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Kafka's *A Crossbreed*: A Postmodern Cultural Critique of Pet Keeping

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Abstract
This work endeavours an elliptical reading of Franz Kafka's A Crossbreed*, to critique the postmodern culture that subtends pet keeping, subsequently unpacking Kafka's contribution to animal ethics. The research question is: What unjust structures subtend postmodern cultural practices of pet–keeping that are implied in the story? This critique considers that Kafka's story intends an animal ethics. This is primarily supported by the author's reputation in biographical accounts of his life as being sensitive to the miserable plight of animals. This question will be addressed in three parts. The first discusses the aesthetic category of 'cute' from Lorenz's idea of* Kindchenschema*, identifying it in the crossbreed's physiology and behaviours. It then exposes the grim background of the cultural fetish of 'cute' that arises in societies within the grip of political regimentation, which gave rise to pet keeping as a therapy. It also motivated the selection as well as rejection of pets on the basis of mere physical looks. The second delves into the tactile phenomenology and psychology of 'petting,' revealing the ambivalence about the ethical issue of care in exchange for anthropogenically initiated animal domestication. The third focuses on the haunting question of the end–of–life disposal of the crossbreed, which is somewhat linked to the cognitive dissonance on the issue of meat and the moral status of the pet animal.*

Keywords: *Kafka, crossbreed, animal ethics, Levinas*

Introduction

Kafka's connection to and compassion for animals are prominent in his writings. There is a biographical account by his best friend, Max Brod, that Kafka, after having decided on a vegetarian diet, talked to a fish in an aquarium, saying, "Now at least I can look at you in peace, I don't eat you anymore" (Brod 1960: 74). In Kafka's letter to Milena dated June 12, 1920, he wrote that he wanted to help overturn a beetle that had fallen on its back which implies an amazing attention and sensitivity even to small animals (Kafka 1990: 11–12). In a diary entry in 1917, Kafka shared with his fiancée Felice Bauer that he strives "to know the whole human and animal community, to recognize their fundamental preferences, desires, and moral ideals …" to grapple with his self–conflict (Kafka 1973: 624).

Unfortunately, animal stories in general, including those of Kafka, are usually interpreted as anthropomorphic critiques of the human condition, with

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little focus on the animals and their cause. However, Hoang's (2022: 166–167) article diverges from the fable perspective and "examines some of Franz Kafka's works about animals through the lens of ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism," which includes *The Crossbreed*. Hoang appreciates that the story "is one of the most incomprehensible works by Kafka, with the boundary between the human and the animal unclear" and that in the "story of less than one thousand words, the animal's perspective emerges as a focal point." In line with this, Hoang cites Derrida's 1997 essay *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, in which the philosopher coined the word 'zoopoetics' to ascribe to Kafka's literary style, which imbues reading consciousness with the animal's presence and perspective (Derrida: 2008: 6, 13). Using Moe's definition, zoopoetics is "the process of discovering innovative breakthroughs in form through an attentiveness to another species' bodily poises. It assumes many actual, biological animals possess agency to craft gestures, vocalizations – clear material signs – in order to create social cohesion with conspecifics and other animals" (Moe 2013: 10; Hoang 2022: 173). The mere recognition that the animal could look at us is a perception of a face and a subjectivity. Hoang says that "many people do try to understand animals while watching them. Through these attempts, they may also gradually become aware of themselves by responding to animals' gazes. Kafka is one author who has experienced this attempt to understand" (Hoang 2022: 173). In the story, Hoang notes that "The unusual and mysterious nature of this hybrid creature creates some confusion for the narrator, who feels powerless to understand its mind and therefore fully accepts its challenging, penetrating look" (Hoang 2022: 172). It is the business of this work to advance Hoang's prompt of the animal's gaze and articulate the social and political context that makes possible the practice of pet–ownership. It will trace the horizon of meaning that scaffolds the bittersweet relationship between the peculiar pet and the narrator in Kafka's story.

Kreisberg discusses Kafka's hybrid as an allegory to the author's interstitial existence within the social class conflict in his parentage, his vegetarianism within a society comfortable about meat–eating, and the growing anti–Semitism in Prague during his time. Kafka wrote the story originally in German, and Kreisberg translates crossbreed' from the German word *Kreuzung* which, translated directly in English, would mean crossing, or intersection. Kreisberg writes:

> During Kafka's life he was many times at a crossroads, feeling torn between his different personae: a secular Jew searching for spiritual answers, a lawyer defending workers and yet employed by the state, a lawyer who was really a writer, a Jew living in an increasingly anti–Semitic Europe, a confirmed bachelor who longed to be married, a son at psychological war with his father, and a man deeply uncomfortable with his physical body (Kreisberg 2010: 35).

