

THE ANIMALITY IN ME: RED PETER AND ELIZABETH COSTELLO

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Abstract: The debate surrounding the treatment of nonhuman animals raises fundamental questions about humanity's ethical responsibility and anthropocentric biases. This study explores the complexities of pain, language, and moral consciousness in relation to nonhuman animals through the lens of literature, particularly focusing on the writings of J.M. Coetzee. Central to this inquiry are questions regarding the distinction between humans and nonhuman animals, the ethics of their treatment, and the role of language and imagination in understanding their pain. Coetzee's works, including "Elizabeth Costello" and "The Lives of Animals," and Franz Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" serve as platforms for critical reflection on these issues, challenging readers to confront their preconceived notions and ethical obligations. Drawing from philosophical perspectives, literary analysis, and scientific research, this study examines the intersections of human-animal relations, morality, and the limits of human understanding. Through analysis of texts such as "A Report to an Academy" by Kafka and "The Lives of Animals" by Coetzee, the paper further explores the concept of empathy as a bridge between human and nonhuman experiences of pain and suffering.

Keywords: Nonhuman animals, Anthropocentrism, Pain, Language, Anthropomorphism, J.M. Coetzee, Franz Kafka, Empathy, Identity, Moral Consciousness.

Introduction

AM I AN ANIMAL?¹ If I am an animal, how am I different from nonhuman animals?² How do we understand the pain of nonhuman animals in the absence of language? These primary questions come to our mind when we think (if we do) about the pain of nonhuman animals.³ Any discussion

¹ Please see Derrida's *The Animal that Therefore I Am* for a good discussion (400-403).

² I am using the term 'nonhuman animals,' and not 'animals' to distinguish between man and animal, because we are all animals, after all.

³ Darwin has already shown that humans are like other nonhuman animals. The Humanists believe and insist that control over the environment is just another version of the Christian faith. Even in other religions, the treatment of animal is largely based on the idea of sacrifice. To shape the future of the universe as a better place to live, human beings have changed their perception to gain control over nature. Edward Osborne Wilson, an American biologist, researcher, theorist, naturalist, and author argues that "genetic evolution is about to come conscious and volitional,

on nonhuman animals presupposes the torture and killing of them. It would be futile to consider the Western point of view on the treatment and killing of nonhuman animals from third world countries like South Africa or India, where the masses are largely dependent on eating and selling nonhuman animals as a livelihood. Even then, are the nonhuman animals entitled to suffer? The argument on the basis of vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism is futile, because there is nothing to prove that a vegetarian person will not be a torturer or kill any living being—Hitler was a vegetarian, whereas Mother Teresa was a non-vegetarian.

Human beings are anthropocentric from the beginning of life. What we do on this earth—claiming ourselves to be superior beings has much to do with our supremacy over vulnerable and weak living beings. When we take an ethical stance on the killing of nonhuman animals, we cannot avoid the long history of eating nonhuman animals and its socioeconomic relation. Academic arguments or philosophical thinking cannot merely avoid the truth—we cannot wake up one fine morning and stop the killing of nonhuman animals. For our own sake only, we need to think about the treatment we impose on nonhuman animals. The question of the treatment of nonhuman animals has to be correlated with other issues that worry us in our time. In the first place, we need to ask, how do we treat fellow human beings? How do we treat nonhuman animals? Do we have the right to inflict pain? In the larger scenario, what is an obvious question: does our anthropocentrism pose a threat to the planet? Where are we advancing?⁴ In his 1995 Granta essay “Meat Country,” Coetzee says:

The question of whether we should eat meat is not a serious question. The ‘should’ in the question is anomalous: bringing ‘should’ into contact with eating meat, as with bringing ‘should’ into contact with sex, is like asking, ‘Should we be ourselves?’ Interpreted to mean ‘Should we be what we have made ourselves to be?’ The question might perhaps be a real one. But we have not made ourselves to be creatures with sexual itches and a hunger for flesh. We are born like that: it is a

and usher in a new epoch in the history of life The prospect of this ‘volitional evolutionary’ – a species deciding what to do about its own heredity – will present the most profound intellectual and ethical choices humanity will be positioned godlike to take control of its ultimate fate. It can, if it chooses, alter not just anatomy and intelligence of the species but also the emotions and creative drive that compose the very core of human nature” (qtd. in Gray 5). Though many biologists and social scientists have attacked him, but seeing the present scenario of the world one can guess that he has spoken the hard truth.

