

***The Turning of the Tide: The Evolution of Ethics and
Contemporary Moral Considerations Regarding Nonhuman
Entities in American Literature***

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Abstract

There is an increasing scientific interest, among animal behaviorists, in the mental and emotional world of animals, and in the need to extend ethical concern to the nonhuman world in the process of the evolution of ethics. Yet, in the field of literature, this recent topic has attracted the attention of very few authors. The nonfictional works of Alice Walker and Edward Abbey, "Am I Blue" and "The Moon-Eyed Horse," in which the authors delve into the emotional and cognitive lives of horses and their capacity for suffering, are two of these few literary texts. The narratives in these works have much in common with the anecdotes of cognitive ethologists who investigate animal emotions, cognition, and consciousness in natural habitats and who conclude that animals have rich emotional lives. It is anticipated that, in time, ethology will secure the extension of ethics to the nonhuman world, and thus, cruelty to animals will become a topic for ethical considerability. Walker's and Abbey's texts on animal minds and emotions, in which they willingly embrace scientific ideas of their day, are significant in view of their contribution to the research of ethologists and to environmental ethics.

Key words: Ethics, evolution of ethics, ethology, cognitive ethology, ethology in literature, animal minds, animal behaviorist, cruel treatment to animals.

Özet

Günümüz hayvan davranış bilimcileri arasında hayvan zihni ve duyguları konusuna ve etiğin evrimi sürecinde bu konunun insanoğluna getirdiği etik sorumluluklar üzerine gittikçe artan bir ilgi vardır. Ancak edebiyatta bu yeni alanda fazla yapıt bulunmaz. Amerikalı yazarlar Alice Walker ve Edward Abbey'nin atların duygu ve düşünce dünyalarını ve acı çekme yetilerini ele aldıkları kurgu olmayan eserleri, "Am I Blue" ve "The Moon-Eyed Horse," bu alanda yazılmış az sayıdaki eserden ikisidir. Bu eserlerde anlatım, doğal ortamlarda hayvanlarda duygu, düşünce ve bilinç konularını inceleyerek hayvanların zengin duygusal dünyaları olduğu sonucuna ulaşan bilişsel etologların anekdotlarıyla benzerlik gösterir. Etoloji, zaman içinde, ahlaki yükümlülüğün insanoğlunun dışındaki canlı varlıklara da genişlemesini sağlayarak, hayvanlara eziyetin etik kapsama alınmasını sağlayacaktır. Walker ve Abbey'nin, çağın bilimsel görüşlerini kucaklayan, hayvan zihni ve duyguları üzerine eserleri etologların çalışmalarına ve çevre etiğine katkılarından dolayı önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etik, etiğin evrimi, etoloji, bilişsel etoloji, edebiyatta etoloji, hayvan zihni, davranış bilimci, hayvana eziyet.

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Until he extends the circle of compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace.

Albert Schweitzer

The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?

Jeremy Bentham

The two American writers, Alice Walker¹ and Edward Abbey,² although dedicated to widely differing causes, converge on one important point; they both affirm the moral standing of nonhuman entities. In a personal narrative, titled “Am I Blue,” in the prose collection *Living by the Word* (1988), and in “The Moon Eyed Horse” in *Desert Solitaire* (1968), Alice Walker and Edward Abbey write about the inherent value of animals, and both touch upon a topic that still has a fairy-tale status in western culture, that of animal cognition, intelligence and emotions. In these nonfictional works, Walker and Abbey observe a horse from close proximity and, in the end, from their anecdotal approach, in which they record visible signs of suffering in a horse, similar to those of a human being, the need to transcend speciesism³ and to extend moral consideration to animals emerge as a central issue.

In “Am I Blue,” Walker writes about a large white horse, named Blue, within a time span of three years. His dwelling place is a fenced part of a meadow next to Walker’s house in the country, and he is boarded by Walker’s neighbors next door. “Occasionally, one of the children, usually a stocky teen-ager, but sometimes a much younger girl or boy, could be seen riding Blue,” narrates Walker. “They would

¹ Alice Walker is one of the leading black American women writers. She writes on the struggle of black people throughout history, on the need to preserve black culture, and on the experiences of black women in a sexist and racist society.

