

The Great Chain of Being

- Medieval world view in the Christian and Western culture
- Describes a hierarchy of all being, ranging from God as the highest spiritual being till the rock as lowest material being
- The lower an entity is in the chain, the lower its grade of perfection is considered
- Vertical order of the Chain:
 - God – most perfect being, “primate” in the Chain
 - Angelic Beings – purely spiritual beings; possess reason, love, imagination; yet lack omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence of God
 - Humanity – standing in the middle between the spiritual and the material extremes of the Chain, sharing traits of both sides
 - Animals
 - Plants
 - Minerals
- These groups are subdivided hierarchically, too: E. g. the highest-ranking human being is the King, the highest-ranking animal is the lion or the elephant, and the highest-ranking metal is gold
- Each entity possesses positive attributes of its previous (lower) link, and adds more positive attributes
- God is seen as ultimate perfection; yet the universe is only considered perfect (in the sense of “complete”) if it also contains less perfect beings than God
 - This holds as an explanation for why God created “evil” or permits it

Sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_chain_of_being (2011-03-30 18:36)

<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/courses/re/chain.htm> (2011-03-30 18:36)