

## BETWEEN THE SPECIES

[www.cla.calpoly.edu/bts/](http://www.cla.calpoly.edu/bts/)

Issue V

August 2005

### Lost Dog

H. Peter Steeves

DePaul University

Here, at the shore of the Caribbean, the crab removes his eyes, casts them to the sea, and sings for them to return. And they do. He watches as they—he—find home again, gliding through the water, flying into the air, landing, balanced on their gangly stems.

Here the jaguar watches too—and demands to play, to be let in on the secret. The crab hesitates and warns the jaguar that a large fish is swimming near, that he could eat the eyes and they would be lost forever. Fearless, the cat the Venezuelans call *el Tigre* insists, and with a song, the crab removes the jaguar's eyes and casts them to the waves. Where they are eaten by the fish.

In blind rage the jaguar slashes out at the crab who crawls away in fear. Now the jaguar collapses on the beach in spasms of whimpers and tears. In this way the buzzard comes upon him, sees opportunity, and offers to help. "Find my eyes," cries the jaguar, "and I will kill something for you to eat."

The buzzard stews up a hot paste of bark and grass and starchy roots, shapes it into two balls, and shoves it into the jaguar's empty sockets. In burning pain the great cat shrieks "I am on fire, fool, and still I can't see!"

"Open your eyes," laughs the buzzard, and when he does the jaguar sees the world with new eyes, flaming orange, that burn in the night.

And this is how the jaguar lost and found his eyes.

In Venezuela the city streets are filled with homeless dogs, *perros vagabundos*. I see them each day from the car as I drive to the university, along the street as we walk to the grocery, from the window and through the bars high up in the apartment where in the heat their bodies are distant, shimmering, and waving in and out of focus as if, perhaps, illusions.

Weekdays, in mid-morning, a short-haired shepherd-mix plays in the dirt with workmen two blocks south. They are building another apartment high-rise but they have yet to begin the

foundation. The shepherd climbs little mountains of dirt—*el rey de la montaña*—and barks, hoping someone will try to chase him off. From time to time the workers throw clumps of dry dirt in graceful arcs across the lot where they explode like grenades into dust. The shepherd chases each one, knowing there will be nothing left to fetch. He barks and rolls in the dirt, and at noon they all have lunch.

Along the city streets I see the dogs traveling. They stay on the sidewalks, in general, and cross at intersections. They trot with their heads tilted down, seldom looking around, giving the impression that they are headed somewhere important, that they know precisely where they are going and why. No mindless wandering; no stopping to beg.

I thought at first they were lost—a *gringo* assumption, I know now. They live in the city, in neighborhoods, and are watched over by many people. In the United States, lost or stray, we would catch them, kill them, secretly turn them into soap and chicken feed. Here they are part of life, almost citizens. They remind me who I am, where I am, and keep moving on toward a goal and destination of which they never speak.

I think of Emmanuel Levinas and Bobby, the stray dog who visited the philosopher in his concentration camp. “The last Kantian in Nazi Germany,” Levinas called Bobby, because he wagged his tail and reminded the prisoners who they were. It was something like “respect,” writes Levinas.

I have no nightmare of suffering to compare, but I know the power of the stray dog.

And I know that dogs are not Kantians.

Even for Levinas, Bobby could not truly be a Kantian because he lacked “the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives.”<sup>i</sup> Indeed, Levinas has nothing respectful to say about animals in the short essay in which he recalls the few weeks during which Bobby affirmed the humanity of the prisoners in Camp 1492. Bobby, we learn, has neither ethics nor *logos*. He is animal and therefore subhuman. He is (truly) what the Nazis were trying to make (falsely) their prisoners: “a gang of apes,” “no longer part of the world,” “chatterers of monkey talk”—“signifiers without a signified.”<sup>i</sup> These are parallels around which Levinas dances carefully: the human and the animal, the Nazi and the prisoner, a meal of meat and the Holocaust. Heidegger—as so often in these matters—is not careful, claiming, as he did in 1949, that the “motorized food industry” was essentially the same as the gas chamber and concentration camp.<sup>i</sup> Knowing what we know about Heidegger’s views on animal being, the comment is doubly dangerous. In *Being*

