

ISSN: 1948-352X

Journal for Critical Animal Studies


INSTITUTE FOR
CRITICAL ANIMAL
STUDIES



Volume 15, Issue 1, 2018

Journal for Critical Animal Studies

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Journal for Critical Animal Studies



**Volume 15, Issue 1
March 2018**

Issue Introduction: What Sci-Fi Has to Offer Us as Nonhuman Animal Activist-Scholars

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Issue Introduction:

What Sci-Fi Has to Offer Us as Nonhuman Animal Activist-Scholars

One can't help but notice how popular Zombie apocalypses and Armageddon type themes are in the media currently. Science fiction is increasingly being used to imagine our dreams for a better place or even describe worst case scenarios like what you might find in your nightmares. As a scientific trope, science fiction stories are popular because they represent ordinary people overthrowing governmental structures, fighting back against evil, and rebuilding society on their terms, from the ground up. This type of science fiction is symbolic during a time when our political climate is one in which people from all over the world are protesting their governments and fighting back against repression. When it comes to studying societal ills and nonhuman abuse, there may be no better place to start than within the realm of science fiction.

More and more scholars use science fiction as a frame of reference to consider the political and philosophical factors behind ecological oppression and justice. Science fiction offers us an ideal medium to make social comments about the world and envision a future that is different from our own, yet still plausible to achieve. By envisioning a world that is logically possible, science fiction allows us to explore possibilities and be inspired by what could just be beyond the horizon. It helps us think about how society could function differently, and how we might work toward making our dreams for a better world possible in real-world application. It also helps us think about shortcomings, barriers, and roadblocks in our way and how we might overcome them.

As a metaphorical response to the widespread ecological and political crises facing nonhuman animals, William Huggin's essay "Suffering For Utopia: 'The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas'" and Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), uses Ursula K. Le Guin's classic science fiction short story to address the anxieties and concerns that accompany CAFO operations. According to Huggin's analysis, Le Guin's story serves not only as a guide for expressing our cultural fears regarding nonhuman animal abuse, but also as a forward-looking prediction of what is possible if we do not change our behavior as humans. Using such scholars as Jonathan Safran Foer, C. J. Adams, Marc Bekoff, Naomi Klein, and Mark Rowlands, as well as much recent science on nonhuman animal cognition, Huggins shares with us a call to action, to rid the world of nonhuman animal suffering, achieve justice, and start today. Organizers and activists can benefit from this analysis since they are primarily responsible for creating such utopian worlds. Joining the worlds of speculative fiction with critical animal studies injects our work with innovation into our political practice

Journal for Critical Animal Studies



**Volume 15, Issue 1
March 2018**

Suffering For Utopia: ‘The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas’ and Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)

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Abstract

In this essay, I use Ursula K. Le Guin’s classic short science fiction story as a template for considering our practices of confining nonhuman animals to supply humanity’s growing need for protein, specifically regarding the fast food industry. Most people are unaware of how the system maintains itself. This essay attempts to be a primer on what confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are and how they function, utilizing the child of Omelas and its scapegoat status to draw attention to nonhuman animals trapped in the CAFO system. While billions of nonhuman animals exist in these factories without sunlight or even the ability to move, this essay focuses specifically on pigs in gestation crates. I utilize a wide variety of sources, including but not limited to Jonathan Safran Foer, C. J. Adams, Marc Bekoff, Naomi Klein, and Mark Rowlands, as well as much recent science on nonhuman animal cognition. Some in Omelas are unwilling to live in a utopia sustained by suffering, the ones who walk away—the essay concludes as a call to action, with multiple sources and examples as to how a world free from nonhuman animal suffering might be achieved.

Keywords: fast food, animal rights, Le Guin, veganism, ethical omnivorism, Matt Miner

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Suffering For Utopia: ‘The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas’ and Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)

Or if the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which...utopias should all be outdone, and millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torment, what except a specific and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain?

