

# Chapter 7: ‘Pity the Meat!’: Ideology, Metaphor, Violence

In: Theophilus Savvas. *Vegetarianism and Veganism in Literature from the Ancients to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge UP, 2024.

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# Conclusion: carnivorism as ideology

“One of the things that I hope this book has done is to offer an insight into the way in which **carnivorism functions as an ideology**. Most interpretations of ideology hinge upon the notion of power – and the perpetuation of it over one group by another. Ideologies are not always obvious, especially to those who are in some sense in thrall to them. Ideologies frequently obfuscate and occlude; they may blind individuals or groups to other ‘ways of seeing’, as John Berger put it in his book which was concerned variously with the implicit ideologies of images.”  
(emphasis added, Savvas 206)

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# On anachronistic methodology

“a text ought not be understood as only a reflection of the ideology of its historical context; rather, texts contribute to the creation of ideologies and with that create also contexts for their own reading.”

(Savvas 206-207)

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# Main argument: nonviolence (cf. Judith Butler)

“Any act of violence for Butler ultimately leads to the question of how much grief a life might be worth, a question which she refuses to entertain on the grounds that, ‘to be subject to a calculation is already to have entered the gray zone of ungrievable’. **Non-human animals have always in habited this ‘gray zone’**, and so the underlying spirit traced in this book can be said to presuppose, and thus also to demand, full grievability for all animal life, human and non-human alike.”

(Savvas 215)

# Producing logics of oppression: metaphor

“Many of the texts discussed here intimate that the logic behind the ideology of carnivorism and animal-use more generally is the same as that behind those ideologies that oppress, restrict, or coerce the human. The expression of such logic is dependent upon a literary trope: the metaphor of the human-as-animal. This figure of language gives rise to the possible treatment of humans as animals – in other words, gives rise to the possibility of the literalisation of the metaphor.”

(Savvas 207)

# On the litigious nature of comparison

“At a recent conference on the work of novelist Bridget Brophy, one prominent vegan theorist was upbraided for his utilisation of the language of the Holocaust in a description of animal husbandry. When challenged as to why, the response was that it was ‘offensive’ and left at that; no further rationale was provided, or, it was thought, needed.”

(Savvas 210)

“unless we are willing to beg the question at hand, we cannot view the comparison of violence toward human beings and animals as scandalously inadequate *simply* because it compares human to nonhuman life.”

(emphasis in original; Matthew Calarco qtd. in Savvas 210-211)

# On the litigious nature of comparison

“The question at hand is, I suppose: What rationale might there be for the rejection of such a comparison that is not based on some sort of species chauvinism?”

(Savvas 211)

“The most frequently invoked narrative that would legitimise this a priori rejection (or, conversely, would delegitimise the comparison) is science. Donna Haraway’s understanding of ‘**sharing suffering**’, outlined in *When Species Meet* (2007)... [Haraway’s] line of argument would not be appropriate for humans using other humans and so it is unclear why it should be acceptable here.”

(emphasis added; Savvas 211)

# On the litigious nature of comparison

“The risk in the race- animal combination... is to see race only as a platform to set the scene of animal studies rather than viewing it as a permanent presence inextricably part of the animal question. The race- animal question begs to be addressed as a true combination rather than as a succession of thoughts that... look at race first and then move onto the animal question. The animal turn... offers a unique chance to take an in-depth look at the modern impact of a historically grounded system of mutual racialization and animalization. For this to happen, however, blackness cannot simply be used as a means to serve the next cause, or as Carol J. Adams would say about the commodification of animals, ‘as a means to others’ ends.’”

(Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog. Blackness and the Animal Question*, Columbia UP, 2018, p. 2)

# Metaphor vs. Metonymy, comparison vs. association

“the limits of thinking that Derrida highlights are related to the limitations of literary representation. (After all, how, precisely, does one write the animal as a developing agential being?) Metaphor is the trope of comparison and that is the way in which the consideration of human suffering alongside animal suffering usually proceeds”

(Savvas 213)

“metonymy, which might be a more useful literary trope here, based as it is on contiguity and association”

(Savvas 214)

# Metaphor vs. Metonymy, comparison vs. association

“[I. B. Singer’s] fictional works do not compare the treatment of animals in society at large to the treatment of humans during the Holocaust. Rather, those texts **situate** the Holocaust in terms of the human behaviour towards non-human animals in order to reveal something about the **governing epistemology that seeks to legitimise both practices**. This act of situation tells us something about the Holocaust, as well as revealing truths about the human use of non-human animals. This does not rely on a metaphorical drawing together of human and animal – and so does not relegate the animal to secondary element [rhetorical vehicle].”

(emphasis added Savvas 213)

## **synecdoche?**

(e.g. Holocaust  
= “situate[d]” in  
= **part of** the “governing  
epistemology”)

vs.

## **metonymy**

(speciesism or the “Chain of Beings” as a chain of semantically contiguous signifiers, used to conceptualize Blackness as the missing link between humans and apes)

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# Metaphor (comparison) vs. Metonymy in existing theory

Thinking through “the example and relation” as opposed to “comparativity and the exception”

“While we should most definitely bring into focus the **relays betwixt and between** the genocide of indigenous populations in the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, Asian American indentured servitude, and Latino immigration among many factors, we cannot do so in the grammar of comparison, since this will merely reaffirm Man’s existent hierarchies rather than design novel assemblages of relation”

(Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus. Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Duke UP, 2014, pp. 11, 13)

“multiple systems – racism, classism, sexism, speciesism – are not merely linked, mutually reinforcing systems of oppression: they are different **faces of the same system**”

→ *synecdoche*

(Greta Gaard, “Ecofeminism on the Wing: Perspectives on Human-Animal Relations,” *Women and Environments International Magazine*, no. 52/53, 2001, p. 20)

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# An “antidote”: embracing animality

“This logic [carnivorism] is evidently undergirded both by an occlusion of the obvious non-literary reality, that the human is already an animal, and by the assumption that being an animal is something to be abjured rather than embraced.”

(Savvas 207)

“To be human is to err; but it is also, quite frequently, to be inhumane. The antidote might be the enlargement of our kinship community beyond the human. In this story, it might be better to say that it is only in a recognition of – rather than revulsion towards – shared animality that both human and non-human may, finally, be saved. Because the truth is that... it is the fear of being animal... which denies the possibility of communication, in the Camusian sense, between humans and those abjected as ‘animals’”

(Savvas 209-210)

# (perceived) identity or recognition vs. alterity

“the mere feeling of a connection doesn’t guarantee the right kind of action.”

(Syl Ko, “Notes from the Border of the Human-Animal Divide. Thinking and Talking about Animal Oppression When You’re Not Quite Human Yourself,” [2017] 2020, p. 72)

“would it not be more ethical to develop our faculty of caring for other life forms for their own sake, rather than because we identify with them?”

(Janis Birkeland, “Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice,” *Ecofeminism*, ed. Greta Gaard, p. 49)

“the ethical turn that has followed in the wake of deconstruction is an attempt to recognize and extend care to others while acknowledging that we may not know what the best form of care is for an other we cannot presume to know. It is a concern with and for alterity, especially insofar as alterity brings us to the limits of our own self-certainty and certainty about the world”

(Keri Weil, “A Report on the Animal Turn,” 2010, p. 13)