

## A PROTEST AGAINST HUMAN DOMINATION OVER NATURE IN DANIEL QUINN'S *ISHMAEL*

*Daniel Quinn'in İsmail Adlı Romanında  
İnsanın Doğa Üzerindeki Hâkimiyetine Karşı Bir Protesto*

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**ABSTRACT:** Daniel Quinn's 1992 novel *Ishmael* has initiated a profound re-examination of our connection with the natural world and has challenged the prevalent view of human supremacy. Although human domination over nature is an issue that has been widely studied so far, there is a lack of a detailed study on this novel that draws attention to the human-nature relationship. This research examines the pivotal insights and themes expounded in *Ishmael*, shedding light on their implications for our understanding of our position within the ecological community. At the heart of the novel lies Ishmael, a wise gorilla who assumes the role of an unconventional teacher on deeply established convictions about human superiority and the unchecked exploitation of Earth's resources. Ishmael's teachings underscore the complex interdependence of all life forms and emphasize the pressing need to listen to the voices of fellow forms in the tapestry of life. This study endeavors to explore the concept of human supremacy, examining its origins and the transformative potential inherent in embracing a more inclusive perspective regarding our bond with nature. It analyses the historical, religious, and cultural factors that have preserved human dominance and the resulting detrimental actions toward the environment generated by these beliefs. Eventually, this research concludes that Ishmael's message remains relevant and urgent, beckoning us to critically evaluate our values, behaviors, and assumptions. It implores us to actively engage in reshaping our world by challenging prevailing narratives, interrogating societal structures, and adopting sustainable practices.

**Keywords:** Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael*, nature, environment, human supremacy

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**ÖZ:** Daniel Quinn'in romanı *Ishmael* (*İsmael*, ilk Türkçe baskı 2012), doğal dünyayla olan bağlantımızın derinlemesine yeniden incelenmesini sağladı ve insanın üstünlüğüne dair yaygın görüşe meydan okudu. İnsanın doğa üzerindeki tahakkümü bugüne kadar çokça çalışılmış bir konu olmasına rağmen, bu roman üzerine insan-doğa ilişkisine dikkat çeken detaylı bir çalışma eksikliği söz konusudur. Bu araştırma, *İsmael*'de açıklanan temel anlayışları ve temaları incelemekte ve bunların ekolojik topluluk içindeki konumumuza dair anlamlarına ışık tutmaktadır. Romanın merkezinde, insanın üstünlüğü ve dünya kaynaklarının kontrolsüzce sömürülmesi hakkındaki köklü inançlar konusunda alışılmadık bir öğretmen rolünü üstlenen bilge bir goril olan İsmail yatıyor. İsmail'in öğretileri, tüm yaşam formlarının karmaşık karşılıklı bağımlılığının altını çizer ve yaşamın dokusundaki ortak formların seslerini dinlemenin acil ihtiyacını vurgular. Bu çalışma, insan üstünlüğü kavramını, bu kavramın kökenlerini ve doğayla olan bağımıza ilişkin daha kapsayıcı bir bakış açısı benimsemenin doğasında var olan dönüştürücü potansiyeli incelemeye çalışmaktadır. İnsan egemenliğini koruyan tarihi, dini ve kültürel faktörleri ve bu inançların neden olduğu çevreye yönelik zararlı eylemleri analiz eder. Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, İsmail'in mesajının güncel ve acil olduğu sonucuna vararak bizi değerlerimizi, davranışlarımızı ve varsayımlarımızı eleştirel bir şekilde değerlendirmeye çağırır. Hâkim anlatılara meydan okuyarak, toplumsal yapıları sorgulayarak ve sürdürülebilir uygulamaları benimseyerek dünyamızı yeniden şekillendirmeye aktif olarak katılmamız için bizi teşvik eder.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Daniel Quinn, *İsmael*, doğa, çevre, insanın üstünlüğü

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### Introduction

The idea of human superiority in nature has been challenged more effectively since the publication of Daniel Quinn's thought-provoking novel, *Ishmael*, in 1992. Quinn's captivating narrative directly confronts long-standing beliefs regarding our dominion over the natural world, compelling us to reconsider our position as residents of this planet. Taking inspiration from *Ishmael*, this article examines the notion of human supremacy, its roots, and the transformative possibilities that arise when we adopt a more comprehensive outlook on our connection with nature. According to Pete Reinwald, the publication of *Ishmael* sparked global discussion groups organized by The Friends of Ishmael Society and motivated schools and teachers to incorporate it into their curricula, a practice that continues in some educational institutions today (Reinwald, 2013).

