

TITLE:

Those Who Cannot Speak. Animals as Others in Ancient Greek Thought

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ABSTRACT:

The essay is concerned with the topic of the difference between humans and animals in ancient Greek thought. Starting with the lexical problems in studying ancient terms indicating animals, the author presents various definitions of man formulated in contrast to animals, treated as inferior beings. She focuses on the term *logos*, understood both as reason and ability to speak, which the animals were deprived of according to most of Greek thinkers. The author shows also how the idea of man uniqueness has changed from the archaic period to the classical one. At the end of the essay several reasons why the ancient philosophers define man in opposition to animals are suggested.

KEYWORDS:

animals, human, ancient Greece, Greek thought, other, otherness, logos, reason, speech, Plato, Porphyry, Aristotle

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THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK. ANIMALS AS OTHERS IN ANCIENT GREEK THOUGHT

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You (...) said with great readiness that there were two kinds of living beings, the human race and a second one, a single class, comprising all the beasts (...). But indeed, (...) if there is any other animal capable of thought, such as the crane appears to be, or any other like creature, and it perchance gives names, just as you do, it might in its pride of self oppose cranes to all other animals, and group the rest, men included, under one head, calling them by one name, which might very well be that of beasts.¹

The problem of a strong distinction between humans and all other species belonging to the animal kingdom is nowadays one of the main subjects of a relatively young discipline, known as animal studies. The issue of the disparity between two groups – humans on the one side and a medley of all other animals, from an elephant to a fruit fly, on the other – has been raised in more and more philosophical treatises². It is well proved that our modern outlook on human-animal relations, based mainly on an exclusive view on man, has been compiled of the ancient Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian theology³. Thus it seems evident that in classical antiquity the man-animal distinction should be at least as well defined as nowadays. However, as Richard Sorabji demonstrates, our modern attitude to animals comes mostly from Christian interpretation of the works of Aristotle and the Stoics, which in fact were only „one half, the anti-animal half, of the much more evenly balanced ancient debate”⁴.

As evidenced by the fragment of *Statesman* by Plato quoted at the beginning of this essay, in ancient Greek philosophy the problem of man-animal distinction was not rigid and could be raised as a matter of discussion. It does not mean that the differences between humans and animals were disregarded or did not exist in the ancient Greek thought. As John Heath noticed, animals „have often provided the fundamental metaphor of Otherness”⁵. Being this element of the environment, which is most similar to man, animals were an ideal starting point for defining humanity

¹ Plato, *Statesman*, 263c-d.

² E.g. J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. D. Willis, New York 2008.

³ E.g. I.S. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans. Changing Attitudes to Animals In Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas*, Oxford 2006, pp. 262 ff.

⁴ R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals. The Origins of the Western Debate*, New York 1995, p. 2.

⁵ J. Heath, *The Talking Greeks: each, Animals, and the Other in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato*, Cambridge 2005, p. 315.

by an opposition – in the same way as the ancient Greek men defined themselves in contrast to women, barbarians, slaves or metics (resident aliens). The difference between humans and animals was, however, variously defined depending on an author or period. Nowadays the best known are the definitions proposed by Aristotle and the Stoics, which focused on man's intelligence, but in fact they were only ones of many proposals for definition formulated by ancient Greeks. The main aim of this essay is to analyse other ideas of human-animal differences, with a particular emphasis on speech (connected with reason) as the main feature by which Greeks distinguished man from other species.

The fundamental problem we have to face while studying the attitude to animals in ancient Greek thought is the incompatibility of modern terms used for animals with those present in ancient languages. The term 'animal' – having the same or very similar meaning in most European languages – is nowadays understood in a few ways. In a biological sense, an 'animal' means any living being who belongs to the kingdom Animalia. This term includes also humans. In everyday non-scientific usage, however, the word 'animal' encloses all living beings except humans and plants. The classical term that is often translated into English as an 'animal' is *zoon*. This word, however, had far broader meaning, as it primarily indicated any 'living being' (compare with the word *zoe* – 'life'). It meant as well 'animals', 'humans' and sometimes even 'plants'⁶. Therefore ancient authors (including Aristotle) very often used a term *zoon* to indicate man; if they had the need to distinguish a human from other species, they usually named beasts as *alla zoa* what meant 'other animals'. In Greek there were also other terms nowadays translated as 'animals', but with narrower meaning, as they did not encompass some species, for example fish or domesticated animals. Among them particularly worth mentioning is the term *therion*, which means 'beast', 'wild animal'⁷ and its far rare synonym, *knodalon* ('beast', 'monster'). Both of these terms could be used to indicate a brute man, or a man who behaves like a wild animal. Hence these words, unlike *zoon*, were often negative.