² Edward Abbey is one of the most significant nature writers. With his radical environmentalism, he urges mankind to reconsider his relationship with the natural world. In his much acclaimed nature writing, *Desert Solitaire*, he points out that “It is not enough to understand nature; the point is to save it,” and becomes a harsh critic of modern industrial culture.

³ Speciesism, a term originally coined by Richard Ryder, points at the immoral act of discrimination against a being simply because he or she is not a member of one’s own species. Singer views speciesism as much an evil as racism and sexism. He states, “Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. White racists do not accept that pain is as bad when it is felt by blacks as when it is felt by whites. Similarly those I would call ‘speciesists’ give greater weight to the interests of members of their own species when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of other species.” See Peter Singer. “Equality for Animals?” in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*. Armstrong and Botzler. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.,1993. 331.

appear in the meadow, climb up on his back, ride furiously for ten or fifteen minutes, then get off, slap Blue on the flanks, and not be seen again for a month or more” (Walker 4). Noticing that Blue is “horribly lonely” and is visited only occasionally, Walker starts paying attention to him out of sheer sympathy, feeding him apples from a tree in her yard from time to time. During Walker’s second year in the country, another horse—a brown one⁴—is brought to Blue’s “five or so fenced-in acres” to mate with him. Walker observes the change in Blue’s behavior. Now there is liveliness in his eyes and he is no longer bored in his confined space. As Walker states, “there was a different look in his eyes. A look of independence, of self-possession, of inalienable horseness” (6). Then, sadly, his mate is taken away, after she becomes pregnant. Following the separation, Walker notices an immense change in Blue; she observes that upon their separation, Blue becomes a “crazed person.” Walker observes:

He galloped furiously, as if he were being ridden, around and around his five beautiful acres. He whinnied until he couldn’t. He tore at the ground with his hooves. He butted himself against his single shade tree. He looked always and always toward the road down which his partner had gone. And then, occasionally, when he came up for apples, or I took apples to him, he looked at me. It was a look so piercing, so full of grief, a look so *human*, I almost laughed (I felt too sad to cry) to think there are people who do not know that animals suffer. (7)

Alice Walker, upon witnessing the treatment of the animal as a mere object, and its ensuing behavior, entertains the possibility that animals can feel intense humanlike emotions. She concludes saying that the horse felt immense “hatred” for the humankind, and “put up a barrier within to protect himself:”

[I]n Blue’s large brown eyes was a new look, more painful than the look of despair: the look of disgust with human beings, with life; the look of hatred. And it was odd what the look of hatred did. It gave him, for the first time, the look of a beast. And what that meant was that he had put up a barrier within to protect himself from further violence. (8)

Edward Abbey, in his “The Moon-Eyed Horse” written 20 years earlier, takes up a similar account in which a horse “puts up a barrier within” to protect himself from the cruel treatment of humankind. In line with the immense sympathy he has for nonhuman life throughout *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey tells about “an independent horse,” the Moon-Eye, that he had sought and found in the canyons near Salt Creek.

⁴ Alice Walker, with the “brown” horse that is “put with” the white horse [“the same expression that old people used ... when speaking of an ancestor during slavery who had been impregnated by her owner” (Walker 7)], draws an analogy between racism and speciesism, and following the footsteps of Peter Singer, sees speciesism as much an evil as racism.

“The Moon-Eyed Horse” starts with the account of Mackie—a Moabite—who tells Abbey about a runaway horse, leading a solitary life in the canyons. As Mackie narrates, the Moon-Eye is a runaway because he had been used by Roy Scobie as a horse-for-hire on a ranch. Because of “an inflamed condition of one of his eyes, called moonblindness,” the work he was forced to perform irritated him immensely. Finally, “one day on a sight-seeing tour through the Arches [...] all his angers came to a boil and he bucked off a middle-aged lady from Salt Lake City” (173). Then he was beaten violently for his unexpected behavior to the lady. Unable to endure the cruel treatment, Moon-Eye ran away to a remotest corner of the canyon, where he had been living all by himself for the past 10 years. Mackie’s touching story of Moon-Eye leaves a deep imprint in Abbey, and a month after hearing the story, he makes up his mind to venture into the canyons and to track down the runaway horse and take him back to civilization, for “It’s not natural for a horse to live alone” (175). After a long and arduous journey, Abbey, to his surprise—for the story he had heard seemed much fiction than fact—finds Moon-Eye and overviews his “strategy” to make him yield to his plans:

Since Moon-Eye had learned to fear and distrust men on horseback I would approach him on foot; I would carry nothing in my hands but a hackamore and a short lead rope. Better yet, I would hide these inside my shirt and go up to Moon-Eye with empty hands. Others had attempted the violent method of pursuit and capture and had failed. I was going to use nothing but sympathy and understanding, in direct violation of common sense and all precedent, to bring Moon-Eye home again. (177)

Feeling genuine sorrow for Moon-Eye’s horrible loneliness in the canyons, Abbey tries every means to take him back to civilization. “I’ve come to take you home, old horse. ... You’ve been out here in the wilderness long enough” (180), says Abbey, and tries to convince him to move out of the thick branches of a juniper tree where he seeks refuge from the human intruder. His insistence to take him out of the thick branches results in his near death. “Snorting like a truck he came forward, right at me, bursting through the branches,” narrates Abbey. “Dry wood snapped and popped, dust filled the air, and as I dove for the ground I had a glimpse of a lunatic horse expanding suddenly, growing bigger than all the world and soaring over me on wings that flapped like a bat’s and nearly tore the tree out of the earth” (182). Abbey strives hard, under the unbearable heat of a summer day until after sunset, to create friendship and to save the horse from his misery; all subsequent efforts fail. Realizing that he cannot break Moon-Eye’s distrust for humankind, Abbey leaves the canyons singlehandedly.

In “Am I Blue” and “The Moon-Eyed Horse,” both Walker and Abbey delve into a topic that has been gaining increasing legitimacy recently: animal minds,

emotions and cognition. The narratives in both works have much in common with the anecdotes of cognitive ethologists, the animal behaviorists who claim that some animals have conscious minds and can feel intense humanlike emotions.⁵ The recent field of cognitive ethology is described as “the comparative, evolutionary, and ecological study of animal minds and mental experiences including how they think, what they think about, their beliefs, how information is processed, whether or not they exhibit consciousness, and the nature of their emotions (Bekoff 87).⁶ The field observations⁷ of ethologists, over long years, provide evidence that animals feel a wide range of emotions. They come to the conclusion that alongside primary emotions, such as aggression and fear which are inborn, some animals possess secondary emotions such as happiness, love, grief, jealousy, envy, empathy, despair, shame, anger, embarrassment, and many other complex feelings. Such evidence ruling out emotions as specifically human traits contributes to our understanding of animal minds and legitimizes the rights of animals for moral standing.

Can animals think and reason? Do animals possess self-awareness? Do animals have humanlike emotions? Such questions first captured the attention of Charles Darwin, perhaps the most important scientist of the nineteenth century who helped shape the modern world. Darwin rejected the shortsightedness of the machine age, and argued that animals-especially mammals-possess many of the behavioral traits that humans possess. As Bekoff summarizes, “In his books *On the Origin of Species* (1859), *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Darwin argued that there is continuity between humans and other animals in their emotional (and cognitive) lives ... In *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*

⁵ Mark Bekoff, in his *Minding Animals*, refers to other fields of study delving into animal emotions. He states, “Current research in ethology, neurobiology, endocrinology, psychology, and philosophy is providing compelling evidence that at least some animals feel a wide range of emotions, including fear, joy, happiness, shame, embarrassment, resentment, jealousy, rage, anger, love, pleasure, compassion, respect, relief, disgust, sadness, despair, and grief” (103).

⁶ Cognitive ethologist, Marc Bekoff provides further explanation as, “‘Comparative’ means that researchers compare and contrast closely related (for example, wolves, coyotes, and domestic dogs) and more distantly related species (wolves and lions or tigers, all carnivores); ‘evolutionary’ means researchers want to know why and how a given behavior evolved over time; and ‘ecological’ means they want to learn how variations in the food, the social environment, or the habitat influence the behavior patterns they are studying” (87).

