by creating a multitude of non-human characters that interact with Animal Man, either directly or through indirect means.
the city, cast into the fringes of society. They were not thought of as members of society. Rather, they were more akin to animals. “The Ban and the Wolf,” which describes the very being that is at once belonging to both and neither side of the spectrum, seems to articulate some central issues in *Animal Man*. Several characters in *Animal Man* belong to this indeterminable middle ground between humans and animals. I follow Agamben’s argument that the first man/animal boundary manifested through the use of the bandit’s exile. Before that development, it is possible that all animals were seen as creatures exclusive to humans, and there were no lines to transgress. The process of building society allowed for there to be exiles which cast humans from their societal position and thrust them into the world of the animal.

Throughout the comic series, Animal Man is shown as a mediator or communicator between humans and animals, but also someone who is, due to his supernatural abilities, beyond both humanity and the “animal kingdom.” A problem with this is that the animals in *Animal Man* are not realistic. The variety of imaginary creatures that serve to blur the boundaries between human and animals represent Morrison’s stance on the ways in which animals may function as such and in relation to humans. He has created some animals that simply act in the familiar animal-like manners and some that are hybrids between humans and animals, and some that may even completely break out of the human/animal binary. When viewing the animals in *Animal Man*, it is important to draw from the way they are used to affect the reader and the problems that such non-human characters bring about. As animals and humans are mostly incapable of sharing ideas, it is impossible to do anything other than speculate how animals would react in these situations. Though there have been advances in communication between man and animal, it is in fact unnecessary for this examination. My study seeks to show how Morrison simultaneously dramatizes both his philosophical views on animals and his ideology of animal rights. It is through Morrison’s storytelling that the audience is able to learn about Animal Man’s progress and the suffering that animals are put through by humans and the ways various human discourses define the perception of animals. Morrison’s text is highly politicized, and as such, the animal rights and political aspects must be included. It has been made clear, in the issue where Morrison inserts himself as a character, that the Animal Man, as he wrote him, was to be used to help further the rights of animals. The comic was used to spread that message further than Morrison could in his personal life. In the time between the printing of *Animal Man* and this research, PETA has changed its methods, and has become driven more towards political power through
shame. I will take into consideration Morrison’s take on man’s treatment of animals that he deems worthy to keep as pets and those he sees fit to experiment on, but I am, however, more concerned with the ways he reimagines or fails to reimagine animals and humans. I will structure the following analysis around a few key issues raised by the comics as the key factors used discursively to elevate humans over animals: language, work, intelligence vs. instinct, and being poor-in-world vs. being rich-in-world.

Language
In an interview with Pulse from 2003, Morrison brings up the questions of language as one of the main characteristics that define humanity:

We’re so familiar with written language that we sometimes forget how outlandish a concept it must have seemed to our ancestors. Writing allowed people to copy and transfer their thoughts and their tribal codes of conduct to others, even unto generations they themselves would not live to personally instruct, affect or control. The words themselves must have seemed alive and immortal and as “holy” as ghosts. Written law was thus a way of mastering time and influencing the future, a weapon greater than fire and steel, I hope you’ll agree. When read, the written word made the head buzz and ring and fill up with voices and commands from nowhere, as if God Himself had come thundering down through the symbols, off the page and into the room, fertilising and impregnating the mind with his Ghostly, unmistakable presence. (1)

Animals are incapable of using any language known to humans. As such, there is a gap between human and non-human animals. This gap is one of power, and one that links our ideas of intelligence belonging to humans while animals react only on instinct. Language is a human way of creating a culture among groups and society in general. This sense of language is fully unknown to non-human animals. Non-human animals have their own particular vocalizations, whether it be through screeching or chirping, yet these sounds do not fall into the category of language as human characters understand it. Man is an animal that has developed the mental capacity for language, and through that development created the boundary. Aristotle uses “zoon
logikon”⁵ to describe man as being an animal that can use reasoning. Kant added that the rationality of humanity allows it to use complex symbols, which further displaces man from animals. While animals may be able to communicate through signs, humans use these symbols in order to express intricate concepts. Humans have the capability of creating these symbols and structuring expressions, which link thoughts. I believe that the source of this boundary, while wholly man-made, subsists on man’s creation of language and the construction of ethics, which hold societies together.

However, as Derrida insists, the true boundary of man/animal is obfuscated by the inability of inter-species communication. As such, the marginalization of animals through a single word furthers the reductive nature of Western society’s image of the animal kingdom. Albeit a simple solution, one cannot rightfully place all animals into a solitary definition, and create the word “animal” to go against the species of man.

To further problematize the language used by philosophers to separate animal from man, Yoriko Otomo presents the literal symbols of man and animal as they are in Kanji. The symbol for “man,” 人間, is composed of two parts, one representing “human,” the other, “between.” As Otomo predicates, “The infinite caesura of what we call ‘human’ is reflected here in the first image, made up of two people propped up against one another, and in the second image, which emphasizes the in-betweenness, conditionality, or reciprocity of the first.” (Otomo 389). Moreover, the word for “animal” is even more abstract, lending to the cultural significance of metamorphosis found within Japanese culture. The Kanji for “animal” is 動物, which translates to “moving” and “form.” Animal “cannot be figured in terms of an image, but here, rather than being phrased in terms of an onto-theological economy of recognition, the animal subject is figured in terms of movement (Otomo 390).” Even when using the word “animal” in other languages, there arises the difficulty of pinpointing what precisely falls into the category of animal.

While non-human animals may not have their own language, they still carry meaning with their howls and vocalizations. There have been various studies on animal vocalizations and attempting to understand them the way that humans beings understand language, very few have ended with results that convey language. Although these meanings are not known to us, that does

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⁵ Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics details the concept of man as being a rational animal through man’s use of creativity and intelligence. Nicomachean Ethics Book 1, Chapter 7.
not mean that they should be disregarded as purely instinctual cries. In one study held in 1995 at Georgia State University, a pygmy chimpanzee constructed strings of three words “mad,” “fight,” and “Austin,” which is the name of another chimpanzee (Johnson 1). This led the researchers to find that a fight had broken out in the nest of the chimpanzee named Austin. Though the words were surprising to say the least, they led to the question about whether animals are capable of understanding language or if they simply recognize patterns associated with treats. While the question of animals having language is not ground-breaking, the conditions of the chimpanzee attempting language had rarely been reported in such a manner. Kanzi, another chimpanzee in the Georgia State University study, was shown to respond to direct, vocal orders made by the researchers, such as “Take off Sue’s shoe” and “Give the dog a shot.” These actions, though followed through by Kanzi, were met with dispute by linguists, such as Noam Chomsky, who believe that Kanzi and the other chimpanzees were merely parroting what the Georgia University researchers had taught them. While there is some substance to the idea that Kanzi was mimicking the actions shown to him by the researchers, there is still a disagreement as to whether or not that means that animals are fully incapable of language. Dr. Stuart Shanker, a philosopher at York University in Toronto, believed that there was more to the words and actions of the chimpanzees than that accredited to them by linguists such as Chomsky. Shanker states, “the linguists are applying a double standard: they dismiss skills—like putting together a noun and a verb to form a two-word sentence—that they consider nascent linguistic abilities in a very young child” (Johnson 1). The linguists’ take on the intelligence of the primates is held to a different standard than that of humanity, so that no matter what advances appear, they are continuously judged as being inferior. As such, it is near impossible for any true agreement to come between researchers. However, it seems as though the concept of parroting and language as used by humans may not be as divided.

