FRAMING ANIMAL-RIGHTS ACTIVISM:
AN ANALYSIS OF GRANT MORRISON’S ANIMAL MAN

A Thesis in
Communication Arts & Sciences
by
Bryan Boyd Blankfield

© 2010 Bryan Boyd Blankfield

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

December 2010
The thesis of Bryan Boyd Blankfield was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Christopher L. Johnstone  
Associate Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences  
Thesis Advisor

Thomas W. Benson  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Rhetoric  
Head and Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences

Jeremy Engels  
Assistant Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

In the late 1980s, animal-rights activists spread their message through a variety of channels. An important animal-rights text from this period is Grant Morrison’s *Animal Man*, a comic series produced by DC Comics. This thesis employs Kenneth Burke’s cluster analysis method to reveal Morrison’s frames in *Animal Man*. Frames are rhetorical devices that both serve a definitional function, in that they indicate how something is to be understood, and promote a certain moral evaluation of and/or action toward it. Close inspection of Morrison’s rhetoric reveals his conception of animals, humans, and his vision of a moral society. Through strategic framing, Morrison challenges the speciesist belief that animals are inferior to humans and therefore are ours to use. Moreover, he argues that humans have forsaken their responsibility toward animals and the environment. Ultimately, he provides a vision of a moral society in which humans respect and protect animals.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>vi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1:</strong> Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design and Methodology</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for the Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Outline</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2:</strong> A History of the Animal Protection Movement</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Protectionism Emerges: History 1822-1945</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Protectionism Evolves: History after 1945</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentalism</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the Movement: Animal Protection Terminology</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3:</strong> The Evolution of Frames in <em>Animal Man</em></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational Frames: Animal Man in <em>Strange Adventures</em></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revamping and Radicalizing: Morrison’s <em>Animal Man</em></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A New Type of Evil: Scientists and Hunters</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Voice of Animal Suffering: B’Wana Beast</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I Was the Man with Animal Powers!”: Animal Man</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrayal of Animals</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizing Disparate Frames: Human Animals</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4:</strong> A Growing Emphasis on the Environment and the Eschewal of Violence</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with Friends and Family: Making Sense of Animal Rights</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Guy Who States the Obvious:” Animal Man</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrayal of Animals: Dolphins and Primates</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrayal of Humans</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Man Meets Morrison</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 5:</strong> Conclusion: Envisioning a Moral Society</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions for Further Study</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1: Animal Man’s Actions..............................................................14
Figure 3-1: Reactions to a Wailing Glob of Primates.................................49
Figure 3-2: The Hunters Approach Ellen....................................................55
Figure 3-3: B’Wana Beast is Merciless......................................................58
Figure 3-4: Sheba’s Demise........................................................................65
Figure 3-5: Covers to Issues #2 and #3.....................................................67
Figure 4-1: Reader Adopts Roger’s Point of View....................................81
Figure 4-2: Animal Man Speaks Directly to the Reader............................82
Figure 4-3: Animal Man Engages the Reader..........................................87
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The production of this Masters Thesis would have impossible without the many individuals who have either taught, guided, or cheered me on along the way. Of my teachers, I owe the greatest debt of gratitude to Dr. Christopher Johnstone, who has patiently corrected my grammatical errors and taken the time to explain which rules I had broken. His ever-abiding interest in ethics has helped me stay on track and engaged. While I am extremely grateful for the professors at Penn State who have sharpened my knowledge of rhetoric, special thanks goes to Dr. Thomas Benson and Dr. Jeremy Engels. Both have been instrumental in my education and the creation of this thesis. I am equally appreciative of my undergraduate professors, Dr. “Mrs.” Berry and Dr. Stewart, both of whom continue to cheer me on.

Playing no small role in my development as a student and an individual are my colleagues at Penn State. I am especially grateful to Jess Bargar, Anne Harries, Mark Hlavacik, Hillary Jones, Una Kimokeo-Goes, Kristen Mathe, and Scott Simpson, who have served both as listening boards and wellsprings of knowledge. Special thanks go to John Loyd, who introduced me to comics; Scott Simpson, who further fostered my appreciation of comics as rhetorically significant; and Tim Schroth, whose enthusiasm for this project cheered me on more than I can express.

Above all, I am grateful for the support my family has provided and continues to provide. I am truly blessed to have such caring parents, creative siblings, and loving grandparents. The joy they bring me daily is incredible.
The animal rights controversy is about the treatment of animals, but it is also about our
definition of ourselves and of a moral society.

— Jasper and Nelkin, *The Animal Rights Crusade*
Introduction

Background and Purpose of the Study

Different conceptions of nonhuman animals have emerged throughout the ages. They have been and are viewed as sources of food, pieces of property, means of entertainment, and objects of worship. Despite these conceptions—or rather, because of cruelties associated with the first three—many individuals in Great Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century began to view animals as creatures deserving of compassion as well. During the mid-1970s, conceptions of animals in both countries became much more radical as the animal-rights movement framed animals as creatures deserving of rights. Frames are rhetorical devices that both serve a definitional function, in that they indicate how something is to be understood, and promote a certain moral evaluation of and/or action toward it. Whereas many humans assume a natural order of things in which they are superior to animals and therefore are free to use them however they wish, animal-rights activists employ frames that draw attention to and challenge this entrenched assumption. Through these frames, animal-rights activists invite us to scrutinize our “definition of ourselves and of a moral society.” Diane L. Beers observes that animal-rights activists “perceive scant difference between the artificial boundaries we use to rationalize away rights for animals exploited for our purposes and those used to justify the subjugation and legal exclusion of other races or groups of people” (2006, 3-4). Similarly to our mistreatment of other humans, animal-rights activists believe that our abuse of animals stems from a form of prejudice, which they label, “speciesism.”
The 1980s were a period of explosive growth for the animal-rights movement. Though by no means accepted by everyone, animal-rights organizations grew dramatically as thousands of individuals were persuaded that animals possessed certain inalienable rights. Specifically, animals were viewed as having the right to live free from injustices imposed by human interests. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) proclaims, “Animals are not ours to eat, wear, or experiment on” (quoted in Simonson 2001, 408). During the 1980s, animal-rights activists used various media and methods to disseminate their message. In addition to seeking news coverage, activists spread their message through celebrity endorsement, books, pamphlets, philosophical treatises, rock albums, and public demonstrations such as the picketing of fashion shows, bloodhunts, and corporations responsible for animal suffering. In September 1988, the animal-rights perspective was transmitted through yet another channel, as DC Comics published the first issue of Animal Man.

Written by Grant Morrison and drawn by Chas Truog, Tom Grummett, and Doug Hazelwood, Animal Man articulated the animal-rights ideology as its eponymous superhero, Animal Man, protected and respected animals in each monthly installment. Every superhero has some ability: Spiderman slings webs, and Superman has super strength and can fly. Animal Man’s powers are somewhat more versatile, however, as he can assume the abilities of nearby animals. For instance, he can fly if a bird is near him, or breathe underwater, provided that a fish is close. His powers aside, what is most remarkable about Animal Man is his history as a superhero. Although Animal Man is the central character in Morrison’s comic book, Morrison did not invent him. Animal Man first appeared in 1965 in issue #180 of Strange Adventures, a series produced by DC Comics and characterized by particularly bizarre stories. For instance, one of the issues featuring Animal Man (or A-Man, as he was then called) also contained a story
about Immortal Man, “the hero who lived and died 100 times!” (Strange Adventures 1966, #190). Generally speaking, Strange Adventures capitalized more on introducing new characters in each issue than on character development, and Animal Man appeared only a few times before being rescued from obscurity by Morrison.

Despite not inventing Animal Man, Morrison played a significant role in updating the character for a 1980s audience. Drawing heavily upon the new perspective provided by the animal-rights movement during the 1970s and 1980s, Morrison, who was an animal-rights activist himself, recreated Animal Man as an animal-rights activist and featured him as the title character in his own series. This rendition proved successful, and the series Animal Man, which was originally planned as a four-issue miniseries, ran in monthly installments from September 1988 to November 1995 (Morrison published his final issue of Animal Man in August 1990, having authored 26 issues). Recognizing the rhetorical importance of the frames employed by animal-rights activists—they define not only animals, but also humans, and exhibit a type of morality the activists endorse—this thesis examines Morrison’s use of frames in his comic series.

Comics are often considered to be an inferior medium, reserved for adolescents who have not yet “graduated” to books. However, this common perception belies the rhetorical complexity and sophistication of which the medium is capable. McCloud (1993) argues powerfully for their rhetorical significance while providing an overview of the medium. Groensteen (2007) discusses the rhetorical nature of panel arrangement in comics. Focusing specifically on superhero comics, Bongco (2000) considers their history in the United States while analyzing them as a genre. In terms of their cultural significance, Inge notes the importance of analyzing comics, in that they “serve as revealing reflectors of popular attitudes, tastes, and mores” (1990, xi). Simonson (2001) observes the importance of utilizing popular entertainment media for animal-rights
activists. According to Simonson, “When social noise [such as animal-rights activism] gets expressed through [entertainment media], some of its dissonance can dissolve into the structured rhythms of affection and attention that popular culture contains” (2001, 416). In short, popular media such as comics provide important conduits for channeling animal-rights messages.

While Animal Man has been a subject of several analyses, they are limited in number and have tended to ignore its recurring animal-rights theme in favor of other aspects; including Morrison’s feelings of guilt about writing comic books (Lukin 1995), his use of post-modern elements (Callahan 2007), and Animal Man’s identity as a family man (Coughlan 2009). With the exception of Olson’s and Goodnight’s (1994) examination of the social controversy over fur, it has only been within the past decade that animal-rights rhetoric has received scholarly attention. One common theme within studies of animal-rights rhetoric is an emphasis on PETA. Simonson (2001) notes PETA’s ability to tap into popular media in order to spread its message. Both Pace (2005) and Deckha (2008) analyze PETA’s campaigns, such as the “I’d Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur Campaign” and “Milk Gone Wild,” from a feminist perspective. Atkins-Sayre (2010) argues that PETA’s visual appeals encourage humans to see themselves as consubstantial with animals. Scudder and Mills observe that PETA’s attack messages cause a “significant erosion of the already low credibility held toward the animal processing industry” (2009, 164). They also find that PETA’s attack messages build its credibility among individuals who initially hold a neutral attitude toward PETA. Scudder’s and Mills’ research is significant because Kruse (2001) notes that the media tend to frame animal-rights advocates as less credible than scientists experimenting on animals. Thus, an animal-rights text unfiltered by the media can be effective in reducing the credibility of its target while building the credibility of the animal-
rights organization. This is important to take into consideration in my analysis of Animal Man, since the media did not reframe Morrison’s message before it was received by readers.

Not all of the articles on animal rights focus specifically on PETA, however. Other studies have analyzed animal-rights rhetoric more broadly. For instance, Stewart (1999) notes the extent to which animal-rights rhetoric is necessarily other-directed; since animals cannot speak for themselves to attain equality, freedom, and justice, they must be spoken for by others. Black (2003) explores the use of “rights” as an ideograph by the animal-rights movement. Black and Black (2004) scrutinize the use of the term “terrorist” to describe the Animal Liberation Front. More recently, Goodale and Black (2010) have edited a volume on animal ethics, which contains essays on how we distance ourselves from animals through labels, as well as rhetorical analyses of both animal-rights activists and corporations that exploit animals.

In light of Christian Spielvogel’s observation that “Rhetorical critics can expand their understanding of the power of morality in . . . discourse by regarding moral values as a frame used to evaluate any issue rather than just a public argument about moral issues” (2005, 551), this thesis takes into consideration the type of morality endorsed by Grant Morrison as he frames animal rights in Animal Man. The twenty-six issues he authored were published by DC Comics between September 1988 and August 1990. Although new issues of Animal Man continued to be published until 1995, and Animal Man has appeared in other series, I focus primarily on the issues Morrison wrote. This approach allows for an element of consistency in the frames employed. In order to understand the extent to which Morrison radicalized Animal Man by employing an animal-rights frame, I also examine all the issues of Strange Adventures featuring Animal Man; namely, issues #180, #184, #190, #195, and #201. However, my examination of
the *Strange Adventures* issues is cursory, as it is only intended to highlight the frames employed by Morrison.

In order to illuminate Morrison’s use of frames and to address Jasper’s and Nelkin’s observation that “The animal-rights controversy is about the treatment of animals, but it is also about our definition of ourselves and of a moral society” (1992, 7), *Animal Man* is subjected to the following interrogation: How does Morrison frame animals and humans? How do his frames invite readers/viewers to understand humans, animals, and the relationship between them? How does the use of the comic medium affect the framing process? What moral attitudes or stances toward humans and animals are promoted by the frames used? What courses of action are suggested by the frames employed? Finally, what are the implications for animal-rights texts, discourse, and framing suggested by these frames?

**Research Design and Methodology**

Frame analysis was popularized by Goffman after he noted the role of frames in “the organization of experience” (1974, 11). He observed that frames are mental structures that allow one to make sense of his or her surroundings. According to Goffman, “each primary framework allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms” (1974, 21). Two of these occurrences are objects and roles (Lakoff 2010, 71). For instance, a Roman Catholic frame would identify priests, acolytes, worshipers, rosary beads, Communion, confession, the Bible, the Holy Trinity, Mary, saints, kneeling rail, etc. Frames also include relationships between these objects and roles. In accordance with the aforementioned frame, acolytes help priests administer Communion to worshipers. The existence and nature of this frame can easily be highlighted by briefly
contrasting it with another Christian frame. Whereas Roman Catholics view Communion sacraments as the literal body and blood of Christ, most Protestants view these as symbolic only. Constructed over time, frames are particularly important to a social movement such as animal rights, insofar as “the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture” (Goffman 1974, 27). Thus, individuals may possess a unified belief system by virtue of the frames common to their group.3

While Goffman’s interest in frames consisted mostly in explaining how individuals make sense of their surroundings, the literature on frames has also explored frame formation. Snow and Benford argue that social movements possess three “core framing tasks” (1988, 199). They must diagnose the problem, present a solution, and motivate members to act. In order for these three tasks to resonate with members, the frames of a social movement must be aligned with those of their members. Snow et al. (1986) identify four primary alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation. Of particular importance to this study are frame bridging and frame transformation. Frame bridging is the act of connecting two ideologically similar but unconnected frames, such as animal rights with environmentalism. By linking two frames, an organization’s message may resonate with a larger population, thereby encouraging the mobilization of more activists (Gerhards and Rucht 1992, 587). Frame transformation is the process by which a frame is radically recreated. While discussing frame transformation, Mika observes, “a phenomenon is reconceptualized so that what was once tolerable is now immoral and unacceptable” (2006, 920).

Snow and Byrd argue that the origins of collective action frames (i.e., those generated by social movements and organizations) have been ignored because of the common assumption that they are “pulled whole cloth from a broader cultural ideology” (2007, 130). Seeking to
demonstrate the extent to which collective action frames are new presentations of older ideas, Snow and Byrd describe two processes: frame articulation and frame elaboration. Frame articulation is the assembly of “events, experience, and strands of moral codes so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling way” (Snow and Byrd 2007, 130). The novelty associated with frame articulation is largely because a new perspective is provided—instead of a new idea—through a blending of pre-existing ideas. Frame elaboration involves highlighting the importance of certain beliefs, events, or issues over others. Nelson and Oxley observe that the reoccurrence of some frames over others suggest their importance overall (1999, 1041).

Another explanation of the framing process, which highlights more clearly its moral aspects, has been offered by Entman: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (1993, 52; italics in original). Entman here suggests that frames may be viewed as having four primary functions: they define the problem, present or imply a cause, provide for moral judgment, and suggest possible remedies. Clearly, frames play an important role in how we understand reality. Based on our perception of reality, we will act toward objects or other individuals in certain ways. Lakoff, who is cognizant of the power of frames, encourages us to consider “whose frames are being activated—and hence strengthened—in the brains of the public” (2007, 72). The production of frames is often influenced by the producer’s social role, as well as the current rhetorical situation. According to Johnston, “One speaks differently as a sociologist, a father, or a teacher. One writes differently in a diary, letter, or an official document, partly because of changing speech situations, but also partly because changing role perspective changes assessments of what is important to say and what is not” (1995, 224).
Hallahan notes how “frames shape the perspectives through which people see the world” (1999, 207) by emphasizing, including, and excluding details. This description of frames is strongly comparable to Burke’s oft-quoted discussion of terministic screens, in which he states that our words not only serve as a “reflection of reality” (1966, 45), but also as a selection and deflection of reality. Indeed, frames and terministic screens can be considered as metaphors for the same concept. Insofar as this is the case, one might wonder—why should a rhetorical analysis employ terminology predominantly used in sociology, when rhetorical theory already provides a comparable terminology in “terministic screens?” By considering Burke’s thoughts on terministic screens we may arrive at an answer. Burke observes, “whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen. . . . with its ways of directing the attention and shaping the range of observations implicit in the given terminology” (1966, 50).

While “terministic screens” and “frames” may be considered as invoking the same concept, they have invited different observations in rhetorical studies and sociology. Synthesizing the different observations emerging from both fields makes for a more robust theoretical approach.

Thus far I have discussed the observations that emerge from frame theory. The rest of this section examines the observations arising from “terministic screens” and related rhetorical concepts, such as definitions. Concerning terministic screens, a number of scholars have applied Burke’s (1966) initial theorizing in varied contexts (Bello 1996; Fox 2002; Rockler 2002; Blakesley et al. 2003; Stob 2008). Blakesley et al.’s uses are particularly pertinent to this thesis because they are concerned with identifying the presence of terministic screens in film. In so doing, they challenge traditional applications of the concept, which focus primarily on the written or spoken word. In many respects, this approach makes sense insofar as Burke attributes his original sense of terministic screens to photographs and not to language: “When I speak of
‘terministic screens,’ I have particularly in mind some photographs I once saw. They were *different* photographs of the *same* objects, the difference being that they were made with different color filters. Here something so ‘factual’ as a photograph revealed noticeable distinctions in texture, and even in form, depending upon which color filter was used for the documentary description of the event being recorded” (1966, 45).

Definitions perform a function similar to that of frames. Schiappa argues that when we seek to understand a situation, “defining” and “framing” may be considered as interchangeable. Both provide a naming function and serve as a “form of social influence” (2003, 151, 165). For instance, Black noted the importance of framing “communism” as a “cancer” (1970, 109-119). Through this metaphor, the Radical Right of the 1960s influenced the way Americans understood communism; namely, as a disease from within one’s own body that must be excised before it is too late. Owing to their definitional function, frames can encourage specific attitudes and actions among the public. Burke observes, “to call a man a friend or an enemy is *per se* to suggest a program of action with regard to him” (1984b, 177). Similarly, the way one frames animals recommends particular actions toward them. Both Dunayer (2001) and Stibbe (2001) describe how language about animals sustains their oppression and exploitation.

It is important to acknowledge that frames are comprised of language, which is rarely neutral. This point has been emphasized by both Burke (1984b) and Booth (1988). According to Burke, language “tends naturally toward the use of implicit moral weightings, as the names for things and operations smuggle in connotations of *good* and *bad*, a noun tending to carry with it a kind of invisible adjective, and a verb an invisible adverb” (1984b, 192). Booth similarly observes that “even the simplest story cannot be described without employing the language of value” (1988, 92). This value-laden language necessarily encourages a system of attitudes in the
audience. It is for this reason that Black notes, “The critic can see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become” (1970, 113).

Likewise, Booth has concluded that audiences can be made into a “kind of desirer” (1988, 204). Booth’s point is that an author can craft a story so that readers desire certain circumstances, ranging from a “happily ever after” for a couple for whom we been encouraged to root, to the death of a character we have been invited to despise. Thus, the circumstances crafted by an author are necessarily moralized. Ultimately, by paying attention to Morrison’s frames and the language comprising them, this thesis discerns his vision of a moral society.

Guiding my consideration of Animal Man is Burke’s cluster analysis method. Cluster analysis can be used to identify the frames an author employs because both frames and clusters denote an organization of experience. More specifically, similarly to clusters, which identify “what goes with what” (Burke 1973, 20) for an author, frames are an individual’s interpretation of reality. Thus, cluster analysis provides a means for identifying the frames employed by Morrison. Burke first mentioned cluster analysis in Attitudes toward History (1937). However, he did not explain the steps to this methodology until Philosophy of Literary Form (1957). Since then, cluster analysis has been further elaborated upon by Rueckert (1963) and applied on several occasions (Berthold 1976; Foss 1984; Reid 1990; Marston and Rockwell 1991; Cooks and Descutner 1993; Lee and Campbell 1994; Lynch 2006; Britten 2010). One significant development in this method has been its application to different media. While initially created by Burke to analyze verbal texts, Reid employed it to analyze a painting’s visual text. More recently, Britten used cluster analysis to investigate a comic book, which contains both verbal and visual elements.
This method of rhetorical criticism consists of three main steps. First, one identifies all the key terms in the text. Key terms are the words or visual elements that recur most frequently or with high intensity. Second, one identifies the clusters that surround these key terms. For instance, in Rueckert’s cluster analysis of Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*, he notes that one of the key terms, *nature*, is “surrounded in its various contexts by the following terms: repose, beautiful, sweet sensations, felt in the blood and heart, purer mind, tranquil restoration, pleasure,” while another key term, *society*, is surrounded by “lonely room, weariness, mystery, burden, heavy, weary weight” (1963, 85). In the case of visual elements, Reid notes that one identifies those which “are adjacent to or in close radius to each key term” (1990, 43). Third, one interprets the meanings of the key terms based on their relationships with their clusters. For instance, returning to Rueckert’s example, one could conclude that Wordsworth views nature as something good and society as something bad. Not only does cluster analysis provide a sense of “what goes with what,” it also lends itself to “agon analysis,” which Burke describes as “what vs. what” (1973, 69). In agon analysis, one locates and identifies what key terms are in opposition with each other. Opposition may be explicit, demonstrated by competition, or revealed by contrasting imagery (Berthold 1976, 304).

In some respects, the comic medium poses an interesting challenge to the use of cluster analysis. Britten observes, “The inclusion of images in cluster analysis allows further nuance to the reading . . . . [than] when analyzing [verbal] text alone, and this challenges those who would seek to clearly categorize the rhetoric of such an artifact. In seeking ‘what goes with what,’ the inclusion of images forces us also to ask ‘and how?’” (2010, 368). One way to overcome this challenge is to proceed from a holistic understanding of comics. Although Britten is right to analyze both the verbal and visual elements of a comic, he runs into difficulty because he
analyzes these elements separately. According to Bongco, “The relation between text and image is a defining characteristic of comics, and the efficacy of the medium rests on the interdependence of the two mediums. As such, comics cannot help but demand of its readers the ability to decipher and ‘read’ a new language of combined written and illustrated codes” (2000, 49; italics mine). A more robust application of cluster analysis to the comic medium would consider these elements together. In order to avoid the bifurcation of verbal and visual elements in my analysis, I rely upon McCloud’s discussion of the icon. McCloud describes an icon as “any [verbal or visual] image used to represent a person, place, thing, or idea” (1993, 27).

Essentially, icons are the language of comics.

