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## Modest Heroism: *Beowulf* and Competitive Altruism

Eric Luttrell

### Christian Virtues or Human Virtues?

Over the past decade, adaptations of *Beowulf* in popular media have portrayed the eponymous hero as a dim-witted and egotistical hot-head. This is unfortunate, given that in the Old English poem he is a paragon of personal restraint and social intelligence. Though he is described as having the strength of thirty warriors and having a long history of slaying superhuman monsters, *Beowulf* shows considerable modesty and deference in his dialogue and action throughout the poem. Some of the poem's most influential scholars have invoked the hero's virtues as evidence of a deeply-rooted Christian ethos. However, the virtues thus described precisely resemble an evolutionarily advantageous array of pro-social traits that would constitute a selection advantage for individuals who possessed them. Cross-cultural evidence suggests that the virtues which scholars have attributed to Christianity are not exclusive to that or any religion and cannot be used as evidence of the poem's cultural origin.

For two centuries, scholars have debated whether or not *Beowulf* could have originated in an oral tradition predating the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. Nineteenth century philologists contended that the poem's occasional references to God, sin, and Cain, were late interpolations added by the Christian monks who transcribed the poem from a pagan original (or originals) in the early eleventh century. In the early twentieth century, this hypothesis fell out of favor with scholars who preferred to see the poem as an indivisible thematic whole composed by a single author in a uniformly Christian cultural milieu. Frederick Klaeber, whose edition of the poem remains the standard, insists that:

[T]he general impression we obtain from reading the poem is certainly the opposite of pagan barbarism. . . . Predominantly Christian are the general tone of the poem and its ethical viewpoint. We are no longer in a genuine pagan atmosphere. The virtues of moderation, unselfishness, consideration for others are practiced and appreciated. The manifest readiness to express gratitude to God on all imaginable occasions . . . and the poet's sympathy with weak and unfortunate beings . . . are typical of the new note.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, Klaeber notes, “The main characters, Beowulf and Hrothgar, have undergone an astonishing spiritualization and moral refinement.”<sup>2</sup> Klaeber does not describe what sort of moral character Beowulf and Hrothgar would have exhibited before Christian spiritualization or what sort of ethics would constitute a “genuine pagan atmosphere,” but he clearly presumes they would be devoid of moderation, unselfishness, or consideration for others, and that it would necessarily constitute “barbarism.”<sup>3</sup>

The assumption that a non-Christian hero must be a savage did not begin or end with Klaeber.<sup>4</sup> For many influential scholars, the implication that *Beowulf* might have non-Christian roots is tantamount to an attack on the poem's moral and artistic value. In a series of articles collectively titled *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, frequently recommended in discussions of the poem's religiosity, Eric Stanley is unambiguous:

The aim of these chapters is to point to the continuity of a critical attitude which exalts whatever in the Germanic literature of the Dark Ages is primitive (that is, pagan), and belittles or even fails to understand whatever in it is civilized, learned, and cosmopolitan (that is, inspired by Christianity).<sup>5</sup>

In their lengthy introduction to the current scholarly standard edition of the poem, Fulk, Bjork, and Niles maintain Klaeber's judgment almost verbatim:

Predominantly religious in nature are the general tone of the poem and its ethical viewpoint. . . . The virtues of moderation, unselfishness, and consideration for others – virtues restricted to no particular religion, but associated with Christian precepts – are both practiced and appreciated. Particularly striking is the moral refinement of the two principal characters, Beowulf and Hroðgar.<sup>6</sup>

Even in their attempt to avoid derogating other religions, the editors ratify the assumption that morality originates in religion. This assumption is characteristic not only of religious commitments but of twentieth century theories of cultural

determination. In the standard social science model<sup>7</sup> nearly all psychological characteristics, particularly moral beliefs, are assumed to be learned by the individual from the surrounding culture. While we may say that the expression of moral tendencies differs according to cultural context, this does not mean that morals as basic as those listed above originate in any single culture or belief system. Not only are the virtues of moderation, unselfishness, and consideration for others independent of any particular religion, but the delicate balance between heroism, self-sacrifice, and modesty that exemplify the familiar literary “Christ figure” have clear roots in human evolutionary psychology.

### The Evolution of Altruism

Over the last forty years, cognitive psychologists and anthropologists have illustrated the cross-cultural consistency and evolutionary roots of the behaviors Klaeber and his successors attribute to Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Altruism, the willingness to sacrifice one’s own interest to benefit another, does not require theological imperatives. Humans are social animals. Even our susceptibility to cultural influence is, itself, a biological adaptation. Our success as a species depended on our ability to cooperate in defense, food acquisition, and habitat manipulation. Cooperation, if it is to be sustainable, demands that reciprocation be enforced and community benefits denied those who only exploit others. If we did not come hardwired to detect cheaters, those who reap the rewards without sharing the cost would out-reproduce those who sacrificed, and the genes for cooperation would quickly disappear.<sup>9</sup> Cognitive predispositions for reciprocal altruism enabled early humans to cooperate with non-kin to their own ultimate benefit.<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean that cooperation is limited to immediate and direct reciprocity. People donate money, time, and blood to charities often without ever even seeing the people who benefit from their sacrifice. We may say that virtue is its own reward, but, scientifically speaking, this is only a proximate explanation. Ultimately, there must be some sort of selection benefit to giving without the expectation of return. Richard Alexander proposed a theory of *indirect reciprocity* in which an individual such as a blood donor makes a sacrifice for the benefit of stranger and benefits by an elevation in social status.<sup>11</sup> The later return of an equal amount of blood is not the goal of a blood donor. Such a charitable donation advertises an unselfish partner in whom potential partners can trust, not to mention someone with a healthy physical constitution. In such a scenario, a single act of altruism communicates two things. First, it signals that the individual has a particular ability or access to a particular resource that can benefit others. For example, a hunter who gives away large quantities of meat advertises his skill in hunting. Second, it signals that this individual is not inclined to exploit others or keep tabs on his debtors. These two factors, coupled with the uniquely human capacity for communication, could result in an elevation in social status once word got out that the altruist was uniquely able and uniquely willing to bolster his community. This elevation in status could create far more benefits than direct reciprocity. Controlled studies of the effects of altruism on status corroborate this hypothesis. Hardy and Van Vugt demonstrated that test subjects elevated altruistic co-participants to leadership positions far more frequently and granted them significantly more resources than they did to less altruistic individuals.<sup>12</sup>

This indirect reciprocity and elevation in status support the hypothesis of “competitive altruism.”<sup>13</sup> In this hypothesis, individuals attempt to perform more altruistically than their fellows in public settings in an attempt to elevate their own prestige. “Competitive altruism” might seem to be a contradiction in terms if we assume that an altruist would not deliberately use immediate self-sacrifice as a means to ultimate self-promotion. If the motivation is evolutionary rather than conscious, the pattern will remain the same independent of external or internal explanation by the individual altruist. The proximate motivation may be real compassion, but this begs the question of where genuine compassion comes from and why it is sustainable. In a socially intelligent species such as ours, those who cultivate a reputation for the greatest ability and the greatest willingness to contribute to the good of the group are rewarded with social status, unsolicited resources, and valuable partnership opportunities.

### “Most eager for fame”

The social world of *Beowulf* is a world of competitive altruism. The last word of the poem describes the eponymous hero as *lofgeornost*, “the most eager for fame.” Some scholars have called this a condemnation by the poet of Beowulf’s hubris,<sup>14</sup> but the context suggests otherwise. “They said that, out of all the kings in the world, he was the mildest and most gentle of men, the kindest to his people, and the most eager for fame.”<sup>15</sup> It is unlikely that such terms as “mildest of men,” “most gentle,” or “kindest” would preface an accusation of hubris. Preceded by two positive virtues, it would seem that

his eagerness for fame, not just the fame itself, was considered virtuous.

The desire for fame is encouraged more often than not throughout the poem. Before turning guard duty over to Beowulf for the night, Hrothgar reminds him to “Think of glory and show mighty courage.”<sup>16</sup> After his success, Hrothgar commends him by saying, “Now you, yourself, have done such deeds that your fame will endure always and forever.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, as Wiglaf comes to Beowulf’s aid against the dragon, he encourages his king: “Dear Beowulf, do what in your youth you said you would, never let your fame diminish as long as you live.”<sup>18</sup> Beowulf, himself, consoles Hrothgar upon the death of his thane: “Each of us will continue to wait for the end of life in this world. Let him who can strive for glory before death. That is the best afterward for those bereft of life.”<sup>19</sup> This advice has close parallels in Old Norse literature, which viewed the ethos of its pre-Christian forebears far more favorably than did Anglo-Saxon England. In the *Hávamál*, the Old Norse collection of proverbs attributed to Odin, fame is more prized than wealth, family, or life itself – that is, more than anything that could be exchanged through direct reciprocity. “Cattle die, kinsmen die, one dies oneself just the same, but the fame of renown never dies for any who earns himself that excellence.”<sup>20</sup> These passages are not necessarily normative, and they do not advocate building one’s reputation by deceptive means, but they do advocate demonstrations of personal quality that aim not only to effect an immediate outcome but also to win long-term prestige for the individual.

This focus on cultivating prestige is not culturally exclusive. Studies by Robin Dunbar and colleagues discovered that roughly two-thirds of randomly sampled conversations focused on the individual’s social identity and social network.<sup>21</sup> These two-thirds are evenly divided between exchanging information about other group members and advertising one’s own virtue as a community member. These two foci of discussion serve complimentary roles. In the communication of information about others, the individual acts for the benefit of the group by passing along potentially relevant information by which others may judge who deserves social support and who should be avoided. In advertising his own virtue, the individual acts primarily in his own interest; but, if he really does have some expertise that could benefit the group, he benefits that group by his unique contribution.

We find this same pattern of social conversation in the dialogue of *Beowulf*, and we can easily see its social function for both the group and the individual. When Beowulf comes to Heorot, he enters a traumatized social circle. The king and his most able thanes have failed to rebuff Grendel’s bloody incursions. If an untried warrior announced his plan to succeed where the Danes had failed, it would come as an insult. However, Beowulf has proven himself and his reputation precedes him. When Beowulf is introduced to him, Hrothgar comments: “Reliable seafarers, those who brought the Geats money and goods in thanks, have told me that he has the strength of thirty battle-hardened men in his strength of hand. . . . To this good man I shall offer treasures for his true courage.”<sup>22</sup> Because Beowulf has cultivated his prestige through past actions, and because other men have passed this information on, Hrothgar knows he can invest in a new ally, and Beowulf is granted a means to further increase his prestige.

### Competitive Altruism versus Bragging

Prestige might be fluid and abstract, but can still resemble a zero-sum game. This is perhaps what prompted Roberts to describe the altruism that leads to it as “competitive” rather than merely “public” or “conspicuous.” Beowulf’s reputation grants him entry into Heorot and the hospitality of the king, but it also threatens those who have been courting Hrothgar’s favor long beforehand. Unferth, in particular, feels his own social dislocation at Beowulf’s arrival, and responds by attacking the story upon which Beowulf’s social status depends. He asks, “Are you the Beowulf who strove with Breca on the open sea in a swimming race? There for pride you tested the waters and for brash boasts you risked your life in the deep water.”<sup>23</sup>

Though *lofgeornost* may carry positive connotations, Unferth chooses terms “for wlence . . . ond for dolgilpe” which imply the sort of arrogance indicative of an individual who would place his own status-seeking above the good of his group. The narration of the poem confirms Unferth’s motivation to protect his own comparative prestige: “This quest of Beowulf’s, the brave sea-farer, was a great annoyance to Unferth, since he did not think that any other man on earth, under the heavens, could achieve more fame than he, himself.”<sup>24</sup>

Unferth’s insult sparks a lengthy volley of competitive altruism, with each competitor promoting his own past feats and derogating the other’s as anti-social. Beowulf responds by invoking a direct comparison: “I have never heard anything about you in such deadly straits, sword rages. In the play of battle neither you nor Breca, with a fine sword, has done a deed as bold or daring.”<sup>25</sup> This line is possibly the closest Beowulf comes to a blunt boast. Perhaps for this reason, he follows with the paralepsis, “I do not boast of it!”<sup>26</sup> But Beowulf’s retort is mindful of the social context. He is advertising

himself not merely as a great warrior, but a warrior whose alliance will benefit the community of Heorot far more than Unferth's. "I say in truth, son of Ecglafl, Grendel, that awesome terror, never would have caused such havoc or humiliation in Heorot against your lord, if your courage and spirit were as fierce as you yourself say they are."<sup>27</sup>

This is mixed with a reminder that Unferth's past victories were conspicuously anti-social. Beowulf publicly confronts Unferth with his own past act of fratricide – an act that not only violates reflective historical norms but exploits the evolved predisposition to familial cohesion. "You became your brothers' murderer, your next of kin. For that you will suffer punishment in hell, no matter how sharp your wits."<sup>28</sup> As many scholars have noted, this act of fratricide connects Unferth with the Biblical Cain, but it hardly needs to be stated that the prohibition against fratricide did not originate in the book of Genesis. Genes discouraging people from killing those with the same genes bear a clear selection advantage over those which do not. This taboo, whether spoken or not, is obeyed even in the bloodiest Norse sagas.<sup>29</sup> *Beowulf* specifically enunciates this as a general taboo, almost to the exclusion of any other proscribed sin. At the end of the poem, as he lies mortally wounded and reflects on his life, Beowulf only mentions one crime that could condemn him: "For all that I may have some joy, though sick with life's wounds, because the ruler of men will not charge me with the murder of my own kinsmen, when my life goes out from my body."<sup>30</sup>

Beowulf's satisfaction with his legacy enunciates a necessary cognitive predisposition. A reputation for a high capacity for violence must be balanced with an equal reputation for pro-social behavior. A highly skilled warrior is as likely to be an adversary as an ally, and, if an adversary, constitutes an immediate danger. This danger is as likely to come from inside the group as it is from the outside. A bully within a community may seek to elevate his status by violence or intimidation. Besides the obvious danger of physical harm, the bully's victims risk losing their own resources, social privileges, and mating opportunities or mating autonomy. This sort of status elevation through dominance is the norm in our nearest non-human kin. Frequently, a single male ape is able to dominate other males by intimidation or physical violence and thereby maintain exclusive access to females and hence to reproductive fitness.<sup>31</sup> It is also often the case in early, large-scale human populations. Chieftains who subdue large populations with the help of well-paid retainers enjoy a parallel status escalation but on an exponentially larger scale.<sup>32</sup> A 2003 study of the Y-chromosome of Central Asian males revealed that 8% of the men of Central Asia descended from Genghis Khan or one of his close male relatives (who were likely his generals).<sup>33</sup>

The only thing that could check the reproductive success of such an oppressive strategy is the formation of a coalition of the oppressed. Non-human primates lack our capacity for language and thus for a well-organized coup d'état. Conquerors succeed by rewarding the loyalty of their retainers, who stand to gain more status by serving as a buffer between the ruler and his resentful subjects. But between these two periods of strong hierachalism, and for the majority of our species' particular evolutionary history, humans may have been able to curb the benefits of brute domination. While human beings (typically males) may enjoy dominating others, they are far less enthusiastic about being dominated themselves, particularly when this entails unrequited personal sacrifice. In small-scale, hunter-gatherer societies such as those in which our species evolved, it would have been far harder for a single individual to maintain his dominance over subordinates who were capable of organizing themselves against him.

Anthropologist Christopher Boehm has documented the cross-cultural occurrence of a particular ambivalence toward prominent individuals, especially when they become coercive and threaten to subjugate their peers.<sup>34</sup> In small-scale societies and even incipient chiefdoms, overbearing individuals are regularly checked by social leveling mechanisms that serve to create what Boehm designates a *reverse dominance hierarchy*. This is not to say that egalitarianism evolved for its own sake. Rather, shared ambivalence toward domination by another outweighed the inclination toward dominance by any individual in the band-level societies in which humans lived for the majority of our species' evolution. Such a culturally-enforced equilibrium, if it were maintained over a sufficient number of generations, could even have caused selection pressure against tyrannical traits, resulting in the evolution of mental mechanisms for self-control.<sup>35</sup> The evolution of self-control would be more advantageous than wholly losing the attributes that enabled domination, since these attributes could be put to pro-social uses such as fighting off other groups. In other words, the same attributes could elevate an individual either to dominance or to prestige – the definitive difference being whether they were used for the benefit of others or not.<sup>36</sup> If groups held the potential to form reverse dominance hierarchies, then prestige would be the most stable strategy.

Naked aggression is not the only attribute that could provoke the sort of leveling mechanisms that manifest in a reverse dominance hierarchy. Any ability which an individual possessed in excess could lead to an elevation in status. Any elevation in status could lead to inequality of resources or alliances. Any inequality could provoke attempts by

disadvantaged individuals to level the playing field. The possession of individual resources, keen hunting ability, physical superiority, and even too much charisma could all result in the elevation of one individual at the expense of others, and therefore may provoke leveling attempts such as insult or censure.<sup>37</sup>

Boehm describes the methods used by the Dobe Ju/'hoansi (also known as !Kung) hunters of the Kalahari for keeping even the most able hunters from deliberately parlaying their abilities into social status. One !Kung custom gives credit for a kill to the owner of the arrow used in felling the animal rather than to the one who shot the arrow or tracked the animal. Many hunters will return from solo expeditions and describe the prey they provide to the community as if they found it lying on the ground. When modesty is absent, the reverse dominance hierarchy brings forth its leveling mechanisms:

There is great variability among men as to who is responsible for the kills. They use two principal mechanisms to keep the best hunters from dominating the politics of the camp and monopolizing the women. We have seen that they preemptively cut down those who might become arrogantly boastful. They also share all large-game meat, helping those who are incapacitated or down on their luck, and these customs are enhanced by some very practical cultural rules. . . . The fact that the best hunters speak so modestly, and frequently swap arrows to avoid envy, is a monument to the efficacy of ridicule as an instrument of social control. . . . If they are faced with serious upstartism people like the !Kung will go far beyond ridicule.<sup>38</sup>

Anthropologist Richard Lee encountered the !Kung reverse dominance hierarchy first-hand.<sup>39</sup> During his fieldwork, Lee had earned a reputation as a miser for not sharing the provisions he brought with him. At Christmas, he hoped to improve his reputation by purchasing the healthiest ox he could find to slaughter for a Christmas feast. Finding an ox which he calculated would provide four pounds of meat for every member of the local !Kung social network (which Lee estimated at 150), Lee reserved the massive animal for the feast. When the !Kung learned of his plans, they referred to the animal as “a bag of bones” though it was larger than any livestock Lee had seen in his time with the !Kung. Others commented that “it was going to be a grim Christmas because there won’t be enough meat to go around,” and told Lee that he “has lived here for three years and still hasn’t learned anything about cattle”; “You’ll have to kill it and serve it, I suppose, but don’t expect much of a dance to follow.”<sup>40</sup> When the custom was finally revealed to Lee, one of the !Kung told him:

It is our way. . . . Say there is a Ju/'hoan who has been hunting. He must not come home and announce like a braggart, ‘I have killed a big one in the bush!’ He must first sit down in silence until I or someone else comes up to his fire and asks, “What did you see today?” He replies quietly, “Ah, I’m no good for hunting. I saw nothing at all, just a little tiny one.” Then I smile to myself because I know he has killed something big.<sup>41</sup>

This art for understatement has clear parallels in Germanic literature with roots preceding the rise of strong chiefdoms or monarchial states and the conversion to Christianity. In *Grettis saga*, a much-cited Icelandic analogue of *Beowulf*, Grettir enters a grave mound and fights for his life against a *draugr*, an undead terror, which has been terrorizing area farms. After defeating his opponent, Grettir staggers back to the farmhouse where he is a guest, carrying with him the treasure that the *draugr* had been guarding. Instead of keeping the treasure for himself, the hero lays the treasure out on his host’s table. The host responds by asking why he stayed out so late at night. Instead of recounting his victory against the supernatural threat, Grettir replies only, “Many little things happen at night.” The only part of the treasure Grettir seems to want for himself is a short sword. His host agrees to give it to him on the condition that “you must prove your prowess before I give you the sword,” as if the victory against the *draugr* and the yielding of treasure to the group were not quite enough.<sup>42</sup> This may seem cold hospitality from one whose lands have been saved from a ghostly marauder, but in the context of the !Kung’s custom its social function is more evident.

