

On the Dignity of Animal Nature

Or

The Virtues: Divine, Human, and Animal

An unpublished manuscript by
William Bartram

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Introduction:

I made this transcript from xerox copies in 2004 and then corrected it in 2009 with the help of the dissertation transcript by Nancy E. Hoffman. Since then, Hallock and Hoffman have published their version with even further revisions, not incorporated here.

In order to make clear that the treatise on animal dignity is embedded into the larger essay on the virtues, I have used a blue font for the more telling passage. It is clear from the illustration of the ms below that Bartram was still revising this piece and far from having a fair copy. In this transcription I have left out many of the deletions and corrections that would not make for smoother reading.

It may be also, that, as we are Creatures of the supreme Being, made for a certain and indispensable purpose in this Vast System of Creation, as instruments, Members, or Organical beings designed and created to form a part in the Whole and act and perform a certain part. And then again each individual hath a particular part to act and perform in the Human System. The Almighty, being the Sovereign Creator, his divine Intelligence is diffused through every part of his works which directs and rules all. The most secret, invisible, and insensible operation in us may be the effects of this divine Intelligence acting after various manners, either directly or by various agencies, the secret causes unknown to us and the effects not sensible to us at all time.

Thus the Divine Intelligence may act arbitrarily or independently of the System of order established by himself for the various orders of his works in the Vast Universe; for every part of his works may be in themselves perfect, agreeable to the intent and design for which they were created, yet imperfect in comparison to their Creator or of the Universal System. And although the Universe may act and operate by established Order and system or by secondary Intelligence, yet we suppose the Supreme Intelligence secretly directs and overrules the whole, varies, alters, and ever creates new intentions according to his Will, perfect Wisdom and Omnipotence.

But with respect to the Divine Virtues or his superior attributes, they are invariable, unalterable in themselves because they are the attributes of himself, as: Truth, Mercy, Justice, Righteousness, Benevolence, Love, Charity, Benignity, Immutability, Patience, Pardon, etc. And likewise with respect to the Moral or Human Virtues, their principal or Archetypal Ideas are unalterable, perfect, and eternal, but with respect to us, as they affect our senses and affections are rather to be considered as qualities because we use and apply them for our various purposes, but still Our Reason informs us of their real and perfect nature and when we listen to and obey her dictates, we make use of all our senses or affections innocently.

For it is properly our duty but to subdue our Passions and affections, not to destroy and annihilate, and only retain or admit such as we find by experience contribute to improve the Heart and beautify the Body or Mind. It is true, if we find that our passions are formidable, importunate, and intrusive and our intellectual and mental powers are weak, it may be the safest to drive such passions and importunate affections from our bosom and as it were expel them out of sight and keep them under foot. As Our Lord hath said, it is better to lose an Eye or an arm than to suffer those members to delude us to our destruction.

I own that of all Our passions, sentiments, and affections Dissimulation is the most mischievous and indignant, and I believe that no person more highly approves of simplicity and sincerity than myself.

Yet hard and difficult as it is with me, I must own that in a certain degree Mankind, **especially those nations who have adopted the present system of refined civilization**, could not live without associating some degree of this pernicious vice in their moral system; for most people are now obliged to arm themselves with it in their own Defense. If indeed we only used it as a defensive armour, it might be allowed in some degree reasonable. Dissimulation seems to be a species of what modern Philosophers call Instinct. Since in animals we find that almost every order of the Animal Creation are actuated by it, more or less, but then, wherever we observe it in animals, it is for their own defense, for protecting their young, for procuring only a necessary subsistence, or for their safety.

Dissimulation then appears to be not only a necessary affection in our minds, but also an important one, if used aright that is, only in our own defense and never to hurt or wrong another person. Was not there a virtue in the dissimulation practiced by the Wife of Ulysses?

I allow there was more heroism in the virtue of the [wife?] of Lucretia, and don't imagine, my friend, by these arguments that I approve of dissimulation, according to its worst or generally received sense or construction. That's impossible, be assured. I abhor it and almost shudder at recollecting the mischief that has [been] and may be perpetrated by hypocrisy.