In order to identify key icons, I locate those that are either highly intense or frequently recurring. In Animal Man, no icons are more intense and frequent, perhaps, than the main characters. Clusters may be identified in terms of the speech, thoughts, appearance (ranging from facial expressions to clothes or costumes), and actions employed. Of these four elements, a character’s actions deserve further remark. Actions may be implied within a panel or created by transitions between panels (fig. 1-1). The second panel, which shows Animal Man in the process of opening a beer—as revealed by the foamy spray and the onomatopoeia—is an example of an action contained within a panel. As for all three panels in sequence, they reveal his act of retrieving a drink from the refrigerator, opening the beer, and sitting down with his feet on the table. However, unlike the act of opening a beer, all of these actions require the reader to imagine other actions that have occurred between panels. After all, Morrison does not tell us how Animal Man moves from the refrigerator to the kitchen table. Presumably he shuts the refrigerator door, opens the beer, and then sits down. These types of transitions are referred to as “action to action” by McCloud, who estimates that they constitute 65% of all transitions between
panels in American mainstream comics (1993, 75-6), such as *Animal Man.* Because of the preponderance of action to action transitions, it is also possible that actions may serve as key icons, provided that they frequently recur or are highly intense.

![Animal Man's Actions](image)

Fig. 1-1. Animal Man’s Actions

Although I make use of cluster analysis in this study, one important qualification must be noted. Since my primary objective is to identify and describe the animal-rights frames that Morrison employs, not every chapter contains a true cluster analysis. Chapter three, which examines the first four issues of *Animal Man,* features a proper cluster analysis. However, chapter four does not. This is because the first four issues analyzed in chapter three contain a complete animal-rights storyline, whereas the next twenty-two issues examined in chapter four only contain an occasional animal-rights storyline or reference (while writing the later issues, Morrison feared that he was becoming too preachy and reduced his animal-rights emphasis). Thus, an accurate index of the later issues would not reveal as high an emphasis on animal rights.
as this study suggests. Nonetheless, since arguments for animal rights continue to emerge throughout the series and Morrison makes an appeal in the final issue for readers to join PETA, it is important to understand how he frames animal-rights all the way through.

**Rationale for the Study**

While other works have examined the rhetoric of the animal-rights movement, this thesis is unique and significant for several reasons. First, despite *Animal Man*’s novelty in providing an animal-rights argument to a comic-reading audience, Morrison’s animal-rights leanings have largely been ignored in favor of his innovative style and the non-animal rights storylines he incorporated in later writings. For instance, Callahan argues that “the [animal-rights] stories end up being the weakest in his run of the title, largely because they don’t contribute to the overall narrative progression” (2007, 89). However, Callahan makes the mistake of reading too much into the storyline’s progression and ignores the cultural resonance and appeal of an animal-rights superhero during the late 1980s. As Inge (1990) has argued, comics are important sources for understanding societal views. Thus, *Animal Man*’s animal-rights emphasis is significant in that it reflects a societal embrace of animal activism as an important issue. Equally significant is the novelty provided by both the comic medium and its audience. By articulating an animal rights perspective in the comic format, Morrison is able to reach audiences that may not have been reached otherwise. More specifically, although the data on DC Comics readership during the late 1980s, let alone for *Animal Man* specifically, are somewhat difficult to pin down, current estimates suggest that most readers of mainstream comics, such as DC Comics or Marvel Comics, are males (no less than seventy percent) between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five. \(^7\) These data are particularly fascinating in light of the animal-rights activist demographic. Jasper
and Poulsen observe that females generally constitute no less than 70 percent, and often near 100 percent, of an animal-rights organization’s membership (1995, 502). Thus, Morrison is writing about a social issue typically salient to females in a medium enjoyed mostly by males.

Second, most of the analyses of animal-rights rhetoric focus on activists who identify with particular organizations. While these analyses have proved enlightening and their decision to focus on such activists is understandable—after all, it is not easy to locate the rhetoric of individuals who support animal rights outside but are not members of an animal-rights organization—the recurring focus on members of established organizations provides a narrow conception of activism, encouraging one to view it only within an organizational context, such as with PETA. For instance, Stewart has observed that activists working for an organization take on a sense of identity from that organization: “A demonstrator was not merely an animal rights activist but a PETA ‘rescuer’ or ‘crusader,’ an Animal Protection Institute of America ‘protectionist,’ or an Animal’s Agenda ‘sustainer’” (1999, 100). In short, such analyses fail to shed light on the rhetoric of individuals who are animal-rights activists, yet who do not identify with an animal-rights organization. Moreover, by focusing on the rhetoric of activists who belong to an organization, their analyses implicitly emphasize the agency of organizations at the expense of individuals operating on their own, which is particularly ironic since the animal-rights movement began at the grassroots level. Since Animal Man was produced by individuals not explicitly affiliated with an animal-rights organization, it can provide insights into an overlooked perspective.

This study also provides two methodological contributions. The first concerns the use of cluster analysis for the comic medium. Although Britten has already demonstrated that cluster analysis may be used on this medium, there is room for refinement. Instead of treating visual
and verbal elements separately, one should consider them holistically by examining icons in a
text. In addition to refining cluster analysis, this study demonstrates that this method of
rhetorical criticism may be used to reveal the frames an author employs. Thus, this study
contributes to our knowledge of both cluster analysis and rhetorical nature of framing.

**Chapter Outline**

In order to examine the animal-rights frame in *Animal Man*, the following four chapters
are divided into three main parts. In chapter two, I provide a history of the animal protection
movement in the United Kingdom and United States. As a social movement, animal advocacy
has had a following in both nations since the mid-nineteenth century. This history is necessary
for fully understanding the way in which Morrison frames animals. This chapter also clarifies
the relationship between animal advocacy and environmentalism, as well as the difference
between animal welfare and animal rights.

Having established the history of animal protectionism, I analyze Morrison’s *Animal Man*
in chapters three and four. Chapter three begins with a brief explanation of Animal Man’s
original portrayal in the 1960s. I then perform a cluster analysis of the first four issues of *Animal
Man* in order to identify the different frames employed. In chapter four, I continue analyzing the
frames Morrison employs in *Animal Man* throughout issue #26. I conclude both chapters
explaining why these frames are particularly useful and what they seek to emphasize.

In the final chapter, I distill from earlier chapters my main observations and discuss what
conclusions can be drawn from them. I then discuss the broader implications of my study for our
understanding of both animal-rights activism and the rhetorical process of framing. Lastly, I
explain what implications my thesis may have for further research in these areas.
A History of the Animal Protection Movement

Prior to landing on Plymouth Rock in 1620, the Puritans were exhorted by John Winthrop to “be as a city upon a hill.” Twenty-one years later the Puritans enlisted the expertise of Nathaniel Ward to write out a formal legal code for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Ward, a Puritan minister and lawyer who claimed to have read nearly all the English common law, was a perfect candidate for this task. However, while writing the colony’s legal code, Ward also penned a new page in history. Deviating from British law, Ward included two statutes protecting animals in the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s legal code, “The Body of Liberties.” According to Liberty 92, “No man shall exercise any Tirranny or Crueltie towards any bruite Creature which are usuallie kept for man’s use.” Liberty 93 states, “If any man shall have occasion to leade or drive Cattel from place to place that is far of, so that they be wary [weary], or hungry, or fall sick, or lambe [lame], It shall be lawful to rest or refresh them, for a competent time, in any open place that is not Corne, meadow, or inclosed for some peculiar use” (Beers 2006, 19-20). These statutes are remarkable for several reasons. As previously mentioned, they were wholly original. No precedent for animal protection had been set in the English common law. Moreover, neither England (later the United Kingdom) nor the United States would follow the Puritans’ example for nearly two centuries.¹ Thus, in respect to the legal relationship between humans and animals, the Puritans’ example as “a city upon a hill” went unobserved. Nonetheless, Liberties 92 and 93—which were the product of English citizens on American soil—foreshadow a growing
concern for animals in the nineteenth century, which began in the U.K. and quickly crossed the Atlantic to America.

As with other social issues during the nineteenth century, such as slavery and women’s suffrage, England was one step ahead of America in two primary respects in its concern for the well being of animals. Not only did the British government precede the U.S. in passing national legislation preventing cruelty to animals, British citizens formed anti-cruelty organizations ahead of Americans. These organizations served as models for Americans eager to start their own. The most prominent example of this imitation may be found in the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals’ (ASPCA), which was based on the British SPCA. Since the nineteenth century, animal advocacy in both countries has continued to develop; stronger legislation has been passed and more organizations have been formed. Moreover, the ideology supporting the movement has evolved, such that there is now a greater emphasis on animal rights, in addition to preventing cruelty.

While there were many important moments in the development of the animal-protection movement, the 1980s were particularly significant. A period of explosive growth and greater acceptance by the public, the 1980s have been described by Diane L. Beers as “the movement’s halcyon days” (2006, 200). An important artifact from this period is Grant Morrison’s Animal Man, a comic series produced by DC Comics. For several reasons, Animal Man is a significant development in animal-rights advocacy. The most prominent is that Morrison recreated the series’ title superhero as an animal-rights activist. While many other superheroes had begun to address social issues during this time, none had addressed animal rights as fully as Morrison did in Animal Man. Further significance lies in Morrison’s nationality. As a British author, Morrison’s work for DC Comics, one of the U.S.’s most prominent comic publishing houses,
hearkens back to Great Britain’s earlier influence in the U.S. concerning animal advocacy. The moral issues and forms of animal abuse addressed in the series also display an important intermingling of animal protectionist thought between the two countries.

In order to describe the animal protection themes that run throughout Animal Man, this chapter examines the history of animal-protection movement in the U.K. and U.S. Although Rod Preece and Lorna Chamberlain rightly note, “[in the West,] a self-conscious humane respect for the interests of other species is a relatively recent phenomenon, and one which even today is only in its infancy” (1992, 5), there have nonetheless been significant developments in these (relatively) few formative years. To underscore these developments, this discussion covers campaigns and animal-protection legislation in the U.K. and U.S from the first half of the nineteenth century until the 1980s. However, greater emphasis is placed on the developments in the mid-to-late twentieth century, upon which Morrison clearly draws in his framing of animal rights. After tracing these trajectories, I explain two different strands of animal protectionism: animal welfare and animal rights. This explanation is necessary to fully understand the movement’s history and Morrison’s framing.

**Animal Protectionism Emerges: History 1822-1945**

It seems fitting that the U.K., a country well known for its animal lovers, should have been the first to pass national legislation protecting animals from cruelty.\(^2\) However, as Charles D. Niven notes rather grimly, “England became a pioneer in legislation against cruelty to animals because cruelty to animals in England was so atrociously bad around that period that something had to be done about it” (1967, 61-2). During the early nineteenth century, much of this cruelty served as entertainment for the lower class; animals were often pitted against each other, as in
the case of cock fights and dog fights, and in different forms of baiting sports wherein dogs were sicced on bears, badgers, and bulls. Decades later, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, animal protectionism became increasingly embraced for therapeutic reasons as well. According to James Turner, “Animal protection served as a sort of intellectual pacifier for the thousands of literate individuals who now had to learn to live with the idea of the cousinhood of man and brute [thanks to Darwin] and, though not deeply disturbed by that notion, needed a little reassurance” (1980, 53). In this section, I provide a brief overview of the animal-protection movement’s emergence in the U.K. and U.S. This overview covers notable legislation and the emergence of animal-protection organizations created to protect animals from cruelty.

After several unsuccessful attempts to pass animal-protection legislation in the U.K., Martin’s Act was passed in 1822. The first British law of its kind, Martin’s Act focused on domesticated animals, specifically cattle, horses, mules, and sheep. Over the next three decades, amendments to this legislation enlarged the protection to cover all domesticated animals, such as dogs, cats, chickens, and pigs. Moreover, baiting sports were made illegal (Beers 2006, 22).

The first humane organization for animals in England, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), was formed in 1824. Sixteen years later, the SPCA became a Royal society (RSPCA) through Queen Victoria’s patronage. As the RSPCA’s name suggests, it was largely concerned with preventing animal abuse and encouraging compassion towards animals. Alleviating animal suffering would remain the central concern of animal protectionism until the late 1970s, when the movement began to shift to an emphasis on animal rights.

In the 1860s, the RSPCA became involved in the issue of vivisection. Although today vivisection is used loosely to describe any animal experiment that causes suffering, it originally referred to operating on live animals (vivisection means, literally, “live cutting”). Seeking to
regulate vivisection rather than to abolish it, the RSPCA lobbied for the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876. This law required scientists to obtain licenses for experiments on live animals. Licenses were granted only on the basis that the experiments would contribute to knowledge for reducing (human) suffering and prolonging life. While this was the first law of its kind in the world, it was rather weak. Richard D. Ryder notes that this law, despite “making numerous worthy restrictions on animal experimentation, allowed nearly all those restrictions to be annulled by means of special certificates issued to experimenters by the Home Office” (1989, 116).

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was not formed until 1866, delayed in part by the U.S. Civil War. One of ASPCA’s earliest successful campaigns was on behalf of urban workhorses. Horses were the predominant form of transportation. Teams of horses lined city streets as they pulled public transportation carts and moved goods. However, since these animals were seen as expendable—one horse-railroad company manager proclaimed, “horses are cheaper than oats”—they were often overworked, which led to their premature deaths. It was not uncommon to see carcasses of overworked horses on city streets. Through the ASPCA’s efforts, which included boycotts, legislation, raising public awareness, prosecution, and intervening physically, more humane standards were developed for the treatment of work horses. For instance, more troughs were provided throughout cities for horses. Moreover, and quite remarkably, the first ambulances were developed for injured horses (Beers 2006, 24, 63-65).

In the late nineteenth century, a growing concern for the welfare of animals was evident in U.S. legislation as well. Despite many states having anti-cruelty laws, there was no federal law protecting animals until 1873—over fifty years after Martin’s Act was passed in the U.K. In
the U.S., a federal law was finally enacted when animal protection groups rallied over the plight of animals transported by railroad to slaughterhouses. Travelling by rail was a painful experience for animals because they were packed together in railroad cars with different types of animals. Because of these crowded quarters, many animals were trampled or gored before they reached their destinations. The horrible travel conditions were compounded by the lack of food and water. Obviously, this method of transport led to considerable weight loss—according to Jordan Curnutt, “as much as one quarter of their body weight” (2001, 193). Moreover, such transportation arrangements frequently resulted in over one third of the livestock perishing before they reached the stockyards. The animals that survived the trip were often diseased, which was problematic since they were soon slaughtered for human consumption. In 1873, the Twenty-Eight Hour Law was passed, which required that livestock transported on trains be watered, fed, and allowed to rest every twenty-eight hours. This legislation counteracted the conditions animals were subjected to on their long journey from ranches and farms in the west to urban slaughterhouses in the east. It also improved the quality of meat.\(^3\)

In 1911, the British Parliament passed the Protection of Animals Act. The most comprehensive piece of animal protection legislation in the U.K., this Act protects any animal, including birds, fish, and reptiles, from “unnecessary suffering” (what exactly constitutes “unnecessary suffering” is decided by the courts). The only exception to the law is hunting, or “blood sport,” as it is called in U.K. Over the years, several amendments to the Protection of Animals Act have afforded animals more protection. For instance, in 1954 and 1964 the Act was amended so as to require anesthetics during animal operations. Originally, the Act only required that operations be performed “humanely.” One of the more significant features of the Protection
of Animals Act is that those who have caused animal suffering can be held accountable, whether or not they intended to be cruel (Clough and Kew 1993, 105-109, 114-115).

During the early twentieth century, animal protectionism in both the U.K. and U.S. began to shift away from horses, livestock, and vivisection—the last of which gradually became more acceptable since the result was to reduce human suffering (as opposed to forms of cruelty such as bull-baiting, which only served as entertainment)—toward pets. According to Turner, “By the time of the First World War, most SPCAs had become little more than clubs of cat lovers and dog fanciers. Not until after 1945 would the primacy of pets be challenged” (1980, 122-123). In part, Turner suggests that this shrinking concern for the wellbeing of other animals was due to the growing attention directed elsewhere—toward children, the lower classes, and homeless—as part of the Progressive agenda. Beers, however, argues that Progressivism “did not stifle the movement’s momentum but rather fed it. . . . [Progressive] reformers believed that some societal ills begot other societal ills, which, in turn, weakened the entire moral fabric of society. Abuse was one of those ills, and few Progressives drew sharp distinctions between animal abuse, child abuse, and domestic abuse, believing instead that each fed on and perpetuated the other: they were elements of the same battle” (2006, 92-3). Thus, despite the appearance that animal protectionism waned during these years, it thrived in conjunction with other aspects of the Progressive agenda.4

**Animal Protectionism Evolves: History after 1945**

In the decades following World War II, animal protectionism in the U.K. and U.S. became increasingly radical. While anti-cruelty campaigns were still a key element of animal protectionism, the types of animals receiving consideration expanded considerably because of
new developments in animal slaughter, farming, fishing, and experimental research. Opposition to the status quo grew as radical concepts such as speciesism, animal rights, and animal liberation were articulated by philosophers. Moreover, radical groups formed in response to the ineffectiveness of the older protectionist organizations. In this section, I continue tracing the trajectory of the animal-protection movement in both the U.K. and U.S. until the late 1980s.

In 1964, Ruth Harrison’s *Animal Machines* was published. With a foreword by Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring* (1963), Harrison’s book raised awareness about “factory farming.” A new development in the farm industry, factory farming refers to the mechanization of farming, which allows for mass production of food. Owing to its emphasis on mass production, factory farming reduces the living space for animals so as to pack more animals in. In short, it sacrifices the quality of an animal’s life for quantity of production. Describing the Protection of Animals Act of 1911 as “hopelessly outdated,” Harrison argued that “Its drafters could not possibly have envisaged the type of insidious cruelties which are perpetuated in modern animal husbandry” (1963, 143). Harrison’s book quickly led to the British Parliament’s formation of the Brambell Committee in 1965. This committee sought to define what exactly counted as suffering so that the government could regulate the treatment of farm animals. The Brambell Committee’s recommended regulations ranged from providing more room for animals, to prohibiting the mutilation of animals—farmers commonly de-beaked chickens and docked pigs’ tails (Guither 1998, 3). Although many of the recommendations made by the Brambell Committee were not put into effect, Harrison’s book encouraged people to think more about the conditions under which their food was produced.

Since the 1960s, vegetarianism has grown in popularity in the West. Although part of its popularity has been due to an interest in Eastern philosophy, the modern animal-rights movement
has also contributed significantly. Because of their commitment to preventing cruelty to
animals, many welfarists, and all animal-rights activists, are either vegetarians or vegans.
Vegetarians, of course, abstain from eating all animal meat (including fish and poultry), but will
consume animal products (dairy, eggs). Vegans abstain from eating meat and any other animal
products. Although some people may adopt vegetarianism or veganism as a lifestyle regardless
of the well being of animals (perhaps they do not like meat or want to lose weight), for animal
activists it is a moral choice. Vegetarianism and veganism also serve as a means of boycotting
the cruel treatment of animals by factory farms.

During the late 1960s, concern grew in the U.S. over dolphins, as they had become one of
the more prominent casualties of the tuna-fishing industry. The chief cause of dolphin fatalities
was the widespread use of purse-seining net techniques, whereby a net is lowered into water and
catches everything that happens to swim into it—including dolphins (Curnutt 2001, 363). In
1972, the U.S. Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act in order to reduce the
number of marine mammals killed. Instrumental in its passage were the Humane Society of the
United States (HSUS), the Animal Welfare Institute, and other animal-welfare groups (Beers
2006, 193). While the passage of this Act was an important step toward saving dolphins, much
damage had been done already. According to Curnutt, “By the time the Marine Mammal
Protection Act was passed in 1972, an estimated 5 million spinner and spotted dolphins had died
as a direct result of purse seining” (2001, 364).

In addition to those involved in food production, animals used in American laboratories
were given protection during the mid-1960s. The first instance of protection for laboratory
animals in the United States occurred with the passage of the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act
(LAWA) of 1966. Originating in a case where a family dog was stolen and used for lab research,
the purpose of LAWA (according to its preamble) was “to protect the owners of dogs and cats from theft of such pets, [and] to prevent the sale or use of dogs and cats which have been stolen” (quoted in Curnutt 2001, 442). Although LAWA required that the animals be treated humanely, this was limited to basic essentials, such as food, sanitary living quarters, and “adequate veterinary care.” Unaddressed were humane standards for experimentation. In 1970, LAWA underwent significant modification and was given a new name, the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). AWA increased the scope of those regulated under LAWA. Whereas only research facilities and animal dealers had been covered under LAWA, AWA now included animal exhibitors, such as circuses and zoos. Moreover, it expanded the types of animals protected to include any warm-blooded animal recommended by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Excluded from this protection, however, were mice, rats, birds, and farm animals (Curnutt 2001, 442-443). Significantly, AWA clarified “adequate veterinary care” as the use of pain-relieving drugs. It also stated that those who interfered with USDA inspectors would be punished.

In 1985, several important amendments were made to AWA as part of the Improved Standards for Laboratory Animals Act. These amendments made it illegal to use an animal for more than one surgery, except in cases of “scientific necessity” (Curnutt 2001, 446). Those handling animals in research facilities were now required to undergo training in the humane treatment of animals and experimentation. Moreover, the penalties for violations were increased. These amendments grew largely out of two key instances of primate abuse in laboratories, brought to light by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).8 Ultimately, many exposés, prosecutions, and break-ins of scientific labs by animal-rights groups fostered an enmity between scientists and activists. According to Deborah Blum, “Before the 1980s, scientists did not fear activists so much, and activists gave researchers
more benefit of the doubt. Now, they watch each other like wary enemies—each convinced that they are staring into the eyes of fanatics” (1994, 106).

One particularly divisive issue for British animal protectionists is blood sports. This activity involves the pursuit of an animal, such as a fox or deer, by hunting dogs and hunters on horseback. Beyond the death of an animal, animal activists criticize blood sports for causing unnecessary suffering. For instance, the hound dogs used in the chase are bred for endurance, not speed, thereby “encouraging a protracted chase” (Clough and Kew 1993, 17). Hunts often last several hours, until the exhausted animal is shot. Because of the association between blood sports and the aristocracy, these recreations were not opposed by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), whose benefactors were largely the upper echelons of society (Garner 2004, 60, 66). Moreover, Ryder observes that, “to attack blood sports, and fox-hunting in particular, struck at the core of the British class system and the nation’s traditional fantasies about country life. For nearly two hundred years the English middle classes had dreamt of being country gentry and believed that fox-hunting was one of its principle qualifications” (1989, 189). Contention over blood sports led several groups to split away from the RSCPA to form their own organizations during the 1960s and 1970s.

Greater concern for animals was fueled during the seventies and eighties by Peter Singer’s Animal Liberation, first published in 1975. Singer made a powerful argument, appealing to reason over emotion, for treating animals with equal consideration. He argued that “the tyranny of human over nonhuman animals” (1990, i) was due to a prejudice of most humans everywhere: speciesism.9 Speciesism parallels two other dominant -ism’s of the time, racism and sexism, and refers to privileging one’s own species over other, non-human species. Despite Singer’s eschewal of the language of rights (he prefers the term “animal liberation,” which
echoes women’s liberation and black liberation), his book has become known as the “bible of the animal rights movement” (Farley 1990). Similarly to Harrison’s Animal Machines, an important aspect of Animal Liberation was its inclusion of photographs depicting animals in factory farms or being experimented on. According to Gary L. Francione, “For many people, [Animal Liberation] was their first exposure to the industries that produced the meat for their dinner or that subjected nonhumans to shocking, scalding, burning, and mutilation in the name of science” (1996, 12).

