Animals in Greek and Roman Religion and Myth
Animals in Greek and Roman Religion and Myth

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CHAPTER THREE

VOX NATURAE:
THE MYTH OF ANIMAL NATURE
IN THE LATE ROMAN REPUBLIC

FABIO TUTRONE

1. Signifying mirrors. Animals, sources, and conceptual transformations

In a famous passage of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul describes the imperfect and obscure character of human knowledge, while envisaging the admirable clarity of divine eschatological realities. As Paul puts it, ‘now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully’.¹ Of course, the Christian author’s mystic discourse is intended to oppose present and future, material world and metaphysical truths, in a peculiarly spiritual sense which has nothing in common with the discussions of Classical scholars. Nevertheless, such a resolute incitement to a bipartite consideration of things, interpreting the evidence at our disposal as a puzzling, second-rate reflection of the real world, should not sound unfamiliar to philologists. As a typically post-Romantic (and post-positivist) discipline, Classical Philology has tended to construct its own mystic view of history.² In this view, Latin authors and the whole heritage of Roman philosophical texts have frequently figured as a sort of deforming mirrors, that is to say, as inaccurate and partial reproductions of Greek thought. While Greece has traditionally been considered the lost heaven of ancient

¹ 1 Corinthians 13.12.
philosophy, the original dimension one should always try to rescue, the works of Roman thinkers have basically been used as sources—Quellen, in the meaningful vocabulary of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Altertumswissenschaft.3

As Carlos Lévy pointed out, even in our day “the suspicion remains that the Roman philosopher was a philosophizing Roman, namely someone who saw philosophy as an object and did not define it as a subject. The Roman philosopher may well maintain that there is nothing more important in his life than philosophy, but the fact that he was a consul, the advisor of a prince, or an emperor himself, seems to belie such a statement”4. Like other contemporary scholars of ancient philosophy, Lévy has subjected Hermann Diels’ “phylogenetic” view of the doxographic tradition (and its on-going influence on academic research) to harsh criticism.5 He rightly remarked that the transmission of philosophical tenets, like that of rhetorical doctrines, undergoes a complex and, so to speak, multifocal elaboration.6 Thus, instead of going in search of one (irremediably lost) original source, one should strive to see the progressive manipulation of beliefs as “a continuous and plural process of creation” (“un processus de création continu et pluriel”).7

Remarkably, an analogous methodological perspective has been

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3 Moatti (1997) 20, has compared the proclivity of modern scholars to assume “systematic filiations” (as unrelated to the dynamics of acculturation) with the so-called “illusion of origins” perceptively described by Marc Bloch. Cf. Bloch (1952) 5-9: “le problème subsistera toujours de savoir pourquoi la transmission s’opéra à la date indiquée: ni plus tôt, ni plus tard. Une contagion suppose deux choses: des générations de microbes et, à l’instant où le mal prend, un “terrain”. Jamais, en un mot, un phénomène historique ne s’explique pleinement en dehors de l’étude de son moment”.

4 Lévy (1996a) 15.

5 I refer, of course, to the famous collection of Diels (1879). A fundamental revision of Diels’ approach—or, as they put it, “a partial farewell” to his method (106-9)—has been carried out by Mansfeld and Runia (1997), who call for a more careful consideration of contexts, genres, and individual authors in the analysis of doxographic accounts.

6 Lévy (1996b) 117 sharply observes that while scholars are not keen to imagine a continuous and linear tradition between Aristotle’s Rhetoric and Cicero’s De inventione, they are in the habit of applying a much more rigid paradigm to the field of philosophical knowledge. However, expressions of discontent concerning the canonical method of source-criticism are more and more common among Classical scholars. Not without a certain amount of regret, Mansfeld (1999) 14, notices that “Quellenforschung (or Quellenanalyse, Quellenkritik) enjoys a bad reputation today, especially among students of ancient philosophy”.

7 Lévy (1996b) 121-2.
adopted in the cultural-anthropological study of animal figures on the basis of Dan Sperber’s path-breaking contributions. In particular, Sperber’s book *La contagion des idées*\(^8\) has inspired a series of stimulating investigations on the ancient representation of animals and its symbolic background.\(^9\) The focal point of such investigations, of course, is not the identification of a supposedly linear tradition. On the contrary, a kind of *conceptual epidemiology* enables detection of permanent and varying features of each animal type, for it is precisely the adjustment of certain elements that denotes the peculiarity of writers, ages, and social milieus.\(^10\)

I believe that it is worth applying this original perspective to the comprehensive framework of Roman philosophy, accepting the fact that Cicero’s or Lucretius’ presentations are not mere simplifications (or distortions) of Greek sources, but highly relevant stages of a centuries-long transformation. Indeed, it seems that, once again, animals (and their critics) can offer a thought-provoking pattern for intellectual analysis.\(^11\)

Curiously, in the ancient tradition animals experience a similar condition to that of Latin philosophical texts, since they are frequently depicted as mirrors or voices of an underlying reality which is difficult to capture elsewhere. Such a reality, of course, can be either positive or negative, desirable or execrable, and hence animals appear at the same time as idealised and disgusting mirrors. By and large, the interpretation of such living reflections is controversial, for different writers and lines of thought tend to evoke the model of animal behaviour for different

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\(^8\) Sperber (1996).


\(^10\) Sperber (1985) 74-5 sees “causal explanations of cultural facts as necessarily embedded in a kind of epidemiology of representations”. When discussing differences and similarities between epidemiology *sensu proprio* and its analogical application to the field of human culture, Sperber purposely points to the prevalence of transformation processes in the dynamics of knowledge transmission: “epidemiology of diseases occasionally has to explain why some diseases are transformed in the process of transmission. Epidemiology of representations, on the contrary, has to explain why some representations remain relatively stable, i.e. why some representations become properly cultural”. Cf. also the wide-ranging treatment of Sperber (1996) 79-135.

\(^11\) As is well-known, in his influential study of primitive totemism, Lévi-Strauss (1962) claimed that animals are “good to think with” (“bons à penser”), opening the way to further researches on the symbolic construction of animals and its general theoretical significance (see, for instance, the reappraisal of Sperber [1975]). With regard to Classical scholarship, the heuristic potential of similar researches has been highlighted by Bettini (1998) 219-48, and Franco (2003b).
purposes. As a rule, however, when animals are raised to the rank of positive mirrors, they are presented as embodiments of Nature. The identification between animal life and natural values, zoological data and allegedly cosmic principles, has been rightly recognised by cultural anthropologists as a characteristic feature of the Western mentality. In particular, the traditional binary opposition between nature and culture (which, far from being “universal”, is embedded in the culture of the West) runs parallel with the argumentative contrast between man and animal, presuming a biological—if not ontological—gap between human and non-human beings. The history of Western thought has been shaped by the combination of primitivist and progressive views, alternately praising or denigrating animals as the quintessence of a “state of nature”.

From the long-term perspective of conceptual history, the period I shall be focusing on in the present paper—the so-called Late Republic—seems to be of special interest, since it is in these years that some of the most influential writings dealing with the problem of humanity and beastliness, anthropocentrism and animal nature, come out. The frequent recurrence of themes relating to the animal condition in different authors of this time—themes such as bestialisation, human identity, and sociability—can easily be connected to a shared cultural milieu. It is certainly no accident

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12 See Dierauer (1977) 194: “die Tiere als vox naturae—mit dieser Metapher ließ sich nicht bloss die Position der Epikureer, sondern ebenso die gewisser Sophisten sowie der Stoiker und vor allem der Kyniker wiedergeben. Unterschiedlich war nur die Art, wie man diese Stimme der Natur interpretierte, welchen Ausruf man daraus heraushörte”.