*and Time* we learn that only *Dasein* can die—other living things merely perish. David Clark, then, is right to worry that “Heidegger’s...assertion takes on utterly chilling consequences: insofar as the Jews perish with and *like* the animals who die in meat-processing plants, that is as essentially similar ‘fabrications’ of the military-industrial-agricultural complex, *they cannot be human...*[and are thus slaughtered] with impunity.”<sup>i</sup> One can read Heidegger as lowering the horror of the Holocaust to the level of the carnivorous food industry, rather than raising the tragedy of the carnivorous food industry to the level of that greatest tragedy, the Holocaust. The lowering, no doubt, springs from evil intent. The raising is nobler, though perhaps unutterable. Still, how much hierarchy! How great the need to order our sorrows!

At home, the “Puppies Behind Bars” program thrives. Inmates train seeing-eye guide dogs, living with them in their cells. This is not the death camp of Levinas, though there is racism at work throughout. But enough of the ranking of tragedy! Each day the men work with the dogs, coming to know each other, coming to know what is expected. Hatred, say the program directors, begins to melt away. The inmates become someone new. “Nobody needs to tell me I’m worth something,” he says through bars and through tears. “This dog tells me that everyday.”<sup>i</sup>

Levinas does not speak of order. The first half of his essay concerns the problem of animal rights—and here he is close to demanding vegetarianism; the second half is about Bobby—and here he cannot bring himself to thank this animal Other. Yes, Bobby jumped up and down and barked in delight when the prisoners returned in the evening, but Bobby didn’t *mean to*. He didn’t mean it. Clark is right again: “What is ‘language’ if it is not the wagging of a tail, and ‘ethics’ if it is not the ability to greet one another and to dwell together *as* others?”<sup>i</sup> But for Levinas, the barking was a signifier without a signified, not a choice, not a duty, but an inevitable manifestation of his lowly being—a Cartesian Kantianism: input=see a man; output=bark and jump. Should the stock market plunge and our fortune be lost, we will not think to thank the servants for continuing to address us as “Madam” and “Sir.” It is what we are regardless of our circumstances; they merely recognize it in a world gone mad.

When Ulysses returns and is recognized by his dog, the canine is, perhaps, “the last true Greek in Ithica,”<sup>i</sup> but Bobby is no Kantian. Levinas’ reading of the bark turns *us* into Kantians. With the bark, Bobby is thought to be playing a canine Kantian role. Instead of hearing Bobby say “There is still love. I still love. And we are together,” Levinas hears the voice of an inferior reminding him that whatever happens, the starry heavens will be above him, the moral

law will be within him, and he is still an end in himself. It is good and needed news in a place of despair, but it cannot be seen as a gift because nothing less was expected.

In the camp, remarks Levinas, “the French uniform still protected us from Hitlerian violence. But the other men, called free, ... stripped us of our human skin.”<sup>i</sup> One wants to question the philosopher on the importance of skin: human skin, a uniform, a coat of fur. Surely he sees the absurdity, the categorial nominalism that creates the combatant, the civilian, the French from the outer trappings of a covered body. One wants to place Bobby before Levinas and ask him to acknowledge that furry canine skin as skin, entice him to question the bureaucratic separation of species. But for Levinas there can be no face-to-face meeting, for Bobby has no face.<sup>i</sup>

It is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog. Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face. We understand the animal, the face of an animal, in accordance with *Dasein*. The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog... I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called “face.” The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I don’t know if a snake has a face. I can’t answer that question... But there is something in our attraction to the animal... In the dog, what we like is perhaps his child-like character... We do not want to make an animal suffer needlessly and so on. But the prototype of this is human ethics. Vegetarianism, for example, arises from the transference to animals of the idea of suffering. The animal suffers. It is because we, as human, know what suffering is that we can have this obligation.