### The Social Function of Hrothgar’s “sermon”

When Richard Lee asked his !Kung hosts why it was a custom to insult someone who had provided such a vital resource to the community, his interlocutor replied, “Arrogance.”

When a young man kills much meat he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can’t accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody. So we always speak of his meat as worthless. This way we cool his heart and make him gentle.<sup>43</sup>

The Danish king Hrothgar seems to show a similar wariness after Beowulf’s second victory. When Beowulf returns from killing Grendel’s mother, his grisly trophies attest to his bravery and martial prowess. Hrothgar assures the returning

hero that he has won the glory which motivated his journey, and he simultaneously affirms that, despite his unequaled abilities, Beowulf is not a threat to his weaker peers: “Your glory has spread throughout the world, my friend Beowulf, over every people; you take it all in stride and balance power with wisdom. I will perform an act of friendship for you, as we agreed before. You will be a comfort forever for your own people, help of heroes.”<sup>44</sup> As a contrast, Hrothgar follows this praise by telling the story of Heremod, an arrogant and greedy king who killed his own thanes. “He grew not for their benefit, but for their destruction and the annihilation of the Danish people. Enraged, he cut down his table-companions, shoulder-companions, until he turned away alone from the joys of men, that famous prince.”<sup>45</sup> As Heremod grew in personal power, he turned against his own men, exhibiting an inversely proportional relationship between individual power and pro-social commitment. This is the very pattern of behavior the !Kung fear from an arrogant hunter.

Hrothgar’s advice for Beowulf is not restricted to pro-social functionality. The lines that follow have become known as “Hrothgar’s sermon” due to the references to God, sin, divine obligation, and incursion by evil spirits. The terms are vague, however, and we cannot rule out past claims that what is specifically Christian was added late in the poem’s oral history. Hrothgar credits God with Beowulf’s victory and claims that Heremod went wrong the day he forgot that his status was a divine gift. The social function of these deferences to God’s participation, as well as similar references to Fate, Death, and other abstract agents, are more akin to the !Kung’s “finding” a carcass on the hunting ground. That is, they function as a disavowal of Beowulf’s superiority to the Danes, not primarily as affirmation of the Christian belief in Providence. In stark contrast to Christian hagiographies contemporary with the *Beowulf* manuscript’s production, no one in the poem cites God’s will as something to which their own agendas should aim. No one looks forward to divine intervention. They are motivated by the quest for personal glory and the glorification of their kin groups, and this motivation is, itself, regarded as a virtue. It is only when one individual conspicuously out-performs his peers and could potentially wax in arrogance to the point of threatening others that divine agency is inserted into the story. Having failed to protect his people, Hrothgar stands to lose the most status by being shown up in his own hall. Deflecting credit for killing Grendel from Beowulf to God serves the old king’s interest most of all.

In describing his battles in Grendel’s mere to Hrothgar, Beowulf echoes the king’s providential attribution:

I did not gently escape that underwater battle with my life. I performed my deed with difficulty. The fight was decided against me at first, but God protected me. I could not use Hrunting for that fight, though that weapon is good; but the ruler of men granted to me that I might see on the wall an old, gigantic sword, shining as it hung. He has often guided the friendless one. So I took that weapon.<sup>46</sup>

By contrast, upon his return to Geatland, Beowulf tells the story of his adventure to Hygelac without the attribution of divine agency. He tells his uncle that, though Grendel meant to kill him, “it would not be so once I stood up in anger.”<sup>47</sup> This is not to say that Beowulf shows no modesty before the Geats. In his speech to Hygelac, Beowulf skips the details of his own actions and focuses on the fact that his fame will be shared by the Geats as a group: “It is too long to tell how I there repay the people’s enemy for all his crimes, my prince. I did honor to your people with my actions.”<sup>48</sup> In both scenarios, Beowulf deemphasizes his own martial superiority and elevates the status of others. In doing so, he displays an acute social intelligence that has, unfortunately, not survived in modern adaptations of the poem.

If, as Roberts suggests, competitive altruists must make their accomplishments public, and if, as Boehm suggests, communities are wary of anyone who might abuse high status, then the most successful social climbers will be those who display their power without appearing to do it deliberately. Individual merit must be displayed clearly but indirectly. Throughout the poem, Beowulf does exactly this. When he first arrives in Heorot, he deftly communicates his own prowess at the same time he communicates his deference to group consensus:

The best warriors and the wisest men of my own people advised me that I should seek you out, Lord Hrothgar, because they knew the extent of my strength; they had seen me, themselves, coming from the fight, stained with my enemies’ blood after I subdued them, slew a tribe of giants, and fought sea-monsters amidst the waves in the night. I survived that gauntlet, avenged the Weders’ persecution as they asked of me, beset by enemies.<sup>49</sup>

In these lines, Beowulf walks the narrow space between self-disclosure and bragging. He communicates his own strength and past triumphs, but his words focus on what his people had seen and decided. A competitive altruist is still an altruist. The character he embodies – the humble savior – is precisely the character one would predict given the social selection pressures described by Roberts, Dunbar, and Boehm. Beowulf’s virtues are not Christian virtues but human virtues. The most we can say is that these virtues were *not incompatible* with Christianity. If this is true, the possibility that *Beowulf* originated in a pre-Christian culture proves more tenable than previously believed.

Notes

1. Friedrich Klaeber, introduction to *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, (Boston: Heath, 1922), xlxi-l.
2. Friedrich Klaeber, “The Christian Elements in Beowulf,” trans. Paul Battles. *Subsidia* 24 (1996 [1911]): 56-7.
3. For a pagan contrast to Beowulf’s Christian values, Klaeber offers only the *Nibelungenlied*, a German epic dating to two centuries after the production of the Beowulf manuscript and resembling chivalric romance of the high middle ages in theme and style more than its Germanic sources or analogues. See Hatto, A.T. appendix to *Nibelungenlied* (London: Penguin, 1969), 354-99.
4. Klaeber cites the following from Alois Brandl, 1908: “The values which appear to be Christian lie at the very heart of Beowulf’s character. He never thinks of waging an offensive war to gain booty, as the reckless Hygelac does; he protects his nation from human as well as supernatural foes; he is humble, pious, protects orphans, and gives thanks to heaven – in a manner reminiscent of the Savior – that he is able to sacrifice his life in order to win the treasure for his followers”(Klaeber, “Christian Elements,” 57). For a summary of scholarly attitudes since Klaeber, see Edward B. Irving Jr., “Christian and Pagan Elements,” in *A Beowulf Handbook*, edited by Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 175-192.
5. Eric Stanley, *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past: The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism and Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 3. Stanley’s parentheses.
6. R.D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John D. Niles, introduction to *Klaeber’s Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008), lxxv.
7. See John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “The Psychological Foundations of Culture,” in *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, ed. Jerome H. Barkow, John Tooby, and Leda Cosmides (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19-136.
8. Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
9. Robert Axelrod *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
10. Robert Trivers, “The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism,” *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 46.1 (1971):35-57.
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12. Charlie L. Hardy and Mark Van Vugt, “Nice Guys Finish First: The Competitive Altruism Hypothesis,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32 (2006):1402-13.
13. Gilbert Roberts, “Competitive Altruism: From Reciprocity to the Handicap Principle,” *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 265.1394 (1998):427-431. See also: M. Van Vugt, G. Roberts, and C. Hardy. “Competitive altruism: Development of reputation-based cooperation in groups.” In *Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* edited by R. Dunbar & L. Barrett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 531-40.
14. Fidel Fajardo-Acosta, *The Condemnation of Heroism in the Tragedy of Beowulf: A Study in the Characterization of the Epic* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1989).
15. “cwādon þæt hē wāre wyrldcyning[a] / manna mildust ond mon(ðw)ærust, / lēodum līðost ond lofgeornost (3180-2). The translations of *Beowulf* are my own from *Klaeber’s Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition, revised by R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). Numbers indicate lines, which should be roughly equivalent across modern English translations.
16. “gemyne mārþo, māgenellen cyð,” 659.
17. “Þū þē self hafast / dādum gefremed þæt þīn [dōm] lyfað / āwa tō alder,” 953b-55a
18. “Lēofa Bēowulf, lāst eall tela, / swā ðu on ġeoguðfeore ġeāra ġecwāde / þæt ðū ne ālāte be ðē lifigendum / dōm gedrēosan,” 2663-66b
19. “Ūre ǣghwylc sceal ende ġebīdan / worolde līfes; wyrce sē þe mote / dōmes ǣr dēaþe; þæt bið drihtguman / unlifgendum æfter sēlest,” 1384-9.
20. “Deyr fē, deyia frāndr, / deyr siálfir it sama, / en orztírr / deyr aldregi / hveim er sér góðan getr,” Hávamál 76, in Ursula Dronke, trans. and ed. *The Poetic Edda Volume 3: Mythological Poems 2* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 17.
21. This is opposed to the sharing technical information, non-social physical phenomena such as the weather, or remote social information such as politics, entertainment, or culture. See R.I.M. Dunbar, N.D.C. Duncan, and Anna Merriott, “Human Conversational Behavior,” *Human Nature*, 8.3(1997):231-46.
22. “Donne sāgdon þæt sālīþende, / þā ðe gífsceattas Geata fyredon / þyder tō þance, þæt hē þritiges / manna māgencræft on his mundgripe / heaþorð hæbbe. . . . Ic þām góðan sceal / for his mōðpræce madmas bēodan,” 377-81a, 384b-85.
23. “Eart þū se Bēowulf, se þe wið Breca wunne / on sīdne sāt ymb sund flite, / ðær git for wlenēe wada cunnodon / ond for dolgilpe on dēop wāter / aldrum nēþdon?” 504-510a.
24. “Wæs him Bēowulfes sīð, / mōðges merefaran, mičel æfþunca, / forþon þe hē ne ūpe þæt ǣniġ Ⱦðer man / ǣfre mārða þon mā middangeardes / gehēdde under heofenum þonne hē sylfa,” 501b-505.
25. “Nō ic wiht fram þē / swylcra searonīða secgan hýrde, / billa brōgan. Breca nāfre git / æt headolāce, nē ġehwæþer incer, / swā dēorlice dād gefremede / fāgum sweordum,” 581b-6a.

26. “nō ič þæs [fela] ǵylpe,” 586b.
27. “Secge ič þē tō sōðe, sunu Eglāfes, / þæt nēfre Gre[n]del swā fela gryra gefremede, / atol ǣglēca, ealdre þīnum, / hȳnðo on Heorote, gif þīn hiȝe wāere, / sefa swā searogrim, swā þū self talast,” 590-4.
28. “ðū þīnum brōðrum tō banan wurde, / hēafodmēgum; þæs þū in helle scealt / werhōd drēogan, þēah þīn wit duge” (587-9).
29. R.I.M. Dunbar, Amanda Clark, and Nicola L. Hurst, “Conflict and Cooperation Among the Vikings: Contingent Behavioral Decisions,” *Ethology and Sociobiology* 16 (1995): 233-246.
30. “Ič ðæs ealles mæg / feorhbennum sēoc ǵefēan habban; / forðām mē wītan ne ðearf waldend fīra / morðorbealo māga, þonne mīn sceaceð / lif of lice,” 2739b-43a.
31. Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996). The major exception to this norm is the pygmy chimpanzee or bonobo. Females are as likely as males to occupy the alpha position, and jockeying for position is a subtler art.
32. Malcolm Potts and Thomas Hayden, *Sex and War: How Biology Explains Warfare and Terrorism and Offers a Path to a Safer World* (Dallas: Benbella, 2008), 8-11.
33. T. Zerjal, Y. Xue, G. Bertorelle, “The Genetic Legacy of the Mongols,” *Annals of Human Genetics* 72 (2003):717-21. The Y chromosome is passed from father to son relatively unchanged and therefore serves as a reliable trace of male lineage. The widespread distribution of a single powerful male’s DNA is known as the “Founder Effect.” For a parallel study demonstrating the genetic success of Ireland’s King Niall, see L.T. Moore, B. McEvoy, E. Cape, K. Simms, G.D. Bradley, “A Y-chromosome signature of hegemony in Gaelic Ireland.” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 78 (2006):334-8.
34. Christopher Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1999).
35. Christopher Boehm, *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).
36. Joseph Henrich and Francisco J. Gil-White, “The Evolution of Prestige: Freely Conferred Deference as a Mechanism for Enhancing the Benefits of Cultural Transmission,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 22 (2001):165-196.
37. Christopher Boehm, “Egalitarian Behavior and Reverse Dominance Hierarchy,” *Current Anthropology* 34.3 (1993): 227-240.
38. Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest*, 48.
39. Richard Lee, *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1993), 183-188.
40. Lee, *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 184.
41. Lee, *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 187.
42. *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, Trans. Bernard Scudder, Ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (London: Penguin, 2005) 40-1.
43. Lee, *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 188.
44. “Blæd is ǣrāred / ǵeond wīdwegas, wine mīn Bēowulf, / ðīn ofer þēoda gehwylcē. Eal þū hit ǵeþyldum healdest, / mægen mid mōðes snytrum. Ič þē sceal mīne ǵelāstan / frēode, swā wit furðum sprēcon. Ðū scealt tō frōfre weorþan / eal langtwīdiȝ lēodum þīnum, / hæleðum tō helpe,” 1705-9a.
45. “Ne geweoх hē him tō willan, ac tō wælfalle / ond tō dēaðcwalum Denīga lēodum; / brēat bolgenmōd bēodȝenēatas, / eaxlȝesteallan, of þæt hē āna hwearf, / māre þēoden, mondrēamum from,” 1711-15.
46. “Ič þæt unsoften ealdre gedīgde / wiȝge under wætere, weorc ǵenēþde / earfoðlīcē; ætrihte wæs / gūð ǵetwāfed, nymðe meć god scylde. / Ne meahte ič ȝet hilde mid Hruntinge / wiht ǵewyr̄can, þēah þæt wāpen duge; ac mē ǵeuðe ylda waldend / þæt ič on wāge ǵeseah wlitig hangian / eald sword eacen, ofost wīsode / winīgea lēasum, þæt ič ȳð wāpne ǵebræd,” 1655-64.
47. “hyt ne mihte swā, /syððan ič on yrre uppriht ȳstōd” 2091b-92. The moment at which the hero stands up is also the turning point in the fight with Grendel’s mother, though the narration attributes agency to both God and Beowulf (1554-5).
48. “Tō lang ys tō reċenne hū i(c ȳ)ām lēodsceaðan / yfla gehwylcēs ondlēan forȝeald; / þær ič, þēoden mīn, þīne lēode / weorðode weorcum,” 2093-6a.
49. “Þā mē þæt ǵelārdon lēode mine / þā sēlestān, snotere ȝeorlas, / þēoden Hrōðgār, þæt ič þē sōhte, / forþan hīe mægenes cræft mīn[n]e cūþon, / selfe ofersāwon, ȳā ič of searwum cwōm, / fāh from fēondum, þær ič fīfe ȝeband, / ȳðe eotena cyn, ond on ȳðum slog / niceras nihtes, nearoþearfe drēah, / wræc Wedera nīð – wean ahsodon – , / forgrand gramum,” 415-24a.

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## **Secretary of Disorientation: Writing the Circularity of Belief in *Elizabeth Costello***

**Dena R. Marks**

In the collection, *Philosophy and Animal Life*, Cora Diamond and Stanley Cavell debate about whether the eponymous character of J.M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello* holds views about the slaughter of animals that cohere with Cavell's notion of ethics. The focal character of the novel, Elizabeth Costello, is a famous writer who, now on the lecture circuit, uses her podium to argue for the fundamental equivalence between human and animal life. In her lectures, Costello claims that philosophers have programmatically justified cruelty toward animals through dualistic arguments that favor mind over body, human over beast. Likewise, she argues, poets have worked to subvert the rationalization of animal abuse by asking readers to imagine the experience of being nonhuman. In her chapter, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," Diamond uses Cavell's notion of ethics – that, even if we cannot know the pain of others, we are required to acknowledge that pain – to corroborate Costello's view that all life deserves equal respect. Cavell responds, in his chapter "Companionable Thinking," that the injunction to acknowledge the pain of others does not extend beyond the human because the foundations of ethical treatment are grounded in the idea that humans can communicate experiences of being through a shared grammar.

While Diamond and Cavell engage with the claims that Costello makes in her lectures as if the character were a philosopher, they miss many of the ways in which Coetzee qualifies the convictions of his main character within the context of a work of literature. In the context of various social and nonsocial situations – alone, with family members, and performing in public – and over the course of the novel, Coetzee represents the expression of Costello's belief as circular: she collects evidence that causes her to waiver from her views only to return to her privately held conviction when she reconsiders the harm done to animals. Thus, in a sense, Cavell is both justified and infelicitous for questioning Costello's convictions. Justified because she circles back to her bodily felt aversion to animal cruelty and infelicitous because her aversion is felt in the body and so, according to Cavell's logic, can only be acknowledged, not be debated. Coetzee had asserted a congruent idea about the body in an earlier interview with David Atwell: "Whatever else, the body is not 'that which is not,' and the proof of that is in the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt" (Coetzee "Interview" 248). Despite the fluctuations of Costello's thoughts, what remains at the end of the novel is an enduring sense of disgust regarding the maltreatment of animals that opens the novel to debate about the contributions that a novel can make to ethics.

It is important to note that Cavell and Diamond were critiquing only the portions of *Elizabeth Costello* that Coetzee had previously published in the 1999 collection, *The Lives of Animals*. The 2003 novel, *Elizabeth Costello*, is divided into a series of "lessons" instead of conventionally named chapters, so that the stories published in *The Lives of Animals* comprise Lessons 3, "The Philosophers and the Animals" and Lesson 4, "The Poets and the Animals" ("Acknowledgments" 231). Most of the lessons in the novel, including 3 and 4, are set in ordinary, academic environments: we see Costello give her lectures about animal cruelty and hear the objections of her audience members at Altona College, on a cruise ship in the Arctic, and at a conference in Amsterdam. We also witness private interactions between Costello and her family members: a car ride with her son to the airport and a visit to her sister in South Africa. Coetzee, however, surrounds these realistic chapters with more self-reflexively fictional ones that call the craft of writing into question. In the first lesson, "Realism," we not only learn that Elizabeth Costello is a successful 66 year-old Australian writer and read an excerpt of a lecture she gives on the sameness of apes and humans, but we also read Brechtian interruptions of the narration, such as, "The presentation scene itself we skip. It is not a good idea to interrupt the narrative too often, since storytelling works by lulling the reader or listener into a dreamlike state in which the time and space of the real world fade away, superseded by the time and space of the fiction" (16). The last lesson about Costello, "At the Gate," is a blatant play on Kafka's parable "Before the Law" and represents Costello in a purgatorial state trying to convince the gatekeepers that she belongs on the other side. The final lessons of the book depart from Costello's story altogether, representing instead an epistolary exchange between Lord Bacon and Lord and Lady Chandos. The overt attention Coetzee draws to the fictionality of the work in these lessons directs the reader to the limitations of responding to Costello's more ordinary lectures as if they were presented in the "real world."