What is interesting, the term *zoon* is relatively late. Before the time when this term came into use in the 5th century BC to indicate animals, no generic word enclosing all animals could be found in Greek⁸. The utter lack of the term 'animals' in the archaic Greece might indicate that the relations between man and animals radically changed in the classical period, as then arose the need for this very word. Indeed, some scholars suggest that the history of an ancient attitude to animals should be divided into at least two periods: the first would encompass the pre-Socratic thought

⁶ „All things live which partake of heat - this is why plants are living things (*zoa*)”; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 8.28 (trans. R.D. Hicks).

⁷ The term *therion* has the same Indo-European root as Latin *ferrus* ('wild', 'brute'). Slavic terms for 'animal' have the same root (nowadays understood as a generic term, the same way as in English), e.g. *zwierzę* in Polish.

⁸ S. H. Lonsdale, *Attitudes towards Animals in Ancient Greece*, „Greece & Rome. Second Series”, 1979, No. 2 (26), pp. 146–159.

(and include also the epics) and the second – the philosophy of the great thinkers of classical period, especially Aristotle and the Stoics⁹.

Even if in archaic period the generic word for all animals had not been yet known (or had been used too rarely to remain in written sources), the first Greek authors were able to express the animal otherness from humans. Probably the first author, who defined the fundamental difference between man and animals, was Hesiod, a Greek poet living in the 8th or 7th century BC. In his didactic poem titled *Works and Days*, Hesiod addresses his brother, a landowner:

But you, Perses, lay up these things within your heart and listen now to right, ceasing altogether to think of violence. For the son of Cronos [Zeus] has ordained this law for men, that fishes (*ichthysi*) and beasts (*thersi*) and winged fowls (*oionois peteenois*) should devour one another, for right (*dike*) is not in them; but to mankind he gave right (*diken*) which proves far the best¹⁰.

Hence the human uniqueness consists in the awareness of *dike* – ‘right’ or ‘justice’. According to Steven Lonsdale it means that the fundamental difference lies in an ethical sphere, as men do not prey on their own kind¹¹. It seems, however, that the Hesiod’s message was slightly different: the world of man is well organised – people do not use violence if it is not necessary as the law will punish them for every offence. Beasts, however, have no rules besides the law of the stronger (*ther* and *oionos* are different kinds of predators).

There is also another aspect worth noticing in the quoted fragment. According to Hesiod it was son of Kronos, Zeus, who ordained this law for man. In the Greek tradition Kronos was the one who ruled in the golden age of man, while Zeus – in the iron age. The iron age, the epoch in which the author lived, was the time of violence, suffering and hard work, while the golden one was the mythical epoch of stability and prosperity. The idea, also included in *Works and Days*¹², symbolised not only the initial happiness of the mankind, but also peace and harmony with all beings. The message of the cited fragment is therefore ambiguous: people are superior to animals, as they have the justice to prevent an excessive violence which is common in the world of beasts, but, on the other hand, the justice was not necessary if people lived in the golden age, in common peace. In this magnificent epoch there were no differences between man and animals, especially taking into account that in that

⁹ See e.g. S. Newmyer, *Being the One and Becoming the Other: Animals In Ancient Philosophical Schools*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, red. G.S. Campbell, Cambridge 2014, pp. 507–534; G. Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy*, Pittsburgh 2010.

¹⁰ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 274–280 (trans. H. G. Evelyn-White).

¹¹ S.H. Lonsdale, op. cit., p. 156. See also: R. Renehan, *The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man*, „Harvard Studies in Classical Philology”, 1981, No. 85, pp. 254 ff.