In *Ishmael*, a wise and insightful gorilla, assumes the role of an unorthodox instructor, leading his human pupil on an expedition of ecological enlightenment. Ishmael confronts the prevailing cultural myth that humans are the chosen and dominant species, inherently superior to all others, and possessing the right to exploit the Earth's resources without facing any repercussions. Quinn's narrative highlights the interconnectedness of all life forms and underscores the urgency of listening

to the voices of our fellow inhabitants in the community of life. The novel offers an ecocritical reading by drawing attention to the non-human world. Kerridge argues that “ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (1998: 5). According to Glotfelty, ecocritical discussions concentrate on “the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” as well as negotiations between “the human and the non-human” (1996: xix). Thus, the novel seems gives us much evidence about the interactivity between human beings and nature.

In terms of giving voice to an animal that assumes the role of a teacher, *Ishmael* differs from many other literary works that have been explored in relation to environmental crisis. For example, Marzec discusses that *Robinson Crusoe* is a narrative which deals with control and colonization of land and nature (2007: 14). Amitav Ghosh refers to “ecology and the climate crisis in novels such as *The Hungry Tide*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *The Gun Island*” (Karmakar and Chetty, 2024: 316). In such works, although ecological issues are the main focus, non-human beings are voiceless and silent. *Ishmael* lets a gorilla speak and teach a human being how nature and environment are destructed by selfish ambitions of humans. Through this method, the traditional teacher-student relationship is deconstructed in such a way that the narrator becomes a student who learns about the historical development of human-nature relations.

Just as *Ishmael* challenges us to question the narrative of human supremacy, this article delves into the profound implications of this change in basic assumptions. By critically examining the historical, religious, and cultural factors that have sustained human rule, we can uncover the ingrained beliefs that underlie our environmentally destructive actions. *Ishmael*’s lectures serve as a catalyst for exploring alternative perspectives that emphasize collaboration, mutual respect, and environmental stewardship. Throughout our study, our objective is to emphasize the significance and timeliness of *Ishmael*’s message. As we struggle with unparalleled ecological challenges like climate change, species extinction, and habitat degradation, the necessity for a fundamental shift in our mindset becomes increasingly evident. By embracing the wisdom imparted by *Ishmael*, we can redetermine our role within the intricate interconnections of life and foster a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence with nature.

### **Human Supremacy**

The concept of human supremacy, often referred to as anthropocentrism, which in its literal sense refers to a human-centered perspective, has deep roots in human history and can be traced back to numerous factors. However, according to Goralnik & Nelson, in its most significant philosophical context, it represents the ethical conviction that only humans possess inherent value; conversely, all other entities are considered valuable solely based on their ability to serve humans or their instrumental value (2012: 145). From an anthropocentric standpoint, humans are accorded direct moral significance as they are considered ends in themselves. On the other hand, other creatures, living or non-living or systems are seen as mere means to fulfill human goals.

The role of mainstream religious beliefs in Christianity is often thought to have been an integral part of the process in the transition from a religion-based society to a human-centered one. According to William Leiss, "The Judaeo-Christian religion" removed "spirit" from "nature" and claimed that what distinguishes human beings from the rest of other creatures is that only they carry "spirit" as sharing partly "God's transcendence of nature" (1994: 34). In the Bible, there are passages that underscore human dominance or stewardship over the natural world. These passages are often referenced in discussions about human relationships with the environment. One commonly cited verse is from the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, where God gives humans dominion over the Earth. In Genesis 1:26-28, it states:

"26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of these, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth" (Gen. 1:26-28).

This verse has been interpreted to imply that humans have a privileged position and authority over the rest of creation. For instance, in *Bibleref.com*, humans are claimed to have been designed to represent God's authority on Earth as we govern and bring the rest of His creation under control, and it is also stated that cultures that deny the concept of humans being created in the image of God often exhibit a pattern of terrorizing and mistreating fellow human beings, which is not unexpected or unreasonable. (Genesis 1:27, 2023). Similarly, in Psalm 8:6-8, it is mentioned that God has made humans rulers over the works of His hands and has placed all things under their feet.

This passage has been understood to imply a position of superiority or control over the natural world.