—William James, *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*

We live in a world of incarceration, not limited to but especially in the way our industrial food system operates. Eric Schlosser’s notion of the fast food nation, which “infiltrated every nook and cranny of American society” (Schlosser, 2001, p. 3), pervades America’s dietary culture. It’s a culture where protein requirements are met by a system of confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) that deliver inexpensive pre-processed and pre-packaged meat and dairy to supermarkets and restaurants daily, a kind of carnivorous utopia whose elaborate decorations belie the suffering endemic to their production. This grand atmosphere of denial looms carnival-like over our civilization. Trademarked icons lure in the hungry with low prices, whose global profits “have risen by about 20% since 2001” (Schlosser, 2001, p. 271), are now larger than some nations’ GNPs (Business Insider, 2011). They feature famous actors and sports personalities, and offer low-nutrient food disguised with chemical colors, flavors, and additives. In some places, the festivities roll on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with never a cessation in the system’s flashing neon heart, like something from a future science fiction dreamland. This scenario comes from no

fecund imagination, however: it exists, today, alongside the suffering of billions of souls to keep it moving. And it exists on the slim accord, between anyone buying into it and those running it, that we not look too closely at the underpinnings of how this glamorous protein utopia actually works.

Worldwide, somewhere near 150 billion animals go to slaughter each year (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), the vast majority of them treated with indignity from birth to ignominious death in an industrial food system far more concerned with production and profit than any form of ethics. Mark Rowlands (2002), in his groundbreaking book *Animals Like Us*, opens with “Our treatment of animals is not good. Anywhere. But in some places, it is worse than others” (p. 1). The slaughter totals do not consider the many millions of nonhuman animals killed in vivisection laboratories and experiments, nor those injured for entertainment in cinema or circuses and other menageries that still occur in some places. Nor does this include the approximately 2.4 million mostly healthy and adoptable cats and dogs—one roughly every 13 seconds—put down in shelters in the United States alone (Humane Society of the United States, 2016). With the human population projected to expand to 11.5 billion by 2100 (Bartlett, 2012, p. 34), the suffering of nonhuman animals in the system can equally be projected to get worse.

Feeding that many people and keeping them flush with nonhuman animal flesh might seem a sort of futuristic scenario to someone from the recent past. Science fiction’s brief existence as a genre is replete with views of potential societies, many of which exist as dystopian visions: Yevgeny Zamyatin’s (1921) seminal classic *We*, Aldous Huxley’s (1932) *Brave New World*, George Orwell’s (1949) *1984*, Margaret Atwood’s (1986) *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and the recent *Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins (2008) to name but a few. Besides Sir Thomas More’s (1516) eponymous classic, *Utopia*, which he playfully meant as “no place,” Samuel Butler’s

(1872) Victorian satire *Erewhon*, and Edward Bellamy's (1888) *Looking Backward*, Ursula K. Le Guin (1974) also attempted to create modern science fiction utopias in novels such as *The Dispossessed*. Ernest Callenbach's (1982) *Ecotopia* stands as another example of this type of fiction's rarity. Both Callenbach and Le Guin concern themselves with ethics. Creating a fictional utopia presents challenges. Gerard Klein notes, "all societies, be they the most utopian, the most perfect ones you can dream of whatever your dreams, carry in their depths their own denial, a fundamental injustice" (Bloom, 1986). Our industrial food system is no different, and its extrapolation has a literary correlate, from a different work by Le Guin.

While other critiques of the industrial food system are possible from multiple disciplines, including cinema, science fiction offers the unique opportunity to consider aspects of being outside the human realm. In the introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin (1969) writes "The purpose of a thought experiment, as the term was used by Schrodinger and other physicists, is not to predict the future...but to describe reality, the present world" (xiv). Le Guin's (1975) classic Hugo-winning science fiction story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," introduces readers to the utopia of Omelas. Citizens have no worries or cares, no one goes hungry: "A marvelous smell of cooking goes forth...from the tents of the provisioners. The faces of small children are amiably sticky; in the benign grey beard of a man a couple of crumbs of rich pastry are entangled" (Le Guin, 1975, p. 280). Every need and entertainment is provided by citizens' membership in the perfect society. Yet, as with our food system, citizenship in Omelas comes with a catch. The well-being of Omelas

depends on the suffering of "one lost soul," a child living in utterly degraded and bestial circumstances in the basement of a public building. The people of Omelas are aware of this situation, but for the most part they accept the unalterable fact that to improve the lot of the

child would be to throw away the happiness of the remaining thousands. A few people, however, cannot live with this fact without feeling overcome with guilt, and those few choose to leave the city. The ones who walk away from Omelas exemplify the revolutionary individual who cannot enjoy a prosperity dependent on the suffering of others (Spivak, 1984, p. 84).