¹² Hesiod, op.cit., 109–128.

time all animals could speak¹³. There was also no need for animal killing, as the earth itself nourished them with its fruits¹⁴. The idea of an utopian world with common vegetarianism and no animal sacrifices was a popular motif in the Greek comedies, among which perhaps *Wild Beasts (Theria)* by Crates was the best known. The author described a world with no animal sacrifices, no meat-eating and no need for slaves, as tables would set themselves for feast¹⁵. To the audience living in the 5th century BC, all these phenomena must seem equally ridiculous.

The basic source of the knowledge of the archaic Greece are undoubtedly the Homeric epics. In *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, written in the 8th century, animals are mentioned many times, especially in the similes, in which the great poet compares the acts of human heroes to the behaviour of animals. In the epic simile, in fact, a human being seems to be „at least for a moment in time, *like* another species in behaviour and character”¹⁶. As Otto Körner suggested, the precision of the Homeric description of animals’ behaviour and psychology might result from the fact that Greeks in the time of Homer lived in closer proximity to animals than did the Greeks in classical period¹⁷. What is worth mentioning the motif of a lonely shepherd was a very popular theme in the Greek myths and early Greek literature. As Lonsdale noticed, this motif shows a very important aspect of human-animal relationships in the archaic period - an idea of reciprocity: the man provided protection to his flock and the animals (sheep and a dog) were the only company of the shepherd¹⁸. It could be also the reason why in the Homeric epics the difference between humans and animals seems to be much less evident than in later philosophical works. It does not mean that Homer did not distinguish man and animals. Irrespectively of all possible differences, however, one thing was undeniable: both humans and animals are living and both are mortal, in contrast to everlasting gods. As Stephen Newmyer wrote:

The Homeric concept of “otherness” posits a sharper distinction between the divine and the mortal than between human and non-human: in the world of Homeric epic, human beings are reckoned to be more like other animals than they are like the gods¹⁹.

¹³ D. L. Gera, *Ancient Greek Ideas on Speech, Language, and Civilization*, Oxford 2003, p. 19; Plato, *Statesman*, 272b-c. What is interesting, it seems that Greek fables began with the conventional phrase: „When the animals spoke”; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.7.13.

¹⁴ This idea was also very popular among contemporary and later philosophers and religious followers: vegetarianism was a rule in Orphism and Pythagoreanism, but many other thinkers (like Empedocles, Theophrastus, Seneca, Ovid, Plutarch, Plotinus, Porphyry) also stick to a meat-free diet. Plato, although apparently not a vegetarian, presented a meat-free diet as an ideal in his *Republic* (372b-c).

¹⁵ K. J. Reckford, *Aristophanes' Old-and-new Comedy: Six essays in perspective*, T. 1, Chapel Hill 1987, p. 90.

¹⁶ S. Newmyer, op. cit., s. 508.

¹⁷ O. Körner, *Die homerische Tierwelt*, Munich 1930, p. 2. See also: S. Newmyer, op. cit., p. 508.

¹⁸ S. Lonsdale, op. cit., p. 149.

¹⁹ S. Newmyer, op. cit., p. 508.

Paradoxically, even the animal sacrifices could be interpreted in that way: if we assume that primarily animals were offered in replacement to their owners²⁰, it suggests, that for the gods there was no evident differences between humans and animals.

On the other hand, some Homeric similes may be interpreted as an emphasis of the differences between the world of Greeks and the uncivilized world of other nations. As Deborah Levine Gera notices, Trojan forces are compared by Homer to bleating lambs²¹ and clamorous cranes²², which might suggest that barbarian language sounds to Greek like an animal one²³. By this comparison both barbarians and animals are put in contrast to Greeks, the only ones who possess the proper language. Greeks do not deny that barbarians have their own tongues, but their dissimilarity to Greek was one of the main reasons for treating barbarians as strangers and inferiors. Even the term *barbaros* – in antiquity not entirely pejorative – is echoic of unintelligible speech of foreigners²⁴.