⁷ Ethologists carry out their studies in the open field, which is basically Darwin’s approach. They believe that “Naturalizing the study of animal emotions will provide for more reliable data than information collected in unnatural circumstances ... because emotions have evolved just as have other behavioral patterns and organ systems” (Bekoff 108).

Darwin claimed that ‘the lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain, happiness, and misery’” (107). On the basis of his observations, Darwin stated that monkeys are capable of elaborate deceit, insects can solve problems, and many animals can deliberate about what to do (Jamieson and Bekoff 111). In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin argued that “there is no great gap between the mental powers of humans and those of other animals, that the difference is a matter of degree, not of kind” (Porter and Graham 321). Although Darwin set out to prove-with his anecdotal approach-animal emotions and cognition as early as the 1870s, this did not find acceptance among biologists as did his theory of evolution by natural selection.

A renewed interest in the cognitive states of animals began in the 1970s with a biologist, named Donald R. Griffin who is widely accepted as the creator of the field of cognitive ethology.⁸ Griffin’s book, *The Question of Animal Awareness: Evolutionary Continuity of Mental Experience* (first published in 1976) is accepted as a landmark study on animal consciousness. Griffin, in his book, entitled *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness* (2001), an updated edition of *Animal Minds* (1992), delves into animal minds and consciousness and provides anecdotes in the mental experiences of animals. His research is primarily directed at proving conscious intent in animal behavior and, thus, to convert those who deny consciousness in animals. Since the publication of Griffin’s *The Question of Animal Awareness*, there has been unprecedented interest in animal cognition and emotions among animal behaviorists. With these studies that show the similar structure of human and biotic communities, cognitive ethologists conclude that animals, after all, qualify for moral consideration.⁹ Among these researchers in the field of cognitive ethology, Marc Bekoff¹⁰ is gaining increasing attention, and the discipline itself is gaining increasing legitimacy thanks to his work. Bekoff, in *Minding*

⁸ As described by Bekoff, “Cognitive ethology traces its beginnings to Charles Darwin” (87).

⁹ The reference is also to the descriptions of animal social relationships. Ethologists observe that, under natural conditions, animals do amazing things, such as the formation of pair bonds (just like marriages) of, for instance, wolves that last a lifetime, and the family relationships and close ties of, for instance, elephants within the herd. Bekoff states, “Elephants live in matriarchal societies in which strong social bonds among individuals endure for decades” (4).

¹⁰ Marc Bekoff is a Professor of Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He has conducted field studies of many animals-“coyotes, wolves, dogs, Adelie penguins, archer fish, western evening grosbeaks, and Stellar’s jays” (Bekoff xix)-for the past 30 years and in his numerous publications-more than two hundred papers and eighteen books-he provides proof for the rich and complex emotional lives and intelligence of animals. For detailed information on Bekoff and his publications, visit <<http://literati.net/Bekoff/>>.

Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart (2002), and in his other books on animal behavior¹¹, claims that-despite a good deal of scepticism-the animal world is full of heartfelt emotion as our own. Bekoff disregards the debate over animal emotions and consciousness for he knows that the discipline itself will imbue science with a greater concern for animal minds. In Bekoff's *Minding Animals*, there are Bekoff's and other ethologists' field observations. The book covers such topics as the richness of behavioral diversity; how animals are perceived, represented and misrepresented in mass media; animal minds and emotions; human intrusions into animal's lives; animal welfare, animal rights, and protection. The book also comprises discussions on the evolution of behavior, on the philosophy and theology of our relationship with nature and animals, and numerous anecdotal stories that show the richness of animal behavior and the wide range of their feelings. The following extract from *Minding Animals*, in which Bekoff briefly summarizes "grief" in diverse animals as observed under natural conditions, exemplifies the nature of the studies of ethologists:

Many animals display profound grief at the loss or absence of a close friend or loved one. Jane Goodall, the world-renowned primatologist and conservationist who has studied chimpanzees for more than forty years, observed Flint, a young chimpanzee, withdraw from his group, stop feeding, and die of a broken heart after his mother, Flo, died. Flint remained for several hours where Flo lay, then struggled on a little further, curled up, and never moved again. Sea lion mothers watching their babies being eaten by killer whales wail pityfully, in anguish of their loss. Dolphins have been seen struggling to save a dead infant and mourn afterwards. And elephants have been observed standing guard over a stillborn baby for days with their heads and ears hung down, quiet, and moving slowly. Joyce Poole, who has studied wild elephants for almost two decades, believes that grief and depression in orphan elephants are real phenomena. Orphan elephants who saw their mothers being killed often wake up screaming. (16)

Indeed, such anecdotes exemplify that "there is continuity between humans and other animals in their emotional (and cognitive) lives." A behavioral scientist, Stephen M. Sivy, justifies the "continuity" with the theory of evolution itself. He says, "If you believe in evolution by natural selection, how can you believe that feelings suddenly appeared, out of the blue, with human beings?" (Rifkin "A Change of Heart"). In short, Bekoff's and other ethologists' stance is a plea for moral

¹¹ Bekoff's *The Smile of a Dolphin: Remarkable Accounts of Animal Emotions* (2000) comprises the anecdotal memoirs-on the deep emotional lives of animals-of fifty scientists who have spent their careers watching animals.

extensionism in the light of the observations on animal minds, which will steer the cultural evolution of ethics in the direction of nonhuman entities.

Should we, then, go on giving Walker's and Abbey's narratives on thinking and feeling animals a fairy-tale status? Indeed, the answer to the question lies in future studies, for animal emotions and cognition are still a controversial topic among many scientists.¹² After all, despite mounting interest in cognitive ethology, for a major transformation in man's line of thinking towards the acceptance of animal emotions, we still need scientific evidence [such as the studies conducted by neuroscientists¹³] to back the arguments. We may conclude, then, that the narratives of Walker and Abbey are, rather, like the anecdotes of cognitive ethologists, and cannot be taken as hard data proving the existence of such secondary emotions in animals. Yet, we may decidedly state that each of the writers, by taking up the issue of animal hatred for humankind, reminds the reader of the hateful treatment that sentient animals have been exposed to over the centuries. The narratives can be regarded as a wake-up call to give an end to the complacency toward animal suffering; they can be taken as a plea to treat animals not as resources, but as beings entitled to humane treatment and justice; they can be viewed as a cry for ethical considerability to animals who have suffered much in the face of human cruelty.¹⁴

In "Am I Blue" and in "The Moon-Eyed Horse," then, Walker's and Abbey's emphasis on the animal capacity for suffering has an ethical dimension. They reject the long-held western view that only human beings can have moral value in and of themselves, and argue that any sentient being has interests which qualify for moral

¹² Bekoff states, "Cognitive ethology is a young science, and we need not be apologists for the enormous gaps in our knowledge about others' minds. We need to be patient and give ethologists time to do the extremely challenging work that needs to be done" (99).

¹³ Laura Tangle, with reference to the studies conducted by neuroscientists, argues that there is already scientific proof for animal emotions. Tangle states, "There is "hard" scientific evidence for animal emotions as well. Neuroscientists who study the biology of emotions, a discipline still in its infancy, have discovered key similarities between the brains of humans and other animals. In all species studied so far, including our own, emotions seem to arise from long-evolved parts of the brain—particularly the amygdala, an almond-shaped structure in the brain's center. Working with rats, they have found that stimulating one part of the amygdala invariably induces a state of intense fear. Rats with damaged amygdalae exhibit neither normal behavioral responses to danger (such as freezing or running) nor the physiological changes associated with fear (such as higher heart rate and blood pressure)." See Tangle "Natural Passions."