The Enlightenment era, characterized by a surge in scientific discoveries and rational thinking, played a pivotal role in shaping the concept of human supremacy. Thinkers such as Francis Bacon and René Descartes emphasized the power of human reason and advocated for the domination and control of nature through scientific investigation. This approach of scientific reductionism and objectification of the natural world reinforced the belief in human superiority and the perception of nature as a mere resource that humans can exploit. The remarkable advancements witnessed during this period such as industrial revolution, mechanical devices and machines instilled a sense of awe and newfound trust in the capabilities of human intellect. A growing conviction emerged that individuals could surpass the knowledge inherited from previous generations and achieve a significantly enhanced understanding of the nature of existence.

One influential philosophical framework that contributed to human supremacy is Cartesian dualism, which René Descartes formulated. Descartes proposed a radical separation between the mind and the body, suggesting that only humans possessed an immaterial mind or soul, thereby distinguishing them from the rest of the natural world (Descartes, 2003: 115,118).

In his book *The Great Instauration of the Dominion of Man over the Universe (1561-1626)*, Francis Bacon expressed his desire for humanity to regain control over the universe, symbolically represented by the Garden of Eden that was lost by Adam in the Fall (Bacon, 1964). Bacon argued for the restoration of mankind's authority over nature through scientific progress, technological innovation, and the application of experimental investigation. He believed that by using the tools of the mechanical arts, humanity could recover its divine right to rule over nature (Leiss, 1994: 50). According to Choy Yee Keong, Bacon emphasized that nature reveals itself more clearly when subjected to the trials and manipulations of human artifice than when left untouched (2018: 111). He urged the "true sons of knowledge" to explore the depths of nature's secrets, to penetrate the outer realms, and ultimately gain access to its innermost chambers (Keong, 2018: 111).

According to Toby Svoboda, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), known for his philosophical works, controversially rejects the notion that non-rational beings, which includes non-human animals, possess moral standing. According to Kant, human beings have only indirect duties when it comes to

animals. In simpler terms, he argues that moral reasons for how we treat animals are derived solely from the duties we have towards ourselves and other human beings. Kant's perspective suggests that our obligations towards animals are not based on their inherent worth or moral considerations specific to them, but rather on how our treatment of animals reflects or affects our duties towards fellow humans (Svoboda, 2019).

Throughout history, the emergence of industrialization and technological advancements significantly contributed to the establishment of human supremacy too. The rapid progress of science and technology, particularly during the Enlightenment era, further bolstered the belief in human exceptionalism. The ability of humans to manipulate and exert control over nature through inventions and scientific discoveries such as engines and optics fostered a sense of superiority and reinforced the notion that humans stood apart from and above the natural world. This mindset further reinforced the hierarchical view of humans as distinct and superior beings.

Colonialism and expansionism also contributed to the concept of human supremacy. The exploration and exploitation of new territories by European powers during the age of colonialism were driven by the belief in the superiority of Western civilization. For Alice L. Conklin, this mindset justified the subjugation and exploitation of Indigenous peoples and the natural resources of these regions, reinforcing the idea of human dominance over both human and non-human entities (Conklin, 1998). Colonialism, which coincided with the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, also played a noteworthy role in perpetuating human supremacy. European powers embarked on imperialistic ventures, viewing non-Western cultures and lands as inferior and prime for exploitation (Watts, 2013: 31). Indeed, the ideology of cultural and racial superiority that permeated human societies also extended to the natural world. This mindset not only justified the subjugation and exploitation of Indigenous peoples but also facilitated the appropriation of their lands and resources. The belief in Western superiority became intertwined with the notion of human dominance, strengthening the concept of human supremacy. This interconnected ideology not only reinforced the perception of human superiority over nature but also perpetuated systems of colonization, imperialism, and environmental exploitation.

In recent times, however, there has been a growing recognition of the flaws and consequences associated with the ideology of human supremacy. Environmental crises, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, have

shed light on the unsustainable nature of anthropocentric practices. Many individuals and movements are now advocating for a change in basic assumptions towards an ecocentric or biocentric worldview, which acknowledges the inherent worth of all life forms and seeks to foster a more balanced and mutually beneficial relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world.

Recently, the shortcomings and negative consequences of human supremacy have become more apparent. The escalating ecological crises, coupled with a growing understanding of the interdependence of global ecosystems, have compelled us to reexamine our connection with the natural world. As a result, various movements have emerged, including environmental and indigenous rights movements, as well as ethical philosophies like deep ecology and ecocentrism. These movements and philosophies actively challenge the notion of human superiority and instead promote a comprehensive and sustainable approach to our interactions with the environment. This shift in perspective acknowledges the intrinsic value of all living beings and recognizes the need for a harmonious and balanced coexistence with nature.