Reading the book as a fiction about writing appears to counteract the claim that the work is primarily Costello's or even Coetzee's treatise on animal rights. Although Diamond and Cavell engage with Costello's ideas, the question has arisen in criticism about whether Coetzee's focal characters argue for his own belief in animal rights. For instance, in "Converging Convictions: Coetzee and His Characters on Animals," Karen Dawn and Peter Singer make the case that Costello is a mouthpiece for Coetzee's position on animal ethics. After noting Costello and Coetzee's demographic, dietary, and professional similarities – they both come from former British colonies, are strict vegetarians, and famous writers – Dawn and Singer pair the character's professed views on animals with the author's own (109). Costello, most controversially, invokes an outcry from the character David Stern when she connects the Nazi death camps to contemporary slaughterhouses. She says, "We are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it" (65). Similarly, they note, Coetzee likens slaughterhouses to death camps in his non-fiction essay "Meat Country." There he asks, "Is it fair to remind ourselves of the Nazis, who divided humankind into two species, those whose death mattered more and those whose deaths mattered less? What does the ox think about being consigned – without consultation – to the lower species than the bear or indeed the spotted owl or the Galapagos sea turtle?" (115). While Coetzee and Costello do both discuss the equivalence of life and an abhorrence to industrialized killing, it is, of course, important to respect the distinction between an author, writer, and his character, especially in a text that calls attention to the artfulness of writing fiction. At the same time, it would be counterproductive to consequently ignore the fact that the ethical treatment of animals is a recurring topic in Coetzee's works (not only *Elizabeth Costello* but also *Disgrace*).

Yet, to exclusively assert that there is a direct correspondence between Coetzee's ideas and Costello's is to ignore the indicators of uncertainty about the ethical assertions that are contained in the text. The claims often associated with Costello are: 1) That we should not devalue the lives of animals; this contention is captured in the vivid "Plutarch Response" she gives to the question of why she is a vegetarian: "You ask me why I refuse to eat flesh. I, for my part, am astonished that you can put in your mouth the corpse of a dead animal, astonished that you do not find it nasty to chew hacked flesh and swallow the juices of death wounds" (83). And, 2) That she has a capacity to feel this disgust and awaken our ethical obligation to animals because, as a poet, "she can think her way into other people, into other existences" (22). Although the book contains these didactic, moralistic assertions about her capacity to appreciate the other, the novel contains another trope, that writers "maintain beliefs only provisionally: fixed beliefs would stand in [the] way" (195). Costello thereby subverts the possibility of ethical argumentation in fiction when she takes the stance that, as a writer, she is a "secretary of the invisible," she merely records what she hears and is not tethered to a moralistic purpose (199). The question remains as to how or whether we reconcile Costello's perennial aversion to animal cruelty with the claim that writers do not believe in anything.

One response philosophers have taken to the novel is to evaluate the ethics of Costello's argument that the suffering of animals at the slaughterhouse deserves equal compassion as the suffering of humans. A reader of Cavell's book, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, might expect the ordinary language philosopher to appreciate Costello's view on animals. After all, in the chapter "Knowing and Acknowledging," Cavell, like Costello, criticizes philosophers of the skeptical tradition for sidestepping the bounds of everyday human ethics when they argue that we can never "know" the anguish of another because "it is impossible that two people should have (or feel) the same pain" (242). The skeptic claims that although pain can be descriptively the same (same symptoms, disease, location), the mere fact that it exists within two people means that it is always numerically segregated (243, 245, 247). Such philosophers then generalize their doubt about the feelings of others to question "the ground of our beliefs altogether" (240). In order to move beyond such doubt, Cavell contends, you must work to convince "the skeptic in yourself" that the feeling is a "plight of the mind" (239, 241).

The skeptic is right that we cannot be certain of another person's pain, but, Cavell argues, s/he is answering the wrong question. The question of whether we can have the same pain as another person is not relevant to the ordinary situation of that person's pain (248). As Cavell writes, to use the language of epistemology when saying "I know I am in pain" or "I know she is in pain" is to acknowledge the hurt and acknowledgement ("admission, confession"), "goes beyond knowledge" (256-7). The particular situation of pain calls for acknowledgment, not certainty, belief, or knowledge because "a failure to acknowledge is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness" (257, 264). The question becomes whether a human who fails to acknowledge the pain of a nonhuman animal should also be accused of such callousness.

Cavell, seeming to anticipate Costello, concludes his essay with a brief expression of "gratitude" to poetry for exposing the feelings of others, which confirms the notion he suspects, that humans do (descriptively) feel the same pain

(265-6). Such a conclusion confirms the project of ordinary language philosophy as he described it in the beginning of the essay that: “The way you must rely upon yourself as a source of what is said when, demands that you grant full title to others as sources of that data – not out of politeness, but because the nature of the claim you make for yourself is repudiated without that acknowledgment” (239). Because meaning through language stems from a shared experience with grammar, when we express our observations through the same system of language, we are sources for each other of knowledge.

Initially, it would seem as though Cavell’s philosophy can be used as a theoretical foundation to support Costello’s. Indeed, in the chapter “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” Diamond employs Cavell’s notion of ethics to support Costello’s claim that even if we cannot understand the pain of animals, they deserve for us to acknowledge it. Responding to Thomas Nagel’s argument that “a bat is a fundamentally alien creature” that we cannot understand, Costello remarks, “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” (80). Diamond utilizes Cavell’s conception of the difference between knowing and acknowledging to make her argument that philosophy may need poetry to gain such “exposure to that separateness,” the appreciation without subsumption of the other (76-7). For Diamond, Cavell allows philosophers to move beyond skepticism to the requirement of “acknowledging” the feelings others express in an ordinary, compassionate manner (57). Diamond finds Costello’s argument, that the difficult task of poetry is to acknowledge the lives of others, legitimate when she responds to her that, “Philosophy characteristically misrepresents both our own reality and that of others, in particular those ‘others’ who are animals” (57). Diamond’s view that philosophy needs poetry to gain access to feeling so that we may better respond to the pain of animals seems to align with Cavell’s own. Cavell, however, like the character Stern in *Elizabeth Costello*, rejects the idea that the slaughter of animals and humans should be treated with equal disgust.

In “Companionable Thinking,” Cavell comments that while the mass slaughtering of animals for food brings humans one of its greatest forms of pleasure, cruelty to humans in war, torture, genocide, etc. does not bring most people pleasure (though he notes that Nietzsche might disagree) (94). Defending his own omnivorous habits, Cavell writes, “I am human” and professes that he has a “persistent feeling that a sense of shame at being human [...] is more maddeningly directed to the human treatment of human animals than to its treatment of its non-human neighbors” (123, 125). We should, in a sense, be more concerned with the maltreatment of human animals; even if the preference for our own species is irritatingly arbitrary, such is the foundation of ethics because the human point of view is the only one we can descriptively understand (Williams 118). For Cavell, Costello and Diamond extend the requirement to acknowledge the pain of others beyond its ordinary human bounds when they turn animal slaughter into an ethical issue.

What Diamond may have missed in her use of Cavell’s theory of ethics is that even within “Knowing and Acknowledging” Cavell lays the groundwork for his notion that animals and humans do not belong in the same ethical sphere. In addition to the problem of language, Cavell raises the old question about whether the human capacity to conceal or reveal pain by choice separates the species. He suggests that the capacity to choose alters the way we respond to pain by asking: “How shall we understand this wish for a response to my expressions (of pain, of any region of the mind)? Does it suggest that our concept of my knowledge of another is bound up with the concept of my freedom, an independence from the other, from all others – which I may or may not act upon? What is this ‘knowing a person’”? (253). An animal, if we may surmise an answer, does not choose whether to request or deny acknowledgment. This supposition tests the boundaries of ethics, whose practitioners, since Kant has been rejected, resist forcing universal principles on those who do not solicit them.

The preliminary question that arises from reading Elizabeth Costello in conjunction with *Philosophy and Animal Life* then appears to be, whose ideas about animals are right? What is the most ethical way to treat animals? Yet, what Diamond and Cavell both fail to address is the way in which the novel itself qualifies the convictions of its main character, calling into question Costello’s beliefs in poetry and animal-sanctity. In his book, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Derek Attridge reminds critics that Elizabeth Costello is a novel that tests generic boundaries between reality and fiction (197). That is, while Coetzee may agree with the claims that Costello makes about animals, by presenting Costello’s views in a fictional interlocution with other characters, Coetzee explores his ideas and invites the reader to appreciate, rather than simply assess the validity of the dialogue of his characters (200). Similarly, Jonathan Lear, in “Ethical Thought and the Problem of Communication,” argues that Coetzee’s book is ethical, not because it posits claims about the way we should treat animals, but insofar as it represents discourse on the subject (66). Lear places Coetzee’s work in a continuum with Plato’s dialogues and Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous tracts, which as he claims, “defeat the reader’s desire to defer to the ‘moral authority,’ the ‘novelist’ John Coetzee” (67). Thus, the argument runs, by setting

Costello's views in a fictional conversation with other voices, Coetzee invites readers not to simply agree or even argue with her but to investigate the issue for themselves.

Following Attridge, evaluating the ethics of Costello's argument becomes less important than reading the story ethically, that is appreciating the singularity of Coetzee's craft ("Against Allegory" 65). In Elizabeth Costello, we receive the context of her lectures, that is, what her words mean to her and others in multiple situations and over time. Yet, examining the context and manner in which Costello's arguments unfold, recoil, and then unfold again places Costello in closer alignment with Cavell than either would expect as both seem to be interested in the expression of belief rather than simply the adherence to a particular belief. Additionally, reading for the formal properties of the final book helps to confirm Cavell's engagement with Costello's views on animals because such a reading demonstrates the persistence of Costello or even the arranger's convictions.

Coetzee emphasizes the literariness of the book by initiating the novel with a metafictional discussion about the problem of creating a bridge from the reader's world to the fictional world. He uses distancing devices throughout the first part of the book to prevent readers from being absorbed in the story's realism and instead reminds them of the act of reading. For instance, Coetzee marks leaps in the temporality of the plot with "We skip," "a gap" (9, 27). In the first chapter, the text appears to analyze its generic qualities as a disembodied narrator discusses literary Realism saying:

Realism has never been comfortable with ideas. It could not be otherwise: realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no autonomous existence, can exist only in things. So when it needs to debate ideas, as here, realism is driven to invent situations – walks in the countryside, conversations – in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby in a certain sense embody them. The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. In such debates ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to speakers by whom they are announced, and generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world – for instance, the son's concern that his mother not be treated as a Mickey Mouse post-colonial writer, or Wheatley's concern not to seem an old-fashioned absolutist. (9)

For a passage about embodying ideas, the narration is remarkably spectral. Realism, an idea, takes a verb and is endowed with the human capacity to feel "comfortable." The language enacts the discomfort of giving ideas a life at the same time that it contradicts the ideas posed in the discussion of realism, that ideas must be personified in people. Similarly, the voice that speaks these lines sounds authorial and authoritative, which undermines the notion that ideas must be tied back to characters. The ambivalence of this statement about realism announces the uncertainty of the project that is about to unfold at the same time that the grammatical trickery casts realism in a dubious light. This pattern of oscillating conviction and doubt shapes the text that follows.

This circular structure is reinforced in lesson two, "The Novel in Africa," in which Costello asserts, retracts, and then reasserts her original attitude about the African novelist Emmanuel Egudu. She initially remembers that she had always regarded him as a "poseur" but now, "mellowed" she tries to attain a more relativistic stance by thinking that he is the product of his position (36-37). Subverting the convictions that she trumpets in the next few lessons, she thinks that she will slacken her sense of moral certitude: "she no longer believes very strongly in belief. Things can be true, she now thinks, even if one does not believe in them, and conversely. Belief may be no more, in the end, than a source of energy, like a battery which one clips into an idea to make it run. As happens when one writes: believing whatever has to be believed in order to get the job done" (39). After hearing his talk, in which Egudu reduces all of Africa to one illiterate plane, she realizes that her original conviction was correct; he is the poseur she once thought he was (41). Following the vacillations of her thought raises the question as to whether this reassertion of her original attitude means that the position she takes in her public lectures, that she is able to inhabit the lives of nonhuman animals, is equally subject to reevaluation (12, 22).

Indeed, in contemplating the animal life that Poe imagined in the Arctic north while she is on a cruise near the pole, she thinks, "The seas full of things that seem like us but are not. Sea-flowers that gape and devour. Eels, each a barbed maw with a gut hanging from it. Teeth are for tearing, the tongue is for churning the swill around: that is the truth of the oral" (54). She appears to arrive at a position of accepting the incomprehensible alterity of sea-animal being as well as the necessary violence of maintaining being. This position reverses the claim that Diamond associates her with, the ability to read into the lives of others. We might expect that Costello will also then accept the fact that humans too must kill in order to live until the next page when she describes the slaughter of penguins on the Macquarie Island as an ethical failure.

Coetzee utilizes pathos-laden prose to describe the Macquarie Island slaughters, perhaps in order to convey the corporeality of Costello's conviction that such slaughters are inherently vile. Given Coetzee's academic interest in

linguistics he is most likely aware of what he is doing with language in this passage (Atwell 143). Costello thinks of the island that “Hundreds of thousands of penguins were clubbed to death here and flung into cast-iron steam boilers to be broken down into useful oil and useless residue. Or not clubbed to death, merely herded with sticks up a gangplank and over the edge into the seething cauldron” (Coetzee 55). Costello begs the question as she describes the human treatment of animals as cruel while leaving out the premise that it is wrong to kill animals. With the use of the words “clubbed” and “sticks,” she characterizes the nineteenth-century humans who killed the penguins as recidivistic cavemen. The imagery of oppression is furthered by her use of the word “gangplank,” figuring the human as pirate and penguin as punished captive. The “seething cauldron” characterizes the slaughter of animals for goods as witchcraft. In her most private moment, alone in the Arctic, she feels and expresses her visceral disgust at the maltreatment of fellow creatures.

Yet, Coetzee does not conclude her inner thoughts about animals with this conflation of human and animal life. After the description of the penguin slaughter, she proceeds to emphasize the difference between animals and humans in order to explain how it is that sea creatures may “gape and devour” while humans should be portrayed as cruel when they do. She observes that the descendants of the brutalized penguins “seem to have learned nothing. Still they innocently swim out to welcome visitors; still they call out greetings to them as they approach the rookeries (*Ho! Ho! they call . . .*)” (55). Here she implicitly reasons that because humans have the capacity to remember the past, they ought to avoid committing such horrors. As is evident in the way this chapter unfolds, Coetzee depicts the contradictions of evolving belief, but does not ultimately allow Costello to reverse her position that animal cruelty is repugnant.

Some critics have argued that Costello’s fallacious argumentative strategies, such as begging the question, give the upper hand to the philosophers with whom she argues. Marjorie Garber asks “But why is the debate about the ‘lives of animals’ so clearly staged as a debate between poetry and philosophy, and why does philosophy seem so clearly to dominate, if not to win?” (79). But does philosophy seem to win so clearly? Since Costello references some real-world philosophers, we are invited to engage with her interpretation of their works. When Costello is asked whether she is a vegetarian because of a moral conviction, she responds, “It comes out of a desire to save my soul” (89). Jonathan Lamb argues that she problematically relies here on Descartes’ notion of the human being as a vessel for a soul at the same time that she decries him for making “man godlike, animals thinglike” (69). Similarly, Michael Bell argues that the writers she cites to support her claims ultimately undermine her: “She invokes Blake, Lawrence, and Ted Hughes to affirm the integrity of all animals’ lives and to challenge Thomas Nagel’s philosophical exposure of the anthropomorphic fallacy in his essay ‘What Is It Like to Be a Bat?’ Actually [. . .] Nagel is not her opponent but her ally. Nagel argues against materialist reductions of consciousness and makes her point in advance” (Bell 177). When Costello challenges the claim Nagel makes about the nature of consciousness in his article “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” she does seem to present weaker arguments than her opponent.

As she reports it, Nagel argues that “our minds are inadequate to the task” of reading into the mind of the bat, which will always remain wholly alien to us (76). Costello retorts that even if the mind of a bat is different than the mind of a human, we still share an experience of being: “To be a living bat is to be full of being; being fully a bat is like being fully human” (77). The argument supports her position on poetry, that poets do have the capacity to read into the lives of others, as she claims, “If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed [Marion Bloom], 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” (80). The lines sound self-aggrandizing as they over-simplify Nagel’s argument.

While asserting her own capacity to transcend all differences, she contradicts herself when she both attests to the illimitability of her talents and excuses herself from appreciating all forms of life, if one of those forms is a Western philosopher: “Despite Thomas Nagel, who is probably a good man, despite Thomas Aquinas and René Descartes, with whom I have more difficulty sympathizing, there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another” (79-80). It is laughably contradictory that she reaches the limit of her ability to sympathize when she tries to read into the mind of a fellow human, Descartes.

Nagel’s point, which she approaches in her meditations on the sea creatures in the Arctic, is that we cannot really understand what it is like to be a bat because the constitution of a bat is biologically different than our own. Instead of seeing with two eyes, bats sense the world through sonar, which “is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or image” (Nagel 438). Nagel and not Costello’s thought coheres with Levinas’s conception of ethics as that which moves from the “Same toward the Other [and] never returns to the same” (Levinas 49). Costello elevates the poet’s capacity beyond this notion ethics when she claims that poets ought to and can subsume all otherness into the same.

Sam Durrant argues that her inadequate glosses of the texts she cites point the reader to the limits of the “sympathetic imagination” to comprehend otherness. Durrant notes that Coetzee’s oeuvre “rehearses the failure of Costello’s sympathetic imagination, the failure of the literary endeavor itself” (120). Durrant proceeds to argue that Coetzee establishes a new relationship between the ethical and the literary which is grounded in this respect for alterity (120). The problem with such arguments that the philosophers defeat Costello in debate is that they do not account for Costello’s persistent bodily feeling of disgust and Coetzee’s un-ironic treatment of her. Despite the shakiness of Costello’s arguments, what remains at the end of the novel is an enduring feeling of pain and horror at the maltreatment of animals.

Costello ends her conversations with philosophers not with a sense of defeat but with the final word that logical persuasion itself is flawed. Giving voice to one of Cavell’s arguments about the ethically acceptable preference for humans, one philosopher asks Costello if, “At bottom we protect our own kind. Thumbs up to human babies, thumbs down to veal calves. Don’t you think so, Mrs. Costello?” (90). Instead of answering the question, Costello rejects rational discussion altogether saying, “I don’t know what I think [...] I often wonder what thinking is, what understanding is. Do we really understand the universe better than animals do?” (90). Costello works within a closed system in which rational debate is inherently moot because she wants to attack the premise of philosophical argumentation altogether.

If she reverses her position and sounds illogical, so much the better for her case as she claims: “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. That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language; and if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner” (111). Arguing that reason is the problem, aside from being a strategy of last resort, is a way of ending the conversation without concession since it would become pointless for anyone to argue with a privately held, viscerally felt conviction.

Bracketing the logic of her conviction, Garber and Bell read the performance of her convictions as a primarily public phenomenon. Emphasizing the context of the human relationships and scenarios that influence her statements, Garber asks “Why should a classical sexual triangle of the human social and cultural world (mother-son-son’s wife) animate an argument about animals?” (74). Just as Costello passionately speaks about kindness we must show to animals, her daughter-in-law is depicted scowling, her son appears sympathetic but pitying, her sister is thousands of miles away doing charity. In light of her alienation from the humans around her, Costello seems to prefer animals who cannot deny her love.

Garber recalls Costello’s figuration of her ideas about animals as a ‘hobbyhorse,’ which Garber defines as “both obsession and horse costume” (76). To Garber, Costello wears her convictions about animals as part of a public performance. As Bell notes, “as a famous writer she is especially exposed: she may be required to articulate, and as it were perform, her personal convictions in public” (181). Garber and Bell’s emphasis on the social nature of her arguments does not quite explain why, in a tired, private moment with her son she asserts her convictions in the same emotional manner she utilizes in public and why she chooses to assert her personal convictions in public. She was not required to perform her convictions about animals; she willfully climbed on her hobbyhorse.