The above shows that the crossbreed is an image of the marginal existence of Kafka in Prague society during his time, but what begs to be seen is the liminal status of a pet animal in urban society. Kreisberg gives this work a nudge in the following lines:

> A cat is a pet, a taboo animal for eating in most Western countries, but lambs are created to be eaten. One of the critical issues for Jews in Europe at this point in history was that of the process of assimilation into the larger society. Perhaps Kafka is mulling the need to become less a lamb (victim) and more a pet (valuable, but still lesser, still a commodity in some sense) (Kreisberg 2010: 35).

But the above still performs the service of a fable that uses the animal as an image of the human condition. The locus of this critique is the marginal existence of the animal. Kreisberg does urge a proper cultural critique, "that of the relationship between the human species and the animal. On a deeper level, Kafka is subtly asking us to think about our ideas of animals as either sources of food or as coddled pets (Kreisberg 2010: 38). Where Kreisberg ends is the starting point of this work. It addresses the question: How does Kafka speak for the cause of the animal in *A Crossbreed*?

This work aims to offer a postmodern critique of the politics and ethics of pet keeping, as embedded in Kafka's 'A Crossbreed', articulating how Kafka speaks for the cause of the animal in the short story in the present day. Thus, this interpretation adopts Gadamer's (2004: 336–341) hermeneutical view, in which interpretation does not remain confined to the author's temporal context but connects it to the historical present. An example of temporal interpretation would be that of Glasova (2016: 196–207), which studied the meaning of the genesis and taxonomy of Kafka's crossbreed within the context of Kafka's parental social class conflicts, the Jewish religious texts about the expulsion from paradise, and the inheritance of original sin, which designates the lamb as a sacrificial animal. This work will not pursue what the animal means in Kafka's temporal, cultural, and subjective context, but unloads from the framework of contemporary animal ethics literature.

To define the steps to be taken in this critique, a word needs to be said about Kafka's literary style. Kafka is more popularly known for his works *The Trial* and *The Castle,* which are valued for the psychological condition of individuals subjected to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. A literary term commonly associated with Kafka is the word *Kafkaesque* which denotes Kafka's quintessential literary style that creates a "kind of nightmarish atmosphere … the pervasive menace of sinister, impersonal forces, the feeling of loss of identity, the evocation of guilt and fear, and the sense of evil that permeates the twisted and absurd logic of ruling powers" (Cuddon 1998: 441). Thus, the first step in this critique is identifying the *Kafkaesque* moments in the narrative in which a ruling power seems to affect the animal negatively, and this will be

noted by descriptions of the animal's physiology, emotions, and living conditions. In Kafka's style, what creates the nightmarish atmosphere is that the source of ruling power is unidentified; in short, it is omitted or unsaid. This is the second step in this critique: identifying the possible sources of oppression on the animal that is unsaid in the story. Derrida, an admirer of Kafka's zoopoetics (1978: 372–373), calls this 'ellipse' or 'ellipsis,' drawn from the Greek *elleipsis*, meaning 'omission.' What is omitted or unsaid is precisely the political cultural scaffolding that makes possible a domesticated animal in an urban setting. This postmodern cultural critique will be developed in three parts: the politics behind owning 'cute' pets, the tactile phenomenology and moral psychology of petting, and the question of the end–of–life mode of pet disposal, which is somewhat entangled with the moral cognitive dissonance about meat.

The politics of 'cute' in pet ownership

A Crossbreed (*Eine Kreuzung*) is a very short narrative about an individual's pet, which is a paternal inheritance. The narrator tells the story in the first–person point of view and begins by describing a pet that has a mixture of two distinct, unrelated species:

> I have a curious animal, half kitten, half lamb. It is a legacy from my father. . . From the cat it takes its head and claws, from the lamb its size and shape; from both its eyes, which are wild and flickering, its hair, which is soft, lying close to its body, its movements, which partake both of skipping and slinking. Lying on the windowsill in the sun, it curls up in a ball and purrs; out in the meadow, it rushes about like mad and is scarcely to be caught. It flees from cats and makes to attack lambs. On moonlight nights, its favourite promenade is along the eaves. It cannot mew and it loathes rats. Beside the hen coop, it can lie for hours in ambush, but it has never yet seized an opportunity for murder.
>
> . . . I feed it on milk; that seems to suit it best. In long draughts it sucks the milk in through its fanglike teeth (Kafka 1993: 393).