13 See Rivera (1999) and Descola (2005), though in this case, too, the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss has proven inspiring and groundbreaking (cf. e.g. Lévi-Strauss [1967] XVI). As Descola (2005) points out, even if the heritage of the Graeco-Roman world made a fundamental contribution to the development of the nature/culture dichotomy—it may suffice to mention the Roman opposition between ager and silva, cultivated land and wild space—the establishment of our current dichotomy is strongly indebted to modern age naturalism.

14 See the classical treatment of Lovejoy and Boas (1935).

15 Indeed, one should not forget that in the Middle Ages and the modern era Latin texts were among the main sources of philosophical knowledge. When Thomas Aquinas and Francis Bacon reshaped the Stoic concept of natural law, for instance, they basically drew on authors such as Cicero and Seneca. Here and elsewhere, I employ the term conceptual history with explicit reference to the interpretive approach primarily known as Begriffsgeschichte. For the purposes of Classical scholarship, special attention should be paid to Reinhart Koselleck’s view of historical temporality as a meta-physiological dimension inherently involving the presence and transformation of concepts: see now Koselleck (2002).
that in the age of civil wars, when traditional moral values and social models began to crumble, Roman writers felt the need to investigate the origins of human community, its salient features, and, by contrast, the notion of animality. Therefore, instead of dissecting the Latin texts at our disposal in search of their sources, we should rather adopt a systemic perspective allowing us to detect the intellectual exchanges occurring across the Greek and Roman worlds. Cicero and Philodemus are not self-conscious doxographers requiring ‘comparatist’ surveys after the style of Diels’ tables.\textsuperscript{16} They are part of a wide-ranging process of reception and conceptual rearrangement which gives new meaning to previous ideological traditions. Interestingly, one of the focal points of this process concerns the moral and cognitive status of animals as well as their role as mirrors of cosmic truths. To all appearances, the cultural and epistemological myth of animal nature—i.e. the typically Western idea that animals embody a perennial state of nature, as opposed to human society—receives important inputs from the first century BCE discussion on ethics and natural philosophy.

An exhaustive review of all the extant texts of the late Republic focusing on such matters is beyond the scope of this paper. It will suffice to take into account a series of representative passages from the words of Sallust, Cicero, and Lucretius to get a sense of the ideological relevance of zooanthropological issues\textsuperscript{17} to the cultural debate of this period.

\textbf{2. Sallust on cattle. A dualistic ethics for the crisis of the mos maiorum}

Since most of the remarks made so far evidently concern the field of philosophy and theoretical constructs, it may be useful to start our quick survey with an author who is not renowned for his philosophical interests: the purportedly “pragmatic” historian Gaius Sallustius Crispus.

\textsuperscript{16} See Diels (1879) 529-50. However, the fact that in our day Diels’ cladistic approach frequently draws methodological criticism should not obscure its evident merits as an epoch-making reappraisal of largely neglected (or misunderstood) traditions. Diels’ contribution to the development of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries \textit{Altertumswissenschaft} is properly highlighted in Calder and Mansfeld (1999).

\textsuperscript{17} In its proper scholarly meaning, zooanthropology is the study of man-animal relationships and their many-sided cultural significance. See the presentation provided by Marchesini and Tonutti (2007) 11-13, who include the stereotypic representation of animals as pre-cultural beings among the main concerns of zooanthropological inquiry.
At the beginning of his De coniuratione Catilinae, Sallust justifies the choice of literary otium—which he famously presents as an alternative form of civic engagement—on the basis of a morally compelling cosmological picture:

*Omnes homines, qui sese student praestare ceteris animalibus, summa ope niti decet, ne vitam silentio transeant veluti pecora, quae natura prona atque ventri oboedientia finxit. Sed nostra omnis vis in animo et corpore sita est: animi imperio, corporis servitio magis utimur; alterum nobis cum dis, alterum cum beluis commune est. Quo mihi rectius videtur ingeni quam virium opibus gloriam quaeque et, quoniam vita ipsa qua fruimur brevis est, memoriam nostri quam maxume longam efficere. (Cat. 1.1-3).*

It becomes all men, who desire to excel other animals, to strive, to the utmost of their power, not to pass through life in obscurity, like the beasts of the field, which nature has formed groveling and subservient to appetite. All our power is situated in the mind and in the body. Of the mind we rather employ the government; of the body, the service. The one is common to us with the gods; the other with the brutes. It appears to me, therefore, more reasonable to pursue glory by means of the intellect than of bodily strength, and, since the life which we enjoy is short, to make the remembrance of us as lasting as possible. (transl. Watson [1896]).

In order to revise (or, more precisely, to widen) the traditional Roman view of a free man’s political duties, the writer appeals to a long-lived anthropocentric conception of the cosmos. An active spiritual life, based on a virtuous use of reason and memory, is said to constitute the original vocation of man, whereas animals are depicted as irrational and greedy beings par excellence. Sallust’s intellectual purpose is to extend the Roman model of a worthy human life by moving the focus of such a model from the collective ideal of direct engagement to the more radical (and universal) notion of animus or rationality. In anthropological terms, one might say that our text proposes a shift to a different paradigm of anthropopoiesis: what makes men human and worthy of their status is not only the assumption of political responsibilities, but, more basically, a.

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18 The problem of anthropopoiesis is at the core of the present-day anthropological debate. By this term, scholars refer to the symbolic devices employed by human cultures in order to construct a standard pattern of humanness. See e.g. Affergan at al. (2003): “‘Renaissance’ de l’homme comme être social et fabrication de modèles et de fictions d’humanité, l’anthropopoïèse se saisit des figures de l’humain qui, constitutives du fait de civilisation, traversent les cultures et informent les démarches de l’anthropologie”. Cf. also Allovio and Favole (1996), and Calame and Kilani (1999).
Commentators usually recall the vaguely Platonic character of Sallust’s proemial statements. And there is no doubt that Plato’s ethically significant portrayal of prone animals in the Republic exerted a profound influence on this and other classical descriptions. However, one should not undervalue the impact of Stoic models, since, as the case of Cicero will show, Stoic anthropocentrism played a very important role in the late Republican discussion on animal and human paradigms (as well as in the development of Roman philosophical anthropology as a whole). In particular, the idea that, unlike beasts, men and gods share the gift of reason—so that the animus functions as a hierarchic cosmological criterion—seems to reflect a crucial Stoic tenet. In the conceptual repertory of first-century Roman writers, however, long-lived Platonic stereotypes and widespread Stoic principles tended to merge. Above all, as mentioned earlier, our main efforts should not be directed at the identification of single sources, but at a careful recognition of the author’s ideological aims, seen in their broader cultural context. Indeed, Sallust’s reception of previous theoretical patterns is also shaped by traditional common-sense beliefs. The writer was perfectly aware that in his readers’ imagery—even in the imagery of those who had not read Plato, but simply