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of cruelty inflicted on animals in the past ages, see Keith Thomas. "Cruelty" in *Thinking Through the Environment: A Reader*. Ed. Mark J. Smith. New York: Routledge, 1999.

consideration. Their bold writing on the capacity for suffering in the animal creation and on the need to accord moral standing to nonhuman beings signals their belief in the evolution of man's ethical systems, albeit slow. Walker's and Abbey's moral extensionism to animals on account of their "suffering" capacity brings to mind what Jeremy Bentham, the English philosopher, had stated more than 200 years ago. Bentham, as early as 1780, had articulated the need to extend ethical concern to the "animal creation," for they had the capacity to "suffer," and hinted at a future possibility of an expanded concept of rights. In his *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1780), Bentham revealed:

The day has been, I grieve to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing, as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate? What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? (135-136)

Bentham's plea for moral extensionism on account of the suffering capacity of nonhuman beings did not come out of its own accord. It was, rather, a revolt to the Cartesian thought, in the Age of Reason, that reduced animals to mere intricate machines. Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method* (1637), stated that animals acted mechanically, like a clock. -According to Descartes, since animals were merely reacting to external stimuli and were performing behavior without consciousness they were mere automata that could feel no pain. Descartes stated that animals "have no reason at all and it is Nature which acts in them, according to the arrangement of their organs. In the same way we see that a clock, which is composed only of wheels and springs, can calculate the hours and measure the time more precisely than we can with all our intelligence" (123). According to Descartes, nonhuman species were distinctly different from human beings and could not be accorded with moral standing since they lacked language and reason. For Descartes, animals' incapacity

for speech “not only proves that beasts have less reason than human beings, but that they have none at all” (123). Thus, with the Cartesian philosophy, the image of animals as machine was born.¹⁵ Animals, since then, have been relegated to the realm of objects, or things, and hence, seen as unworthy of interests or rights. In other words, animals have become mere mechanisms for human ends, not beings “in-their-own-rights.”

For Bentham, the crucial qualification for ethical considerability was “suffering.” Whereas for Descartes, it was the capacity to reason, or the capacity for discourse. Bentham’s plea for ethical considerability on account of the suffering capacity of animals remained a weak one in overturning the Cartesian denial for animal suffering, for the conceptual foundations of this denial had its roots in the middle ages, in the Thomist thought that drew a sharp line between the human and the nonhuman realms. According to St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), it was wrong to inflict pain on animals. However, his stance against cruelty to animals did not stem from a belief in the suffering capacity of animals. For Aquinas, as he clarifies in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Book Three, Chapter 112), cruel treatment of animals was wrong on the grounds that this engendered cruelty to other human beings:

Indeed, if any statements are found in Sacred Scripture prohibiting the commission of an act of cruelty against brute animals, for instance, that one should not kill a bird accompanied by her young (Deut. 22:6), this is said either to turn the mind of man away from cruelty which might be used on other men, lest a person through practicing cruelty on brutes might go on to do the same to men; or because an injurious act committed on animals may lead to a temporal loss for some man, either for the agent or for another man; or there may be another interpretation of the text, as the Apostle (1 Cor. 9:9) explains it, in terms of “not muzzling the ox that treadeth the corn” (Deut. 25:4). (97)

¹⁵ Descartes was, in Oelschlaeger’s terms, “a virtual clone of Francis Bacon” (87). Bacon, the father of modern science, had a radically anthropocentric vision of the world. With his *New Atlantis* (1621), Bacon introduced a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature and all its species for human benefit. The research institute (in *New Atlantis*) where animals are experimented upon legitimated all future animal experimentation. In *New Atlantis*, in the research institute [Solomon’s House], it is stated that “We have ... parks ... of beasts and birds, which we use ... for dissections and trials, that thereby we may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man ... We try all poisons, and other medicines upon them” (Bacon 1226). Today’s laboratories where animals are experimented on for human benefit, with no regard for their suffering, first originated in the philosophy of Bacon.

Thomas Aquinas, largely drawing from Aristotelian philosophy,¹⁶ had emphasized the intellect and rationality as the primary criterion for separating the human and nonhuman worlds. Aquinas stated, “In the order of natural perfection, only the rational creature holds dominion over his acts, moving himself freely in order to perform his actions. Other creatures, in fact, are moved to their proper workings rather than being the active agents of these operations, as is clear from what has been said” (94). For Aquinas, humans—since they came closer to divine likeness owing to their intellectual nature—were governed for their own sakes, whereas animals—since they lacked reason—were subordinated to the rational creatures. Aquinas asserted, “of all the parts of the universe the more noble are intellectual creatures, since they come closer to the divine likeness. Therefore, intellectual creatures are governed by divine providence for their own sakes, while all others are for the intellectual ones” (96). This kind of thinking elevated human beings to a privileged position beyond the animal kingdom, and gave animals instrumental value only.¹⁷ Once the purpose of animal existence was established as the service of man, this sanctioned the brutal treatment of animals. Thus, when Descartes declared animals as unthinking machines, he had before him centuries of old heritage that denied life to nonhuman beings.