⁴ We are in an asymmetric situation, where the nation state does not control mass destruction but the individuals, and this is the result of the new digital technology, like “Genome Sequence” which can decide the complete DNA sequence of an organism. Because of digital technology an individual can spread pandemic, it comes through even one’s FedEx box. William Nelson Joy, American computer scientist, has written thus:

The 21st century technologies – genetics, nanotechnologies and robotics – are so powerful that they can spawn whole new classes of accidents and abuses. Most dangerously, for the first time, these accidents and abuses are widely within the reach of individuals or small groups. They will not require large facilities or raw materials. Knowledge alone will enable the use of them. Thus we have the possibility not just of weapons of mass destruction but of knowledge-enabled mass destruction (KMD), this destructiveness hugely amplified by the power of self-replication (qtd in Gray 13). These are real threats that largely have been created by the government with educating the masses, and informing about the moral and ethical responsibility of an individual.

given, it is the human condition. We would not be here, we would not be asking the question, if our forebears had eaten grass: we would be antelopes or horses. (Coetzee 46)

What we need to understand is life in its whole form. “Respect for life, one might call it It is not death that is offensive, but killing, and killing only of a certain kind, killing accompanied by ‘unnecessary pain.’ Somehow the imagination knows what the other’s pain is like, even the ant’s pain” (Coetzee 49). Applying imagination and inferring knowledge, we try to understand the pain of the Other. Otherwise, the pain of the Other is generally considered as doubtful because of its invisibility. It is through the knowledge and experience of pain that we reach out to understand the pain of the Other. Moreover, it is through our own understanding of pain we understand the pain of the Other.⁵

Writing about the condition of nonhuman animals, Coetzee utilizes the fictional mode to raise various moral and ethical issues. His work has been criticized for concealing “the interest of a different sort of apolitical focus. . .” and for “his flirtations with political correctness” as having a nervous and self-canceling quality” (Fromm 341-42). Dealing with the issues of desire, cruelty, and human values, Coetzee leaves an open ground to see the various facets of the issues, without passing judgment. He presents the conflicting views and dramatizes them in order to stress the importance of knowledge and thinking, and to show that the treatment of nonhuman animals has to be included in the larger nature of our moral thinking. Even in the biomedical literature, the discussion on the nonhuman animal’s pain is very minimal, and the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) confines itself to human pain. This leads to the question of what we do not know, and mostly cannot know, about the undiscussed pain of the nonhuman animals.⁶ For Coetzee, “an unmediated experience of the world we have to fall back on empathy with animals” (Stranger Shores 85). Writing about Rilke’s view on animals Coetzee quotes “What is out there, we know it from the animal’s face alone, for the young child we turn around and compel to look back seeing form/formation [Gestaltung], not the open [das Offne], that in animal vision is so deep” (85). As Rilke writes:

What is outside, we read solely from the animal’s gaze,
for we compel even the young child to turn and look back at
preconceived things,

⁵ For a good discussion of the concept of pain and the necessity of the knowledge of pain see Charles Sayward’s “Applying the Concept of Pain.”

⁶ The reception of the pain of nonhuman animals is paradoxical; the human being’s response to pain is limited—either as a form of sympathy or for the sake of an argument—to satisfying human needs. Human beings’ abstention from the understanding of the nonhuman animals’ pain is—and there are many philosophers, activists, sociologists writing and debating on the pain of nonhuman animals—anthropocentric. Pain is not a singular, straight line of emotional artifacts. The most obvious justification of pain is given either a biological or religious connotation. In case of nonhuman animals’ pain—in most cases they are the receivers—the biomedical literature is not satisfactory—the IASP automatically refers to pain as human-centered. The centrality of human beings’ pain has left the pain of the nonhuman animals un-discussed.

never to know the acceptance so deeply set inside
the animal's face. (85)

ELIZABETH COSTELLO argues for the condition and treatment of nonhuman animals through a series of questions and discussions in her two lectures: "The Philosopher's Animal," and "The Poets and the Animals." These two chapters of Elizabeth Costello (2003) are part of Coetzee's lectures at "The Tanner Lectures on Human Values" sponsored by Princeton University, and they were later published as *The Lives of Animals* (2016)⁷. J M Coetzee's presence in the public platforms is an unusual one—he delivers his speech through stories. The form that Coetzee chooses in Elizabeth Costello/ *The Lives of Animals* counts as an academic novel—a minor genre that is popular in our time. Without writing about the issues directly, these kinds of novels take up different important issues in a narrative form to have a direct narrative effect.⁸ Through stories, Coetzee raises moral and ethical questions related to the abuse and torture of nonhuman animals.⁹ How do we treat nonhuman animals? Do we have the right to treat them unfairly? The conditions

⁷Coetzee's "Tanner Lectures on Human Values" were delivered at Princeton University on 15-16 October 1997. In many cases there are similarities between J M Coetzee and John Berger. They both endorsed the idea that they are story tellers, and their job is to tell stories. John Berger in his poem "Story Tellers" writes:

Writing

crouched beside death
we are his secretaries

Reading by the candle of life

we complete his ledgers

Where he ends,

my colleagues,

we start, either side of the corpse

And when we cite him

we do so

for we know the story is almost over. (Berger 14)

⁸ In classics, Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) and Randall Jarell's *Pictures from an Institution* (1954) are of that kind. In recent years David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975), and *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984) are such instances.

