I stand in affirmation of the resolution, Resolved: Humans are fundamentally different from other animals.

I’d like to offer the following definitions to clarify the ground of this debate:

Collins Dictionary defines ‘fundamentally’ as: “**related to the** *deep,* **basic nature of something.**”

The basic nature of an organism is comprised of all its important features. These features create the basis of what that being is. Fundamental differences arise when one organism possesses some factor essential to its makeup that others do not. These differences are referred to as differences in kind. Doctor of Psychology and American Philosopher Jerome Adler clarifies this distinction.

*Adler, Mortimer Jerome. “The Modes of Difference: The Possible Answers”. Lavergne, TN: Publisher Not Identified, 2014. Retrieved from* [*http://www.thegreatideas.org/dmd02.html*](http://www.thegreatideas.org/dmd02.html)

**A***n observable or manifest* **difference in kind may be** *based on and* **explained by the fact that one of the two things being compared has a factor or element in its constitution that is totally absent from the constitution of the other***; in consequence of which the two things,* **with respect to their fundamental** *constitution or* **make-up[.]***, can also be said to differ in kind…. If man differs in degree from all other physical things, he does so with respect to whatever characteristics are common to man and these other things; and, in each of these respects, man has either more or less of the common trait.* **If man differs in kind from all other physical things, he does so by virtue of possessing one or more characteristics totally absent from or lacking in** *these* **other things.**

Thus, the affirmative burden is to prove that humans possess at least one innate trait or quality that is lacking in other animals.

Throughout this debate, the affirmative will show that the social nature of humanity has facilitated three connected yet fundamentally different features compared to all other animals: cumulative culture, rationality, and conceptual thought.

My first contention is that human culture, or the process of differentiating oneself through interactions with your social environment, is what separates humanity from other forms of animality. This process is uniquely human and is necessary to the defining of human nature. Tim Ingold, Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland writes:

*Ingold, Tim. “Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology”. London: Routledge, 2015. Print. Retrieved from https://mimosvet.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/encyclopedia-anthropology.pdf*

*However there is not only one way of being human. Whatever else it may be,* **the capacity for culture is a capacity for generating difference. In and through that creative***, generative process,* **played out in** *the ordinary course of* **social life, the essence of humanity is revealed as cultural diversity. For any** *particular* **individual***, caught up in the process,* **'becoming human' entails becoming different from other humans** *who speak*

*different languages or dialects, practise different arts, hold different beliefs, and so on. If it is in their thus differentiating themselves from one another that human beings are essentially distinguished from animals, it follows, of course, that human animality is revealed as the absence of such differentiation, in sameness.* **Each one of us comes into the world as a creature born of man and woman, a biologically human organism whose physical constitution is entirely indifferent to** *his or her subsequent education into the code of conduct of* **one culture or another.** *As far as my existence as a member of the human species is concerned, the fact that I happen to be English rather than, say, French or Japanese is quite incidental. But with regard to the expression of my humanity, it is vital. It makes me someone, rather than just something. Or to put the same point in general terms,* **culture underwrites the identity of the human being, not as a biological organism but as a** *moral subject. In this latter capacity, we regard every man or woman as a* **person. My personhood is therefore inseparable from my belonging to a culture, and both are crucial ingredients of my being human.”**

This means that if other animals do not possess culture in the same form as human culture, or minimally without the same effect, we are fundamentally different, since this difference is directly linked to the core of who we are.

The ability to build, comprehend, and be influenced by culture is due to a uniquely human ability that allows culture to cumulate over time. Developmental Psychologist and Professor of Psychology at Duke University, Michael Tomassello, explains:

*Tennie, C., J. Call, and M. Tomasello. "Ratcheting up the Ratchet: On the Evolution of Cumulative Culture." Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences 364.1528 (2009): 2405-415. Print.*