One early animal-rights organization to form in the wake of Animal Liberation was PETA, which was co-founded in 1980 by Alex Pacheco and Ingrid Newkirk. According to Pacheco, “I read one chapter [of Animal Liberation] and it gave me the nuts and bolts of how to put your beliefs into action. It connected my guts with my brain” (quoted in Farley 1990). Newkirk noted that, after reading Animal Liberation, “I came to realize that . . . animals have a worth in and of themselves, that they are not inferior to human beings but are rather just different from us. They don’t exist for us nor do they belong to us. I also realized that it should not be a question simply of how animals should be treated within the context of their usefulness, or perceived usefulness, to us, but rather whether we have a right to use them at all” (1999, xvi). PETA grew in prominence during the 1980s after bringing public attention to the abuse of laboratory primates, but also for its involvement in the fight against fur, cosmetic testing, and factory farms. The group’s frequent connection with the ALF, however, painted it as a radical organization. This image was reinforced by comments from Newkirk, such as, “I don’t believe that human beings have the ‘right to life.’ That’s a supremecist perversion. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy” and “Six million people died in concentration camps, but six billion broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses” (both quotations in Marquardt, Levine, and
LaRochelle 1993, 175, 176). Despite its portrayal as a radical organization, or perhaps because of it, PETA’s membership swelled from 8,000 members in 1984 to 300,000 by 1990 (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, 31).

Although animal-rights activism was growing by leaps and bounds in the 1980s, the animal-welfarist element of animal advocacy was by no means stagnating. It, too, experienced a dramatic increase in membership. For instance, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which averaged about 15,000 new members annually during the early late 1970s and early 1980s, added 100,000 new members every year from 1984 to 1988. In 1988, its membership totaled over half a million (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, 38). However, in many respects the animal-rights element of the movement eclipsed the welfarist activists. This is perhaps most easily recognized in the common use of “animal rights” to refer to the entire animal-protection movement by those outside it. In part, this was encouraged by welfarists who employed rights language themselves. Andrew Rowan notes that “An animal ‘welfare’ proponent may well use animal ‘rights’ terminology in a political campaign because it strikes a responsive chord with the general public” (1993, 23). Moreover, the use of “rights” terminology is especially important in the U.S., where it “is commonly used to establish a claim for disenfranchised groups” (Rowan 1993, 23).

One distinct trend in animal advocacy is the number of women involved. Jasper and Poulsen note that women tend to constitute no less than 70 percent, and are often near 100 percent of animal-rights organizations (1995, 502). For this reason, Beers describes them as the “backbone of the animal advocacy” (2006, 9). There are several reasons for the high number of women activists involved in animal protection efforts. Feminist scholarship often draws parallels between the domination of animals and traditional domination of females in the male-
dominated societies of the West. Historically, both animals and women have been used and possessed. For some feminists, protecting instead of killing animals serves as a means of rejecting male violence and control. Moreover, it serves to assert an alternative, feminine worldview marked by pacifism (Adams 2000, 101). In addition to animal protectionism as a feminist expression, societal norms have also contributed to the predominance of women in animal activism. More specifically, animal-protection societies were often among the few opportunities for women to be active in public life. Because women were considered to be more nurturing than men, anti-cruelty societies were considered appropriate for them. Despite the high concentration of women involved in animal advocacy, it has only been in recent decades that women have commonly assumed leadership positions.

**Environmentalism**

The 1970s witnessed not only the emergence of the animal-rights movement, but also of environmentalism. Although U.S. citizens had been concerned about the environment for nearly a century, they were previously motivated by conservation instead of the belief that the environment had an inherent right to be left alone. Since animal-rights activists and environmentalists argue that humans should respect the “rights” of the natural world, it is often assumed that they are closely linked. However, the two movements do not always agree. Much of the difference between them is owing to the ecological perspective of environmentalists, which stresses the interconnectedness of organisms and their environment. In this section I identify a few areas of agreement and tension between these two movements. I also discuss Greenpeace, an environmentalist organization that was supported by animal-rights activists during the 1970s.
Animal-rights activists and environmentalists have similar goals, as both groups seek to stem the destructive practices of humans. However, their impetus for action often varies. For instance, both want to see a reduction in the number of farm animals. However, whereas animal-rights activists protest ownership of farm animals because it violates the animals’ right to live free from oppression, environmentalists dislike farm animals because they often ruin wild habitats—perhaps none more publicized than the destruction of rainforests to provide grazing land for cattle. Moreover, environmentalists dislike the various forms of pollution produced by farming operations, ranging from phosphate in rivers to the waste produced by animals (Finsen and Finsen 1994, 244-245).

In addition to protesting farms, both are concerned about wild animals. In response to the efforts of many environmentalists and some animal protectionists, the U.S. Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973. This Act made it illegal to harm any species, whether plant or animal, declared endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Beers 2006, 190). Similarly to their fight against farms, animal-rights activists and environmentalists protect endangered animals for different reasons. While animal-rights activists are concerned about the wellbeing of each endangered animal, environmentalists want to save animals for broader, ecological reasons. For example, if a species becomes extinct, the intricate relationships between all the organisms in a particular environment may become disrupted. Significantly, although the Endangered Species Act often serves to create a united front between the two groups, it can also cause friction. During the early 1980s, members of the San Francisco SPCA became upset and protested when deer were shot on Angel Island in order to protect the native fauna (Finsen and Finsen 1994, 244).
Generally speaking, the uneasy alliance between animal-rights activists and environmentalists is illustrated in the issue of hunting. Whereas animal-rights activists would place a moratorium on hunting if they were able to, many environmentalists are more hesitant. This is because environmentalism developed out of the conservation movement. One method employed by conservationists to protect land and wildlife for future generations was hunting species whose populations had become too large. Although some environmentalists reject hunting in order to stabilize ecosystems, the movement’s heritage and historical ties with hunting organizations remain strong. Moreover, hunting organizations provide strong financial support for environmentalist groups. Thus, Beers notes that environmentalist groups such as the World Wildlife Fund and Sierra Club “consciously avoided broadcasting their official positions, understanding that whatever their stance, they surely would alienate some members. But when pressed for an opinion, all condoned some form of hunting as a legitimate tool for managing natural systems” (2006, 184).

Although there are many important environmentalist groups, one of the more prominent to have defended animals is Greenpeace. This organization, which adopted its name in 1971, was founded in 1969, initially to protest nuclear-weapon tests. By the mid-seventies this organization had increased the scope of its interests from “the sanctity of human life to the sanctity of all life” (Robert Hunter, a founding member of Greenpeace, as quoted in Nash 1989, 179). These expanded interests often meshed with those of animal-rights activists. For instance, in 1975 Greenpeace attempted unsuccessfully to prevent the slaughter of whales by Russian whalers. In 1977 they worked to save baby seals, which were slaughtered by Canadian sealers for their popular white fur. However, with the exception of these two instances, Greenpeace has largely concerned itself with broader environmental issues. Moreover, their positions on animals
reflect a more dominant ecological perspective. For instance, during the mid-1980s Greenpeace canceled its anti-fur campaign after Native Americans argued that it was an important aspect of their culture. Decisions like this have led to a decrease in their support from animal-rights activists.

**Defining the Movement: Animal Protection Terminology**

A number of labels have been used to describe those concerned about animal advocacy since its inception in the nineteenth century. “Historically,” Beers observes, “this expansive movement has embraced people who have variously called themselves animal welfarists, protectionists, zoophilists, humanitarians, rightists, and, most recently, liberationists” (2006, 3). While some of these labels have waned in popularity (such as zoophilist, which became closely linked with zoophil-psychosis during the early twentieth century), many of the rest are still used. Generally speaking, animal activists fall into two camps. There are animal welfarists who promote the humane treatment of animals, and animal rightists who believe that we have no right to control animals. Clarifying what exactly these labels mean is important because they reflect a variety of moral stances embraced by different animal protectionists.

**Animal Welfare**

Compassionate toward the suffering of animals, welfarists seek to reduce *unnecessary* animal suffering—in short, they believe humans may use animals for consumption, research, clothing, etc., provided that it is done humanely. Although animal welfarists are concerned for the well being of animals, they believe that animals are the property of humans. Francione observes that animal welfarists consider it “acceptable to trade away any animal interest—
including freedom from pain or death—as long as the human interest involved is regarded as ‘significant’ and as long as any animal pain, suffering, or death is not ‘unnecessary’” (1996, 8). In order to get a better sense of what human interests are regarded as “significant” by animal welfarists, it may help to consider the policies of the Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS), a prominent animal-welfare organization. John Hoyt, a former president of the HSUS, has commented, “We are not a vegetarian organization, and as a matter of policy do not consider the utilization of animals for food to be either immoral or inappropriate” (quoted in Guither 1998, 42). However, while the HSUS is not opposed to eating meat, they do condemn the use of veal crates. HSUS’s rationale for opposing veal is that it harms animals, while merely catering to a human’s taste. For similar reasons, the HSUS has campaigned against the use of fur (Finsen and Finsen 1994, 121, 260).

In order to reduce animal suffering, welfarists educate the public about treating animals better (e.g., spay and neuter), establish humane shelters, and lobby for legislation that will reduce inhumane practices. The emphasis on public education is a remnant of the first welfare organizations, such as the RSPCA. At the time, it was considered more humane to educate the ignorant, lower classes who found amusement in cockfights and bull-baiting, rather than to prosecute offenders (Turner 1980, 44). The perceived conservativeness of welfarist organizations during the late twentieth century frequently assisted their ability to enact reform. This was largely because politicians are more willing to work with organizations that demand less extreme measures. However, such an advantage is a two-edged sword. It has also led more radical rightists, such as Tom Regan and Francione, to criticize them. According to Regan, animal welfarists “[work] to improve the corrupt system of exploitation” (quoted in Guither 1998, 9). Francione observes, “animal welfare . . . always endorses some version of
instrumentalism, or the treatment of nonhumans exclusively as means to human ends” (1996, 31). This is a recurring critique. Because animal welfarists expend most of their energies on reform rather than abolition, they are often criticized by animal-rights activists and liberationists for aiding and abetting the enemy. Rejecting this accusation, animal-welfarists Preece and Chamberlain have declared, “We stand squarely on the side of the animals. But we do not believe that compromise is an evasion of principle. It is instead the most effective means to implement principle” (1992, 1).

Although welfarism represented the conservative wing of animal advocacy during the late twentieth century, it was considered a radical position when it first emerged a century prior. Before then—with the exception of the Puritans, of course—no one was penalized for cruelty toward an animal. It has only been since the late twentieth century that animal welfarism has been considered conservative. In part, this was because of philosophers who, beginning in the 1970s, fostered a more radical conception of humanity’s responsibility toward animals; but also, as Singer argues, to the tendency of welfarist organizations to push for reform instead of abolition: “[as they] grew in wealth, membership, and respectability, they lost their radical commitment and became part of the ‘establishment’ . . . . Again and again the societies compromised their fundamental principles for the sake of trivial reforms” (1975, 218). This growing perception among frustrated animal protectionists led to the formation of animal-rights organizations.

*Animal Rights*

The term “animal rights” is often a source of confusion. For which rights exactly, do animal rights activists fight? Moreover, which types of organizations best represent animal-
rights activists? Are they the humane societies, the groups that stage peaceful protests, or “terrorist” organizations like the ALF? In this section, I clarify what exactly constitutes animal rights.

Animal-rights activists believe that animals, like humans, have certain inalienable rights. Which rights an animal possesses is determined by their “fundamental interests” (Rollin 1990, 3456-3461). For instance, a cardinal has the right to fly, and a trout the right to swim. Animal-rights activists argue that since all animals were originally wild creatures, it is within their fundamental interests not to be used or owned by humans. Annabelle Sabloff observes, “animal-rights activism sees its aims as more far-reaching and radical than in the past: nothing less than the establishment of a new order of relations between humans and other animals” (2001, 113).

In order to bring about this new order of relations, animal-rights activists employ a variety of tactics, many of which overlap with those of animal welfarists. Animal-rights activists lobby for legislation, organize protests, and educate the public. Although their goals are more radical than animal-welfarists, many animal-rights organizations, such as PETA, support animal-welfarist measures in order to minimize current animal suffering. According to Francione, “the modern animal ‘rights’ movement has explicitly rejected the philosophical doctrine of animal rights in favor of a version of animal welfare that accepts animal rights as an ideal state of affairs that can be achieved only through continued adherence to animal welfare measures” (1996, 3). Rather bitterly, Francione argues that modern animal-rights activists should be called “new welfarists” (1996, 3).

While all animal-rights activists challenge our conception of a moral society, not all do so in the same way. Although most groups engage in peaceful protest, some, such as the ALF, prefer violence. As with most social movements, violence is a problematic and divisive means
of achieving one’s goals. Violence can provide urgency for one’s claims, but it is also generally frowned upon because it suggests that persuasion through dialogue has not been attempted or that the means for peaceful persuasion have failed. Activists who do not engage in violence often distance themselves from those who do, or refuse to acknowledge that violent activists are part of the same movement. For instance, animal-rights scholar Lyle Munro argues that true animal-rights activists “follow a non-violent philosophy of animal advocacy and activism which should not be confused with extremists such as the Animal Liberation Front, whose use of violent and illegal tactics places them outside the mainstream movement” (2005, 6). Even PETA, which refuses to condemn the ALF’s tactics and acknowledges them as a fellow animal-rights organization, makes it clear that the ALF works independently of them. Overall, while animal-rights activists employ a wide range of tactics ranging from reform to violence, they share the belief that animals deserve more than “better treatment.” Animals deserve an equal consideration of their rights.

**Conclusion**

By the late 1980s, animal protectionism had established a prominent, though precarious, position in the U.K. and U.S. Although animal protectionists had been responsible for effecting legislative change favorable to animals, as well as for influencing the hearts and minds of the British and American public, fear of extremism was ever in the background. Though caught off guard, scientists and industries attacked by animal protectionists redoubled their efforts and began to fight back. In some respects, this retaliation is best expressed in an article in the March 1988 edition of *Reader’s Digest* entitled, “The Facts about Animal Research.” Written by Robert J. White, M.D., who is described as “an eminent scientist and neurosurgeon,” this article
is decidedly anti-animal rights. Almost immediately, White assures readers that “There is virtually no major treatment or surgical procedure in modern medicine that could have been developed without animal research” (1998, 127). Seeking to convince those with welfarist sensibilities, he also notes that many animals have “profited from this research” (128), and lists the different vaccines developed, surgical procedures for animals perfected, and items such as pacemakers for family pets. In a climactic, grand finale worth quoting in full, White states:

Do we want to wipe out leukemia? Alzheimer’s? AIDS? Diabetes? Do we want better vaccines, more effective treatments and cures for high blood pressure, coronary-artery disease, stroke and myriad other ills? All of these things and more are possible within the next 25 years, some of them sooner, because of the work medical scientists are doing with animals. But they can’t be accomplished if we surrender to the mindless emotionalism and intimidation of the animal rights fanatics. The choice is ours. (1988, 132; italics mine)

Clearly, animal protectionists had found their mark if scientists had to defend animal research in *Reader’s Digest*. However, *Reader’s Digest* was not the only periodical covering animal rights in 1988. In December of that year, a cover story in *Newsweek* addressed the animal-rights issue, too. Though neither completely embracing nor rejecting the argument for animal rights, *Newsweek* was more fair-minded, as it explored the “thorny ethical question: do the practical benefits of animal experimentation outweigh the moral costs?” (Cowley et al. 1988, 50). It was into this undecided world that *Animal Man* was introduced by Morrison in September 1988.
Imagine for a moment that you could borrow any animal’s natural ability. What would you do? Would you soar among eagles? Swim with dolphins off the Great Barrier Reef? Swing through the tropical canopies of Borneo with orangutans? Race across the savannah with cheetahs? Surely these are some of the more alluring possibilities, although one could always hibernate like a grizzly, spray noxious fumes like a skunk, or possess the indestructibility of a cockroach. The possibilities are endless in a world full of animals proficient at creeping, crawling, flying, running, jumping, swimming, and swinging—to name only a few such skills.

One can easily complicate this imaginary scenario further, for as soon as you assume an animal’s ability you immediately encounter the question of purpose. Are you changing the colors of your skin like an octopus because you need to blend in with your surroundings, or are you doing it for fun? To what end will you use your awesome ability?

These are some of the fundamental questions that faced the original creator(s) of Animal Man, and that were encountered by Grant Morrison, who revolutionized this character in the late 1980s. With the ability to assume any animal’s innate powers, Animal Man’s own powers and purposes are guided by the writer’s imagination. Kenneth Burke reminds us, “The world contains an infinity of objects. The artist’s engrossment involves a selection from among them” (1984a, 193). By noting the selections each author makes while writing and drawing Animal Man’s adventures, one can discover the frames they employ. As noted in chapter one, understanding an author’s frames is important because they provide a moral perspective for
viewing and evaluating actions. By being aware of the frames Morrison employs in *Animal Man*, one can explain the worldviews and attitudes they encourage in the audience.

Frame articulation is important for this exploration of frames in *Animal Man*. Coined by David Snow and Scott Byrd, “frame articulation” refers to the integration of previously disparate “events, experience, and strands of moral codes so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling way” (2007, 130). The most important aspect of frame articulation is that it provides a new perspective on older ideas. Morrison’s *Animal Man* is a good example of frame articulation; he blends an older comic-book hero with the ideology of animal-rights, which emerged shortly after Animal Man’s initial publication in the 1960s. By blending the conceptions of justice that a superhero embodies and the concern for animal well-being, Morrison articulates a new frame. The believability of such a frame is partially a matter of historical contingency—namely, the greater acceptance of animal rights—but also of a degree of logic: it seems reasonable that a superhero would be interested in protecting the sources of his (or her) powers.

This chapter examines the way in which Morrison frames animal rights in *Animal Man*. However, before doing so, it is helpful first to explore Animal Man as he was originally conceived during the 1960s in the comic series, *Strange Adventures*. By examining the earlier portrayal of Animal Man, Morrison’s subsequent animal rights engrossment stands in sharp relief. Specifically, Animal Man’s interaction with animals changes completely from *Strange Adventures* to *Animal Man*, as do the ways in which animals are referred to. Likewise, the characters who are portrayed as villains change drastically.
Foundational Frames: Animal Man in *Strange Adventures*

*Strange Adventures* was a long-running series produced by DC Comics; it ran from 1950-1973 for a total of 244 issues. While predominantly based in science-fiction, *Strange Adventures* capitalized on bizarre storylines. Despite the degree of gravity that I wish to place on Morrison’s rendition of Animal Man, I must acknowledge that the character was originally conceived in a rather lighthearted manner. First introduced as “the man with animal powers!” in issue #180, Animal Man shared company with wacky individuals, such as “the man with the computer eyes!”; “the man with the comet head!”; and even “the crazy-quilt man!”—all of whom starred in their separate issues of *Strange Adventures.*

The most noticeable difference between the earlier portrayal of Animal Man in *Strange Adventures* and Morrison’s is the relationship between Animal Man and animals. Although the cover of issue #180 shows Animal Man wrestling with an alien, a large portion of the storyline revolves around Animal Man fighting animals. The very first page shows him delivering a gorilla-powered punch to a berserk elephant, and as the story progresses it is evident that animals and aliens are linked together in the writer’s mind as opponents for Animal Man to overcome. Not only does Animal Man clobber an elephant, he also defends himself from a gorilla and a tiger, and protects a group of school boys from a sea lion. The linking of animals and the alien as enemies is also demonstrated by the language used. For instance, on the cover the alien is referred to as a “living nightmare,” and within two pages a tiger is described as a “four-footed nightmare.” Moreover, the extent to which animals are undesirable, and somewhat contemptible, is demonstrated by the animal labels applied to Animal Man. He describes himself as “a mouse of a man” and is called a “chicken” by his friend Roger when he fails to propose to his sweetheart Ellen.
In issue #184, Animal Man spends less time beating up animals and more time defending his town from aliens. Nonetheless, animals are frequently invoked as he describes himself delivering more gorilla punches and springing like a tiger. By using phrases such as “sitting duck” and “holy cow,” the writer draws attention to our reliance on animals for explaining the situations in which we find ourselves (Kane 1966, 184:9, 10). This stylistic choice is continued throughout the rest of Animal Man’s appearances in Strange Adventures, with phrases such as “playing possum,” “bull’s eye,” “clam up,” etc. Beyond these phrases, which bring to mind many attributes of animals, Animal Man’s actions are framed through violent animal metaphors. For instance, in referring to some criminals he was chasing, he stated, “Now to move in for the ‘kill’ . . . ,” and of an animal he was not going to attack, but only assume its powers, he said, “I spotted my prey.” Significantly, these are more figures of speech than representations of his actions—he does not kill the criminals nor does he attack the animal. However, this is noticeably different from Morrison’s animal-rights activist Animal Man, who is largely pacifistic and would never describe any animal, much less one from which he was about to borrow powers, as “prey.” Importantly, while the writers of Strange Adventures are clearly trying to emphasize the connection between Animal Man and animals through his powers and use of language, insofar as he is often referred to as “A-Man” his animal connection is elided. Moreover, read literally, this moniker reaffirms that Animal Man is still a man.

While Animal Man was frequently associated with animals through the language employed in the narration of Strange Adventures, it is important to consider a few more details before analyzing Morrison’s rendition of Animal Man. In order to see the full significance of Morrison’s work, we must look at Animal Man’s role as a superhero. According to his best friend, Roger, it is Animal Man’s “duty to use your fantastic powers against evil.”
Significantly, although Animal Man had beaten up animals and aliens in earlier issues, after Roger frames his duty as fighting evil, the only opponents he fights are crooks. Since crooks are always the “bad guys” Animal Man fights, the author(s) of *Strange Adventures* frames them as evil. This conception of evil is strongly critiqued in Morrison, who, as I explain below and in the next chapter, frames *hunters, government research programs,* and *businesses* as evil—not common crooks—by having Animal Man fight them instead. Moreover, although Animal Man stops fighting animals in *Strange Adventures,* he is by no means interested in their well being. For instance, at one point Animal Man’s leg gets caught in a steel-jaw leg-hold trap—a situation that Morrison could easily have used to demonstrate the dangers of such devices, not to mention having Animal Man destroy the trap lest an animal get caught in one. However, in *Strange Adventures* Animal Man assumes the strength of a nearby lion to open the trap and free himself with no apparent injury, which suggests that they are not harmful to animals and are easy to escape from if you are strong enough. Generally speaking, Animal Man can be seen as adopting a purely utilitarian stance towards animals; he scouts his neighborhood to get a sense of where the animals are—such as in zoos or aquariums—so that he can use their powers to fight crime.

Overall, the issues of *Strange Adventures* featuring Animal Man are playfully written, packing in as many references to animals as possible. Although Animal Man largely refrains from beating up animals after the first issue, his relationship with them is largely one of convenience. Animals are purely a means to defeat the bad guys. This is not to condemn Animal Man as he was originally conceived. Schiappa observes, “When it comes to defining our shared reality, there is simply no escape from questions of power, interests, and historical contingency” (2003, 105). While I touch upon these questions throughout this thesis, it should already be clear that historical contingency plays a large role in the evolution of Animal Man.
from “the man with animal powers” to the animal-rights activist with animal powers. Without the emergence of the animal-rights movement during the 1970s, the idea that a superhero might be morally concerned for the wellbeing of animals may not have arisen.

**Revamping and Radicalizing: Morrison’s Animal Man**

Morrison’s decision to frame Animal Man as an animal-rights activist has important implications for how we consider animals, humans, and our society more generally. While the superhero genre had been linked with upholding a moral society long before Morrison began writing, he articulated a new vision of what a moral society is, one grounded in the burgeoning animal-rights movement. To an extent, Morrison was acting similarly to PETA, which was able to spread its message more effectively during the late 1980s and early 1990s by appealing to what Peter Simonson describes as “the symbolic worlds that many of us happily inhabit” (2001, 416). Not only does such a methodology ensure exposure to those who do not care to follow the news, it makes exposure to animal-rights ideology pleasant for the recipients.