Augustine, in his *Confessions*, describes his infancy and his own learning of language:

When they named any thing, and as they spoke turned towards it, I saw and remembered that they called what they would point out by the name they uttered. And that they meant this thing and no other was plain from the motion of their body, the natural language, as it were, of all nations, expressed by the countenance, glances of the eye, gestures of the

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6 The words were strung together using a keyboard used to help children incapable of forming their own sentences.
limbs, and tones of the voice, indicating the affections of the mind, as it pursues, possesses, rejects, or shuns. And thus by constantly hearing words, as they occurred in various sentences, I collected gradually for what they stood; and having broken in my mouth to these signs, I thereby gave utterance to my will. Thus I exchanged with those about me these current signs of our wills, and so launched deeper into the stormy intercourse of human life, yet depending on parental authority and the beck of elders. (Augustine I 8)

His language learning mirrors that of the abovementioned chimpanzees from Georgia State University experiments. A human doing this is seen as learning language, and yet when a non-human performs in the same manner, it is thought of as a trick or a feat.

Language is a difficult division to cross in Morrison’s Animal Man. On the one hand, Morrison can deliver the simple vocalizations of non-human animals throughout every issue and leave their feelings up to the imaginations of the audience. On the other hand, the world that Morrison is writing is one of fiction, and one where multiple images can be used to convey a message. As such, he can write a highly fictionalized take on the inner-workings of a non-human animal. Through the use of the comic book as a medium, Morrison develops a way to present ideas and possibilities. For instance, throughout each issue of Animal Man, Morrison depicts the minor animals as showing some sense of body language. In Issue #4, the animals at the San Diego Zoo look upon Animal Man and the character B’wana Beast as they fight. Animal Man comments directly on the body language that the creatures are showing him. This method of depicting the sense of body language and how non-humans use it comes off a little strong due to the announcement that Animal Man makes. As well as showing body language, there are instances wherein background animals show strong, unified vocalizations. While in the zoo again, this time in Issue #6, the animals around Animal Man begin to vocalize in unison, screaming as if they are attempting to communicate with humans. There is a sense of terror shown through the use of font and colors that make up the animals’ vocalizations. Though the audience cannot understand fully what the animals are “saying,” there is the implication of fear that can be understood.

It is not simply the animals which provide body language throughout the series. In one incident, in which Animal Man has lost control over his powers, he works with a fellow hero
named Vixen. As his powers are beyond his control, he mistakenly picks up the abilities of chimpanzees to scrutinize body posture and read body language. This is an interesting insight as it shows a human character displaying the characteristics of an animal and working with a type of language that comes as being natural to that animal.

There are also examples of animals being given their own sense of language—though these examples are highly fictionalized and humanized. The non-humans are not only important to the plot points of the comic, but are also important to Animal Man. An important animal which is given language is Djuba. Djuba was shown as a motherly figure to the other animals being tested in the STAR facilities. She had a way of speaking to the test subjects which was not fully disclosed in the comic. While she was being tested on, Djuba was spoken to by another ape, a subject named Roon. Roon and Djuba share a moment while the disease eats away at Roon’s body. He speaks to Djuba, letting her know that he is dying, and that he will be headed home. As Roon’s body is carried off by the scientists, Djuba weeps, showing the strong emotional tie that she has with Roon and the other test subjects.

Roon’s existence within Animal Man momentarily relates to Derrida’s discourse on the naming of animals, in which Adam “is required to mark his ascendancy, his domination over them, indeed his power to tame them” (Derrida ATTIA, 32). This mark of domination began with Adam in mythology and continues with our current views on animals. Human beings have language and therefore appear to be the ones in control. In Animal Man, in a single panel, the audience can see that the chimpanzee has been named Lucky by the scientists. However, the chimpanzee identifies himself as Roon, rather than the doubly ironic moniker given to him. Rather than being called the name he chose—which is an impossibility even within Animal Man—Roon was named by a human. The naming is a way to use human language to ensure control and order over the non-humans.

There are human-like speech patterns given to the character of the Dolphin, so that the reader may follow its thoughts as the issue progresses. Its words are fractured, spelled incorrectly, and more akin stream of consciousness than anything else written in Animal Man. Although it is difficult to follow at times, it is a good use of voice and elevates the animal beyond that of a submissive object. This is one of the few moments in the series where Animal Man is not around to interject his thoughts on the subject or doubly imply the feelings held by the animals. Yet, by giving Djuba and the character of Dolphin their own voices for the issues,
Morrison shows a problem similarly to the way presented by Heidegger. In regards to understanding animals, the only way is to imagine being in their predicaments, and lend them human voices. In Heidegger’s terminology, Morrison would be “transposing” himself into the animals. This however, comes with a few problems, at least when considering the inability to fully use this transposition as a discourse.

This moment does not consist in our simply forgetting ourselves as it were and trying our utmost to act as if we were the other being. On the contrary, it consists precisely in we ourselves being precisely ourselves, and only in this way first bringing about the possibility of ourselves being able to go along with the other being while remaining other with respect to it. There can be no going-along with if the one who wishes and is meant to go along with the other relinquishes himself in advance. (Heidegger 202-203)

Although it seems likely that Morrison would prefer to write in a way similar to how animals do it in order to better develop the character, it is also an impossibility. Any animal that he writes for will still retain his voice, just as it is for any character that he creates. Yet it is through this creation of a false language that Morrison is able to use these non-humans to speak at all. By having a voice, they are developed as animals beyond animals—they are animals that have a touch of human intelligence to them. Along with furthering the humanization of animals found within these comics, Morrison is also propelling each animal above the humans in one way or another. With Djuba, there is the calm, gentle, intellectual nature that flows from her. The other animals, and B’wana Beast, are drawn to her, and treat her with deep respect. With the Dolphin, there is poetry and mercy. The Dolphin knows that it has the ability to take the life of a man, yet chooses to save him. It believes that even though his mate and child will never return, there is a better way to go about life than revenge. These two creatures in particular have been given a voice to speak with, and while they are never heard by Animal Man, they are more direct addresses to the readers.

