

## Review essay

# Cats, Christendom, and the undivided self: The feline philosophy of John Gray

*Jonathan C. P. Birch*

### **Reviewed work:**

John Gray, *Feline Philosophy: Cats and the Meaning of Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), pp. 128, ISBN: 978-0141988429. £8.99

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*Dr Jonathan Birch is an intellectual historian who works at the intersection of religion and philosophy in early modern European culture. He teaches biblical interpretation and philosophical theology at the University of Glasgow and is Chief Philosophy Examiner for AQA. He is the Reviews Editor for Theology in Scotland.*

From Solomon, the black kitten who became my first feline companion as a child, to Moses the tabby Maine Coon who prowls the study as I work, I have chosen biblical names for cats. But cats are notoriously under-represented in the Bible itself: in the most recent edition of the New Revised Standard Version, only the deuterocanonical Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch 6:23 in Roman Catholic Bibles) refers to anything that might correspond to either the *Felis catus* or its ancestor the *Felis silvestris lybica*.<sup>1</sup> Granted, this omission is bothersome only to cat lovers, and may not be considered a sufficient reason to reopen the canon of Scripture. One

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<sup>1</sup> They feature in a list of the creatures found resting upon idols in pagan temples: 'Bats, swallows, and birds alight on their bodies and heads, and so do cats. From this you will know that they are not gods, so do not fear them.' (Letter of Jeremiah 21–22).

might argue that the cat family is well represented in the form of larger, wilder specimens: lions, for example, are namechecked at regular intervals from 1 Samuel 17:36 (לָאוֹן) to Revelation 9:17 (λέων). But to be satisfied with this defence is to tolerate sizeism. The omission is all the more surprising given the trajectory of modern research, reported here by the philosopher John Gray, which shows that the *Felis silvestris lybica* ‘began to cohabit with humans 12,000 years ago in parts of the Near East that now form part of Turkey, Iraq and Israel’ (p. 16).<sup>2</sup> The arrangement seems to have been built on mutual self-interest: human communities were regular sources of food; cats provided pest control.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the Children of Israel were content to cede regional hegemony to the Egyptians and their *Book of the Dead* in the edification of smaller cats.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the reason for this neglect, we must begin our feline reflections outside the Bible. By the end of this essay, however, it will be clear that in the *Felis catus* we glimpse nothing less than the spiritually undivided innocence of life before the Fall.



### A distinctive treatment of an enigmatic subject

John Gray’s *Feline Philosophy: Cats and the Meaning of Life* is an unusual combination of historical, literary, anecdotal, and scientific insights into the domestic cat and its relationship with humankind, which the author integrates, deftly, with his characteristically perceptive and unsparing

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship between the domestic cat (*Felis catus*) and the European wildcat (*Felis silvestris silvestris*), of which the endangered Scottish wildcat is one, is a matter of dispute: see Greta Veronica Berteselli et al., “European Wildcat and Domestic Cat: Do they Really Differ?”, *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 22 (Nov–Dec 2017): 35–40.

<sup>3</sup> Their renown in this sphere has continued to be celebrated in modern times. Only one cat has ever been honoured with the Dickin Medal – the highest British honour for animal valour in battle – which was awarded posthumously to Simon, a small black and white cat, for his rat catching exploits on the HMS *Amethyst*, in the aftermath of a strike by the People’s Liberation Army on the Yangtze river in 1949. Simon is profiled here in the People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals: <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/what-we-do/animal-awards-programme/pdsa-dickin-medal/simon>.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the sacred position of cats in different cultural contexts, see Georgie Anne Geyer, *When Cats Reigned Like Kings: On the Trail of the Sacred Cats* (London: Routledge 2012).



thoughts on the human condition.<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that *Feline Philosophy* was published during the pandemic when (for good and ill) our desire to integrate animals into our domestic lives was so apparent. In six chapters Gray explores (1) cats within the context of a potted history of (mainly Western) philosophy, literature, and society; (2) feline ethics; (3) feline happiness; (4) feline love; (5) time, death and the feline soul; and (6) cats and the meaning of life, complete with 10 ‘hints’ for life inspired by these lounge lions.