*Tomasello et al. (1993a) claimed that from the point of view of process,* **a key feature of uniquely human cultural products and practices is that they are cumulative.****One generation does things in a certain way, and the next generation then does them** *in that same way—***except that perhaps they add some modification** *or improvement***. The generation after that then learns the modified** *or improved* **version, which then persists** *across generations**until further changes are made***. Human cultural transmission is** *thus* **characterized by the** *so-called* **‘ratchet effect’, in which modifications** *and improvements* **stay in the population** *fairly* **readily** *(with relatively little loss or backward slippage)* **until further changes ratchet things up again.****This process obviously relies** *both* **on** *inventiveness, for the cultural novelties, and on* **faithful transmission across generations to keep the novelties in place until other novelties come along.** *The claim in the original paper was that while inventiveness is fairly widespread among primates, humans transmit cultural items across generations much more faithfully, and it is this* **faithful****transmission** *(the ratchet) that* **explains why human culture accumulates modifications over time in a way that chimpanzee and other animal cultures do not***… The key point in the current context is that the* **cultural traditions of non-human primate species***, including those of chimpanzees, do not seem to accumulate modifications over time with any kind of ratchet effect. Rather, they* **represent behavioural biases of different populations***—all within the respective species’ ZLS—generated by founder effects, individual learning, and product-oriented (rather than process-oriented) copying.* **Human cultural traditions** *can and do* **accumulate modifications over time, thus producing improbable design that survives over multiple generations***. Our explanation of this phenomenon for many years has focused on the fact that human social learners focus to a much greater degree than other non-human primates on the actual actions performed by others (process copying), not just the results produced on the environment (product copying). But added to that we believe that* **uniquely human forms of cooperation make human social organization in**

**many ways different** *as well, as things* **such as teaching and norms of conformity, [which] contribute to the cultural ratchet.**

The symbiosis between our drive to understand others and the tools we possess to do this creates a biocultural effect on our lives, a process far different and fundamental than that acts on other animals. Namely, biocultural evolution has replaced biological evolution as the main influence in human lives. James Calcagno, biological anthropologist and Professor of Anthropology writes:

*Calcagno, James M., and Agustín Fuentes. "What Makes Us Human? Answers from Evolutionary Anthropology." Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews 21.5 (2012): 182-94. Print.*

*First,* **humans are characterized by a fully developed theory of mind, with the ability for flexible language skills and the** *concomitant* **symbolic** *and global* **reality of culture.** *This is a common theme among essays emanating from diverse research perspectives within evolutionary anthropology (see Whiten and Erdal1 for a similar and well-reasoned conclusion).* **Our language abilities,****social interaction,** *symbolic behavior,* **and cultural variation all seem tied to our desire to understand the minds of others,** *for both cooperative and selfish reasons.* **It is this cultural and cognitive reality, lived simultaneously through social, linguistic, symbolic, and evolutionary contexts, that makes humans truly distinct from other beings on the planet.** *We are not ‘‘ignoring the evolutionary substrate of our own unique cognitive evolution,’’ as Stiner and Kuhn warn against, but using comparisons with other species to understand differences in the ‘‘totipotentiality’’ of human behavior, as Sussman suggested. Nonhuman primates surely show signs of empathy, cooperation, and imitation, which would be expected from an evolutionary perspective. However,* **no other species are so** *intensely* **motivated***, both cooperatively and competitively,* **to reconstruct their** *entire* **environment and** *live their* **lives based on** *their concerns with* **the mind of others.** *Second, and as the direct result of our first point, we are biocultural animals. As Marks recently elucidated,* **no other species has evolved as we have: human evolution is not simply a biological process, but** *truly* **a biocultural process. Our biology cannot be understood outside of the aforementioned cultural and cognitive reality, and culture cannot be fully understood without biology.** *Thus, our biology and culture are not just intertwined, but melded together, co-existent, inseparable. Evolution is about both continuities and discontinuities.* **Our biocultural nature is the core discontinuity that emerges in our evolutionary history** *(even though this discontinuity between living humans and nonhumans must have emerged in a continuous way over time). Our contributors demonstrate our biocultural nature eloquently in varied ways, and much of evolutionary anthropology makes this point, directly or otherwise.*

Thus, the drive to connect our minds through means unattainable by other animals creates an ingrained characteristic that humanity alone possesses. This links directly back to my definition of fundamentally different by creating an ‘in kind’ difference in humans.

My second contention is that humans differ fundamentally from other animals due to their ability to think rationally. Rationality is being able to conceptualize and apply deliberate forms of past and present thought to make decisions, and more generally, to think abstractly without material references. Rationality and conceptual thought are fundamental human characteristics and they are the foundational basis of what separates us from other animals. Professor of

Bioethics and the Director of the Institute of Bioethics at Franciscan University, Patrick Lee, writes:

*Lee, Patrick, and Robert George. "Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics." Jama 300.24 (2008). Web. Retrieved from* [*https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human\_dignity/chapter16.html*](https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human_dignity/chapter16.html)