⁹Coetzee's fiction, especially *Elizabeth Costello* and *Disgrace* have invited many philosophers and professors of philosophy for discussion like Peter Singer (Princeton University), Stephen Mulhall (Philosopher and Fellow of New College, Oxford), Alice Carry (Professor of Philosophy, New School for Social Research, New York), Michael Funk Deckard (Lenoir-Rhyne University, North Carolina), Alena Dvorakova (University College, Dublin), Ido Greiger (Ben-Gurion University), Anton Leist (University Of Zurich), Robert Pippin (University of Chicago), and Samantha Vice (Rhodes University). Derek Attridge shares his experience in his book *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*:

I was lucky enough to be in the auditorium at Princeton University on October 15, 1997 when Professor John Coetzee rose to deliver "The Philosophers and the Animals"—the first of two Tanner Lectures on Human Values he was giving that year under the general title "The Lives of Animals." This was, of course, J.M Coetzee the novelist, but his presence in an academic setting made one particularly conscious of his status as Professor of General Literature at the University of Cape Town (Attridge 192).

through which nonhuman animals live is painful—one might argue that they are accustomed to their conditions. But who is responsible for such conditions? If somebody does not belong to our race, does it mean that she/he deserves any less equality or is entitled to be exploited? In the same way, what applies to the nonhuman animals' kingdom? Nonhuman animals are considered less intelligent or their lack of communication through language does not justify the treatment they get. Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham asks:

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholding from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? (qtd. in Singer's *Practical Ethics* 49-50)

The moral question is: can they suffer? Human beings have always considered nonhuman animals as fit for subjugation, because of their perceived lack of personal autonomy. The controversial segments of Costello's lecture are (i) the reference to Kafka's *Red Peter*, (ii) the comparison of the killing of animals with the killing of Jews in the Third Reich. Provoking the audience (of course the readers too) to pursue an ethical stance on the treatment of the animals, Costello argues:

They went like sheep to the slaughter. They died like animals. The Nazi butchers killed them. Denunciation of the camps reverberates so fully with the language of the stockyard and slaughterhouse that it is barely necessary for me to prepare the ground for the comparison I am about to make. The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals. (AL 20)

She further elaborates her arguments:

It was and is inconceivable that people who did not know (in that special sense) about the camps can be fully human. In our chosen metaphors, it was they and not their victims who were the beasts. By treating fellow human beings, beings created in the images of God, like beasts, they had themselves become beasts. (AL 21)

After this part of the lecture ("The Philosophers and the Animals) and before the second lecture ("The Poets and the Animals"), there was a reception in Costello's honor. One of the faculty members Abraham Stern neither comes for the dinner nor for the second lecture. Rather he sends a note in the form of a letter:

Dear Mrs. Costello,

Excuse me for not attending last night's dinner. I have read your books and know you are a serious person, so I do you the credit of taking what you said in your lecture seriously. At the kernel of your lecture, it seemed to me, was the question of breaking bread. If we refuse to break bread with the executioners of Auschwitz, can we continue to break bread with the slaughterers of animals? You took over for your own purposes the familiar comparison between the murdered Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle. The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say. That is a trick with words which I will not accept. You misunderstand the nature of likenesses; I would even say you misunderstand willfully, to the point of blasphemy. Man is made in the likeness of God but God does not have the likeness of man. If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way.

Forgive me if I am forthright. You said you were old enough not to have time to waste on niceties, and I am an old man too.

Yours sincerely,

Abraham Stern. (LA 50)

Costello does not reply. We see her directly delivering her second lecture at the Stubbs room in the English Department talking about Rilke's "The Panther," Ted Hughes's "The Jaguar" and "Second Glance at a Jaguar." The analogy that Costello draws between the killing of the Jews and the killing of nonhuman animals is horrifying and controversial. Stern's note which draws a parallel argument, is not refutable, and Costello's comparison has a truth in it. What then, are we to make of it?

Coetzee/Costello is provoking the human conscience and the form of human knowledge. Her comparison between the Jews and the nonhuman animals is certainly a controversial argument. The whole section reflects her engagement and her effort to make sense of the cruelty to nonhuman animals. Understanding and thinking are interconnected. As long as thinking takes place, understanding grows. Understanding cannot just take place—it has to be developed through some sort of thinking—simply without reflecting on our acts. The structure of pain is complex. Its complexity lies in the complexity of the brain. After various scientific research in the field of pain, experts have argued that pain is processed in multiple regions.¹⁰ The knowledge of pain apart from the visibility of the suffering, mostly depends on the sense of recognition.