In the previous section, I discussed how Animal Man, animals, and the villains were originally framed in *Strange Adventures*. In the remainder of this chapter I examine the frames employed by Morrison in the first four issues of *Animal Man*. This delineation is appropriate since these issues contain a complete storyline (they were originally intended as a four-issue miniseries). They also contain the greatest concentration of animal-rights themes in the entire series. In order to understand how Morrison frames the main characters, I perform a cluster analysis of *Animal Man*. For the sake of clarity, I organize my key terms into the following categories: villains, B’Wana Beast, Animal Man, animals, and humans. From this analysis I then derive his conception of a moral society.
To preface my analysis, here is a brief overview of the storyline in the first four issues: Animal Man (whose real name is Buddy Baker) has married his sweetheart Ellen and has two children, Cliff and Maxine, who are aged approximately 10 and 6, respectively. Seeking employment, Animal Man decides to become a fulltime superhero and starts honing his animal powers. Within a week he is asked by Dr. Myers at a Scientific and Technology Advanced Research (S.T.A.R.) Laboratory to investigate a recent break-in. Woven throughout this introduction of Animal Man and his family is another storyline, focusing on a mysterious figure walking around San Diego in a trench coat. Eventually we learn he is B’Wana Beast, a superhuman from East Africa who can link telepathically with animals via his helmet and has the ability to fuse two organisms together. B’wana Beast is tracking his friend Djuba, a highly intelligent ape, who is being held captive at S.T.A.R. Labs for research. After B’Wana Beast rescues Djuba from the labs, Animal Man agrees to help return the ape to S.T.A.R., since Djuba has been injected by the scientists with a highly contagious strain of anthrax. Although he agrees to return Djuba, it is clear that Animal Man has grown increasingly disgusted with the research practices at S.T.A.R. Labs.

While Animal Man is away helping Dr. Myers, Ellen and Maxine walk in the woods, where they happen upon a group of hunters. These men are an unsavory bunch, and they proceed to assault Ellen. Maxine manages to escape and returns with a neighbor, who rescues Ellen before she is raped. Meanwhile, Animal Man successfully tracks B’Wana Beast and Djuba to the San Diego Zoo; however, not before Djuba succumbs to the anthrax infection. Although Djuba’s death convinces Animal Man that the scientists, and not B’Wana Beast, are the villains, he is unable to persuade B’Wana Beast that he is now on his side. Enraged at the death of Djuba, B’Wana Beast attacks Animal Man, but is soon weakened by the anthrax and Animal Man wins.
the fight. Out of sympathy for B’Wana Beast, Animal Man heals him completely. Later that night, B’Wana Beast returns Djuba’s lifeless body to S.T.A.R. Labs. However, not without exacting revenge: while there he uses his ability to fuse two organisms together on Dr. Myers, combining the scientist with Djuba. Ultimately, Dr. Myers gets a taste of his own medicine—to his horror—as he is mistaken for an ape and experimented on by his colleagues.

A New Type of Evil: Scientists and Hunters

When Animal Man last appeared in Strange Adventures (issue #201), he had spent both that issue and the two previous issues (#190, #195) fighting would-be crooks and maintaining order in his community. True to superhero form, Morrison frames Animal Man as eager to uphold justice. However, this time around the villains are scientists and hunters, both of whom harm animals and humans alike. In the next two sections I explain how Morrison frames these two classes of villain.

Scientists

Seeking an opportunity to prove his mettle as a superhero, Animal Man eagerly agrees to help Dr. Myers track down the person responsible for vandalizing S.T.A.R. Labs. Dr. Myers’ research, which he claims is centered on finding a cure for AIDS (readers later discover that Dr. Myers is really trying to develop a strain of anthrax for the military), has come to a halt since the laboratory was vandalized. The physical damages are immense. Not only does the laboratory look like a tornado hit it, a large number of the research primates have been mysteriously fused into a grotesque living conglomerate—essentially, a wailing glob of primates. Although Animal Man agrees to help Dr. Myers by tracking the person responsible, Morrison predisposes the
audience to view Dr. Myers negatively in a number of ways, ranging from their conversation to the panel layout and visual images.

During Animal Man’s first conversation with Dr. Myers, the scientist explains that he is trying to develop a vaccine for AIDS and that such research requires testing on primates. Engaging in small talk, Animal Man states, “I’ve heard the theory that AIDS could have started with monkeys.” Although Dr. Myers corroborates this theory, Animal Man proceeds to comment—while facing a biohazard sign—how he “also heard that the virus may have escaped from a military research installation” (1:23). Instead of telling Animal Man that he is wrong, the scientist quickly changes the subject. Dr. Myers’ avoidance is quite important, because it suggests to readers that the military, not monkeys, is to blame for AIDS. This suggestion gains credibility as the storyline develops and a strain of anthrax escapes from S.T.A.R. Labs, which is a military research installation. Insofar as the military, and not monkeys, are responsible for viruses like AIDS, there is less incentive to study primates for a cure and more incentive to prevent military research from committing the same mistake. Shortly after this quick interchange, Dr. Myers is framed as being insensitive when he shows Animal Man the aforementioned wailing glob of primates. Whereas Animal Man is clearly taken aback, Dr. Myers, who is Caucasian, is shaded darkly in the background, so we do not see his emotions (fig. 3-1). As a result, Dr. Myers is portrayed as emotionless toward the plight of the animals. This lack of emotion is fleshed out further in the next issue as he, with cool, calm scientific detachment, discusses the glob of monkeys: “Fascinating isn’t it? Look at their eyes. They simply can’t comprehend what it is they’ve become” (2:3). Meanwhile, Animal Man rolls his eyes in disgust.
Fig. 3-1. Reactions to a Wailing Glob of Primates
To help Animal Man track down the person responsible for the damage, Dr. Myers gives him access to laboratory dogs so he can absorb their sense of smell. Although these dogs are not shown, their well being is called into question when Animal Man tells Dr. Myers that “I’d have preferred healthy dogs.” While Dr. Myers assures him that they are healthy—“you don’t think we’d waste time performing neurosurgery on sick animals” (2:7)—the presence of “sickness bubbles” around Animal Man’s head suggest that Dr. Myers is mistaken or lying. It is important to keep in mind that Animal Man is not condemning Dr. Myers at this point in the storyline; this does not occur for another two issues (in issue four). However, Morrison is clearly dropping hints about how to view scientists who experiment on animals. Not only are scientists framed as unfeeling toward animal suffering, they are also seen as liars—either that or ignorant about the care animals need, their Ph.D.s notwithstanding.

Dr. Myers’ unflattering portrayal is further underscored by his final remarks to Animal Man as he departs on his tracking mission; Dr. Myers calls out, “Happy hunting!” (2:7). Normally this would be a rather innocuous phrase, suggesting a rigorous search. However, by juxtaposing this phrase with the hunters’ storyline, which follows immediately, Morrison makes a stronger comment on the speciesist stance of the scientist. Specifically, he implicates scientists and hunters as common enemies of animals. This is particularly important because our society generally views scientists positively. Moreover, we tend to prize scientific knowledge when it is used to keep humans alive, regardless of the cost to animals. As noted above, Morrison has already challenged the role of scientists by suggesting that the knowledge they produce is really harmful to society (not to mention animals). Thus, Morrison frames scientists pejoratively by linking them with hunters, the latter of whom are generally associated with killing and who are portrayed in Animal Man as violent and chauvinistic.
Whereas the first two issues only hint at the moral depravity of scientists, the next two issues confirm the implicit frame. The next time scientists appear in the storyline, they are covered from head to toe in white biohazard suits, which render them impersonal. Despite the fact that Animal Man is helping S.T.A.R. Labs, the scientists treat him rather harshly and force him into the back of their van. The next time we see S.T.A.R. Labs personnel, a researcher is swearing and throwing a cup at monkeys, who are in a cage, screaming. Due to the layout of the story (the first panel on the page shows him throwing the cup), we are unable to tell whether the scientist is justified in being angry. However, the layout encourages the reader to view the scientist as short tempered—not to mention violent toward animals.

Shortly thereafter, B’Wana Beast rescues Djuba from S.T.A.R. Labs, which causes Dr. Myers to panic, since the ape is infected with a mutant strain of the anthrax virus. At this point, Dr. Myers reveals to Animal Man that they were not really researching AIDS, but are designing a strain of anthrax to be used in warfare. Dr. Myers’ goal was to design a strain that would kill lower animals, such as the enemy’s livestock, but be harmless to humans so that the army could subsequently invade the territory without being infected. His experiments to design such a weapon focused on primates, which included Djuba. If Dr. Myers’ revelation of his deception and motives is not enough to challenge the value of scientists and their knowledge, he proceeds to note that the entire state of California could soon be uninhabitable due to the virus spreading. Moreover, the visuals during this grim disclosure focus on a field of dead sheep, with men in white biohazard suits holding clipboards and taking notes—further reinforcing the depravity to which scientific inquiry can descend. Though Animal Man is not an animal-rights activist at this point, Morrison can be understood as making an emotional appeal to those concerned about the wellbeing of animals through both the visual imagery of dead sheep, which are circled by flies,
and the idea that the military would target animals specifically. The visuals also portray Djuba’s traumatic capture, which depicts her enjoying nature, then crying out in pain after being shot with a tranquilizer dart, and finally on a research table surrounded by men in biohazard suits as she is injected with the strain of anthrax. The crime committed against Djuba in particular is magnified by the pacing of the panels, but also by Dr. Myers, who describes her as “vulnerable,” “friendly,” and “intelligent” (3:18).

Fearful for the safety of California, Animal Man agrees to track down Djuba and B’Wana Beast and bring them back to the lab. After defeating B’Wana Beast, he returns empty handed to S.T.A.R. Labs—B’Wana Beast took Djuba’s corpse with him as Animal Man was distracted—and Dr. Myers threatens to sue Animal Man. However, it becomes clear that Dr. Myers is concerned about continuing his research on Djuba, not about the possibility of a statewide epidemic. Just before Animal Man leaves, he tells Dr. Myers that “the work you’re doing here is barbaric and immoral. I’m ashamed I ever got involved” (4:19). Tellingly, Dr. Myers only takes issue with Animal Man saying he is ashamed—despite the emphasis that Morrison clearly places on the words “barbaric” and “immoral.” Ultimately, Animal Man punches Dr. Myers after the latter insults him by calling him a “useless, penny-ante ‘super-hero’” (4:20). This is significant, inasmuch as punches in the superhero genre are typically reserved for the bad guys, especially those who cannot be reasoned with. Thus, Morrison confirms that scientists are the villains and implicitly critiques the common association of rationality with scientists.

That Morrison portrays scientists from S.T.A.R. Labs pejoratively is striking because of their prior portrayal in DC Comics’ continuity. More or less, any time an author for DC Comics needed to explain some scientific piece of equipment, he/she would include S.T.A.R. Labs in the storyline. Moreover, S.T.A.R. Labs has been traditionally seen as a neutral
organization (Callahan 2007, 67, 69). In a sense, S.T.A.R. Labs can be considered a synecdoche for scientific research in the real world (as noted earlier, S.T.A.R. stands for Scientific and Technology Advanced Research). Overall, by reframing his readers’ conception of scientists in Animal Man and DC Comics’ continuity, Morrison encourages his audience to view scientists—a typically approved community—as “barbaric and immoral.”

**Hunters**

While Animal Man ran errands for Dr. Myers, his wife Ellen and daughter Maxine had a terrifying encounter with a group of hunters. Similar to the scientists, the hunters are framed as malevolent toward both animals and humans. However, whereas Morrison encourages his readers to undergo a complete frame transformation in their understanding of scientists, he makes it clear from the hunters’ first appearance that they are an unsavory bunch. One of the hunters, Ray, shoots a robin just for the thrill of it, litters, and complains about “that woman an’ her damn yakkin’ on” about the soap opera Dynasty (presumably “that woman” is his wife) (1:21). Ray is clearly happy to get out of the house. Ray’s comment foreshadows his sexist attitude, which is particularly striking since Morrison has already established Ellen as a strong female character. The theme that hunters are sexist and extremely violent is continued throughout the storyline as they threaten animals and Ellen.

After Dr. Myer’s parting call to Animal Man, “Happy hunting,” Morrison transitions immediately away from S.T.A.R. Labs to the forest, where a young deer is seen grazing. The deer looks majestic; light shines down around it, as though from heaven. Moments later the deer is dead, having been shot by Ray. While the heavenly light suggested that it was wrong to shoot the deer, Morrison continues framing Ray negatively by having him crack a joke about killing
Bambi. That his hunting buddies laugh at the joke serves to portray them negatively as well.
Overall, Morrison continually frames hunting as fun or “happy” only for hunters; for animals and
Ellen, it is a terrifying experience.

Around this time, Ellen decides to take Maxine to walk in the woods. Shortly after
Maxine goes to explore on her own, Ellen happens upon the dead deer. No longer does heavenly
sunshine filter around the deer. Instead, there are a cloud of flies, empty beer cans, and a snake
in the grass. As Ellen wonders who could have done such a thing, the hunters reappear and Ray
exclaims, “Well it looks like ol’ Lew was right. This is the Garden of Eden. And we just found
Eve” (2:18). Although Ray’s comment to Ellen seems rather innocuous, if not flattering, the
visual text suggests otherwise (fig. 3-2). In the first panel in which they appear, the hunters are
shown from behind and shaded completely. This shading not only creates an ominous effect, but
renders the barrel of Ray’s gun, which is pointed directly towards Ellen, indistinguishable from
his body and suggestively phallic. Moreover, Ellen is crouching on the ground, while Ray and
his friends are standing over her. The hunters are seen as dominating and disgusting. Although
we do not see Ellen and the hunters again until the next issue, Morrison’s efforts to frame the
hunters as dangerous and out of control is immediately confirmed when we see them again.
In the next issue, Morrison solidifies this frame by having Ray try to rape Ellen. Ray’s action has been foreshadowed in a number of ways, both visually and verbally. Visually, his shirt seems a little too small; unlike everyone else in the comic, we can see some of his belly hairs. His gun is frequently pointed directly at Ellen in a phallic manner. Moreover, his language often reveals him as sexist. One of the first things Ray asks Ellen is if she was the recent centerfold in *Hustler*. He becomes increasingly violent and, after administering a death sentence to Sheba (a neighbor’s cat, who just gave birth to kittens in the forest) by throwing her to his Doberman Pinschers, he calls Ellen a slut and batters her with his gun. Ray belittles and stereotypes Ellen as she falls to the ground: “You got a *headache*, huh? You want to watch *Dynasty*? Damn women are all the same!” (3:8). Significantly, she falls right next to the deer Ray shot earlier. By Ellen’s proximity to the deer, Morrison emphasizes their similar status as
victims of violence. Ray’s threats continue as he asks Ellen if she knows what a “double veteran” is (a double veteran is when one rapes a woman and then murders her). Fortunately, Ellen is rescued by her neighbor, Mr. Weidemeir, before Ray can finish unzipping his pants. In the end, one of Ray’s hunting buddies kills Ray, thinking he has gone too far.

Although Morrison provides some redemption, albeit bleak, for the hunters by having one shoot Ray, he paints a nasty picture of them. This negative portrayal is particularly interesting, for just as Morrison changed the moral valence of S.T.A.R. Labs, he does the same for hunters. Originally, hunters in Strange Adventures were seen as morally neutral, if not in a positive light. In fact, the only hunters in Strange Adventures were Animal Man and his best friend Roger. Morrison made sure to address this particular detail in Animal Man; after Roger reminisces about how they used to go hunting, Animal Man replies, “I had to give all that up when I got my Animal Man powers. I could feel it every time I killed something” (1:16). Overall, hunters are seen as crude, belligerent individuals who threaten animals and humans alike. Excepting the hunters’ crude sexism, they are quite similar to the scientists at S.T.A.R. Labs, who also threaten animals and humans.

**The Voice of Animal Suffering: B’Wana Beast**

One of the most mysterious characters in Animal Man is B’Wana Beast. In the first two issues, B’Wana Beast is shrouded in mystery due to a lack of information surrounding his motives and his strategic coloring (specifically, whenever he appears he is shaded blue, which creates a distancing affect). Due to his violent nature and his attempts to break into S.T.A.R. Labs, readers are encouraged to view B’Wana Beast as a villain. However, as the storyline progresses it becomes clear that he is anything but a villain; B’Wana Beast is merely trying to
rescue his friend Djuba from Dr. Myers’ deadly experiments. In many respects, B’Wana Beast can be considered the voice of the animals. Not only does his telepathic connection with them allow him to share their thoughts and feelings with readers, he is frequently referred to as “the Beast,” which further underscores his connection with the animals. This abbreviated version of his name also adds to his mysterious nature, since readers do not learn his full name until the fourth issue. Mystery notwithstanding, B’Wana Beast draws attention to the suffering of animals throughout the first four issues.

B’Wana Beast’s telepathic link with animals allows him to share their thoughts and feelings, and to tap into their senses. Morrison capitalizes extensively on this ability in order to provide a voice for the animals. Since B’Wana Beast is trying to rescue Djuba by following his telepathic link with her, he, too, is subjected to the suffering she experiences at S.T.A.R. Labs. The most-emphasized sense is hearing, which allows readers to gain access to a sense that is limited by the medium. Consider, for instance, the opening lines of the series: “Ten miles outside the city,” Morrison writes, “the screaming begins in earnest . . . quiet at first, like a commotion heard in another room it grows steadily louder with each step . . . screaming . . . the monkeys screaming . . . rattling the bars, hammering the wire mesh, playing their cages like tuneless instruments” (1:1). The word “screaming” is repeated throughout the first four issues and is associated with the monkeys being stuck in cages. Morrison makes it very clear that the screaming is a problem: “if only the noise would stop . . . the terrible noise . . . an orchestra of cages . . . a headful of screaming monkeys” (1:1).
Fig. 3-3. B’Wana Beast is Merciless

As B’Wana Beast enters the city he suffers further sensory overload from his telepathic link, but also because of the myriad sights, smells, and sounds of the city itself. While B’Wana Beast takes a moment to clear his head of the painful sensory overload, he is attacked by a thug who quickly realizes that he is overmatched. This episode is particularly noteworthy because the language used to describe B’Wana Beast defending himself invokes a connection with animals, albeit in a somewhat pejorative sense (fig. 3-3). In three successive panels, B’Wana Beast is described as being “quick as a snake,” “strong as a buffalo,” and “merciless” (1:11).

Significantly, Morrison does not associate the lack of mercy with an animal, as he did with quickness and strength, thereby suggesting that animals are not merciless. Insofar as these panels are propelled by parallel construction, Morrison invites the reader to complete the “as a
“simile for “merciless.” Since he did not attribute mercilessness to an animal, Morrison appears to be suggesting that this label applies to either the thug or B’Wana Beast himself. More generally, “merciless as a human” could work, since they are both humans, but also because the narration immediately before and after this scuffle mentions S.T.A.R. Labs, which centers on humans mercilessly inflicting suffering upon animals.

Throughout Animal Man, B’Wana Beast provides a verbal outlet for animals, amplifying their awful experience of imprisonment and experimentation at S.T.A.R. Labs. As highlighted above, a recurring theme is the screaming monkeys. However, he broadcasts more than this. As B’Wana Beast is en route to rescue Djuba, he is accompanied by the following narration:

Input comes in over the mind bridge . . . sick, hammering pain . . . the smell of chemicals, sharpened steel and diarrhea. . . . The Beast grinds his teeth together and runs. . . . The pain paces him . . . yelling madly in his ears. . . . Stifling a cry, he bites into his lip . . . he keeps on running . . . and thinks of home. . . . He feels the hot breath of Africa on his skin . . . feels the cool, anesthetic winds of Kilimanjaro’s summit. . . . The pain recedes, lost in the blue, icy distance. (3:3)

Whereas the laboratory is associated with jarring pain and sickness, Africa is presented as a powerful, soothing anesthetic. Morrison’s decision to use the word “anesthetic” is particularly noteworthy in that it is typically used by lab researchers. Part of the critique presented by animal-rights activists during the 1980s was that research labs failed to anesthetize animals properly, per National Institutes of Health guidelines. Likewise, this passage suggests that either scientists at S.T.A.R. Labs are not giving anesthetics correctly, or the laboratory environment is so horrible that no amount of anesthetic is adequate. Otherwise, B’Wana Beast would not be suffering via his psychic connection. Significantly, B’Wana Beast does not run into a nearby pharmacy to pick up pain killers; instead, he simply thinks of his and Djuba’s
home, thereby suggesting that the only proper “anesthetic” (i.e., being free from pain) for them is to live freely in the wild.

After Animal Man defeats B’Wana Beast, which happens only because the anthrax weakened him, Animal Man offers to take him to a hospital where he can be healed. B’Wana Beast refuses, convinced that the “hospitals” Animal Man refers to are places “where animals are blinded . . . and burned . . . and . . .” (4:15). Importantly, Beast is cut off at this point and does not complete the third action committed against animals in the so-called “hospitals.” By not completing this sentence, Morrison sets free the imaginations of his readers. Although Animal Man does not intend to take B’Wana Beast to such a facility, Morrison draws attention to the strategic renaming that occurs with some of the labels we use in connection with animals.

Moreover, as B’Wana Beast delivers his final monologue he is sprawled on the ground, pain-stricken and dying. Throughout Animal Man, Morrison has employed B’Wana Beast as a synecdoche for all suffering animals. As B’Wana Beast represents the animals in living, he does the same in dying.

“I Was the Man with Animal Powers!”: Animal Man

During the mid-1980s, many comic-book writers offered edgier, grittier versions of the superheroes readers loved, as well as of the genre more generally. Two of the more successful writers in this regard were Alan Moore and Frank Miller. In his widely acclaimed Watchmen (1986, 1987) Moore introduced the anti-hero genre, which portrayed superheroes as “prone to paranoid moral delusions and dangerous fascist tendencies” (Wright 2001, 272). While Moore created his own superheroes, Miller recast older characters, such as Batman and Daredevil, as more violent crime fighters. Wright observes, “Once confident symbols of hope, superheroes
now spoke to the paranoia and psychosis lurking behind the rosy veneer of Reagan’s America” (2001, 266). In short, this was the beginning of an age defined by superheroes with deep-seated psychoses. Significantly, Morrison breaks away from this trend in several ways in *Animal Man.* Animal powers notwithstanding, Morrison frames Animal Man as a fairly regular guy. The first issue of *Animal Man* begins with Buddy unemployed, save for a few gigs as a stuntman, and deciding to go into the superhero business full time. Readers do not see Buddy in his Animal Man costume for the first eighteen pages of the first issue, which is rather unusual for a superhero comic (as is a superhero with young children) (Callahan 2007, 65). When he does wear his costume, he wears a jacket over it because he is self-conscious of the tight-fitting spandex. Unlike billionaire playboy Bruce Wayne (Batman) and other wealthy superheroes, Animal Man’s finances do not allow for the latest gadgets or computers. This is clearly evidenced by Ellen’s complaint that Animal Man spent eight hundred dollars on his costumes. Additionally, instead of researching the backgrounds of villains in an underground lair, he visits the local library to consult the fictional Rovin’s *Fifth International “Who’s Who” of the Superhuman Community.*

Another primary way Morrison breaks from the standard fare of mainstream comics in the 1980s lies in Animal Man’s general eschewal of violence. Very rarely does Animal Man throw the first punch. More often than not, the villain catches him off guard and he has to fight to survive. Perhaps the quintessential example of his pacifism occurs during his encounter with B’Wana Beast in the San Diego Zoo. Animal Man tells him, “I don’t think we really have to fight about this, you know? I’m on your side. Okay?” right before getting decked by an enraged B’Wana Beast (4:5). True to Animal Man’s good nature, even after defeating B’Wana Beast, he takes the time to heal B’Wana Beast’s anthrax infection. One of the few instances in which
Animal Man resorts to unprovoked violence is when he tells Dr. Myers that he will no longer help him. As noted above in the discussion of scientists, Animal Man loses control and hits Dr. Myers after the latter says it was a mistake to use Animal Man, calling him a “useless, penny-ante ‘superhero’” (4:20). Even then, it is clear that Animal Man was doing his best not to hit him and that he did not feel any better after punching Dr. Myers.