There are perhaps many species of Dissimulation. Coquetry may be one of them and even Courtship, when there's no real evil intended. In short, there are many varieties of this passion both innocent and pleasing. However, it's a pity we had not another term for innocent and defensive dissimulation. Deception carries rather a bad meaning. Let us call it Artifice. I think we must under some name or other admit this affection of the mind in some degree among our necessary passions, at least in our present state of existence. Thus we have taken a view of dissimulation, one of the most formidably dangerous passions in our nature, if not kept under strict rule or regulation.

Revenge comes next in order of importance. I think it may not on any account be admitted, as we can do well without any degree of it.

Pride I shall include entirely also. We may admit a small degree of resentment. Hatred we have not the least use for.

Now let us take a view of the virtues. The first Order of Virtue I have already mentioned under the attributes of the Deity which are copies for our imitation, but which in our state of nature it is not possible for us to equal, no more than a painter can produce the original animal being on canvas.

The secondary Order of Virtues, or such as are accommodated to our nature and which we have in some degree the use and control of, I shall first enumerate. The Masculine Virtues are Valor, Intrepidity, Courage, Love in every [sense?], Strength, Generosity, Magnanimity, Piety, Clemency. Those which belong to the Female Sex are particularly Chastity, Modesty, Meekness, Sensibility, Charity, Humility, Affection, Commiseration, Timidity, Love, etc.

I shall forbear entering into a full description of the [81v] merits of all the virtues, or the Powers and effects of our Vices and deformities, which I shall leave to thy own imagination because after nice and refined examination and application, may produce a needless embarrassment and confusion. For, in some instances, an excess of some of our virtues becomes vice or deformity. Indeed, it seems that what we generally term vices are inseparable from their opposite Virtues, as the shadow is to Bodies, and which serves as the Color obscure in Painting which presents the object in a stronger and more natural light. But this is not the case with the Divine Virtues, which we imagine to be the Attributes of the Deity, which are intrinsically good and perfect, perfectly apparent and beautifully, requiring no opposite or relief to attach our notice, love, or esteem for the Object.

Thus it appears that Reason or that Divine Monitor which has been supposed by the Ancient Philosophers an emanation from the Divine Intelligence and which constantly accompanies us in this Life, points out to us, either immediately in every one of us or by the advice and direction of another person, what is right and true virtue, or our exact duty in the [exercise?] of the Virtues, Affections, and Passions. No doubt but this Monitor resides within us individually, but through a habit of indulging our passions and affection or by [listening?] to their seducing language and feelings we cannot [or] do not attend to the Voice of Reason. And it is by the powerful seductions of our passions and affections that we neglect to purify the Heart and disgrace the Mind.

Knowing the Uncertainty of our term of Existence here in this life and being convinced of the clearness and accuracy of thy judgment, the purity and simplicity of thy Heart and the strength and firmness of thy Mind, I consider it as a duty incumbent on me to declare my sentiments freely on a subject though of little moment to Mankind in general at this time, yet to me of much importance. Namely, of the Dignity of Animal Nature with respect to the Station or Degree they hold in the grand System of Creation in this world. When considered in a physiological sense, the great Naturalist and Philosopher Linnaeus has constituted the whole terrestrial system under three grand divisions which he calls kingdoms in Nature, viz.

1. Minerals or *Lapides*, a confused mass of inanimate matter mixed together consisting of four elements, namely, Earth, Water, Air, and Fire.
2. Vegetables, which are organical bodies, animated, but not having sensation.
3. Animals, which are living organical, self-moving Bodies endowed with sentiment.

At the head or first in the animal Kingdom, he hath placed Man, a being exclusively endued with Wisdom, the power and the prerogative (above all other terrestrial beings) of knowing himself and his creator. This Wisdom (*Sapiens?*) he imagines to be a Ray, emanation, or particle of the Divine Intelligence communicating with this spirit or mind of man which is the source of human Knowledge and the power of [forming?] Ideas and Understanding.