A further example is the journey of the Coyote, and his appearance on Earth. He does not talk, per se, but holds with him a manuscript called a Gospel, written in an unintelligible alphabet. These crude symbols hold with them a narrative, the reason for the Coyote’s existence. The symbols signify ideas, making them the written form of a language. As Ferdinand de
Saussure writes,

Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object. But the spoken word is so intimately bound to its written image that the latter manages to usurp the main role. (Saussure 23-24)

What is interesting in the comics is that the symbols carried by the Coyote create a form of silent speech. This almost looks like a representation of Derrida’s inversion of the supremacy of speech over writing: “[t]he system of writing in general is not exterior to the system of language in general” (Derrida OG 44). The Coyote does not speak but he writes and his writing is his voice. The symbols, though undecipherable to Animal Man hold meaning to the Coyote, which is the basis of all writing. Writing is not something that happens beyond language, and although this is a fictional example, Morrison once again incorporates language into the lives of otherwise voiceless animals. The fact that the Coyote carries a Gospel in an unknown language seems to be an example of the way humans may use double standards when judging themselves and animals. Like in the example of Aristotle, whose learning of language resembled that of the ape, the Coyote’s scripture is like the scripture of civilizations whose spoken languages died out and all that remains is writing.

In Animal Man, language-bearing non-humans are mixed with non-humans that lack all capacity to speak. Their status is lifted above that of the normal animal, and as such, the animals that have language become key roles in the development of the plot. All of the animals that have language allow the reader to see the other side of the human/animal boundary, but again in terms similar to human characters. They all handle language differently: the dolphin speaks in stream of consciousness, Djuba speaks directly yet motherly, and the Coyote relies on the written word. This separation of the usage of language highlights the characteristics of each non-human. The Dolphin’s stream of consciousness and incorrect spelling reflects the romantic characteristics of innocence and mercy that Morrison has inscribed into the animal. Djuba’s speech patterns are clean and evident of a clear communicator, for she communicates with not only the apes that are tested alongside her but with the entire animal population in the zoo. The Coyote’s speech relates
to the usage of tools, the creation of a text, and the work that he must undertake. It is this combination of work, language, and animal appearance that cause the Coyote to be such an enigmatic and supra-animal character.

**Work: Paw vs. Hand**

Work made man, Friedrich Engels claimed (Engels 440). And his work as a superhero made Animal Man. Despite Morrison’s attempts at diminishing the divide between human beings and animals, even in the series the notion of work is used as a distinguishing factor between different creatures. What is interesting about Morrison’s series is that many animal-characters perform some sort of work, and some, like the Coyote have a very solemn work such as being some form of Jesus-like prophet and a savior. In order to discuss the idea of work, I will tie it to two things: the notion of “powers” and the distinction between hands and paws. To begin this investigation of hands and paws, I will take an in depth look at a few aspects of the character Animal Man, as he is the most fully developed character within the series. Along with being the focal character of the series, Animal Man is also an everyman character (much like his older adaptations). Unlike heroes such as Batman or Superman, he is neither rich nor overly powerful. Animal Man lives the life of a Middle Class American on the West Coast. His powers are limited only to the abilities of animals. Animal Man does not have Superman’s heat vision or ice breath. He must instead rely on his knowledge of animals and improvise. In regards to Animal Man’s location in the world of both human and non-human animals, it is important to note the difference in the way each side exhibits their respect or disdain for the hero. When dealing with both human and non-human animals, Animal Man begins to shift his thought processes, attempting to determine which is of more worth.

The notion of “powers” held by Animal Man are important as they show the discrepancy in thought that human characters hold towards animals. As Animal Man borrows his powers from animals, the focus of his abilities is the way that he utilizes the power as a human. Non-human creatures are seen as vessels for carrying such abilities. Moreover, the human-imposed hierarchy can be seen through Animal Man’s use of those powers as superpowers. The animal limbs such as paws are seen as clumsy tools, an extension used by animals to for instance grasp and feed,

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7 Friedrich Engels believed that humans are workers, producers while animals are seemingly gatherers—the production of work and the use of tools potentially created the boundary of man and animal.
and therefore essentially different from the human hand. Yet, it is interesting to note that when Animal Man acquires the sheer muscle strength from a strong animal, this particular power becomes a tool more like the human hand, and less of an animal limb.

The kind of work in which animal limbs are used is distinguished from the kind of human-like work performed by Animal Man. His utilization of super powers is what make him into a super hero. As a normal man, Buddy Baker is nothing special and generally is disregarded by the community. Once he dons his uniform, however, he becomes superhuman, and a symbol of the animal world. Animal Man’s powers derive directly from any non-human creature in the vicinity. His abilities are not flashy, as he is incapable of physically transforming into the creature from which he borrows a power. He is also regulated to maintaining them for a short period of time. Animal Man’s powers, at the start of the series rely on him being within a close proximity of the animal he wishes to adapt a power from. The abilities are, however, variable and allow for Animal Man to seamlessly flow from one to the other. He quickly shifts his abilities in battle, trying to rely on his intellect over the animistic strength or agility.

Animal Man’s powers are unnaturally occurring, as they were gained in a way typical to super hero origin stories. Shortly after gaining his powers, Animal Man uses them in a typical heroic fashion by foiling the plans of minor criminals. Although he is still not as identifiable to citizens as other DC characters, he is regarded as a superhero. His animal-derived abilities give him an edge over minor threats. These “powers” are but normal functions in the animals, and, as Heidegger argued, the animal is incapable of viewing its abilities beyond itself. Whatever “power” an animal may possess is simply an organ. Humans who lack such “powers” are still regarded as being on a higher level of existence than animals, and those like Animal Man become super human through the employment of animal abilities. In a sense, this is another emphasis on the human use of reason to think of animal abilities abstractly as powers which can then be harnessed through the use of intellect. One could perhaps argue that animals are not aware of the “powers” they possess. This is problematic because it means that one looks down upon an animal at the same time as one views animals as having abilities that could take humans to the next level of the evolution into super-humans. While he is trying to show qualities of animals, Morrison seems to end up maintaining the superiority of human intellect.