Like his book, Gray is not easy to classify. He tends to write in the mode of a philosophical historian – an incisive analyst of ideas and culture – but a philosopher doubtful of his discipline’s pretensions, and some of its practitioners. Indeed, he begins the book with the gentle teasing of an unidentified philosopher who told Gray that he had successfully ‘persuaded’ his cat to embrace vegetarianism (p. 1). Once it had been established that the cat still had the freedom of the great outdoors, it was hard not to share Gray’s scepticism. Gray is an atheist but not unsympathetic to religion, and he does not place secular philosophy on a pedestal: religion and philosophy of all kinds ‘try to fend off the abiding disquiet that comes with being human’ (p. 2). Some of the thinkers who best capture that disquiet, for Gray, are sceptical, fideistic Christians: from Michel Montaigne to Blaise Pascal. By contrast, ‘Cats have no need of philosophy [or religion, presumably]. Obeying their nature, they are content with the life it gives them.’ The same could be said, of course, for many other animals, and this is a thought that kept occurring to me while reading this book: ‘Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns’ (Matthew 6:26). As such, the volume is perhaps best viewed as a feline-focussed case study in what we can learn about human nature (and its discontents) by paying careful attention to the other animals in our midst: if humans can ‘set aside any notion of being superior beings, they may come to understand how cats can thrive without anxiously inquiring how to live’ (p. 2). But Gray is realistic in his ambitions for feline philosophy. In his tenth and final hint he suggests that, ‘If you cannot learn to live a little more like a cat, return without regret to the human world of diversion’ (p. 110); and one of his suggestions is to ‘take up an old-fashioned religion, preferably one that abounds in rituals’ (p. 111). Here

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<sup>5</sup> Already showcased in such works as Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Granta, 2002).



Gray follows Pascal, for whom it is action rather than metaphysical speculation that kindles and sustains the fires of faith.<sup>6</sup>



### A beloved and demonized creature

There are many cat lovers in the religious, intellectual and literary traditions sketched by Gray, from the great essayist Montaigne to the novelist Patricia Highsmith (who was rumoured to have based her psychopathic antihero Tom Ripley on one of her own cats). And due respect is paid to the usual suspects among animal-loving Christians, such as St Francis of Assisi, whose name has been readily adopted by so many charities devoted to the care of animals.<sup>7</sup> A wider-ranging and more ecumenical survey would have to include St Modestos of Jerusalem (patron saint of animals in the Orthodox Church), John Wesley, Frances Power Cobbe, Albert Schweitzer, Paul Tillich, and many more in Protestant traditions.<sup>8</sup> It is hard to determine Christian-cat relations in the earliest years of the Church, not least because presumed references to cats in Greek (e.g. αἰλουρος) cannot always be distinguished from references to weasels or ferrets: mustelids were initially preferred by Greeks and Romans as agents of pest control, with cats gradually winning then over as both hunters and preferred pets.<sup>9</sup> Some of the most intimate material evidence we have from late antiquity comes from the Eastern Church. A 2015 excavation of the early Byzantine Balatlar church complex, in Sinop, discovered the remains of a human being of indeterminate sex, who had been buried alongside a female cat, their assumed domestic companion. Today cats roam freely around many Orthodox churches and monasteries in Greece, though none are as famous as those who reside at the Monastery of St Nicholas of the Cats in Cyprus, where imported cats were once celebrated for protecting monks from snakes and served as attractions to

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<sup>6</sup> See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1669), §3–4.

<sup>7</sup> They include, on these islands, the St. Francis Hospice for Cats in England: <https://www.sfhfc.org.uk/>.

<sup>8</sup> For a multi-faith study of animal theologians, see Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey, eds., *Animal Theologians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> See Vedat Onar et al., “A Cat Skeleton from the Balatlar Church Excavation, Sinop, Turkey”, *Animals* 11, no. 2 (January 2021): 1–20; 2: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7912163/pdf/animals-11-00288.pdf>.



medieval pilgrims.<sup>10</sup> Islamic culture has been friendly towards cats since its foundations: although there are no references in the Quran, these clean and elegant beasts are revered in the Hadith, where the ill-treatment and neglect of cats has been thought deserving of the gravest post-mortem punishments.<sup>11</sup> Gray retells the charming story of the Prophet Muhammad cutting off the sleeve of his garment, before taking leave to pray, rather than disturb the sleeping cat beside him.<sup>12</sup> But before we can return to these more edifying accounts of human-feline relations, we are confronted by a horrific history of medieval and early modern cruelty to cats in European Christian culture, in both Catholic and Protestant contexts.

