

The God-given Order of Nature

Carl von Linné

(b. Stenbrohult, 13 May 1707; d. Uppsala, 10 January 1778)

In this selection from the Introduction to his best known work, *The System of Nature* (1735), Carl von Linné articulates an idea pervasive in the eighteenth century: that an underlying hierarchical order in nature was established by God, or providence by itself, and that it is the duty of humans to discover this order and to classify everything that exists – from human to fauna and flora – accordingly. This worldview led many writers whose works are collected in this volume to the assumption that their classification of humans into races and their theories about this classification were guaranteed by an inviolable “order of nature.”

Homo in The System of Nature

Man, when he enters the world, is naturally led to enquire who he is; whence he comes; whither he is going; for what purpose he is created; and by whose benevolence he is preserved. He finds himself descended from the remotest creation; journeying to a life of perfection and happiness, and led by his endowments to a contemplation of the works of nature.

Like other animals who enjoy life, sensation, and perception, seek for food, amusements, and rest, and who prepare habita-

tions convenient for their kind, he is curious and inquisitive; but, above all other animals, he is noble in his nature, in as much as, by the powers of his mind, he is able to reason justly upon whatever discovers itself to his senses; and to look, with reverence and wonder, upon the works of Him who created all things.

That existence is purely contemptible, which regards only the ratification of infinitive wants, and the preservation of a body made to perish. It is therefore the business of a thinking being, to look forward to the purposes of all things; and to remember that the end of creation is, that God may be glorified in all his works.

Hence it is of importance that we should study the works of nature, than which, what could be more useful, what more interesting? For, however large a portion of them lies open to our present view, a still greater part is yet unknown and undiscovered.

All things are not within the immediate reach of human capacity. Many have been made known to us, of which those who went before were ignorant; many we have heard of, but know not what they are; and many must remain for the diligence of future ages.

It is the exclusive property of man, to contemplate and to reason on the great book of nature. She gradually unfolds herself to him who, with patience and perseverance, will search into her mysteries; and when the memory of the present and of past generations shall be entirely obliterated he shall enjoy the high privilege of living in the minds of his successors, as he has been advanced in the dignity of his nature, by the labours of those who went before him.

The Universe comprehends whatever exists; whatever can come to our knowledge by the agency of our senses. The Stars, the Elements, and this our Globe.

The Stars are bodies remote, lucid, revolving in perpetual motion. They shine either by their own proper light, as the Sun, and the remoter fixed Stars; or are Planets receiving light from stars. Of these the primary planets are solar: *Saturn, Jupiter, Mars; the Earth, Venus, Mercury, and Georgium Sidus*; the secondary are those subservient to, and rolling around the primary, as the Moon around the earth.

The Elements are simple bodies constituting the atmosphere and probably filling the spaces between the stars.

Fire: lucid, resilient, warm, evolant, vivifying.

Air: transparent, elastic, dry, encircling, generating.

Water: diaphanous, fluid, moist, gliding, conceiving.

Earth: opaque, fixed, cold, quiescent, sterile.

The Earth is a planetary sphere, turning around its own axis, once in 24 hours, and around the sun once a year; surrounded by an atmosphere of elements, and covered by a stupendous crust of natural bodies, which are the object of our studies. It is terraqueous having the depressed parts covered with waters, the elevated parts gradually dilated into dry and habitable continents. The *land* is moistened by *vapours*, which rising from the waters, are collected into *clouds*; these are deposited upon the tops of mountains; form small *streams*, which unite into rivulets, and reunite into these ever-flowing rivers, which pervading the thirsty earth, and affording moisture to the productions growing for the support of her living inhabitants are at last returned into their parent sea.

The study of natural history is simple, beautiful, and instructive in the collection, arrangement, and exhibition of the various productions of the earth.

These are divided into the three grand kingdoms of nature, whose boundaries meet together in the Zoophytes.

Minerals inhabit the interior parts of the earth in rude and shapeless masses; are generated by salts, mixed together promiscuously and shaped fortuitously.

They are bodies concrete, without life or sensation.

Vegetables clothe the surface with verdure, imbibe nourishment through bibulous roots, breathe by quivering leaves, celebrate their nuptials in a genial metamorphosis, and continue their kind by the dispersion of seed within prescribed limits.

They are *bodies organized, and have life* and not sensation.

Animals adorn the exterior parts of the earth, respire, and generate eggs; are impelled to action by hunger, congeneric affections, and pain; and by preying on other animals and vegetables, restrain within proper proportion the numbers of both. They are bodies organized, and have life, sensation, and the power of loco-motion.

Man, the last and best of created works, formed after the image of his Maker, endowed with a portion of intellectual divinity, the governor and subjugator of all other beings, is, by

his wisdom alone, able to form just conclusions from such things as present themselves to his senses, which can only consist of bodies merely natural. Hence the first step of wisdom is to know these bodies; and be able, by those marks imprinted on them by nature, to distinguish them from each other, and to affix to every object its proper name.

These are the elements of all sciences; this is the great alphabet of nature: for if the name be lost, the knowledge of the object is lost also; and without these, the student will seek in vain for the means to investigate the hidden treasures of nature.

Mammalia

Order I. Primates

Foreteeth cutting: upper 4; parallel teats 2, pectoral

HOMO

Sapiens. Diurnal; varying by education and situation

- 1 Four-footed, mute, hairy. *Wild man.*
- 2 Copper-coloured, choleric, erect. *American.*
Hair black, straight, thick; *nostrils* wide; *face* harsh; *beard* scanty; *obstinate*, content, free. *Paints* himself with fine red lines. *Regulated* by customs.
- 3 Fair, sanguine, brawny. *European.*
Hair yellow, brown, flowing; *eyes* blue; gentle, acute, inventive. *Covered* with close vestments. *Governed* by laws.
- 4 Sooty, melancholy, rigid.
Hair black; *eyes* dark; *fevere*, haughty, covetous. *Covered* with loose garments. *Governed* by opinions.
- 5 Black, phlegmatic, relaxed.
Hair black, frizzled; *skin* silky; *nose* flat; *lips* tumid; crafty, indolent, negligent. *Anoints* himself with grease. *Governed* by caprice.

Monstrosus. Varying by climate or art

- 1 Small, active, timid. *Mountaineer*
- 2 Large, indolent. *Patagonian*
- 3 Less fertile. *Hottentot*
- 4 Beardless. *American*

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5 Head conic. *Chinese*

6 Head flattened. *Canadian*

The anatomical, physiological, natural, moral, civil, and social histories of man, are best described by their respective writers.