Looking at Heidegger arguments, it is clear that differences between humans and animals do not necessitate a hierarchy, which places humans above animals:
For we immediately find ourselves in the greatest perplexity over the question concerning
greater or lesser completeness in each case with respect to the accessibility of beings, as
soon as we compare the discriminatory capacity of a falcon’s eye with that of the human
eye or the canine sense of smell with our own, for example. However ready we are to rank
man as a higher being with respect to the animal, such an assessment is deeply
questionable, especially when we consider that man can sink lower than any animal. No
animal can become depraved in the same way as man. (Heidegger 194)

In Morrison’s work, the general ideology of rights apparently does away with hierarchies, and
follows to an extent Heidegger’s reasoning, but one cannot neglect the fact that the mere
existence of Animal Man’s powers and the particular way they work serves to maintain the said
hierarchies. When an elephant wields tremendous physical strength it is a matter of course. When
Animal Man is capable of harnessing that raw strength, he is seen as mastering a feat unlike that
of other men. He cannot but be regarded superior to the animal in all cases, as he has rationality
behind the displays of power, and this in turn makes him super human. Indeed, throughout the
series of Animal Man, a large cast of characters display animal-derived powers, such as Vixen
and B’wana Beast. One of the super heroes that Animal Man teams up with for several issues is
Vixen. Vixen can shift to using animal powers through the use of her “totem.” Vixen can pull
strength, speed, or agility from any animal in her proximity. B’wana Beast, in contrast, pulls his
strength from directly interfering with animals. He forges together multiple animals so that they
can aid him during fights. He also has an artificial source of strength and increased stamina.
Around his neck is an elixir that grants his his super-human strength, and on his head is a helmet
that relays his thoughts to the animals. When viewed along with Vixen and Animal Man, B’wana
Beast is rather alien in the way he gains his powers. Yet all three are still more capable of
performing a task than the animals that they take their powers from. It is this combination of
animal and human that allows them to be seen as something more than either. Through the use of
these tools that were handed to them, Animal Man, Vixen, and B’wana Beast easily outclass both
human and non-human animals. This leads me to Heidegger’s notion of “hand,” which Derrida

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8 It is shown later in the series that Animal Man, B’wana Beast, and Vixen all share a base source of their power. The source comes from two otherworldly beings that had created B’wana Beast’s helmet and elixir, Vixen’s totem, and Animal Man’s physical existence at different points in time.
pick up on and claims that it is beyond the scope of just the treatment of tools within the grasp of humanity.

No, the hand of man, this signifies that we are no longer dealing with prehensile organs or instrumentalizable members that some hands are. Apes have prehensile organs that resemble hands, the man of the typewriter and of technics in general uses two hands. (Derrida GII 182)

The hand, in my view, is the ability to conceive the world in its entirety, to devise tools, and to see tools as such. The hand that humanity has, according to Heidegger is the scope necessary to provide insight on the proper usage of tools and develop a greater focus of work. The animal may have certain abilities—like the capability to fly—but only retains that ability for its natural purposes: transportation, evasion. However, beings such as Animal Man can acquire an ability to fly and use it to perform a stunt for an audience’s amusement or to strike fear into a villain. Animal Man in particular sees his powers as tools that are both internal and external to his person. Both Vixen and B’wana Beast actually use tools to steal animal abilities.

In contrast to this trio, the Dolphin has powers that are quite limited when viewed along the likes of Animal Man and Vixen. Dolphin is only capable of performing feats underwater. She has the ability to breathe underwater, and the standard hero fare of super-human strength. Dolphin is shown to have more freedom in her life than any of the other figures, as she manages to disappear upon the end of the issue. Though Dolphin is lacking the variety of powers held by the other heroes, she still is more capable of holding her own than the animals which share her abilities. And yet, when placed beside Animal Man, her powers seem to be a second nature to her, rather than something forged to be beneficial. Like the hand of Heidegger’s ape, she is incapable of developing her power into greater tools. The Dolphin does not attempt to further test her abilities. She does not seem to understand what capabilities she may hold, and how she may use them creatively. Animal Man, on the other hand, has honed his powers to benefit him to their maximum potential. His powers are used not only to influence humanity, but to preserve the lives of animals. These quests for influence and preservation, while being characteristics found in many super heroes and villains (influencing others to gain control, preserving the lives of species they are tied to)—they are also strong characteristics of animal-rights activists. These
characteristics cause Animal Man to fit neatly into Morrison’s animal rights activism. His convictions to do the right thing propel Animal Man forward, both as a human character and as a super hero.

However, there are occurrences where Animal Man is shown to lose the ability to properly manifest his powers into that which is beneficial to him. While the powers are indeed a tool in his hands, there is the lack of understanding behind the properties of his powers that keep him from fully developing the abilities until later on. When he is without a way to fully harness the powers the way that he had grown comfortable with, Animal Man ends up thinking himself as being practically without powers, which for him is a fate worse than being a normal human. The tools no longer at his disposal—to a controllable degree—Animal Man finds himself unable to help those in trouble, and unable to help himself against what could be considered animal instincts.

Furthermore, it is not only the heroes of the series which have their powers given to them through the devices and tools. The villains that Animal Man must face vary to a large degree, though there are a few that pull their strength from items. A character known as Tabu plays a fairly small role in the process of Animal Man’s growth, yet shows the actions taken by those who lose their tools. Tabu’s super powers take the form of various masks which allow her to gain the strength and abilities of the animals depicted—similar to the powers of Animal Man. However, she cannot manifest her powers at will, and must physically change masks in order to harness the power. While fighting against Tabu and her employer, Animal Man and Vixen destroy the set of Tabu’s masks, leaving her with only the power of the one she was wearing. Although Tabu retained that particular set of abilities tied to the remaining mask, she was unable to further experience the wide range of strengths and skills that had belonged to her. It is interesting to note that as she lost her tools, her appearance in Animal Man became more animalistic in posture and the brutality of attacks was obvious. Much like Animal Man, she finds herself frustrated at the lack of powers once possessed, which is shown through the way she fights.

Psycho Pirate is another minor villain in the comics that Animal Man must face. As with the other villains and heroes, he holds particular tools in the form of super human powers. Unlike those who derive their powers from the abilities of animals, Psycho-Pirate’s abilities manifest in the form of seeing into other dimensions, and acting as a gate between worlds. Psycho-Pirate
does not lose his powers, but is instead overcome by the power and releases hundreds of lost worlds into a single space. While the others lose their powers and show feelings of frustration towards it, Psycho-Pirate loses control of his powers and accepts his loss in a manner that seems to be that of relief.

The loss of power, the abandonment of their tools, or the progression of their abilities to a point which can not be contained are all aspects that must be faced by the super-human characters alone. The work put into mastering their powers is that which comes naturally to animals (excluding the powers of Psycho-Pirate). There seems to be a connection of super human powers being more than what the human body is capable of containing properly. Morrison may be indeed criticizing human beings’ reliance on tools and how they position them above animals.

I would like once again to stress the way discourse on work as such is used as a distinguishing factor that elevates humans over animals. Nicola Masciandaro views the subject of work as the line which divides humanity from non-human animals. Using Karl Marx’s definition of work, Masciandaro examines the difference between man’s work and the work of the animal.