Sitting in the car with her son on the way to the airport, we might expect Costello to unmask her conviction and reveal a more moderate, personal stance but here she speaks at the height of her certainty. Echoing her use of the palpable language of the Macquarie Island description, she says:

It’s that I no longer know where I am. I seem to move around perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! Yet every day I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money. (114)

At the beginning of the speech, we might expect that she is confessing to a sense of mental disorientation, the “where am I” of senility. However, by the end of the paragraph it becomes clear that she is reasserting her public convictions in private.

The immediacy of her convictions is expressed in the pathos ridden, single word sentence, “Corpses.” She could have said “meat,” “burgers,” “filets,” any word that describes food rather than murdered flesh. The word “corpse” is an apt choice because it originally referred to the body of any living creature, human or animal before the word came to refer strictly to the dead body of a human (“Corpse” OED). Her use of “corpse” to describe animal meat performs her conviction that humans and animals are of the same flesh while bypassing the need for rational proof. Using the word “crime” similarly begs the question as it describes the slaughter of animals for food already as a violation of the law.

Outside of the context of a public lecture, she eschews logic while asserting her fellowship with animals with the same fervor she expressed when she was alone in the Artic and on stage at Altona College. The response her son gives, “There, there,” feels inadequate as it infantilizes her at the same time that it represents, perhaps, the proper response to her attitude, acknowledgment (115).

What makes Coetzee’s work so elusive is that he depicts Costello undermining the equivalence she draws between animals and humans in the following chapter. The difference between the species surfaces in Costello’s letter to her sister Blanche where she writes, “we perform acts of humanity. Acts like that are not available to animals, who cannot uncover themselves because they do not cover themselves” (150). Here she arrives at a Cavellian point that the ability to conceal pain demarcates a boundary between humans and animals. Even at the end of the book Costello would not argue that this difference provides justification for cruelty but we may expect her to revise some of her earlier sweeping statements about the sameness of bat and human life.

In lesson six, she revisits the equivalence she previously drew between animal slaughterhouses and concentration camps. But she does not offer the kind of retraction that might satisfy Stern or Cavell. Even a more formal reading, that accounts for the shifts in Costello’s thought throughout the book, offers evidence that she ultimately defends her original positions. In the lesson, “The Problem of Evil,” she reacts to the criticism she received for drawing the analogy between slaughterhouses and the Holocaust:

She had spoken on that occasion on what she saw and still sees as the enslavement of whole animal populations. A slave: a being whose life and death are in the hands of another. What else are cattle, sheep, poultry? The death camps would not have been dreamed up without the example of the meat-processing plants before them. That and more she had said: it had seemed to her obvious, barely worth pausing over. But she had gone a step further, a step too far. The massacre of the defenseless is being repeated all around us, day after day, she had said, a slaughter no different in scale or horror or moral import from what we call the holocaust; yet we choose not to see it. Of equal moral import: that they had baulked at. [ . . . ] It was an entanglement she might have foreseen and should have avoided (156-7).

This passage represents the thoughts of someone who is both still attached to her original conception of the meat industry as “a slaughter no different” from the Holocaust and is attempting to comprehend where her idea went astray. While she does ultimately decide that the “entanglement” is one she might have “avoided” she still does not see how human and animal lives might be different, in the sense that the Holocaust lives in the memories of those who were affected by it while animals probably do not remember the slaughter of their parents. We have followed the circuitousness of her thought only to discover that her principles remain unaltered because they are viscerally felt.

Was it ultimately wrong of Cavell to engage with the arguments that Costello makes instead of understanding the fictional context in which she uttered her claims? Exposure to Costello’s interiority over the course of the novel reveals her lack of certainty about her own beliefs as well as her repeated return to her bodily felt convictions. She avers that she does not believe the things she says anymore as she defends the profession of writing as an ethically neutral craft: “It is not my profession to believe, just to write. Not my business. I do imitations, as Aristotle would have said” (194). Such ethical disorientation is represented as a potential good when she thinks, while in Amsterdam, “Disoriented: is it simply because she has lost her bearings that she is thinking these black thoughts? If so, perhaps she ought to travel less. Or more” (160). The more confused she becomes the closer she arrives at a position of skepticism, calling not only particular beliefs into question but all beliefs.

Her uncertainty about certainty recalls her previous statement that she did not choose vegetarianism out of moral conviction but rather out of a desire to save her soul. When she defends her lack of belief “before the gate,” she relies on a definition of belief as “The mental action, condition, or habit of trusting to or having confidence in a person or thing; trust, dependence, reliance, confidence, faith” (“Belief” OED). As her doubts, contradictions, and adaptations throughout the novel suggest, she does not possess a belief about animals as in a mental act about an idea. But, she may possess another form of belief “A basic or ultimate principle or presupposition of knowledge; something innately believed, a primary intuition” (“Belief”) as she acknowledges in the line, “Now that she thinks of it, she lives, in a certain sense, by belief” (222). The idea that her redemption will come through her belief in the value of animal life resurfaces in her vision of the DOG-GOD behind the gate. If we take the vision seriously for a moment, it suggests that if she could remember her deeply felt intuition that all life is sacred, she would be able to pass through the gate to salvation. Not quite able to adhere to one position, she mistrusts her own equation of dog with god when she laments that it is “too literary!” (225). The irony of the lines creates two tongues, one which posits an idea and one that subverts the idea, but both avenues remain extant.

The epistolary chapters that close the book repeat this pattern of offering animals as a transcendent force and then qualify the claim. In these chapters, we move from a narration about Elizabeth Costello to a set of letters from Lord and Lady Chandos to Lord Bacon. The first letter from Lord Chandos to Lord Bacon contains his confession that he prefers animals to humans “a dog, a rat, a beetle [ . . . ] counts more for me than a night of bliss with the most beautiful, most devoted mistress” (226). Instead of subverting the grounds of his preference for animals, the letter from his mistress to Lord Bacon describes the pain she feels at being passed over for animals. She writes that we are not such elevated creatures to find revelation in animals. While he is living in “the time of the giants, the time of the angels,” she writes, we are living in the “time of fleas” (229). Such a formulation does not dismiss the belief in spiritual revelation through animals as a lower principle, but rather positions the belief as higher principle than she is able to attain. The book, then, closes with a sense that the Dog-God formulation, while overblown and literary, as the purple prose of the letters reinforces, has an enduring spiritual or ethical potency.

While Costello’s positions may not be homogenous over the course of the novel, the overarching arc of the book suggests that her ethical conviction about animals has an ultimate potency. Atwell notes that Coetzee’s fiction neither enumerates “a record of failed attempts at transcendence” nor strives to “turn paralysis into a virtue by appealing to notions of play”; instead, Coetzee “search[es] for [a] way in which the novel might recover an ethical basis” (4, 6-7). What Coetzee attempts is different than simply offering a position on animals that philosophers can agree or disagree with. Rather, if we take Costello’s pronouncement in front of the gates as a statement about writing in general, Coetzee does an imitation of a person who has a conviction about animals that undergoes alterations, contradictions, and reaffirmations throughout the novel. We witness Coetzee’s mastery of linguistic registers as we see Elizabeth Costello assert, debate, and doubt her beliefs in private, in public, and among family. Although the book questions the foundation of belief altogether and seems to posit disorientation as a proper ethical stance, the book does not end with the kind of vertiginous irony that leads to ethical paralysis. Rather, the novel posits the persistence of a gut-instinct as a linguistic phenomenon that perhaps invites debate as much as it calls for readerly acknowledgment.

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## **“The poor little working girl”: The New Woman, Chloral, and Motherhood in *The House of Mirth***

**Margaret Bertucci Hamper**

The New Woman was born out of an intense political and social period in American history. In her struggle for independence, each element of the New Woman’s newly-formed life – from medicine to marriage – was placed under public scrutiny as an individual ethical dilemma. Edith Wharton fervently shared in these controversies, embedding in her work responses to those issues that sprung from the New Woman’s birth.

One of Wharton’s most complicated and troublesome responses to these dilemmas is set in her famous novel *The House of Mirth*. Many critics, including Frances Restuccia, regarded Wharton’s novel as a feminist one in which Lily Bart – the novel’s main character – fails to thrive in a world where women who fail to live up to the paragon of conventional femininity are disregarded. Indeed, Wharton was pro-suffrage and, as Amy Kaplan argues, Wharton defied contemporary expectations of female authorship, writing not to extend domestic duties but promote social change. However, I want to complicate such claims for Wharton’s feminist intentions in *The House of Mirth*, keeping in mind Margaret McDowell’s contention that while Wharton’s views on feminism changed over time, at some level she held women to conventionally feminine standards. I put it to you that *The House of Mirth* is a novel that allows women only those freedoms conventionally feminine.

Lily Bart is a young and beautiful socialite who, when faced with a choice between marriage for love or finance, chooses neither. When Lily becomes unwittingly indebted both financially and romantically to a married man, she chooses to enter into the world of the working class, surrounded by “liberated work women” (302). Lily finds herself irreconcilably unsuited to the world of work and ends her life by overdose on a controversial drug called chloral.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the New Woman was emerging as a worker in an array of lower professions. These working women, and their often unhappily married sisters, were often diagnosed with neurasthenia. This disease presented as nervousness and insomnia, ostensibly caused by the stress of work life and unhappiness in the home, serving husbands and rearing children. The New Woman’s supposed difficulty with work and home-life was recognized in medical journals, newspaper articles, and fiction. One character in a late nineteenth-century play, *The New Woman*, exclaims:

To the hospital I would go, to learn trained nursing, that I may bring the new woman back from the gates of sickness, perchance of death, to the realms of health and strength – that she may not only compete with, but outstrip the Old Man! (241)

“The gates of sickness, perchance of death” likely refer to this epidemic of neurasthenia (*New Woman* 241). Both the causes – domestic and professional unhappiness – and symptoms of Lily Bart’s distress – her “smitten . . . nerve-centers,” and “sleepless[ness]” – fit neatly with those of neurasthenia (Wharton 173, 188).

Lily seems to fall victim to this disease only after she enters the world of “liberated work women” (302). One night, as Lily hopes for sleep, she thinks that “she had learned by experience that she had neither the aptitude nor the moral constancy to remake her life on new lines, to become a worker among workers and let the world of luxury and pleasure sweep her by unregarded” (Wharton 319). Lily gives up hope of independence and self-subsistence soon after her entrance into the workforce; she laments that she is “a bad – a bad girl – all [her] thoughts are bad . . . [She] thought [she] could manage [her] own life – [she] was proud – proud!” (173). She feels incapable of New Womanhood.

Wharton seems not to have had much faith in women as workers. In her article *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort*, she recounts warmly what a French Doctor had explained to her: “Frenchwomen never make really good sick-nurses . . . They are too personal, too emotional . . . they are not systematic or tidy . . . The French war-nurse sometimes

mislays an instrument or forgets to sterilize a dressing; but she almost always finds the consoling word to say and the right tone to take with her wounded soldiers” (*Fighting France* 246). This embracing of the stereotypical clumsy female worker with a strong maternal instinct suggests a less-than-wholehearted approval of the then-emerging New Woman. Lily too, is an inept worker. After two months as a milliner, “she was still being rebuked for her inability to sew spangles on a hat frame” (301); Lily never does become a talented milliner, despite her earlier talent at sewing her own hats.

What’s more is that Lily, at the beginning of the novel, is established as biologically superior; an admirer wonders whether Lily is of the same “species” as the “dingy” women in the street (Wharton 3). Even this biologically-superior woman is “incapable of managing [her] own life” (Wharton 173). Lily describes herself as a “bad” for having the desire to be independent and, in so doing, rejecting conventional, paradigmatic femininity. The New Woman, suggests Lily, is not only impractical and unconventional, she is unethical.

Lily notes that there are other “bad girls” who live near Gerty – another unhappy New Woman – and wonders if they:

ever pick themselves up? Ever forget, and feel as if they did before? . . . Don’t they always go from bad to worse?

There’s no turning back – your old self rejects you, and shuts you out. (Wharton 174)

Gerty’s silence confirms Lily’s suspicions. There appears to be no return from this ostensibly “bad” brand of independence. This independence causes Lily, like other New Women to become “ill” (Wharton 280). Lily’s illness has made it so that “her hands sh[ake],” she is “nervous,” and she “do[es]n’t sleep at night” (280-1). Like those whom she describes as the “liberated work-women,” Lily eventually finds solace in chloral (302).

This controversial medication, a derivative of chloroform, was often prescribed to neurasthenia patients. Chloral seemed to have been effective – especially on the mentally unstable, but it was also dangerous (Williams 69). Numerous poems, medical journals, and magazines note that chloral was often unpredictable and deadly. Lily Bart’s chemist warns, “You don’t want to increase the dose, you know . . . It’s a queer acting drug. A drop or two more, and off you go; the doctors don’t know why” (Wharton 305). Some women died from taking it at home; others died in the doctor’s office under the supervision of the professionals who prescribed it (Obituary 202).

Regardless, chloral remained a popular drug for the New Woman suffering from neurasthenia. “The new woman,” argues one contemporary author, “has suggested a highly effective method of dealing with th[is] intrusive little stranger – chloroform” (Stutfield 164). This is the drug to which Lily Bart becomes progressively addicted and with which she finally commits suicide. It would seem, then, that Lily’s death is a testament to the failure of the “liberated work woman” (302). By casting chloral as the cause of Lily’s death, Wharton reminds contemporary readers that the New Woman was an unreliable fixture of society; both her disease and its cure would render her endeavors unsuccessful.

Wharton’s intent, however, was not only to bring attention to the precarious condition of the New Woman. Chloral was also used as a pain-killer and sedative for expectant mothers before and during labor. Readers contemporary to Wharton, knowing this, would also associate Lily’s use of chloral with motherhood. It was a common late nineteenth-century fear that bad mothers “enfeebled in mind and spirit” by chloral, begetting “doomed children,” took the drug to subdue their dissatisfaction, provoking mental instability (Phelps 130). Before I discuss the further implications of Lily’s use of chloral, I would like to lay the groundwork for a general understanding of both how motherhood is presented in the novel and place it in its appropriate historical context.

In one of the closing scenes of *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart meets with Nettie Struther, a mother and wife, whom we meet earlier in the novel as a distressed, working woman. Later, Lily rests from emotional and physical exhaustion, dreading the return to her boarding-house home, while Nettie tries to give Lily hope. Nettie, who had once been in a similar state of emotional and physical distress, tells Lily that she “never thought [she’d] come back alive” from the working world (Wharton 333). “You see,” she says, “I didn’t know about [my husband] and the baby then” (333). Nettie finds purpose and happiness in the duties of wife and motherhood. Lily is without child and without purpose or happiness, child or husband.

Nettie and Lily have switched roles: Nettie, once hopeless and without purpose, looked to Lily for inspiration and now, as Lily says, “It will be my turn to think of you as happy . . .” (Wharton 333). Lily will look to Nettie’s domestic lifestyle as a model for happiness and purpose.

This scene between mother and lost soul seems to dovetail with the sentiment of *Two “New” Women* (1894). The author argues that what distinguishes the New Woman from the old fashioned woman is “nothing but the absence of all regard for the feeling and comforts of others” (IIA). These women can be redeemed, however, through motherhood. The author argues that motherhood “will awaken the heart of even the most insensible woman” (IIA). That is to say, Lily might have redeemed herself from having been “bad” by pursuing this traditionally feminine role.

The editor of *The Ladies' Home Journal* also supposes that the New Woman is an immoral creature who lives in opposition to “what God intended a woman should be” (*At Home* 14). Another author argues that the New Woman replaces “motherhood with . . . mannishness” and certainly, at the beginning of the novel, Lily does wish to strip away her femininity (*Bishops* 650). She wishes that she could “have a[n apartment] all to [her]self! What a miserable thing,” she exclaims, “it is to be a woman” (Wharton 5). This established dissatisfaction with unfeminine, childless women makes conspicuous Wharton’s attention to Lily’s admiration for Nettie’s domesticity.

Lily, both attempting New Womanhood and addicted to chloral, makes for a frightening mother figure. Just before her conversation with Nettie, during which Lily admires Nettie’s child, the name of Lily’s sleep-aid, chloral, is for the first time introduced. Lily hopes that “excessive weariness would reinforce the waning power of the chloral” (330). Introducing chloral at this point in the novel signaled to readers the unfortunate connections Wharton sought to draw between New Womanhood and motherhood.

When Lily visits Nettie Struther, it is apparent that Lily has unrealized potential as a mother; as Lily holds the child, “the frozen currents of youth had loosed themselves and run warm in her veins: the old life hunger possessed her . . .” (340). As Lily feels the child “sink trustfully against her breast,” and the “soothing influences of digestion prevail” over the child’s uneasiness, “the weight [of the child] increased, sinking deeper and penetrating her with a strange sense of weakness as though the child entered into her and became a part of herself” (Wharton 335). It is here that Lily’s lost potential as a mother is made clear. Nettie exclaims that it would “be lovely . . . if [the child] could grow up to be just like [Lily]” (335). Hearing this, Lily returns the child to her mother and says that the child “must not do that” (335). Lily remembers that though she was once a paragon of femininity, she is no longer a figure to be admired. She has unwittingly become a New Woman whose mental instability and drug addiction would realize contemporary fears of unstable mothers.

Several passages in *The House of Mirth* make clear that Wharton regarded child-rearing as the redeeming quality of the business of marriage. It was a common fear that New Women would not bear children, or worse, would bear “doomed children” (Phelps 130). Wharton seems to have shared the fear that proper child-rearing would be lost on the “liberated work woman” (302). Even Rosedale, a nearly-villainous Jewish businessman in *The House of Mirth*, is redeemed in appearance by his interaction with a child.

Rosedale takes on uncharacteristic charms of “homely goodness” when interacting with this child (Wharton 263). Wharton’s suggestion that Rosedale’s “advances to the child . . . were not, at any rate, the premeditated and perfunctory of the guest under the hostess’ eye, for he and the girl had the room to themselves,” render soft even the most distasteful characters (263). Lily, however, has squandered her every chance at redemption through marriage and childbirth. Instead, Lily remains “bad” and can find “tranquility” only through suicide (347). In her final moments, she pleasantly imagines Nettie Struther’s child in her arms and is then swept away by the “invisible hand” of chloral (342-3).

Although *The House of Mirth* is often regarded as a feminist novel about a woman who chooses not to take part in the business of marriage, this reading takes the opposite view. Wharton’s response to the ethical dilemma presented by the new woman is this: the conventions of femininity which provide for domestic and personal tranquility are not to be disregarded. If readers are meant by Wharton to take a lesson from Lily, certainly it is that women are often ineffective workers, better suited to the duties of the domestic. The importance of child-rearing for women and the frightening figure of the chloral-addicted, working mother make it clear that though Wharton may have considered “liberated work women” a problematic figure at best, however unappealing, Lily Bart’s ordeal serves as a cautionary tale about the tragedy and immorality of transgressions of the new woman’s path “against which her mother had so passionately warned her” (313).

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## **Moral Courage in *The Runaway Jury***

**Kristin Mathis**

There is a significant amount of moral courage involved in properly performing one’s civil duties as a jury member, especially in high profile cases where the stakes are high. John Grisham’s *The Runaway Jury* highlights the moral issues involved in a civil suit between a smoker’s widow and a big tobacco company, Pynex. With millions of dollars and a historical decision involving Big Tobacco at stake, the pressure in the jury room is high, as is the opportunity for corruption. In Grisham’s jury more than half of the jurors are secretly – and illegally – bribed, blackmailed, deceived, or threatened by a group of men working for Pynex. One juror, known as Nicholas Easter, is on his own moral crusade and goes through great – though mostly illegal – lengths to fight against the “Big Four” tobacco companies. Nicholas’ secret campaign as a rogue juror begs the following questions: in impossible situations, such as when one is fighting against multibillion dollar tobacco corporations, what is the “right” thing to do? Can an illegal act still be considered one of moral courage?