The analogy Costello draws between the killing of the Jews and the animals emphasizes that we are all animals. Though striking, this kind of analogy is not new in literature. In the Iliad, Homer draws an analogy between a horse's death and a soldier's death. For Homer both deaths are equal

¹⁰ In case of ultrasound, human beings are oblivious, but it is painful for animals like dogs in an ultrasonic signal at 22 KHz and 150 decibels. On the other hand a human (might) feel pain walking bare foot on a floor with a temperature of 45 degree temperature.

(Homer xvi). The metaphoric reference certainly captures the superlative quality, but it also brings forth life and death in equal terms. As David Ritchie puts it in his *Natural Rights*:

If the recognition of Animal Rights is compatible with the kindly use of a horse as a beast of burden, would not a kindly negro-slavery be also perfectly compatible with the recognition of Natural Rights generally? And if we discriminate between what may be rightly done to the mollusc from what may be rightly done to the mammal, on the grounds of different grade of sentience, should we not also . . . discriminate between what may be rightly done to lower and higher races among mankind – the lower and less civilized being undoubtedly less capable of acute feeling? (Ritchie 107-8)

These kinds of analogies that these texts draw are not to undermine the value of human life, but to point out the modes of imagination through which we can certainly bring change in our ways of looking at the lives of all creatures. Elaine Mark, a faculty of the English Department, asks Costello:

Are you not expecting too much of humankind when you ask us to live without species exploitation, without cruelty? Is it not more human to accept our own humanity—even if it means embracing the carnivorous Yahoo within ourselves—than to end up like Gulliver, pining for a state he can never attain, and for good reasons: it is not in his nature, which is a human nature? (LA 55)

Acknowledging that it is a good question, Costello replies:

I find Swift an intriguing writer But he can't mean that, we say, because we all know that it is atrocious to kill and eat human babies. Yet, come to think of it, we go on, the English are already in a sense killing human babies, by letting them starve. So, come to think of it, the English are already atrocious. . . . If it is atrocious to kill and eat human babies, why is it not atrocious to kill and eat piglets? (LA 56)

The genocidal violence of the Nazi regime is not the end of such violence, human beings continue such monstrous acts even today and justify them with different political and religious connotations. Coetzee's analogies and metaphors are not new. After three years of Nazi regime, Aristotlean scholar A. M. MacIver writes: "The ultimate sufferers are likely to be our fellow men, because the conclusion is likely to be, not that we ought to treat the brutes like human beings, but that there is no good reason why should not treat human beings like brute" (qtd. in Bourke 183). Is it difficult to assess the results of these analogies? Even after the Holocaust, various other forms of killings go on. Human beings have not stopped killing other human beings, so how do we expect that these analogies will help to stop the torture of nonhuman animals? Costello's son asks her: "Do you really believe, Mother, that poetry classes are going to close down the slaughterhouses?" and Costello says "No"; she later states: "If I do not convince you, that is because my words, here, lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness, the unabstracted, unintellectual nature, of that animal being" (LA 65).

RED PETER, an ape reports to an academy the method and evolution of his transformation from an ape to a human being. Belonging to the Gold Coast, Red Peter was shot twice (one bullet hit his cheek and another lodged itself below his hip), captured, and confined in a cage for five years. The wound was severe and he had to limp a little. He describes the cage as follows:

The whole construction was too low for me to stand up in and too narrow to sit down in. So I had to squat my knees bent and trembling all the time, and also, since probably for a time I wished to see no one, and to stay in the dark, my face was turned toward the locker while the bars of the cage cut into my flesh behind. (Kafka 131)

Red Peter's painful confinement made him to decide a way out. He could not think of freedom because freedom "prove[s] to be an illusion" (Kafka132). He can only think of a small thing, a way out. So he realized that he had to do what humans do. He started imitating the human's action, observing everything carefully. It was not difficult for him to follow the men, their gestures. He waited, though, to copy the exact gestures. First, he learned how to spit. It took a few days for him to imitate human behavior—they spat, he spat. The difference was he licked his face after the spat, they don't. Slowly he learned how to smoke, though it was difficult for him to make the "difference between an empty pipe and a full pipe". The most difficult task for him was to uncork the wine bottle and drink (Fig 4.1).¹¹ The taste of the spirit was horrible and initially, he threw the bottle. Red Peter and his teacher, both of them did not like this. Red Peter wanted to master all the gestures and habits of humans. So he had to do it. One day finally he took the bottle and drank the wine like his master, "like a professional drinker" (Kafka136), and after finishing the bottle he shouted "Hallo", and the people around him shouted too: "Listen, he's is talking!" (Kafka136). In front of the Academy, Red Peter says: "I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings, I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason" (Kafka 136).