21 On the Stoics’ reason-based cosmology and its anthropocentric structure see now Wildberger (2006), esp. 1.205-75. As is well-known, the pre-eminence of animus and intellectual activities over the corporeal dimension is stressed in the proem of the Bellum Iugurthinum (1-2) as well. In the past, several scholars indeed suggested that Sallust’s historiographic ideology was influenced by Stoicism, or even by Posidonius (cf. e.g. Pantzerhelm and Thomas [1936] and Altheim [1956]), thus engaging in controversy with the supporters of a Platonising interpretation (see the overview provided by Colish [1985] 292-8). Similar conflictual reconstructions clearly reflect the above-mentioned approach of Quellenforschung, and La Penna (1968) 36, is certainly right in claiming that “quando si tratta di concetti così generici e diffusi, la ricerca di fonti precise diventa impossibile ed inutile”—though La Penna himself does not refrain from making his own suggestions concerning Sallust’s sources. Besides the considerable impact of the Roman milieu (to which I shall now refer), one should also bear in mind the ascendancy of proterptic treatises and their largely shared arguments, since, independently of specific philosophical orientations, such treatises often resorted to a rhetorical contrast between man’s rational vocation and animal bodiliness: see La Penna (1968) 21-3, while Wagner (1910) and Bignone (1950) 221-3, go too far in seeing, respectively, Posidonius and Aristotle (qua authors of a Protrepticus) as the main sources of Sallust’s proems.
lived in an agro-pastoral society like Rome—animals appeared as morally and cognitively inferior beings. He deliberately exploited such a commonsense association in order to support his dualistic and moralistic conception of life: a conception of primary importance to Sallust’s discourse on the late Republican crisis and its fundamental causes.\[22\]

In more general terms, the symbolic opposition between animal and human status (that is to say, between animal and human nature, for man’s physiological vocation is said to be culture, culminating in the practice of ethical virtues) underpins all of Sallust’s works. The moral and political crisis of Rome is depicted by the Latin historian as a form of collective bestialisation, a general repudiation of the use of reason for the sake of eagerness and violence. In the famous picture of chapter 5, Catilina’s animus is openly said to be ferox (‘savage’ or ‘untamed’).\[23\] Likewise, the corrupted citizens betraying the values of the mos maiorum are typically described as committed to ‘bestial’ vices such as lubido, avaritia, and socordia.\[24\] In Sallust’s eyes, a similar process of moral degeneration may have appeared as a paradoxical and improper return to primitive savagery, since in the so-called archaeology of the Bellum Catilinae the native inhabitants of Latium, the Aborigines who mingle with the Trojans, are labelled as a genus hominum agreste, a ‘wild kind of men’, unaware of laws, government, and non-migratory life.\[25\] An analogous description is


\[23\] Cf. Cat. 5.7-8. Throughout the work, Catiline’s impetuous behaviour is variously assimilated to the vehemence of wild animals. In 52.35, for instance, Catiline and his army are said to threaten Rome ‘with their jaws’ (faucibus). And at the very beginning of his First Catilinarian Oration (1.1), Cicero himself had presented the conspiracy as a relentless chained beast. On such disparaging depictions and their folk background see Tutrone (2010a) 220-4.

\[24\] In light of its easily discernible etymological origin, the recurrent term socordia/secordia (which is frequently taken in the more common meaning of ‘laziness’ by Sallust’s interpreters) implies a polemic reference to the degradation of inner faculties; see e.g. Cat. 4.1; 52.29; Jug. 1.4; 2.4; 31.2; 85.22.

\[25\] Cf. Cat. 6.1-3. On Sallust’s reconstruction of the origins of Rome and its intellectual peculiarities see Briquel (2006), who regards Ateius Philologus as the historian’s fundamental source. Much more interesting, however, is Briquel’s comparison between the Sallustian account and such well-known treatments of Roman primitive history as Cato’s Origines, Vergil’s Aeneid, and the late antique Origio Gentis Romanae. On the basis of this comparison, Briquel connects Sallust’s emphasis on inter-ethnic fusion and rejection of other common versions with the purpose of calling for civic harmony—an extremely urgent purpose in the age of civil wars. Moreover, Briquel (pp. 96-7) points to the possible Catonian origin of the description of the Aborigines as a savage people (cf. also Richard [1983] 411,
applied to the first inhabitants of Africa, the Gaetulians and Libyans, in the ethnographic digression of the *Bellum Iugurthinum*:

*Africam initio habuere Gaetuli et Libyes, asperi incultique, quis cibus erat caro ferina atque humi pabulum uti pecoribus. Ii neque moribus neque lege aut imperio quoisquam regebantur: vagi palantes quas nox coegerat sedes habebant.* (Iug. 18.1-2).

In the beginning Africa was inhabited by the Gaetulians and Libyans, rude and uncivilized folk, who fed like beasts on the flesh of wild animals and the fruits of the earth. They were governed neither by institutions nor law, nor were they subject to anyone’s rule. A restless, roving people, they had their abodes wherever night compelled a halt. (transl. Rolfe [1931]).

The pre-cultural condition of such primitive peoples is characterised not only by nomadism and absence of laws, but also by pasturing and the consumption of raw flesh. Given that the author later explains how these savage tribes, mingling with more civilised peoples of foreign origin, created a powerful and extended kingdom, the analogy with the Roman archaeology of the *Catiline* is even more striking. As Robert Morstein-

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and Martinez-Pinna [2002] 55-6). What is certain is that Vergil, *Aen.* 9.603-13, took up the same anthropological pattern when characterising the Latins as a *durum a stirpe genus*, alien to the refinements of civilisation. And annotating Vergil’s text, Servius, ad *Verg. Aen.* 9.600, refers indeed to Cato’s and Varro’s similar presentations, thus confirming the long-standing relevance of such culturally embedded representations.

On Sallust’s interest in ethnography and his relationship to a long tradition of ethnocentric patterns see Oniga (1995), who devotes special attention to this African excursus (Iug. 17-19). Oniga (esp. 23-50) offers a perceptive reconstruction of the ancient discussion on cultural norms, climatic determinism, and social evolution—a discussion ranging from Homer and Herodotus to Aristotle, Posidonius, and beyond. In the Aristotelian tradition, in particular, peripheral peoples tend to be assimilated to a state of anti-cultural animality, both in a positive and a negative sense; cf. also Sassi (1988), and Bettini (1992). Oniga (78-9) rightly parallels Sallust’s account of African prehistory with the reconstructions of primitive Italy in Cato, Vergil, and Sallust’s own *Catiline*. While Thomas (1982) 96 had suggested that Vergil’s description in *Aen.* 8.314-36 represents “a conscious reminiscence of Sallust’s Libyan ethnography”, the extensive material gathered by Oniga supports the view that all these texts rely on widespread cultural beliefs.

Cf. 18.3-12. Remarkably, in the history of the Numidians, too, a prominent role is played by the move of a mythological hero (Hercules, who strongly evokes Aeneas) and his wandering companions. See Moatti (1997) 264, and Morstein-Marx (2001) 192-3.
Marx pointed out, a careful comparison between the two passages “reveals that the Numidians are represented as archetypal ‘anti-Romans’, like the Romans an imperial people but occupying the opposite cultural pole”.\textsuperscript{28} But it is clear that in Sallust’s view a degrading regression to the animalistic stage of human life is always possible as a consequence of moral degeneration. From the writer’s critical standpoint, the first-century Roman Republic is very close to a similar involution—an involution which, in light of Sallust’s proems, looms over mankind as a whole. The opposition between nature and culture, brutishness and civilisation—or, in Lévi-Strauss’ terms, raw and cooked\textsuperscript{29}—operates on both a synchronic and a diachronic level in Sallust’s historiography. It is no accident that the “materialistic” men of the proem of the \textit{Bellum Catilinae} are explicitly likened to cattle (\textit{veluti pecora}) in the same way as the early inhabitants of Africa (\textit{uti pecoribus}).