Bobby cannot truly suffer; Bobby cannot truly have a face. Levinas has taken the Kantian ethic and reformulated it in his own terms. As the measure of all things, Man has a duty *to* himself only, but in as much as the animal is like him in some ways and he will become callous toward humans should he mistreat animals, Man has a duty *regarding* the animal.<sup>i</sup> And so, too, do we grant the animal some semblance of a face—distorted from its pure human form—and some relief from suffering. The animal’s face is not his own—it is a reflection only. And the same holds for animal suffering.<sup>i</sup>

What could Bobby be missing? Is his snout too pointy to constitute a face? Is his nose too wet? Do his ears hang low; do they wobble to and fro? How can this *not* be a face? The truly interesting debates begin with flies and octopi, with worms and jellyfish. Perhaps with crabs—

those eyes! But a dog? The dog's face is all there, all familiar, and with all the expressions of sorrow, accusation, guilt, and joy that we have come to know—not out of a hollow transference from us to them, but a bilateral pairing.<sup>1</sup> I know what expectation is partly because I looked into my dog's eyes when she would rush to the back door in preface to our going out to explore a frozen stream, a newly tilled field, a distant corner of the woods where we found blackberries that stained our lips, our skin. Did Levinas learn nothing of hope from Bobby?

Separated by hundreds of miles but tied together by the same war—the same evil occupying a different homeland—Erazim Kohák's father was a prisoner of the Gestapo in Czechoslovakia for the first half of the 1940s. He lived his life on a wooden bench in a basement of the Petschek Palace, sitting all day while waiting to be called for interrogation. The Nazi's imprisoned his body and further controlled his face, his gaze: he was to stare straight ahead, glancing neither left nor right, his eyes fixed on the mass of the whitewashed wall before him. Shackled in a demonic Platonic cave, Kohák had not even shadows on the bright surface to keep him company.

How can one remain human? How can eyes return, thrown into a sea of white without even the faces of fishes to look back?

And then one day a fly appeared, lit directly on the wall before the man's gaze, and proceeded to clean its wings with its hind legs. Not a simple spot of black on white, but a triumph of life in an horizonless expanse of death, the fly returned Kohák's eyes. Rejoicing, the man could see and celebrate the detail others might miss: he could recognize and take a leg for a leg, a face for a face, a gift for a gift. And for this soul who could see hope when it was offered, there would be no later backpedaling, no philosophical tracts subtly ridiculing the wandering animal. "It was a touch of life," recalls his son, now a world famous environmental philosopher, "...[and until] his death in 1996 my father never killed flies...[but] would catch them under a glass and take them outside...with a word of thanks. I do it after him to this day."<sup>1</sup>

Flies are on the wall all around me. Dogs wander in and out of my life. The animal's body is Here and There. The animal's face is everywhere.

The cheetah tries to hide hers in a camouflage of spots. A butterfly tries to augment his with predatory eyes stenciled to his wings. For the first few weeks of each season the rabbits are fooled by the face of our inflatable owl in the vegetable garden (they soon catch on—the face is dynamic and alive; it cannot be captured in plastic). To deny the animal face is to fear the demand

it will make. Levinas admits that “the beginning of language is in the face...[that] in its silence, it calls you.”<sup>i</sup> What need, then, is there for that verbal, human manifestation of *logos*? The animal’s silent face is authority. And if Levinas is right, if this authority requests rather than insists, if “one can do the opposite of what the face demands [because] the face is not a force,...[a]uthority is often without force,”<sup>i</sup> then the face of the animal must be seen as especially demanding—politically meek, historically ignored, as it is.