¹¹ An Orang-Utan from Borneo, captured by Carl Hagenbeck, and kept as a pet. In his autobiography *Beasts and Men* he provides several pictures and descriptions of capturing of baboons, exactly how Kafka has described in his story.



Fig. 4.1. Carl Hagenbeck. *Beasts and Men*.1909. *What it Means to be Human: Historical Reflections From the 1800s to the Present*. By Joanna Bourke. Counterpoint. 2011.

Franz Kafka wrote “A Report to an Academy” towards the end of the First World War and introduced Red Peter to us. However he is not real, and it comes from Kafka’s imagination. However, Kafka might have read or was somehow aware of Carl Hagenbeck’s memoir *Beasts and Men* (1909) where he has caged animals transported to Europe (Fig 4.2). As Red Peter mentions: “Yet as far as Hagenbeck was concerned, the place for ape was in front of a locker-well then, I had to stop being an ape” (Kafka 132).



Fig. 4.2. Carl Hagenbeck. *Beasts and Men*.1909. *What it Means to be Human: Historical Reflections From the 1800s to the Present*. By Joanna Bourke. Counterpoint. 2011

Kafka’s Red Peter’s deliberate attempts to follow human instinct reflect the devastation that humans wrecked on other humans in the World War. The story shows that it is the mode of

communication, language, that distinguishes nonhuman animals from human beings. As Darwin has already shown, all animals are products of the evolutionary process. Different researchers have already demonstrated the sense of empathy in nonhuman animals and their mode of communication through silent language. People who have lost hearing and speaking ability largely depend on the sign language. “Promoters of sign language tended to see signing as a gift of God: it bypassed the problems caused by the proliferation of spoken languages (the Tower of Babel) and their inherent tendency to dissimulate. The signing was, therefore, ‘natural’ to all humans, mute or not” (Bourke 52). Red Peter’s first exercise was to imitate the gesture as a medium of the sign. It had taken him five years to learn the behavioral patterns of human beings. But he emphasizes to the gentlemen of the academy: “Your life as apes gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be further removed from you than mine is from me” and “everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike” (Kafka 130).

Kafka’s Red Peter hints at our nudity—the animality in us. He emphasizes that he can show the scar on his hip, by taking his trousers down to the members of the academy because a newspaper has reported that Red Peter’s ape-nature is not yet under his control. He further says: “when the plain truth is in question, great minds discard the niceties of refinement” (Kafka 131). The sense of nudity has gone back from Red Peter; he is now with human beings who were once, like him, nude. But they cannot go back to nudity because they have realized their nakedness. When a cat looked at the naked Derrida, he was confused to decide whether he would be ashamed or not. Derrida argues “that the property unique to animals and what in the final analyses distinguish them from man, is their being naked without knowing it The animal therefore, is not naked because it is naked” and “There is no nudity in ‘nature.’ There is only the sentiment . . .” (Derrida 374). The behavioral patterns of human beings are both instinctive and imitative. A child does not know the difference between being naked and being clothed. It is the mother or the caretaker who covers her/him in cloth. The child slowly learns the sense of modesty or shame. The distance and the binary (man/animal) we have created, have pushed the nonhuman animal far from the same race. Therefore Derrida asks:

Who I am therefore?

Who is it that I am (following)?

Who should this be asked of if not of the other?

And perhaps the cat itself? (Derrida 374)

Although Elizabeth Costello argues that Kafka has probably read Wolfgang Köhler’s *The Mentality of Apes* (1917), there are different versions of the source of Kafka’s story. But that is not so important because we know that whatever is the source, Kafka pinches his readers and reminds them of ape-like nature. Kafka was certainly preoccupied with the devastation of the World War and its implications. What reasons are left then if human beings kill other human beings? Kafka’s Red Peter’s story of the past to the Academy is to make his audience realize the

pain of the Other. Pain underlines the existence of Others as a gift. Pain as pain designates the Other as the Other. Red Peter's story is thus an appeal to our humanity, and Kafka delivers it through Red Peter himself. Here Kafka is aware that it is difficult to read somebody's mind. Fiction and truth juxtapose simultaneously in search of truth, and we forget whether the story is by Kafka or Red Peter. Thomas Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?" raises the question of the otherness of the animal, and Nagel suggests that it is not possible to experience the life of a bat because of the use of sonar or echolocation which is subjectively impossible for human beings. He argues:

Our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited. It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task. (Nagel 439)

Nagel's idea and his argument is another reductionist approach to limit the consciousness and imagination of the being. Is it possible to set up a continuum for every living thing? To end up with what it is to be a dog, a horse, an ape, a woman, or a man?

