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C.S. Lewis's Insights on the Suffering of Animals

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C.S. Lewis's Insights on the Suffering of Animals

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C.S. Lewis on the Pain of Animals

Gabriele Greggersen¹

Moral education, as I understand it, is not about inculcating obedience to law or cultivating self-virtue, it is rather about finding within us an ever-increasing sense of worth of creation. It is about how we can develop and deepen our intuitive sense of beauty and creativity.

Rev. Dr. Andrew Lizzy

Introduction

One of C.S. Lewis's biographers, who happened also to have been his secretary for some time, considers the book, *The Problem of Pain*, that we are focusing in this article the first strictly Christian book Lewis ever wrote. He began to write it in 1939 and finished it a year later. It was also intensively debated by the Inklings, the discussion group founded by him and his colleague and friend J.R.R. Tolkien. The central aim of the group of Christian writers and scholars was to make a kind of "theology of romance," discussing basically mythology and each of their own manuscripts from a theological perspective.

The Problem of Pain deals directly with one of the greatest theological doubts most of the people have. That may also be the reason why its first edition of 1940 was included in a series called "Christian Challenges." Geoffrey Bles, who acquired the Century Press publishing house in 1930, was responsible for this project. First Lewis commented that he actually wanted to remain anonymous, since he knew that his ideas would not be appreciated at all by some of the most orthodox readers. Fortunately the editor at that time, Ashley Sampson, did not agree with this idea.

In this book, Lewis previewed some philosophical and ethical themes, such as the pain of animals, that are being very much debated today. There is even a science dedicated to it, which is called "Etology" and which leads with the animals' behavior. "Etology involves behavior studies, animal instinct, knowledge, language, species' behavior standard etc." (Silveira, <<http://www.aultimaarcadenoe.com.br/etologiaangles.htm>>)

There are even contemporary and famous Vegetarians and defenders of the "rights of animals," such as Rev. Dr. Andrew Linzey, who were inspired by Lewis's works. On our part, we are not intending to exhaust the several theological arguments Lewis uses to defend his recent faith in *The Problem of Pain*. Alias, it was even not the author's intention to give settled answers to all the questions raised and discussed. As

put in the preface to a French edition, he had something completely different in mind as he wrote the book. His only concern was to call attention to the unity and coherency of the Christian world view. He never lost that conviction nor gave that concern up from his conversion until his death. Hooper, also stresses this emphasis in Lewis's biography, citing from his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*:

Even when I feared and detested Christianity, I was struck by its essential unity, which, in spite of its divisions, it has never lost. I trembled on recognizing the same unmistakable aroma coming from the writings of Dante and Bunyan, Thomas Aquinas and William Law. Since my conversion, it has seemed my particular task to tell the outside world what all Christians believe. Controversy I leave to others: that is the business of theologians . . . If unity of charity and intention between us were strong enough, perhaps our doctrinal differences would be resolved sooner; without that spiritual unity, a doctrinal agreement between our religious leaders would be sterile (Lewis *apud* Hooper 1996, 296-297).

In spite of that emphasis on the unity among all Christian views, Lewis was convinced that most of his readers would not much appreciate the bad news he was announcing. In one word, he says that pain and evil exist in the world and that the human being is himself much accountable for that. That is why Lewis also liked much better not to handle such controversial topics directly, but rather indirectly, through his literary fictions, one of which we will analyze below. His point of departure regarding human sufferings could be outlined as follows: One of the largest arguments of non-Christians against the existence of God is that there is pain in the world. For if God actually is a good and rightful Creator, why does He allow pains

throughout the world?

As a means to a possible answer to that question, Lewis stresses the positive sides of suffering. Although pain will always be seen as something negative, on the other hand it brings about a consciousness about the very *existence* of evil, and thus, also of goodness. It also helps to let us see the goodness and badness *in us* (*Pain*, 92-93), that is, our own limited and dependent condition (*Pain*, 106-107).

Furthermore, pains may lead us also to a more complete devotion to God (*Pain*, 92-98). Seen from this point of view, they become less frightening. It might even be perceived as some thing pleasant, if we do not revolt against it. In some cases, rather than stimulating our anger, it may promote our obedience and love (*Pain*, 32, 90). In this sense, pain may be even seen as God's best for us. Those great and mysterious connections, however, are perceived only by large souls, which are pleased by being allowed to participate in Jesus's suffering or even desire it.