Although the barbarians' tongues grated on Greeks' ears, they were – after all – similar to man languages whereas animals' ones did not sound like any human tongue. Communication with barbarians (with the help of translators, in broken language or even non-verbal gestures) was possible to Greeks, but it was unable to be done with animals. The inability to communicate with animals became the literary motif in *Odyssey* with almost calamitous overtone. The Cyclops Polyphemus, cheated and blinded by Odysseus, dreamt that his ram could speak and tell him where the cunning Greek hid himself. So Polyphemus says: „If only thou couldst feel as I do (*homophroneois*), and couldst get thee power of speech (*genoio eipein*)”²⁵.

The importance of speech in ancient Greek, however, did not arise only from the necessity of communication. The main term for speech was *logos*, which had an abundance of other meanings, from 'computation' to 'law' or 'fable'. *Logos* indicated also 'reason' – the term, which in ancient Greek seemed to be inseparable from 'speech'. The ability of speaking was the best evidence of having reason. In other words, there was no speech without reason and no reason without speech. In ancient Greece as well as in Rome, the rhetorical talent was the most desired gift of gods, often highly paid with long hours of oratorical practices or even harsh physical exercises. It was charisma and eloquence (in tandem with ability of proper pronunciation and intonation) which ensured high status, political career and impact on the people. The significance of speech in the word

²⁰ As Edmund Leach noticed: „Before the sacrificial animal is killed the donor of the offering invariably establishes a metonymic relationship between himself and the victim by touching the victim on the head. The plain implication is that, in some metaphorical sense, the victim is a vicarious substitution for the donor himself”; idem, *Culture & communication. The logic by which symbols are connected. An introduction to the use of structuralist analysis in social anthropology*, Cambridge 1986, pp. 88–89.

²¹ Homer, *Iliad*, 4.433–438.

²² Ibidem, 3.1–7.

²³ D. L. Gera, op. cit., p. 2.

²⁴ The term is not only Greek, but of Indo-European origin (compare Sanskrit *barbara* - 'stammering', 'non-Aryan').

²⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.456–457 (trans. A. T. Murray).

of ancient Greeks and resulting from it inferiority of animals is best demonstrated in the sublime orations of Isokrates (5th/4th century BC), for example:

For in the other powers which we possess we are in no respect superior to other living creatures (*allon zoon*); nay, we are inferior to many in swiftness and in strength and in other resources; but, because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts (*theriodes zen*), but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech (*logos*) has not helped us to establish²⁶.

Hence for Greeks the intelligible speech was the exclusive prerogative of humans²⁷. In very anthropocentric Greek mythology, in contrast to the myths from many other cultures (especially shamanism), animals took almost no part in the myths and were never seen as smart or cunning²⁸. The most perspicuous exception were Aesop's fables, in which – worth noticing! – animals usually had an ability to speech. Animal fables conventionally took place in the golden age²⁹ and it seems that at that time animals were perceived not only as talking, but also as wise beings. In the aforementioned *Statesman* by Plato the Stranger regretted that people did not live in the golden age, as the possibility to converse with animals would be a salutary experience to philosophers – for a unique knowledge of every species could be added to the general store of wisdom³⁰.

In one of the Aesop's fables, quoted by Callimachus (3rd century BC), animals angered Zeus, complaining about his rules. As a result, the god took away the animals' speech and gave it to man, what presumably indicated the end of the idyllic golden age and the beginning of the distinction between humans and animals³¹. Deprived of speech, the animals became reasonless beings and consequently reason was the main feature, by which man was distinguished from other species. In Euripides' account of the development of human civilization, the leading part had been played by an indefinite god, who separated humans from beasts (*theriodes*): "Having first placed intelligence (*synesis*) in us, then he gave us speech (*glossa*) – the messenger of *logos* – so that we could come to know the discourse"³². The idea is very similar to that of the fable cited by Callimachus and also to the Hesiod's view.

²⁶ Isokrates, *Nicoles of the Cyprians*, 3.5-6.

²⁷ D. Gera, op. cit., p. 182.

²⁸ I mean the mythological archetype of cunning trickster, who was an animal in many mythologies (e.g. coyote, or raven in native American stories).

²⁹ D. Gera, op. cit., p. 20.

³⁰ Plato, *Statesman*, 272b-c.