Work’s inherent tension is an aspect of the ambivalence of the human, in the sense that work expresses the simultaneous debility and mastery of human nature. Where the animal appears to embody an identity of being and function, work brings into relief the distinction between being and function, self and role, within human nature. (Masciandaro 2)

Masciandaro continues by speaking of imagined structures built by architects. Man is capable of creating first in his mind, and then creating in reality. Here the division comes two-fold. First, human beings have the ability to build off of their ideas, which can be transformed before work begins. Animals are seen to be devoid of this ability, lacking the comprehensive skills of humanity. Secondly, humanity is typically shown to control other beings in order to perform work, such as the use of draft horses or the hiring of employees. There are some examples of animals which enslave and trap other creatures – for instance, certain species of ants herd aphids in order to force production of honeydew. Although this is an occurrence outside of humanity, a major association of the work-animal/controller belongs to humans and their use of animals. This is problematic, due to the way Masciandaro later describes work as bringing humanity closer to
the animal. Instead of separating humanity fully from animals, work can place humanity in a position where it is being used similarly to a non-human animal, hence the phrase “worked like a dog.” Though there is this separation between the work of human and the work of non-human, the boundary is fluid and based on a hierarchy of power. This use of animals for work relates to the way that several non-human animals are treated in *Animal Man*.

Early into *Animal Man*, the audience is introduced to STAR Labs, which uses animals for medical and scientific testing. In later issues, Animal Man joins a small collection of Eco-terrorists with the objective of freeing animals from testing facilities. It is here that he comes across a number of apes who have had their eyes sealed. This example of animal testing in *Animal Man*, though presented with brutality, was based on the 1985 event when the Animal Liberation Front\(^9\) entered the University of California, Riverside to release animals tested there from captivity. While inside, they located a young macaque monkey named Britches, who had had his eyes sewn shut for sensory deprivation study.\(^10\) While this is jarring, it is still more believable to imagine a monkey undergoing this treatment instead of, perhaps, a human child. It is clear from this example that the reverse is impossible. An animal could not occupy such space and have such a position and do such “work” on human beings. Not even the intelligent Djuba can do it. Again, what is evident is that Morrison seems to follow the kind of discourse presented by someone like Heidegger while at the same time attempting a critique of humanity’s distinctness. In the final analysis, Morrison is not so much blurring the boundaries between humans and animals as much as he is mainly using the popular comic-book medium to present his political ideology.

**Intelligence vs. Instinct**

Morrison argued, “If you believe in evolution, there’s really no clear dividing point between us and animals. Even when you look at languages, and brain size relative to the size of the organism, there aren’t as many clear distinctions as most people think or would like to think” (Cherry 460). A key division in the man/animal binary is the nature of the human intelligence when pitted against that of the animal’s instinct. The commonly held view of animals as beings

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\(^9\) The Animal Liberation Front is an organization that, occasionally through illegal means, removes animals from both laboratories and farms so that they can be cared for in safe houses and animal sanctuaries.

\(^{10}\) A film was released by PETA, called “The Story of Britches” which shows footage of the ALF’s entering of the University of California, Riverside.
without intelligence, only capable of acting on their instincts. Animals in captivity seem capable of learning tricks or following instructions. For instance, the actions of Pavlov’s dogs link less to intelligence and more to conditioning of the subject. The subject of intelligence among animals is highly debated, yet it is general (and non-scientific) consensus that humans are known to be the holders of intelligence while non-humans progress only to survive (unless of course they are draft animals or farmed animals, which in that case they progress only to allow humans to survive).

In the first few issues of Animal Man, the audience is introduced to an ape named Djuba, the companion of B’wana Beast. She is looked down upon by the researchers at the fictional Star Laboratories: “But the ape was most definitely real ... and vulnerable. It was a fascinating specimen. Tests revealed a much greater area of uncommitted cortex in the animal’s brain than was normal. It was even so friendly and intelligent that some of our staff began to refer to it as ‘the missing link.’” (Morrison Issue 3, page 18). Djuba is seen as something more than an animal, which is why she is held with such high regard by otherwise callous researchers. The uncanny intelligence she displays is that which heightens Djuba’s priority to the researchers, not for the growth that can be experienced between both worlds of human and non-human, but to benefit the researchers alone. Djuba, though shown to be highly intelligent—she formerly lived alongside B’wana Beast and worked as a side-kick in his comics—does not get classified as an animal.

Instead, she is likened to the “missing link,” a step between man and animal. She is in some sense resembling Agamben’s bandit. Her intelligence brings her above the status of an animal, yet she is treated like something below a human. The “missing link” is a non-scientific term of a transitional fossil in man’s evolution from animal, and yet upon their discovery of this link in Djuba, the researchers focus on creating a new viral disease with Djuba as the host. Djuba’s intelligence is wasted on man’s greed; it is wasted on man’s urge to control and influence rather than to understand. Thus, this interaction of Djuba with the researchers problematizes the view of man being of highest intelligence when compared to all other creatures. For if man was to hold intelligence, then would man not want to see what could be learned through interaction with and study of Djuba herself, rather than the way an anthrax strain affected her body? However cynical it may seem, this scenario relates Morrison’s view of how man in reality may react to such a find. Like in the cases of work and language, Morrison explores the more philosophical issues relating to the divisions between humans and animals, but
ultimately it is his animal rights agenda that comes across as the main point of the narrative.

The Coyote is an enigmatic creature that arrives during Issue #5 “The Coyote Gospel.” The Coyote is a cartoon animal previously known as Crafty who was given a human form by its creator. Before the issue starts, Crafty was a simple cartoon coyote that lived in a world similar to the animated shorts created by The Warner Brothers studio. The world he lived in was full of needless violence, and Crafty set out to end the violence by meeting with his creator. The creator agreed to end the violence in that world if Crafty was willing to sacrifice his life. Crafty was thus transformed into the Coyote and sent to the Earth as it appears in Animal Man. The Coyote seems to represent the base innocence of the animal like the bandit described by Agamben. Though not necessarily an antagonist to Animal Man, the Coyote brings doom with him wherever he travels.

When the Coyote is first encountered, it is by a trucker who has picked up a hitchhiker. The trucker and hitchhiker, Carrie, become friends while on the road, and inadvertently run over the human-like Coyote, killing it for the time being. The Coyote, nearly immortal, manages to rise from the incident, but a series of distressing events follow the nameless truck driver who suffered through the loss of his mother and best friend, and learned about Carrie’s death during a drug raid. He assumes that the Coyote is the Devil, and sets out to destroy it. The truck driver first shoots the Coyote, causing it to fall into a canyon similar to the actions of the Warner Brothers’ character Wile. E. Coyote. Following the fall, a boulder is rolled onto the Coyote, crushing it in a horrific manner. The Coyote suffers through the pain of the ordeal, but then he manages to reconstruct his body. The Coyote trips an explosive set by the truck driver, causing more agony for the man, as he is caught in the blast radius. Animal Man arrives on the scene, having been driven to that location by both instinct and the actions of the animals. Rather than attempting to plot a course or further study the behaviors of the non-humans that he interacts with, Animal Man simply follows his “gut feelings” and the feelings projected onto him by the animals. There is a brief period where he questions these occurrences, but he places his trust in what could only be considered his instincts. The trust in his instincts at this point is marked by how there is no logical reason for Animal Man to follow the feeling he has. He is simply moving forward with no plan. In a way, instincts appear to be forms of intelligence inherent in different creatures and working without conscious thought or deliberation.