In contrast to anthropocentric practices, ecocentrism, also known as the Arcadian vision, ascribes intrinsic value, rights to all other life forms, and rejects the notion that humans hold a privileged status in the universe. Ecocentrists recognize that nature is abundant and crucial for human survival, but they also perceive it as delicate and in need of careful handling. Consequently, humans cannot be immune to the adverse consequences of disregarding the laws of nature, and economic growth is inherently constrained by the extent to which local flora and fauna can withstand human exploitation. Ecocentrism emphasizes the importance of exercising caution and respect towards nature, acknowledging its intrinsic value and interconnectedness with all living beings (Desrochers, 2022).

By critically examining the historical, philosophical, and cultural factors that have contributed to the concept of human supremacy, we can question and deconstruct this belief system. This critical reflection opens the door to alternative worldviews that emphasize humility, cooperation, and a deep appreciation for the intrinsic value of all life forms. Recognizing our place within the broader community of life allows us to forge a path towards ecological stewardship and a more harmonious coexistence with the natural world.



### **Rethinking Our Role in Nature: Insights from Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael***

In his thought-provoking novel *Ishmael*, Daniel Quinn strategically introduces a non-human character to disrupt human assumptions and challenge the prevailing narrative of human supremacy. Through the unconventional choice of a gorilla as the teacher in the novel, Quinn invites readers to consider an alternative perspective and critically examine their own beliefs and assumptions. By presenting the teachings and insights from a non-human point of view, *Ishmael* prompts readers to question the hierarchical notion that humans are inherently superior beings with the entitlement to dominate and exploit the natural world. The presence of a gorilla as the teacher serves as a powerful symbolic representation, effectively challenging the deeply ingrained notion of human superiority and encouraging a reevaluation of our relationship with the environment.

His choice of a gorilla, *Ishmael*, as the main character is driven by several compelling considerations. Primarily, Quinn aims to introduce a character that commands respect and authority, capable of effectively challenging deeply rooted human-centric beliefs. Among the diverse array of creatures in the natural world, gorillas possess a striking combination of strength, intelligence, and charisma, rendering them an ideal choice to fulfill the role of a powerful teacher and advocate for the non-human community. The selection of a gorilla as the central character allows for a captivating and absorbing narrative, enhancing the novel's ability to challenge human assumptions and foster a reevaluation of our relationship with the natural world.

Gorillas are sometimes thought to be different from other animals due to their interconnection with humans and nature. As magnificent creatures who share a close genetic lineage with humans, gorillas evoke a sense of kinship and similarity to humans, which is proposed by advocates of evolutionist theories. By choosing a gorilla as the protagonist, Quinn underscores the notion that we are part of a larger ecological tapestry, intimately connected to the fate and well-being of all species. Furthermore, gorillas have often been the victims of human exploitation and habitat destruction, particularly due to deforestation and the illegal wildlife trade. By shining a spotlight on the plight of gorillas, Quinn highlights the devastating impact of human activities on non-human communities and draws attention to the urgent need for environmental stewardship and conservation efforts.

Daniel Quinn states in his internet site *ismael.org*. that what he wants to convey as the main idea throughout his work is that to ensure our survival on Earth, it is essential that we pay heed to the messages shared by our fellow members within the interconnected web of life. So, who is best suited to represent these fellow beings? Should it be one of us or one of them? Clearly, it should be one of them. The teacher had to be one such member of the community – nonhuman in nature. Among all these fellow beings, none possesses a greater impact and authority than a gorilla which is why he opts to depict Ishmael as a gorilla rather than a parrot, salmon, or butterfly (Quinn, 2023).

The expression “Teacher seeks pupil. Must have an earnest desire to save the world. Apply in person” (Quinn, 1995: 1) is a significant statement that serves as a central theme and call to action in the novel. This expression represents the essence of Ishmael’s message and his search for a pupil who is willing to challenge conventional thinking and actively work towards addressing the world’s pressing environmental and societal issues. It underscores the importance of personal engagement and responsibility in effecting positive change. The call to “apply in person” (1995: 1) suggests that this undertaking is not a mere theoretical or abstract pursuit; rather, it requires direct, hands-on involvement and action. The expression above invites individuals to actively participate in reshaping the world by challenging prevailing narratives, questioning societal structures, and reevaluating human interactions with the natural world. It captures the urgency, commitment, and personal engagement necessary to address the ecological and social challenges we face. It serves as a rallying cry for individuals to embrace their role as agents of change and actively seek knowledge, understanding, and solutions to foster a more sustainable and harmonious world.