Nicholas Easter and his girlfriend, Marlee, are a couple with a mission. They met in Kansas while Nicholas was beginning law school and Marlee was working at a bar nearby. The reader learns that both of Marlee’s parents passed away before she turned twenty-one, both died of lung cancer, and both were life-long cigarette addicts, despite endless efforts to quit. Though Nicholas dropped out of law school, the two remained together and began conspiring to get back at Big Tobacco through civil litigation. Through careful plots and conniving charisma, the pair managed to get Nicholas placed on the jury for a civil suit between Celeste Wood, a smoker’s widow, and Pynex, a large tobacco company. Marlee tricked the corrupt men working for Pynex to “buy” the verdict, or to pay her \$10 million to sway the jury to vote for the defendant, while all the time she was truly working to help the plaintiffs. Nicholas then convinced his jury to return a nine-to-three verdict, awarding the plaintiff four hundred million dollars in punitive damages and two million dollars in compensatory damages. Nicholas swayed the majority of the jury members through his strong leadership skills, credibility, and charisma; however, as a stealth juror he was illegally on the jury, and he also employed illegal tactics – such as poisoning one juror and framing another – to remove three of the jurors from their duty to replace them with alternates.

Whether or not Nicholas and Marlee acted legally, one could argue that they still acted with moral courage. According to Al Gini, moral courage is “readiness to endure danger for the sake of principle . . . [It] is the ability to transcend fear and endure risk to put ethics into actual practice” (4). In *The Runaway Jury*, Nicholas and Marlee are enduring the risk of legal prosecution in order to take action against an unethical business that is too powerful and corrupt to be kept in check by a fair trial. The legal system should have been able to protect consumers from the tobacco industry, but the companies in *The Runaway Jury* have employed illegal scare tactics – such as stalking, arson, and blackmail – to prevent losing tort cases identical to the one highlighted in the novel. Their actions may be the only way to stop the tobacco industry, so one can see that they acted rightly, despite the legal risks.

Nicholas’ and Marlee’s actions also embody Dennis Moberg’s three elements of moral courage. The first element is “choosing rightly when faced with the likelihood of personal harm,” and I have already established the risk of harm the pair faced, as well as the idea that their choice to act was a “right” one (189). Moberg’s second element of moral courage

is the idea that it is the act of moderation, somewhere between cowardice and foolhardiness (189). This element closely relates to his idea of weighing the risk and return of a potential action. For an action to be morally courageous rather than foolhardy, the “expected results [must] warrant the risks incurred” (196). Nicholas’ and Marlee’s short-term expectation was to award a verdict to the plaintiff as a way of holding Big Tobacco accountable for the death and suffering caused by its addicting and harmful products; this expectation was realized and they were able to award the plaintiff \$402 million, half of Pynex’s cash value. Their long-term expectation was that this verdict would be the beginning of Big Tobacco’s decline, which would ultimately save millions of lives. The only risks the two faced were legal charges and probably jail time, if caught. It seems that an expected result of saving millions of lives would justify the risk of two lives in jail, if the plot were to be unsuccessful. The final component of moral courage is that an action must be “aimed at a vision of the good” (189). Nicholas’ and Marlee’s actions were aimed at conserving “the moral priority of human beings over property,” which Moberg specifically cites as a valid moral principle for which to strive (189-190).

The fact that Nicholas’ and Marlee’s actions fit Al Gini’s definition of moral courage and embody all three of Moberg’s elements of such courage seems to prove that these two people are a truly morally courageous pair. However, it seems that the illegality of the scheme must still be addressed. In reality, the only reason that the moral courageousness of Nicholas’ and Marlee’s actions can be questioned is that the practice of being a stealth juror is illegal, which means that the entirety of their good deeds is based on an illegal act. According to Howard and Korver’s diagram for decision-making criteria, what is ethical is not always the same as what is legal (“3-Decision Making Criteria”). Sometimes an action can be morally correct without being lawful and such is the case with Nicholas Easter and his partner, Marlee. Interestingly enough, Howard and Korver’s third decision-making criterion is prudence – whether or not an action is in one’s self-interest – and it does not seem that Nicholas’ and Marlee’s actions are self-serving. The only things the pair personally gained from all the risks they took to battle Big Tobacco were their profits from investing the ten million dollar bribe. Marlee profited from the cash by short-selling shares in tobacco companies just before the verdict was read. She returned the full ten million dollars to the man who tried to bribe her and said to him, “I’m not a thief. I lied and I cheated because that’s what your client understands” (387). She then proceeded to explain why she and Nicholas had come after the company by telling him about her wonderful parents and their horrible deaths.

Some may argue that Nicholas and Marlee did not have to act illegally to make a difference; for example, maybe they should have participated in some sort of whistleblowing act since they knew so much about the corrupt practices that Pynex was using to win civil suit after civil suit. The risks of blowing the whistle on such a large, powerful, and corrupt company, however, are far too dangerous to warrant this course of action. During the trial, arsonists working for Pynex burned Nicholas’ apartment and fifteen others surrounding his. Clearly this company has no fear of acting with violence to get what it wants. Pynex also had men stalk Marlee’s past, through her multiple name changes and her residence in various places around the world, to find out her birth name and the details of her family history. If the company has no qualms about violence and has the ability to track and find people who desperately do not want to be found, certainly such a company would track down and, in some way, destroy anyone who tried to blow the whistle. Since whistleblowing would have been more dangerous for Nicholas and Marlee, one can believe that to act in this way would have been too “foolhardy” to qualify as moral courage (Moberg 189). However, their chosen method could qualify as a sort of underground whistleblowing because it essentially achieved the same effects. Though Nicholas and Marlee were never employees of Pynex, they still did enough research to have the inside information necessary make their move. The pair still took great personal risk to “stop harmful actions on behalf of the public interest” (Kohn 61). Even though Nicholas and Marlee did not expose Pynex’s misconduct to the public, they still “triggered change,” which Stephen Kohn says is the purpose of whistleblowing (66). Firstly, Nicholas’ and Marlee’s actions cost Pynex half of their cash as a company; this forced the company to make cuts to their budget and presumably forced them to cut back on the amount of money the company could spend to purchase verdicts in future cases or hire people to illegally interfere with juries. The couple also deterred Pynex from acting dishonestly in future trials because Marlee threatened them by saying, “next time you boys go to trial, we’ll be there” (388). Though Nicholas and Marlee did not participate in the conventional form of whistleblowing, they still loosely followed the structure of what whistleblowing is, including the risks and results.

Overall, it is clear that Nicholas Easter and his girlfriend, Marlee, acted with moral courage when they infiltrated the jury of the case *Wood v. Pynex* to sway verdict towards the plaintiff. Their intentions and thought processes were in line with morally courageous standards because they wanted to work for the good of the general public. They weighed the risks and expected results of their plan and determined that their actions were justified. Ethicality does not necessarily mean legality, and so the fact that their actions were illegal does not detract from the moral courageousness of their acts,

especially because theirs might have been the only way possible to achieve success in helping to protect the public from the powerfully corrupt tobacco industry.

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### **A Labyrinthine Modesty: On Raymond Roussel and Chiasmus**

**W.C. Bamberger**

Raymond Roussel (1877 – 1933) was a French poet, novelist and playwright whose works were almost totally dismissed during his lifetime. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, he was rediscovered and became a strong influence on the literary avant-garde, particularly on French “New Novelists” such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and on “New York School” poets and novelists such as Kenneth Koch and Harry Mathews.

Roussel’s first book (self-published, as were all his books during his lifetime) was *La Doublere [The Understudy]* in 1897. Roussel wrote this long poem in a frenzy of inspiration, working night and day for months. Writing the poem filled him with a joyous feeling of glory. As he later told psychologist Pierre Janet, he was at that time certain that he “carried the sun within himself,” to the point of keeping the curtains tightly drawn in his work room, fearing “that the shining rays emanating from [his] pen might escape into the outside world through even the smallest chink. . . . To leave these papers lying about would have sent out rays of light as far as China, and the desperate crowd would have flung themselves upon my house” (Ford, 13). When the poem was published Roussel ventured out into the streets of Paris expecting to be mobbed; he was ignored. For much of the remainder of his life Roussel wrote and wrote in the vain hope of enlisting readers to help him recapture that elusive glory. This we know by way of Roussel’s own writings and through notes taken by his psychoanalyst, Pierre Janet. Using these sources as clues, this paper suggests that Roussel’s last great work, the long poem *New Impressions of Africa [Nouvelles Impressions d’Afrique]* was written in reaction to his therapy sessions, in which Janet tried to find ways to help Roussel to, in effect, have a little less faith in his own glory, and to learn to be comfortable with the doubt that it would ever come to pass.

If this is indeed the case, it shades the unanimously received picture of Roussel as being consumed with wordplay and personal glory and moves him a little further inside the circle of our common humanity.

Three years after the disappointment of the non-reception of *La Doublere*, Roussel published a booklet titled *Chiquenaude*. This was his first published work to employ a compositional strategy that helped shape a number of his later works: he would begin a text with a seed sentence and a second sentence almost identical to the first, differing from it by a few letters, or perhaps a break in a compound word, or by utilizing another meaning of the same word, et al. *Chiquenaude*, for example, begins with “*La vers de la doublure dans la pièce du Forbran talon rouge avaient été composés par moi.*” [“The verses of the understudy in the play *Forbran talon rouge* had been composed by me.”] It concludes with “*Les vers de la doublure dans la pièce du fort pantalon rouge . . . !*” [“The worms in the lining of the piece

of strong red trouser . . . !”] Then, as Roussel later wrote, “The phrases found, it was a case of writing a story which could begin with the first and end with the latter.” (Roussel 1995 [1935], 4)

The resulting texts offer almost nothing in the way of character development, empathy or suspense, and very little that might be termed “plot.” What Roussel offers instead is endless invention and verbal novelty. Roussel’s 1914 novel *Locus Solus* (“A Place Apart”), for example, includes such verbally-generated wonders as an aerial pile driver that constructs a mosaic made of human teeth. Roussel used the above procedure to write a number of other works, including the novel *Impressions of Africa* (1910), which features such sights as a zither-playing worm, a marksman who can peel an egg at fifty yards, and a railway car that rolls along on calves’ “lights” (lungs). The procedure was employed in a number of short tales and two plays as well. Roussel spent years on these texts, even while thinking of them simply as lures: he continued to hope that anyone encountering them would be led back to *La Doublere*, which he always felt was his highest achievement, his true glory.

Pierre Janet was a Parisian psychologist with a special interest in religious mania. He felt that Roussel was suffering from something quite similar: Janet published some of his observations about Roussel (under the name “Martial”) in the two volumes of his *De l’angoisse à l’extase* (1926).

Janet seems to have felt that he himself barely escaped suffering this same mania. In a short autobiographical sketch, Janet identifies his twin passions as a young man as being the natural sciences and religion. The first he identifies as a “passion [that] determined my taste for dissection, precise observation, and classification.” Of the second he wrote, “At the age of eighteen I was very religious, and I have always retained mystical tendencies which I have succeeded in controlling. It was a question of conciliating scientific tastes and religious sentiments . . .” (Janet 1930).

Janet notes that he began seeing Roussel just prior to the outbreak of World War I, when Roussel would have been just shy of forty. A later note identifies Roussel as being forty-six – which would make the year 1923. It was during this period that Roussel was writing what many see as his magnum opus, his most labyrinthine work, *Nouvelles Impressions d’Afrique*, a 1274-line poem with footnotes, written in alexandrine couplets. The poem includes four cantos of unequal length. Each is a single sentence beginning with an imagined scene in Egypt, a sentence broken up by digressions within parentheses and more parentheses within those, at times reaching a fifth level of digression. All of these digressions eventually return to the original sentence at its conclusion. As the poem’s translator puts it, “The form of each canto means its end inevitably returns to its opening, and this return creates a moment fraught with the sweet melancholy pang of simultaneous completion and loss.” (Roussel 1911 [1932], 15 – 16). Canto IV, for example, begins

Skimming the Nile, I see flitting by two banks covered  
With flowers, with wings, with flashes of brightness, with rich green plants  
*Of which one could provide twenty of our salons*  
(Sweet salons, where as soon as someone has turned on his heels and left  
((Amusing themselves with talk either of his cowardice [ . . . ]

And, some 90 lines later, concludes,

Or of his astute talents if he cheats at cards;))  
About whoever is departing numerous rumors are started;),  
*With thick foliage, with glinting lights and fruits.* (Roussel 2011 [1932], 211, 251 [Italics added])

In his posthumous explanatory work, translated as *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, Roussel explicitly states that he did not use his transmuted-sentences process in this poem’s composition – but he doesn’t explain which guidelines he did use. I want to suggest that Janet told Roussel about some of the structural devices that shape the text of the Old Testament, and that Roussel, with his fondness for such structural devices, adapted these for the writing of the *New Impressions*.

Here we unavoidably enter the realm of conjecture – because, while Janet recorded and made public Roussel’s statements, there appears to be no public record of what Janet said to Roussel. We know that Janet read some of Roussel’s works generated by the transmutation process, and it seems likely that Roussel would have explained his process to his analyst. The facts that Janet would have had about Roussel then would have included his unquenchable thirst for glory, an obsession Janet identified with religious mania, as well as Roussel’s fondness for serious word play and for concluding his works where they began. It seems quite logical that Janet would have introduced Roussel to the “documentary” or “scientific method” of Biblical textual exegesis. What makes it seem likely that this would have come to Janet’s mind is his perception – however subjective the leap that led him to it – of Roussel’s ambitions as being akin to religious mania. (Parenthetically, we might wonder whether Janet’s own obsession with this affliction might have warped his understanding of his patient’s needs – but that’s another subject.)

The “documentary” theory of Biblical analysis proper began with a Frenchman, Jean Astruc’s *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux, dont il paraît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse* (“Conjectures on the original accounts of which it appears Moses availed himself in composing the Book of Genesis”) (1753). More studies appeared, primarily in English and German through the 18th and 19th centuries, but there was also a small flurry of activity in French at the turn of the 20th century when Albert Condamin published *Le Livre de Jérémie* (1902) and *Le Livre d’Isaïe* (1905). Janet, with his need to reconcile his scientific and “mystical” sides, would certainly have been aware of these works.

This method considers the texts (almost exclusively the Old Testament) as verbal constructions, identifying how in nearly every line word play such as puns and homonyms play important roles, how the verses are constructed of lines that mirror/reverse one another, and how both verses and whole books are structured by the principles of chiasmus or “Ring Composition” – a technique closely resembling Roussel’s own procedures.

The late Mary Douglas identified the two essential elements of chiasmus or “ring composition” as being, firstly, that the conclusion of the text must in some way return to its beginning; and, secondly, that the primary meaning or lesson of the text occurs at its mid-point. The binding of Isaac, for example (Genesis 22.1 – 18), begins with God telling Abraham to take “your son, your only son” to be sacrificed, and ends with God telling Abraham that because he did not withhold “your son, your only son,” God blesses him and his descendants. The midpoint of this tale (Genesis 2.11) is the scene where the angel calls down to Abraham to spare Isaac (Douglas, 20). Douglas convincingly locates this structure throughout the Old Testament as well as in such antique texts as *The Odyssey* and Medieval Chinese novels.

If we reread Roussel’s “mysterious” *New Impressions of Africa* with chiasmus in mind – and are open to various definitions of the “middle” of a text – we discover some interesting things.

All four cantos are interrupted by various digressive lists. Canto I is interrupted by three categories of lists. That which straddles the center of the canto concerns itself with doubt of our understanding and perception, with the question of (as Michel Foucault writes) “Even with the most immediate of things, can one be sure whether they are this or that, useful or harmful, real or fake” (140).

Canto II, the longest at 611 lines plus footnotes, includes six categories of lists that (again utilizing Foucault’s excellent synopses) comprise a dialectic on questions of size and nature, shape and scale, contradictions in a life and success that is “spoiled at the core by coming from a source that contradicts it.” The list that straddles the middle here is that of things of different sizes but with similarities of form such that they could be mistaken for one another in some rare circumstances: i.e.” a fried egg and the head of a tonsured monk ill with jaundice” (Foucault, 142). The canto then is a depiction of the ways in which we (including Roussel) might mistake one thing for something of quite another scale.

Canto III is 110 lines long. Lines 55-59 and the footnote to line 56 are a digression on the evils of snobbery, most specifically that of the Biblical Jacob and Esau: “(((The role played by snobbery (((in essence, what was Jacob? / An open snob, swelled by the purchase of a birthright / Which Esau, a snob himself / cried over as he digested his meal;)))) / Was, is, and always will be a leading one;))).” The footnote to line 56 considers whether only humans suffer from snobbery, and includes the observation (in which we can easily read ambivalence; Roussel is trying, but he is Roussel, after all) that one can’t reliably identify “a colossal genius” by the “legendary insults he encountered in his youth” (Roussel 2011, 187, 191, 195).

Canto IV is 98 lines long. Lines 49 to 51 allude to the triumph of posterity over the glory even of kings. The subjects of the two footnotes attached to these lines are 1) things that make people wait, including “Public acclaim”; and 1, again) how “There is no one who does not cherish an ambitious dream” (Roussel 2011, 223, 227). This sounds like Roussel trying to come out of his tightly-curtained room and see himself at one with the rest of the human race . . . if reluctantly.

As already noted, to read *New Impressions of Africa*, the above quoted passages and observations about its structure, as Roussel borrowing from scientific or documentary Bible exegesis to try to come to terms with his nostalgia for glory, to further mitigate his destructive faith in his genius and so gain through the acceptance of a little healthy self-doubt some degree of humility is conjecture. But the above is more than coincidence (or this critic stretching “middles” to corral an elusive degree of proof) and points to Roussel at least entertaining the notion that he has mistaken the scale of his genius.

In light of this idea it is ironic that admirers of his work, latecomers who have taken him up several decades after his death, continue to polish his reputation. Perhaps one day, despite Janet and literary history’s best judgment, Roussel will be proven to have been right about himself after all.

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## **MORAL SENSE: Biology & Morality – (Where Science and Philosophy Intersect)**

On 26 April 2012 there was a Moral Sense Colloquium at St. Francis College, Brooklyn Heights, N.Y., sponsored by Provost Timothy Houlihan. What follows are the program notes of the event (by Gregory F. Tague) and two of the papers, each one presenting a different perspective on the moral sense.

Our purpose in organizing this Colloquium is threefold: to mark the unveiling of the forward-looking improvements to the science center; to bring together the community of learners at St. Francis College; to demonstrate how science and philosophy (or science and other disciplines) work together.

We envisioned a small Colloquium with faculty members sharing ideas with a much larger audience on the themes and subjects outlined below (and issued a faculty-wide Call, May 2011). We encouraged faculty with a focus in science to read philosophy and faculty with a focus in philosophy to read science (using some of the guides we provide here).

At the heart of the colloquium is the notion of moral sense, which has been variously defined, by philosophers and scientists (from the seventeenth century up to the present), as an approval faculty, or conscience, or sympathy, or compassion, or as an instinctual social emotion. In Darwin's century, while Herbert Spencer and T.H. Huxley famously defended Darwin's ideas, they also confounded his notion of morality by pitting it against nature (i.e., the flawed ideas of social Darwinism). After Darwin, prominent biologists of the twentieth century have tackled the question of why cooperation extends beyond kin: R. Haldane (in 1932) uses the term *altruism*; in the 1960s W.D Hamilton addresses the evolution of social behavior, and George C. Williams writes of *social donors*; by 1971 R.L. Trivers pens his famous article on the evolution of reciprocal altruism. Since then there has been a steady flow of articles and books (popular and academic) on what it means to be moral (and from whence such behavior arose). What follows are some thought-provoking questions and background information that stimulated ideas for the Colloquium.