The Coyote delivers a message to Animal Man in the form of a parchment, detailing the cruel world he had lived in and the sacrifices he had made in order to bring peace. Animal Man is
unable to decipher the writing, and the Coyote is quickly shot by the truck driver. The truck
driver, using a bullet that was originally a silver cross, manages to finally kill the Coyote, and in
his mind, save the world from “the Devil.” The way the truck driver views the Coyote is similar
to the mythology of the werewolf which can only be stopped by a silver bullet. Much like the
chimerical human-animal formations created by B’wana Beast, the Coyote is a mixture of human
and animal form. However, he does not have the same frame of mind as the humans that B’wana
Beast fuses with the rat and cockroach. Instead, the Coyote gives off an air of innocence, and
purposefully lives his life of suffering. Crafty chose to become this amalgamation of man and
d椰ote in order to provide a better world for his people, while the men used by B’wana Beast
were merely tools to further the Beast’s goals. Though the Coyote cannot speak to Animal Man
or others directly, and prefers to live his life on Earth without violence, he is still seen as a threat
to the truck driver, simply due to the incidents that followed their first encounter. The truck driver
never attempts to reason with the Coyote, and treats him in a manner that follows Agamben’s
definition of the bandit.

The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without
any relation to law and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage
between animal and man, physis and nomos, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit
is the life of the loup garou, the werewolf, who is precisely neither man nor beast, and
who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither. (Agamben 105)

When Agamben inspects the medieval law surrounding the bandit, he finds that those banned
from the city are seen as already being dead. This allowed any member of that city to strike out
against the bandit, as they were “permitted to kill without committing homicide” (Agamben 104).
The Coyote, to the truck driver, is not an innocent animal, nor is it a man who can be reasoned
with. Instead, it is the werewolf—or in the truck driver’s words, the Devil—a force which must
be destroyed. Like Agamben’s bandit, he has already been marked as dead. Within the message
that the Coyote carries, the Gospel of Crafty, there is a story of a creature that strives to redeem
his world from the strife it faces, and eventually overthrow the callous cartoonist-God that sits in
their version of Heaven. Before any of these desires can be understood or any of his suffering can
be acknowledged, the Coyote is killed by the silver bullet. His death mimics Christian
symbolism, as the Coyote falls to the center of the crossroads, arms splayed. Though the Coyote seems to mimic the figure of Christ throughout the issue through his suffering for the good of all, his resurrection, his ascension, and his death at a cross, the most captivating moment for the audience is when the Coyote sheds tears.

The Coyote, while dying, is unable to speak to Animal Man, and instead weeps, possibly out of pity for his fellow cartoon characters. This shows that while the man of the story was interested only in delivering what he thought was justice, the animal was innocent of any crime. Unlike the other antagonistic forces in the series, the events that unfold in the truck driver’s life are never disclosed as being correlated to the Coyote. There is no proven relationship between the incidents that take the lives of the trucker’s friends and family and the encounter that happened at the beginning of the issue. The Coyote is merely a scapegoat (in the truest sense of the word, as the truck driver believes his death will justify the deaths of his friends and appease God) and his human-animal exterior allows the truck driver to see the Coyote as neither part. At the end, both the Coyote and the truck driver die, leaving Animal Man essentially clueless as to his part in all of this. Animal Man did not attempt to see the Coyote as neither man nor animal, but instead accepted him as he was. The Coyote in this instance reflected empathy and intellect, which is normally attributed to humanity. He is calm, peaceful, and acting through a set plan of logic. He is not worried about his safety for his only concern is the objective he must reach. Much like Animal Man’s work as a hero, the Coyote holds with him his own sense of work. The Coyote must bear the pain and torment of death, isolation, and unending failure. However, he proceeds through his life-death-rebirth cycle without cessation.

The truck driver, however, acts solely on his instincts. Without proof of what the Coyote is or how his life had become the way it was, the truck driver insisted that his gut instincts were correct and guiding him truly. The driver is working in a sense that is beyond that of a normal man: he shows the ability to muscle through an explosion that would seemingly incapacitate a human. Although he is similar to the Coyote in his sense of work—his desire to kill the Coyote and the Coyote’s desire to deliver his message—there is a disparity between the two and how they go about their tasks. The truck driver, though seemingly using intelligence through his careful planning of the explosives and melting of a silver cross into a special bullet only further punctuates one of the emotions that is typically tied to the concept of instincts: fear of the unknown. This is quite problematic, generalizing emotions as being tied to instincts.
What is interesting here is that Animal Man is practically deprived of his intelligence and reasoning and it is his instinct that takes him to the place where he can bear witness to the even in which he will not play a greater part. His function as a superhero is suspended and he is more of an observer. This way Morrison seems to suggest that instinct may be a higher form of intelligence because this particular instinct brought him to witness something that is supposed to be akin the inception of a religion such as Christianity. To put it in even more religious terms, Animal Man was chosen as the witness of this symbolic event.

Intelligence is typically linked to ethics. Humans have the capability to collect knowledge, so they must also have a grasp over quandaries such as morals. The strong emotional ties between the character of Red Mask and his dog Roy, for instance, show one of the overlying themes that was always present in Morrison’s series, the idea that animals all have rights and may possibly show emotion and intellectual capabilities much like those of humans. With Roy, though he was only in one page, the reader is able to gleam this connection that men and dogs share. Much like the mourning face of Djuba, Roy had a face of his own, one that conveyed emotion with the capability of a human face.

Yet, this incorporation of Roy into the story is problematic, for Red Mask has potentially personified his old companion, supplanting the feelings of guilt that he had with what he saw in his dog’s eyes. Unlike Djuba or the dolphin, Morrison has not allowed the reader into the mind of Roy. The reader is only capable of seeing what Red Mask saw. Yet, with this problematic scene, there is the inclusion of personhood upon Roy. He is treated as near equal to Red Mask, and is a leading factor to the guilt and pain experienced by the aging villain. Furthermore, this could simply be a part of the surprising hierarchy that dogs hold over other non-human animals when positioned near humanity. Nerissa Russell, while examining the man/animal boundary as presented in literature, elucidates the position that the dog occupies in the human world.