While the novel does not explicitly delve into the agricultural revolution, it indirectly addresses the impact of agriculture on human society and its consequences. Ishmael, the gorilla character, and teacher, puts forth the notion that the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to settled agricultural communities had a profound influence on human society and the relationship between humans and the natural world. According to Ishmael’s teachings, the adoption of agriculture brought about a fundamental shift in human behavior and worldview. It resulted in a change from a more sustainable and harmonious way of life to one characterized by domination and exploitation of the natural environment. The novel suggests that with the advent of agriculture, humans began to view themselves as separate from and superior

to the natural world, leading to the degradation of ecosystems and the loss of balance in the web of life.

While the agricultural revolution is not the central focus of the novel, its underlying message encourages readers to reflect on the consequences of human actions and the need to reevaluate our relationship with the environment. It invites us to critically examine the societal shifts that have occurred throughout history and consider alternative ways of living that prioritize sustainability, cooperation, and a more balanced coexistence with the natural world.

“This was the turning point. The world had been made for man, but he was unable to take possession of it until this problem was cracked. And he finally cracked it about ten thousand years ago, back there in the Fertile Crescent. This was a very big moment—the biggest in human history up to this point. Man was at last free of all those restraints that ... The limitations of the hunting-gathering life had kept man in check for three million years. With agriculture, those limitations vanished, and his rise was meteoric. Settlement gave rise to division of labor. Division of labor gave rise to technology. With the rise of technology came trade and commerce. With trade and commerce came mathematics and literacy and science, and all the rest. The whole thing was under way at last, and the rest, as they say, is history. And that’s the middle of the story” (1995: 69).

Ishmael thinks that human domination over nature is not a new phenomenon but encompasses a period of centuries going back to the rise of agriculture which marks the transition to settled life followed by division of labor and then industrial revolution. However, Ishmael argues that this shift came with unintended consequences. The novel suggests “man was certainly not made to conquer and rule it” (1995: 145) though agriculture created a mindset of humans as the rulers and conquerors of nature, leading to the destruction of ecosystems and the depletion of resources. This perspective contrasts with the earlier hunter-gatherer societies, which were often portrayed as living in harmony with the natural world.

The agricultural revolution also introduced concepts such as ownership, property, and hierarchical social structures. The novel explores how these societal changes contributed to the rise of civilization, including the formation of cities, the division of labor, and the development of complex social and economic systems. Agricultural revolution divided the people on earth into two separate groups: “Takers” and “Leavers.” In the novel the terms “Takers” and “Leavers” are used to describe two distinct types of cultures or societies and represent contrasting approaches to human existence and the relationship between humans and the natural world.

In *Ishmael*, the concept of the Takers represents modern human societies, often referred to as “civilized” or “dominator” cultures. These cultures emerged with the agricultural revolution approximately 10,000 years ago, which marked the transition from nomadic hunting and gathering to settled agricultural communities. The Taker culture is distinguished by a set of beliefs and behaviors that differentiate it from other cultures. Central to this culture is the belief in human supremacy, the notion that humans are separate from and superior to the natural world. This belief system perpetuates the idea that the Earth and its resources exist primarily for human exploitation and consumption. Taker cultures are characterized by a relentless pursuit of growth, expansion, and control over nature. This drive for continual progress often results in widespread environmental destruction and the depletion of natural resources. The Taker mentality prioritizes the accumulation of wealth and power, often at the expense of the well-being of the natural world and other species.

Through the critique of the Taker culture, *Ishmael* challenges the assumptions and behaviors that have led to environmental degradation. It calls for a shift in perspective, urging readers to recognize the interconnectedness of all beings and adopt a more sustainable and balanced approach to our relationship with the natural world.

“This is the way it’s done in your own culture, except that you use a pair of heavily loaded terms instead of these relatively neutral terms. You call yourselves civilized and all the rest primitive. You are universally agreed on these terms; I mean that the people of London and Paris and Baghdad and Seoul and Detroit and Buenos Aires and Toronto all know that—whatever else separates them— they are united in being civilized and distinct from Stone Age peoples scattered all over the world; you consider or recognize that, whatever their differences, these Stone Age peoples are likewise united in being primitive” (Quinn, 1995: 22).