It is the knowledge that provides us with the embodied self. We cannot be a corpse to realize death. Knowledge tells us what it is to be a corpse: "The knowledge we have is not abstract—'All human beings are mortal, I am a human being, therefore I am a mortal'—but embodied. For a moment we are that knowledge. We live the impossible: we live beyond our death, look back on it, yet look back as only a dead self can" (LA 32). It is only through the paradigm of my experience and knowledge that I can understand the life of the Other, and in that case, pain becomes a medium, a firsthand experience that we all go through. It is through the experience and understanding of pain that we can reach close to the Other. The various misconceptions of supremacy that human beings have over nonhuman animals have created the binary of man/animal. One cannot realize one's being in the confinement of a binary. Confinement of any kind is the confinement of the being, the embodied self. It is to evaluate how we look at the prisoners who are also treated as nonhuman animals.¹² As Costello observes:

Fullness of being is a state hard to sustain in confinement. Confinement to prison is the form of punishment that the West favors and does its best to impose on the rest of the world through the means of the condemning other forms of punishment (beating, torture, mutilation, execution) as cruel and unnatural. What does this suggest to us about ourselves? To me it suggests that the freedom of the body to move in space is targeted as the point at which reason can most painfully

¹² I am using the word animal here because that is how law treats and calls a human being who is a criminal in the eyes of the law.

and effectively harm the being of the other. And indeed it is on creatures least able to bear confinement—creatures who conform least to Descartes’s picture of the soul as a pea imprisoned in a shell, to which further imprisonment is irrelevant—that we see the most devastating effects: in zoos, in laboratories, institutions (LA 33-34)

We create false propositions and reasons to satisfy our needs, even to kill another human being. We create a god and destroy it for our own sake. How are we different from the nonhuman animals? It is not that we think therefore we are, but it is the awareness of both, the whole consciousness that we are, and therefore: “To be alive is to be a living soul. An animal—and we are all animals—is an embodied soul” and “a heavily affective sensation—of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes’s key state, which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell” (LA 33).

Red Peter does not remain in Kafka; he becomes Coetzee’s spokesperson in the *Lives of Animals* or *Elizabeth Costello*. The lives of animals feature as a recurring theme in almost all of Coetzee’s works. Most of his narratives move around third world countries like South Africa where human beings’ life is politically vulnerable and measurable, and Coetzee’s nonhuman animals are an integral part of the narrative. Incorporating nonhuman animals in his narratives, Coetzee follows a pattern in which pain and impending death reinforce one another. Coetzee’s narrative of pain evokes the sympathetic imagination in those who have not experienced pain. Pain is enabled in us, embedded, and because of pain we exist, and because we exist we are vulnerable like Kafka’s ape who is “embedded in life. It is the embeddedness that is important, not the life itself. His ape is embedded as we are embedded, you in me, I in you Kafka stays awake during the gaps when we are sleeping. That is where Kafka fits in” (EC 32).

“DO FISH FEEL PAIN? CAN PARROTS THINK?” asks Coetzee in his foreword to Jonathan Balcombe’s *Second Nature: The Inner Lives of Animals*. He points out that the understanding of the pain of nonhuman animals comes from self-serving knowledge rather than scientific treatises. He further argues:

Ordinary people do not need to have something proved to them scientifically before they will believe it. They believe it because their parents believed it, or because it is accepted as so in the circles in which they move, or because figures of authority say it is so. Mostly, however, people believe what they want to believe, what it suits them to believe. Thus: fish feel no pain. (Balcombe 10)¹³

¹³ Talking about animal sensitivity, Balcombe takes up British ethologist Donald Broom’s argument that “fishes may in some cases suffer more than we do, for they may lack ways that we have for dealing with pain. For instance, humans can be told (or we can tell ourselves) that a pain will not last for long, whereas fishes presumably are unable to do so” (Balcombe 17). The lack of cognition reduced their sense of time, which also means they have less anticipation of past and future.

Purely utilitarian motives are usually behind human beings' attribution of pain to nonhuman animals.¹⁴ Human beings have placed themselves at the center of everything. This position of 'man' being at the center—anthropocentric—has led to the claim that 'man' is a superior being. The knowledge of pain has also served as an instrument to inflict pain on others on the grounds of economic supremacy, political enforcement, and racial and religious superiority. The general attitude towards nonhuman animals is instrumental. Utility overrides moral responsibility. Bentham's question 'Can they suffer?', as Derrida argues, "is disturbed by certain passivity . . . that testifies to a sufferance, a passion, a not-being-able" (Derrida 396). Derrida proposes that it is not only a matter "to speak, to reason, and so on," but we need to recognize "the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing . . ." (Derrida 396).