The *Kafkaesque* question is, of course, where the animal with such physiology and traits biologically originated. To this date, there has been no documented genetic engineering of animal hybrids, so the critique cannot take this trajectory. The closest breed of a cat with woolly sheep hair is the Selkirk Rex (László 2023), which is a result of natural genetic mutation, but this cat is not known to exhibit lamb traits. The Muirs' (Kafka 1993) English translation included the parenthetical subtitle '[A Sport]' which, in archaic English, pertains to an aberrant form or a mutation, and not 'sport' in the sense of 'a game.' While much could be poked into the moral issue of selective breeding that ensues from genetic mutations, the fundamental interrogation lies in what values are animals selected as pets, whether purebred or moggies. Something

could be scratched here on the issue of the disturbing history of postmodern animal domestication.

The kitten (cat) is a domesticated animal that has retained its feral instincts. The lamb (sheep) has its wild relative species, but in the context of a family farm, it also serves as a pseudo–family pet and a food reserve. Immediately, it insinuates the confused role of the domesticated animal that was formerly running free and wild, but at the onset of civilisation and urbanisation, is suddenly stashed within homes, under the peril of roadkill if it wanders; loved and cherished, but also abandoned in dire circumstances, or worse, cooked and eaten. Its [1] Fangs sucking on a (milk bottle) nipple is an image that suggests its existential rage over the anthropogenic intervention that parented animal domestication.

Kafka chose two adorable animals that children love, and the fact that he joined the infantile forms of two species generates an impression of, so to speak, 'cuteness overload.' We shall focus on this business of being 'cute' and its political dictates on pet ownership. There is something *Kafkaesque* about the political history of valuing 'cute' pets.

The concept of cute could be traced to Konrad Lorenz's (1943: 274) idea of the *kindchenschema*, a term he used to denote a particular physiology of the infant's face: a large and roundish head, a high and protruding forehead, and large eyes. The 'baby look' instantly triggers natural mechanisms of care and nurturing from the parent, which is necessary for survival, well–being, and continuation of progeny. Borgi et. al (2014: 12) experimented with an application of Lorenz's *kindchenschema* to animals using eye tracking and fixation patterns on child respondents and found that the power of 'cute' already works in early childhood, not only in adults.

The current notion of the word 'cute' can be traced back to the 1850s, in American and British English, where the term was associated with children, women, the domestic sphere, and a kind of "feminine spectacle" (Merish 1996: 196). The word 'cute' is translated in German as *liebe* or *süss*, in Czech, *roztomilý*, in Spanish, *lindo*, and in French, *mignon (*Richard 2001: XIV thesis*)*. Ngai (2022, intro) says that the 'cute' is a minor aesthetic form that is banal, not formally identified as a historical artistic style or technique, such as the Baroque or Art Deco, and is attached to the emotion of swooning.

From psychology, the 'cute' was deployed to art, politics, and retail. The 'cute' culture is ubiquitous worldwide; however, its early manifestations are seen in Japan, as exhibited by cute paintings, prints, and images in the Yano Museum of Fuchu City during the Edo Period (1603–1868). In the 1970s, there had been an explosion of kawaii (cute, lovable, adorable) cultural products and practices throughout Japan, led by the fandom of Hello Kitty.

Sato (2009: 38–42) ruminates on the shadow of the 'cute' culture in Japan generally as a crutch for postwar recuperation from the Japanese defeat

in WW II, a soft, diminutive acquiescence to the U.S. It rides on many levels of historical change: the shift in the 1970s from political ideology to post–industrial consumerism; the women's defiance of marital structures in the 1980s resulting in the Lolita fashion that prolongs their childhood; and the passing away of the Showa Emperor in 1989 that marks an end to military despotism. The study of Yang (2023: 91) echoes this theory, speculating that the culture of 'cute' proliferates in societies governed by totalitarian and dictatorial rules. She cites, for example, the 38 years of Taiwanese martial law rule (1949–1987) during which many people were persecuted by the government simply for public assemblies to express dissent. Outward displays of political opinion are very threatening; in effect, supporters of the Democratic Political Party utilise cute merchandise to express their political opinion 'softly' but also to sense who in a crowd supports their side.