Levinas can offer no description of the face. When asked to define its necessary characteristics—the needed bits and pieces—he rightly eludes a physical laundry-list and speaks instead in ethical terms. The face is not a representation, not a thing which comes to hand; it is a means to access: “it needs something. It is going to ask you for something.”<sup>i</sup> This is what makes our ethical relationships with animals incalculable: I do not know what request will be made. I cannot capture it with rights or balanced utility summations, and therefore know what to do—have completed my duty—up front. Being together means sharing a good and sharing a life, and I cannot understand any of this without the transcendence of the face-to-face relationship.

Levinas has become a Kantian, but I know many dogs who are Levinasian.

Along the streets in Maracaibo I see the faces. I will only come to know a few—the city is too large, too alienating. These are Bobby’s latino cousins, communitarians, wanderers. It is important to remember: no one’s pet visited the camp. Bobby, too, was a *perro vagabundo*, and in this way yet again different from Ulysses’ dog. Perhaps Bobby was like this short-haired shepherd; perhaps they are both more like Ulysses than his dog. Here, an island of builders, leveling mountains and making the Earth smoke. There, an island of prisoners, the presence of evil, the chance for a hero to hint at hope before wandering on.

From the city to the jungle, to Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Lost World* somewhere in the heart of Venezuela.<sup>1</sup>

For two days we made our way up a good-sized river, some hundreds of yards broad, and dark in colour, but transparent, so that one could usually see the bottom. The affluents of the Amazon are, half of them, of this nature, while the other half are whitish and opaque.... Twice we came across rapids, and in each case made a portage of half a mile or so to avoid them.... Of animal life there was no movement amid the majestic vaulted aisles which stretched from us as we

walked, but a constant movement far above our heads told of that multitudinous world of snake and monkey, bird and sloth, which lived in the sunshine, and looked down in wonder at our tiny, stumbling figures in the obscure depths immeasurably below them. At dawn and at sunset the howler monkeys screamed together and the parakeets broke into shrill chatter, but during the hot hours of the day, only the full drone of insects like the beat of a distant surf, filled the ear, while nothing moved amid the solemn vistas of stupendous trunks, fading away into the darkness which held us in.

Preparing for a trip to Venezuela, one learns nothing from Conan Doyle. (I am reminded of a German of my acquaintance who felt confident before his trip to Puerto Rico because he could speak Latin. “*Adverte dexter, sis!*” he planned to tell the taxi drivers, offering directions back to the hotel.) It is not just that there are no dinosaurs in Venezuela, but that there is life everywhere—if one is not so quick to separate the human and animal worlds.

The lost world of Conan Doyle’s novel is lost, I take it, not in space but in time. It is true that the Europeans “discover” the lost world (Professor Challenger, at one point, is called the “Columbus of science”), but this is not the same as “recover.” The latter indicates that something was lost and then found; the former gives no indication of prior knowledge of the thing’s existence.

“Lost” is said in many ways. It is juxtaposed with both winning and finding. One can lose something and one can be lost.

When we lose instead of win, there is a permanence to loss that appears to make it different from losing, for example, the car keys. The keys, under the status *lost*, seem capable of being found. But the permanent loss of, say, the World Series can never be undone. Still, it is not the notion of competition—of winning versus losing—that is troubling here. It is this permanence. For we can lose our virginity to a loved one, lose a loved one to death, or lose a weekend to alcohol: all permanent losses with no mirror-possibilities of winning. The issue, however, is still more complex. That which is lost can never truly be found. *All* loss is permanent. The lost dog who makes his way home is found to be a new dog. Lost love is never regained—even with the same person—but can only be replaced by another. Ulysses always returns a new man.

The search for what is lost, then, is always doomed. Yet we must search. The categories of *lost* and *found* have a weird logic not unlike the *giving* and *receiving* of the gift. When the gift is received it demands a new giving and thus is something other than a true gift.<sup>1</sup> So, too, does losing demand a search, although what we find is never what we lost; and thus, why look?