Considering that we live in a practically deaf world, among people who do have no patience to listen any more, it is very difficult to hear or understand His messages spontaneously. That is why Lewis called pain "God's megaphone" (*Pain*, 93). We would add to that, that probably the problem is also the excess of noises surrounding us.

It has also to be stressed, according to Lewis, that suffering is attached to the essence of the human fallen nature (*Pain*, 31-33, 89), being thus a part of the present existence. It comes as a consequence of the evil in us, which, in return, comes from the abuse of human freedom (*Pain*, 135).

For pain can be felt either objectively or subjectively. It surely will never be a comfortable sensation and it must be taken as something against God's will. On the other hand, in relative terms, it may be reconciled with God's momentous will. It may be used by Him to exterminate evil all around the world and to promote the complex and transcendent aspects of reality (*Pain*, 116-117).

In many cases, however, if a person simply does not want to admit those relations, the experienced pain also use to stimulate rebellion against God (*Pain*, 95, 118), as we will see below, based on Lewis's characters. Independently of the reaction of the person, though, and herein lies the positive side of Lewis's bad news, there will always be a solution for the problem of pain, for whom comes to know God's unchanging love. Therefore we have first of all to put human beings in their proper place, admitted as fallen creatures in a also fallen world (*Pain*, 47-48), adopting a "divine" perspective.

The pain of animals is also deeply connected with human pain, as we will try to show, based on Lewis. As

Charles Williams, one of Lewis's best friends, put it in his comment on Lewis's text about the pain of animals:

Mr. Lewis's [. . .] style always is—goodness working on goodness, a lucid and sincere intellect at work on the facts of life or the great statements of other minds [. . .]. The chapter on the Animal Pain is perhaps especially valuable, as that of Hell is especially terrifying, and that on Divine Omnipotence especially lucid (cited by Hooper, 302, originally published in *Theology*, XLII - January, 1941, 62-63).

1. Key questions in this article

In the mentioned chapter called "Animal Pain," Lewis assumes that animals do not earn it to suffer. They cannot behave ethically well or badly. That is why their suffering seems so incomprehensible for us. Everything which we humans might know about animals is speculative and too little precise. Although humans may be physically associated to the world of animals (in a creational perspective, at least) he is destined to be more than an animal (*Reflections in Psalms*, 115-116, 134). The sense of suffering of the animals becomes a even larger secret than our own human pain, if we take into consideration that animals show a much different reaction to suffering.

Although humans cannot achieve a sure answer to the question of the sense of the pain of animals, after all, there must be an answer, if God is rightfull, and He has to know it, if He is perfect. And He does not only permit but also stimulate us to raise and discuss questions like that. Several Biblical characters show us how God like to be asked, He only does not always answer, because He knows better what is the best for us.

Throughout the next pages we will consider, why it is that important to ask such mysterious questions. C.S. Lewis at least did not restrain himself from placing them. In the next lines, we will reviews some of the main points of his "Theology of animals" (*Pain* 130-143):

1.1. On the nature of animal's pain

If we would ask a veterinarian mediciner, or also biologist, we might collect some tentative answers on how and whether animals do suffer. One could possibly classify, animals according to their sensitivity to pain or according to the function of their nervous system. A mole, for example, does not suffer, when it has to dig. One could not expect the same, however, from a horse or bird. To what extent do a female pet suffer with the lost of one of its little ones?

One could also try to classify animals according to

the degree of their consciousness. For Lewis the soul, which could also be interpreted as the conscience or spirit, is not fixed. It passes through a process of growing, which has several stages. Although most animals are most likely to be able to reach some of these levels, it cannot be maintained that they possess any conscience or a spirit. Animals probably do not have a consciousness of their suffering, because they have no conscious and delimited *self*. Apparently, their suffering is underconscious (or unconscious), because they have no self-conscious personality. Even those pets that look just as if they would be able to talk or to have a personality, that is probably more due to their owners, than to a actual personality (*Pain*, 139, 141).