- Do we have an inherited (evolutionary, adapted) moral sense?
- How are emotions related to morality?
- Is there a biological explanation for morality?
- In what way do disciplines outside of biology and philosophy (e.g., psychology, sociology, economics) help explain the various loci of moral decision making?
- How (according to developmental psychologist Paul Bloom) do we reconcile humanist values with a mechanistic explanation of the brain?

These important questions (and certainly others by implication) bring together philosophy, psychology, and especially biology.

Philosophers (mostly British) of primarily the eighteenth century (in reaction to a number of complex events – religious, social, and scientific – of the seventeenth century), developed a notion of the moral sense. These philosophers,

working in an increasingly secular age, argue very strongly that any human goodness was not bestowed from a divinity but was driven by innate human feelings of benevolence or sympathy. Marc Hauser, as a Harvard research psychologist (as well as others, notably Joshua Greene), has written extensively about this very issue: from an evolutionary and biological perspective, we do in fact have a so-called moral sense. Taking the lead from the British Moralists, Darwin, in *The Descent of Man*, has a chapter on moral faculties and employs the term moral sense. There is a rich history of philosophy that focuses on morality and ethics; now, science is helping us understand much better those concerns (and the connection of ancestral human caring to morality). Paul Ekman (a psychologist of emotions) helps us understand social-moral decision making in terms of our individual biological construction. Neuroscientists (such as Michael Gazzaniga and Antonio Damasio), biologists (such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett), as well as, for instance, a psychiatric lawyer (Laurence Tancredi) have written on these controversial topics – i.e., the connection between the biology of the brain and moral decisions or moral behavior.

While the eminent primatologist Frans de Waal has consistently insisted on the *continuities* (in evolutionary terms) of sociality and cooperative behavior between primates and human beings, he has had many detractors (such the noted developmental psychologist Jerome Kagan, who stresses the biology of morality but aims for something distinctive in being human). Philosopher Martha Nussbaum, in her book *Poetic Justice* (and elsewhere), suggests (contrary to Plato and more to Aristotle), that the emotions (over and above reason) have the potential to be good moral guides. In fact, the evolutionary psychologist Leda Cosmides and anthropologist John Tooby have strongly suggested that reason is an evolved instinct. Meanwhile, philosophers such as Antony Flew and Alvin Plantinga have argued (against naturalism) that there is a rational basis for theism.

A related focal point with the moral sense is social behavior:

- What happens to us – biologically – when confronted by a moral dilemma?
- What role does the brain play – in its various parts – in helping us make a moral decision?
- What do other disciplines tell us about moral decision making?
- How do individual differences – biologically and environmentally – account for moral decisions?

Pairings of biology and philosophy on this subject that come to mind include, notably, the team of scientist Maxwell Bennett and the philosopher Peter Hacker. The philosopher John Searle is a noted materialist and Darwinian. What is happening in other disciplines? There is: evolutionary psychology; the biology of emotions; neuro-philosophy (recent work by Patricia Churchland). In literary studies, Suzanne Keen has used science to focus on emotions and empathy; Joseph Carroll has single-handedly, begun in the early 1990s, started literary Darwinism. There is no better time than now, and no better place than St. Francis College, to enter into and engage in this conversation.

#### **Speakers / Presentation Titles**

Dr. Kristy Biolsi (Psychology): What does it mean to be a moral animal?

Dr. Kathleen Nolan (Biology): Altruism, selfishness and spite – and the costs and benefits of each.

Dr. Irina Ellison (Biology): The changing pulls of biology and morality in the formation of life.

Dr. Sophie Berman (Philosophy): “*Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme*” (“Science without conscience is but ruin of the soul”).



## **What Does it Mean to be a Moral Animal?**

**Kristy Lindemann-Biolsi**

### **Abstract**

From a psychological perspective, one can argue that morality is a trait that has both a learned and a genetic component. In fact, morality is generally thought to be a uniquely human trait, however, some researchers today argue the point that human cognition has evolved over time and that rudimentary elements can therefore be seen across animal species. The development of morality in humans, the psychological abilities thought to underlie moral behavior (self-awareness and theory of mind) and evidence for these abilities in non-humans as the basis of ‘moral’ behavior in animals are discussed.

### **What Does it Mean to be a Moral Animal?**

The nature versus nurture debate continues to be in the forefront of psychological investigations of morality. The focus has been on whether we learn to be moral through those around us (by explicit teaching and/or observational learning) or due to genetics (our DNA). Today, researchers generally agree that as a whole we are a product of our genetic make-up as well as our environment, and this seems to pertain to our moral sense as well. That being said, many believe that morality is a distinctly human characteristic, one that is not found across animal species (see Kant, 1798/1978). But, if morality is embedded in our DNA then it is subject to the process of evolution which would indicate that, in the least, the rudiments of morality may be present in nonhuman animals (from here on referred to as animals) such as our closest relatives, the great apes. This then begs the question of what we mean when we discuss a moral behavior – what is morality and what does it mean to be a moral animal?

Within the field of psychology morality can be defined as making the ‘right’ choice and behaving appropriately according to one’s cultural norms and religious belief system. We can study morality by presenting participants with different scenarios and asking them to make decisions. Perhaps the most well-known work on the psychological development of morality has been conducted by Lawrence Kohlberg (e.g., 1963, 1981) in which participants of varying ages were presented with a series of scenarios and then asked to make moral judgments. In this type of work the participant’s specific judgments are easier to quantify than why they made that choice, as when asked about their decision many participants say they just ‘know’ what is moral or not. One version of a classic moral scenario, called the *Heinz Dilemma*, is as follows:

A woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to produce. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman’s husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$1,000 which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: ‘No, I discovered the drug and I’m going to make money from it.’ So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man’s store to steal the drug for his wife, leaving the \$1000 where the drug was sitting. (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 19)

After reading scenarios like this one, participants are asked various questions, such as their opinion on whether or not Heinz should have broken into the store, if he should be punished, and if so what type of punishment he should receive. Young children give very straight forward answers – that Heinz stole, that stealing is wrong, and therefore he should be punished. As children reach adolescence their moral reasoning becomes more complex and they begin to take the situation/context into consideration. Studies show that adults take context into account, as well as cultural beliefs, and that these heavily influence the punishment that they feel fits the crime (Kohlberg, 1963; 1981). Adults also note the difficulty of these decisions, stating that they know it is wrong to steal, that Heinz should be punished, but that his punishment should be less severe since he was trying to save his wife. It is also interesting to note that adult participants tend to state

that even though they feel it was wrong they would do the same thing given a similar situation.

As our moral compass grows and matures it is affected by our learning environment. Many of us learn what is ‘right’ versus ‘wrong’ based on explicit instruction. Our caregivers (and our religious and cultural norms) inform us which actions are acceptable and which are not, they inform us about the effects of context on our moral decisions, and they tell (and show) us how we will be rewarded or punished according to our actions. We quickly learn that immoral actions are punished while moral actions are rewarded. Perhaps what is more interesting, and was surprising at the time of investigation, are the results of a classic series of studies run by Albert Bandura. This line of work illustrated that children’s behavior (moral and otherwise) is not only affected by being directly rewarded and punished but that they learn through *passive observation* of the reward and punishment of others – a concept that was new to learning theory at the time (Bandura & MacDonald, 1963; Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963). In this line of work, children were brought into a room where they watched a video of an adult interacting with a ‘bo-bo doll’ (an inflatable five-foot tall doll that bounces back up when knocked over). The child was exposed to one of three types of videos. In each video the adult did one of three things: he interacted nicely with the doll (e.g., talking), was violent with the doll (e.g., hit the doll with a wooden hammer), or was neutral (e.g., played with other toys ignoring the doll). After watching one of these videos the child was then brought into a room similar to the one observed. The researchers were interested in what the child did when alone in the room with the doll and if the type of video he was exposed to (nice, violent, or neutral) influenced behavior. They found that the children were in fact influenced by the behavior of the adult in the video that they saw – they were more likely to carry out the observed behaviors (Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Bandura et al., 1963). This is an excellent illustration of how we learn moral behavior through social modeling.

Further studies then demonstrated that children did not simply imitate the adults in the video but that they were directly influenced by the consequences of the adults’ behavior. Regardless of the condition (nice, violent, or neutral) the children were more likely to repeat the observed behavior if the adult was reinforced and less likely to repeat it if the adult was punished (Bandura & McDonald, 1963). For example, if a child was exposed to an adult punching the doll, and that adult was reinforced for doing so, the child was more likely to punch the doll herself, above and beyond the simple effect of having observed that behavior.

The ‘bo-bo’ doll studies therefore provide support for the learning of moral behavior. If morality was entirely based in our DNA, then the child would act morally in all cases, regardless of what the adult modeled for them. But, of course, the fact that we learn aspects of morality does not exclude us from obtaining the *ability* for moral behavior through our DNA. To assume that if it is genetic we must demonstrate morality at birth would be “. . . to confuse an organism’s ‘initial state’ with its evolved architecture. Infants do not have teeth at birth – they develop them quite awhile after birth. But does this mean they ‘learn’ to have teeth?” (Cosmides & Tooby, 1997, para.87). Morality is the interaction of our DNA and environment at work and looking at the morality, or lack thereof, of infants and young children can shed light on this fact. Infants and young children lack impulse control and rational decision making skills. Both of these are essential for moral behavior as we must often hold back our initial impulse in order to evaluate the situation and then make a rational, and one would hope, moral decision. This lack in morality at such a young age is not always due to a lack of knowledge of appropriate moral behaviors. Anecdotally, we hear many stories of young children not being able to control themselves and taking what they want, when they want it – even in light of their caregiver’s best attempts at teaching them ‘right’ from ‘wrong.’ When asked, children can even articulate that they know a behavior was ‘not nice’ or was ‘wrong,’ but that they did it anyway. The cause for this apparent immoral behavior is an immature brain – a product of our DNA. Our morality develops over time as we are taught but also as our physical brain matures from infancy to adulthood.

In a classic study of impulse control, individual children of varying ages are placed in a room with a single candy in a bowl (Mischel & Shoda, 1989). A researcher tells the child that she can have two candies upon the adult’s return to the room in a few minutes or, if she cannot wait, she can ring a bell and take the one candy currently in the bowl. If the child rings the bell and takes the one from the bowl then she receives no other candy. An adult in this situation can sit in the room and patiently wait for the researcher to come back and give her the reward. A child younger than age four, however, cannot. Almost immediately upon the researcher leaving the room children ring the bell and take the single candy. Delayed gratification is beyond their grasp at this age, not because they did not understand the instructions, but rather because key areas of the child’s brain are immature. One of these key areas is the *prefrontal cortex* (located just behind the forehead) which is involved in decision making, the formation of complex strategies, following rules and suppressing impulses (Casey et al., 1997). Neuroimaging studies have shown that it develops slowly and is not fully developed until adolescence (Gogtay et al., 2004). Likewise, both the *orbitofrontal cortex* (located behind the eyes and involved in

impulse control and decision making involving rewards) and the *anterior cingulate* (located between the prefrontal cortex and the deep inner emotion areas of the brain and involved in suppressing emotional responses) continue to develop through adolescence. Neuroimaging studies have confirmed that between the ages of three and six these regions of a child's brain are functioning at a more mature level (Posner & Rothbart, 2000). This is also the age at which studies, such as the one described above, find that children can patiently wait in order to earn a larger reward. It is worth noting that investigations of the brains of adults with psychopathy, a disorder that includes compromised impulse control and a general lack of morality, show an altered activation of the prefrontal cortex, the orbitofrontal cortex, and various emotion areas of the brain (Motzkin, Newman, Kiehl, & Koenigs, 2011; Shamay-Tsoory, Harari, Aharon-Peretz, & Levkovitz, 2010).

Moral behaviors are therefore not only learned through reward and punishment and the observation of others, but are due to the level of maturation/activation of various areas in the human brain. Because of this complex and fundamental interaction, researchers such as Tooby and Cosmides (2007) argue for taking an evolutionary approach when investigating human behavior. If physical characteristics, such as the human brain, are programmed by our DNA and have evolved over time, then psychological characteristics, such as morality, that are rooted in the brain's electrochemical functions are also subject to the process of evolution. Morality as we know it today may have evolved from an ability to consider other's values, and the consequences of acting in accordance with those values, and as a result to choose a behavior (see Tooby & Cosmides, 2010). In other words, an individual knows what another expects or wants, what will be reinforced or punished (and the severity), and then chooses to do the 'right' or 'wrong' behavior based on that knowledge. The individuals that are able to make the 'right' choices most often would succeed in their social encounters and likely find a mate and reproduce, passing along their DNA which includes the 'code for morality.'

It seems that over evolutionary time environmental pressures of various kinds have selected for the ability to act morally in the human species. This then brings the concept of morality being uniquely human into question. Based on Darwin's theory of continuity, no physical attribute or psychological ability can simply appear in a species without having rudiments of it found in related species. He stated, "If no organic being excepting man had possessed any mental power, or if his powers had been wholly different from those of the lower animals, then we should never have been able to convince ourselves that our high faculties had been gradually developed. But it can be shewn that there is no fundamental difference of this kind" (Darwin, 1871/1936, p.445). Essentially 'something' does not come from 'nothing.' This concept is the foundation by which comparative and evolutionary psychologists investigate the behavior of both humans and animals. Therefore researchers have begun to answer the question of what makes a moral animal by studying the species most likely to demonstrate moral behavior – those that are most closely related to humans (the great apes) and those that have evolved within similar environmental pressures likely to select for moral behavior (those with a complex social structure). To date, the most commonly studied animals have been monkeys, chimpanzees, and canids (e.g., dogs, wolves, and coyotes).

Since the definition of morality is a complex matter, we must clearly define testable aspects for investigations into the moral behavior of animals. One such aspect is an animal's behavioral reaction to social norms (as mentioned, morality is thought to have evolved in part due to social pressures). Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) are well known for their complex social structure in which they form long-term relationships (de Waal, 1998). Grooming is at the heart of many reciprocal exchanges and when relationships are stressed it is through grooming that reconciliation often occurs (Dunbar, 1996). This social tactile behavior is critical to chimpanzee culture and has been hypothesized as central to human expressions of reciprocity and gratitude, which drives much of human moral behavior (Hertenstein, Keltner, App, Bulleit, & Jaskolka, 2006; Keltner, Horberg, & Oveis, 2006). Touching/grooming are gestures that are indicative of such qualities in an individual and those that reciprocate are deemed cooperative and therefore are valued members of a social group. Interestingly, chimpanzees form coalitions within the larger troop and grooming within these subsets is an important social behavior for maintaining group cohesion. It has been suggested by Tooby and Cosmides (2010) that the adaptations necessary for successful coalitions were critical in the evolution of morality.

Play behavior also carries with it social norms which, when violated, can lead to the expulsion of an individual from a group. Pierce and Bekoff (2009) have suggested that play is the process by which moral principles are learned. It teaches about fairness and obeying rules as well as the consequences of violating those rules. Humans, nonhuman primates, and canids all demonstrate rules for play and if these rules are violated the transgressor is punished and/or ostracized from the group (see Pierce & Bekoff, 2009; see also Rudolf von Rohr, Bukart, & van Schaik, 2011). For example, chimpanzees will play by 'fighting' and one rule is to inhibit their force in order to avoid causing harm. This is especially true if their

playmate is a younger animal (Goodall, 1986; Hayaki, 1985; Mendoza-Granados & Sommer, 1995). In fact, older animals will increase the frequency of their play signaling if they are in close range of a younger animal's mother in order to highlight the fact that they are playing (Flack & de Waal, 2002; Jeannotte, 1996).

Canids demonstrate a stereotyped bow upon initiating play and, similar to the chimpanzee, self-handicap (Pierce & Bekoff, 2009). They will inhibit the strength of their bite and if, during a play bout, they bite too hard they immediately drop into a bow to indicate that the hard bite was an accident and that they wish to continue to play – a form of an apology. Role reversing is also seen in canid play in which a dominant animal will demonstrate subordinate behaviors such as rolling over and exposing its belly (Pierce & Bekoff, 2009). Of course, honest signaling is critical for these social interactions. If one were to bow and signal a play session and then attack the other animal, that individual would quickly be distanced from the group. In fact, coyotes that violate the rules of play often end up leaving the group, and it is known that loners have an increased mortality rate (Pierce & Bekoff, 2009).

Another testable aspect of morality is one's expectations of equality for group members. Humans often refer to this as a form of justice, and we have such things as equal opportunity employment to underscore this point. When we feel that others are treated 'better' or are getting more resources than we are, we get angry since it 'is not fair.' A form of social injustice has been studied in capuchin monkeys (*Cebes appela*) (Brosnan & de Waal, 2003) and chimpanzees (Brosnan, Talbot, Ahlegren, Lambeth, & Schapiro, 2010). Brosnan and colleagues found that these primates exhibit behaviors in accordance with anger when they see conspecifics receiving a better reward than what they themselves received. A reward which might have been acceptable when every animal received it will become less acceptable, and possibly even refused, if a conspecific is seen to receive a more sought after item (Brosnan et al., 2010). That being said, for humans and animals, low status group members will generally settle for a lower reward rather than being forced to leave the group (Keltner et al., 2006). There is also evidence that chimpanzees may punish each other, as when given the option, they will pull a rope that causes a platform containing food to fall when it is in reach of a conspecific that had previously stolen food from them (Jensen, Call, & ToMasello, 2007).

A major hurdle for those studying morality in animals is that one can never know the true intention behind the observed behaviors. As mentioned earlier with the Heinz Dilemma, we can ask our human participants not only what their choice would be but *why* they would make that choice. The *why* is missing from all animal work – it is inferred by the researcher through her research design rather than told to us directly by the subject. Perhaps then, providing some more persuasive support for the possibility of a moral sense in animals is research conducted on the psychological abilities that have been thought to underlie human moral behavior. In other words, if humans possess ability 'X' and that allows for morality, then the species we deem to have moral behaviors should also have ability 'X.' Then through the use of convergent operations we can more soundly ascertain that the observed 'moral' behaviors of animals do in fact have moral intent – or in the least, that the foundations for moral intent are in place.

Humans possess the two cognitive abilities of self-awareness and theory of mind (ToM) which lay the foundation for moral behavior by allowing for the emotions of sympathy and empathy. One must be aware of the self in order to understand how her actions affect others and how the actions of others affect her. ToM is often discussed as mind reading as it provides one with the awareness of the knowledge state of other individuals. Self-awareness emerges in humans at about 18 months of age whereas ToM emerges at around four years of age, and both are notably lacking in many individuals with autism spectrum disorder (Johnson, 1982; Spiker & Ricks, 1984).

Johnson (1982) found that between the ages of 18-24 months, when children show self-awareness, is when altruistic and prosocial behaviors emerge. Interestingly, the animal species who have exhibited aspects of self-awareness also exhibit aspects of a moral sense. To date, a number of animals have scientifically demonstrated self-awareness including chimpanzees (Gallup, 1970; Kitchen, Denton, & Brent 1996; Thompson & Boatright-Horowitz, 1994), gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla*) (Posada & Colell, 2007), orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus abellii*) (Gallup, 1982), pigtail monkeys (*Macaca nemestrina*) (Thompson & Boatright-Horowitz, 1994), Rhesus monkeys (*Macaca mulatta*) (Rajala, Reininger, Lancaster & Populin, 2010), dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) (Marino, Reiss, & Gallup, 1994), and elephants (*Elephas maximus*) (Plotnik, de Waal, & Reiss, 2006). Overall, the strongest data have repeatedly come from the great apes, especially from our closest relatives, the chimpanzees.