When something or someone is lost, we feel the loss as a present absence. How easy it would be if “lost” meant “gone.” But the lost love is with us still, aching, emptily intended. We search her out the way the tongue probes the missing tooth; the pain of a lost parent is the pain of the phantom limb, here and not-here. Being lost is a special form of absence. This is how the jaguar lost *and* found his eyes—new eyes to see a new world. This is how fire remakes the old into the new. This is why traveling eyes, swimming eyes, flying eyes, are disembodied but not lost: the whole cat travels with his eyes through the sea; the return at the moment of the song is a return but not a recovery. This is how the buzzard came to turn death into birth, the light of fire into the light of a soul, loss into gain.

But when one is lost one’s self, the phenomenology is different. My Here becomes nameless, anchored only to my bodily presence. The nexus of Theres that surround me become unfamiliar, inhabited by unfamiliar Others. I do not lose my communitarian nature, but I feel I am different, differently constituted by these Others and this place. To distant Others I may be presented as absent. To myself, I am present in the unknown.

Half a world away, ecologist Robert Michael Pyle, searching for Bigfoot, once got lost. In retrospect, embarrassed, he looked back on his time and remarked:<sup>1</sup>

[n]o other animal has ever been lost. Disoriented, maybe. Temporarily confused as to location. But unless tossed in a rat’s maze or transported far from home like a bad bear, every creature knows exactly where it is at every waking moment. Each “inferior” animal brain carries its own global positioning device and Geographic Information System as standard operation equipment. At least this is what I believe about the essential nature of wild organisms: by definition they are situated. Only people get lost.

I respect Dr. Pyle’s work—especially his excursions in search of our long lost hairy siblings—but there is nothing right in this passage. Shall we work backwards? I fear his definition of “person” is suspect. I want to hear more about “being situated” (I imagine he attributes it to animals rather than humans because the modern, Liberal person is supposed to be rootless, ready

to relocate when Bill Gates snaps his fingers, happy to abandon family and friends because, after all, there is always e-mail to keep us together). I contest the notion that there are clearly wild as opposed to domesticated organisms. I will fight to my last breath that any of us has an essential nature in one of these categories.<sup>1</sup> I want to resist thinking—even metaphorically—that animals are fleshy technology; it leads to Descartes' robots, Malebranche's brutality, and Kant. It leads to no good. I ask us to think about the examples chosen as counter evidence. A rat lost in a scientist's maze? There is no home in a rat's maze; how could the rat be lost? The maze, the laboratory, is dystopia. The troublesome bear loses home not even because he displaces humans from theirs, but because he threatens their *vacation*. Neither rat nor bear got There (instead of Here) on his own; both were abducted, both were forced into the unknown. And this much, at least, is true: I have known confused, disoriented, and lost animals. The labels are not synonymous.

What romanticism Pyle evokes! What a desire for mythical lost feral knowledge. The guilty imperialist projects a purity onto the savage he seeks to enslave in a hidden hope that "we" are truly different.

And yet the abandoned dog returns a hundred miles to his home through unknown country; the hummingbird flies three days without stopping across the sea, unerringly returning to her Venezuelan winter refuge.

What, then, does it mean to be situated? Must one have a home in order to become lost? Can we understand "home" in a non-capitalist manner, free of mortgages and building codes? Can we imagine it in a non-human manner—a way of belonging, a place to be without a codified mailing address? Are the hummingbirds, like me, away from home when in South America, yet fully appreciating their situation?

The belief that an animal cannot be lost is not the belief that an animal is situated, but that an animal cannot be appropriately situated. Home, for us, has come to mean a fabrication, a construct to shelter us from what we deem Other, the unknown, the natural world. *But this nature is where the animal lives, goes the thinking. How can she be away from home? One river is as good as the next; any mountain will do.* To say that the animal cannot be lost is to strip her of home.