In some respects, Morrison embraces the ordinariness of Animal Man as a superhero. For instance, while Animal Man pontificates about who is responsible for vandalizing Dr. Myers’ lab, Superman flies by and strikes up a conversation with him. After nearly breaking Animal Man’s hand unintentionally in a handshake, Superman explains what brings him to San Diego:

Superman: Well, I have an appointment in Pakistan in twenty minutes so I’ve got some time to kill. I saw you with my telescopic vision and thought I’d say hello. Excuse me one moment. You hear that? Sorry. Of course you don’t.
Superman: Light aircraft in trouble over Port Townsend. Have a nice day.
Animal Man: Uh . . . sure. . . . (4:12)

In this brief encounter, Superman demonstrates his superiority in almost every respect. He has better vision, more acute hearing, and is far stronger and faster than Animal Man. Moreover, Animal Man’s inability to get a word in edgewise suggests Superman’s dominating personality. However, superior abilities do not necessarily make for a good superhero. There is an adage in the world of comics that Superman fans are mostly young children, while teenagers favor Spiderman. Once kids grow up, the nearly indestructible man of steel is not as easy to relate to as is another teenager struggling to make sense of his relationships and his purpose in life. The principle at play in this tendency has been famously explained by Kenneth Burke: “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by . . . identifying your ways with his”
While the Superman/Spiderman adage does not mention Animal Man, one can extend Burke’s observation and conclude that Animal Man will strike a chord with those who live rather ordinary, middle-class lives—especially if they care about animals.

One of the most important claims to be gleaned from Morrison’s framing of Animal Man is that even animals merit a superhero’s attention, which, by extension, suggests a societal responsibility toward animals. Traditionally, the superhero genre has focused on protecting society and upholding moral standards—the assumption being that humans deserve protection from individuals who or situations that cause them to suffer physically and/or psychologically. Morrison suggests, however, that justice is not limited to humans, nor is it about fulfilling their desires by virtue of their status as Homo sapiens. Instead of recovering precious pieces of art from crooks, as he did in the 1960s, Animal Man begins to realize that protecting suffering animals is more important than art. Thus, Animal Man serves to protect all innocent individuals, regardless of species. To this extent, Animal Man rejects a speciesist point of view.

In addition to Animal Man’s penchant for protecting animals, his own powers provide a subtle argument against speciesism. Insofar as Animal Man relies on animals for his powers, the superiority of animals over humans in certain areas is tacitly stressed. If this were not the case, Animal Man would not have any reason to assume their abilities; he could just rely on his own strength, speed, agility, etc. If anything, his power would be considered a handicap. In a very real sense, animals allow for Animal Man to become a “superman”—or perhaps, a super-animal—of sorts. His powers also serve to educate readers about the abilities of animals. Although one can never know for certain how informed a typical reader is concerning animal abilities—for example, that salamanders can regenerate limbs and chameleons can change the color of their skin—Morrison encourages the reader to think about these abilities more than they
might do already. For instance, while Animal Man employs the regenerative power of earthworms, he describes the tremendous pain involved. Moreover, while fighting B’Wana Beast, Animal Man borrows the speed of an impala, which could easily remind readers how the impala is first and foremost an animal, not an automobile.

**Portrayal of Animals**

Humans are not the only important characters in *Animal Man*. Animals also play key roles as both victims and exceptional creatures. Concerning the former, animals are seen as needing protection from hunters and scientists specifically, who harm animals both physically and emotionally. This is a significant departure from *Strange Adventures*, which did not focus on animals’ need for protection. Although Morrison largely refrains from anthropomorphizing animals, he is able to convey their thoughts and emotions through visual images. Visuals are integral to the comic medium, but are also successful animal-rights messages. Jasper observes, “Because we think we ‘know’ the feelings of animals, we do not have to be told if an animal in a photograph is happy or unhappy. We believe the evidence to be clear and direct” (1997, 175). For this reason, animal-rights activists frequently employ images of animals to support their arguments.

**Animal Victims**

Morrison makes it clear that animals can be harmed physically and emotionally, not to mention that they can be killed. In the first four issues of *Animal Man*, hunters and scientists are portrayed as the greatest abusers of animals. It has already been highlighted that Ray and his hunting buddies kill a variety of animals, both wild and domesticated: a robin, a deer, and a cat.
Obviously, shooting animals or feeding them alive to hunting dogs involves physical harm, albeit to varying extents. Although Morrison does not suggest that the robin and deer suffered greatly from being shot—indeed, they are motionless afterward—he still manages to frame hunting negatively. For instance, after Ray shoots the robin, he leaves it on the side of the road along with an empty beer can. The bird is used merely for target practice.

Fig. 3-4. Sheba’s Demise

Of all the animals Ray kills, the demise of the cat Sheba is the most heart wrenching because her death is drawn out and she suffers noticeably (fig. 3-4). Ray forcibly takes Sheba from his hunting buddy, who was holding her properly by the scruff of the neck, and proceeds to grasp her improperly in a choke hold. Sheba’s discomfort is apparent as her eyes bulge and front
paws wave frantically before Ray tosses her to his Doberman Pinschers, both of whom wait to intercept Sheba in midair with their razor sharp teeth. The brutality of Sheba’s death is magnified by not depicting the cat being torn apart, thus freeing the reader to imagine Sheba’s grisly death.\(^\text{18}\) This is not to say that Morrison does not help readers imagine the cat’s death, however. Instead of seeing Sheba’s demise, the reader is provided with a close-up of Ellen’s face as she closes her eyes in disgust and shields her face with her hand; the dogs, who are also absent, are “heard” chomping down on the cat via onomatopoeia, as blood sprays on Ellen. On the next page, Maxine appears alarmed, having seen the entire thing. Maxine’s facial expression confirms for the audience that Sheba died a gruesome death. Moreover, a few pages later, the reader is reminded of the death as the dogs are seen still munching on Sheba’s remains.

The hunters’ harmful actions toward animals are despicable owing to the senselessness of their violence, but also because they derive considerable enjoyment from it. However, the scientists are framed as equally guilty, if not more so, for harming animals physically and emotionally. Readers are encouraged to distrust scientists as soon as they pick up a copy of Animal Man from their local comic book store, since two of the covers for the first four issues draw the reader’s attention to the abuse of primates (fig 3-5). These two covers depict primates as either screaming or sick, standing in a cage, to Animal Man’s horror. Significantly, a hunter is never depicted on the first four covers—or on any of the later Animal Man covers, for that matter.
In addition to their negative portrayal on the covers of the comic, scientists are also portrayed negatively in the stories. As was noted above, scientists are generally framed as emotionless or as oblivious to the needs of their research animals. Unlike the hunters, scientists abuse animals of higher intelligence, which provides Morrison with a more sophisticated means of demonizing the scientists. Specifically, whereas readers were encouraged largely by visual images to feel disgust at Sheba’s death, Morrison is able to convey the thoughts of primates, since they are capable of sign language. For instance, Djuba recalls how Roon, one of the lab chimpanzees, told her via sign language, “I’m leaving here. . . . I’m going home. Piss on them. I’m going home.” While this comment is certainly not very sophisticated, it leaves no question...
as to where Roon would rather be and what he thinks of the scientists. Moreover, despite Roon’s rather simple sentences, which are only three words long, his ability to sign and Djuba’s interpretation skills highlight their considerable intelligence. This intelligence, however, makes their fates all the more distressing. While Roon eventually leaves his small cage, it is only because he dies and is being removed from the lab in a biohazard waste bucket (it is at this moment that Djuba recalls Roon’s aforementioned declaration, “I’m leaving here,” which makes his mistaken optimism all the more tragic). Roon’s death is rendered even more depressing by the visual images of his emaciated body, which are coupled with narration that states how he eventually became so weak he was unable to move his fingers to sign. Ultimately, “the germs struck his body dumb and ate away the defiant light in his eyes” (3:1). The coup de grace of Roon’s tragic demise is that the scientists, ignorant of his real name, called him Lucky. As for Djuba, while she outlives Roon, she does not fare much better. The experiments have left her tired, pain stricken, covered with sores, and on the threshold of death; she is no longer able to remember Africa. In one of the few instances of anthropomorphism in Animal Man, Djuba is seen shedding tears at her terrible predicament. Clearly, by highlighting the intelligence of primates, Morrison is able to make their imprisonment in the lab all the more tragic and unjustified.

Exceptional Animal Abilities

Throughout Animal Man Morrison portrays animals as superior to humans insofar as they can accomplish things that we cannot—at least, not without inventing a machine to assist us. For instance, that Animal Man needs to assume a bird’s ability to fly acknowledges the bird’s superiority in flight. Although this observation may seem rather trivial, it is really important in
light of the speciesist attitudes, or prejudices, that animal-rights activists accuse humans of holding toward animals. Specifically, animals are often considered as inferior to humans because they are less intelligent than humans (surely, Roon’s and Djuba’s intelligence is what makes their abuse is so poignant). It was humans, after all, who created democracy, went to the moon, built particle accelerators, etc. Even the statement above, “without inventing a machine to assist us,” can be seen as a demonstration of human ingenuity or intelligence.

Animals have also been considered inferior because of their inability to use symbolic language. Indeed, this is the cornerstone of Burke’s “Definition of Man” (though he also chides humans for their misuse of symbols) (1966, 3-24). Animal-rights activists argue that, as long as animals are considered as inferior to humans, they will be subjected with impunity to pain and suffering at the hands of humans. This is why animal-rights activists stress that the apparent inferiority of animals to humans is the result of measuring animals according to a human yardstick, which glorifies our intelligence and use of symbolic language (Newkirk 2009, 9-10). If humans were to be measured by what animals excelled at, we would likewise fail. For instance, in terms of speed and agility, no human is competition for a gazelle and, returning to the initial example, neither is a human competition for a bird in flight.

In the first four issues alone, Animal Man takes on the abilities of a cat, a spider, fish, birds, ants, dogs, a praying mantis, earthworms, a salamander, a chameleon, an impala, an elephant, and a human (B’Wana Beast). Of all these different animals—excepting B’Wana Beast, whose inclusion will be discussed in the following section—the smaller ones such as the ants, praying mantis, and earthworms are most likely to raise an eyebrow, since their array of abilities, earthworms especially, seem rather pathetic. Although spiders are also small, the popularity of another superhero, Spiderman, does not seem to leave any room to doubt their
utility. Interestingly, Animal Man does not use a spider’s abilities to sling webs or climb walls, but instead uses its tremendous strength—relative to size—to do weight-lifting reps with the family Jeep. That Animal Man uses a spider for strength is even more interesting once we take into consideration his use of ants; for while ants are typically touted as being one of the strongest creatures relative to their size, Animal Man uses them in order to run fast. Thus, in addition to demonstrating the extent to which animals possess superior abilities, Morrison breaks down certain stereotypes we associate with different animals. As Burke suggests in his essay on terministic screens, any selection of reality necessarily entails a deflection. By incorporating often-overlooked (or deflected) abilities of animals, such as an ant’s speed or a spider’s strength, Morrison highlights other reflections of reality, thereby expanding what readers view as a specific animal’s fundamental characteristics.

Although many of these animal-related reflections, selections, and deflections are intertwined with the abilities of the animals, Morrison also draws attention to the existence of animals. On the one hand, he does this very generally by implicating them as an important source of power for Animal Man. On the other, he also encourages us to think about commonly overlooked animals. For instance, right before Animal Man assumes the speed of an ant, Ellen asks him, “Is the desert really the best place to test your powers, Buddy? I don’t see too many animals around.” Before outpacing the family Jeep on foot, Animal Man chides her, saying, “You’re just not looking. Ever see an ant run?” (1:15). In this passage, Morrison invites us to consider a more expansive animal kingdom than did the writers for Strange Adventures; for, although Animal Man assumed the abilities of a wide array of animals—such as snakes, electric eels, and bulls—in Strange Adventures, he never bothered to use those of insects, much less of earthworms. However, as Morrison demonstrates, even earthworms have abilities that can be
desirable from time to time. After losing an arm in combat, Animal Man employs the regenerative power of an earthworm to grow another. Indeed, the bizarre array of animals on which he relies is part of the fun of Animal Man. He cannot always afford to discriminate among different animals. Sometimes the most unusual animals can literally be lifesavers.

Not only does Animal Man embody the attributes of animals physically, he demonstrates their abilities verbally. Whereas B’Wana Beast amplifies the awful experience of animals (due to their separation from nature), Animal Man amplifies their skills. For instance, after Animal Man absorbs Dr. Myers’ research dogs’ ability to smell, he thinks to himself in amazement, “The city’s a Disney-Land of scents and perfumes. There’s a whole smellscape that we just never experience. It’s incredible . . . the texture of everything. . . . I can smell emotions . . . smell the water in underground pipes . . . the color of paint drying on office walls. . . . Incredible” (2:9; italics in original). In this particular passage, Morrison underscores the keen olfactory abilities of dogs by listing qualities to which humans are oblivious. He also coins the word “smellscape” to get at this. Just in case a reader might not acknowledge the awesomeness of a dog’s sense of smell, Morrison emphasizes this twice. Moreover, he breaks up Animal Man’s thoughts through the use of ellipses, and he emphasizes key words so as to provide the description in a condensed form.

Synthesizing Disparate Frames: Human Animals

Thus far I have explained the various frames Morrison applies to specific humans and to the animal kingdom. As with animals, he frames humans quite broadly. While doing so he tends to synthesize two terministic screens. In order to suggest the moral depravity of humans, Morrison employs a biblical-creation frame, which portrays the human condition in terms of the
Garden of Eden and humanity’s subsequent fall. In order to suggest continuity between humans and animals, and thereby a closer relationship between then, he employs an evolutionary frame. This, of course, is a peculiar mixture, since Darwin and the Bible are typically viewed as being antithetical. Despite their conflicting orientations, Morrison uses both frames to critique the human condition and challenge the popular belief that humans are superior to animals.

The synthesis of these disparate frames occurs in the very first pages of issue #1. As B’Wana Beast becomes nauseated by the smell of the city and the noise of screaming monkeys, he asks himself, “Why did we ever come down out of the trees?” While this is clearly a reference to Darwinian evolution, it is followed on the next page by an image of Buddy in a tree, rescuing a neighbor’s cat. The neighbor, Mrs. Weidemeir, cautions him to be safe: “Watch you don’t fall, now, Buddy!” (1:1, 2). Despite his neighbor’s warning, Buddy does fall. However, he assumes the cat’s ability and lands on his feet. Thus, in response to B’Wana Beast’s question, Buddy suggests that we came down from the trees because we fell or, as becomes clear very soon, because we “fell” in a biblical sense. In the following pages, Morrison makes clear, several times over in subtle and overt ways, that he is drawing upon a biblical-creation frame. The first subtle instance is on the following page when Mr. Weidemeir asks Buddy to get out of his garden. Another subtle reference occurs shortly thereafter. Once Buddy begins his superhero training, Morrison labels each day. However, instead of referring to each day as Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc., Morrison refers to the days as “Day 1,” “Day 2,” “Day 3,” etc. On “Day 6,” Buddy meets Dr. Myers, volunteers to help him, fights B’Wana Beast, and returns home. Although Morrison stops short of “Day 7,” which is the day of rest in the creation story, he does end the fourth issue at night with all the loose ends resolved and the Baker family settling in for the night, thereby suggesting that the next day—“Day 7”—will be a day of rest.22
Admittedly, subtle connections demand more overt evidence in order to avoid appearing merely conjectural. Fortunately, there are plenty of overt references. For instance, the first time readers are introduced to Ellen, she is singing the song, “If You Were the Only Boy in the World,” which contains a reference to the Garden of Eden. However, Ellen slightly confuses the lyrics to the song. Instead of singing, “we could go on \_loving\_ in the same old way,” as per the lyrics, as Ellen sings, “we could go on \_living\_ in the same old way” (1:5; italics mine). Through his emphasis on living, Morrison encourages readers to consider how Adam and Eve originally lived. Before they were expelled from the Garden of Eden for breaching their covenant with God, they served as the Garden’s caretakers. This initial lifestyle is important for several reasons. Because Adam and Eve did not eat animals, but ate fruit instead, this Edenic lifestyle is similar to that advocated by animal-rights activists. Their lifestyle also resonates with the views of environmentalists, since they cared for plants and nature more broadly. That Adam’s and Eve’s concern for the wellbeing of animals and nature is set in place by God gives greater authority to an animal-rights and environmentalist stance.

In addition to employing a biblical-creation frame with the Baker family and their neighbors, Morrison uses it in the hunters’ dialogue. For instance, they describe the woods as a Garden of Eden, and they refer to Ellen as “Eve.” Further confirming this frame is a snake, which briefly appears in front of Ellen as she finds the deer that Ray shot. The snake, of course, hearkens to the biblical narrative of the fall. Generally speaking, the hunters can be seen as embodying a “fallen” (sinful) relationship, as is indicated by their tendency to litter and to hurt both animals and humans. Hunters are not the only ones who have fallen, however. Morrison makes it very clear in B’Wana Beast’s dying monologue (or so it seems—Animal Man later heals him) that the whole human race has fallen. Despite his original evolutionary perspective,
B’Wana Beast comments that “we were given *paradise* . . . and we turned it into an . . . *abattoir*. . . everywhere we go . . . we leave things bleeding and *screaming* . . . we’re *murdering* the world. . .” (4:17). According to B’Wana Beast, humans have taken the ultimate gift and distorted it beyond recognition. We have turned the entire planet into a slaughterhouse. His earlier experience with the screaming monkeys, and his current struggle to survive the anthrax virus created by Dr. Myers, only serve to demonstrate the depths to which the human race has fallen.

What is particularly noteworthy about B’Wana Beast’s monologue is that Morrison uses it to bridge a biblical-creation frame with an environmental frame, the latter of which is couched in the idea that humans are “murdering the world.” B’Wana Beast elaborates the environmental frame when he says, “mankind has to be stopped buh-before there’s nothing left . . . we think we own the world. . . .” He thus critiques the idea that humans own the world, which is held by those Christians who view the biblical mandate to have dominion over the earth as a license for any and all uses of the world’s resources. Although Morrison does not elaborate much on the environmental frame in the first four issues, it grows in importance later—so much so that the animal-rights theme is often forced into a secondary position. B’Wana Beast ends his monologue with one final use of the biblical-creation frame: “Oh God, we’ve *fallen* so far . . . and there’s stuh-still . . . there’s still . . . no . . . bottom” (4:17).

Thus far, I have capitalized on the extensive use of the biblical-creation frame since Morrison employs it much more frequently than he does an evolutionary one. Despite the somewhat secondary role of the evolutionary frame, it plays an important part; for while the biblical-creation frame underscores that human society is in disrepair, it has not traditionally allowed an equal footing among all animals. As Burke observes in his essay on terministic screens, “where Darwin views man as *continuous* with other animals, the theologian would stress
the principle of *discontinuity* in this regard” (1966, 50). This discontinuity has allowed the “dominion mandate,” mentioned above, to flourish. Morrison alludes to an evolutionary frame on two significant occasions. As highlighted above, B’Wana Beast begins the storyline by referencing evolution. By starting the first issue with an evolutionary frame, Morrison immediately encourages the audience to view humans as “continuous with other animals.” In the fourth issue, significantly entitled “When We All Lived in the Forest,” Morrison enacts this frame again. He does so by having Animal Man tap into B’Wana Beast’s ability to fuse two animals together, just as he would with any animal. Since B’Wana Beast, despite his bestial name, is human and Animal Man is only able to assume the abilities of animals, this necessarily includes humans as part of the animal kingdom. Although the times Morrison employs a biblical-creation frame outnumber his use of an evolutionary frame, their synthesis suggests that humans can no longer believe that everything is alright with their world. Humans are seriously harming it and need to better understand their relationship with animals, lest they injure the world even more.

**Conclusion**

By using an animal-rights frame, Morrison recreates the Animal Man character. Unlike *Strange Adventures*, which featured storylines on how Animal Man brought bank robbers to justice, Morrison directs attention toward instances of animal abuse and Animal Man’s growing dissatisfaction with our awful treatment of animals. Morrison emphasizes in three central ways that our treatment of animals is appalling. First, he demonstrates it by showing how both hunters and scientists harm animals. While it is doubtful that readers are unfamiliar with the violence inflicted upon animals by hunters, Morrison shows that scientists are no better. Second,
Morrison shows how exceptional animals are. Part of the justification for mistreating animals is the belief that humans are superior. Through Animal Man’s reliance on animals for his powers, Morrison demonstrates that humans are not superior in everything and provides a subtle argument against speciesism. Moreover, for those who argue that intelligence is more important than physical abilities, Morrison highlights the intelligence of primates such as Roon and Djuba. Lastly, Morrison employs an evolutionary frame, which establishes animals as continuous with humans rather than as distinct. Since there is only a difference of degree between animals and humans, he argues that it is inappropriate to mistreat them.

Although Animal Man has not performed any acts reflecting an animal-rights stance, he is clearly on the verge of becoming an animal-rights activist. As he states at the end of issue four, “I can’t stop thinking about what B’Wana Beast said. About the mess we’re leaving for our kids. About people like Myers, who torture and maim in the name of science and walk away unpunished to do it all over again” (4:21). One of the central messages provided by an animal-rights frame is that society is in disrepair due to the relationship that humans maintain with animals. This is revealed most clearly in Morrison’s portrayal of hunters and scientists, who threaten animals and humans alike. It is also shown by B’Wana Beast. Due to his intimate telepathic connection animals, he knows all too well that animals suffer at the hands of humans. The pain and suffering B’Wana Beast experiences while rescuing Djuba convinces him that things must change. Humans cannot continue believing that they own the world.
A Growing Emphasis on the Environment and the Eschewal of Violence

In the previous chapter, it was noted that the first four issues of *Animal Man* explore the radicalization of their eponymous superhero. In order to radicalize Animal Man, Morrison employs an animal-rights frame, which portrays animals as worthy of protection and humans as a fallen species. This frame reappears and undergoes several significant changes throughout the next twenty-two issues (at which point Morrison finished writing for the series). One of the changes to take place is that Morrison increasingly makes use of frame bridging, which is a frame-alignment process. Essentially, frame bridging is the act of connecting two ideologically similar but unconnected frames. In particular, Morrison bridges an environmental with an animal-rights frame. By linking these similar frames, Morrison is able to channel beliefs and emotions associated with environmentalism into support for animal rights. In addition, Morrison continues to reveal different ways that animals need protection, and suggests that humans are not a superior species. Moreover, he frames acts of violence as unacceptable—regardless of whether they are committed by animal abusers or animal-rights activists.

Despite his interest in animal-rights activism, Morrison grew wary of “turning the comic into a kind of ‘animal abuse of the month’ soapbox” (26:13). Thus, he began to mete out small doses of animal-rights philosophy in nearly every issue and only two of the twenty-two subsequent issues feature an animal rights-driven plot. Issue #15 centers on the slaughter of dolphins; issue #17, on an animal-rights raid that goes awry. In the final issue, Morrison writes himself in as a character in the series and has a conversation with Animal Man. As he converses
with the superhero, Morrison returns to the importance of animal-rights activism and encourages readers to join PETA. Given Morrison’s continued concern for animal rights, this chapter examines his use of an animal-rights frame throughout the rest of the series.