**Human beings are fundamentally different in kind from other animals***, not just genetically but* **in having a rational nature** *(that is, a nature characterized by basic natural capacities for conceptual thought, deliberation and free choice).* **Human beings perform acts of** *understanding , or* **conceptual thought, and such acts are fundamentally different kinds of acts than** *acts of* **sensing, perceiving, or imaging. An act of understanding is the grasping of***, or awareness of,* **a nature shared** *in common* **by many things.** *In Aristotle's memorable phrase,* **[T]o understand is not just to know water (by sensing or perceiving this water), but to know what it is to be water.** *12 By our senses and perceptual abilities we know the individual qualities and quantities modifying our sense organs-this color or this shape, for example. But* **by understanding** *(conceptual thought)* **we apprehend a nature held in common by many entities***-not this or that instance of water, but what it is to be water.* **By contrast, the object of the sensory powers,** *including imagination,* **is always** *an individual*, a this **at a particular place and** *a particular* **time***, a characteristic, such as this red, this shape, this tone, an object that is thoroughly conditioned by space and time.* **The contrast is evident upon examination of language.** *Proper names refer to individuals or groups of individuals that can be designated in a determinate time and place. Thus* **"Winston Churchill" is a name that refers to a determinate individual, whereas the nouns "human,"** *"horse,"**"atom,"* **and "organism" are common names.** *Common names do not designate determinate individuals or determinate groups of individuals (such as "those five people in the corner"). Rather, they designate classes . Thus,* **if we say, "Organisms are composed of cells," the word "organisms" designates** *the whole class of organisms,* **a class that extends indefinitely into the past and** *indefinitely into the* **future.** *All syntactical languages distinguish between proper names and common names.* *Human beings quite obviously are aware of classes as classes. That is, they do more than assign individuals to a class based on a perceived similarity; they are aware of pluralities as holding natures or properties in common.13 For example, one can perceive, without a concept, the similarity between two square shapes or two triangular shapes, something that other animals do as well as human beings. But* **human beings** *also* **grasp the** *criterion,* **the universal** *property**or* **nature, by which the similars are grouped together.**

Rationality and conceptual thought are fundamental human characteristics and they are the foundational basis of what separates us from other animals. Patrick Lee continues:

*Lee, Patrick, and Robert George. "Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics." Jama 300.24 (2008). Web. Retrieved from* [*https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human\_dignity/chapter16.html*](https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human_dignity/chapter16.html)

**The capacity for conceptual thought in human beings radically distinguishes them from other animals** *known to us***.** *This capacity is at the root of most of the other distinguishing features of human beings. Thus,* **syntactical language, art,** *architecture, variety in* **social groupings** *and in other customs, burying the dead, making tools, religion, fear of death (and elaborate defense mechanisms to ease living with that fear), wearing clothes, true courting of the opposite sex,16* **free choice and morality***-all of these, and more, stem from the ability to reason and understand***. Conceptual thought makes** *all of* **these** *specific* **acts possible by enabling human beings to escape fundamental limitations of two sorts. First, because of** *the capacity for* **conceptual thought, human beings' actions and consciousness are not restricted to the spatio-temporal present. Their awareness and** *their*

**concern go beyond what can be perceived** *or imagined* **as** *connected immediately with* **the present. Second, because of** *the capacity for* **conceptual thought, human beings can reflect back upon themselves and their place in reality, that is,** *they can attain an objective view, and* **they can attempt to be objective in their assessments and choices. Other animals** *give no evidence at all of being able to do either of these things; on the contrary, they* **seem thoroughly tied to the here and now, and unable to take an objective view of things** *as they are in themselves, or to attempt to do so.* **The capacity for conceptual thought is a capacity that human beings have in virtue of the kind of entity they are.** *That is, from the time they come to be, they are developing themselves toward the mature stage at which they will (unless prevented from doing so by disability or circumstances) perform such acts.**Moreover, they are structured-genetically, and in the non-material aspect of themselves-in such a way that they are oriented toward maturing to this stage.ix So, every human being, including human infants and unborn human beings, has this basic natural capacity for conceptual thought.*

Lastly, theories that classify the cognitive difference between animals and humans as merely natural causes of a shared evolutionary process fail because the incentive to adopt human-like cognitive traits would be equally advantageous to all species. Tim Ingold, Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, writes:

*Ingold, Tim. "What Is an Animal?" Unwin Hyman, Vol. 12. (1988). Print.*

*Moreover, the kinds of* **selective pressures that** *might have* **promoted the development of conscious awareness in humans should have been equally at work on other species with which humans have had** *close and* **lasting contacts.** *Coy suggests that* **these pressures would have lain in the adaptive advantages for the individual of one species conferred by the ability to predict the likely actions of individuals of** *the same or* **another species** *whether predators, competitors or prey***. Thus*,* to the extent that the human hunter benefits from forecasting the reactions of the deer, so the deer benefits from being able to predict the hunter's prediction, and to confound it by exercising autonomous powers of intentional action. So every increment in the development of awareness on one side of the** *interspecific* **relationship would increase the pressure for** *further* **development on the other***,**and vice versa.*