Today, as regards ethical treatment of animals, much has been achieved since the times of Descartes. Aldo Leopold, in his “The Land Ethic” in *A Sand County*

¹⁶ In fact, Thomas Aquinas was a strict follower of the Aristotelian philosophy that set a hierarchical ordering to the whole creation, with man at the top, and thus had an enormous influence on western thought. According to Aristotle, the entire hierarchy of organisms existed for the sake of man since only man possessed the “faculty of reasoning and thinking.” This very notion, eliminating the autonomous existence of animals, created such deep seated attitudes that, when coupled with the Thomist thought, it paved the way for the instrumental treatment of animals including their use in laboratories for scientific research, for human benefit. In his *Politics*, Aristotle states, “plants are for the sake of animals, and the other animals are for the benefit of humans. This is so for tame animals, because of the use to which they are put, and because they are our food. Most, if not all, wild animals are for the sake of food and other benefits, so that clothing and other tools might come to be from them. Then, if Nature does nothing imperfect or in vain, it must have made all of these things for the sake of humans” (28).

¹⁷ For a discussion of the privileged status of human beings, see Keith Thomas “Human Uniqueness” in *Thinking Through the Environment: A Reader*. Ed. Mark J. Smith. New York: Routledge, 1999. Thomas explains, “According to Aristotle, the soul comprised three elements: the nutritive soul, which was shared by man with vegetables; the sensitive soul, which was shared by animals; and the intellectual or rational soul, which was peculiar to man. This doctrine had been taken over by the medieval scholastics and fused with the Judaeo-Christian teaching that man was made in the image of God (Genesis i.27). Instead of representing man as merely a superior animal, it elevated him to a wholly different status, halfway between the beasts and the angels” (17).

Almanac (1949), had argued for the extension of ethics to the land-to soils, waters, plants, and animals-and had viewed it as “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity” (239). As Leopold-and Bentham much earlier-had anticipated, we now know that ethical consciousness is not a static idea, rather it is a dynamic and changing phenomena. Figures 1 and 2, from Roderick Nash’s *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (1989), on “the expanding concept of rights” and on “the evolution of ethics” clearly illustrate that we have already started expanding the concept of society to include nonhuman entities. There is, indeed, unprecedented interest in the study of animal minds, cognition and emotions. The animal behaviorists, as followers of Darwin’s revolutionary ideas, are paving the

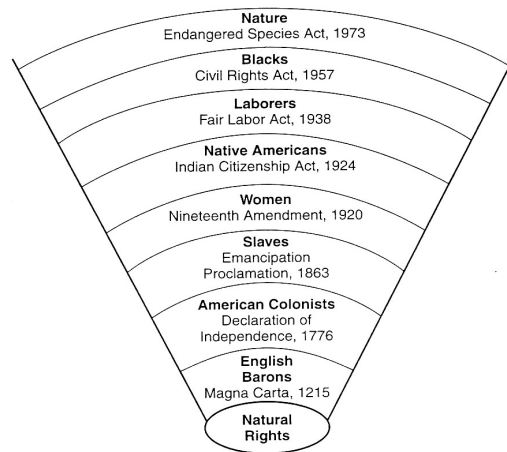


Figure 1. Nash’s diagram of “The expanding concept of rights.” (qtd. in Smith 4)