In order to give a general sense of what occurs in these issues and to provide a foundation for my discussion below of the frames, here is a brief overview:

After defeating B’Wana Beast, Animal Man decides to make his family vegetarians and becomes increasingly active in animal-rights activism.⁵ In issue #15, Animal Man helps a group of eco-terrorists stop the slaughter of dolphins in Canada. This issue is notable for its bridging an environmental frame with that of animal rights. It is also remarkable for its artistic elements. The color scheme is dominated by soothing cerulean skies and emerald oceans, which make the crimson blood of killed cetaceans more disturbing. The narration is especially unique since it is frequently provided by a dolphin, whose grammar lacks punctuation. Instead of retarding reader comprehension, the absence of punctuation allows for a more melodious tone. Moreover, the storyline is particularly poignant—so much so that one reader wrote a letter to the editor stating that he was in tears by the time he had read page eight.² Again and again, Morrison stresses the keen intelligence and gentle nature of dolphins. For instance, when the narrating dolphin has the opportunity to seek revenge upon a drowning man, who killed his family, he rescues him instead, stating, “our way is different” (15:24). Overall, Morrison portrays dolphins as a more advanced species than humans.

Two issues later, Animal Man raids a research laboratory at the University of California with a group of animal-rights activists. After removing the research primates, one of the activists sets fire to the laboratory so as to punish the scientists for harming animals. Although Animal Man disagrees with the decision to burn the building, he does not try to stop the activist.
horror, he later discovers that three firemen suffered chemical burns while trying to put out the fire. This incident forces Animal Man to rethink his activism. Although he is deeply concerned about suffering animals, he agrees with Ellen and his best friend Roger that he made a poor decision in raiding the laboratory. The tension he feels is exacerbated the following day as he debates the benefits of animal research with a representative of the medical community. After being reminded of his responsibility as a role model and being questioned about whether he has ever broken the law, Animal Man’s composure quickly evaporates; he realizes that he has lost the moral high ground through his participation in the raid. Dismayed by the possibility that innocents could be hurt in his attempt to alleviate animal suffering, Animal Man cuts his ties with the radical activists and quits his superhero job.

Tragically, the consequences of Animal Man’s prior activism continue to haunt him as several corporate bosses, who are angered by his commitment to protecting animals and the environment, hire a hit man to kill Ellen and their children. Animal Man seeks revenge and easily dispatches his enemies. However, having completed his revenge he finds that he does not feel better, nor has his killing spree brought back his family. Hoping to fix everything, he borrows a time machine, but even this is unable to return his life to normal. In the end, he wanders somewhat aimlessly in a place called comic book limbo until he arrives on Morrison’s doorstep. While speaking to Morrison, Animal Man comes to realize his existence fully as a comic book character and his role in animal-rights activism.³

Conversations with Friends and Family: Making Sense of Animal Rights

Family and friends are the most important social connections a person can have. Not only are they a source of comfort and affection, they also reaffirm and shape one’s identity,
whether by affirming or discouraging undesirable traits or beliefs. Of course, such a process is not a one-way street; those who wish to influence others often find themselves influenced in turn. Nor is it always completely effective. Sometimes individuals refuse to change who they are, even if it would please their families and friends. Animal Man’s relationships with his family and friends demonstrate the dynamics of such influence and counter-influence when he decides to become an animal-rights activist. By paying attention to Animal Man’s attempts to reason with his son Cliff, wife Ellen, and best friend Roger, but also to their responses, one may observe several important changes made by Morrison in his framing of animal rights. Specifically, Morrison bridges an animal-rights frame with an environmental and, less frequently, a nuclear-freeze frame. He also clarifies his conception of animal rights by framing radical, violent animal-rights activism as unacceptable.

Whereas the animal-rights activists with whom Animal Man associates applaud his decision to help them save the animals, Roger thinks that his support of animal rights has become an “obsession” (6:4). This is understandable from a man who hunted with Animal Man before the latter received his animal powers, and who would help him catch common criminals in Strange Adventures. In Animal Man, Roger stays out of harm’s way and helps his friend instead by managing his affairs as a superhero, which largely consists of receiving letters from animal-rights activists asking for Animal Man’s assistance. The first time Roger tells Animal Man that a bunch of animal-rights groups want him to help them save some lab rats, he is surprised to hear that Animal Man is more than happy to oblige. As far as Roger is concerned, it is better to sacrifice a few rats, regardless of the suffering imposed upon them, in order to save a human. However, Animal Man, who operates from an animal-rights framework, questions his friend’s assumption that animal life is less important than human life. Significantly, as he does
so, the panel is drawn in such a way that the audience is encouraged to embody Roger’s perspective and take on his role in the conversation; specifically, readers are made to see Roger’s hands as though they are their own (fig. 4-1). The power of this strategic visual is continued in the first panel on the following page, as Roger is eliminated completely and only a close up of Animal Man’s face is shown. This makes it seem as though he is speaking directly to the audience (fig. 4-2).

Fig. 4-1. Reader Adopts Roger’s Point of View
Responding to Roger (and the reader), Animal Man states, “Think about it for a minute. What makes a human being any more important to the universe than a rat? I mean, think about it!” (6:5). Though Morrison has readers embody Roger only momentarily, he encourages them to confront the speciesist views they may hold. In particular, he reframes the scenario so that the worth of animals is not judged in light of humans. Instead, he challenges humans to declare their own worth after reminding them that they comprise far less than an infinitesimal speck in the universe. Consistent with a speciesist view, Roger defends himself by reasserting that “rats are animals. Humans are intelligent. . .” However, before he can continue, Animal Man quickly cuts him off, saying, “Oh yeah? Well, tell that to the planet! I don’t see rats devastating the rainforest or stockpiling nuclear weapons! I don’t see. . .” (Holiday, 6:5). Although Animal Man’s retort is silenced prematurely by an alien spacecraft flying unexpectedly overhead, Morrison can be understood as bridging an animal-rights frame with both environmental and nuclear-freeze frames. By bridging these frames he suggests that these ideologically similar though separate groups belong under the same banner, having common interests and enemies (Snow et al. 1986, 467-9). Thus, if a reader is strongly committed to saving the environment or
stopping the nuclear arms race, and only tentatively devoted to animal rights, he or she may come to view these issues as interconnected. More importantly, he or she is encouraged to become more committed to animal rights. Despite Morrison’s lack of thoroughness in this instance of bridging, he encourages the reader to understand that Animal Man had plenty more to say, had he not been interrupted. In subsequent issues, this proves to be the case.

Animal Man’s activism first sends shockwaves through his family when he decides that they will all become vegetarians. Although Ellen has the largest problem with this change at first, largely because Animal Man tries to throw away all their meat without consulting her, she decides to go along with his decision. Their son Cliff, however, who is at the awkward age where high-school bullies are a constant threat, has more difficulty with this change. Not only does being a vegetarian give his classmates one more reason to tease him, he does not understand why his family is not supposed to eat meat when their very own pets do. After Animal Man catches him sneaking a hamburger from a local fast-food chain, he explains that “Cats have to eat meat or they die. Humans are different. Humans can think things through. You’ve got to understand that nothing exists in a vacuum, Cliff. Everything is connected. Certain events have certain consequences” (17:10). Through this conversation Morrison tackles a typical question posed to animal-rights activists. Significantly, he does not rely on a purely animal-rights argument to defend the practice of vegetarianism. For instance, he could argue that eating meat is immoral because it causes animals to suffer, purely for the pleasure of humans—a pleasure which is unnecessary since humans can live on plants (Singer 1990, 159-164). He could also echo arguments made by mainstream animal-rights organizations, such as that diets with meat are less healthy due to higher fat content or because of the growth hormones used on factory farms (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, 148). Instead, Morrison bridges vegetarianism with an
environmental frame, wherein everything on the planet is interconnected. This bridging becomes even clearer in the rest of Animal Man’s explanation, which becomes more of a lecture:

I mean, when you eat a burger, right? . . . You’re contributing to the destruction of the rainforests. Massive areas of forest get cleared every day to provide grazing land for the cattle that get turned into burgers. Those forests are the lungs of the world. When they’re gone, the carbon dioxide levels will go way up. That’s the greenhouse effect and it’s already happening. Every time you eat a burger, you’re helping to kill the world. Everything’s connected, that’s all I’m trying to say. (17:10)

That Animal Man explains the rationale for vegetarianism to Cliff, instead of to Ellen or his daughter Maxine, is quite important. Meat is often seen as a source of power because of its high level of protein, and eating meat is typically viewed as a masculine activity. Carol Adams observes, “Men who decide to eschew meat eating are deemed effeminate; failure of men to eat meat announces that they are not masculine” (2000, 44). Hence, Cliff’s vegetarianism provides an easy reason for being bullied at school. In case any male readers—who generally form seventy percent of comic readership—decide that vegetarianism would prevent them from associating with the rest of “the guys,” Morrison makes a fairly lengthy appeal to be vegetarians anyway because of a meat-based diet’s environmental impact. Moreover, in an age where most individuals have been influenced as children by fast-food advertisements to eat hamburgers, Morrison directs readers’ attention to previously unconsidered aspects of their diet. Specifically, some dietary choices are wrong not only because they kill animals, but also because they seriously damage the environment and the world. In a statement that echoes a comment he made earlier to Roger, Animal Man concludes his lecture to Cliff by telling him, “I just want you to think about things, that’s all” (17:10).

Animal Man, however, is not the only member of the family stressing the consequences of one’s actions. Lest readers had begun to celebrate any form of animal-rights activism through
Animal Man’s constant willingness to help rescue animals, Morrison makes it clear that dangerous acts cannot be tolerated. After he finishes lecturing Cliff, Animal Man receives a lecture of his own from Ellen, who comments on the consequences of radical animal-rights activism. In response to the injured firemen, Ellen states, “We’re not discussing evil experiments or animal torturers. These were just guys doing their job” (17:12). She continues, “I’ve gone along with this animal rights stuff Buddy. I haven’t said anything because I agree with you. Up to a point. And you just crossed the line. Those people you’re hanging out with are dangerous. They don’t want to help animals, they just want to hurt people” (17:13).

Importantly, Ellen does not tell Animal Man that all forms of animal-rights activism are wrong. Instead, she argues that these particular activists are dangerous. This critique of radical animal-rights activism is especially significant in light of a similar raid carried out by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) at the University of California in 1985, from which Morrison is undoubtedly drawing. However, whereas firemen were hurt in Animal Man, none was hurt as a result of the actual ALF raid. Nonetheless, Morrison’s account contains a particularly pointed critique of the ALF, which proudly boasts that it has never harmed any human or animal since its formation, as ALF members take great care to make sure their target facilities are empty before vandalizing them (Behind the Mask 2006). By suggesting that innocent individuals such as firemen, who have to put out fires started by the ALF, could be harmed in the process, Morrison dismisses such precautions as irrelevant. Radical animal-rights activists who sow seeds of violence cannot always foresee where these seeds may take root.

Although Roger never quite understands his best friend’s animal-rights activism, he begins to distance himself from Animal Man after the firemen are injured. Due to the possibility that Animal Man’s activism may harm someone, he does not want to be his manager anymore.
As Roger explains, he no longer knows whether Animal Man is a good guy or a bad guy. While Animal Man tries to argue that the “real super-villains” are “businessmen in suits . . . multinationals . . . big corporations,” Roger complains that, lately, Animal Man only lectures about saving animals and the environment (17:16). Equally dismayed that his actions contributed to the injured firemen, Animal Man sputters,

Don’t you think I know how I sound . . . I . . . it’s just all this stuff that’s going wrong in this world. I just get so . . . so frustrated . . . The ozone layer’s breaking up. The whales and the dolphins are dying. Poachers have brought the elephants close to extinction. The chimpanzees and the tigers are almost gone . . . All those vicious . . . pointless experiments . . . And then there are the dog fights and the stray cats and all the little cruelties that go on every day. Why isn’t anyone doing anything? These things drive me insane, Roger. They really do. (17:17)

Similarly to when the audience was encouraged to embody Roger, Buddy faces the audience during this outburst (fig. 4-3). Though these half formed interjections do not form a well executed, much less coherent, argument, they do draw attention to a variety of animal-rights issues that Morrison was unable or unwilling to address in the series, such as poaching and animal extinction. Although Morrison mentions instances of animal abuse that are typically well publicized, such as the slaughter of dolphins and whales, he also reminds readers that there are smaller instances of animal abuse that occur daily in our neighborhoods, like cat and dog abuse. Overall, since this is the last issue that focuses exclusively on animal rights, Morrison can be seen as making a final appeal to his audience. This appeal notwithstanding, Roger tells Animal Man that his decision to raid the lab was wrong. Animal Man concedes as much and thereby cements Morrison’s critique of violent animal-rights activism.
While working on *Animal Man*, Morrison was also busy writing the storyline for another comic series produced by DC Comics, *Doom Patrol*. As it happened, the month after issue #17 of *Animal Man* was published—an issue that features some of Animal Man’s most thorough comments on animal rights in the series—Morrison gave Animal Man a cameo appearance in the *Doom Patrol*’s storyline. During one of Animal Man’s brief exchanges with a member of the Doom Patrol, he was teased for being “the guy who states the obvious” (Morrison, Case, and

**“The Guy Who States the Obvious:” Animal Man on Animal Rights**

[Image: Fig. 4-3. Animal Man Engages the Reader]
Nyberg 2004, 56). Although this characterization was intended as a dig at Animal Man, it is noteworthy that instead of capitalizing on his abilities, Morrison places greater emphasis on what Animal Man has to say. This section of the present chapter reads issues #15 and #17 in light of Animal Man’s portrayal in *Doom Patrol*, and argues that Animal Man “states the obvious” while speaking on animal rights. Since Animal Man’s conversations with Cliff, Ellen, and Roger were addressed in the previous section, this section analyzes the frames employed in his words with Dr. Whitmore and an animal-rights activist. In addition to analyzing their conversations, I note how Morrison uses characters in *Animal Man* to characterize its superhero. These characterizations not only affirm Animal Man’s value, but also contribute to the animal-rights frame.

Although Animal Man questions whether he wants to be a superhero and animal-rights activist after the incident with the firemen, he takes part in a previously scheduled, televised debate with Dr. Whitmore. In many ways, this debate represents the final nail in the coffin of his superhero and animal-rights career. When Animal Man is asked whether he has ever broken the law, he loses his composure, realizing that all his credibility has been lost. However, before this fatal question, Animal Man provides several strong arguments against animal testing, whereas Dr. Whitmore relies upon red herrings to frustrate and confound him. For instance, Animal Man notes how drugs such as thalidomide were green-lighted after they did not harm the animals on which they were tested. Yet in human fetuses, thalidomide caused terrible deformities. Had scientists tested thalidomide on a small group of human test subjects instead of animals, thousands of children would not have been born deformed; scientists would have been aware of its adverse affects before approving it for the general public. As Animal Man also observes, some drugs, such as penicillin, digitalis, and quinine, are lethal to animals, but harmless and
beneficial to humans. Had animal testing prevailed in those cases, humans would have been worse off, since the drugs would never have been considered safe to use. Although Animal Man provides factually grounded arguments regarding the original question at hand—namely, whether “animal testing has been an invaluable safeguard against a number of dangerous drugs”—Dr. Whitmore counters with a red herring, asking Animal Man, “But what about free will?” (17:18). Adams notes that these types of conversations often result in a “teasing game of manipulation” wherein those who disagree not only seek to “provoke defensiveness but . . . [to] sidetrack the reformer into answering the wrong questions” (2000, 99-100). Dr. Whitmore continues to manipulate the debate by asking Animal Man if he has broken the law. This question ends up distracting Animal Man by putting him on the defensive. Shortly thereafter, he begins to lose his composure and Dr. Whitmore thereby wins the debate.

Similarly to the tragedy that accompanied the injured firemen, Animal Man’s defeat in the debate is tragic as well. Not only does he lose, he also decides that he is finished being a superhero. Moreover, he lets one of his animal-rights activist friends know that he can no longer help him and other activists. Unlike Animal Man, the activist brushes aside the hurt firemen. As he puts it, “nobody wants to see anyone get hurt, but this isn’t kid stuff, Animal Man! This is war” (17:22). Complementing his portrayal of animal-rights activism as war are his buzz-cut hair and military clothing. Unwilling to be a soldier or even a figurehead for the animal-rights movement, Animal Man parts company with it, to the sorrow of his activist friend. Ultimately, the crescendo in animal-rights advocacy that has permeated the series from the beginning appears to dissipate completely in just one issue. There are important elements to glean from the destruction, however. Violent radicalism is portrayed as detrimental to animal-rights activism. If activists want to be successful, they must hold the moral high ground. In addition, Morrison
frames individuals opposed to animal rights as extremely cunning and able to twist opponents’ words around. As such, they are not to be taken lightly in an argument.

In the remaining nine issues of the series, Morrison largely keeps Animal Man out of all types of animal-rights activism. Instead, his activism amounts to sending checks to Greenpeace. Because of the environmental frames that Morrison linked to the animal-rights frame earlier in the series, Animal Man’s commitment to Greenpeace, which is well known for protecting whales and baby seals in Canada, is seen as congruent with his concern for animals. Animal Man’s commitment to Greenpeace is so great that he pauses long enough to send them a check while he is on his way to exact revenge on the last remaining corporate boss responsible for killing his family! Shortly thereafter, this corporate boss is forced to write out a check of his own, for one million dollars, to Greenpeace.

In what may appear to be an unnecessary, if not unusual, move, Morrison frequently has other characters assert that Animal Man is one of the good guys. While his role as a superhero may make these assertions seem bizarre, his involvement with animal-rights activism may have caused some individuals to doubt his moral status. During the 1980s, animal-rights activists were frequently framed by the media as dangerous individuals, largely because raids on scientific labs by radical activists were more newsworthy than peaceful protests. Of course, leading nonviolent animal-rights activists such as Ingrid Newkirk of PETA did not help much, either. Newkirk was easily painted as a fanatic with declarations that did not fall within the interpretative framework of the general public, such as “Mankind is the biggest blight on the face of the earth” and “I don’t believe human beings have the ‘right to life.’” That’s a supremacist perversion. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy” (both quotations in Marquardt, Levine, and LaRochelle 1993, 175). Moreover, almost anyone else who pledged allegiance to the same
moral philosophy was “tarred with the same brush.” Hence the need to remind at least some readers that Animal Man was not one of the bad guys. Obviously, readers who already embraced animal-rights activism would view his actions as morally sound. For these individuals, any praise would serve to reinforce what they already believed.

Morrison frames Animal Man as a “good guy” through a number of diverse characters, in a variety of ways. Within the first four pages of the series, his neighbor Mrs. Weidemeir praises him for rescuing her cat. She tells him, “You’re one of the good guys, you know that?” (1:4). This comment is echoed nearly verbatim later on by Ellen, though with an important modification. After calling Animal Man a “good guy,” she notes that he “had the guts to go vegetarian and see through all this animal stuff” (16:10). Coming from Ellen, this statement is particularly important since she was not pleased when he decided to throw out all of their meat without telling her. In another instance, Animal Man’s animal-rights activism is praised by a blue-collar worker, who describes Animal Man as “one of us. . . A man of the people,” and states that “it’s about time one of ‘em [superheroes] started looking out for animals, you know?” (9:13). Morrison uses this man to recognize Animal Man for his revolutionary (among superheroes) concern for animals. Significantly, by having a blue-collar worker praise Animal Man in this way, Morrison suggests that the common man is interested in protecting the welfare of animals.

In addition to praising Animal Man for protecting animals, other characters appreciate his concern for the environment. Martian Manhunter, leader of the Justice League Europe and more or less Animal Man’s boss, tells him, “I don’t think the human race understands just how precious this planet is. . . . I admire the strong position you’ve taken on environmental issues and the exploitation of animals. I think we need someone like you [in the Justice League
Europe]. Someone who’s fighting for the life of the planet and not simply for personal glory or ‘the American way’” (9:10). Martian Manhunter’s praise is notable for two reasons. First, his status as an outsider (from Mars) grants him a special position to assess the value of Animal Man. Second, when he reaffirms the preciousness of Earth, he does not do so while surveying a tropical rainforest, coral reef, or some other site typically viewed as an environmental beauty. Instead, he does so while flying with Animal Man over rocky mesas in the southwestern United States. By doing so, Morrison hints that not all precious aspects, such as the seemingly barren mesas, are appreciated. When Animal Man’s family is killed, he is unsure whether he wants to live anymore. However, another superhero insists on Animal Man’s importance and tells him that “Life needs you to go on fighting and not to sit back while they build more bombs and bulldoze more trees” (23:16). In this exhortation, Morrison continues to bridge an environmental frame with a nuclear-freeze frame. Specifically, he suggests that those responsible for destroying the rainforests are also the individuals building bombs, an especially salient accusation during the Cold War.

**Portrayal of Animals: Dolphins and Primates**

After the first four issues of *Animal Man*, Morrison continues to present animals as victims and exceptional creatures. While the ways they are victimized remain largely the same—specifically, they are still threatened most often by hunters or scientists—Morrison encourages readers to expand their conception of these threats. Hunters are not merely middle-class Americans out for a weekend shooting deer. They are also Faroese whalers and British gentry who hunt foxes. Nor does every animal experimented on suffer at the hand of a scientist
working for the government. Many suffer at the hands of scientists conducting research at large universities.

As noted in the last chapter, the more exceptional an animal is, the more it is seen as a perfect victim. The perfect victim of the first four issues is undoubtedly Djuba (though Roon, the other primate, is a close second). Both primates are highly intelligent animals, so much so that some of Dr. Myers’ researchers nickname Djuba “the missing link” (3:18). However, if Djuba is “the missing link,” Morrison frames dolphins as a species that has progressed further evolutionarily than all types of primates, including humans. In many respects, Morrison’s portrayal of dolphins echoes a passage from a Greenpeace newsletter written nearly a decade earlier. According to Michael M’Gonigle of Greenpeace, “Like man (Homo sapiens) on land, whales and dolphins (Cetacea) at sea stand at the pinnacle of evolution . . . [humans’] dominance has been manifested in an unceasing drive to conquer, exploit, and control that has profoundly conditioned our present individual, social, institutional, and environmental existence. . . . Cetaceans stand in poetic contrast to human history. . . . Despite their dominance, these creatures are gentle and passive” (quoted in Jasper and Nelkin 1992, 79). Whereas Greenpeace frames both humans and cetaceans as evolutionary superiors of their domains, Morrison suggests that the general bloodlust of humans is evidence that dolphins are a more advanced species.

Morrison frames dolphins as exemplary creatures, both morally and intellectually, in a variety of ways. Significantly, their exemplariness is always seen in contrast to the shortfalls of humans. For instance, one technique used by humans in Animal Man to slaughter dolphins is to injure one of them, since “No dolphin will leave an injured comrade behind” (15:14). The dolphins’ superior moral code is demonstrated another time when one decides to rescue a man rather than let him drown—even though this man has killed the dolphin’s mate and “child”
In addition to appearing as more virtuous than his family’s slaughterer, the dolphin appears as more righteous than Animal Man, who intentionally left the man out in the ocean to drown. Thus, Morrison suggests that some animals may be more pure morally than the animal-rights activists who would save them.

Besides portraying the dolphins as morally advanced, Morrison also portrays them as highly intelligent. Their intelligence is perhaps most overtly displayed by their periodic narration. Although their grammar is peculiar, because of its lack of punctuation—which makes sense, since punctuation is important only for a written language—their word choices reinforce their intelligence. For instance, a dolphin searching for its family states, “moving through symphonic space a thousand voices ancestral transmissions broadcasting echo rings of ancient intelligence I break through the skin of the world into a sudden empty discordance” (15:1). Clearly, the language in this statement is highly elevated. Occasionally, one needs to adopt a dolphin’s perspective to interpret the meaning, as in the statement, “I break through the skin of the world,” in which “skin” refers to the ocean’s surface. Similarly to the portrayal of animals in the first four issues, Morrison associates dolphins with sound, as is demonstrated by the words, “symphonic,” “voices,” “transmissions,” “broadcasting,” “echo,” and “discordance.”