Elizabeth Costello's empathy for the animal is unconditional, whereas her son John is caught between his mother's position and his wife Norma's criticism about his mother: "It's naive, John. It's the kind of easy shallow relativism that impress freshmen. Respect for everyone's worldview . . . the squirrel's worldview, and so forth . . . it leads to total intellectual paralysis Human beings invent mathematics . . . they press a button, and, bang, Sojourner lands on Mars . . ." (LA 47). John, a professor of Chemistry thinks: "Isn't there a position outside from which our doing and thinking and then sending out a Mars probe looks a lot like a squirrel doing its thinking and then dashing out and snatching a nut?" (LA48). Coetzee's narrative of the nonhuman animal deals with man-animal-nature in a relational pattern; one is not apart from another. His understanding and the role of fiction in delivering the condition of the voiceless does not rest in reason but towards the condition of nonhuman animals.¹⁵ As he has mentioned in the Foreword:

It used to be thought—and probably still is, in some quarters—that what set man apart from mere beasts was the possession of reason. The argument was a subtle one, with profound implications. Reason—God-given reason—was what the mind of man had in common with the mind of God. It was only because his mind was like (even if infinitely inferior to) his creator's that man was able to comprehend, to however minuscule an extent, how the world worked. Mere animals might be able to respond and adjust to the world in which they found themselves, but they would never, properly speaking, be able to understand it because their minds lacked the active principle infusing the universe, namely reason. They (together with their minds) would always be merely part of nature; they could never be masters of nature. (Balcombe ix)

¹⁴ The question, "do animals experience conscious pain?" has not been asked and explored so far in a more systematic manner. It only remained as a debate within the nonhuman animals welfare movement, but it is a pertinent question for scientists and philosophers of mind. For a good discussion please see Carrie Rohman's *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (2009).

¹⁵ By voiceless I mean the nonhuman animal. Voice is not only a medium of making some sound to have some communication. It also assures one's validity of its own subjectivity. The common usage of 'raise your voice' is not only limited to increasing the tonal sound. It also establishes an ethical self. In that way 'voiceless' could any living being who fails to claim its/her/his own voice for any kind of injustice they, she, or he confronts.

The narrative of nonhuman animals' pain demonstrates our vulnerability to them, and it helps to reflect our vulnerable condition. For dying Mrs. Curren "There is something degrading about the way it all ends—degrading not only to us but to the idea we have ourselves, of humankind. People lying in dark bedrooms, in their own mess, helpless. People lying in hedges in the rain" (AI 140). Elizabeth Costello's lectures seem like a closing speech for the pain and lives of the animals in Coetzee's oeuvre. His protagonists are not outside of the planet; they are very much part of the world where the lives of nonhuman animals matter. As Lucy sums up, "there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals" (Disgrace 74). Animality is the essence through which we are, it is not a humiliation, and if it is, it is a good place:

To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.

Like a dog.

Yes, like a dog. (Disgrace 205)

Similarly, when an interviewer Susan Moebus asks Costello's son John whether he would have considered her mother a key writer if she would have been a man, John says: "But my mother has been a man. She has also been a dog. She can think her way into other people, into other existences. I have read her; I know. It is within her powers. Isn't that what is most important about fiction: that it takes us out of ourselves, into other lives?" (EC 22-3).¹⁶ Coetzee is neither representing the Animal Movement nor writing a philosophical treatise on nonhuman animals. His constant engagement with animals, especially dogs, and his use of animal metaphors projects that human beings are somewhere lost like nonhuman animals. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate

¹⁶ In 1872, an unidentified Englishwoman writes a letter to the editor of the *Times*, complaining about the ill-treatment of women as lesser human, and inferior to animals. She writes:

ARE WOMEN ANIMALS
TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, – Whether women are the equals of men has been endlessly debated; whether they have souls has been a moot point; but can it be too much to ask [for] a definitive acknowledgement that at least they are animals? . . . Many hon. members may object to the proposed Bill enacting that, in status respecting the suffrage, 'wherever words occur which import the masculine gender they shall be held to include women;' but could any object to the insertion of a clause in another Act that 'whenever the word "animal" occurs it shall be held to include women? Suffer me, through your columns, to appeal to our 650 [parliamentary] representatives, and ask – Is there not one among you then who will introduce such a motion? There would then be at least an equal interdict on wanton barbarity to cat, dog, or woman . . .