There is, as well, a residue of Levinas' patronization in the claim—a sense in which the animal is child-like, without a will or a direction. Max Scheler separates the human and the animal this way:<sup>1</sup>

The animal hears and sees—without knowing that it does so....For the animal there are only those factors in the environment that are determined by attraction and repulsion. The monkey who jumps hither and yonder lives, as it were, in successive states of ecstasy....It does not have a “will” that outlasts the drives and their changing states....An animal always arrives, as it were, elsewhere than at the destination at which it originally aimed.

Unable to control its passions, Scheler’s animal cannot maintain the plan, cannot avoid the temptation of straying off course. Each voyage would, in effect, be pointless. How can one be lost if there is no place to be going? To say that the animal cannot be lost is to strip him of a will.

There are lost dogs. There are wandering dogs. And anyone who has seen both knows there is a difference. The agony of the lost dog is the agony of the blind jaguar. The agony of the lost dog is what drives him to search for a home a hundred miles away. Hearing only those stories in which he succeeds, we imagine any animal capable of the feat. The majority, of course, leave Penelope forever waiting.

Outside of Venezuela, across the water, home—it will be thought that I romanticize homelessness. In America, wandering dogs struggle to survive. Most, though, maintain their body weight; most are accepted (if only in the sense that other wandering animals are not accepted).<sup>1</sup> If they avoid traffic, the dog catcher, the soap maker, they can lead their lives; but it is hard. In Venezuela they never receive handouts; they share in what is theirs. Each family offers a bit and *el perro vagabundo* moves on. We think him homeless because he has no leash. His home is the neighborhood. It is not to say that all dogs belong outside, then, but it is to recognize that a neighborhood can be home, a place to belong.

These categories trouble us. Perhaps it is due, in part, to the fact that we have come to the city rather than the jungle. In the city one needs a home, which is to say a rent payment, a mortgage. I think of Harry Theodore in New York, a homeless man with eleven short hair German pointers living with him under a cardboard roof on a cliff hanging above the railroad tracks. With his social security check he feeds and provides shots for the dogs—\$587 a month is not enough to rent a human home in the city, but supplemented with turkey from the local deli it is sufficient to feed a family of twelve; and even the local ASPCA must admit that the dogs are well cared for. Still, they are considered strays: how can a homeless man provide a home for a dog? (“He is a stray himself!” go the secret cries. “What sin he must have committed to have

fallen so low!”)The ASPCA cannot help but find it troubling; the dogs should be spayed and neutered. Eilene Leevy, running an animal rescue program on Long Island, finds it disgraceful. Of the dogs, she says “they’re not living a good life.”<sup>1</sup> She announces this with a look of sad disapproval—of Theodore and his friends. She announces this standing in front of the rows of cages at her shelter. And of course, she is, in part, right. Theodore and his dogs are not living the American dream. And New York is in America, not Venezuela. The animals in Leevy’s cages—will they have their sex organs mutilated? will they be murdered when no one claims them, no one wants to provide them with more than a cardboard roof? will they live the good life? Theodore is no romantic; life is hard, he laughs. When we define what a home means and then deny it to some, we fail them. But we fail them twofold: in the defining and the denying. My homeland has failed us all—human and animal alike. It has failed Theodore doubly. And if they are netted and taken away, it will fail eleven short hair German pointers.

One cannot release dogs into the streets in the U.S. where a home has very nearly been defined as the opposite of the street. It is not really the *street* itself that is problematic, but all of the accompanying social goods that are denied when a home is not possessed, and all of the social perceptions that go along with “home” and “homeless.” Homeless humans find the circularity of it all nearly impossible. To get a home they need to pay for one with a job. To get a job they need to list a home address. This is not just a political and economic problem; it is a philosophically conceptual problem as well. Theodore needs to be allowed a shot at the good life, an equal chance to realize his potential and achieve success. But can we not at the same time question how we define “success,” question the very idea of the American dream itself? Homeless dogs in the U.S. need care and the basic goods that come from having a home; but can we not question how we define “care,” question the very idea of *home* itself?