Having taken a view of the Physical Nature of Animals, we shall next endeavor to examine their Ethical or Moral Nature. Of man we have already fully treated. Now, since we have no certain knowledge that animals below the order of Mankind have no Intellectual Powers and since we suppose that all Metaphysical Knowledge is attained by analogy or comparing Ideas, which is Reasoning or Understanding.

If we examine and compare those actions and movements of animals which they have in common with us, we find little or no difference. Why then have we not every reason to believe that those actions and movements are excited and proceed from the same motives or cause?

After all the pains and labor which Buffon has taken to explain away their Intellectual and Rational Powers, He has thereby sufficiently established a truly wonderful Instinct and Intuitive Knowledge or Understanding which he at the same time asserts to be the same and in common with Man. And in reality it is the most useful, worthy, and divine part of our nature; for this

Knowledge is Innocent, indispensable, and Truly Divine since it was created and appointed by the supreme being for the best and most important purpose in our state of existence here. I think it must be the opinion of every rational being that our well being in this life ought to be the chief concern of all our actions and operations.

I do not say that Man is not the first order of Beings in this world and accordingly his formation is such as enables him to subjugate and even tyrannize over every other animal and probably would long ere this have destroyed the whole animal creation if his arms were not withheld by the Supreme Creator and Preserver. But this does not prove because he is the most powerful that he is the most divine.

We say this divine intelligence penetrates and animates the Universe. This is the immortal Soul of nature, of living moving beings, of vegetables, and is in the elements.

I cannot believe, I cannot be so impious, nay my Soul revolts, is destroyed by such conjectures as to desire or imagine that Man, who is guilty of more mischief and wickedness than all the other animals together in this world, should be exclusively endued with the knowledge of the Creator and capable of impressing his love, gratitude, and homage to the Great Author of Being who continually feeds and delights us and all his creatures with every good and enjoyment.

It is so evident that if Man is alone endued with Intelligence and Reason, generally he acts as if he seldom consulted or obeyed the dictates and advice of that Divine Monitor. Nay those who are celebrated by most men [83Ar], the Greatest and most Illustrious Characters on Record demonstrate that they seldom were actuated or influenced by this divine monitor, as Nimrod, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Hannibal, and even Cato. Their actions represent Madness and intoxication. Cato seems to be the most virtuous and harmless for he injured no one but himself, yet in that he certainly was guilty of a most irrational and mad action.

Thus it appears I think that we act most rationally and virtuously when our actions seem to operate from simple instinct, or approach nearest to the manners of the Animal creation. For if we examine minutely the morality or manners of animals, and compare them with those nations of tribes of the human Race who yet remain in the simple state of primitive Nature as Our Indians, who have had but little intercourse with White people, we shall find but little difference between their manners and the Animal creation in general.

Having resided some considerable time amongst several of these Nations, I can give a pretty concise view, both of their Arts and sciences, and their Morality.

In the first place, the Male and female mate and unite in reciprocal Love and affection for the purpose of reproduction, the female shows greatest tenderness and solicitude for the young offspring, and both contribute to rear them up to a state of maturity, and don't abandon them until they are old enough and able to maintain and defend themselves.

They Build Houses, retreats, or castles for defending themselves from the injury of the Climate, and for the defense and preservation of their lives and their offspring, to hoard up provision against a time of necessity, and to have when convenient. They risk their Lives in defense of persons and property, and likewise to obtain and defend their beloved mate or consort; they comfort, defend, feed and protect their aged and decrepit parents, relations, and friends.

Being born with a naked and defenseless skin, natural Instinct, Intuitive knowledge, or Reason tells them so, and that the Creator hath formed them, with Members after such manner and form as to enable them to fabricate natural materials of which Instinct, knowledge, or Reason directs them how to form these manufactures into Clothes to cover their skin, to defend them from the scorching Sunbeams in the South and the rigorous chilling winds and biting frosts in the North, or to make use of furred skins of Animals for the same purpose.