Most of Le Guin's science fiction and fantasy comes with this kind of moral focus, and notably "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" explores the notion of scapegoating for larger societal good. Our food system poses a corollary: is there an ethical or moral dilemma regarding humankind keeping animals confined to maintain our society? Le Guin offers potential answers, critiquing "the modern attitudes of materialism and industrialization, which are anthropocentric" (Cummins, 1990, p. 60). She believes "science fiction is specifically suited to this theme, since its central subject is the interaction of the human with the non-human, the known/self with the unknown/other" (Le Guin, 2004, p. 68). Art, including literature, can be used to form conceptions about social realities. "What romances can do—and Le Guin believes they are 'usable' and 'practical' in terms of ethics and insight—is provide both the means and the end of the process of moral discovery, a discovery which comes in the form of a vision of the wholeness that transcends the ethical horizons of the conscious world" (Bittner, 1984, p. 18).

Very few science fiction writers deal with these issues of moral complexity beyond the human as well as Le Guin, no doubt emerging from the fact that she writes from a Taoist base, a religion that encourages us to look at the world from other than anthropogenic viewpoints. (Le Guin has her own edition of the *Tao Te Ching*, a book she was introduced to by her father.) She notes:

Some people really don't care about trees or fish or stars or how engines work or why the sky is blue; they're exclusively human-centered, often with the encouragement of their religion; and they aren't going to like either science or science fiction. Like all the sciences except anthropology, psychology, and medicine, science fiction is not exclusively human-centered. It includes other beings, other aspects of being. It may be about relationships between people—the great subject of realist fiction—but it may be about the relationship between a person and something else, another kind of being, an idea, a machine, an experience, a society (Le Guin, 1994, *p.* 5).

Read “other beings,” potentially, as animals, and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” can be used as an ethical criticism of the super-size-me culture. The principled tone of Le Guin's tale offers up the possibility to use it to look behind the curtain at what powers the daily reality of our own Omelas.

One could argue that Charlotte Spivak uses the word “bestial” in her summary intentionally. As will be denoted in the following pages, the child's confinement mirrors similar practices in CAFOs across all animal species, such as chickens, ducks, and cattle used for dairy and veal. But for this analysis the focus will be on mother pigs, of whom 82% in operations of 1,000 or more spend time in gestation crates (Gunter, 2013). Like the child in the story, pigs from CAFOs suffer from many of the same issues. This intersectionality of literature and modern farming allows us to examine our complicity in the larger system. The nameless, sexless child

looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect....The child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining. It is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes....It is naked. Its

buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually” (Le Guin 281).

Confined sows show similar ill effects:

The sound coming from the tape was worse than anything I’d ever experienced. Apparently reacting to the feed cart, the hungry sows were all loudly shrieking....The first video showed numerous skittish and sickly animals. I spotted more than a dozen with soccer-ball or baseball size protrusions from their stomachs, sides, or necks. These were not the sick pens; they were just ordinary areas of the daily operation” (Niman, 2009, p. 114).

Though some in Omelas may well use the excuse of the child’s “feeble-minded” state to justify its use for the greater good of everyone else just as many in our society can overlook the suffering of intelligent animals confined for our society’s greater good.