The writer’s representation of cultural and pre-cultural life, as well as his emphasis on omophagy, nomadism, and the lack of a political dimension, reflect a structured system of socio-anthropological patterns, magisterially investigated in the studies of the so-called \textit{École de Paris}.\textsuperscript{30} What is worth noting here is that in late Republican literature the representation of man’s “animal” origins—the rearrangement of the topos of θηριόν \& βίος, which dates back at least to the sophistic age\textsuperscript{31}—plays an impressive and intellectually significant role. Sallust is not the only writer of his age interested in exploring the first stages of human society, the distinctive features of human beings, and their relationship to a destabilising animality. Behind both the \textit{Bellum Catilinae} and the \textit{Bellum Iugurthinum} there is an intense intellectual debate, variously reworking the lines of previous literary and philosophical traditions.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{28} Morstein-Marx (2001) 195. The radical cultural otherness of Numidians is stressed by the fact that even when they grow into a more orderly and complex society, they maintain a series of peculiar ethical features which are antithetical to the Roman model of civilisation—first of all, their unjustified bellicosity and nomadic instability. Broadly speaking, the war against Jugurtha appears as “a war between Roman civilization and the mobile, treacherous, seminomadic ‘Other’” (180).
\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Lévi-Strauss (1964).
\textsuperscript{30} See esp. Vernant (1972), (1978), Vidal Naquet (1975), Detienne and Vernant (1979). Such works, which focus on the Greek world, are admittedly influenced by Lévi-Strauss’ view of nature, culture, and binary oppositions.
\textsuperscript{31} See Dierauer (1977) 25-39.
\textsuperscript{32} A stimulating survey into the breadth of this debate, with special regard to the Roman attitude towards human progress, has been carried out by Novara (1982).
3. Cicero on what man is not. Anthropocentrism and Roman humanitas

One of the most famous and influential discussions of man’s primitive life is recorded in the first chapters of Cicero’s De inventione, a work probably dating to 91-88 BCE. Starting from the observation that in human (and Roman) history the power of speech (eloquentia) has been perniciously separated from the ideal of wisdom (sapientia), Cicero endeavours to show that in its original form the eloquentia characterising mankind was a fruitful and even salvific faculty, for the earliest “animal” phases of human history were overstepped precisely through the use of reason and language. In Cicero’s view, it was the later unnatural divorce of wisdom and eloquence—i.e., in more philosophical terms, of language and virtuous rationality—which disrupted man’s progressive development. But in the beginning human beings ceased to live bestiarum modo thanks to the fact that linguistic communication spread moral knowledge across the community.

As regards the philosophical background to the opening of the De inventione, attention has recently been drawn to the impact of Philo of Larissa and Academic thought. The fact that Cicero’s early work is influenced by teachings in the Platonic tradition, should not, however, lead us to overlook the concomitant influence of Stoic doctrines, especially in light of the author’s long philosophical training under the Stoic Diodotus. Indeed, not only does Cicero argue that eloquence and wisdom

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33 See Kennedy (1972) 106-10.
34 Cf. Cicero, Inv. 1.1-3. Although scholars are often keen to dismiss Cicero’s historical reconstruction in his early treatise as a philosophically insignificant piece (echoing Cicero’s own modest self-assessment of the De inventione: De or. 1.5), such a detailed theoretical introduction brings together relevant notions of the ancient anthropological debate—notions which had clearly been central to the author’s Bildung. What is more, the passage’s great influence on European thought makes it worthy of careful consideration. As Beckman (1993) 6, remarked, “this particular version of the origins of civilization appealed so much to the concerns of the humanists that it became a commonplace in Renaissance thought”.
35 See Cicero, Inv. 1.4-5.
36 Cicero, Inv. 1.2-3. In Cicero’s account, a kind of original civilising hero (quidam magnum vir et sapiens) is said to have understood the great potential of the human mind and brought the people together through his sensible speeches.
37 On Cicero’s house philosopher Diodotus see Brut. 309; Luc. 115; Fam. 9.4; Att. 2.20.6. The lack of references to specific philosophical orientations has led some to see the praise of language in the De inventione as a merely rhetorical topos; see Solmsen (1932) 153, and Barwick (1963) 21-4, whose Quellenforschungen point
freed mankind from primitive beastliness, but he also expressly remarks that it is language that distinguishes man from other animals. Generally speaking, the twofold character of the Stoic concept of λόγος, which covers both the field of “external” language (λόγος προφορικός) and that of inner rationality (λόγος ἡνοίαθέτος), seems to underlie the first chapters of the treatise—for wisdom or sapientia embodies the perfection of reason, ideally directing linguistic expression. In accordance with his own rhetorical interests, Cicero emphasizes the importance of speech to the process described, since, as he says, ‘no wisdom which was silent and destitute of skill in speaking could have had such power as to turn men on a sudden from their previous customs, and to lead them to the adoption of a different system of life’. Even if, as in Sallust’s depiction, the animal

to the Isocratean tradition. By contrast, Lévy (1992) 98-101, and (1995) 155-64, has thoroughly explored the theoretical implications of the passage, placing special emphasis on Cicero’s debt to his teacher Philo. But, the profound influence of Academic tenets seems in this case to have become inextricably intermingled with widespread Stoic beliefs. After all, a representative text cited by Lévy himself (Nat. Deor. 2.148) attests to Cicero’s awareness that Stoic and Neoacademic thinkers agreed on the cosmological centrality of λόγος. And, as indicated during our analysis of Sallust’s preoms, in the late Republican debate the wide acceptance of certain core principles made school barriers less rigid—not to mention the fact that, as Lévy (1992) 104-9, notes, the traditional connection between Platonism and Stoicism became even closer in this period, so that Cicero, Fam. 15.4.16, could confidently claim to spread the same ‘true and old philosophy’ (philosophia vera illa et antiqua) as Cato the Younger. Also see Bonazzi (2007) 121-4.

38 Inv. 1.5.23-8. Cicero also notes that, in respect to many other qualities, humans are ‘lower and weaker’ (humiliores et infirmiores) than the beasts—a point which clearly connects his reconstruction to the tradition of sophistic anthropology exemplified by Plato’s Protagoras (320c-322d). In the Platonic myth, however, it is not λόγος that releases mankind from its original weakness, but ‘technical knowledge’ (ἐπεξεργασία σοφίτα) and the use of fire, which in turn lead to the development of language (322a). On the importance of Plato’s Protagoras to both Academic and Stoic philosophy see Alesse (2007).

39 On this foundational Stoic division (presumably drawing on Plato, Theaet. 189e-190a), and the controversy with the Academy it aroused, see Labarrière (2005) 65-81.

40 Inv. 1.3: (trans. Yonge [1888]). Though Cicero’s emphasis on the power of rhetoric—namely, on the linguistic side of λόγος—is indisputable, Kastely (2002) 241, goes too far in claiming that “Cicero’s myth separates reason and eloquence”. According to Kastely, “it was not reason but eloquence that made the crucial difference in the rise of the human species as a cultural animal, as an animal governed, in part, by nomos”. As mentioned earlier, Cicero’s main concern is precisely to call for a sound conjunction of sapientia (viz. virtus) and eloquentia, a
world incarnates the primacy of corporeal force and the savage essence of human life, Cicero identifies the real source of man’s aberrance as a perverse employment of reason for the mere sake of self-satisfaction, thus embracing the Stoic idea of a ‘subversion of reason’ (διαστροφή τοῦ λόγου) peculiar to mankind. In Cicero’s portrayal, language and rationality are intimately connected, and when the human mind deviates from the right path, such deviation results in a corrupted eloquence.