This [scene?] comprehends most of the wisdom, Knowledge, and understanding of Nations in a simple state of nature. In their attitude and expressions of homage to the great Spirit the Almighty, they look aloft with an awful countenance, uttering a voice of ejaculation. When in a state of rest and tranquility or when their heart is warmed and animated with gratitude and Love, they sing Hymns and Odes or when the Heart throbs with sorrow, and the whole frame is agitated with pain and anguish either through bodily disease or conflict of passion and afflictions for the Death of a parent, Friend or Child, we need not ask them or converse with them by words to know the cause or meaning of all those various actions, operations, and affections. They speak themselves, they commune with the archetypal system of Ideas in each one of us. We know without asking a single question. Though we observe it in a nation we never saw or heard of before.

Now all these, actions and movements, only being some what varied according to different organization, we observe in the Animal Creation, likenesses which we call instinct in them or a Divine Intuitive knowledge; but we can't confess it to be Reason or Intelligence because forsooth it will detract from the Dignity of Human Nature. But where is the proof of this Dignity of our Nature, any farther than being the first order of Animal in point of Bodily frame and organization calculated for carrying Arts or modifications to a greater extent and variety.

But we only excel animals in such things we particularly possess and we may possess some Arts or Modifications, more complicated than what they have. But yet we must confess that some animals possess Arts [83Br] or systems of modification in Ingenuity beyond the power of Human art scarcely to imitate much less, equal or excel, namely, the combs, honey, and wax of bees, the Webs and Nests of Spiders, the Houses or Cells of the Innumerable Tribes and species of Madreporas, Corals, Sea Sponge, and beside innumerable other Instances of the Arts and Operations of Animals which might require large volumes only to enumerate.

I will agree that it is impossible that any Animal will or can weave a piece of Brocade, make a complete ship, a watch or Clock, Mariner's compass, Iron or steel, a Sewing Needle no

larger the Eye Lash and small as a hair which shall contain eleven others, one within another. And It is equally impossible for man to make a Spiders Web, a Honeycomb with Wax and Honey, after the manner of the Apis mellifica, a Madrepore or Sea sponge, etc.

Man no more than any other Animal possesses a creative power, that is, a man alone cannot make a living Animal indued with a Nature or powers of reproduction. He can at most only work upon or modify matter already created to his hands and so can most other Animals in some degree or other.

Various animals tutor and educate their offspring or young, teaching them the proper means of self-defense and of procuring their prey or food and even pointing out to them what is salutary or noxious; they have the faculty and powers of improving, altering or modifying their Manners and arts according to circumstances. They can, not only improve one another, but are taught and improved by Mankind in an infinite variety of Instances. Their actions, voice, and movements demonstrate Understanding, i.e. the Power of Reasoning or deduction by a wise perfect comparison and arrangement of Ideas or notions.

Every Animal hath a Language, both by words or sounds, perfectly articulate, and by actions, which is perfectly understood apparently without error or mistake by every Individual, both old and young, of the same Tribe or Race. They appear to have besides an Universal Language, understood and intelligible to every Tribe at least of the same Order, i.e. all birds understand this common Language and in like manner, all the Tribes and Families of Quadrupeds, and without doubt Reptiles, Amphibia, Insects, and fish have a common or universal Language.

Now if Animals have a vocal Language, it is self evident that they have Intelligence; they have Ideas and Understanding.

There is something so Aristocratic if a Philosopher may use the expression in the Epithet of the Dignity of Human Nature, because, a Man as viewed in the chain of Animal beings according to the common notions of Philosophers, acts the part of an Absolute Tyrant. His actions and movements must, I think, impress such an Idea on the minds of all Animals or Intelligent Beings.

Man is cruel, Hypocritical, a Dissembler. His dissimulation exceeds that of any being we are acquainted with for he dissembles dissimulation itself. Moreover, he curses and damns dissimulation in order more completely to dissemble and deceive. He calls to his aid the sacred Name, being, and Attributes of the Supreme being and all the Virtues, the more completely to cover his purpose.

Nay the Whole of Human or Worldly Wisdom is a continual [series?] or practice of [83Av] of Deceit, fraud, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. The more any Man or Woman approaches to Honesty and simplicity, the more he is accounted a Fool, and he is on the broad road and

hastening on to Poverty, contempt, and Misery until Death releases him from oppression and disgrace. Behold a picture or representation of [the Dignity of Human Nature](#).