On the other hand, the Leavers, also known as the “primitive” (Quinn, 1995: 146) or “self-sustaining” (1995: 148) cultures, represent the indigenous and traditional societies that have existed for thousands of years prior to the rise of Taker cultures. Leaver cultures have a fundamentally unique perspective on human existence and the natural world. They view themselves as an integral part of nature, recognizing their interconnectedness with other living beings and the environment. Leaver cultures typically live in harmony with nature, following sustainable practices and recognizing the limits of the natural world. They prioritize the well-being of the community and the balance of ecosystems over individual desires and material accumulation.

“The creatures who act as though they belong to the world follow the peace-keeping law, and because they follow that law, they give the creatures around them a chance to grow toward whatever it’s possible for them to become. That’s how man came into being. The creatures around *Australopithecus* didn’t imagine that the world belonged to them, so they let him live and grow. How does being civilized come into it? Does being civilized mean that you have to destroy the world?” (Quinn, 1995: 150).

As *Ishmael* expresses in the novel, the lifestyle of the Leavers is not solely about hunting and gathering; it revolves around allowing the rest of the community to thrive—and this can be achieved by agriculturalists just as effectively as by hunter-gatherers (Quinn, 1995: 10).

The concept of “Takers and Leavers” in *Ishmael* is significant as it provides a critique of the dominant the Taker culture which claims that “the world belongs to man” (1995: 240). while exploring alternative modes of existence according to which “man belongs to the world” (1995: 240). The novel portrays the Taker culture as being fundamentally responsible for ecological devastation and the disconnection of humans from the natural world.

“The problem is that man’s conquest of the world has itself devastated the world. And in spite of all the mastery we’ve attained, we don’t have enough mastery to stop devastating the world—or to repair the devastation we’ve already wrought. We have poured our poisons into the world as though it were a bottomless pit—and we go on pouring our poisons into the world. We’ve gobbled up irreplaceable resources as though they could never run out—and we go on gobbling them up. It’s hard to imagine how the world could survive another century of this abuse, but nobody’s really doing anything about it. It’s a problem our children will have to solve, or their children” (Quinn, 1995: 80).

Through Socratic dialogues between the protagonist and the telepathic gorilla *Ishmael*, Quinn challenges the worldview of the Takers and proposes a shift towards a more Leaver-like mentality. The book urges readers to reevaluate their relationship with the environment and embrace sustainable and cooperative practices. Rather than using environmentally hazardous chemicals and devices, individuals can make use of methods that are not harmful to animals and nature. In their relations to nature, humans need to embrace a holistic approach.

In the course of the time the unnamed narrator understands the real problem of the so-called civilized people stating that “any species that exempts itself from the rules of competition ends up destroying the community in order to support its own expansion” (1995: 135). When a species disregards the principles of competition and pursues its own

expansion without considering the well-being of the larger community or ecosystem, it can inadvertently lead to the destruction of that community or ecosystem. Here Quinn highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of species within an ecological framework. In the context of the novel, the quote above aligns with the book's exploration of the destructive consequences of human exceptionalism and the belief that humans are exempt from the rules that govern the natural world. By prioritizing their own expansion and dominance over other species and ecosystems, humans can disrupt the delicate balance of the environment and cause harm to the overall community of life. It also underscores the importance of recognizing the interrelationships and interdependencies that exist within ecosystems. It suggests that a sustainable and thriving community is one in which each species operates within the constraints of competition while also fulfilling its ecological niche and maintaining the overall health and stability of the community.

By heeding this understanding, we can strive for a more comprehensive approach to our interactions with the natural world, recognizing that our actions have consequences that reverberate throughout the entire ecosystem. It reminds us that a harmonious and sustainable coexistence requires considering the needs and well-being of the broader community rather than solely focusing on individual or species-level expansion.

The ending of Daniel Quinn's novel *Ishmael* is poignant and thought-provoking, leaving readers with a sense of contemplation and reflection. It serves as a culmination of the philosophical journey and insights gained throughout the book. In the final chapters, the protagonist engages in a series of conversations with the character Ishmael, an enigmatic gorilla who acts as a teacher and guide. These conversations explore the cultural and ecological issues facing humanity, leading to a deeper understanding of the destructive narrative that has shaped our relationship with the natural world.