That 'cute' is used to negotiate a 'comfort zone' within postmodern power in regimented societies has become the aesthetic determinant in choosing 'cute' pets for their therapeutic role. In Weiss and Miller's (2012: 144, 150–152) research on five animal shelters in the U.S., the appearance of animals is the most significant reason people decide to adopt from shelters, with social behaviour and personality as the next reasons. The data from the study shows that in adopting both puppies and dogs, appearance is the top reason, whereas for cats and kittens, it is behaviour with people. However, in adopting kittens, appearance comes first, but in cats, it is behaviour with people. It remains to be qualified if 'appearance' here would fit within the descriptive 'cute.' In Holland's (2019: 4–6) research on the reasons for acquiring pet dogs in the U.S., UK, Ireland, and Canada, the details that define good appearance are: short and straight fur, coloured eyes, a seeming smile, and other anthropomorphic behaviours such as dancing, rolling eyes, or making sounds that resemble talking. Surprisingly, appearance figures prominently over the value of health. Holland also cites Lorenz's *kindenchenschema* as the most probable reason for the value of appearance.

The next part presents the psychoanalysis behind the human demeanour toward the cute pet, which betrays a regulated desire to dominate and colonize the vulnerable.

The phenomenology and moral psychology of petting

Kafka's narrator describes the lovable vulnerability of the crossbreed thus:

> Sitting on my knees, the beast knows neither fear nor lust of pursuit. Pressed against me it is happiest. It remains faithful to the family that brought it up. In that there is certainly no extraordinary mark of fidelity, but merely the true instinct of an animal which, though it has countless step–relations in the world, has perhaps not a single blood relation, and to which consequently the protection it has found with us is sacred (Kafka 1993: 393).

What is *Kafkaesque* from the above is the animal's seeming loyalty to a caregiver, only because it has known no other choice. The narrator relates that the crossbreed is so endearing and loyal, but that is only because its species is so unique that it knows no other conspecific relations; it does not relate to nor pursue other kittens or lambs, which is why it cannot propagate. It is monophagous, feeding only on milk, implying 'manufactured' milk since it has never known a surrogate animal parent. The lacuna of why it has no choice does echo the anthropogenic injustice of most urban pets being wrestled away from their parents at an early age, i.e., selectively breeding domestic pets for desired physiology and traits, *fixed* to become almost entirely dependent on the human caregiver.

It is not only the history of cute pets that leaves a shady trail. Similarly, there is something *Kafkaesque* about the signification of fondling a cute pet. It is governed by a power–driven relationship that involves a particular psychological attitude and tactility ethics. There is something about the cute pet that is so abashedly vulnerable, but the way it evokes compassion and care is not in the same sense as we pity the beggars in the streets or the victims of war who are not at all cute. A cute pet is adorable to touch. To care for and love the cute pet feels 'so yummy' inside, but to give food to a beggar churns the stomach. As mentioned earlier, the pets that win in the 'good looks' contest are the ones that get adopted from the shelter, implying their exuberance in carrying their poverty and vulnerability in purest innocence and joy.

Its utter vulnerability that begs caring for is what makes it cute, as Harris avers, "Something becomes cute not necessarily because of a quality it has but because of a quality it lacks, a certain neediness and inability to stand alone, as if it were an indigent starveling . . ." (2000: 4). Yet, as Lorenz theorizes, the very cuteness is the narcissistic manipulator that solicits care to ensure its maintenance. Richard affirms this:

> Cute arises by manipulating the guarantee of non–manipulation. Professing its own demure and complete powerlessness, it gains power over and directs all interactions with it: parents wait upon the infant, not the other way around. Simultaneously referring to and negating its own vulnerability, cute functions as a self–fulfilling system, maintaining its image as 100% stolid and happy and obvious only by virtue of utter contingency (2001: thesis IV).