Significantly, Morrison associates dolphins with mostly pleasant or neutral descriptions of sound, while he portrays the primates at S.T.A.R. Labs as constantly screaming and “playing their cages like tuneless instruments” (1:1). The dolphin narrative, however, indicates that the noise is not endemic to the monkeys, but pervasive in the space inhabited by humans.

Two issues after featuring the storyline on dolphins, Morrison returns to primate abuse in laboratories. Despite witnessing the horrible conditions at S.T.A.R. Labs, the primate abuse Animal Man encounters at the University of California horrifies him. Here, primates have their
eyes stitched shut and cower from the sound of humans. In response to Animal Man’s puzzlement as to why scientists would do such a thing, a fellow raider tells him, “Sight deprivation experiments. Totally worthless. These monkeys spend their entire lives in darkness and then they’re killed. Somebody gets a grant. Somebody writes a paper telling other scientists what they already know” (17:6). Notably, this answer is strikingly similar to Peter Singer’s argument in Animal Liberation against animal experimentation. Instead of framing science as the pursuit of knowledge and discovery, both men present it as a meaningless regurgitation of previous knowledge for grant money—for which animals pay the ultimate price.10

It is significant that Animal Man did not help raiders liberate animals from the fictional S.T.A.R. Labs, but from a college laboratory that had actually been raided by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) in 1985. The storyline is more realistic or, as Walter Fisher (1987) would argue, has narrative fidelity. However, there is one major difference between the ALF’s raid and the one on which Animal Man goes. Shortly after the actual raid, PETA, which often serves as a mouthpiece for more radical groups, reported that the ALF “took 21 cats, 35 rabbits, 38 pigeons, more than 80 rats, more than 70 gerbils, 9 oppossums [sic] ‘and an infant primate who had been the victim of sight-deprivation experiments since birth,’ from the university’s Riverside campus” (Associated Press 1985). Thus, of the 260 animals rescued by the ALF from the University of California, only one was a primate. Yet, according to Morrison’s version of the raid, one would be led to believe that there was more than one primate being experimented on, and that primates were the only animals in the laboratory. Generally speaking, his framing of the experiments is significant in light of the number of primates used as research animals. Of the seventeen million animals used yearly in laboratory experiments during the late 1980s, roughly 85 percent were rats and mice. Moreover, Newsweek reports, “In 1987 the nation’s 1,260
registered research centers used 180,169 dogs, 50,142 cats, 61,392 nonhuman primates, 538,998 guinea pigs and 554,385 rabbits (Cowley et al. 1988, 51).” In other words, around the time that Morrison was writing Animal Man, more rats, mice, guinea pigs, rabbits, and dogs were being used than primates.

In part, the impression that primates are the principal victims of research abuse is owing to the large amount of publicity received by animal-rights organizations such as PETA and the ALF during the 1980s over several cases of primate abuse. Even Britches, the infant primate from the University of California who was used in sight-deprivation experiments, would eventually star in an animal-rights video produced by PETA. Another reason for portraying primates as the main type of animal experimented on (for both animal-rights organizations and Morrison) is their higher intelligence. As was mentioned before, the victimization of intelligent animals allows for the most poignant storylines. This is even demonstrated on the covers for Animal Man, which are intended to capture the attention of individuals as they peruse comics in comic book stores. The issues that include primate abuse and the slaughter of dolphins show only these animals suffering on the cover, whereas the death of the cat Sheba in the third issue never merited a cover. Ultimately, while Morrison’s and other activists’ emphasis on primates in framing laboratory experiments provides support for rescuing these animals, it also contributes to the trivialization of other laboratory animals, which is equally important since readers are encouraged to disregard other animals on which experiments are done (Schiappa 2003, 155).

In light of Morrison’s frequent emphasis on the intelligence of animals, his storyline takes a somewhat peculiar, if not speciesist, twist after Animal Man learns of his family’s murder. As Animal Man prepares to exact revenge on the corporate executives responsible, he is accompanied by the following narration: “I wish I could stop thinking. I can’t afford to think,
only to react. Like an animal. I must let myself go” (21:1). In many respects, this statement frames animals in a fashion similarly to Descartes, who famously argued that animals were unthinking automatons that merely react to their environment. Within a Cartesian framework, if an animal does not think, but merely reacts, then the telltale signs that an animal is suffering are viewed as merely an unconscious reaction. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, this framework provided a stalwart defense for vivisection, which is the practice of cutting open a live animal so as to track internal physiology, such as blood circulation. Because of the influence Descartes had with the vivisectionists, Singer declares him to be the “absolute nadir” (1975, 200) in the history of cruelty toward animals. Understandably, viewing animals as unthinking can be, in some ways, tantamount to speciesism, since it allows for incredible animal abuse. Thus, it is somewhat inexplicable that Morrison uses Animal Man to emphasize that animals are unthinking. That he does so while Animal Man is about to kill those who killed his family only compounds the matter by suggesting that their inability to think allows for them to be cruel. It may be posited, perhaps, that even those who consciously embrace animal-rights activism sometimes fall into speciesist thinking, which is deeply ingrained in both American and British society. Perhaps. Whatever Morrison’s rationale, the extent to which this anomaly is apparent only serves to demonstrate the success he has had thus far in the series creating and maintaining an animal-rights frame.

**Portrayal of Humans**

In the previous chapter it was remarked that Morrison frames humans as both fallen and evolutionarily continuous with animals. Specifically, he employs a biblical creation frame and an evolutionary frame. Although there are far fewer biblical references, such as to the Garden of
Eden, in issues five through twenty-six of *Animal Man*, Morrison’s framing of humans remains similar. If anything, he expands upon the fallen characteristics of humans and portrays their evolution as base compared to other animals. In addition to their violent nature, humans are seen as greedy, arrogant, and foolish. These negative traits are frequently demonstrated in humanity’s misuse of both animals and the world’s resources. It is also revealed by nonhumans, such as aliens and animals, who critique human nature while drawing attention to characteristics of humans that are often overlooked. Unlike the first four issues, in which only villains demonstrate the fallen nature of humanity, Morrison shows in later issues that animal-rights activists are not perfect, either. So thorough is he in his depiction of humanity as fallen that he also tars Animal Man.

In his issue featuring dolphins, Morrison floods readers with examples of humans mistreating animals, but also other humans. Since he frequently shows Faroese islanders killing cetaceans and attempting to harpoon the eco-terrorists as well, it is clear that he means to portray them negatively. However, a closer reading reveals that these killers are not the only ones guilty of harming animals and the environment. For instance, during one of Animal Man’s conversations with Dane Dorrance, an eco-terrorist who is doing his best to thwart the slaughter of dolphins, Dorrance tells him:

> Mankind is so stupid, Buddy. Why can’t we see beyond a quick buck? Even if we refuse to see that cetaceans are highly intelligent, it’s . . . I mean, whales eat plankton, right? Did you know that 70% of the world’s oxygen is produced by plankton? Without the whales to control it, the plankton population will increase out of control, and there’ll be a catastrophic global temperature rise. Our stupidity has turned the world into a hand grenade. Our greed has pulled the pin. (15:9)

Notably, Dorrance does not describe the individuals who slaughter cetaceans as stupid and greedy. Instead, he speaks in general terms, indicting all of humanity. Propelling this censure of
humanity is an animal-rights frame, which he bridges with an environmental one. This bridging is significant not only because it provides two arguments for protecting cetaceans—namely, their intelligence and crucial role in preventing the world’s ruin—but because the environmental frame downplays the necessity of saving animals simply because they are intelligent. Thus, Morrison avoids stressing intelligence as a measuring stick, which so often happens in debates on animals. In addition to criticizing humanity in general and those who slaughter dolphins specifically, Morrison has Dorrance admit to a number of things he did unlawfully, such as wrecking one of the Faroese boats and threatening citizens of another country. In his attempt to save the dolphins, Animal Man is also guilty: he lost his temper and threw Ongur Nielsen, one of the more egregious Faroese, into the ocean so as to kill him. As mentioned above, Nielsen was fortunate to survive thanks to the kindness of a dolphin, whose family, coincidentally, was killed by the Faroese. As the dolphin states, “our way is different” (15:24). Thus, one of the major themes to be pulled from this issue is that all humans—even the good guys—are fallen. Only the dolphins are morally pure.

Occasionally, Morrison uses nonhumans to frame humans in Animal Man. Through their outsider status, these individuals provide a unique perspective on humans. Martian Manhunter’s comment to Animal Man about humans not truly appreciating their planet has already been mentioned. Another example occurs when Animal Man is referred to as “Earth animal” several times by an alien (6:9, 14). That this label sounds somewhat awkward, despite its accuracy and the widespread acceptance of evolutionary theory, demonstrates the extent to which humans have suppressed their connection with other animals by generally reserving the word “animal” for every animal except Homo sapiens. By reminding readers of the extent to which humans are
consubstantial with nonhuman animals, Morrison makes it easier to defend the rights of other animals.

Morrison also employs the thoughts of animals while framing humans. In some respects, animals allow for a more profound critique of humans than do aliens, since aliens are fictitious. While some readers may question the ability of animals to critique humans, this obstacle is largely overcome by using intelligent animals, such as the primates Roon and Djuba (whose thoughts of humans were mentioned in the previous chapter), and dolphins. Echoing the sentiments of Roon and Djuba, a dolphin describes humans as “dreadful” and “monsters.” The dolphin also associates humans with “dirt” and “sickness,” the latter of which resonates well with readers who remember Dr. Myers’ attempts to create a deadly virus. Tellingly, the dolphin views humans as violent animals goaded by the desire to kill. However, unlike Roon, who indignantly tells Djuba to “piss on [the humans],” the dolphin pities humans and calls them “poor creatures” (15:11). That dolphins pity humans sheds a great deal of light on how Morrison frames their relationship with humans, as pity occurs when one considers another worse off than he or she is (Snow 1991, 196). In other words, by having dolphins pity humans, Morrison continues to challenge the belief that humans are superior beings. According to the dolphins, humans were “left behind by evolution beached by time in clumsy bodies.” The dolphins do not consider all lost for the human race, however; “one day the . . . hu-men will shed the limbs that build and harm[;] one day they will be as we are” (15:11).

**Animal Man Meets Morrison**

In issue twenty-six, Animal Man encounters a comic book version of Grant Morrison. Understandably, it comes as quite a shock to Animal Man that another individual has been
determining his thoughts and actions; Animal Man is so alarmed that he attempts to prove his agency by killing Morrison. However, no sooner does he throw Morrison out a window than he finds Morrison standing behind him, saying, “I made you do that too. I can make you do anything” (26:5). Throughout the rest of the issue, Morrison has a heart-to-heart conversation with Animal Man and briefly explains comics, violence, and animal rights. Intertwined through each of these subjects is Morrison’s framing of humans, which guides his framing of animal-rights activism. Specifically, Morrison explains that humanity’s superior strength allows for animal abuse. He also indicates that humanity’s addiction to violence demands aggression even in comic narratives so as to make them more realistic. Morrison demonstrates this need for aggression by punctuating the issue with pointless violence—Animal Man’s attempt at killing him is merely the first of such instances. Ultimately, by framing humans as violent, Morrison encourages readers to embrace kindness and nonviolent animal-rights activism instead.

During their conversation, Animal Man becomes alarmed when he realizes that a future writer might make him eat meat. Though he protests that he would not do so because he is a vegetarian, Morrison corrects Animal Man, saying that he does not eat meat because he is written that way. Morrison explains, “You care about animals because I wanted to use you to draw people’s attention to what’s happening in the world.” Somewhat despairingly, he adds, “In my world, in the real world, I can’t do anything about the things that upset me. All I can do is join protest groups and write this comic” (26:13). This statement is particularly fascinating since he describes both protest groups and comics as impotent. While it is true that his fear of sounding too preachy somewhat handicaps his ability to draw people’s attention toward animal abuse in Animal Man, he sells himself short. Moreover, that Morrison later encourages readers to join PETA contradicts this despairing remark. If he truly considers participation in protest
groups and writing *Animal Man* as having no power to effect change, for consistency’s sake he should not make an appeal for PETA.\(^\text{14}\)

Throughout *Animal Man*, Morrison frames animal abuse as stemming from human greed, arrogance, stupidity, and our penchant for violence. In his final explanation of animal abuse, he frames it as a matter of power. Morrison declares, “I could talk about it for a hundred pages—two hundred—but in the end it all boils down to three words. ‘Might makes right.’ Man is able to abuse and slaughter and experiment on animals simply because he’s *stronger* than they are. Other than that, there’s no *moral* ground on which to justify *any* animal exploitation” (26:13). This, of course, does not preclude the frames mentioned above (greed, arrogance, etc.), as they all contribute to animal abuse when they are backed with power. Ultimately, Morrison’s simple explanation of animal suffering undercuts any sophisticated defense that humans may have for exploiting animals. Morrison suggests that humans harm animals not because of any innate entitlement, but because they wield the largest stick. As he continues, he reiterates his frequent critique of human intelligence: “A child with leukemia has no more intrinsic right to life than does a white lab rat, anyone who believes that man’s ‘intelligence’ makes him special has only to look at the way we continue to destroy our *environment*. *Man is not* an intelligent species” (26:13). This statement is important not only because he continues to bridge an animal-rights frame with an environmental one, but also because of the disease mentioned. According Robert J. White, M.D., leukemia is one of the illnesses that can be cured, provided, of course, readers refuse to “surrender to the mindless emotionalism and intimidation of the animal rights fanatics” (1988, 132). Clearly, Morrison is familiar with the arguments presented by the medical community. Significantly, Morrison is equally opposed to mindless emotionalism and intimidation, as demonstrated by *Animal Man*’s earlier break with radical animal-rights activists.
Thus, Morrison’s framing of animal-rights activism in *Animal Man* challenges White and those who frame animal-rights activists as fanaticism.

During their conversation, Morrison summons two villains for Animal Man to fight, since he feels that the excessive dialogue without action is too dull. These villains echo suggestions made by his readers, which Morrison acknowledges. One villain, “the Shark,” is an anthropomorphic shark who poses the problem of Animal Man defeating something he has sworn himself to protect. The other villain, Slaughterhouse, is Animal Man’s ideological opposite and “loves to kill and torture animals . . . and thrives on burgers.” This impromptu fighting match alarms Animal Man, but Morrison merely tells him that, “the idea is you fight this guy and settle the moral argument by beating him into the ground.” Reinforcing his portrayal of violence as endemic to humanity, Morrison continues, “Don’t laugh. That’s the way we deal with things in the real world, too” (26:15). While Animal Man gets pummeled in the background, Morrison takes a moment to acknowledge the artists and other individuals who made the series possible. After thanking his readers, Morrison appeals directly to his audience to join PETA. Similarly to Animal Man’s pacifistic nature, he notes that PETA is “involved in active, non-violent campaigns on behalf of animals” (26:17). Though seemingly straightforward, many important details are tightly packed into this fight scene, along with the encouragement to join PETA. One is Morrison’s dislike of violence, which is simulated in the background and provides a contrast to the non-violent nature of PETA. In light of Morrison’s environmentalist turn in later issues, it is somewhat remarkable that he asks readers to join PETA rather than Greenpeace, which he features quite prominently as a trustworthy organization after Animal Man stops helping the radical animal-rights activists. Thus, Morrison makes it clear that not all animal-rights organizations are bad. Moreover, this scene highlights the artificial nature of
Animal Man. Whereas at one moment villains are introduced to beat Animal Man bloody, the next moment he is seen without a scratch. Morrison informs him, “Get up. There’s nothing wrong with you. It’s only a comic” (26:18). Since it is only a comic, if any real action is to be taken, it must be taken by the readers who have become “desirers,” to use Booth’s phrase, of nonviolent animal-rights activism.

Toward the end of their conversation, Morrison reflects on the death of his cat in order to drive home the point that humanity is obsessed with violence. As he explains the episode, shortly after Morrison began working on the series his cat had become fatally ill. Despite doing his best to save his cat’s life, he admitted that “there was a part of me . . . rubbing its hands and saying, ‘well, at least if she dies, I’ll be able to use it in Animal Man. It’ll add a nice touch of poignancy.’” As he continues, “We’ll stop at nothing, you see. All the suffering and the death and the pain in your [Animal Man’s] world is entertainment for us. Why does [sic] blood and torture and anguish still excite us? We thought that by making your world more violent, we would make it more ‘realistic,’ more ‘adult.’ God help us if that’s what it means. Maybe, for once, we could try to be kind” (26:18-19). On this note, Morrison manipulates the series once again. However, instead of infusing it with more violence, he returns Animal Man to his home, with his family restored.

**Conclusion**

Compared to the first four issues, in the later issues Morrison allows for a more intimate exploration of animal rights by presenting the issue as a recurring topic in Animal Man’s conversations with his friends, family, opponents and, eventually, Morrison himself. While these conversations sometimes turn into lectures, the reader is encouraged to hear arguments for,
and sometimes against, animal-rights activism. Morrison makes clear that one of his primary objectives is for readers to think about their treatment of animals and about whether they hold any speciesist biases. In order to avoid sounding too preachy, he devotes more time to the rest of the storyline. Nonetheless, the importance of animal rights is still evident. In some respects, the quintessential example of its importance amidst other developments is when Animal Man sends a check to Greenpeace while seeking revenge for his family’s murder. By having Animal Man take a moment to send them money, despite other pressing concerns, Morrison demonstrates that Animal Man is never so preoccupied as to forget about helping animals.

Closely related to Morrison’s decision to comment more subtly on animal rights is his bridging of an animal-rights frame with other ideologically congruent frames, such as environmentalism and nuclear-freeze. By connecting these frames, Morrison is able to avoid sounding too preachy on animal rights while still arguing for their legitimacy. More specifically, through bridging animal-rights with environmentalism, his use of an environmentalist frame automatically suggests the welfare of animals—despite no overt mention of them. The aforementioned example of Greenpeace demonstrates this as well. At this point in the narrative, Animal Man has severed his ties with the radical animal-rights organizations. However, owing to Morrison’s continual bridging of animal-rights activism with environmentalism—which, as noted in chapter two, are related, though often conflicting, types of activism—one is able to view Animal Man’s contribution to Greenpeace as his commitment to helping animals. In addition to maintaining subtlety, the bridging process allows Morrison to tap into the beliefs and emotions associated with other frameworks and to provide new reasons for defending animals. Moreover, it encourages those who already operate within one of the other frames to adopt an animal-rights perspective.
Ultimately, Morrison articulates his conception of a moral society in these issues. Central to his vision of a moral society is the eschewal of violence and the recognition that humans are not inherently more valuable than any other animal. In many respects, the dolphins exemplify his vision of a moral society. Not only are they nonviolent, they are strongly committed to family and to those who suffer. Moreover, they demonstrate great acts of kindness towards other animals, including humans, by saving them from death. Significantly, dolphins view humans as less advanced evolutionarily than themselves. Thus, their acts of kindness would be similar to a human rescuing a lab rat or any animal about to suffer. Morrison’s vision of the moral society is also echoed in his comment about the child with leukemia possessing no more intrinsic value than a white lab rat. While this remark is far more fleeting than his treatment of the dolphins, it is equally profound, if not more so. Similarly to those who would argue that people should not be judged by their skin color, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, etc., Morrison includes “species.” As far as he is concerned, we should do our best to respect all life. Although Morrison reveals the extent to which even he falls victim to the pleasure of violence, as when he writes comics, he holds out hope that readers, no longer ignorant of their enjoyment of violence, can try to be kind instead.
Conclusion: Envisioning a Moral Society

Over the course of two years, Grant Morrison presented his vision of a moral society in monthly installments of *Animal Man*. During this time, as Morrison transformed Animal Man into an animal-rights activist and critiqued violent radicals, readers were encouraged to accept the belief that humans are not superior to animals. Moreover, he encouraged readers to recognize and act upon the knowledge that animals possess rights, too. Morrison’s contribution to animal-rights activism follows in the wake of many other activists who have advocated for animals in the U.K. and U.S. Since the early-to-mid nineteenth century, animal advocates in both countries have improved the lives of animals in various ways. One approach has been to fight for animal-protection laws. Despite their progress in the legal arena, the road to such legislation has been fraught with difficulty and disappointment for animal advocates, as many of these laws have not achieved complete reform. Frustration has led some animal activists to resort to sabotage and freeing animals from captivity. Although this has also contributed to the welfare of animals, animal activists are largely divided as to whether to condone or condemn this violence. One approach, which has worked in conjunction with the move for animal-protection legislation consists of making direct appeals to the public’s moral sensibilities. This approach has been employed by both animal welfarists, who petition for the humane treatment of animals, and animal-rights activists, who argue that humans have no right to use animals. The growth in membership of animal-welfarist and -rightist groups alike serves as a testament to the persuasiveness of these direct appeals, as does the rise in the number of individuals adopting
vegetarianism and veganism for moral reasons. It is this nonviolent appeal to moral sensibilities that Morrison employs in *Animal Man*.

While Morrison can be seen as just another animal-rights activist in the long history of animal advocacy, there are a number of reasons to resist such a simplistic view. Because of the scholarly emphasis on the rhetoric of animal-rights organizations, as opposed to individuals, activists fighting for animal rights on their own are often overlooked. This emphasis on organizational advocacy inadvertently suggests that animal-rights organizations are the only effective sources of animal-rights messages. The present study enlarges our perspective regarding animal-rights activism by bringing individual activists into the scope of rhetorical study. It also draws attention to Morrison’s use of the comic medium, which set him apart from other animal-rights activists. By using comics, Morrison was able to reach a unique audience through a medium they enjoyed.

Morrison’s radical reframing of Animal Man has significant implications for how we understand humans, animals, and our responsibilities in a moral society. While humans have typically prized their intelligence as something that sets them above all other creatures, Morrison argues that humans are not intelligent. The tendency of humans to destroy the environment, and ultimately themselves, is evidence of how foolish they truly are. Instead of embracing “intelligent” as a summarizing god-term for humans, Morrison offers terms such as “violent,” “greedy,” “arrogant,” or “stupid.”¹ Moreover, despite never using the term “speciesist,” he frequently draws attention to the extent to which humans are just that; not only are the villains of the series, such as Dr. Myers, Ray, and the Faroese, comfortable with using animals for their own gain; so, too, is Animal Man’s best friend Roger, who argues that it is appropriate to sacrifice a few lab rats to save a human life.
In order to challenge speciesist views, Morrison employs a variety of tactics. Sometimes, when Animal Man is challenging the speciesist stance of other characters, he is drawn so that he is speaking directly to the reader. This is best exemplified in his conversations with Roger. Morrison also frames animals in such a way that speciesist views can no longer be defended as morally sound. In his issue featuring the slaughter of dolphins, he contrasts the violent nature of humans with the peaceful nature of our aquatic counterparts. By doing so he is able to advance the argument that dolphins are morally purer than humans. A somewhat similar argument is advanced throughout the series every time Animal Man assumes the natural ability of an animal. Insofar as he needs to rely on animals, there is the tacit recognition that animals are superior to humans in having certain physical powers. Because the belief that animals are inferior to humans is one of the leading reasons for animal abuse, recognizing that they are in some senses better than humans complicates the ease with which humans may justify harming animals. That animals are abused because they are seen as inferior should not be surprising, since many groups of humans, such as women, African-Americans, and Jews (during the Holocaust especially), have been treated violently for the same reason.