Or at least that is what we may suppose in a phenomenological approach, that all that humans are able to notice with some security about animal's suffering is their *reactions* to it, particularly those, which are similar to our own reactions. Humans are not able to know, how animals feel themselves and how they perceive pain internally. In any instance, we may say that, if everything is all right, humans does love for animals.

According to Lewis, that kind of love may be considered an analogy to God's love to men (*Pain*, 43-44, 47), similarly, the confidence of animals to its owners may be compared to the confidence men may have in God (*Letters*, 207; *Letters to an American Lady*, 56). In this regard men may learn a lot from animals. It is needless to say that humans have no right to treat animals badly, or do them some injustice (*Weight of Glory*, 114), as they reflect the creativity of God (*Mere Christianity*, 139). Their nature must be understood in close relation to humans, who are reflections of the image of God. (*Pain*, 138-141). In this sense Lewis would say that pets and domestic animals are more "natural" than wild ones. They represent a bridge between the human world and all the rest of nature (*Four Loves*, 78-79). But an animal should never replace a human being, nor be more loved (*The Four Loves*, 79). The love of them was manifested very early in Lewis's lives. It helped him to develop his fantasy and create his "Animalland," which results on the faerie tale *Boxen*.

1.2. On the origins of animal's pain

To this question, likewise, one could pursue medical and biological explanations. Nevertheless, that will not take us far further in the discussion about the justice of their suffering. But as Lewis shows us, the Bible and the Christian theology give us a clear, although not very popular answer, which is that nature as well as humans are fallen. For the issue touches the conception of sin, which has to be understood as the creature's separation from the origin of life, and the

consequent permanent influence of evil in this world. In this connection Lewis reminds us of a theory, which says that there had been creatures already, which surrendered themselves to evil even before the creation of the world. God's good creation cannot be imagined without freedom, that is, without the attached possibility of a free decision against God.

That is surely no sufficient explanation for the origin of evil, but rather only the consequence of the abuse of human freedom, which necessarily results in evil and pain. If Satan exists and is related to evil in this world, why shouldn't he also had tempted animals, a part from human beings, even before the creation of humans? In any instance, in Lewis's vision, both, animals and the whole nature are fallen since the creation. That is, the corruption and consistent suffering of nature are analogies to the case of human sin. This theory can also be clearly inferred from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as *The Silmarillion*, which he discussed intensively with his friend C.S. Lewis. Creatures like the ents or even the elves are clear mirrors of the human behaviour. All bad creatures, which once used to be good, suffer under their own evilness. Tolkien in return also discussed Lewis's *The problem of Pain*.

Furthermore, in the introduction of *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis compares the case of his fictive world with Middle Earth: "Those who would like to learn further about Numenor and the True West must (alas!) await the publication of much that still exists in the MSS of my friend professor J.R.R. Tolkien." (*That Hideous Strength*, New York, Macmillan, 1965, 7).

Both worlds and stories have this in common: the use of the analogical power of fairy tale, in order to get sense of humans misteries, such as evil and pain. For in Tolkien's and in Lewis's vision: "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said" (*On Stories*, Harvest, 1982, 45).

In the same way as we may find analogies of men in fairy stories to humans behaviour, we may also find analogies in the animal world, which was planned and created by God, especially concerning sin and suffering. Both, for men and for animals, to sin is to behave *against* the most natural behaviour for each creature. That is, not to behave according to the perfect plans and best proposals of the Creator. The only goal of evil is to lead men not to behave like humans, but like animals, like vermins or even like monsters, which would be porportional to an animal behaving like an inanimate object..

1.3. On the justice of animal's pain

In despite of God not bringing about animal's suffering, it is still unexplained, how He should permit it, since He is a good God. That is the central question

of Lewis's chapter. And he is not concerned here with the specific question whether there is a heaven or a hell for animals; nor if animals are or will be conscious of their pain in the "other world"; and finally nor if they do have conscious personalities or not. For these questions are after all anthropocentric ones that and not answerable at all from a human perspective. What we are rather intended to discuss is about the possible sense of the suffering of animals, in the context of creation. Since we are talking about "sense," it follows that we are also talking from a human perspective. On the other hand, he is not intended to reduce that sense to a subjective, antropocentric interpretation. He is rather concerned with the viewpoint of the whole human reality (the bigpicture). The point of departure of Lewis's question is thus not only a theological but also a creational one.