Intelligence in nonhuman animals matters, just as it does in humans. Nonhuman animals remember trauma and can show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) just like humans (Romm, 2016). Like a sow, compounding the horror of the child and its use for the greater utilitarian good of Omelas, it can remember “sunlight and its mother’s voice” (*Le Guin, 1975, p. 281*). While the utilitarian critiques of “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” is a fascinating discourse, this paper strictly concerns itself with the ethics of confinement. Le Guin wonders about the ethical choice here, as she has written that “a mother who does not bond with her child is defined less as immoral than as inhuman” (*Le Guin, 2004, p. 158*). The human mother of the child chosen to suffer, at least, may have chosen consciously for the supposed betterment of her society. Beyond the suffering of the child, imagine the suffering of the mother forced to give up the said child for the community’s greater food good. Pregnant sows never even get the choice. Confined to a gestation crate for life, they will never know the natural pleasure of bonding with any of the

average of 3.5 litters (Pacelle, 2010, p. 44) they will bring into the world. This is because they are slated for that neon food tunnel, especially when, as recently as 2010, 222 pigs were slaughtered every minute (ibid. 43). Pigs in natural settings are “attentive mothers” (Niman, 2009, p. 124), generally raising broods of 7 to 10 piglets; in a CAFO, sows cannot interact with their young in any way more meaningful than providing milk until the piglets are “prematurely weaned and fattened for slaughter” (Pacelle, 2010, p. 44). In that entire time, between impregnation, gestation, birth, and nursing, the sow only sees its young through the bars of its crate. Beyond the crass inhumanity of the system, sows also often have to watch their young lay dead in the pens or, occasionally, fall into manure pits and drown in urine and feces (Niman, 2009, p. 114). Barry Estabrook’s (2015) *Pig Tales* offers a detailed critique of industrial pig farming, based on his own experience visiting industrial pork facilities and firsthand accounts from people who can testify to the intelligence of and emotional sensitivity of pigs.

The fact that pigs possess intelligence is proven science. Nonhuman animals born to the world, cognizant enough to solve puzzles and create their own unique kind of mayhem would most probably be able to dream of a world in which they were allowed to move about—nothing born to the world was meant to spend its life in a cage. Pigs prefer to sleep nose to nose, and just as anyone who has witnessed a cherished pet dog moving during a dream, pigs manner the same dream behavior during sleep (Lavelle, 2016). In general, pigs test higher than dogs on scales of intelligence (Wright, 2014, n.p.). As Marc Bekoff notes, however, comparing one nonhuman animal to another means very little in the grand scheme of life and nonhuman animal cognition:

Another reason why these cross-species comparisons are relatively meaningless...is because some people claim that supposedly smarter animals suffer more than supposedly dumber animals and it’s okay to use the dumber individuals in all sorts of invasive and

abusive ways. There are absolutely no sound scientific reasons to make this claim and, indeed, the opposite might be true (Bekoff, 2013).

Everything alive can suffer—sentience is not unique to humankind. Once we seemed wise enough to know this simple fact. Our literature abounds with examples of intelligent pigs: E. B. White's Wilbur in *Charlotte's Web* (1952); Napoleon and the other pig overlords from George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945); Dick King-Smith's *Babe, The Gallant Pig* (1983); and the beloved Piglet from *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and other books, to mention only a handful. The bygone days in which these characters thrived outdoors in all seasons are long past, however. Imagining any of these favorite characters confined to a crate for the four miserable years of its life should be hard for us to stomach. Yet as with many things in life, literature can enable us to empathize with beings across all spectrums of life and work to motivate us to better their lives.

The great wealth of literature on painism and sentience continues to grow annually, putting the lie to claims that nonhuman animals do not feel pain as we do. Nonhuman animal biology contains much of the same body chemistry as humans, so “by far the most natural explanation of the presence of endorphins and other opiates in non-human animals is that these animals can feel pain” (Rowlands, 2002, p. 7). Also, if nonhuman animals feel pain as we do, then their biochemistry also aligns with ours in terms of play and mental stimulation. Intelligent species such as pigs that can open gates, use a language unique to themselves (Lavelle, 2016), aid others of that same species in distress, play video games, and coordinate with others to open latches and work out systems of escape (Foer, 2009, pp. 64-65) confined from birth to death in a four-foot crate can hardly be thought to be any happier than the woeful child of Omelas. If pain is a universal constant then so is sadness, as well as listless depression. It is also difficult to imagine that anything living such a brief, miserable existence could possibly be beneficial to our health. Whether we imagine

a child in the garret or a nonhuman animal, the pleasures of our and Le Guin's Omelas still depend upon suffering.