The most common measure of self-awareness for both humans and animals is a procedure termed the *mark test* which places a visible marker (often an odorless dye) on the subject (Gallup, 1970). In this test half of the subjects are marked on a part of the body that cannot be easily seen except through the use of a mirror. The control subjects are sham-marked having no actual mark to be seen. Then the subjects are all exposed to a mirror and their behavior is recorded. If a subject

investigates the mark on his own body after having seen it in the mirror, and if he uses the mirror in order to investigate his image, he is said to have passed the test. If he treats the reflection in the mirror as another individual (e.g., aggressive behaviors, touching the mirror rather than himself, etc.) he is considered to have failed the test and not to have demonstrated self-awareness.

It is important to note, that the mark test is not without controversy. The results of the test are sometimes ambiguous and there are various methodological aspects, outside the scope of this paper, that have been thought to underlie the variability of the results of some species (see Gallup, 1994; Shumaker & Swatz, 2002). In particular, it has been stated that strong evidence for self-awareness has been found in the great apes and has not been found in monkeys (for a general review see Anderson & Gallup 1999). Also, the ecological validity of using a mirror with animals must be taken into account. A mirror is meaningful to humans but may not be so for an animal. Because of this, the mark test requires that the subjects are provided exposure to a mirror, prior to the study, in order to habituate them and to provide an opportunity for learning about the general properties of mirrors. However, even though the cognitive capability of self-awareness evolved at a time when mirrors were not present, there were reflective surfaces, such as pools of water, providing some ecological validity for the use of mirrors.

If one is self-aware then she may also possess knowledge of another individual's self and his own state of awareness ('mind reading' or ToM). Gallup (1982) proposed that ToM is a byproduct of self-awareness as animals that fail a mark test also fail tests of ToM. As mentioned earlier, ToM lays a foundation for morality since being aware of another's mental state allows us to feel sympathy and empathy. Interestingly it also is a foundation for acting immorally, as it allows for deceit and lying. One can plant a false belief, or lie, in the mind of another in order to manipulate his actions. A typical test procedure for ToM is called the *false belief task* in which children are given a scenario (often a puppet show is used along with a story) and asked questions about the thoughts and actions of the characters. For example, a child may be told about 'Sally' who has a ball. The story states that Sally places the ball in a green drawer and leaves. Then Mary takes the ball out and puts it in the blue drawer. The child is then asked where Sally will look for her ball when she returns, and why. Children below the age of four typically say that Sally will look in the blue drawer (where it is, not where she left it) because that is the ball's location and she wants it. Children age four and older will typically answer that Sally will look in the green drawer because that's where *she thinks it is* (e.g., Kaysili & Acarlar, 2011). This is a remarkable change in the child's mental capacity – to know that the mental state of one individual, in this case Sally, is different from his own, and to be able to accurately predict the other's behavior accordingly.

Theory of mind is a hallmark of being human as well as a building block for morality, and it has been tested for in only a few animal species. The rudiments of ToM have been demonstrated by the domestic dog (Udell, Dorey, & Wynne, 2011), the bottlenose dolphin (Tschudin, 2001), and the Rhesus monkey (Marticorena, Ruiz, Mukerji, Goddu, & Santos, 2011), but most studies have focused on chimpanzees (see Call, 2007; Call & Tomasello, 2008; Hare, Call, Agnetta, & Tomasello, 2000; Tomasello Call, & Hare, 2003). Of course, animals cannot be told a story and then tell us what they expect, therefore researchers must be creative with their methods. Within the realm of both developmental and comparative psychology a general principle of recording looking time/preferences has long been established as a way to infer what a nonverbal individual (typically an infant or an animal) deems is interesting or defies a preconceived belief. A false belief task can be carried out in front of an animal with food items hidden by caretakers and looking time can be recorded as a measure of its expectations. A general example of this type of research method would have a subject watch a scenario in which 'caretaker 1' places a treat into a green bag and then leaves the room. While he's out 'caretaker 2' moves the treat into a blue bag. Then 'caretaker 1' returns and reaches into a bag and the subject's looking time is recorded. If one has ToM he or she would expect 'caretaker 1' to reach into the green bag since that is where he left the treat. This is a normal and uninteresting behavior resulting in a short looking time by the subject. Alternately, reaching into the blue bag would be surprising and would elicit longer looking times. Using this type of method rudimentary aspects of ToM have been shown by nonhuman primates such as Rhesus monkeys (e.g., Marticorena, et al., 2011).

Another research design that has been used to successfully demonstrate aspects of ToM in chimpanzees is to allow a subject (a subordinate animal) to witness where a desirable food item is hidden within its habitat under two differing conditions (Tomasello et al., 2003). In the first condition a dominant animal also sees where the food is hidden, while in the second condition the food is hidden out of view of the dominant animal. Chimpanzee social structure dictates that the dominant animal will take the food; therefore, after the food is in place the animals are both allowed into the habitat and the behavior of the subject is recorded. Retrieving the food when the dominant animal is aware of it would typically end with the subordinate in poor social standing and the food being taken by the dominant animal. Therefore, the subject only

retrieving the food under the first condition (where only he has knowledge of the food) has been taken as evidence for an awareness of the dominate animal's mental state (Tomasello, et al., 2003).

Research on both ToM and self-awareness has been limited in regards to the species studied. The future of the field of comparative and evolutionary psychology should continue these investigative pursuits with more varied species and using multiple research methods in order to better elucidate these complex cognitive abilities that underlie morality. However, regardless of the amount of research with animals providing evidence of moral behavior, one can argue a definition of morality in which intent of behavior is required. If we hold to this strict interpretation of morality, then perhaps we will never be able to say that animals have a moral sense and then we, as humans, can continue to hold onto our unique status in the world. However, considering the process of natural selection, by which we have evolved to where we humans are now, it is difficult to hold onto that point of view. Arguably we should at least nod our heads to the other animals that share our world and who seem to not only have the underlying psychological mechanisms required for a moral sense, but who have also demonstrated scientifically that they are capable of at least some moral actions. Research in the areas of developmental, comparative, and evolutionary psychology, has converged on a common notion – that there is more than one moral animal.

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### *Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme*

**Sophie Berman**

In François Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532), Gargantua's letter to his son Pantagruel – away in Paris pursuing his education – resonates with the Renaissance's fascination and enthusiasm for new possibilities of knowledge. Let me see in you “an abyss of science,”<sup>1</sup> the father writes to the son. As regards knowledge of the “facts of nature,” in particular, “I want you to pursue it carefully, so that there be neither sea, river nor fountain of which you do not know the fish; so that all the birds of the air, all the trees, shrubs and bushes of the forests, all the grasses of the earth, all the metals hidden in the belly of the depths, the precious stones of all the East and the South, none of these be unknown to you.”<sup>2</sup> But all this studying is meaningless if not paralleled with the development of the student’s moral sense, “science without conscience is but ruin of the soul [*science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme*].”<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, what an early 16<sup>th</sup> century reader of *Pantagruel* understood by the word “science” – knowledge in the most general sense, as in the Latin *scientia* – is not quite what we put under the same word today. Yet the ideal of a universal, all-encompassing knowledge that transpires in Gargantua’s letter, and the concern it expresses to accompany the “abyss of science” with a moral compass, speak to our time. Rabelais’s text is remarkably fit to launch a reflection on moral sense in relation to the sciences.

The similar rings in French of the words “science” and “conscience” suggest a proximity: science and conscience go together. The statement also indicates that they are distinct, and can be disjointed. Indeed there is a risk inherent in the pursuit of science and its applications, a risk that grows proportionally as knowledge expands. The risk is to sever science from conscience, and hence from the pursuit of wisdom, which is the only thing worth pursuing, and under which every human activity is to be subsumed. For, as Gargantua also tells his son, “sapience does not enter the malevolent soul.”<sup>4</sup> Such severance is, for the human soul, its utter ruin.

As the science and technology of our time expand ever-further our understanding of the world and of ourselves, as well as our capacities for action, they seem to cry out for a moral sense in order to direct toward wisdom their development and their use. This article proposes a simple idea: the moral sense, of which conscience is the other name, cannot be provided by the science and technology that it needs to direct. It must be sought in something within us which escapes by definition all scientific discourse, yet is the core of our humanity: our irreducible freedom and its relation to the transcendent.

Already Henri Bergson noted, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), that modern technological tools have extended the power of the human body to an unprecedented degree, creating a dangerous imbalance in urgent need of a remedy. Machines, he writes,

have imparted to our organism an extension so vast, have endowed it with a power so mighty, so out of proportion to the size and strength of that organism, that surely none of all this was foreseen in this structural plan of our species. . . . Now, in this body, distended out of all proportion, the soul remains

what it was, too small to fill it, too weak to guide it. Hence the gap between the two. Hence the tremendous social, political and international problems which are just so many definitions of this gap, and which provoke so many chaotic and ineffectual efforts to fill it. What we need are new reserves of potential energy – moral energy this time.<sup>5</sup>

He sums up the solution in a famous formula: “The body, now larger, calls for a supplement of soul [*un supplément d’âme*] . . .”<sup>6</sup> Several decades later and in different terms, Hans Jonas echoes Bergson’s diagnosis and impassioned call for a remedy, when he writes in *The Imperative of Responsibility*:

Technology, apart from its objective works, assumes ethical significance by the central place it now occupies in human purpose. Its cumulative creation, the expanding artificial environment continuously reinforces the particular powers in man that created it . . . Outshining in prestige and starving in resources whatever else belongs to the fullness of man, the expansion of his power is accompanied by a contraction of his self-conception and being. . . . If the realm of making has invaded the realm of essential action, then morality must invade the realm of making, from which it has formerly stayed aloof . . .<sup>7</sup>

Jonas points out that a new problem has been created by the fact that our “technical knowledge,” which empowers us to act on the world, is far ahead of our “predictive knowledge,” which enables us to foresee the long-term effects of our action.<sup>8</sup> Reducing this gap is not just a scientific problem, but a moral challenge, for the power that our technical knowledge places into our hands can adversely affect our distant future and even the very existence of humanity. Morality today is compelled to address this challenge.

The moral sense that we urgently need, and that Bergson and Jonas so ardently call for, can be found neither in the laws of nature nor in the products of our own ingenuity. In other words, it cannot be provided by science. There is no science that teaches us how to use science wisely, or what ethical guidelines should constrain its pursuit. It must first be pointed out that science does not ground itself. Thus, it is not entitled to claim that it holds the ultimate word about all things in general and the human experience in particular. Science properly conducted makes no such claim, for it does not concern itself with the whole; it always operates within boundaries, which is precisely the key to its remarkable successes. The statement that “there is no other legitimate discourse on reality than the scientific one” is not a scientific proposition, but a philosophical one, and hence a self-defeating one. The fundamental questions pertaining to the moral sense (its nature, its origin, what it directs us to do) relate to the fundamental metaphysical question, which is the question of meaning. This is not to discount the valuable and useful insights offered by sciences such as evolutionary biology, psychology or anthropology, into human behavior insofar as it can be characterized as “moral.” These sciences can describe the conditions that need to be in place in order for a moral sense to emerge, or the conditions in which the moral sense is called to exercise its power. But the essence of the moral sense escapes these approaches. It is the mystery of the human soul, its freedom of choice, and its absolute origination. Included in this is the mystery of evil, of which the presence in the world betrays the perversion of the moral sense – for only a being meant to be moral is capable of immoral behavior. However helpful we may find economical or psychological explanations of the most egregious manifestations of evil in history, they do not go to the core of the matter, where no scientific explanation can reach. The human being is something more than what the sciences can say about it. It is, as Plato puts it in the *Timaeus* (90a), “a plant whose roots are not in the earth, but in heaven.”<sup>9</sup> The rootedness of human nature in that which is “above” it, not in that which is “below” it, ultimately grounds how the human being must live.

The moral sense is about obeying a command, and nature does not command anything. Nature does not say that an act is *right* and should therefore be performed, that a state of affairs is *unjust* and should therefore be corrected. The sphere in which there is a command is the sphere of freedom, which is other than the natural sphere. Ethical naturalism attempts to blur the distinction between fact (what is) and norm (what ought to be), and to read the moral norm *in* the natural fact. This position is eloquently defended, in Plato’s *Gorgias* (482e-484c), by the character of Callicles, in a speech that seems to come straight out of the book of a social Darwinist. Nature herself, Callicles claims,

demonstrates that it is right that the better man should prevail over the worse and the stronger over the weaker. The truth of this can be seen in a variety of examples, drawn both from the animal world and from the complex communities and races of human beings; right consists in the superior ruling over the inferior and having the upper hand. By what right, for example, did Xerxes invade Greece and his father Scythia, to take two of the countless examples that present themselves? My conviction is that these actions are in accordance with nature; indeed, I would go so far as to say that they are in accordance with natural law, though not perhaps with the conventional law enacted by us.<sup>10</sup>

Nature, in this view, is the only reality, and consequently the only source of rules. Now, what does nature show us? A world of inequality, where the strong overpower the weak: no essential difference exists between a stronger animal pouncing on a weaker one to devour it, and Xerxes invading Greece or Darius, Scythia. Since that is the way things *are*, that is the way they *should* be. It *is*, therefore it is *just*: might is right. There is a flaw, however, in Callicles' identification of the human world with the animal world: the big difference between a lion pouncing on a gazelle and Xerxes invading Greece, is that Xerxes had a *choice* to invade or not to invade Greece. Human beings are free, they have choices. That is why they must be held accountable for their actions, and not attribute them to the natural world, where freedom does not exist, and where, therefore, there are no norms directing the choices that free beings should make. Rousseau argues effectively, in *On the Social Contract*, the absurdity of the notion of a so-called "right of the strongest":

The strongest is never strong enough to be master all the time, unless he transforms force into right and obedience into duty. Hence the right of the strongest, a right that seems like something intended ironically and is actually established as a basic principle. But will no one explain this word to me? Force is a physical power; I fail to see what morality can result from its effects. To give in to force is an act of necessity, not of will. At most, it is an act of prudence. In what sense could it be a duty?<sup>11</sup>

Where strength rules, there is no *right* on the ruler's side, only the *fact* of his force; consequently there is no *duty to obey* on the side of those who are subject to this force, for there can only be a duty where there is freedom.

Not all ethical naturalists defend a "might is right" position. Many see something else in nature and explore the evolutionary advantages of altruism, the drawbacks of selfishness. Indeed nature seems to offer numerous examples of self-sacrifice or mutual support as well as of blatant self-interestedness or disregard for the welfare of others. But if the moral sense is explained *entirely* from such perspectives, morality is brought down to the world of facts, and made dependent on something that is of a nonmoral nature. This is the surest way to destroy it. No philosopher has more vigorously than Kant highlighted the irreducibility of the moral imperative, of the *ought*, to what *is*. "The question at issue here," he writes in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*,

is not whether this or that has happened but that reason of itself and independently of all experience commands what ought to happen.<sup>12</sup>

That is why

worse service cannot be rendered morality than an attempt be made to derive it from examples. For every example of morality presented to me must itself first be judged according to principles of morality in order to see whether it is fit to serve as an original example, i.e., as a model.<sup>13</sup>

The moral law, according to Kant, must come to the human will in the form of a command, a "categorical imperative," because human beings are rational (they can represent to themselves the good), and yet not thoroughly rational (they have natural inclinations which do not spontaneously agree with the good). Thus, the moral law bears witness to both our dignity, which stems from our ability (absent from animals) to receive the moral command, and our weakness, which stems from our inclination (absent from a thoroughly good will, if such a thing exists) to disobey this same command. But above all it bears witness to the freedom of the human will, for only a free will can will to perform its duty, not for this or that benefit that may be derived from it, but out of pure respect for the moral law.

Morality requires a being that is capable of heeding an *ought* because it is free. It requires a being that not only exists in nature but *transcends* nature. It requires a being that is not just body, but soul. The first thing to do, in order to approach the essence of the moral sense, is to recognize that we do indeed have a soul, for "ruin of the soul" begins with denying the soul's existence. Bergson's call for a "supplement of soul" to match a body "distended out of all proportion" presupposes agreement on the fact that there is a soul in the first place. We seem to be moving further and further away from such an agreement. But denial of the soul is not a scientific position, even though it is often articulated by scientists who step out of the bounds of their respective disciplines and venture into philosophy.

The fine point of Descartes's famous and much-maligned dualism (the "real distinction" between "thinking substance" and "extended substance") is to affirm the irreducibility of the human to something that is or can become an object of scientific investigation – in other words, to something that exists only within a network of determinations. This dualism must be understood in the context of the Scientific Revolution of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, in which Descartes himself was a prominent actor. For Descartes, no person of sane mind has ever doubted that he/she has a body, and no one needs philosophy to be reminded of that. The task of philosophy is not to convince us that we are not angels, but to remind us that we are not animals or machines. Thus understood, the philosophical task is made all the more necessary by the increasingly pervasive presence of science and technology – which function by definition under a principle of

determinism – in our personal and social lives. Philosophy is not there to tag along with the sciences. It is there to be *metaphysics*. It is there to stress that the human is “something else” – in Descartes’s terminology, another “substance” or “thing” – than an assemblage of parts of matter moving around according to deterministic laws. The human being is an “I,” characterized by freedom, and as such the “image and likeness” of the infinite in which it originates. Once this is clear, the common intuition, shared by all sane people, that there is a uniquely intimate union between oneself and one’s body can receive its philosophical validation. By making room for an immaterial soul, whose transcendence to the material world reflects the divine transcendence, the Cartesian dualism opens against all forms of naturalism the possibility of a compelling moral norm.

In approaching all things human, two planes of understanding must be distinguished. One is the scientific plane (subdivided into as many perspectives as there are relevant sciences), the other one the metaphysical plane. Both have their legitimacy. When Descartes claims in his Third Meditation that his parents cannot be his creators,<sup>14</sup> he is not *denying* the role that his parents might have played in bringing him into the world as a biological being. He is saying that insofar as he is “something else” than a biological being, namely a thinking thing that bears the idea of the infinite, his existence cannot be explained merely as the product of a biological process. Our primary relationship, the relationship that makes us what we are, is our relation to the infinite. We have a moral sense insofar as we are related to what is “above” us, not insofar as we depend on what is “below” us. Only to the extent that we acknowledge the human being’s freedom from the weight of determinism can we acknowledge the absoluteness of conscience. Failing such acknowledgment, all we are left with is “ruin of the soul.”

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**BOOK REVIEWS**

Lisa Zunshine, editor. *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2010. Paperback. 400 pgs. ISBN: 9780801894886. \$35.00US

Not that there has to be a direction, but (in the muddled ripples of postmodernist thinking) where are studies in the humanities headed? If science is (among other things) a method, what are the humanities? Is it merely a *byproduct*, as some (Steven Pinker), have infamously claimed? In the wake of post-structuralism, is there any wonder that the humanities (for those outside such disciplines or for those outside of academe) appear, dare one say, useless? The tide has turned and the water is clearing. In fact, the debacle resulting from much nonsensical post-structuralist and post-modern writing has been over for some time. One very promising area of thought is evolutionary studies, especially in terms of the adaptive function of the arts. Another closely related area is cognitive studies, and Lisa Zunshine's *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* best exemplifies this extraordinarily rich mine of ore. For anyone in search of new patterns of thinking about the arts, or a history and encapsulation of cognitive studies (whether honors-type undergraduates, graduate students, or college instructors), Zunshine's book is highly recommended. No doubt the book will prove fruitful for many years to come and serve to prod more scholars into new areas of cognitive and evolutionary thought.

If one is not familiar with her, Professor Zunshine has been working in this field for quite some time – perhaps one of the pioneers. From her biography in the book, Dr. Zunshine is the Bush-Holbrook Professor of English at the University of Kentucky. She has authored or edited, or co-edited nine books (notably, for this review, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, 2006, and *Strange Concepts and the Stories They Make Possible: Cognition, Culture, Narrative*, 2008). Zunshine (per a Guggenheim fellowship) was a visiting scholar in the Department of psychology at Yale University, 2007-08. Each contributor to the volume is at least as accomplished as Professor Zunshine, so readers are in very good company.