*Ishmael* leaves the reader with an open-ended question and a call to action. It presents a challenge to the reader to consider their own role within the cultural and ecological systems they inhabit and encourages them to reassess their perspectives, choices, and responsibilities.

“As long as the people of your culture are convinced that the world belongs to them and that their divinely appointed destiny is to conquer and rule it, then they are of course going to go on acting the way they've been acting for the past ten thousand years. They're going to go on treating the world as if it were a piece of human property and they're going to go on conquering it as if it were an adversary. You can't change these things with laws. You must change people's

minds. And you can't just root out a harmful complex of ideas and leave a void behind; you have to give people something that is as meaningful as what they've lost—something that makes better sense than the old horror of Man Supreme, wiping out everything on this planet that doesn't serve his needs directly or indirectly" (Quinn, 1995: 249).

At the end of the novel, the protagonist, whose name is never revealed, learns the ultimate purpose of his conversations with Ishmael. Ishmael explains that humanity's civilization is based on a flawed cultural story, which he calls the "Taker" culture. This culture is characterized by the idea that humans are separate from and superior to the rest of the natural world. Ishmael argues that this mindset has led to environmental destruction and the oppression of other species.

Ishmael encourages the protagonist to spread the knowledge he has gained and to challenge the dominant cultural story. The protagonist realizes that changing the cultural narrative is essential for humanity to live in harmony with the planet and its ecosystems. The novel concludes with the protagonist feeling a sense of responsibility and determination to share this knowledge and work towards a better future.

### **Conclusion**

Daniel Quinn's novel serves as a powerful critique of the concept of human supremacy and offers a compelling invitation to reconsider our relationship with the natural world. Through the character of Ishmael, the book challenges the deeply ingrained belief in human superiority and entitlement, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings. It prompts readers to question prevailing narratives and explore alternative perspectives that prioritize harmony, respect, and sustainability in our interactions with the environment. Ishmael's teachings inspire a profound shift in thinking and call for a more comprehensive and responsible approach to our place within the web of life. Daniel Quinn encourages readers to critically examine and reassess their beliefs regarding human superiority. By challenging the prevailing ideology of human dominance, Ishmael's teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and underscore the necessity for a more balanced and sustainable approach to our interactions with the natural world.

Quinn's narrative exposes the shortcomings and flaws inherent in the concept of human superiority, inviting readers to recognize the intricate web of life in which we are all interconnected. Through Ishmael's wisdom, the novel prompts us to reevaluate our role within this web and to consider the consequences of our actions on other species and the environment. By

questioning assumptions and highlighting the urgent need for change, Ishmael's teachings serve as a method for promoting a more balanced and sustainable approach to our relationship with nature. The novel invites readers to accept a mindset that values the interconnection of all beings and supports for greater harmony and coexistence with the natural world. Quinn's exploration of human supremacy in *Ishmael* serves as a call to action. It challenges us to recognize the urgency of addressing the ecological challenges we face, and to strive for a more inclusive and compassionate worldview. By embracing a mindset that acknowledges the intrinsic worth and rights of all beings, we can forge a path towards a more sustainable future, one that recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life on Earth.

In a world grappling with environmental degradation, climate change, and biodiversity loss, *Ishmael's* message resonates with increasing relevance. It urges us to transcend the limitations of human-centric thinking and engage in a collective effort to redefine our relationship with the natural world. By humbly acknowledging our place as one among many species, we can move towards a future where human supremacy gives way to cooperation, harmony, and a shared responsibility for the well-being of the planet and its diverse communities of life.

The significance of *Ishmael's* teachings lies in their invitation to adopt a more humble, respectful, and cooperative approach towards the natural world. The novel calls for a transformation in our understanding of ourselves as part of a larger ecological community, rather than separate and superior beings. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the inherent worth and rights of non-human beings, and the wisdom they hold. In the face of escalating environmental crises, *Ishmael's* message gains ever more relevance. It compels us to acknowledge the urgency of addressing the pressing issues of climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological destruction. By transcending the limitations of human supremacy, we can forge a path towards a future where cooperation, harmony, and environmental stewardship prevail.

*Ishmael* invites us to envision a world where our relationship with the natural world is characterized by respect, reciprocity, and a recognition of our shared destiny. It inspires us to strive for a future where human actions are guided by a profound understanding of our place within the interconnected web of life, leading to a more sustainable and thriving planet for present and future generations.



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