That is noted considering that the question of the ultimate justice of the pain of animals, as well as of man, would be completely senseless to an atheist. But since he is assuming the existence of a "nature" and sense of things as well as of life, than the most "natural" animals are those who live according to that, that is, those who are rightfull. And, according to the Christian world view, since they are created by God, and by Him subordinated to man in a fallen world they are not obliged by nature to develop their own virtues, rather to serve firstly God and secondly their masters. Therefore they reflect God in the proportion as they serve Him and their masters.

That is no antropocentric vision but rather a hierarquical and sythemic one, for animals are not less worth than men for being a servant. On the contrary, their function is vital for men, not only biologically. As the Bible itself says in one of the central books on the problem of pain, we are to:

. . . ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12, 7-10; New International Version)

In short: Job, who suffered the greatest imaginable evils was able to see God with his very eyes, through suffering and learning with God's creation, especially the animals: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." (Job 42; 5, New International Version)

Therefore, if nature may teach us things of God, it has not only a preplanned sense and propose, but it also pertains to a whole open system. If there were no hierarquic structure in nature, one could not

differentiate between good or bad, neither judge a good and/or bad behavior.

All evaluations would be relative and thus senseless. As Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1861), the famous Russian novelist, author of what many claimed to be the best novel ever written, *The Brothers Karamazov*, puts it: "If there is no God, everything is permissible." If there were no God, we would not have valid criteria, to differentiate evil from good, neither pain from joy. But if nature is created to reveal and to serve the creator, then the creature serves and reveals best by serving also the creature which stands nearest to him in the created hierarchy, and which reflects God's images best, which is men. It is surely no coincidence that before creating man and after have done all the rest of the universe God said: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, ^[1] and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1, 26 New International Version).

Nevertheless, that position means not necessarily a privilege, but rather a big responsibility for humans, who are responsive for the good or evil that happen in the world. That is precisely why the suffering of animals seems so unjust. To go back to our main question: Why must animals suffer, if they have no responsibility over their actions?

Lewis's reply to that, although he himself was not completely satisfied by it, was that God's justice presupposes the promise of recovering of the fallen nature. That the destruction caused by sin and evil will be repaired and that each creature will be restored to its true and proper nature (*quidditas*).

It has also to be sadly recognized that the human creatures, that are the image of God, are also responsible for that restoration. Similarly to the animals in the battels of Narnia, they are invited to take part on the redemption of the whole world, included animals. That is a powerfull ecological appeal for today, which most Lewis's readers unfortunately use to overlook.

1.4. On the theological problem of evil

Professor C. E. M. Joad, who at the time of the publication of Lewis's above article was chief of the philosophy department of the University of London, wrote a comment on Lewis's article. The professor agreed that the suffering of animals is linked with evil, that is, with an abuse of human freedom to bad purposes. Nevertheless he cannot understand, why God would only create good and perfect things. Could He himself not have created unperfect creatures?

In respect to the question of consciousness and whether the animals have a self-confident personality and therefore also the ability to think Professor Joad

considers Lewis's interpretation too naive. For, if higher animals would have consciousness and therefore also a soul and a personality, they would also have been fallen and consequently, have to be punished for their errors. Furthermore, it is sheer folly for him to believe in the existence of a Satan. Likewise it seems absurd to him the idea that all pain, even the physical one, may be connected with the moral corruption or that animals could feel no pain at all. After Professor Joad's own ideas:

If they have souls, we can give no plausible account (a) of their immortality—how draw the line between animals with souls and men with souls?—or (b) of their moral corruption, which would enable Christian apologists to place them in respect of their pain under the same heading of explanation as that which is proposed and which I am prepared to accept for man? (*God in the Dock*, 166)

First of all Lewis replies that his intention in his article was not to give definitive answers to the problem, but to freely express his reflections on it (guesswork). Humans are able to perceive their own nature and sense in the life as well as their own suffering, but not however that of other entities.