³¹ D. Gera, op. cit., pp. 31-32. It does not mean that in the golden age people did not speak, but their language skills were similar to animals' ones. When Zeus bestowed humans with animals voices, people acquired additional language skills, while animals became completely deprived of speech.

³² Euripides, *The Suppliants*, 202-204 [trans. after:] A. Pappas, *More Than Meets the Eye: Aesthetics of (Non)sense in the Ancient Greek Symposium*, [in:] *Aesthetic Value in Classical Antiquity*, ed. I. Sluiter, R.M. Rosen, Leiden 2012, p. 85.

The ability to speak was so important that it could even be the main factor to decide whether one creature belongs to human species or animals. It should be remembered that the world of ancient legends was inhabited with a whole host of legendary people whose appearance and manners were far different from those of ordinary humans. One of that mythical nations were *Kynocephaloi* ('dog-headed'), half-man and half-dog people from Ctesias the Cnidian's account of India (5th century BC). While Ctesias designated *Kynocephaloi* as humans (*anthropoi*)³³, the Roman author who wrote in Greek, Claudius Aelianus (2nd/3rd century CE), admitted them among 'irrational beings' (*alogois*), "for their speech is inarticulate, unintelligible, and not that of men"³⁴. 'Irrational beings' is here the synonym of 'animals'. The term *alogos* is the negative form of *logos* and means both 'mindless' and 'dumb'. The same synonym was used in the title of a polemical dialogue *Peri tou ta aloga logo chresthai*, traditionally attributed to Plutarch (1st/2nd century CE) and conventionally translated as *Beasts are Rational*. This translation does not reflect a pun putted in the original title, which should be translate rather as 'About the irrational beings, which use reason'.

If an ability to speak (and thereby having reason) is the feature, on the basis of which humans and animals were decisively distinguished, one question arises: should people treat disabled persons similarly to animals? It was the problem that in antiquity was raised only by Porphyry (3rd century CE), but in modern debates becomes more and more popular (known as 'an argument from marginal cases' nowadays at first putted forward by Peter Singer³⁵). Porphyry, in a letter to Firmus Castricius, noted:

And is it not absurd, since we see that many of our own species (*antropon*) live from sense alone (*aisthesei monon*), but do not possess intellect (*noun*) and reason (*logon*), and since we also see, that many of them surpass the most terrible of wild beasts in cruelty, anger, and rapine, being murderous of their children and their parents, and also being tyrants, and the tools of kings [is it not, I say, absurd,] to fancy that we ought to act justly towards these, but that no justice is due from us to the ox that ploughs, the dog that is fed with us, and the animals that nourish us with their milk, and adorn our bodies with their wool?³⁶

Porphyry challenged also the opinion that speech reflected reason:

And if this be the case, is it not absurd to call the voice of man alone [external] reason, but refuse thus to denominate the voice of other animals? For this is just as if crows should think that their voice alone is external reason, but that we are irrational animals, because the meaning of the sounds which we utter is not obvious to them; or as if the inhabitants of Attica should thus denominate their speech alone, and should think that those are irrational who are ignorant of the Attic tongue, though the inhabitants

³³ Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 72 (48b).

³⁴ Claudius Aelianus, *On the Characteristics of Animals*, 4.46 (trans. A.F. Scholfield).

³⁵ P. Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*, New York 1975, p. 265. See also: D. A. Dombrowski, *Vegetarianism and the Argument from Marginal Cases in Porphyry*, „Journal of the History of Ideas”, 1984, No. 1 (45), pp. 142–143.

³⁶ Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, 3.19, (trans. Th. Taylor).

of Attica would sooner understand the croaking of a crow, than the language of a Syrian or a Persian. But is it not absurd to judge of rationality and irrationality from apprehending or not apprehending the meaning of vocal sounds, or from silence and speech? For thus some one might say, that the God who is above all things, and likewise the other Gods are not rational, because they do not speak³⁷.

It should be remembered that in general Greek writers did not deny that many animals could communicate within their own species, but they predicated that the man speech was more subtle. A Stoic philosopher, Diogenes the Babylonian (3rd/2nd century BC), noticed in his missing tractate *On Voice* that:

While the voice or cry of an animal is just a percussion of air brought about by natural impulse, man's voice is articulate and (...) an utterance of reason, having the quality of coming to maturity at the age of fourteen³⁸.