That vulnerability has an inherent cuteness, as long as it has the baby look, explains the mode of touch relations we enact on everything cute, whether a stuffed toy or a living animal. According to Ngai:

> By this logic, the epitome of the cute would be an undifferentiated blob of soft doughy matter. Since cuteness is an aestheticisation of powerlessness ('what

> we love because it submits to us'), and since soft contours suggest pliancy or responsiveness to the will of others . . .The bath sponge makes this especially clear because its purpose is to be pressed against a baby's body and squished in a way guaranteed to repeatedly crush and deform its already somewhat formless face. The nonaesthetic properties associated with cuteness – smallness, compactness, formal simplicity, softness or pliancy – thus call up a range of minor negative affects: helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency (Ngai 2012: 64).

To explain the deeper meaning of squishing would invoke the thought of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas for his ethics of tactility, which appears in his phenomenology of eros. Levinas uses the metaphor of the sexual act to articulate his ethics of the significant relationship. In sexual activity, we are attracted to touch the surplus of flesh or mounds of flesh, which Levinas calls 'voluptuosity', i.e., breasts or the buttocks. The temptation to touch is excited by a voluptuosity of the flesh; however, his concept of voluptuosity is not exactly physical. The spiritual meaning of voluptuosity is an invitation to transcend the lust of defining the beloved Other within the constructs of knowledge and to be ferried over to a desire for the invisible, the 'Otherness of the Other', that is undefinable. Levinas says:

> When, with Freud, sexuality is approached on the human plane, it is reduced to the level of the search for pleasure, without the ontological signification of voluptuosity and the irreducible categories it brings into play ever being even suspected. One gives oneself pleasure ready made one reasons on the basis of it. What remains unrecognised is that the erotic... the subject enters into relation with what is absolutely other, with an alterity of a type unforeseeable in formal logic, with what remains other in the relation and is never converted into "mine" (Levinas 1991: 276).

In sexual activity, for Levinas, the lust to grasp at the flesh is metaphorical of the drive for power to subsume the Other into the categories of the egoistic self. This is where Levinas differentiates between the tactile motivations of touch and caress. Touch is governed by power, colonising the Other into one's turf of truth and knowledge; in contrast, to caress is to relate respectfully, allowing difference, freedom, and distance; it lets the other maintain Otherness.

> The forms of objects call for the hand and the grasp. By the hand the object is in the end comprehended, touched, taken, borne and referred to other objects, clothed with a signification, by reference to other objects. (Levinas 1991: 191).
>
> . . .
>
> The caress, like contact, is sensibility. But the caress transcends the sensible. . . Anticipation grasps possibles; what the caress seeks is not situated in a perspective and in the light of the graspable. The carnal, the tender par

> excellence correlative of the caress, the beloved, is to be identified neither with the body–thing . . . (Levinas 1991: 257–258).

We know from experience that petting animals is only possible if they trust us. Lack of familiarity and stable relations that establish trust is why almost all wild animals do not allow human touch. This is even more prominent in cats than in dogs. Many cats are more wary about anyone touching them and allow only brief periods of petting, even for their human keeper. Cats have a reputation for accepting affection only on their terms; when petting them becomes more aggressive, grasping, and protracted, they flee from the human hand.

The oscillation between touch and caress also applies to animals when introduced to each other during conspecific and even interspecific play. Burghart's (2005: 89–96) studies on social play among nonhuman animals show that during the rough and tumble, animals make use of role reversal, self–handicapping, and play signals in which they oscillate between aggression and gentleness, indeed between Levinas's 'touch' and 'caress' to negotiate their limits. For example, canids use the play bow to signal the beginning and end of play, to distinguish what is play chase from predation, play fight from real fight, or what is play mounting from sexual mounting.

The voluptuosity in the cute animal prompts the aggressive touch, but its opposing quality of fragility mitigates for care and tenderness. The economic strategy of affective care in petting to ensure its infinite supply is such that cuteness pushes for a deluge of affection but recoils its aggression by collapsing into caresses of tenderness. What underlies this relationship dynamics is the ironic principle that powerlessness becomes the very origin of power.

Perhaps the ultimate test of authenticity in the animal–human relationship is the conduct of care of a pet's human at the time when the pet is most vulnerable, that is, during its aging and dying, when it is no longer really looking cute. This will be discussed in the next part.