In addition he says that apparently Professor Joad misunderstood thoroughly this chapter, although he also seemed to have very well understood the previous chapters of *The problem of Pain*. Although he said that he simply cannot accept some points of the Christian perspective, he comes to the same conclusion as Lewis, which is that the pain of animals is an analogy to that of humans. Both agree with the fact that the pain of the animals cannot be ignored and requires an answer.

Nevertheless the existence of a consciousness is decisive in Lewis's vision about the decision about the "ethics" of animals, despite the opinion of the professor. It is true, of course, that animals really do suffer pain, independently of whether it is conscious or not. In spite of this, no one can punish or expect nature to be accountable for its actions, for it does not have consciousness of them. The more conscious a being is of its action, the more is it subject to the evaluation and reproach of others.

In addition there are two different powers of the mind: consciousness and unconsciousness. The animals' mind is apparently nothing but chemical and instinctive, otherwise each animal would have to have some (even if an imprecise) kind of consciousness of its own origin. Saint Thomas of Aquinas probably would add that in this case animals would also be able to speak:

For Aquinas, it is the Son, the Word, the Intelligence through which God creates all, who speaks in these verses. Thus, Creation is also an utterance made by God: creatures are

because they are thought of and uttered by God: and *precisely because of that*, they are knowable to human intelligence (7). It is in this sense that theology—in the happy formulation of Romano Guardini—affirms the "verbal character" (*Wortcharakter*) of all created things. Or to quote Aquinas himself: "In the same way that the sounded word manifests the 'interior word' (8), likewise the creature is a manifestation of divine conception (. . .); *creatures are like words* which manifest the Word of God" (*In Sent.* I d. 27, 2.2 ad 3). (Lauand, 21)

The difference between humans and animals lies thus not in the fact of the *Conception*, but in each natural *design*, in the sense or purpose of their creation. Humans were designed according to God's image, therefore they are speaking beings. Animals, on the other hand, are normally conceived as unspeaking beings. Although God is as creative and free as He is, as Gitt and Vanheiden remind us so well, in at least two occasions in the Bible God used animals to speak to humans (Genesis 3. 1 ff; Numbers 22, 21 ff).

It is surely also no coincidence that the talking animals who appear in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are at the side of Aslan, whereas those who rendered themselves to the White Witch have lost their speech. Furthermore, in *The Silver Chair*, Digory and Pole react frightened, interrupting their meal as soon as they discovered that the meat they were eating was that of speaking animals.

In the sequence of his answer to Professor Joad, Lewis adds that his distinction between domestic animals (tame animals) and wild animals (brutes) does *not* mean that the least may be abused by humans for good ends, such as vivisection.

Herewith Lewis also answers to the implicit question of what may have happened with the world without the event of the Fall, which is as unanswerable as that of the destiny of animals itself. There are too many possibilities of answering it, than simple human beings could exhaust.

In any event, one is sure: Words such as temptation, corruption or sin are dangerous, and most often misunderstood and better avoided. What we must understand as being a sin always has to do with some distortion or corruption of reality. Although the strategies and methods used by the devil to distort reality may be very diverse, he has no creativity.

Here one could naturally once again appeal to biological criteria, such as the existence of hemispheres in the brain in order to decide which animals may have a consciousness and which do not. But Lewis stresses that any speculation on this, whether based on scientific evidences or subjective arguments, can be used either to

defend agnostic ideas or Christian ones. For the fact that humans do not know all answers, changes nothing of reality as such. It follows not, for instance, that there really might be no answers at all, or that everything may be dark around humans. For it could also mean that reality is too much light for us to exhaust. It is bigger than our eyes may be able to distinguish.

This idea was systematically treated by the German theologian and philosopher Josef Pieper in his doctoral work, *Unaustrinkbares Licht: Das negative Element in der Weltansicht von Thomas von Aquin*. Based on Saint Thomas' conception of creation he makes it clear that all creatures become more real and better as long as they fit better with their original nature. The goodness, beauty and reality cohere in the being (*Sein/Wesen*). Goodness, truth and reality are some of the synonyms of being. The idea of the "transcendents" is solidly based on the fact that beings are all created. The createdness of things is thus the key to understanding Thomas' theory of the truth, which is also firmly connected with his so-called "negative philosophy." In essence it is concerned with the apparently incomprehensible and mysterious side of things. For all things that can possibly be understood in the world are either God himself, or one of His creatures.