But it is time to return to our Text. Let us endeavour to improve the Heart and embellish the Mind. To improve the human Heart is to admit of the use and exercise of a certain degree of the Passions and affections which contributes to make the Intellectual Man or the Mind Dignified, Amiable, and Worthy in the sight of The Creator. This perfect degree of mediocrity is determined or pointed out to us by consulting that friendly Monitor Reason or the Divine Intelligence. The Passion of Covetousness is one of the most formidable enemies. This passion, if we give way to it, becomes insatiable. It is the parent of contention and contention begets violence and War.

The Love of Power, Riches, Magnificence and Fame are the offspring of this passion and seem to be the sources or parents of all Our moral Misery. They even mediately affect our bodily Health, bring on diseases Of Body and Mind, and shorten Life.

The ambition and desire of getting Riches, of being able to live in a state of Affluence and magnificence, cut off most of the People at a premature age amongst civilized Nations and together with intemperance, War and the use of spirituous Liquors, destroy the chief of Mankind.

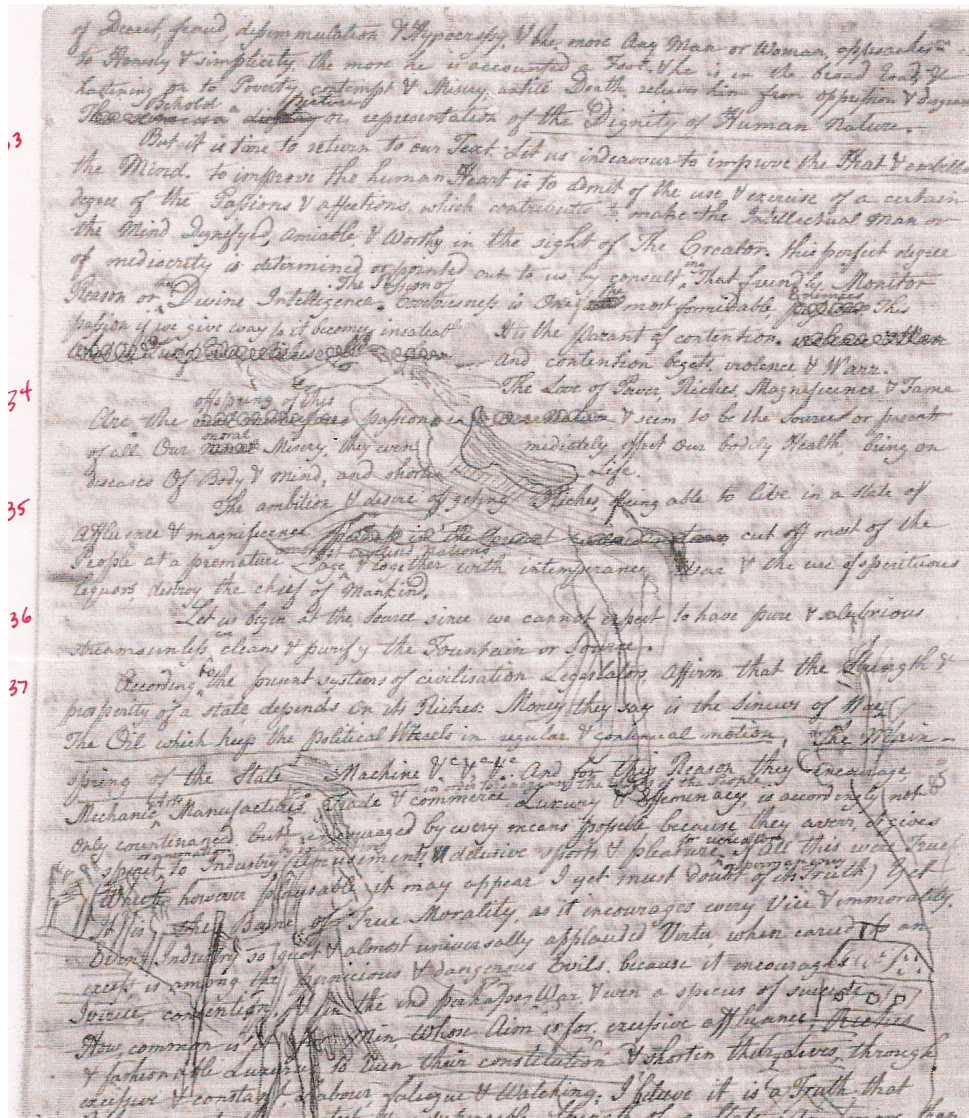
Let us begin at the Source, since we cannot expect to have pure and salubrious streams unless we cleanse and purify the Fountain or Source.