Using literature to activate empathy resonates on a deeper level than simply reacting naturally to story. Like sensitivity to pain, our bodies code empathy into our very own genetic structure through mirror neurons (Bekoff & Pierce, 2009, p. 28). Mirror neurons are not unique to humanity. Using this biochemical fact as a template, we should not only be able to empathize with the suffering of the lost child of Omelas, but also the 150 billion (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) intelligent, emotionally sensitive and aware land animals slaughtered annually in our global food system. That many people can turn away from this instinctual drive encoded in our very DNA, as the citizens of Omelas seem able to do, suggests that our desire for comfort or profit may overwhelm our instinct to care about our world and all the things in it. Somewhere our morality has gone astray. One could argue that such a lack of human empathy in situations of confinement should also make us reconsider any reservations we might have about nonhuman animal cognition. In *Wild Justice*, Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce (2009) demonstrate how nonhuman animals show empathetic responses naturally. It could lead one to question who is the animal and who the human, and what it may take to reactivate that natural empathy we should feel in the face of any obvious suffering.

One of the cornerstones of consideration for recognition of intelligence entails the use of language. "The communications systems in place in nature are quite amazing...but they are not like human language. What we communicate to each other is not just different from what members of any other species can communicate to their fellows; it is many orders of magnitude more powerful" (Wynne, 2004, p. 138). Le Guin played with the idea of nonhuman animal languages previously, in her short story "The Author of the Acacia Seeds." That we should expect a

nonhuman animal to tell us in some linguistic fashion that it does not wish to be caged for its entire life beggars credulity, especially as there are examples of confined nonhuman animals collaborating to escape. Dupre's researches into animal cognition seem far more relevant than Wynne's (2004) in this regard: "If, as I have suggested, intelligence should be conceived as appropriate and flexible response to problem-posing situations, then it is impossible to see why this should require linguistic ability" (Bekoff & Jamieson, 1996, p. 331). We do not deny rights to humans based on their inability to use language, whether from birth defects, disease, or accidents. Yet Wynne (2004) disregards bee dances, the language of elephants, whale songs—especially new findings that mother and infant gray whales "whisper" to one another to avoid predators (*Guardian*, 2017)—and various significant wildlife calls as beneath linguistic applicability. More specifically, the work of biologist Constantine Slobodchikoff's twenty years of research shows that

communication patterns among prairie dogs has shown that they have the most sophisticated animal language decoded so far....Their use of 'language' includes not only nouns, but modifiers, and the ability to coin new words. To date, one hundred words have been identified among Gunnison's prairie dogs. (Williams, p. 54).

Even if animals did fail linguistic criteria, which they don't, said failure would not justify our treatment of them. In regards to the child of Omelas, the language argument loses. When the child attempts to assert its humanity through language—"I will be good....Please let me out. I will be good!" (Le Guin, 1975, p. 281)—its pleas fall on deaf ears. For to listen to it would be to open a door that would undo all that Omelas relies upon to exist, like the threat posed if most of us became too aware of the suffering that allows our system to flourish and chose to walk away from it.

What such an awareness might ultimately lead to would be the acceptance of nonhuman animals as unique individuals, with distinct personalities, desires, and needs. We already name our pets, who become specific entities for us—but animals bred for slaughter, no. As challenging as it may be for some to humanely euthanize a treasured pet, imagine the difficulty of managing a slaughter line if every nonhuman animal's life taken had a name. For the brutal quotidian system to function, the beating hearts in a CAFO can only be cogs in a great protein machine. Returning to the idea of intersectionality, Carol J. Adams expands and deepens the ethical complexity of the issue:

Meat eating fulfills Simone Weil's definition of force "—it is the *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a *thing*." Meat eating is to animals what white racism is to people of color, anti-Semitism is to Jewish people, homophobia is to gay men and lesbians, and woman hating is to women. All are oppressed by a culture that does not want to assimilate them fully on their grounds and with rights. Yet, an enormous void separates these forms of oppression of people from the form in which we oppress the other animals. We do not consume people. We do not consume the other animals. Meat eating is the most oppressive and extensive institutionalized violence against animals (Adams, 1991, p. 70).