Existence itself is therefore connected with the possibility it offers to link or connect to our minds, for things were designed for our potential understanding. In Aquinas' and in Pieper's view, all natures are in principle understandable, under the condition that they are true. As it was formulated by Thomas, truth is first and foremost connected to God's own spirit, but secondarily also to the human one. What we call true is all that is real to the divine as well as the human spirit. Reality, in return, is something put in the middle of two intellects, the divine and the human.

The ambiguities and mysteries that are out there in the cosmos as well as in our own world result on a sceptical attitude of most of modern and contemporary people. In a creatural perspective, however, they give us sufficient grounds to believe in an "unbelievable" good and rightful just as like in the existence of the devil and sin. That is why Lewis wrote also in his *Screwtape Letters* that the devil is rather concerned in the destruction of belief in the existence of the devil rather than the vague religiosity and the naive faith in God.

Because the belief in a physical and mental death, as well as in Satan and sin brings humans to a deeper realization of the truth, as formulated by Pieper:

Nevertheless, to the finite spirit the obviousness of being will never be completely exhausted; for the recognizable part of things always exceed highs far above the recognizable, that are impossible to reach. 'As

a cup of water, that you drink and last for ever: such incomprehensible is the sense of the world.' . . . But even the undrunken water of the sense of world 'stands by' as a drinkable supply for the more deeply thirsting question. It is not darkness that makes things incomprehensible for us, but their unexhaustable brightness (Pieper, Josef *Wahrheit der Dinge*, 60).

The mysteries of the world become thus just as strong arguments for God, as against it: "in so far as I take them to be transcendent illumination to which creation must conform or be condemned. They are arguments against God only, if they are themselves the voice of God." (Lewis, C.S. *God in the Dock*, 171) On the problem of the pain of animals therefore, there are two possible answers ". . . either that there is a Great God, and also a 'God of this world', a prince of the powers of the air, whom the Great God does curse, and sometimes curses through us; or else that the operations of the Great God are not what they seem to me to be." (*God in the Dock*, 171)

2. Narnias' animals

The Narnian animals are mostly represented in close relationship with humans. They are usually very helpful to them. Even wild animals such as bears, leopards and lions are more admired for their virtues and beauty than for their bravery or wildness and they are often playful. A great part of the scenes related to them deal with the everyday life (cooking, lunching, going to sleep, etc.). All talking animals seem to be domesticated. The rodents, such as Reepcheep and the beavers, are particularly familiar and friendly. Lewis showed a special affection to them because of their courage and loyalty. They also play an important role in the battles, where they eventually get hurt and suffer pains. Nevertheless they will all be healed at the end by Aslan or Lucy's magic cordial.

On the other hand, there are also animals which are malicious and ugly. At the time they were created by Aslan, he gave them immediately a self-confident language. Nevertheless he warns them not to use it for bad purposes:

Thereafter, the Talking Beasts were mostly good. The red-chested, bright-eyed Robin guided the children through the wood. Camillo the Hare, Hogglestock the Hedgehog and Clodsley Shovel the Mole all helped Prince Caspian to save Narnia. And Farsight the Eagle fought bravely in the last battle for Narnia, flying at enemy faces and pecking at their eyes. Pattertwig the red Squirrel was full of courage, energy, and mischief. The wisest of the beasts was Glimfather, a white Owl so big

it stood as high as a good-sized dwarf. It was Glimfather who carried Jill on its back through the cool, damp night air to the parliament of owls in a ruined, fusty tower . . . Most helpful of all were the mice—the nibblers and gnawers and nutcrackers; these sharp-eyed, sharp-toothed folk cut through Alan’s ropes to set him free from the Witch. (Riordan, 56-7).

Here we may have some examples of Lewis’s way of protesting against any cruelty against animals, particularly those committed in the name of the science. In *The Magian’s Nephew* it became clearest through the figure of Professor Andrew, who uses guinea pigs for vivisection. There is also a separated chapter in *God in the Dock* on that theme.