The brutality meted out to these creatures was often carried out with a level of religious zeal associated with hunting witches – no surprise that this pair of one-time hate figures became (and remain) closely associated in the popular imagination. There is a perverse irony here, in that in the popular thirteenth-century manual for anchoresses, the *Ancrene Wisse*, a cat is the only animal recommended for these revered holy women (‘ne schulen habbe na beast bute cat ane’).<sup>13</sup> Although contemporaneous with this is the symbolic association of cats with heresy – when did cats ever conform? – in contrast with the *domini canes* (dogs of the Lord), who symbolised the orthodoxy robustly defended by the Dominicans.<sup>14</sup> It *could*

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<sup>10</sup> See Ourania Perdiki, “Through the Eyes of a Mapmaker: Maritime Shrines on Cyprus during the Late Middle Ages”, *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 1–21: [https://mdpi-res.com/religions/religions-12-01022/article\\_deploy/religions-12-01022.pdf?version=1637496857](https://mdpi-res.com/religions/religions-12-01022/article_deploy/religions-12-01022.pdf?version=1637496857).

<sup>11</sup> See Sahih Bukhari 3318 (Book 59, Hadith 124): <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/59>.

<sup>12</sup> According to some accounts this was Muezza, the Prophet’s favourite cat (see Geyer, *When Cats Reigned Like Kings*, 4), although I can find neither Muezza or this particular story in any Hadith.

<sup>13</sup> ‘You should have no animal but one cat only’, although compassionate exceptions are made for women in ‘distress’ and if a spiritual director advises alternative companions: see Robert Hasenfratz, ed., *Ancrene Wisse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pt. 8, lines 76–79: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/hasenfrantz-ancrene-wisse-part-eight>.

<sup>14</sup> See Irina Metzler, “Heretical Cats: Animal Symbolism in Religious Discourse”, *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 59 (2009): 16–32. Although this symbolism in religious discourse needs to be read alongside accounts of the bonds between actual cats and the men and women of the Church who cared for them: Kathleen Walker-Meikle, a historian of medieval pet keeping, has given an



be that such religious symbolism helps to explain the ritual roasting, flaying, skinning, and shooting of cats documented by Gray, carried out on the face of it for little more than mindless public entertainment: the Germans, French and British all stand accused. Gray suggests that this violent enmity towards cats ‘is very often the self-hatred of misery-sodden human beings redirected against creatures they know are not unhappy’ (p. 22). There is prima facie plausibility about this diagnosis of inter-creaturely depravity, although I did feel a twinge of sympathy for the Apostle Paul when he was indirectly implicated in Gray’s speculative analysis:

Often cats were mutilated or killed as embodiments of forbidden sexual desire. From St Paul onwards, Christians viewed sex as a disruptive and even demonic force. The freedom of cats from human moralities may have become linked in the medieval mind with the rebellion of women and others against religious prohibitions on sex. Against the background of this kind of theism it was almost inevitable that cats should be seen as embodiments of evil. (p. 21)

As if the legacy of Paul didn’t have enough to contend with in modernity: poisoning Christian-Jewish relations; subjugating women; homophobia; and now cruelty to cats. This could be the final straw for Tarsus’s foremost man of letters.

The Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment seem to have had no immediate impact on human ambivalence towards cats in European contexts. The mechanistic image of nature which proved so fruitful for scientific enquiry did nothing, in and of itself, for the status of these animals: from René Descartes to Paolo Mantegazza, cruel and unusual experiments on animals generally – and cats in particular in the case of Mantegazza – were variously justified on the assumption that they lacked a soul; that they were best thought of as machines without conscious awareness; or simply because ‘the torture of animals’ was ‘justified by the pursuit of knowledge’ (p. 22). On this reading of the European history of human and feline relationships, ‘Science perfected the cruelties of

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entertaining public lecture on “Clerical Cats in History” for Southwark Cathedral, June 2021: <https://cathedral.southwark.anglican.org/visiting/hodge-the-cathedral-cat/clerical-cats-in-history-an-online-talk-by-dr-kathleen-walker-meikle/>.



religion'. While in Robert Darnton's famous account in *The Great Cat Massacre*,<sup>15</sup> cats were sacrificed on the altar of political protest, as the pampered pets of the bourgeoisie. In summary, cats have been the targets of religious, scientific, and even political violence for centuries. Today, their foes are often to be found among well-intentioned conservationists, who warn of the destructive impact of these famously carnivorous mammals. Gray argues persuasively that their legitimate concerns can be addressed in feline-affirming ways. The work of the Torre Argentina Cat Sanctuary in Rome would be a fine example of this, where neutered rescue cats roam the archaeological remains of the presumed site of Julius Caesar's assassination.<sup>16</sup>



### Cats and the invention of individualism

Although St Paul, Descartes and Mantegazza may be the villains of this story, it is perhaps with Arthur Schopenhauer, an animal lover, who Gray finds himself in most interesting disagreement. Schopenhauer insists that the cat 'playing just now in the yard', is the 'ephemeral embodiment of something more fundamental – the underlying will to live, which [...] is the only thing that really exists' (p. 4). Schopenhauer's point of view represents a variation on the influential Platonic intuition that our familiar world of appearances points insistently to a transcendent reality, or realities (the Forms), on which all individual and fleeting instances of those realities depend. Against Schopenhauer's temptation towards a world less ordinary, Gray wants to redirect the reader to the concrete individuality of cats, 'Every one of them is singularly itself' (p. 5), and by extension the concrete individuality of human beings. Individuals, feline or human, are by definition different, and one of the (many) mistakes of Western philosophy and theology, from the classical period on, has been to raise 'local prejudices' to the level of universal ideals, and assume that 'the best life for humans is the same [...] for everyone' (pp. 49–50). According to Gray, 'The possibility that human beings might flourish in

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<sup>15</sup> See Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin", in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Allen Lane, 1984), 75–104.

<sup>16</sup> When in Rome my wife and I make two pilgrimages: one to St Peter's; the other to see the Roman cats: <https://www.gattidiroma.net/web/en/>.



many different ways, which cannot be ranked in any scale of value, did not occur to Aristotle. Nor did the idea that other animals might live good lives in ways of which humans are incapable'. For Aristotle, the 'human mind most resembles God's' (p. 50), and the hierarchy of values descended from the ethical standards of those human beings he most identified with: male, Greek-speaking, slave-owning intellectuals. Feline philosophy embraces an individualism which is utterly foreign to Platonic or Aristotelian thought.

The relationship between Christianity and the rise of Western, liberal individualism (in a moral and spiritual sense, not simply political and economic) has been revisited this century by academic historians such as Sir Larry Siedentop,<sup>17</sup> and at a more popular but scholarly level by Tom Holland.<sup>18</sup> Gray acknowledges, for example, that while the connection between 'altruism and the good life may seem self-evident' to modern Europeans, the notion of selfless moral duty of one individual to another 'is a novelty in ethics' (p. 59). But for Gray the tendency within Western monotheism has been to imagine that the good life, often characterised by the aforementioned altruism, is a matter of our 'approaching the perfection of a divine being' (p. 53), or in a specifically Christian context, perhaps, the imitation of Christ. Gray does not question the internal logic of that stance within communities of faith. But for the secular intellectual who imagines that they have fully absorbed the lessons of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection (and Darwin himself probably wasn't one of them, according to Gray), they should no longer cling 'to the idea that humans are worth more than other animals' (p. 49), and will accept that they 'are like other creatures in pursuing the good their nature demands' (p. 53), without aspiring to anything that transcends that nature. Of course the desire for the transcendent runs throughout the Christian tradition, but it does not always come with the obliteration of individuality. It is true that for St Thomas Aquinas, for example, the beatific vision is the divine gift which represents the highest end any created being can aspire to,<sup>19</sup> but the individuality is preserved in the body-soul (matter and form)