Like the child of Omelas, which has lost its name, its sex, its identity, indeed exists only as an "it" (pp. 281-283), the great mass of nonhuman animals that make up the industrial food system can only be pieces of the great food design. To give them individual recognition, as with the child, would at least slow the system down if not bring it to a halt. In 2008, the USDA stated that 116,558,900 pigs were slaughtered in the United States alone for the global market. In a system that expeditious one hardly has time to individuate between hogs.

The intersectional nature of confinement and abuse merges with the great intertext, as well. Looked at from the broad historical and literary view, treatment of workers and nonhuman animals in our food system has changed very little since Upton Sinclair's (1906) *The Jungle*. Eric Schlosser's (2001) *Fast Food Nation* highlights this disconnect. Much of what Sinclair railed against still occurs, especially in the concerns of "the routine slaughter of diseased animals" (Schlosser, 2001, p. 204), evidenced in the 2008 leaked videos of "downer" cows being dragged into a slaughterhouse (Associated Press, 2008). Also, akin to Sinclair's revelations, a century after *The Jungle* "meatpacking is...the most dangerous job in the United States" (Schlosser, 2001, p. 172). Far from utopian, the constant pressure on workers not to unionize, to take less breaks, process animals more quickly, not to report injuries, endemic drug use, and the overriding worry of undocumented workers trapped in the flawed system that their jobs could vanish at any moment creates a workplace of stress. The supervisory job "in a slaughterhouse...brings enormous power. Each supervisor is like a little dictator in his or her section of the plant, largely free to boss, fire, berate, or reassign workers. That sort of power can lead to all sorts of abuses" (Schlosser, 2001, pp. 175-176). Workers treated poorly will pass that treatment on to the creatures in their charge. The Humane Society of the United States reports that "animal abuse abounds in the factory farm industry" (HSUS, 2015). The ASPCA also notes that of the 100 million pigs raised for food in the United States alone, most live in "intensive, inhospitable conditions" (2017) where tail docking and castration without sedation are common practices. Abuse seems endemic to these production methods, and organizations like the HSUS and ASPCA respond to reports of abuse, but much of what goes on in these businesses goes on behind closed doors.

Unlike Omelas, where all citizens know what maintains their happiness, corporate agribusiness in the United States makes every attempt to keep its dark secret locked away from the

public. 99% of nonhuman animals raised for food in the United States are born and raised in CAFOs (ASPCA, 2017). Many businesses make light of the suffering in ad campaigns to keep their customers eating meat, like Chick-fil-A's billboard campaign with cows urging consumers to eat more chicken. Most CAFOs are huge locked buildings with video cameras, surrounded by fences of strong wire to keep out prying eyes. Some individuals make forays into factory farms to document what keeps the fast food nation running via photographs, film, or writings. Secret videos show workers brutalizing animals by kicking, beating, dragging, as well as using cattle prods and other electrified devices to motivate reluctant animals. Noted authors, such as Jonathan Safran Foer, have illegally entered factory farms (Foer, 2009, pp. 81-89). Documentaries such as the seminal *Earthlings* as well as short internet videos expose the inhuman practices in these facilities. Businesses have, predictably, struck back. In 1992, Congress passed the Animal Enterprise Protection Act, designed to protect businesses and research institutions that use nonhuman animals in controversial practices from rogue actions by animal liberation groups (Potter, 2011, pp. 103-104). To date, almost 30 states (McFadden, 2014, n.p.) have taken the initiative to shield consumers from the harsh realities of where their food comes from with legislation such as ag-gag laws that attempt to punish those exposing crimes that occur in CAFOs rather than those operating the facilities—because without evidence one cannot have a crime. Such an ethical disconnect is only possible in a pay-to-play political system such as the false democracy that exists in the United States. Yet a business and political climate that attempts to compartmentalize information for reasons of necessity can hardly be ethical in the context of so much suffering, utopian or not. Protecting profits on fast food children's meals seems to be the key component here, as well as protecting the children from knowing or understanding too much, especially when the same system that draws families to its restaurants supports our public school food system (Schlosser, 2001, pp.