The end-of-life question and the cognitive dissonance of eating meat

The final *Kafkaesque* moment in the story concerns the narrator's question of how the animal's life should be decided in its precarious stage of mortality. It is stated thus:

> Perhaps the knife of the butcher would be a release for this animal; but as it is a legacy I must deny it that. So it must wait until the breath voluntarily leaves its body, even though it sometimes gazes at me with a look of human understanding, challenging me to do the thing of which both of us are thinking (Kafka 1993: 394).

What is disconcerting in the above is why the prospect of the knife's butcher was even introduced, despite this option being firmly ruled out by the narrator. Certainly, this preclusion is psychologically linked to Kafka's disgust for meat. In Kafka's letter to Milena dated July 25, 1920, he writes, "my grandfather on the paternal side was a butcher in a village near Strakonitz; I have to not eat as much meat as he has slaughtered" (Kafka 1990: 33). Yet, what is even more astonishing in the narrative is that the reason for choosing natural death is because the animal is a paternal inheritance, not due to personal affection, as is common among pet owners. For example, it is worth noting that the narrator does not mention the name of the crossbreed, suggesting a somewhat detached, objective stance from the perspective of its human keeper. Despite this, the narrator earlier states that the animal shows expressions of cognitive and emotional connection to its human companion. Consider, for example, the passage below.

> Once when, as may happen to anyone, I could see no way out of my business problems and all that they involved, and was ready to let everything go, and in this mood was lying in my rocking chair in my room, the beast on my knees, I happened to glance down and saw tears dropping from its huge whiskers. Were they mine, or were they the animal's? Had this cat, along with the soul of a lamb, the ambitions of a human being? I did not inherit much from my father, but this legacy is quite remarkable (Kafka 1993: 394).

The ensuing speculation from the above is whether the crossbreed crying in empathy for its human could ever be real. Darwin has many accounts of observations of the Indian elephant weeping, attested by Sir E. Tennent when the latter saw some captured and bound in Ceylon, describing that they "lay motionless" on the ground while "tears …suffused their eyes and flowed incessantly." Another elephant exhibited the most dramatic grief: "he lay on the ground, uttering choking cries, with tears trickling down his cheeks." Another account by the keeper of the zoological gardens attested that he witnessed a mother elephant cry with real tears streaming down her cheeks when her baby was taken away from her (Darwin 2009: 175-176). The accounts of animals expressing the entire scale of sad emotions, like howling, crying out, moaning, whimpering, even without tears, are legion in cognitive ethology. Not only do animals cry, but they also understand and condole human crying. Masson (1996: 197) cites a chimpanzee named Nim Chimpsky, reared by humans, who would gravitate near them when they are sad and crying, and tenderly wipe away their tears.

It is evident that the crossbreed's crying, if interpreted as being a real animal (precluding its magical traits), has cultivated a deep emotional bond with its keeper, the narrator. Yet, what is the meaning of the narrator's position regarding the crossbreed's gaze at him, "challenging the thing" which both of

them are thinking? What is that *thing*? The word 'challenging' suggests something horrific, yet the clause 'both of us are thinking' suggests a plausible acceptance to both parties. But it cannot be wanton butchering for meat because of the crossbreed's bequest value. The natural death option is ideal, yet, considering the anguish of prolonged suffering, it cannot be conclusive, and the narrator has ample objective detachment from the pet to carry out its euthanasia. But the clause 'challenging the thing' is indeed intriguing, because it suggests something more morbid than mere lethal injection. Whatever the *thing* is, the reader would never know. But it is representative of anything horrific that could be done to an animal that humans presume to take place within a cooperative understanding. The fact that the reader's mouth gapes at the ending is the most powerful impact of the story. In the silence of the cat–lamb about what the *thing* could be becomes the space wherein what we could speculate instead is the attitude or sentiment in which *it* could be performed.

In Kean's study of the fate of the great animal culling of Britain during World War II, one interesting account is what happened to Minnie, a house rabbit. In a story passed on to the family for generations, it goes that Minnie is the beloved rabbit of two girls, Alison and Madeleine Mayne, who loved her so much that they would put her in a doll's pram and take her around. At the onset of the war, their parents decided to seek refuge in the countryside, but as austerity measures necessitated, Minnie could not be taken along. Their parents then butchered Minnie, cooked her in a pie, served her to the girls, and told them who was in the pie. Alison ate her with pleasure, saying, "If someone had to eat her it was nice that it was us." But Madeleine refused to eat and cried copiously" (Kean 2017: 59). We presume that the tears are due to a cognitive dissonance about whether to eat her own beloved pet's meat because of the deepest respect (of allowing your pet to nourish you in its death in war austerity), and yet, it is as disgusting as cannibalizing on your best friend.