The book itself (a sturdy paperback, good-quality paper, handsomely produced, with a cover and one in-text illustration) is divided into four parts and fourteen chapters. Part one, "Literary Universals," contains one chapter only (Patrick Colm Hogan, on universals); part two, "Cognitive Historicism," has five chapters (Alan Richardson on facial expression; Ellen Spolsky on brain modularity; Mary Thomas Crane on analogy; Lisa Zunshine on theory of mind; Bruce McConachie on hegemony); part three, "Cognitive Narratology," has four chapters (David Herman on second-wave narrative theory; Alan Palmer on storyworlds; Lisa Zunshine on fictional consciousness; Blakey Vermeule on Machiavellian narratives); part four, "Cognitive Approaches in Dialogue with other Approaches (Postcolonial Studies, Ecocriticism, Aesthetics, Poststructuralism)," has four chapters (Patrick Colm Hogan on cognitive emotion; Nancy Easterlin on wayfinding; G. Gabrielle Starr on multisensory imagery; Ellen Spolsky on post-structuralism). There are notes, two bibliographies, contributor biographies, and an index.

Resisting the temptation to favor one section over another, or to point to one chapter as strongest, one as weakest, it is fair to say (without exaggeration) that the collection as a whole is quite solid (each section and chapter building cumulatively), with stellar essays by leading scholars in their fields. If you are not familiar with these scholars, the book provides an excellent path into the landscape of their intricate work. No one in literary or cultural studies – whether drama or film, visual art or literature – can afford to ignore this book and its fresh crop of thinking. Working in tandem with evolutionary studies, it is time that we see how being human means we are an evolved species with multiple adaptations to a highly complex social environment (ancient and modern) that is deeply connected to what we call culture. The book is well-edited, and all the essays are well-written, lucid, and easy (quite enjoyable) to read. Many of the essays, usefully, give brief surveys of the scholarship in particular fields. The book is also a survey of the work of its contributors, as each has written extensively on his or her subject and so (as well as offering new perspectives) positions the genesis (and implications) of each particular approach. For example, if one is already familiar with the works of Zunshine, her two contributions here provide not only a spectacular bird's-eye view of her career but also demonstrate her readings in action.

What is cognitive cultural studies? First, Zunshine answers that question in her Introduction, and second, each contributor addresses the question in a different way. Cognitive cultural studies embraces neuroscience, discursive psychology (the cognitive process immanent in discourse, as David Herman says), cognitive and evolutionary psychology

and anthropology, cognitive linguistics, and philosophy of mind. That is quite a haul, it seems; but the bundle is tied up in one word: brain. Much of psychology (to say nothing of literary analysis and what became in its early stages cultural studies) of the twentieth century (but for the final decade or so) ignored the evolutionary biology of the brain. The brain was taken as a blank slate. It was either seen as a sack to be filled or, as D.H. Lawrence said (according to Freud), a sack of horrors. This, among other things, explains why much of Freud (e.g., his notion of the Oedipus complex) is erroneous, to say nothing of his near cousins, the behaviorists (who were certain that a human being became what she is only through her environment). While some might not wholly agree with evolutionary psychologists (and no one discounts the various influences of different environments), they have helped tremendously in our understanding of how the brain – the mind – is adapted: it is not a tabula rasa but comes with a built-in history and ready-made capacities. (See, e.g., the work of Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, cited in Zunshine.)

Much of Zunshine's book builds from this general premise about the adapted mind in one way or another, and such an approach (as in evolutionary studies) can only add significantly to our understanding of the human condition. This focus is best put in a quote by Ellen Spolsky, from her book *The Work of Fiction* (2004), quoted in CCS: ". . . how does the evolved architecture that grounds human cognitive processing, especially as it manifests itself in the universality of storytelling and the production of visual art, interact with the apparently open-ended set of cultural and historical contexts in which humans find themselves, so as to produce the variety of social constructions that are historically distinctive, yet also often translatable across the boundaries of time and place?" (CCS viii). Indeed, how?

The answer – obvious but ignored for so long – is that evolved creatures with their evolutionarily inherited brain mechanisms (modules and intelligences of the mind, for building, problem-solving, socializing, &c.) – have created (and continue to create) culture. Culture is not a free-floating entity that appears magically and then impinges on us: we decide, we create, we fashion, we write, we tell stories. As David Sloan Wilson has pointed out, a totalitarian government is imposed upon people, but people ultimately opt for a democracy. Such culture is a rich combination of our ancient, early human history (hunter-gatherer groups) blended with the effects of a much more complex social fabric (towns and cities). Indeed, this is why, for instance, a boy from Brooklyn, N.Y., born in the 1950s can respond with curious humanity to the cave paintings of Lascaux or to early epics. In her Introduction, Zunshine pays homage to none other than Raymond Williams, who in *The Long Revolution* (1961) recognizes the evolution of the brain and its impact on culture. In this way, Zunshine says (according to Williams and Spolsky), human creative arts are modes of communication in an environment of human minds (12). We could qualify minds with the word evolved. In other words, all human minds share a common history (of sorts, according to the evolutionary psychologists). Art in all its forms is a representation of something natural, alive, and evolved; art binds the natural and social environments built into our inherited past (stored in our shared human minds). Of course these approaches have been written about, previously, in different ways – Carl G. Jung, Northrop Frye, and Joseph Campbell. The difference here, now, is that much of what the cognitive theorists (and those in evolutionary studies) have to say consists of theoretical ideas shouldered by scientific findings (whether in neuroscience, biology, or human paleontology).

It would be impossible (or impractical) to report in any detail on all fourteen essays, and depending on a reader's research agenda, some might be of less interest than others – though each and every essay in this volume is worth considering. In fact, this book can do for cognitive studies what others – e.g., *The Adapted Mind*, *The Cultural Animal*, *The Literary Animal* – have done for evolutionary studies. At any rate, while Zunshine in her Introduction offers a synopticon of the volume, here is a quick run-down of the chapters, in order (as per paragraph three above).

Hogan rightly focuses on universals, via the evolutionists, rather than "cultural and historical specificity" (37) via social constructivists. As a species we share in more than in how we differ; in literary terms this means that we find in many literatures universals such as allusion, imagery, alliteration, and parallelism. Richardson's essay could be of particular use for those in the dramatic or visual arts, but his emphasis on emotion as revealed in facial expression will not be lost on literary scholars. Spolsky works in the area of brain modularity, and (while she invokes Fodor but not Gardner or Mithen) neuroscience comes into play, especially plasticity and how social environments account for the sudden and dramatic increase in human brain development. Crane (as do others in the volume) cites George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on the fundamental importance of metaphor, and then provides a fascinating story of how analogy, rather than disappearing, became a critical-thinking tool in the seventeenth century because of new and mentally challenging scientific thought. Analogies helped close the gap between such new thought and everyday life (109) – evidenced in Donne's poetry. Zunshine's contribution on theory of mind is without doubt one of the most exciting – in no small part because it reveals our adapted abilities and has practical applications for literature and visual arts, drama, and film. For

anyone not familiar with theory of mind: it is an ability (though at times ineffective) to read someone else's mind – the other person's intention or desire. McConachie (also drawing from Lakoff and Johnson) says that the evolved human brain has capacities "for many residual cultures" (143) – i.e., the concepts of time, force, space, and containment are cognitive functions apparent in cultural creations. Herman skillfully negotiates the bog between an inner realm (Descartes) and an outer realm (the behaviorists) – i.e., the mind is distributed in discourse, conversation, and social interaction. Palmer, in a twist on theory of mind, tellingly points out that readers of fiction enter a storyworld and make an effort "to follow" other (fictional) minds (177) – i.e., not just in terms of what a character thinks (or says) but how such thought is socially distributed in real behavior (which might contradict what the character thinks he believes). Zunshine insists, correctly, that literature is an outgrowth of (and consistently lubricates) the biological parts of our need to interpret other people, and proceeds to offer good examples (particularly from V. Woolf) showing the different levels of intentionality in mental thought and verbal expression. Vermeule capitalizes on what has lately become kindly known as social intelligence but which understandably continues to be labeled Machiavellian – our ancient, inherited adaptations for competition and conflict (as well as cooperation), an approach which also draws from theory of mind. Hogan in a nod to the neuroscientists (he mentions Antonio Damasio), discusses how we essentially are emotional creatures (who then think); this essay has practical applications for drama and film as well as literary works. Easterlin's stimulating (and very personal) essay touches on what she calls our "wayfinding mind" that, literally and figuratively, is made *curious* by "complexity and mystery" in the environment (261). Starr adeptly negotiates the language of neuroscience and the world of literary imagery, noting how multisensory activity is vital to aesthetic experience. Spolsky surprises in an essay that, on some level, apologizes for post-structuralism, but then, on another level, brilliantly explores the "creative potential" of filling in the "gaps" of mental modules epitomized in both Darwin's thinking and post-structuralists; however, while the essay may provoke some eyebrows to raise ("nothing could be more adaptationist, more Darwinian, than deconstruction . . ." [306] and ". . . I see the value of Darwin's theory as a description and not as an explanation of change and adaptation" [307]), at the least researchers in the humanities are encouraged to read Darwin and biology (as well as other sciences and social sciences).

Speaking of Darwin, evolution or evolutionary thinking is apparent in many of these essays. At least six of the essays (whether intentional or not) directly address (and assume) the adaptive function of the arts. Curiously, given this motif in the book, there is no mention of any of the following people (scientists, social scientists, and humanists) working in the area of evolutionary studies: Roy F. Baumeister, Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, Steven W. Gangestad and Jeffry A. Simpson, Michael Gazzaniga, Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson, Eva Jablonka and Marion J. Lamb, Jerome Kagan, Joseph LeDoux, Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, Michelle Scalise Sugiyama, Kay Young and Jeffrey L. Saver. Kay Young's book *Imagining Minds* might have coincided with the publication of the text under review, explaining its absence (but not explaining the absence of her article authored with Saver). And while some on this list might seem off-base they are not: the literary/cultural field is by its own admission looking at the continuities between our evolved animal nature and our adapted human culture. Having said that, one might ask, where then are E.O. Wilson and Frans de Waal – two leading thinkers who have consistently argued for such continuities (to the dismay of Jerome Kagan, who argues for a more distinctly human nature). Nevertheless, as an "Introduction," and to repeat from the opening refrain of this review, Zunshine's *Cognitive Cultural Studies* is an excellent text – intriguing, stimulating, well-researched, a must-read for any serious literary (or cultural) student or scholar.

- Gregory F. Tague

[This review reprinted here with permission of Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, editor, *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*.]

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Edward O. Wilson. *The Social Conquest of Earth*. NY: Liveright/Norton, 2012. Hardcover. 352 pgs. 978-0871404138. \$27.95US

In his latest book, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, the biologist and naturalist Edward O. Wilson attempts to answer the three questions posed by Paul Gauguin in the title of what is arguably his most famous work: "D'où Venons Nous / Que Sommes Nous / Où Allons Nous" (Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?). According to Wilson, these "central problems of religion and philosophy" cannot be solved by those disciplines, and until the three questions are answered, humankind will continue to be "terribly confused by the mere fact of our existence, and a danger to ourselves

and to the rest of life.”

How, then, does Wilson (professor emeritus at Harvard University, discoverer of pheromones, author of the seminal work *Sociobiology*) propose to answer these questions? Through an examination of the evolution (in both the metaphorical and Darwinian meanings) of humanity into what biologist call “eusocial” – truly social – creatures.

As might be expected, such an undertaking has stirred up considerable debate, not only because of Wilson’s final conclusions (more on those later) but also because of the evolutionary theory of natural selection underpinning his attempt to formulate a “theory of everything” (à la quantum physics) that explains all of human nature and behavior, at least in the aggregate. Wilson dismisses the field’s prevailing theory, kin selection, or inclusive-fitness theory (proposed by William D. Hamilton), in favor of multi-level (or group) selection theory. He first did so, with co-authors Martin Nowak and Corina Tarnita, in a 2010 article published in the journal *Nature*. This article, “The Evolution of Eusociality,” claimed that the dominant interpretation of Darwin’s theory of natural selection – that living beings evolve in such a way so as to help each individual propagate its own genes and those of other individuals most closely related to it (hence, the “kin” in kin selection), and that a by-product of this is the continuation of behavior that is good for the group as a whole – is incorrect, and that the older, long-dismissed group selection theory – where genes evolve in ways that specifically benefit one group’s existence over another’s – provides a better way of understanding where humankind came from and what we are.

The reaction was swift and, in large part, negative. Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*) and more than 100 others wrote to *Nature* claiming that Wilson and his colleagues were wrong, that their methodology was flawed and their interpretation of data incorrect. When Wilson published *The Social Conquest of Earth* two years later, Dawkins wrote a scathing review (“The Descent of Edward Wilson”) in *Prospect* magazine accusing Wilson of, among other things, publishing his flawed theory in a book to gain popular acceptance when it became apparent that it would not be accepted within the scientific community. Wilson has given interviews refuting Dawkins’s assertions, other scientists have weighed in, and the debate continues.

How, then, does Wilson attempt to answer Gauguin’s questions?

Writing in a clear, engaging voice (as befits an author twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize), Wilson traces the evolution of humankind from when the first species of *Homo* split off from our common ancestral line to “The Sprint to Civilization” and the Neolithic revolution. Drawing on a number of theories from anthropology, biology and sociology, Wilson weaves together a compelling timeline for the emergence of human beings as eusocial animals. From fingers, fire and (cooked) food through the development of language to the crucial component, the establishing of a defensible “nest” or campsite, Wilson proposes that both genetics (the human hand, with its spatulate fingers and opposable thumb) and environment (lightning strikes sparking fires that our ancestors then took advantage of) helped drive later evolutionary changes that eventually resulted in the emergence of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The campsite, as a location where a group establishes a permanent home, is particularly important in the development of eusociality, which Wilson defines as a group “containing multiple generations and prone to perform altruistic acts as part of their division of labor.” This means that offspring stay at the campsite with their parents, at least until such time as they need to find mates (and then, generally only one of the two sexes will look outside the group for partners), and the group members generally act in ways that promote the well-being of the group. The basic definition of this altruism is that non-reproductive members of the group will assist parents in the care and feeding of their offspring, but in a more general way it means that individuals will more often than not behave in ways that benefit the group as a whole, even if such behavior does not benefit the individual.

What this means, in terms of Wilson’s thesis, is that there is “multi-level selection” occurring, with some “forces of selection” targeting individual traits and others targeting traits of the group; thus, the “evolutionary dynamics” of each group “is driven by both individual and group selection.” In order for groups to survive, they must work together; those groups that work together best thrive, while those that do not cooperate within the group fade away.

Wilson then turns to the insect world, examining the ways in which ants (his specialty), termites and other invertebrates became social insects, a precursor to true eusociality. He provides examples of natural selection, altruism, and evolutionary innovations that helped these insects form lasting, even thriving, colonies. (This is not to say that eusociality is common. Wilson states that of the 2,600 “taxonomic families of insects and other arthropods,” only 15 of those families have been found to include eusocial species. It is even rarer in vertebrates.) He then discusses the ways in which insect altruism and social instincts developed through group selection, and ends this first half of the book discussing the ways in which kin selection theory is flawed, and why multi-level selection is a better explanation for how eusociality arises.

Having laid the groundwork by answering the question “Where do we come from?” in the first nearly-two-thirds of

*The Social Conquest of Earth*, Wilson now moves on to the more difficult question, “What Are We?” He begins with the question, “What Is Human Nature?” He contends that economists, philosophers, theologians and others have tried in vain to define human nature, and that the “very existence of human nature was denied during the last century by most social scientists.” Wilson states that his belief is that joining “multiple branches of learning in the sciences and humanities . . . allows a clear definition of human nature.” For Wilson, “[h]uman nature is the inherited regularities of mental development common to our species. They are the ‘epigenetic rules,’ which evolved by the interaction of genetic and cultural evolution that occurred over a long period in deep prehistory.” Humankind, then, has been formed by both nature and nurture working together, what Wilson and Charles J. Lumsden termed (in 1980) “gene-culture coevolution.” Wilson states that psychologists and anthropologists have found many examples of gene-culture coevolution, and these are what “make up much of what is intuitively called ‘human nature.’” Cultural mores, language and cultural variation are all influenced by this coevolution – it is what makes us who we are.

Wilson then tackles one of humankind’s thorniest issues, “The Origins of Morality and Honor.” In his formulation, the “dilemma of good and evil was created by multilevel selection,” where individual selection and group selection are both acting upon each group member. Individual selection “shapes instincts in each member that are fundamentally selfish with reference to other members,” while group selection works to “[shape] instincts that tend to make individuals altruistic to one another within the group.” This comes dangerously close to assigning a presupposed morality upon each type of natural selection – when we say a gene is “good” or “bad,” it is generally understood to mean that the gene either helps the individual perpetuate its own genome or does something to prevent that perpetuation (i.e. early death from disease, sterility, stillbirth due to mutation), not that it promotes good or bad behavior. Wilson does not stop there, however. He then goes on to explicitly assign what seems to be a moral “choice” (albeit one determined by genetic natural selection): “Individual selection is responsible for much of what we call sin, while group selection is responsible for the greater part of virtue. Together they have created the conflict between the poorer and the better angels of our nature.” This is particularly troublesome given an earlier chapter, “War as Humanity’s Hereditary Curse,” where he states that, “Our bloody nature, it can now be argued, in the context of modern biology, is ingrained because group-versus-group was a principal driving force that made us what we are. In prehistory, group selection lifted the hominids that became territorial carnivores to heights of solidarity, to genius, to enterprise. And to *fear*,” a fear which led to warfare. In this instance, at least, group selection seems to have come down upon the side of the poorer angels of humankind’s nature.

After brief chapters on the origins (and dangers) of religion and the origins of the creative arts, Wilson ends his book by addressing the question, “Where Are We Going?” In the eleven-page chapter, “A New Enlightenment,” he makes the case for studying not only history, but prehistory and, by extension, biology in order to come to an understanding of where we *should* be going. “Humanity is a biological species in a biological world,” and as such has a responsibility to be good (in both senses of the word) and careful stewards of that world. People must heed the genetic-cultural “pull of conscience, of heroism . . . of truth . . . of commitment.” We must, in Wilson’s view, set aside religion, its sacred myths and godheads, because “they are stultifying and divisive” and foster bigotry. We must turn to science and its rational explanations of how the world works, of the reality in which we live. We must understand that the Earth is our home, and that climate change and the “obliteration of biodiversity” pose real threats to both the planet and all her inhabitants. We must abandon any thoughts of manned space travel and its concomitant “dangerous delusion” of colonizing other planets as a way to escape a dying Earth, an Earth we human beings are killing through our actions.

There are places throughout the book where Wilson discusses the ways in which the rapid rise of human beings has strained, to put it mildly, our world’s natural resources. Here, in his conclusion, he points the way toward what he believes is the direction humankind’s journey must take if we are to continue to evolve upon the planet Earth.

- Wendy Galgan



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## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The *ASEBL Journal* is published every year in January. On occasion there might be a special issue. If you are interested in the journal, please visit the blog (About tab) for complete information, mission and goals, aims and scope: [www.asebl.blogspot.com](http://www.asebl.blogspot.com)

Editions Bibliotekos, a sister publication, has to-date published four literary, themed anthologies and is currently finishing a fifth anthology, *Puzzles of Faith and Patterns of Doubt*. The anthology *Being Human* (2012) might be of particular interest to readers of ASEBL since it is evolutionarily inflected. Information and details: [www.ebibliotekos.com](http://www.ebibliotekos.com)