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<sup>17</sup> Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little, Brown, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pt. 1, q. 1, arts. 12–13.





composite of human nature. Indeed, for Aquinas, what survives of the individual at death, the soul, is incomplete as a human person prior to bodily resurrection, and only then can the perfection of that particular creature be realised *in accordance with its own nature*: ‘Hence the heart of an animal is more conformed to an unchanging God when it is in motion than when it is at rest, because the perfection of the heart is in its movement, and its rest is its undoing’.<sup>20</sup>



### ***Pensées diverses on human and feline natures***

For many Western philosophers, the self-consciousness of humankind, as a language-using species of reason, has signalled and defined our higher nature (Aristotle, again, and Aquinas for that matter). But in Darwinian terms these capacities might be considered ‘a one-off fluke’ (p. 5), and not an altogether happy one. In Taoist philosophy, which Gray has repeatedly made common cause within in his writings, the ‘self-regarding consciousness of human beings is the chief obstacle to a good life’ (p. 49). This is, after all, the source of our species’ distinctive awareness of our own mortality and the associated anxieties which attend that knowledge. These anxieties give rise to a tendency that, for Gray, represents the most distinctive characteristic of human nature: the craving for diversion. Pascal recognised this as clearly as anyone: ‘I have often said that the sole cause of man’s unhappiness is that he does not know how to sit quietly in a room’ (p. 32).<sup>21</sup> Cats have no such problem with their own company, and while they may have laughably short attention spans, they immerse themselves completely in whichever activities they are drawn to for just as long as they are drawn to them.

Gray thinks he can write about ‘feline ethics’ because he embraces older and more expansive notions of the ethical, encompassing as it does everything that constitutes the good life, including but not restricted to moral right and wrong, and the *apparently* free decisions we make. In fact, Gray tells us, ‘Human beings no more chose to act “morally” than they choose to sneeze or yawn’ (p. 84). It is hard to take Gray seriously here. His claim is undercut by the phenomenology of decision-making common to human beings from the time we are school-age children. It is true that,

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<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pt. 3, q. 75, art. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, §2: 139.



for much of the time, we act prior to any conscious process of reasoning, but anyone who has ever been confronted with a choice between immediate expediency and what they know to be right (even granting some cultural relativity in standards and priorities) will be conscious of the stark difference between moral deliberation and reflexive bodily movements. The attempt to raise the status of other animals by impugning the capacities of human beings is a familiar tactic among some philosophers. Nevertheless, the ethical tendency of cats is plausibly characterised by Gray as ‘selfless egoism’ (p. 59): ‘egoism’ because cats relentlessly pursue their own interests and pleasures, but ‘selfless’ because, unlike human beings, they have no self-image they are projecting onto the world they are trying to thrive in, no image they are trying to protect through dissimulation and self-deception. Gray appeals to Benedict de Spinoza’s concept of *conatus* – albeit shorn of what, for Gray, are the great Jewish philosopher’s rationalist fantasies – as helpful to our understanding of what is common to the flourishing of felines and human beings: ‘the tendency of living beings to preserve and enhance their activity in the world’ (p. 50). Gray insists that this is ‘far from the will to power that became a popular gospel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ (p. 56), but there has always seemed to me a danger of precisely this unless Spinoza’s egoism – or the closely aligned version of Thomas Hobbes, produced earlier in the same (seventeenth) century – is integrated with classical virtues and altruistic imperatives. The Gospels bring virtue and self-interest together time and time again (e.g. Matthew 6; Mark 10:17–31).

I found myself demurring from some of Gray’s claims in *Feline Philosophy* on empirical grounds (disclaimer: none of my ‘research’ in this area has yet been subjected to peer review). Cats may ‘not *struggle* to be happy’ in the same manner as human beings (p. 25, my emphasis), but I have observed enough *ennui* in domestic felines – whose basic needs for food and opportunities to play are more than satisfied – to doubt whether the mindset of a cat is always something to envy. And while Gray assures his reader that jealousy in cats ‘rarely’ surfaces when new people enter the lives of their human companions (p. 69), I have found that the green-eyed monster can be stirred by even the most familiar of human companions. Gestures of affection between myself and my wife, in which the aforementioned Maine Coon is not included, are variously met with unnerving stares; ostentatious sit-down protests with his back facing us;



and performative activities such as mounting high and precarious surfaces to ensure that attention quickly switches back to him. We have only ourselves to blame: allowing the fluffy overlord to sleep between us since he was a kitten. But whatever our parental failings, jealousy (or jealousy-adjacent) behaviour is not foreign to the feline nature in my experience.