Dogs frequently inhabit a liminal space: they are animals but live with humans, domestic but not (or only rarely) livestock (Gottlieb 1986; Sharp 1976). Anomalous creatures and liminal zones are both troubling and productive, with the potential to mediate transformations from one state to another. (Russell 11)

Russell continues by exemplifying the transformations of the dog. The dog can be seen as either a
pariah and unclean to eat or as a holy creature, both due to its omnivorous diets. It is potentially this cross-transformation of holy/unclean that allows dogs to be at the side of humans and considered “man’s best friend.” This inclusion of Roy signifies the problems of holding humans as being both intelligence and emotion driven while non-human animals are seen as only being instinctual beings. This method of thinking disregards any inkling of emotion that a non-human may hold, although there are still problems with how Morrison creates spaces for the animals.

This use of animals’ perceived emotions is problematic, when dealing with the ways that Heidegger believes humans personify animals. When questioning the similarity of human sight to the sight of animals, Heidegger comes across a similar problem found when trying to apply human suffering to animal emotions:

Unawares we have found ourselves talking of human beings where it is indeed questionable whether what we call human seeing is the same as animal seeing. Seeing and seeing are not the same thing, although human beings and animals both possess eyes and even the anatomical structure of the eye is alike in both cases. (Heidegger 219)

The supposed animal emotions cannot be thought of as being the exact same as those felt by human beings. However, there is a possibility that the animals feel the same range of emotions that can be felt by humans. The closest links to the animal world are apes, which display a wide range of emotion and facial expressions. As mentioned previously, apes are seemingly capable of understanding basic forms of our language, along with their emotion postures and facial expressions. I believe that emotions are an important part of showing the problem with the instinct/intelligence binary. Emotions, depending on how they’re viewed can rest on either—and both—sides of the human-animal boundary.

In terms of Animal Man, and his relationship to the intelligence/instinct/emotion quandry, he is placed into many struggles where he loses the intellect attributed to humans and becomes reliant on his anger and instincts. In one case, he absorbs the body language capabilities of chimpanzees and is overwhelmed by his instinctual urges and sexual attraction to the character Vixen, as briefly mentioned before. These instinctual urges seem to be linked more to his lack of world rather than the subconscious thoughts brewing within him at that point.

In another portion of the series, and a section that problematizes the concept of animal
instincts, Animal Man must kill a human known as Lennox, and does so as an act of pure revenge. The phrase “an animal” is repeated, as Animal Man forces himself to lose the human side of his being. This seems to indicate that Animal Man believes that the animal is more dangerous and callous than the man. This contradicts Morrison’s discourse which seeks to elevate animals in human eyes within the series. The animals have always been shown as kind and thoughtful, empathetic creatures. Meanwhile, man—and to an extent non-human humanoids—has been the enemy of the natural world. It makes sense within the context, Animal Man trying to keep from experiencing his humanity while torturing a man, but the actions of mankind have been mostly irredeemable. The only creatures shown to be capable of cruelty within the series have been humans, making this section come off as ironic. In earlier instances, Animal Man has already embraced his animal side, and the calm, understanding nature that goes with it. It’s only after he kills Lennox that Animal Man realizes the horrible things he’s done in the name of revenge. It is here that his true “animal side” comes out, as he rocks back and forth, distressed and saddened.

Animal Man moves so drastically between instinct and intelligence that the two seem to be attributes held by both animals and humans.

**Being Poor-In-World**

There is a scale proposed by Heidegger that accounts for the degrees in which a figure can interact with the world and shape it to be that which is beneficial. Man is capable of creating and interacting with the world as he pleases, making him rich-in-world. Man can sense that there are other beings in the environment and is not driven solely on impulse. Meanwhile the animal is poor-in-world. An animal is incapable of developing the world to suit its needs, at least, not to the extent of man. Animals have no agency in the sense of humans, for while they have the ability to make independent choices, they cannot—on a grander scale—voice their opinions. Furthermore, animals lack the sense of other beings as beings. They are driven by desires and instinctual urges. In Heidegger’s theory, the only things that lack world entirely are inanimate objects which cannot even observe the world. Those objects merely take place as a part of the environment. There are some problems with this discourse, as not all men are equally capable of controlling the world around them. Through acts of social injustice, slavery, imprisonment, and hospitalization, men can seemingly no longer be rich-in-world. There is a lack of sense, a lack of power, and a lack of
the ability to change the “world.”

In the series, Beast and Animal Man must travel to Cape Town, in the midst of apartheid. Dominic, a black African man is being held in a prison cell by Officer Van de Voort. This action is to incite a riot and flush out a spiritual and political leader of the black community. Dominic is beaten, isolated, and pushed into a space where he is poor-in-world, as he is considered less in worth than a human. Dominic, much like Agamben’s bandit, has been removed from the human society, yet his position is physically within the limits of civilization. Laura Hudson states that such humans, stripped of their basic rights are held in “spaces of exception” (Hudson, 1664). These spaces are a part of the political system of humanity, holding people who are not treated as human.

Thus, spaces of exception have proliferated within the modern world, from Guantanamo Bay, to refugee camps, to the hospital beds of the “overcomatose”, to the expanding prison system. Within these spaces, human beings are stripped of citizenship, denied a political voice, and subjected absolutely to political decisions in which they have no rights or recourse: they are reduced to the animal. (Hudson, 1664)

Rather than being executed outright, Dominic is humiliated, and his rights are forcibly removed. Van de Voort regales Dominic with the legend of the unicorn, detailing how the men within the tale captured the unicorn by the use of a virgin maiden. Baited by its purity, the unicorn would lower its guard, allowing the men to capture and slaughter it. Dominic is analogous to the legend’s maiden; he is to be sacrificed for Archbishop Mogatusi, the political and spiritual leader that Van de Voort wishes to assassinate. Dominic is freed through the efforts of Animal Man and B’wana Beast, and Van de Voort escapes. Moreover, Dominic is granted the powers of B’wana Beast, changing the title to Freedom Beast. This transition of super-human powers gives Dominic the power that he lacked in society, raising him up to a position of superiority. His powers as Freedom Beast grant him the ability to not only seek revenge on Van de Voort, but establish his place as a man free from the white Afrikaner police. Beyond that, it allowed him to inspire fellow

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11 Spaces of Exception, as explained by Hudson, are based on Agamben’s political theory, wherein “the political realm was clearly demarcated by geographical borders” (Hudson 1663). With such borders, the exile of bandits was only a physical possibility. Today, however, political realm has moved beyond normal geographic borders, and the bandit may live within the physical confines yet still remain on the outskirts of the political realm.
men who had their rights removed. His evolution to a super powered individual brought with it a change in the way he was able to interact with the world.