56-57). Again, Omelas seems at least ethically more consistent than us in this regard because they do not shield their children from the harsh reality that maintains their happiness—they knowingly use a child to sustain utopia. Unlike many of our citizens, they have the courage to look their brutality in the face.

Perhaps the “bestial” suffering seems less horrid because we are, after all, only talking about animals. Yet anyone who spends time around nonhuman animals knows them clearly to be individuals, and seemingly every day a burgeoning amount of research and data appear that show the deep well of intelligence and emotions in our nonhuman animal companions, both wild and domestic. If it is true, as Bekoff and Pierce (2009) state, “that animals have morality” (*Wild* 1), the evidence seems overwhelmingly to indicate that in order to maintain our own moral credibility we must extend similar rights as well as ethical and moral behavior towards them. If we don’t, we simply deny an ethical and biological directive—i. e., mirror neurons, mentioned above—from what makes us human. The ability to move beyond our basest instincts may be the boundary at which morality occurs, as some of our most profound moral philosophers seem to believe—and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” reinforces that hope. Thus, the industrial agricultural model that leads from the field to the trash pile behind supermarkets and fast food restaurants exists in a world outside of morality and ethics, when we bear in mind that 40% of the food produced in the United States is thrown away uneaten (Gerlock & Husted, 2014). Consider for a moment how many confined animals that represents, whose miserable lives were simply tossed away. Our collective conscience should be troubled.

Naturally, as in Omelas, there are those who choose to walk away from our food system, whether through the choices of ethical omnivorism, vegetarianism, or veganism, whose numbers have swelled in the past decade. Complexities arise regarding sourcing food and garnering proper

nutrition, but in a larger context those who walk away from eating all meat products still participate in a taxpayer-supported business structure that incentivizes the neon protein corridor in the alleged interest of public health. The suffering drives itself through tax breaks, poorly enforced labor and animal cruelty standards, artificially created national—think public schools again—and international markets, even the publicly subsidized roads and powerlines that make industrial food a cheap and convenient possibility. The injustices do not stop there:

Attempts to fix glaring and fundamental flaws in the system have failed because large corporations wield far too much political power—a power exerted through corporate campaign contributions, many of them secret; through almost unfettered access to regulators via their lobbyists; through the notorious revolving door between business and government; as well as through the “free speech” rights these corporations have been granted by the U. S. Supreme Court. And though U. S. politics are particularly far gone in this regard, no Western democracy has a level playing field when it comes to political access and power (Klein, 2014, p. 151).

Of all the problems with the system, these foundational wrongs might be the best correlate to Omelas we should be brave enough to confront. Besides the essential issue of the massive amount of suffering by nonhuman animals, anyone looking to change how the system operates needs to focus on the business-cum-government (or vice versa) aspect, especially given the Trump administration’s business-friendly posture. There will be no major, systemic change to nonhuman animal welfare until that duopoly loses its coordination and we replace it with something else. In that regard, only the Green Party of the United States (GPUS) confronts the ecological impacts of confined animal feeding operations and calls for their end in Section III of their platform (gpusa.org, 2016). The GPUS is also the only major political party in the United States with a

specific committee dedicated to the issue of nonhuman animal rights. Some looking for new political alternatives that meet their values might consider that political option.

Like those organizing for political change, and not mentioned in Le Guin's story, others crave a different option to walking away: they stay and fight, because "the laws that permit our current treatment of animals are incompatible with absolutely central components of our moral tradition. These laws are, therefore, as unjust as any laws can be" (Rowlands, 2002, p. 184). There are many ways to fight back, beginning with education: not turning away from the facts or the suffering. If you have made it this far, you could begin with documentaries already mentioned like *Earthlings* or *The Ghosts in Our Machine*, *Cowspiracy*, *Forks Over Knives*, *Speciesism*, and *What the Health?* Jonathan Safran Foer's (2009) *Eating Animals* introduces arguments against meat consumption and notes many other titles for an expanded reading list. And the internet, always evolving, has potentially countless opportunities to broaden your learning on this issue, from light pages like No Meat Athlete to those that deal with heavier issues, like PETA and *The Ghosts in Our Machine*'s daily social media updates. Other organizations push further, perhaps following Chapter 10 of Rowlands' (2002) ethical polemic and its gradations of increasing activism. Everyone has a different threshold. Many organizations and websites offer information on transitioning to a vegetable-based diet, along with the benefits to our health and shared environment, particularly noting that "if you add to livestock all other food-related emissions...what we eat turns out to be the number one cause of global warming" (Hawken, p. 37). The single most effective thing anyone can do is stop supporting the system that does so much harm across the board. Do not forget where the food comes from: see what you're eating through the eyes of the lost child of Omelas. Knowing that at the core of what and how we eat sits an intelligent being whose potential remains confined to an undersized space for its entire life to feed