In the symbolic structure of Ciceronian thought, however, those men who reject their rational and linguistic vocation are usually downgraded to the same level as beasts—a polemic strategy deep-rooted in folk imagery. A censorious passage from the late treatise De officiis shows the relevance of Stoic anthropocentric rationalism to the construction of Cicero’s humanism (and, more specifically, to his view of social ethics and personal identity). While categorically separating man from the instinctual realm of animals, Cicero equates sensualist humans with beasts, for some people would be ‘men only in name, not in fact’ (non re sed nomine):

Sed pertinet ad omnem officii quaestionem semper in promptu habere, quantum natura hominis pecudibus reliquisque beluis antecedat; illae nihil sentiunt nisi voluptatem ad eamque feruntur omni impetu, hominis autem mens discendo alitur et cogitando, semper aliquid aut anquirit aut agit videndique et audiendi delectatione ducitur. Quin etiam, si quis est paulo ad voluptates propensior, modo ne sit ex pecudum genere, sunt enim conjunction which becomes even more necessary in ages of moral corruption (cf. 1.5, with the compelling exempla of Cato, Laelius, Scipio, and the Gracchi). Likewise, at the beginning of human history, the power of speech induced men to accept the principles discovered by reason (ea quae ratione invenissent, 1.3), and the original civiliser (he himself being a sapiens) gained the attention of other humans thanks to his ability in reasoning and speaking (propter rationem atque orationem, 1.2).

41 Cf. Inv. 1.3, where the author describes the emergence of ‘a certain sort of complaisance’ (commoditas quaedam), ‘a false copyist of virtue’ (prava virtutis imitatrix), ‘without any consideration for real duty’ (sine ratione officii). Cicero’s reference to the malicious distortion of a good natural disposition, producing a kind of “symmetrical” imitation of virtue, hints at the typically Stoic view that vice is a rational deviation parallel and opposite to virtue: cf. SYF 3.228-36, and Grilli (1963). The topic is variously debated in Cicero’s works (see esp. Leg. 1.31-2; 47), and in the Roman philosophical debate more generally, as it directly concerns the problem of the origin of evil and that of the end of pleasure (see e.g. Bellincioni [1978] 33-6, and Berno [2003] 25-29, both focusing on Seneca).

42 It may be sufficient to recall that in Classical Latin words like bestia and belua are commonly used as terms of reproach.
quidam homines non re sed nomine, sed si quis est paulo erectior, quamvis voluptate capiatur, occultat et dissimulat appetitum voluptatis propter verecundiam. (Off. 1.105).

But it is essential to every inquiry about duty that we keep before our eyes how far superior man is by nature to cattle and other beasts: they have no thought except for sensual pleasure and this they are impelled by every instinct to seek; but man’s mind is nurtured by study and meditation; he is always either investigating or doing, and he is captivated by the pleasure of seeing and hearing. Nay, even if a man is more than ordinarily inclined to sensual pleasures, provided, of course, that he be not quite on a level with the beasts of the field—for some people are men only in name, not in fact—if, I say, he is a little too susceptible to the attractions of pleasure, he hides the fact, however much he may be caught in its toils, and for very shame conceals his appetite. (transl. Miller [1913]).

Under the lens of a properly anthropological analysis, Cicero’s celebrated ideal of humanitas appears as a powerful anthropopoietic pattern. The echo of Plato’s ethics-based cosmology (which we have already noticed in Sallust) becomes even stronger in this section of the De officiis as a result of the author’s pervasive anti-Epicurean polemic. Many years after the composition of his work on rhetorical invention, Cicero regarded the animal side of human nature as an extremely dangerous (and already overwhelming) ingredient of social life. In his opinion, the escalation of struggles, murders, and political personalism affecting Rome’s declining Republic can be traced back mostly to the loss of a virtuous feeling of community. Above all, Cicero blames the primacy of sensory and individual experiences (tendentiously connected with Epicurean philosophy) as a morally destabilising factor and compares it to a self-degrading bestialisation.

43 See above n. 20.
44 See Atkins (2005) 505-14, and Picone (2012), who both highlight the constructive (and not merely nostalgic) character of the De officiis. As Atkins observes, “in de Officiis, in short, we can see Cicero using the resources of his philosophical education to articulate a conservative moral response to the revolution through which he was living. The mos maiorum is given its most intelligent restatement; and in the process, the language of honestas, dignitas, officium, beneficia, and gloria is reshaped to meet present needs. The four virtues of De officiis are borrowed from Greek philosophy; but they are analysed in sharply contemporary terms” (513).
45 On Cicero’s (and Panaetius’) polemic against Epicurus’ “bestializing” materialism see Narducci (1987) 20-1. However, it is now generally admitted that Cicero’s relationship to Epicureanism was not restricted to criticism and
In order to invert the course of this general involution, Cicero’s late philosophical works endeavour to define a standard paradigm of humanity (which is meant to be universal in spite of its clear cultural embeddedness), by readapting the most salient features of Stoic natural philosophy to the needs of Roman culture. To such an ambitious project (as to almost all the processes of anthropopoiesis), the characterisation of the symbolic role of animals is of paramount importance. In a strikingly large number of passages, Cicero points to the constitutive primacy of human beings as well as to the providential view that animals have been created for the sake of men. Additionally, it is made clear that men do not owe justice to other animals, since, according to Stoic doctrine, justice originates from the rational creation of bonds, and reason is the exclusive prerogative of men and gods.

The second book of the De natura deorum provides remarkable evidence of Cicero’s re-use of Stoic anthropocentric cosmology, including as it does Balbus’ enthusiastic presentation of Stoic theology (and teleology). At the very end of the work, it is Balbus’ idea of a providentially ordered cosmos, corresponding to the needs of men, which is said to have convinced Cicero. In Balbus’ view, the body itself of human beings, with its different organs and limbs, attests to nature’s teleological plan. In accordance with a well-known commonplace of Classical and Hellenistic philosophy, for instance, man’s upright posture is interpreted as a natural privilege leading to the practice of contemplation.

denigration (see Lévy [2001] and Maso [2008]). Moreover, the author’s depiction of a radically individualistic—if not asocial—Epicurean ethics (a depiction largely accepted and reinforced by the later Western tradition) has been validly questioned by scholars, especially since the survey of Long (1985).

46 On the crucial role of animals in man’s self-definition see Shepard (1996) and Rivera (1999). Rivera (67-9) further develops Marshall Sahlins’ critique of sociobiology (Sahlins [1976]), showing how the “bestialization” of animals (i.e. their conceptual degradation as deficient beings) is closely connected with the “bestialization” of men, especially of rival social agents—a type of discourse widely attested in Cicero and other Classical authors.

47 A comprehensive account of the Stoic anthropocentric view of animals and man-animal relationships is offered by Dierauer (1977) 199-252, and Sorabji (1993) 122-57. Sorabji (136) interestingly remarks on the connection between hierarchic cosmology, dualistic psychology, and political imperialism emerging from works such as Cicero’s De re publica.