There is nothing wrong with a dog in the family, a dog with an address. But it requires a moral vigilance not to become a master to a pet, not to see every animal as a stray until it is under our control—physically (in a house, in a cage) and conceptually (as a *house pet*, as a *stray*). There is nothing to be said in general. As is always the case, the challenge is specific to the place, the time, and the type of creatures—human and otherwise—trying to make a friendship work.

Their bodies overlapped nearly to the point of becoming one. A green head appeared from the middle of the jumble, a dry green mouth slowly opening, carefully closing—like a vision from

my childhood, women from my great-grandmother's nursing home kissing excess lipstick onto a sandwiched Kleenex on a Saturday night. The water was two centimeters deep, just enough so that if the three sea turtles were separated, they could stay submerged or stretch their necks above the waterline to breathe and dry their heads. But the only escape from the water completely, from the plastic bottom against which their tiny nails scraped, was to pile Yertle-like one on top of the other. Their stacking skills, still, were not so well developed, and often the attempt left only a jumbled mess of turtles.

In Maracaibo I came to care for my niece's sea turtles, buying a large blue tub to replace the small, clear box; filling it with stones—purchased stones—to form islands; changing their water; feeding them—like a zoo-keeper—with compassion. It was a job of tending and protection. How could I have been more than a good steward? How could I approach them in any way other than their superior? What could I be to the three other than a caretaker?

And then one night while doing dishes in the back washroom a black lizard the size of my thumb crawled in through the barred window above the sink and sat on the wet cement near the faucet. He moved impossibly fast; his toes were spread impossibly wide in a graceful fan at the end of each foot; he stuck impossibly to the dripping wall of the sink, cranked one eye in my direction and turned to face me. Self-conscious, I froze. The moment was pregnant with possibility.

The turtles, too, looked at me all day long. I think they came to know me. Eventually they didn't swim away when I approached as they did with others. I didn't know if they smelled me or heard my voice each time, reassuring them as I drew near. I am just a philosopher. I didn't study them, and I didn't know them long. But I imagine that they learned my face. My clothes changed each day; what other visual sign could there have been? So we looked at each other and came to develop the best relationship we could. With the noblest intentions I could aspire only to be the keeper of their plastic home. But the lizard.... His motions, his thoughts were unscripted. The relationship was open on both ends. We could become anything together.

I wanted to please the turtles so that they would be as comfortable as possible and perhaps not hate me. I wanted to please the lizard so he would stay and perhaps let me get to know him. The difference is not just that the latter was free to leave, though this did create possibilities for us that were not there with the turtles. It is not a Libertarian's freedom that I wish to celebrate; a freedom to pick up and leave and not be bothered by others. It is that I, too, was

able to become something new, something unknown, something better. I am not sure if this is ever possible with pet sea turtles. It is probably possible with a dog. I work to make it possible with life around me. How easily each relationship could degenerate without the constant care that love and friendship require. How easy it is to slip into a pre-ordained role of dominance in this fallen world. *Remember*, warns Levinas, *before paradise was lost, Adam was a vegetarian*. The Pemón Indians of Southeastern Venezuela say that when you are asleep your soul wanders and can get lost in an animal.<sup>i</sup>

A man sees his brother sleeping on the floor of the rainforest. A lizard crawls under the belly of the sleeping man, squeezing between flesh and soil. It emerges and runs a few feet away into the half-buried skull of a long-dead cow. It twists and turns, trapped and disoriented, moving from chamber to chamber—paths, cavities, and compartments that have formed from the deteriorating bone—until it finds its way out and disappears into the jungle. The sleeping man awakens and says “Brother, I dreamt that I was lost in a large house, going from room to room, panicked, until I finally found my way out, my escape.” And the brother understood, because he knew that the lizard had carried the soul of his sibling while he slept.