According to the present systems of civilization, Legislators affirm that the Strength and prosperity of a state depends on its Riches: Money they say is the Sinews of War, the Oil which keeps the political Wheels in regular and continual motion, the Mainspring of the State Machine, etc., etc., etc. And for this Reason they encourage Mechanical Arts, Manufacture, Trade, and commerce in order to exercise the [?] of the People. Luxury and Effeminacy is accordingly not only countenanced, but encouraged by every means possible because they aver it gives spirit or animation to Industry by exhibiting Amusements and delusive sports and pleasure for recreation. If all this were True, which however plausible it may appear I yet must doubt of its truth or permanency, yet it is the Bane of True Morality, as it encourages every Vice and immorality.

Even Industry, so great and almost universally applauded Virtue, when carried to an excess is among the pernicious and dangerous Evils because it encourages Avarice, contention, and in the end perhaps War and even a species of suicide. How common is it for Men whose Aim is for excessive affluence, Riches, and fashionable Luxury to ruin their constitution and shorten their lives through excessive and constant Labour, fatigue, and Watching. I believe it is a Truth that Riches is not the greatest and indispensable Strength of a State any more than [83Bv] of private Families.

But in my opinion Population and Virtue are the most sure and lasting Foundations. By Virtue I mean Morality because according to my meaning or apprehension of Morality, it

includes both our duties to one another and all inferior animals and Religion which is our duties to the Deity. The duties which we owe to God are Homage, Love, gratitude, and Adoration. These affections are indispensable to which we add Humility, Resignation and fear of transgression proceeding from love, reverence, and veneration.



Bartram Manuscript: 83A verso (written over sketches of a horse and a farmer)

Temperance I esteem a Maxim to which we should look or recur in all our actions and concerns in or through Life.

Plainness, Frugality, Economy are virtuous affections which a well regulated Mind approves and recommends, but in all these it is necessary that temperance and mediocrity should present the Mirror, for an excess in either disgraces the mind and vitiates the Heart.

It might be inquired what is the catalogue or enumeration of the Passions or affections that we are allowed to associate with the mind? Perhaps all of them in some degree or other, but must be regulated by Reason or that divine monitor within. In reality we cannot avoid it for the very feeling or consciousness of the existence or being or those passions or affections is a degree of their admission or use. And it is the Business of the Mind (or our proper business) to watch and observe their operations and movements (The proper study of Mankind is Man).

Now on taking a view of our system of Human Knowledge (understanding), and supposing it to be just, it will appear that there is a necessary and indispensable intercourse, connection, and harmony existing between Our Material or Human and our Intellectual Nature; and that when contemplating the Creature Man in our present Life, they are equally divine as being the effect and production of the Creator. There is a mutual dependence for one could not exist without the other. Here in our present Substance and form and perhaps after this Life, in a future state of existence and perhaps in another World or Planet, both of our natures may be equally in like manner connected and dependent under some subtle form or other.

The Divine Monitor (Reason), the Mind (or Soul), and the Corporeal part or System of sensation have a mutual dependence, connection, and intercourse. Every Idea, sensation, passion, affection, and reflection vibrate and act together at the same instant in more or less degree. The Mind as a Mirror takes notice or cognizance of every operation or motion of the sensations, passions, and affections. Reason decides on them; but if Reason be corrupt in and for the perfect performance of this high office, why do we err? I answer: the Mind is often seduced by the interposition of our Passions and affections, by which means we can't sufficiently attend to and obey the dictates of Reason.