What creates the cognitive dissonance for meat? Many people would consider that the way animals are slaughtered for meat is macabre; that they could empathize with the pain of nonhuman animals, and yet, they continue eating meat. There are deeper motivations for meat–eating that are existential. The research of Marino and Mountain (2005: 5–21) demonstrated that the need to stand out from the animal kingdom is part of the terror management of human death. Another way of verbalizing the Darwin principle is saying, "only animals die, not us." Meat–eating is a form of 'civilized' predation operating on the Darwin principle.

But the more horrific question is: what could convince you to eat *your pet* in a way you would imagine that *both of you could think it?* It is difficult to explain Alison's harrowing remark while eating Minnie. We could draw insight from Iseda's (2021: 331–349) research about the Japanese practices of venerating animals sacrificed for scientific research and industrial use, he

mentions particularly the whaling ethics of the town of Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture, in that all captured cetaceans are used without waste, compared to most Western practices in which only the whale oil is extracted and the remains thrown away. In the ethics of *itadakimasu* (I receive it, Sir!), an invocation is recited before meals, not addressed to a deity, but to the animals and plants on the food plate. In a more profound intonation, *itadakimasu* means "I receive your life." Granted that eating one's pet cannot be prevented by certain circumstances, in Minnie's case, consuming the flesh of one's beloved pet becomes a way of venerating it and, in a way, continuing its life by nourishing one's own with it. Perhaps, while this may not be the end–of–life scenario between the narrator and the crossbreed, this kind of spiritual understanding could run along the lines that 'both of them are thinking.' Biographical accounts of animals dying to save the lives of their significant humans in momentary danger are legion. Nevertheless, these are moments of danger that are not on the same plane as a 'premeditated murder' on your plate. Whether 'respectful cannibalism' of a co–animal or a beloved animal still begs the question of why choosing to expend the life of another for our own nourishment is a higher respect than simply abstaining or fasting still stands to be debated.

Conclusion

Facing the research question, three unjust structures of postmodern pet keeping are manifest in Kafka's *The Crossbreed,* which we consider to be a valuable contribution of Kafka to the scholarship of animal ethics. The first is that the 'power of cute' as an aesthetic value originally cradled in politically stressed societies is carried over as a dominant motivating factor in the selection of urban pets. This explains the preference for the expensive purebred over the ordinary strays, and why many pets are abandoned in old age, in sickness, in their incapacity to serve as therapy, or for many other reasons in which they cease to be valuable when they are not 'cute' anymore. The second furnishes the psychological content of the first, which affirms its thesis: the act of petting or fondling a cute animal is fuelled by a power–driven relationship dynamic in which 'cute,' in essence, is a flirtation of vulnerability that transforms the colonizing touch of a pet–owner into a loving caress. Many pet owners would claim to love their pet based on a filial or equal partnership level commensurate with that between humans. But the fact that the pet's utter (cute) helplessness is what drives and sustains human care in an endless vicious cycle between colonizer and colonized betrays the authenticity of the relationship. The third acts as the ultimate test for the authenticity of the human–animal pet relationship. From the ethological data showing the capacity of many animals to understand human emotions, we presume that some animals have become so intimately bound to humans that they could somehow cooperate in many

transactions in which they are disadvantaged, used, and even killed, i.e., becoming pets, meat, etc. Kafka poses the most powerful question at the end of the story: if there could be such a thing as respectful expenditure of an animal's life that could somehow justify and even honour its death, i.e., its service as food. We answer that while many animals are known to rescue humans to the point of their death, this consent is not on the same plane of consent as being the 'holocaust on your plate,' as the latter is premeditated. Moreover, the consumption of meat is found to be a form of terror management toward the existential anguish over human death. In any case, it makes one cringe to consider why the sacrifice of another animal, however willing or self–sacrificing it may appear to be, for our well–being, is an act of a higher respect than abnegation on our part, so that the other animal may simply live.

Note

[1] We are using the pronoun 'its' to refer to the animal to evade the cumbersome 'his/her' choice of gender. We hope this is not taken to categorize the animal as a thing. For one thing, both the narrator's and the crossbreed's gender is not revealed.

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