you, let what you see in that room activate the natural empathic instinct we all possess guide future food decisions.

For those who dare to consider that room, a rising militant nonhuman animal rights activist network makes it challenging to ignore the facts of these issues. Gary Francione leads the abolitionist charge:

Domestic animals are neither a real or full part of our world or of the non-human world. They exist forever in a netherworld of vulnerability, dependent upon us for everything and at risk from an environment that they do not really understand. We have bred them to be compliant and servile, or to have characteristics that are actually harmful to them but are pleasing to us (Francione, 2012).

Brave animal liberators function across the United States and the world doing what they can to save many confined species, risking prison and jail time. Recent legislation such as the 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, labels activists as “eco-terrorists” (Potter, 2011, p. 173), and convictions under it and legislation like it carry heavy penalties. Those who refuse to walk away can also take inspiration from *Liberator* and *Critical Hit*, graphic novels founded by nonhuman animal rights artist and activist Matt Miner, which portray animal liberators as modern day caped crusaders, fighting industrial-scale nonhuman animal crimes—no accident that the first volume shares its name with William Lloyd Garrison’s Boston-based abolitionist paper from the 1800s, further emphasizing the link with scholar-activists like Francione. Unwilling to recognize the industrial horror and enjoy the benefits of utopia, *Liberator*’s quiet heroes do their night work because they cannot walk away from our modern Omelas. In the real world, activists such as these have received longer prison sentences than people convicted of murder simply for following their consciences, caging those who only wish to free others wrongly ensnared. Walking away in protest

of the treatment of one child in order to maintain a utopia works as a moral point to a fiction. In our world, walking away means leaving behind billions of intelligent souls to short lives of incredible suffering, destined to be replaced by billions more. Instead of focusing on the cartoonishness of comic book superheroes of the past or present, *Liberator* and *Critical Hit* refreshingly show a potential path almost anyone could take to heroism—cape optional, mask essential.

In her notes to “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” Le Guin says her inspiration for the story came from William James’s “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life.” As noted in the epigraph, “In this work, he says that one could not accept a happiness shared with millions if the condition of that happiness were the suffering of one lonely soul” (Bucknall, 1981, p. 141). James does not denote whether that soul needs to be human. Le Guin certainly does not make that distinction, and potentially calls readers to action:

To me the important thing is not to offer any specific hope of betterment but, by offering an imagined but persuasive alternative reality, to dislodge my mind, and so the reader’s mind, from the lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live. It is that inertia that allows the institutions of injustice to continue unquestioned (Le Guin, 2004, p. 218).

If a corporation can be given personhood and rights to the extent of its own great wealth and ability to influence the political process, it should not be too much to ask that legal status and rights be extended to other living beings that at the very least walk, eat, drink, sleep, and emote the way we do—much more so than a piece of paper. Unlike the fictional Omelas, however, confined to a set time and place, corporate persons could stretch our own confined fast food utopia across the entire planet—and indeed, under proposed trade agreements, are in the process of doing so. Despite the

industry's backlash, we should heed *Liberator's* call to "never back down" (Miner, 2014, p. 108). One caged soul moves our sentiment in fiction—in reality, billions playing the role of scapegoat should be enough to push us all to create a world none of us would want to walk away from.

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Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established to foster academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal to facilitate communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed in any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Since a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

Review Process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript Requirements

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow APA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have limited endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper (of no more than 250 words). A brief autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, email address, and full contact details.

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