From the belly is born new life. If becomes the thought of a cow; it explores death, the holes with which death leaves us, the presence of the absence of bodies, our interchangeable bodies.

We know now that the Pemón get lost. Home is not a house. Paradise will not be a sub-let in the Amazon. “In my father’s mansion there are many rooms,” is a threat, not a promise of reward.

I wonder: Who visited me while I washed dishes?

Does the lizard not have a soul of its own? Yes, but a human soul can visit, invited, piggy-backed. What then is the lizard? An honored courier? A glorified beast of burden? A friend. This is not Scheler’s animal on the rainforest floor, on the wet cement. He is willful. This is not Conan Doyle’s jungle. The lizard is so much like us—no! we are so much like the lizard—that this union is blessed, this body is an appropriate gift, a temporary home for a wandering human. The giving flesh does not reject the respectful xenotransplant. And the panic, too, is shared: *we* do not want

to be lost to death; the brother and the lizard do not want to make a home of death. Animals do not merely perish. It is something the two E(I)mmanuels could never understand.

Yet this is the cost of all odysseys—the jaguar feeds death to purchase new eyes, new life, a new way of being. Eyes swimming through the water, eyes darting home through the air are still mine, but when I am eaten by the Other—as I am bound to be, my eyes, my flesh, my bones licked clean—I will no longer be me. Should I return in the muscle of a fish, in the blood of a buzzard, in the toes of a lizard, you may not recognize me. The lost dog who makes his way home is always found to be a new dog. And still, we cast our eyes to the sea.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1</sup>See Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit* (Freiberg: Alber, 1983).

<sup>1</sup>David Clark, “On Being ‘The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany,’” in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, ed. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (NY: Routledge, 1997), p. 172.

---

<sup>1</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 153.

<sup>1</sup>Report on “Puppies Behind Bars,” EXTRA (television program); broadcast March 19, 2000.

<sup>1</sup>Clark (1997), pp. 190-191.

<sup>1</sup>Clark (1997), p. 167.

<sup>1</sup>Levinas (1990), pp. 152-153.

<sup>1</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, “The Paradox of Mortality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” interviewed by Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley, trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamra Wright, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 169, 171-172.

<sup>1</sup>See the second part of Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*.

<sup>1</sup>See John Llewelyn for more on this Levinas-Kant relationship in his “Am I obsessed by Bobby? (Humanism of the Other Animal)” in *Re-Reading Levinas* ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 234-245.

<sup>1</sup>See my *Founding Community: A Phenomenological-Ethical Inquiry* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998).

<sup>1</sup>Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo: A Bird’s-Eye View of Ecological Ethics* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), p. 156.

<sup>1</sup>Levinas (1988), p. 169.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1</sup>Levinas (1988), pp. 168-169.

<sup>1</sup>Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World* (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, 1987), pp. 62-64.

<sup>1</sup>One might Cf. Jacques Derrida on this topic [*Given Time*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)].

<sup>1</sup>Robert Michael Pyle, *Where Bigfoot Walks: Crossing the Dark Divide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), p. 254.

<sup>1</sup>At least of the type he implies. We are, I believe, communitarians.

<sup>1</sup>Max Scheler, *Man’s Place in Nature*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (NY: The Noonday Press, 1961), pp. 40-41.

<sup>1</sup>Cf., e.g., Alan M. Beck, *The Ecology of Stray Dogs: A Study of Free-Ranging Urban Animals* (Baltimore: York Press, 1973), esp. pp. 27-32.

<sup>1</sup>Report on EXTRA (television program); broadcast April 8, 2000.

<sup>1</sup>This story is based on my translation of a Pemón story retold in Fray Cesareo de Armellada, *Cuentos y No Cuentos* (Caracas: Instituto Venezolano de Lenguas Indígenas, 1988), see pp. 46-47.