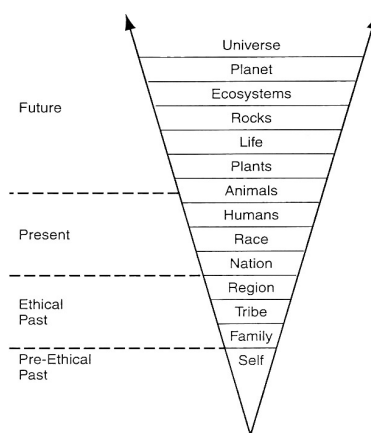


Figure 2. Nash’s diagram of “The evolution of ethics.” (qtd. in Smith 5)

way for a broad-based discourse on ethics and for a cultural evolution in directions that may soon permit the inclusion of nonhuman beings in man's ethical systems. Mark Bekoff believes that "The plural of anecdote is data" (47), and he urges the accumulation of more stories about animal behavior. This, Bekoff believes, will "stimulate further empirical research" and lead to new guidelines for a more ethical future. Studies by ethologists, coupled with the hard data of scientists, may soon legitimize worldwide ethical considerability for the nonhuman entities. Animal welfare and animal rights advocates, such as Peter Singer¹⁸ and Tom Regan¹⁹, are contributing, as well, to the extension of ethical concern to animals. They emphasize that capacities to feel pain and suffer are shared by human and nonhuman beings alike, and they expose the ethical wrong of seeing animals as resources for man, and also of cruelty inflicted on animals by human activities such as hunting for sport, trapping for fur, experimenting on them in laboratories for medical research, and also the ethical wrong in modern factory farms where animals are treated brutally.²⁰ Collectively, all these studies are gradually creating a new consciousness that make animals worthy of our ethical consideration.

Despite modern interest in animal minds, animal rights and welfare, and mounting publications in the field, deep-seated attitudes created by the Cartesian machine world still hinder, today, a wide-scale recognition of animal sentience. The Cartesian world view also accounts for how little space this topic still occupies in

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- ¹⁸ Australian philosopher, Peter Singer is currently the Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University's Center for Human Values. A major influence on the modern animal rights movement, Singer treats ethical issues from a utilitarian perspective, and he argues for animal welfare. Singer takes the Benthamite emphasis on "suffering" as the groundwork of his ethical philosophy and maintains that any sentient being-being with the "capacity to suffer or experience enjoyment or happiness"(Singer 330)-qualifies for moral consideration.
- ¹⁹ Tom Regan, a professor of philosophy at North Carolina State University and an animal rights activist, is considered the philosophical leader of the animal rights movement in the United States. According to Regan, the animals who meet the "subject-of-a-life criterion"-animals having "beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them" (Regan 321)-have rights. This definition basically covers mammals, and does not extend to other animals.
- ²⁰ For a theory of the rights of animals and a broad discussion of ethics, see Peter Singer. *Animal Liberation*. New York: Ecco, 2002; Tom Regan. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983; Matthew Scully. *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002.

the entire literary canon of both past and present with a sort of ethical deficiency that made humans the only beings on earth who qualify for moral standing. It is at this point that Walker's and Abbey's texts—with an expanded concept of ethics—gain significance. At the heart of their works—on sentient animals—is a very modern understanding that humans are simply “fellow-voyagers with other creatures in the odyssey of evolution.”²¹

Yet, evolution in ethics requires conscious effort on the part of the human societies. For a more rapid evolution of our ethical systems, then, the man of letters today, more than ever, is ethically obliged to take up the issue of animal minds and the suffering in the animal creation, and use his power of narration to contribute to the moral standing of animals. In the face of mounting evidence on animal minds, he has a moral responsibility to take up the theme of animal wellbeing. The literary critic is ethically obliged, as well, to delve into this hitherto neglected area, and bring out into the open those authors who were aware of animal minds, and who condemned unethical behavior to animals. Working alongside the other disciplines dedicated to animal behavior, the literary critic and the man of letters need to contribute to the creation of a new kind of awareness to nonhuman life on earth. Lord Man still prone to Disney versions of sentient animals may, only then, leave aside his reluctance and start extending moral concern to billions of sentient beings both within and beyond the scope of his vision.

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²¹ Leopold, in *A Sand County Almanac*, states “It is a century now since Darwin gave us the first glimpse of the origin of species. We know now what was unknown to all the preceding caravan of generations: that man are only fellow-voyagers with other creatures in the odyssey of evolution” (116-7).

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