

## Humanimals in Juvenal's *Satires*

Over the past forty years, animal studies across Classics have greatly proliferated (e.g., Kindt, Newmyer), but animal studies has only obliquely or tangentially found its way into Roman satire (Uden, Gowers). This paper seeks to change that by demonstrating the significance of animals to Juvenal's *Satires*.

In the context of satiric texts, the term humanimality captures how satirists fuse human and animal imagery together through their shared biological imperatives (McHugh & McKay). This paper applies the concept of humanimality to Juvenal's *Satires* because of all the extant ancient satirists Juvenal has by far the most engagement with animals across his sixteen satires. By focusing on two fundamental drives common to both humans and nonhuman animals—consumption and reproduction—this paper examines how Juvenal situates his elite Roman targets in a liminal space between human and animal. In doing so, Juvenal constructs a more complex moral critique by drawing upon two contrasting ancient views of animality.

Although ancient views of animals can vary in the details, we can nevertheless broadly sketch two prevalent perceptions of animals in texts: animal-averse and theriophilic. The former, composed of mostly austere philosophers, portrays animals as base, sensual beings driven by instinctual appetites. Ancient authors with this perspective (like Cicero and Seneca) often compare indulgent humans—especially those who overeat or pursue sexual pleasure without restraint—to animals, thereby reinforcing the idea that to yield to sensuality is to regress toward a lower, animalistic state. In contrast, the second tradition, drawn from scientific and natural philosophical authors (especially Plutarch), deny such vices originate among animals and, indeed, praises them for their natural moderation and harmony with nature. This theriophilic or

animalitarianist view (Boas 1933; Boas and Lovejoy 1935) posits that animals, by acting according to nature, exemplify restraint and moral simplicity.

Juvenal's *Satires* fuse these two incompatible perceptions through humanimality. In emphasizing the gluttony and lust of his human characters, Juvenal eases their transition from human to animal. These figures become humanimals: grotesque hybrids whose immoderate eating and incessant sex mimics the caricatures found in animal-averse literature, yet also marks them as morally inferior to the animals celebrated by theriophilic thinkers. The result is animal satire that uses animal imagery not to liken humans to animals per se but to emphasize how far elite figures deviate from both animal and human ideals. Since throughout the *Satires* Juvenal's real animals never transgress against nature unless a human forces them to, the animal in these images will remain an implicit point of contrast—a silent witness to excess rather than a participant in it—continually reminding the audience of the fundamental difference between beast and human. While these humanimals may appear animalistic, their vice is distinctly and uniquely *human*—a perversion of both nature and reason.

Real animals in the *Satires* act within natural limits; they do not overconsume, overmate, or violate their ecological boundaries unless forced to by humans. This crucial detail distinguishes them from Juvenal's humanimals, who deliberately abandon restraint in pursuit of luxury, ambition, and selfish gratification. His satire, then, does not vilify animals as emblems of vice. Instead, it magnifies the grotesque failings of elite Romans by contrasting their behavior not only with human ideals of moderation, but also with animalistic models of natural restraint. Juvenal's satire thus transcends simple animal comparison: his humanimals are neither human nor beast, but are worse than both.

By navigating between these ancient discourses of animality, Juvenal crafts a moral critique that targets the decadence of the Roman elite while simultaneously interrogating the very boundaries between human and animal. This perspective allows us to read Juvenal not simply as a satirist of social vice, but as a thinker engaged in a broader philosophical conversation about nature, morality, and the limits of humanity itself.

### Bibliography

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