48 Nat. Deor. 3.95.

49 Ibid. 2.140. The long history of this cultural topos, from Diogenes of Apollonia to Aristotle and the Stoics, is briefly recalled by Lanata (1994) 19-21, whose discussion relies on Geoffrey Lloyd’s path-breaking studies of common-sense
At the same time, a wide-ranging section of Balbus’ speech is devoted to praise the physical and intellectual qualities of animals. Even if these are not endowed with reason and language, their instinctual behaviour is said to reveal ‘a certain cunning and shrewdness’ (machinatio quaedam atque sollertia). The description of such faculties—effected via an assortment of mirabilia dating back to the Peripatetic tradition—is nonetheless intended to confirm the existence of immanent divine providence.

Another well-known Ciceronian work bearing witness to the Roman reception of biological arguments is the De finibus bonorum et malorum. In Book 3, Cato illustrates the principles of Stoic ethics, devoting special attention to their physical and psychological basis: the so-called oikeiosis theory. According to this theory, every living being has a natural instinct of “social appropriation” (‘appropriation’ is indeed the basic meaning of the Greek οἰκεῖος, derived from the adjective οἰκεῖος). The Stoics argued that the creation of social bonds—following a first phase of self-appropriation—is the primary teleological inclination of every animal and proceeds in progressive stages. Like the Epicureans (whose ethical polarities (low/high, left/right etc.) and their scientific relevance (see Lloyd [1966])),

50 Nat. Deor. 2.123. The Latin hendiadys seems to correspond to the Greek concept of ἡρόνς, the “practical intelligence” perceived in writers from the time of Aristotle onwards as typically characterising animals (see Labarrière [2005] 121-47). Whether Cicero borrowed similar notions from Peripatetic sources or embraced them through Stoic mediations (first of all through Posidonius and Panaetius, as scholars usually suggest following Hirzel [1877] 191-244) is very hard—if not impossible—to know. Cf. Dierauer (1977) 224-45.

51 Ibid. 2.121-31. As Rocca (2003) 49-57, pointed out, in spite of its adherence to Stoic cosmology, Cicero’s extensive treatment of animal ethology is largely indebted to Peripatetic thought. Several of the author’s exemplifications can be traced back to the ninth book of the Historia Animalium, a text which underwent a complex process of transmission before reaching its present form (Düring [1950], Balme [1991] 1-13) and had a great impact on the ancient biological debate (Dierauer [1977] 162-70, Veggetti [1996] 58-71). It is widely agreed that the Historia was a kind of “open text” in the history of the Peripatetic school, and it has been often surmised that its ninth and tenth books are distinctively post-Aristotelian (cf. Sharples [1995] 32-5). To be sure, an enduring tradition of zoological speculations arose from the works of Aristotle and his early followers (Theophrastus in primis), heavily influencing the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. The breadth of such a multi-faceted heritage appears to justify dismissal of the simplistic approach of Reinhardt (1926) 139-41, who overstated the influence of Posidonius’ fusion of Stoic and Peripatetic materials.

52 On the Stoic doctrine of oikeiosis and its various theoretical connections see Engberg-Pedersen (1990), Pemproke (1996), Long (1996b), Radice (2000), and
theory is expounded by Torquatus in the first book of the *De finibus*), the Stoics saw in animal behaviour an irrefutable proof of their views. However, their overall analyses and conclusions differed widely from those of Epicurus, for they pointed to the unbridgeable distance between human and animal sociability and advocated man’s exclusive possession of reason. Cato explicitly reasserts the exclusion of animals from a reason-based cosmopolitan society as well as from the field of justice and morality:

\begin{quote}
*Et quo modo hominum inter homines iuris esse vincula putant, sic homini nihil iuris esse cum bestiis. Praeclare enim Chrysippus, cetera nata esse hominum causa et deorum, eos autem communitas et societatis suae, ut bestiis homines uti ad utilitatem suam possint sine iniuria.* (Fin. 3.67)
\end{quote}

But just as they (scil. the Stoics) hold that man is united with man by the bonds of right, so they consider that no right exists as between man and beast. For Chrysippus well said, that all other things were created for the sake of men and gods, but that these exist for their own mutual fellowship and society, so that men can make use of beasts for their own purposes without injustice. (transl. Rackham [1951]).

Animals nevertheless play a prominent role in Cato’s discourse and in Stoic arguments generally. Despite their radical marginalisation as irrational agents, they are continuously cited as evidence for pivotal ethical principles. A few paragraphs before making the anthropocentric claim just quoted, for instance, Cato mentions the caring attitude of non-human beings towards their offspring as a proof of the *naturalness* of parental love. Interestingly, he reports the Stoic belief that ‘when we observe the labor that animals spend on bearing and rearing their young, we seem to be listening to the actual voice of nature’ (*naturae ipsius vocem*, Fin. 3.62). Although in the *De finibus* Cicero contradicts both the Stoic and the Epicurean ideals of moral good, abstaining from making any explicit statement on his own preference,\(^53\) his above-mentioned appreciation of

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\(^53\) Even Antiochus’ system, carefully illustrated by Piso in Book 5, is criticised by Cicero in the second part of the same book. A perceptive discussion of Cicero’s philosophical position at the time he wrote the *De finibus* is offered by Lévy. 

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Stoic cosmology predisposes us to take similar assumptions into proper account.

On the one hand, Cicero seems to accept the tenets of Stoic rationalist universalism, as this allows him to support a cosmopolitan idea of law, justice, and political community, which is totally consistent with the Roman experience. The severe denigration of animals discussed so far is a necessary corollary to this fundamental proposition. On the other hand, however, the inherent ambiguity of the Stoic appeal to natural law reverberates through Cicero’s own philosophical arguments. It is noteworthy that when Cato illustrates the natural foundations of human altruism—a point important for Cicero’s model of humanitas and imperialist tutelage—the image of the bulls taking care of their offspring is coupled with that of philanthropic heroes such as Hercules and Liber:

*Ita non solum ad discendum propensi sumus, verum etiam ad docendum. Atque ut tauris natura datum est ut pro vitulis contra leones summa vi impetuque contendant, sic i, qui valent opibus atque id facere possunt, ut de Hercule et de Libero accepimus, ad servandum genus hominum natura incitantur.* (Fin. 3.66).

So strong is our propensity not only to learn but also to teach. And just as bulls have a natural instinct to fight with all their strength and force in defending their calves against lions, so men of exceptional gifts and capacity for service, like Hercules and Liber in the legends, feel a natural impulse to be the protectors of the human race. (trsnl. Rackham [1951]).

Once again, animals are said to mirror a physical truth of social and political relevance. Their paradigmatic behaviour serves as an inspiring *myth*, in an epistemological sense, along with the deeds of mythological...
Vox naturae: The Myth of Animal Nature in the Late Roman Republic

In the intellectual debate of the late Republic, the Stoic identification of animals with the “voice of Nature”, in combination with a rationalist and providential view of social life, must have sounded particularly attractive. While arguing for the cosmological supremacy of mankind (as well as for the humanist vocation of the most powerful human beings), Cicero, engaged intellectual as he was, enlisted the aid of the legitimising myth of Nature and its “zoological” basis. His strenuous efforts as a political thinker were consistently supported by the folk view of animality as a pre-cultural and archetypal condition. However, Cicero himself tells us that the evidence provided by animals concerning natural truths was highly controversial. In the second book of the De finibus, where the Epicurean view of catastematic pleasure as the supreme good is confuted, Epicurus is said to have regarded animals and children as ‘mirrors of nature’ (specula naturae). And we know that the use of zoological arguments in support of ethical and scientific doctrines was a common practice of Cicero’s pugnacious contemporaries, Lucretius and Philodemus. They both seem to have put into effect Epicurus’ exhortation for careful consideration of elementary beings.