Some of the most affecting insights into humankind's unlikely relationship with these (still only) semi-domesticated creatures are judiciously drawn by Gray from outside the philosophical canon: the account by former CBS journalist John Laurence of his journeys with Meo, the war-torn kitten he befriended while covering the conflict in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive, and who accompanied him back to the United States for a new life together;<sup>22</sup> the tale of a refugee cat given asylum in the very country that invaded his own. In *A Cat, A Man, and Two Women* (1937), the Japanese novelist Jun'ichirō Tanizaki explores the nature of love, loneliness, and jealousy, when a tortoiseshell cat, Lilly, is caught in a love triangle between her lifelong male companion, Shonzo, his new spouse, and his jilted ex-wife.<sup>23</sup> The feckless Shonzo's potential for emotional maturity and constancy is realised in his comic-tragic attempts to continue to see Lilly after his divorce. But one of the most theologically redolent of examples from world literature, and the one on which this review ends, originates closer to home.



### Return to Eden?

We are indebted to the great Scottish man of letters James Boswell for most of our biographical knowledge of, perhaps, the most illustrious literary catlover in the English language: Dr Johnson. No doubt inheriting some of the prejudices of his day and their associated neurosis, Boswell confessed to being fearful of cats, but he was touched by Johnson's relationships with them. In his *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) we learn that Johnson was so devoted to his black cat Hodge – about whom poems have been written and sculptures cast,<sup>24</sup> despite Johnson admitting Hodge was

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<sup>22</sup> John Laurence, *The Cat from Hué: A Vietnam War Story* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *A Cat, A Man, and Two Women*, trans. Paul McCarthy (London: Daunt Books, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> See Leigh Hunt, "The Cat by the Fire" (1834), [http://essays.quotidiana.org/hunt/cat\\_by\\_the\\_fire/](http://essays.quotidiana.org/hunt/cat_by_the_fire/); Jon Bickley's sculpture of Hodge was unveiled at Gough



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by no means his favourite – he would personally go out to buy oysters for the delectation of his feline housemate. And in understandably protective mode, Johnson railed against the prospect of the animal's death at the hands of a young man who had lost his mind and taken to shooting cats: 'Hodge shan't be shot; no, no, Hodge shall not be shot!' (p. 41). Even the anxious Boswell had to grant that Hodge was 'a fine cat',<sup>25</sup> as far as cats go.

Johnson is a philosophically congenial point of reference for Gray, not simply because he loved cats, but because of the great lexicographer's scepticism towards the progressive ideal that modern 'society could be rebuilt in order that human beings could achieve the happiness to which they have come to believe they are entitled' (p. 38). Indeed, Johnson satirised this very notion in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759). And throughout his own life Johnson famously suffered from a variety of physical illnesses and psychological disturbances which he knew could not be reasoned away. Convinced as he was that 'thought could not relieve unhappiness' (p. 42), and that ultimate salvation could not be found in this world, he threw himself into the pleasurable diversion of company and conversation – with beggars, royalty, children and animals alike – for which he is sometimes remembered almost as much as he is for his literary achievements. But Johnson was also a convinced Christian, an Anglican, and his cat Hodge 'gave him something that human company could not supply: a glimpse of life before the Fall' (p. 42). Far from being symbols of evil, the amoral souls of cats, unselfconscious and undivided, are perhaps closer to Eden than anything adult humans might know of this side of the eschaton.

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Square in 1997, and be seen at *London Remembers*: <https://www.londonremembers.com/memorials/hodge-the-cat>.

<sup>25</sup> For the full account, see James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, vol. 2: 1776–1784 (Oxford: Henry Frowde, 1904): 478.