Yours respectfully
AN EARNEST ENGLISHWOMAN (qtd. in Bourke 1)

The Earnest Englishwoman is angry because all parliamentarians were not allowed to give vote to the women. And in many cases the Western regulations is more punitive on the cruelty against animal than women. So she complains and feels that women should be allowed to become animal to get the benefits that they are not given. Though the law in Western countries is strict about the cruelty to nonhuman animals, there are several factories where the treatment of the nonhuman animal is inhuman. The letter serves to show the difference that men have made between themselves.

repeatedly compares his pain with the dogs: “I trot around the room holding my face, whining like a dog” (WB 108); “There is no way of dying allowed me, it seems, except like a dog in a corner” (WB 117); “[I am] the filthy creature who for a week licked his food off the flagstones like a dog” (WB 124). For Michael K, human beings serve dog’s purposes as watchdogs or police dogs. In the Age of Iron Verceuil and his dog can be separated, for Mrs. Curren Verceuil is “yellow-eyed, defiant. Dog-man!” (AI 56); she recognizes Verceuil through his dog: “[the dog does] lick my face, lick my lips, lick up the salt of my tears. Kisses, if one wanted to look at the same time... . . Mr. Vercueil? I croaked, and the dog whined with excitement, giving a great sneeze straight into my face” (AI 160). Verceuil and his dog become healers, and the pain goes away, a satisfaction of touch and love: “Where was the pain? Was the pain in a better humor too?” (AI 160). Towards the end of the novel, Mrs. Curren writes to her daughter: “From the side of her shadow husband your mother writes. Forgive me if the picture [Mrs. Curren sends a picture of her, Verceuil, and the dog] offends you. One must love what is nearest. One must love what is to hand, as a dog loves” (AI 191); the dog and the dog-man become her strength against pain, against death, so she thinks she is “well guarded. Death would think twice before trying to pass this dog, this man” (AI 191). The dog-man becomes an epithet in Coetzee’s work. In *Disgrace* Petrus who takes care of Lucy’s farm and her dogs becomes a dog-man: “A dog-man, Petrus once called himself. Well, now he has become a dog-man: a dog undertaker; a dog psychopomp; a harijan” (*Disgrace* 146). The chain of thought we follow in these analogies and conceit are dog-man / man-dog / death-dog-man/ man-death-dog/ dog-man-death. It reveals the brutal condition of several people like Vercueil and Petrus, living with dogs, and the dogs become the watchman-dog and the man becomes dog-watchman.

The dog comes on every page of *Disgrace*. The dogs represent Lurie’s animality, his process of becoming, lost like the dogs who are killed either by the doctor Bev Shaw or by the boys who rape Lucy. It represents South Africa’s suffering animals (*Disgrace* 84): “grilled meat,” “burning meat,” “soup-bones,” “blood,” “brains,” “bones,” “meatballs,” “dog-meat,” “stench of chicken feathers,” “carcasses of pigs,” “boiling offal,” “mutton chops,” “singed fur,” “fried chicken,” “butcher’s meat,” “mess of bones and feathers,” “carrion.” The nonhuman animals’ suffering is as painful as human beings.

A work of art transgresses the self-servitude boundary and helps to open “a faculty, sympathy, that allows us to share at times the being of another,” and “there are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else . . . and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it” (LA 34-5; “emphasis in original”). The imaginative process involved in the work of an artist makes a pathway to imagine what it is not but to be. That is what Beckett has done, Shakespeare has done, and Joyce has done, and that is why Costello emphasizes: “Marion Bloom never existed. Marion Bloom was a figment of James Joyce’s imagination. If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of Life” (LA 35; “emphasis in original”). Costello thinks Wolfgang Köhler would have been a good man, but he is

not a poet, because if a poet had captivated a chimpanzee, he would have done something when they were loping around in a circle, naked, and carrying rubbish. For Costello “Hughes’s “The Jaguar” shows us that “we too can embody animals—by the process called poetic invention that mingles breath and sense in a way that no one has explained and no one ever will” (LA 53), Her son asks: “Do you really believe, Mother, that poetry classes are going to close down the slaughterhouses?” She says “No” (LA 58). He emphasizes: “Then why do it” (LA 58). We can get the answer when Djuren Ratt asks Coetzee in an interview:

What consequences, if any do you think receiving the Nobel Prize will have for the animal rights issue? (Ratt 1)

Coetzee says:

Some reviewers have made the connection between the chapters of Elizabeth Costello that are concerned with animals and the fact that their author has won this year’s Nobel Prize, and have asked the question whether the author believes what his character Elizabeth Costello says about the appalling treatment of animals in our modern world. I do not imagine that a single, rather difficult book will change the world in that respect, but perhaps it will make some small impact. (Ratt 1)

The value of literature lies in its expression, observing the dilemmas of human existence with nothing but the search for the truth. Coetzee is not a medical doctor who shows the value of life in terms of higher consciousness and lesser consciousness.

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