4. The importance of being animals. Lucretius the Epicurean against the mystique of logos

For the purposes of the present survey, it may suffice to discuss an especially eloquent passage from Lucretius’ De rerum natura. Indeed, while expounding the contents of Epicurean philosophy for the benefit of Roman readers, Lucretius makes numerous references to the paradigmatic value of animals, since he regards these as both analogical images of physical truths and morally significant agents. As I have dealt elsewhere

56 On Hercules’ characterisation as a civiliser hero and its aftermath in the Roman tradition see Galinsky (1972) 126-52. Sallust’s use of the Hercules myth in his African excursus has already been mentioned (cf. above n. 27). And such a politically significant myth becomes even more prominent from the Augustan age onwards.

57 Fin. 2.32

58 On the Epicurean attitude towards animals and its original combination of primitivist and rationalist ideas see Dierauer (1977) 194-8. Generally speaking, though Epicurus’ philosophy calls attention to every living being’s tendencies and emotional faculties, its understanding and practice require a proper use of reason. See also Annas (1993) 61-2.
with the ideological implications of the poet’s attitude to animals,\(^{59}\) I shall not insist further on this point. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning here that Lucretius’ use of animal figures was aimed at achieving a very different goal from the demonstration of man’s superior position. Unlike Cicero and Sallust, the Epicurean poet does not aim to remind human beings of any cosmological privilege—for he simply believes that no cosmological privilege exists.

As is well-known, Lucretius’ atomistic world relies on purely material processes of transformation, excluding any providential or metaphysical principle. Neither is man’s upright posture a sign of divine will, nor is reason a gift reflecting a teleological plan. Of course, Lucretius glorifies the role of ratio as a cognitive instrument allowing mankind to understand Epicurus’ precepts (and thus to live ‘a life worthy of the gods’).\(^{60}\) But our author considers rationality an inherited biological trait like the lions’ bravery or the deer’s timidity.\(^{61}\) In more general terms, Lucretius seems to suggest a basic ontological continuity between human and non-human beings, arguing that both emerged out of a process of spontaneous generation.\(^{62}\) Differences of degree—not a physiological gap—are said to separate men and animals.

Lucretius’ famous account of the origin of language can persuasively illustrate the far-reaching repercussions of a similar view as well as its notable originality in the context of late Republican thought. As mentioned earlier, Cicero gives special prominence to the linguistic side of Greek λόγος, thus reflecting the ideals of a society largely based on the political use of language. By contrast, Lucretius takes up the Epicurean view that linguistic expression originated accidentally from spontaneous attempts to communicate and developed by trial and error.\(^{63}\) According to the poet, human language differs from animal expressivity because of its more

\(^{59}\) See Tutrone (2012) 27-154. Important remarks on the subject can also be found in Saylor (1972), Segal (1986), Gale (1991), Shelton (1996), and Scafoglio (this volume).

\(^{60}\) Cf. DRN 3.314-22. Lucretius’ enthusiastic assertion that Epicurean philosophy can lead to a god-like life (digna dis vita) has inspired the title of Konstan’s insightful research on Epicurus’ materialistic psychology: Konstan (2008).


\(^{63}\) On the Epicurean theory of the origin of language, with special regard to Lucretius’ exposition, see Schrijvers (1999) 55-80, Verlinsky (2005), and Reihnardt (2008).
sophisticated character, but both phenomena share the same natural root. It is on the basis of such cogent analogy that Lucretius draws a strikingly lively picture of animal behaviour:64

Postremo quid in hac mirabile tantoperest re/, si genus humanum, cui vox et lingua vigeret/, pro vario sensu varia res voce notaret?/ Cum pecudes mutae, cum denique saeca ferarum/ dissimilis soleant voces variasque ciere,/ cum metus aut dolor est et cum iam gaudia gliscunt./ Quippe et enim licet id rebus cognoscere apertis./ Inritata canum cum primum magna Molossum/ mollia ricta fremunt duros nudantia dentes./ longe alio sonitu rabies restricta minatur,/ et cum iam lactant et vocibus omnia complent;/ at catulos blande cum lingua lambere temptant/ aut ubi eos lactant, pedibus morsuque potentes/ suspensis teneros imitantur dentibus haustus./ longe alio pacto gannitu vocis adulant,/ et cum deserti baubantur in aedibus, aut cum/ plorantis fugiunt summisso corpore plagas./ Denique non hinnitus item differre videtur,/ inter equas ubi equus florenti aetate iuvencus/ pinnigeri saevit calcaribus ictus Amoris/ et fremitum patulis sub naribus edit ad arma,/ et cum sic alias concussis artibus hinnit?/ Postremo genus alituum variaeque volucres,/ accipites aique ossifragae mergique marinis/ fluctibus in saiso victum vitamque petentes./ longe alias alio iacient in tempore voces,/ et quom de victu certant praedaeque repugnant./ Et partim mutant cum tempesstatibus una/ rauco sonos cantus, cornicum ut saeca vexata/ covorumque gregis ubi aquam dicuntur et imbris/ poscere et inter dum ventos aurasse vocare./ Ergo si varii sensus animalia cogunt,/ muta tamen cum sint, varias mittere voces,/ quanto mortalis magis aequ amis tum potuisse/ dissimilis alia aique alia res voce notare! (ORN 5.1056-90).

Lastly, what is so wonderful/ if the human race, with vigorous voice and tongue/ endowed, should mark things out with voices/ differing according to their different feelings? Dumb cattle and wild beasts of every kind/ make noises quite distinct and different/ when they are gripped by fear or pain, or joy/ wells up within them. And the evidence/ for this lies in plain facts well known to all./ Angry Molossian hounds, when first they draw back/ their flabby jowls and bare their teeth and growl/ with rage suppressed, make sounds quite different/ from when they bark and fill the place with din./ And when they lick their pups with loving tongue/ and toss them with paws and nibbling them/ pretend to make sweet tender mouthfuls of them,/ far different then the playful yelps they make/ from when they howl abandoned in the house/ or whimper cringing from the master’s whip./ In neighing too, there is a difference/ when a young

64 To all appearances, Aymard (1951) 104, did not go too far in defining these lines as “la description la plus vivante et la plus nuancée de l’animal que nous ait laissée la littérature latine”.
stallion in the prime of life/ pricked by the spurs of winged love runs wild/
among the mares, and from his flaring nostrils/ snorts out his challenge to
arms, and when he’s weak/ at other times and neighs with quaking limbs./
Lastly, among the different types of birds,/ ospreys, sea hawks, and gulls
amid waves/ seeking their life and living from the sea,/ at other times make
very different cries/ from when they are fishing and struggling with their
prey./ And some birds change their voices with the weather, as ancient
 ravens do and flocks of rooks,/ or so they say, when they cry out for rain/to bring them water, or summon wind and storm./ Therefore if animals are
caused by different feelings, dumb though they be, to utter different sounds,
so much the more and with compelling reason/ must we suppose that men
could in those days/ mark different things by different sounds of speech.
(trnsl. Melville [1997]).