Morrison stresses the urgency of purging one’s own speciesist views by demonstrating the extent to which animals can, and do, suffer. Because of hunters, they suffer in their natural habitat, whether woods, ocean, or sky. Because of the pleasure humans derive from eating an animal’s flesh, the animals suffer on the factory farm and in the slaughterhouse. Because of scientists’ experiments, they also suffer for extended periods of time behind steel bars in concrete laboratories. In emphasizing the suffering of animals, Morrison employs a variety of techniques. Most pervasive are the striking visuals, which depict the pain animals experience at the hands of humans. In order to enhance the visuals, Morrison relies on B’Wana Beast’s
telepathic link with other animals during the first four issues to express the sounds of animal
suffering. Not only does this telepathic link highlight the constant screaming, it serves as a
source of great suffering for B’Wana Beast, who is all too aware of the pain the primates feel. In
addition to B’Wana Beast, Morrison uses direct commentary from the animals themselves.
Although some of this commentary must be inferred from the terrified faces of animals, such as
when Ray throws the cat Sheba to his Doberman Pinchers, it is often made accessible through
the narration of intelligent animals. Significantly, every animal that narrates is distressed by the
violent acts of humans.

While Morrison frequently challenges our treatment of animals, he increasingly bridges
an animal-rights frame with environmental and nuclear-freeze frames. By synthesizing these
ideologically congruent frames he is able to accomplish several things. First, he avoids sounding
overly preachy, which would cause some readers to lose interest. Second, by incorporating other
frames, such as an environmental frame, he is able to convince those who are concerned about
the environment to be concerned about animals, too. As noted in chapter two, connecting animal
rights with environmentalism can be a difficult enterprise because they often do not agree. Since
environmentalists are more concerned about preserving ecosystems, they are more comfortable
with the death of an animal, whether as part of the natural food chain or as a measure to combat
an invasive species, than animal-rights activists, who are concerned about the well being of each
individual animal. Nonetheless, he is able to link animal-rights issues, such as saving the lives of
whales and adopting a vegetarian diet, with saving the environment. Third, the bridging process
presents new ways of protecting animals. Specifically, if an animal-rights frame is viewed as
congruent with a nuclear-freeze frame, an action taken to reduce or eliminate nuclear weapons
will be seen as helping animals.
Understandably, Morrison’s conception of a moral society may be troubling for some, as it demands nothing less than a total re-evaluation of the human race. If one is to agree with Morrison, one must cast off the speciesist attitude that enables us to see ourselves as the pinnacle of both evolution and civilization, and treat animals with equal respect. Fortunately, Morrison makes the transformation easier by providing Animal Man as an example. One of the most important aspects of Morrison’s portrayal of Animal Man is the way in which he becomes an animal-rights activist. Although Morrison certainly encourages the reader, in Booth’s words, to “desire” animal-rights activism from the very first issue, Animal Man does not become an animal-rights activist until the end of issue #4. Only gradually does he come to realize the suffering humans inflict on animals. By allowing readers to witness this gradual transformation, Morrison encourages them to consider the abuse of animals and the speciesism that led Animal Man to start protecting animals. Moreover, lest readers who undergo the same transformation become discouraged by losing debates or making other mistakes, Morrison uses Animal Man to show that no one is perfect. Even the “good guys” make mistakes from time to time. The key is to learn from those mistakes and keep upholding the moral society you know to be true.

**Directions for Further Study**

Having completed my analysis of *Animal Man*, there are several other avenues yet to be explored. Several concern the comic itself, while others pertain to animal-rights activist rhetoric more broadly. Concerning the former, one area that should be pursued is the letter column for *Animal Man*. Similarly to almost every mainstream magazine, *Animal Man* included a letter column. Very early in *Animal Man*’s publication, its editors asked readers to submit a name for the column. The winning name, “Animal Writes,” was clearly a pun and indicates how
editors wanted to frame the discussion, but it also shows what the readers thought would make a good name. Although not every letter addressed animal-rights, a significant number did. Importantly, the letter column allowed readers to argue for or against animal-rights, thereby contributing to, but also challenging, Morrison’s framing.

A closer examination of the rhetorical significance of the covers for *Animal Man* would also be helpful. A number of readers commented on how they were affected by different covers. For instance, Chris Khalaf, who announced his enjoyment of eating meat, noted the profound impact that the cover for issue #17 had on him: “I haven’t been able to eat a burger, a brisket or even a strip of bacon since without consciously reminding myself of each meat’s origin. And that’s something that’s never happened to me before” (quoted in 21:n.p.). Not only are the covers capable of making readers rethink their treatment of animals, they also direct attention to certain forms of abuse. As mentioned in chapter three, two of the covers for the first four issues draw the reader’s attention to the abuse of primates. Completely ignored in the first four covers are the animals who suffer because of hunters.

Concerning scholarship on animal-rights rhetoric more broadly, greater attention should be focused on individuals, as opposed to groups, who are advocating on behalf of animals. The value of this approach is that the critic can better explore the evolution and contingency of an activist’s beliefs. Of course, this is not to say that groups do not evolve and change their stances. However, we must acknowledge that members of a group do not always agree completely with all the tenets of their organization. Having grown up in a Christian community, I am fully aware of the extent to which one may belong to a larger group or community while holding beliefs that conflict with those of others in the same group.² By focusing on the rhetoric produced by mainstream animal-rights organizations, and not on their individual members, the differences in
beliefs about animal rights held by members are lost. Animal-rights scholarship should also include a greater emphasis on organizations other than PETA. Despite PETA’s great size and influence, it is not the only successful animal-rights organization. By repeatedly analyzing PETA, rhetorical scholars inadvertently deflect attention from the diverse strategies employed by other groups, such as the radical Animal Liberation Front, which employs guerrilla tactics to demand animal rights, or the Great Ape Project, which argues that because great apes are intelligent, we should respect them as persons.³ To be sure, this is not to advocate a moratorium on PETA scholarship. Rather, it is a call to further enrich our understanding of animal-rights rhetoric.

**Implications**

As the first chapter made clear, the purpose of this thesis was to examine the frames employed in Morrison’s *Animal Man*. By doing so, it was hoped that we could better understand “the treatment of animals, but . . . also . . . our definition of ourselves and of a moral society” (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, 7). This thesis has revealed the various ways Morrison frames animals and their treatment at the hands of humans. It has also explained how humans should understand themselves in light of the ways they treat animals. Altogether, Morrison’s frames provide a blueprint of sorts for what he conceives as a moral society. This study also has important implications for cluster analysis and frames as rhetorical devices.

Although Britten (2010) has recently demonstrated that cluster analysis may be applied to comics, this study has shown how to apply this methodology to comics properly. Specifically, one needs to consider visual and verbal elements together while searching for key terms and clusters. There is a larger, equally important lesson to be learned. Rhetorical critics who wish to
use cluster analysis must be attuned to the specific demands of a particular medium. The essential element of cluster analysis is the indexing of key terms and discovery of what terms are associated with them. What exactly constitutes a key term will differ according to the medium. Provided a critic is aware of the rhetorical sophistication a particular medium is capable of, cluster analysis may be profitably used for any medium. For instance, although no one has performed a cluster analysis of film, there is no reason why one could not be done.

Since frames direct our attention toward certain interpretations and provide for moral judgment, it is especially important to understand their formation. This thesis demonstrates that one can use cluster analysis to reveal frames. One limitation of the study, nonetheless, is that it proceeded with the understanding that an animal-rights frame would be central to Morrison’s *Animal Man*. Instead of proceeding blindly, this project sought to confirm an initial hypothesis. Future research should perform cluster analysis without extensive foreknowledge of a text in order to demonstrate that this methodology can reveal frames. Nonetheless, the unexpected discovery of an environmental frame suggests that cluster analysis is a valid methodology for discovering frames. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of supplementing cluster analysis with other frame theories, such as Snow and Benford’s work on frame alignment processes. Similarly to my observation that cluster analysis needs to remain open to innovation in its application to new media, critics should incorporate different theoretical approaches to make it more robust. Without synthesizing cluster analysis with frame alignment processes such as frame transformation and frame bridging, the importance of the frames discovered would have been missed or underdeveloped. For instance, frame transformation spotlighted how Morrison portrayed scientists, STAR Labs, and hunters much more negatively than had been done previously. Moreover, frame bridging drew attention to synthesis of an environmental frame
with animal-rights, but also a biblical-creation frame with an evolutionary one. Future research may incorporate other frame-alignment processes, such as amplification and extension, with cluster analysis, or incorporate other aspects of frame theory altogether.

This inquiry has also shone light on two much larger questions. Specifically, what does it matter how animal-rights activists frame animals? Furthermore, what does it matter that animal-rights activists can frame animals such that they deserve rights? Concerning the “how,” we may consider the media that animal-rights activists employ. Taking into consideration the particular medium certain activists use is important because different media emphasize different elements in messages and appeal to different audiences. This study has noted several strengths of the comic-book medium, such as the role of the written text, the visual images, and how the two work together to create meanings. Since visual images have been described as contributing directly to effective animal-rights activism (Jasper 1997, 175; Mika 2006, 915-941), comics can be an ideal medium for advocacy. Moreover, mainstream comics like Animal Man reach a unique audience for animal-rights activism, since most comic readers are male, while most animal-rights activists are female. Finally, because comic series are generally published monthly, they have a unique temporal element: readers of Animal Man were invited to consider animal-rights messages over a period of two years. Perhaps the greatest weakness in using comics to encourage animal-rights activism is that they are seen by many as childish. Nonetheless, McCloud (1993) and Groensteen (2007) have ably demonstrated the medium’s complexity. Moreover, Simonson has observed that animal-rights organizations can be successful by sending animal-rights messages through diverse entertainment media, instead of spreading the word only through dramatic news stories (2001, 401).
Regarding the latter question—what does it matter that animal-rights activists can frame animals?—this thesis suggests that, in transforming our conception of animals, a rippling effect takes place whereby our conception of humanity, animal-human relations, and a moral society are also transformed. Because of an animal-rights frame, we are able to acknowledge the right of each animal to thrive according to its “fundamental interests”—trout should be allowed to swim, and blue jays, fly. Moreover, we are persuaded to treat animals better. Since the Western world has nourished for centuries the belief that we are superior to animals, and therefore are allowed to treat them as we please, the frames provided by animal-rights activists demand not only accountability, but also humility. As Animal Man observes, “Man is not an intelligent species” (26:13). We must be mindful of how our foolishness harms others, regardless of their species. However, awareness of our foolishness must not paralyze us with fear. Instead, it should motivate us to do our best, and use our strengths to protect an interspecies community. When animals are given consideration equal to humans, the moral society proposed by animal-rights activists will be achieved.
**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**


Morrison, Grant (w), Chas Truog (p), and Doug Hazlewood (i). 1988a. The Human Zoo. *Animal Man* 1 (September). DC Comics.


Morrison, Grant (w), Chas Truog (p), and Mark Farmer (i). 1990. Deus ex Machina. *Animal Man* 26 (August). DC Comics.

Morrison, Grant (w), Tom Grummett (p), and Doug Hazlewood (i). 1989. Home Improvements.

*Animal Man* 9 (March). DC Comics.

**Secondary Sources**


The Cove. 2009. DVD. Directed by Louie Psihoyos. Santa Monica, California: Lions Gate Entertainment.


Notes

Chapter 1

1 Although animal-rights activists often use the term “nonhuman animals” when referring to animals, for ease of reading I will follow popular usage. Nonetheless, it is appropriate in a study on framing to acknowledge their point; namely, that common use of the term “animal” elides the fact that humans are animals, too.

2 Since Morrison is responsible for the idea of framing Animal Man as an animal-rights activist and the storyline, I will refer only to him for the rest of the thesis. In addition to Truog’s, Grummett’s, and Hazelwood’s artistic capabilities, the series was assisted by Brian Bolland, who drew the covers, Tatjana Wood, who served as colorist, and John Costanza, who lettered it.

3 While the foregoing example of Communion may suggest that this belief system is religious in nature, it is not necessarily. Indeed, the animal-rights frame examined in this thesis is not.

4 According to Burke, “The motivation out of which he [the author] writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes” (1973, 20).

5 The one exception to this may be the panel itself, which McCloud identifies as an icon (1993, 98). However, while frequent, it is not always very intense.

6 Although Morrison is Scottish, McCloud notes that this proportion is similar for European authors as well.

7 There are a few reasons why these statistics are slightly shaky. On one hand, they represent more current figures, which could differ a bit from the 1980s since mainstream comic publishers have sought to appeal more to women. This, however, would only make the male statistic estimate higher. Overall, most statistics appear to be generalized based on the
individuals whom comic book store owners see most frequently in their stores. Clearly, this is insufficient for numerous reasons. The possibility of having a subscription to a comic only further complicates this usual mode of “guestimating.” See Pustz (1999, 83); Rhoades, (2008, 20).

8 Similarly, Adams notes that “Approximately eighty percent of the animal advocacy movement is women” (2000, 21).

Chapter 2

1 In 1800, Great Britain merged with Ireland and became the U.K. due to the Act of Union.

2 This, of course, is excepting the Puritans, who were not a nation.

3 The Twenty-Eight Hour Law was repealed, revised, and subsequently re-enacted in 1994 in order to address all forms of livestock transportation. During the twentieth century, transportation of livestock via trucks became a popular loophole for this law (Curnutt 2001, 194).

4 A striking example of this is that the ASPCA began investigating complaints of cruelty towards children, in addition to animals, in 1874. Moreover, Beers reports, “By 1922, approximately three hundred animal advocacy groups in the United States had integrated activism on behalf of animals and children” (2006, 93).

5 Some of the first recorded instances of vegetarianism date from ancient Greece. However, these people were not called vegetarians, but Pythagoreans, after Pythagoras, who abstained from meat because he believed that all sentient beings possessed souls (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, 147).
This point was finally brought home for me by Melanie Joy’s recent book, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* (2010). Joy introduces the concept of carnism, which is “the belief system in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate” (2010, 30). Carnism is diametrically opposed to the belief systems of vegetarianism and veganism.

This was probably assisted by the popular television show “Flipper.” For more information, see the documentary *The Cove* (2009).

The first key instance was in 1981, when Alex Pacheco (a cofounder of PETA) worked undercover at the Institute of Behavioral Research in Silver Spring, Maryland. His documentation of primate abuse resulted in the first police raid of a scientific laboratory in the U.S. and the conviction of Dr. Edward Taub, the head researcher, on six counts of cruelty. Although Taub successfully appealed, this case demonstrated that activists could prosecute a scientific researcher. In 1985, the ALF raided Dr. Thomas Gennarelli’s lab at the University of Pennsylvania Head Injury Clinic. In addition to causing physical damage, the raiders confiscated the researchers’ own video footage revealing primate abuse, which they gave to PETA. Shortly thereafter, PETA edited the video footage into a gruesome twenty-six minute video, ironically titled *Unnecessary Fuss*. In the months leading up to the creation of the Standards of Laboratory Animals Act, PETA secured two formal showings of *Unnecessary Fuss* on Capitol Hill.

The word “speciesism” was coined by Richard Ryder in 1970 (Ryder 1989, 328).

Norm Phelps, who traces the history of animal advocacy from 600 BCE, argues that animal rights came first and animal welfare “was a compromise worked out by society between unregulated animal abuse and the demand that animal exploitation be ended. Animal protection began as animal rights; only over time was it worn down into animal welfare” (2007, xvii).
Chapter 3

1 No authorship is provided in the issues of *Strange Adventures*, which introduced the Animal Man character. Morrison does acknowledge, however, that Gil Kane and Carmine Infantino were responsible for the art (2:n.p.).


3 “I Was the Man with Animal Powers!” *Strange Adventures* #180, (Sept. 1965), National Periodical Publications [DC Comics]: 2. For more about the extent to which the English language contributes to the domination and oppression of animals, see Dunayer (2001), and Stibbe (2001).


5 *Strange Adventures* #190: 5, 8.

6 *Strange Adventures* #190: 13.

7 I have abbreviated the citations for each issue of *Animal Man* throughout this thesis largely because the author date citation style is more cumbersome and less helpful when citing comics. The number preceding the colon refers to the issue; the number(s) following is/are the page number(s).
Indeed, organizations such as the Great Ape Project have spent many years defending the rights of great apes. They have also argued that, despite the genetic similarity of chimpanzees to humans—there is less than a 2% difference—there is just enough genetic difference for AIDS research to be ineffective on chimpanzees. For more information see Cavalieri and Singer (1993); Great Ape Project (2003).  

I find them reminiscent of those worn by scientists in Steven Spielberg’s *E.T.*, which came out in 1982. Having watched the movie as a seven year old, my strongest memories of it involve the rather traumatic scene when men in white biohazard suits take E.T. away. Although I did not understand why they were suited up, I knew they were the bad guys.  

By *continuity* I refer to the collective understanding of a superhero across the different comic series produced by the same publisher. Essentially, comic readers follow a number of different superheroes who inhabit the same Earth. For instance, although Superman lives in Metropolis and Batman in Gotham City, sometimes their storylines cross. Once this happens, readers will use their understanding of events in a Superman comic to update or inform their knowledge in a Batman comic. The point is that Morrison’s storyline provides a different perspective of S.T.A.R. Labs than had been previously given in other comics produced by D.C.  

For another critique of scientists and animal experimentation for military purposes by Morrison, check out Morrison, et al. (2005).  

Although it is impossible to prove, Morrison does appear to hint phonetically at each villain’s motivation in the names he assigns them. For instance, “Ray” is phonetically similar to “rape”—an incomplete version of the word, just as Ray was unable to carry out his desire to rape Ellen. The other hunter named is Lew, which is similar to lewd. Finally, Dr. Myers sounds
similar to mire, which suits him well, since he got Animal Man bogged down in difficulties. This should not be surprising, given the more overt naming of superheroes and villains so that their names stand for their powers.

13 Importantly, by minimizing his physical appearance, the words associated with him are heightened. While some individuals, such as Callahan, readers of Animal Man (in the response column), and Morrison himself, have complained about the language style utilized—in that it mimics Alan Moore’s descriptive gravitas too much—it provides an excellent means to analyze B’wana Beast. Specifically, the language coupled with B’Wana Beast carries the suffering of animals to new heights, thereby demonizing S.T.A.R. Labs further.

14 As with most instances of ellipsis in quotations from Animal Man in this thesis, these are from the text itself. I have decided not to omit them and standardize the text because they are stylistically important.


16 For instance, most animal products obfuscate the animal that was once alive. We eat pork, not pig; beef, not cow; mutton, not sheep. Moreover, by referring to these products as meat, humans prevent themselves from thinking that they are eating flesh. Adams describes this strategic renaming as creating an “absent referent” (2000, 50-73). For more about how the English language contributes to the domination and oppression of animals, see Dunayer (2001) and Stibbe (2001).

17 Insofar as Animal Man is concerned about the wellbeing of animals, Morrison’s writing reflects the more socially conscious superheroes of the late 1960s and ‘70s, albeit no one treated animal or environmental welfare as a social issue in comics during this time. For more
information about the transformation of comic industry during the twentieth century, see Wright (2001).

18 It is also important to remember that the first act Animal Man was seen doing was rescuing a cat, which shows the difference between the two men.

19 Some animal-rights activists challenge this, however. The Great Ape Project argues that great apes should be considered persons due to their intelligence (Cavalieri and Singer, 1993; Great Ape Project, 2003). Earlier this year, scientists were also suggesting that dolphins should be considered nonhuman persons as well. By describing these animals as persons, these advocates seek to provide them with some of the rights (e.g. the right to life, freedom from torture—not the right to vote) typically associated with other “persons,” namely, humans.

20 Despite the impressiveness of a dog’s olfactory acuteness, Morrison later notes that moths possess olfactory abilities that are far superior: “Moths have olfactory senses as far beyond a dog’s as the dog’s is beyond ours” (21:4).

21 Significantly, Animal Man’s amazement at the dogs’ smelling ability is interrupted by the Ramones song “Teenage Lobotomy” on his walkman. Although Morrison does not provide the lyrics, the typical reader would have been familiar with this song, which states how “DDT did a job on me,” resulting in the loss of a cerebellum due to lobotomy. Animal Man refuses to dwell on the song, and on how sad Dr. Myers’ dogs looked, because of its depressing nature. Despite the unlikelihood that Dr. Myers was experimenting with DDT, Morrison manages nonetheless to link Dr. Myers’ research with a pesticide famously exposed in Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (1962) as utterly dangerous to all forms of life. Ultimately, Morrison implies that Dr. Myers’ research is equally harmful.
22 Significantly, one of the hunter’s comments on “Day 6,” “I live for these weekends,” suggests that it is Saturday. This further aligns the frame with a Christian conception of the Sabbath.

23 There is actually a term for an intentionally fruit-based diet: Fruitarianism. Unlike veganism or vegetarianism, fruitarianism seeks to go one step further by respecting plants themselves. Specifically, fruitarianists leave the plant intact and only consume its fruit, whether an apple, cucumber, or tomato. They would not eat a carrot, for instance, since it is a plant’s root.

Chapter 4

1 Around the time that issues #6 and #7 were published, two of Morrison’s issues were rejected by his editor. One of them has been described by Morrison as a “really heavy, symbolic issue where Animal Man goes through a hallucinatory hell journey with images of flayed and tortured animals, intended to provoke a visceral response” (Morrison interview in Callahan 2007, 253). Although Morrison was later glad that this issue did not come out, this description provides a good indicator of how he thought about framing animal rights at the time.


3 As noted, this overview is necessarily selective. For those interested in an overview stressing the postmodern elements, please consult Callahan (2007), 69-119.

4 As noted in the previous chapter, a similar effect was employed when B’Wana Beast almost died.
The sheer number of words on this particular page—due to Animal Man’s lecture—is noteworthy. Compared to the dialogue on the previous and following pages, roughly fifty words each (which is more or less the norm), Animal Man’s lecture contains over three times as many. This quotation only presents some of the lecture.

That a superhero, such as Animal Man, makes a cameo appearance in another comic is by no means atypical of DC Comics’ storylines (or of its competitor, Marvel).

For instance, see Kruse (2001, 67-87). In many respects animal-rights activists are still stuck with a pejorative label, although now they are largely seen as more ridiculous than dangerous.

For more information on how moderates within social activist groups defend themselves from radicals see Jorgensen-Earp’s second chapter, “Tarred with the Same Brush” (2008, 61-99).

In later issues, the dolphin may retrospectively be seen even as being more honorable than Animal Man in that Animal Man seeks revenge for his killed family, whereas the dolphin refuses to do so.

See chapter two, specifically pages 42-50, 61-68.

The most prominent biblical reference is found in issue #5. Titled “The Coyote Gospel,” this issue’s esoteric storyline centers on a character named Crafty (a variant of Looney Tunes’ Wiley E. Coyote), who serves as a Christ figure. Since this issue’s storyline does not add anything to understanding Animal Man (save for the first few pages when he decides to become a vegetarian), I have decided to omit it. For more information, see Callahan (2007), 69-73.

Although Morrison was not the first comic book writer to think of doing this, it is certainly unusual. An earlier instance dates from the 1960s, when Gardner Fox, a writer for the superhero the Flash, included himself into a storyline (Callahan 2007, 83). Concerning whether or not this version of Morrison accurately portrays Morrison, Morrison later remarked that this comic book version of himself was really an expression of his views (Callahan 2007, 253).

Of course, one might suggest that Morrison could have written *Animal Man* solely for a paycheck. While the money surely played a part in the decision, his request for readers to join PETA suggests that he believes a) the comic has power and b) PETA has power—otherwise, why join?

**Chapter 5**

1 By “god-term” I refer specifically to Kenneth Burke’s use, not to Richard Weaver’s. See Burke (1970, 2-3).

2 Although this makes sense to me best in a religious sense, all organizations—whether religious, political, or professional—can illustrate the same point.

3 A pleasant exception to this is the just-published *Arguments about Animal Ethics* (2010), edited by Greg Goodale and Jason Edward Black.