Aristotle wrote that the human tongue is freest of all animals and therefore could articulate the various sounds³⁹. A very interesting observation about anatomical differences between man and animals, that enable humans to speak, was also made by Xenophon (5th/4th century BC):

Though all creatures have a tongue (*glottan*), the tongue of man alone has been formed by them to be capable of contact with different parts of the mouth, so as to enable us to articulate the voice and express all our wants to one another⁴⁰.

Xenophon described also other differences of the anatomical character:

Man is the only living creature that they have caused to stand upright (*monon ton zoon anthropon orthon anesthesan*); and the upright position gives him a wider range of vision in front and a better view of things above, and exposes him less to injury. Secondly, to grovelling creatures they have given feet that afford only the power of moving, whereas they have endowed man with hands, which are the instruments to which we chiefly owe our greater happiness. (...) For all other creatures they have prescribed a fixed season of sexual indulgence; in our case the only time limit they have set is old age⁴¹.

And, in the end, he mentioned also mental differences. He puts an emphasis on the human soul, which surpasses the animal one, especially when taking into account the man's religiousness:

Nor was the deity content to care for man's body. What is of yet higher moment, he has implanted in him the noblest type of soul (*psyche kratisten*). For in the first place what

³⁷ Ibidem, 3.5.

³⁸ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 7.55 (trans. R. D. Hicks).

³⁹ Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 660a.

⁴⁰ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 1.4.12 (trans. E. C. Marchant).

⁴¹ Ibidem, 1.4.11–12.

other creature's soul (*allou zoon psyche*) has apprehended the existence of gods who set in order the universe, greatest and fairest of things? And what race of living things other than man worships gods (*ti de phylon allo e anthropoi theous therapeuousi*)? And what soul is more apt than man's to make provision against hunger and thirst, cold and heat, to relieve sickness and promote health, to acquire knowledge by toil, and to remember accurately all that is heard, seen, or learned? For is it not obvious to you that, in comparison with the other animals (*talla zoa*), men live like gods, by nature peerless both in body and in soul? For with a man's reason and the body of an ox we could not carry out our wishes, and the possession of hands without reason is of little worth. Do you, then, having received the two most precious gifts, yet think that the gods take no care of you?⁴²

The idea is slightly similar to Hesiod's and Euripides' one: the deity implanted man with the feature which distinguished him from other animals. Although Xenophon listed also other differences, the possession of the soul was the most important of them, as due to it man was able to worship gods. In all these fragments we can see that man became more similar to gods than to animals and therefore his position in a word of living beings was much more exclusive than it used to be in *Iliad* or *Odyssey*⁴³. What is however the most interesting in this fragment, Xenophon emphasised that human psychical and physical abilities are inseparable. It means that even if animals had had reason, they could not use it because of physical limitations.

The belief in gods (as well as justice, like in Hesiod's idea, and intelligence) was also the distinctive factor in Plato's dialogue *Menexenus*. As Plato noticed, man surpasses all other animals in intelligence (*synesis*) and as the only living being regards justice (*dike*) and gods (*theoi*)⁴⁴. Another thinker, who also defined the differences using an argument of intelligence and understanding, not directly related to speech, was Alcmaeon of Croton (5th century BC):

Of those who do not explain perception by similarity, Alcmaeon first defines the differences among animals. For he says that humans differ from the other animals because they alone understand (*xyniesi*), whereas the others perceive (*aisthanetai*) but do not understand. He supposes that thinking and perceiving are distinct, not – as Empedocles holds – the same thing⁴⁵.

Alcmaeon was a Greek physician and - according to Newmyer – his observation “probably arose from his anatomical investigations on the human sense organs and was intended as an assertion of scientific fact, as he sought to isolate the seat of human intellectual faculties”⁴⁶. As William Guthrie noticed, “the word *xynienai* means literally ‘to put together’, and traces of this basic meaning probably survived in the

⁴² Ibidem, 1.4.13–14.

⁴³ See: R. Renehan, op. cit., pp. 251 ff.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Menexenus*, 237d.