For a few issues, Animal Man is not in control of his powers, or where they come from for the most part. At this point in the series, he simply sends a signal out and tries to gather an ability from whatever exists, hoping that it won’t lead him astray. Much like Heidegger’s animal, Animal Man is poor-in-world, in some sense. Rather than being unable to see what his environment allows, he is deprived of it. His dearth of readily available powers are built on this deprivation. As Heidegger explains,

Yet even here it is not merely a case of comparing what is less at one moment with what is more at another. In this context ‘poor’ implies having a lack or insufficiency. Here too poverty represents a lacking or absence of something which could be present and generally ought to be present. (Heidegger 195)

Animal Man is still able to draw forth the same variety of powers as before, but is simply incapable of filtering the powers that may be useful. He is unable to foresee the consequences of his actions as such, which is reflected and played on in a different manner. While in these issues his dearth of foresight is only attached to the animal powers that he receives, it becomes a major development later. His focus rests primarily on his own powers, and through that, he begins to question his own state of being.

Animal Man does not fully realize that he is in a state of being poor-in-world. In this sense, he is similar to non-humans which also lack the agency needed to see that they are poor-in-world. Animal Man has no control of his abilities. Non-humans have no control over the way the human world—and their place within it—is governed. Seemingly, this relates back to the concepts of language, and how it is seen as a barrier between man and animal. This lack of world coincides with the notion of work. Humans can create the tools necessary to shape their world and thus have no absence of that which could be present. Animals are poor-in-world for they do not—and that is also to say cannot—understand the limitations that are put upon them.

Within the series, the humans are continuously seen as problematic figures, but also

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12 It should be noted that the character Freedom Beast continued existing up until 2009 and continued to fight for human rights.
unaware of the hierarchy they hold over animals. A majority of the humans are seen as generally unaffected by the events that endanger animals, yet they do not always view animals with malice. Likewise, they have made the problem of reducing animals into something amorphous, meaningless, similarly to the use of the word animal to refer to all non-human creatures. Whether in laboratories or in the food industry, as Derrida suggests, there is an overuse of animals as products to the point that one cannot easily or at all separate the animal from the item produced by it or from it.

This has occurred by means of farming and regimentalization at a demographic level unknown in the past, by means of genetic experimentation, the industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat, artificial insemination on a massive scale, more and more audacious manipulations of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and over-reactive reproduction of meat for consumption, but also of all sorts of other end products, and all of that in the service of a certain being and the putative human well-being of man. (Derrida ATTIA 25)

Here, humanity has desensitized itself to the deaths of animals in order to further the comfort and happiness of humans in Morrison’s Animal Man. This desensitization to the deaths of animals seems to interconnect with desensitization to the rest of the human population. Human characters openly attack one another, which is of course the case in the real world, but is made more dramatic in the comics. Humans will kill each other and torture animals to retain their status.

Aside from Animal Man and the antagonistic forces he must face, the reader is introduced to a wide variety of animals who, like Djuba, provide the readers with a sense of the wholly animal. This inclusion of the animal allows for the reader to view non-humans in regards to humanity. The animals in Animal Man are most often shown as either victims of humanity’s greed or companions to humans. There is never any inclusion of animals which are undesirable to the reader—instead only humans within the comic see the animals as such.\footnote{In a study held by Claudine Burton-Jeangros and Annik Dubied Losa, it was discovered that the majority of animals viewed in Swiss media were those who “presented a threat to humans” (Burton-Jeangros 343). Non-human creatures, in this particular media study, are typically seen as a source of fear or a source of entertainment, not companions nor simply other creatures capable of “being.” 36% of the animals viewed in Swiss media during this study were designated as Undesirable Animals. 32% were ‘Shown Animals’—those which are exhibited for entertainment purposes, health purposes, or symbols of higher concepts. Only 5% of the animals in Swiss media are pictured as simply being.}
Morrison’s use of animals within *Animal Man* deflects the focus of the feared or entertaining animal, and positions the audience to see animals that are merely “being” or are in some ways more powerful than humans. This is ironic when contrasted against the fact that the animals in the comic are not seen as miraculous as those who are super-human. Yet, as mentioned earlier, it is merely because those characters can wield the power of animals that they are even considered super-human. Furthering the irony is the way that the animals that do retain some sense of power remain poor-in-world. Though they may have something akin to super-human powers, as is the case with Coyote, they are still limited in what they can do to shape the world. For instance, the Coyote cannot interact with humans in a clear and direct manner. Once again, there is a sliding in Morrison’s narrative between his overt political agenda and his dramatization of his more philosophical views of animals.

**Conclusion**

This thesis has been centered on the way Grant Morrison uses the popular comic book character Animal Man to show both how he views human/animal relation and offer more political ideologies on animal rights and the treatment of animals in his contemporary society. Non-human animals are creatures whose definition is dependent on the existence of humanity, despite the fact that humans are, scientifically speaking, animals. Through the crude usage of the word “animal” the entirety of non-human creatures have been lumped into a single mass, wherein they suffer the hegemony of man. Humanity is incapable of seeing itself as anything other than “not-animal” and equally incapable of seeing all animals as beings on the same level of existence.

In Animal Man, Morrison created a character that worries the boundary between man and animal. Morrison also created a space where non-human characters are given a sense of voice on par to their human counterparts. *Animal Man* transposes the concepts of instincts and intelligence, and how they relate to the human/animal binary. The array of human and non-human characters broke the dichotomy of man/animal binaries by the inclusion of a fair representation of both.

In the final analysis, I find that the comics identify a problem which the author seems to want to solve within the series. What transpires from my close readings is that the series are 

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were seen as Companion Animals—those who have emotional ties to humans.
permeated with two sets of arguments. On the one hand, there is Morrison’s explicitly stated political ideology and his engagement with the animal rights movement, which comes across both in the dramatizations of maltreatment of animals and when he inserts himself as a character in order to lecture the readers. On the other hand, the books seem concerned with the particular philosophical views of what constitutes humans and animals and what are seemingly unbridgeable differences. While this latter issue was my main concern, to show Morrison’s particular take on man/animal binary, I found that this issue was inseparable from Morrison’s ideological investment, especially because the two could be said to clash in most instances. At the same time as he clearly supports animal rights and critiques maltreatment of animals, Morrison’s dramatizations of the particular characteristics that distinguish humans from animals—language, work, intelligence, being rich-in-world—seem to actually maintain the already established boundaries. While Morrison seems in agreement with someone like Heidegger in his stance against human treatment of animals, the way Morrison describes work, intelligence, language, and being-in-world, seems to play into the discourses that have been used to place humans above animals and justify harsh treatments. Morrison speaks against seeing at animals as creatures without language and yet in the series language is used to point out higher intelligence and evoke a certain kind of empathy with the creatures that fall between the categories. It appears that Morrison’s work with Animal Man, though progressive and groundbreaking in many ways within this popular fictional genre, inherited some of the problems already in place from the earlier incarnations of the character, and despite his attempts to revolutionize the use of genre for his ideological purposes, he also partly failed to break out of already established discourses on the perception of human/animal relations.
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