As Elisabeth de Fontenay remarked, in this passage “the constraints of
theory have given way to the pleasure of letting animals enter the poem”.65
In effect, our poet is frequently inclined to put forth similar “ethological”
arguments, for in the De rerum natura, too, animals appear as mirrors and
voices of natural truths, contributing substantially to the reader’s epistemic
advancement. When attacking and deconstructing, by means of a powerful
animal imagery, the widespread view of language as a providential
 prerogative, Lucretius openly challenges the mystique of λόγος established
by other contemporary thinkers under the influence of Stoic and Platonic
tenets.66 It would be unforgivably reductive to see the author’s vivid
demonstration of Epicurus’ doctrine as a piece of perfunctory (if not
doxographic) divulgation67—especially because Lucretius’ emphasis on

65 De Fontenay (1998) 129.
66 In the all-embracing interpretation of Moatti (1997), esp. 301-16, a
methodological appeal to reason and rationalistic systematisations underpins the
Roman intellectuals’ varied responses to the late Republican crisis. The increasing
interest in physical research, usually founded on an anthropocentric perspective,
would be one of the main signs of this cultural phenomenon. However, in contrast
with the mainstream, Lucretius—whose stand is recurrently labelled as “radical”
and “dogmatic” by Moatti (cf. 46; 169-74)—seems to intensify the anti-finalistic
polemics of Epicurean philosophy, promoting an alternative concept of nature and
67 While it is clear that Lucretius’ creative exposition of Epicurean views is far
removed from doxography sensu proprio, scholars have variously remarked on the
role of doxographic writings in the construction of the poet’s arguments; see e.g.
and résumés of various kinds were commonly used by Latin writers in Lucretius’
day, and it would be quite odd to suppose that our poet made no use of them.
Nevertheless, as Lévy (1996b) warned, their influence as a source of philosophical
animal communication and his neglect of mankind’s linguistic development are a *unicum* in the Epicurean tradition.\(^{68}\)

In *De rerum natura* Book 5, Lucretius deals with several problems of socio-anthropological interest, and his careful treatment is inextricably linked to the dynamics of the Roman debate. Like Sallust, Cicero, and Varro,\(^{69}\) the Epicurean poet engages in a complex reconstruction of the earliest phases of human history, paying special attention to the process of culturalisation by which mankind overcame its original beastliness.\(^{70}\) The discussion on the origin of language is a key section of this fascinating reconstruction. Though it is clear that Lucretius rearranges the materialist and casualist anthropology developed in classical thought since the fifth century BCE, a wide-ranging scholarly discussion has arisen over the sources and ideology of Lucretius’ account.\(^{71}\) If we enlarge the scope of

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\(^{69}\) The evidence provided by Varro concerning the late Republican attitude to cultural history deserves much more careful attention than one can devote here. The *De re rustica* shows that this erudite “archaeologist of memory and language” (cf. Moatti [1997] 143) offered a stage-by-stage account of the origins of human society, presumably indebted to the Peripatetic Dicæarchus of Messana (cf. *Rust.* 1.2.15-6; 2.1.3-10). Varro’s interest in historical and anthropological matters (also emerging from the etymological explanations of *De lingua latina*) relies on his epoch-making investigations of early Roman history. It is indeed regrettable that only scattered fragments of Varro’s monumental *Antiquitates* survived. In all likelihood, the author elaborated a sophisticated interpretation of the myth of Saturn’s age and discussed the development of civilisation with special regard to the evolution of technical knowledge. See Reischl (1976) 82-142, Novara (1982) I 445-70, and Van Nuffelen (2010) 167-8.

\(^{70}\) 5.925-1457.

\(^{71}\) It may suffice to mention the thorough surveys by Furley (1978), Sasso (1979), and Manuwald (1980).
our inquiry, however, we can easily see that defining the intrinsic “degree of animality” of human beings—as well as the reasons for a re-emergence of man’s savage nature—was a common purpose of Roman intellectuals in the age of civil wars. The infraction and implosion of standard cultural rules, due to violent political changes, inevitably led to a rethinking of the borders between humanity and naturality.

In the lines immediately preceding our passage, 5.925-1027, Lucretius notably describes the life of early men (who, like other animals, are said to have been born from the earth) and remarks that ‘they wandered in the way of beasts’ (volgivago vitam tractabant more ferarum, 5.932). Compared to the men of the poet’s day, however, such beast-like humans seem far less aggressive, for Lucretius sarcastically notes (cf. 5.999-1010) that they had no experience of war, sailing, excessive wealth, and malicious poisonings. Even if one might surmise that polemical comments of this kind recurred in some of the author’s sources (as ethical-didactic aims have been inherent in the reconstructions of primitive history since the beginning of Greek literature),

they must have sounded particularly meaningful in first-century Rome.

Later on, at 5.1011-27, Lucretius maintains that the creation of parental and social bonds softened the brutal nature of primitive mankind. Nevertheless, it is clear that neither the creation of human society nor the development of linguistic communication caused relevant discontinuities in man’s intrinsically animal status. According to the poet, the human race can wholly fulfil its vocation to reason (which is seen as a special, but not providential condition) only by accepting and practising Epicurus’ word. On the other hand, when irrational and destructive inclinations prevail, men seem to degenerate into something worse than animals. Lucretius’ moralising reconstruction of primitive history includes a wild-eyed

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72 By and large, moral and ideological principles (perceived as relevant to the writer’s present) underpinned ancient histories of civilisation. This is true of both the main forms of genealogical account discussed by Classical authors (forms, of course, overlapping each other): the so-called golden age myth, which emphasised mankind’s gradual decadence from its original happiness, and the theory of human primitive animality, which pointed to the role of progress, knowledge, and material circumstances (see Boys-Stones [2001] 3-27). While the former view was deep-rooted in ancient religious thought and appeared as early as Hesiod (see Gatz [1967], and now Currie [2012]), the latter was characteristic of the anti-teleological tradition (to which Lucretius belongs) and originated from sophistic-presocratic rationalism—perhaps from Democritus’ anthropology: cf. Cole (1967) and Cartledge (1998) 20-5.

73 On this section and its relationship to Epicurean contractualism see Campbell (2003) 252-83.
depiction of the use of animals in early warfare which powerfully corroborates this last assumption. In such an impressive passage, even savage beasts like lions and boars become instruments and victims of man’s senseless violence.⁷⁴

Lucretius might well have agreed with Cicero on the dangers of moral regression resulting from the repudiation of reason.⁷⁵ But the Epicurean poet rejected the idea that embracing an anthropocentric cosmology could contribute to avoidance of such degeneration. Rather than this, he preferred to put his trust in Epicurus’ irenic hedonism, arguing for an anti-teleological and materialistic view of the cosmos. The inconstant and vacillating image of animals he projected can be interpreted as supporting both Cicero’s humanism and Lucretius’ physicalism, for in each of these cases—as in most Western traditions—animals were cited as evidence of underlying imperatives: the irresistible voice of a mythical Nature.

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⁷⁴ See 5.1308-49. Whereas some scholars were so struck by Lucretius’ description that they regarded it as a proof of the poet’s insanity (cf. Bailey [1947] 1529, Beye [1962-63] 167, and Bonelli [1984] 238), other more careful interpreters drew attention to the ethical significance of the passage and its close connection with the Epicurean method of analogical demonstration (see De Grummond [1982], Schiesaro [1990] 159-68, and La Penna [1995]). For a special focus on the text’s zoo-anthropological implications see Tutrone (2010b).

⁷⁵ Novara (1982) I 385-443, suggests that a sort of “distance dialogue” connects Lucretius’ history of mankind and Cicero’s proem to the third book of *De re publica* (and she also mentions Balbus’ speech in *Nat. Deor.* 2.81-163). But what is primarily worthy of attention is the wide-ranging anthropological debate involving a number of different writers and trends.
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