⁴⁵ Theophrastus, *On the Senses*, 25, [after:] E. B. Cole, *Theophrastus and Aristotle on Animal Intelligence*, [in:] *Theophrastus: His Psychological, Doxographical, and Scientific Writings*, ed. W.W. Fortenbaugh, D. Gutas, New Jersey 1992, p. 60.

⁴⁶ S. T. Newmyer, op.cit., p. 510.

mind of a Greek writer of the fifth century⁴⁷, therefore the quotation of Alcmaeon should be understood as “all animals have sensation, but only man can make a synthesis of his sensations”⁴⁸. However, Plato went even further in his studies and in *Cratylus* he suggested that also the very term ‘man’ (*anthropos*) should be derived from his specific features, which distinguished him from animals:

The name “man” (*anthropos*) indicates that the other animals (*alla theria*) do not examine (*episkopei*), or consider (*analogizetai*), or look up at (*anathrei*) any of the things that they see, but man has no sooner seen - that is, *opope* - than he looks up at and considers that which he has seen. Therefore of all the animals man alone is rightly called man (*anthropos*), because he looks up at (*anathrei*) what he has seen (*opope*)⁴⁹.

To sum up, one of the most important feature by which Greeks distinguished humans from animals was the ability to speak, which resulted from the specific Greek understanding of *logos*, the term enclosing both speech and reason. But there were also several others definitions of man which more or less strong contrasted humans with animals. The kind of such definition depended on the epoch in which it was formed and the reason why it was posed. We could agree with some scholars, who suggest that in the time of Homer, the difference between humans and animals was not so evident as in the later times. But the total lack of distinction between species in ancient Greece was characteristic only to the mythical ages. The authors, especially in the times of Homer and Hesiod, willingly invoked the age of primarily similarity of humans and animals. Both the golden age from Hesiod’s *Works and Days* and the heroic age from Homeric poems, were perceived as times much more glorious than the epoch in which the authors lived.

In the philosophy of classical Greece and later one, the distinction between man and animals was clearly defined. It was – most of all – result of the philosophical exploration of the essence of humanity. The Greek men defined themselves in opposition to many other people deprived of political power and perceived as ‘others’ – women, slaves, foreigners. The definition of whole mankind needed a broader reference point – animals. There is probably why since the 5th century we could find several terms enclosing all animals but humans. It should be remembered, however, that the distinction between humans and animals was also the result of a scientific curiosity about species diversity, like in the case of Aristotle, who researched many kinds of animals, finding differences not only between humans, animals and plants, but also among particular species of animals. What is worth noticing, Greeks often used the argument derived from the physical, not only psychological, features of humans such as the difference in the anatomical structure of human tongue (Aristotle) or the upright posture (Xenophon).

⁴⁷ W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume 1, The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*, Cambridge 1979, p. 347.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, The word *xynienai* is related to the term *synesis* (*x* in place of *s* because of an Attic dialect), translated above (in the fragment by Euripides) as ‘intelligence’.

⁴⁹ Plato, *Cratylus*, 399c, trans. H.N. Fowler.

There was probably also another reason for defining the human-animal distinction. With the development of *poleis*, advancing specialization of professions and the separation of citizens from both wild and domesticated animals, killing animals became less and less natural in the eyes of many Greek thinkers. On one hand, it became needful to prove human superiority to animals and resulting from it moral consent to animal killing for humans' needs. On the other hand, however, it caused that in the Greek thought the contrary view arose. Some philosophers, especially Plutarch and Porphyry, tried to demonstrate that arguments used to prove animals' inferiority to humans might be easily refuted. It should be therefore remembered that many of arguments used by modern ethicists in debates on animal rights, could be actually dated as far back as two millennia ago.

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SUMMARY

The essay is concerned with the topic of the difference between humans and animals in ancient Greek thought. Starting with the lexical problems in studying ancient terms indicating animals, the author presents various definitions of man formulated in contrast to animals, treated as inferior beings. She focuses on the term *logos*, understood both as reason and ability to speak, which the animals were deprived of according to most of Greek thinkers. The author shows also how the idea of man uniqueness has changed from the archaic period to the classical one. At the end of the essay several reasons why the ancient philosophers define man in opposition to animals are suggested.