As LeBar put it in his article on the “bioethics” of C.S. Lewis:

It should be noted that Lewis recognized the duty to preserve human life. However, he did not see that this duty entitled men to destroy other rational creatures wantonly to achieve this end [. . .] What does all of this have to do with bioethics? My answer is that it exposes Lewis’s idea of man’s relationship to non-human nature. Humans are members of a hierarchy. We are higher than the animals (even talking animals) and the fauns. Only Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve may sit on the throne of Cair Paravel (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). Talking Badgers and mice do not wear clothes, nor do Talking Apes, except when they are apostate (*The Last Battle*). But man has responsibilities to these creatures. Humans are not to eat Talking Stag (*The Silver Chair*), and are to remember the proper role of Talking Bears, even when they suck their paws (*Prince Caspian*). Humans are not superior to every entity. The star people, of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, can commit sins that humans cannot imagine. Aslan appears as a Lion, not a man. Again, although he was not writing explicitly of bioethical matters, the view of C.S. Lewis about the role of humans seems clear and consistent with many Christian thinkers: we are to be responsible stewards. Vivisection and dealing with pain are important and related bioethical issues. The written views of Lewis on vivisection were deemed sufficiently anti-vivisectionist that they were printed by an anti-vivisectionist society. The only circumstances under which Lewis was willing to concede even the possibility that surgery on animals to advance human medicine might be morally acceptable were quite carefully

circumscribed. The experimenter had to be a Christian who was convinced that humans had a real, and divinely ordained, superiority over animals. The work must be done so as to avoid animal suffering as much as possible, and must be motivated by a desire to preserve the best in human life. Even under these conditions, Lewis was not certain he could approve. (LeBar, <<http://www.as3.org/ASA/topics/ethics/PSCFLeBar.html>>)

To this, we would add from the *Voyage of the Dawntrade*, that Eustace admitted that he loved to torture animals and that he also used to torture them together with his school friends. It is certainly no coincidence that Eustace was transformed into an animal, one of the uglies, a dragon, going through great pains in order to become conscious of his egocentrism and evilness, being regenerated by it with Aslan’s assistance.

Like in Tolkiens’ *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, all evil creatures were good in the past, but they were corrupted, losing their ability to speak. Each character behaves first, like a completely normal animal, according to what they usually represent in the collective imaginary. Like in the fables, or even in myths, their behavior might be taken as an analogy to the human manner of acting. Therefore one can learn important human principles from the experiences and suffering of these animal figures.

On the other hand, we should not consider *The Chronicles of Narnia* fables, as they are not allegories or personifications of human virtues, admitting several different possibilities of interpretation. In the next pages, we will try to analyze some of the Narnian animals, in the only perspective that we are authorized to do it, as discussed before: the human perspective.

First of all, like in nature itself, there are many birds in Narnia. The Albatros, for example, which normally is taken as a symbol of lucky, and in the Narnian case, may also be interpreted as divine providence or even an analogy to Christ. In *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, for instance, the Albatros represents Aslan himself, whose voice was recognized by Lucy.

Once more, like in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, there are also eagles (*The Horse and his Boy*) appearing in the story. Whereas the transport of human beings, which is usually their role in Tolkien, is rather assumed in Narnia by the owls (or Aslan himself).

The function of owls and ravens (*The Horse and his Boy*) seems to be to show the way to the humans in the world, since they have a naturally greater skill to overview different places. After the creation of Narnia they were also formally invited to take part in the first and most important council held there by Aslan.

There appear also morning birds, which were

responsible for purging the tables (*The Voyage of the Dawntrader*) and for enjoying the days of Ramandu by their singing. There are no occurrences of birds suffering any pain in the Chronicles. That may be related to the fact that the language they actually speak is incomprehensible for humans.

They always help humans out of several problematic situations, like the Robin in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The owls are particularly important, not only as a way of transport, but also as a guide and good councillor, as we see in *The Silver Chair*. Although they do not see anything during the day, owls traditionally see very well indeed at night. They are very friendly and suffer only under their own communication problems, which become especially stressed under the deafness of the old Trumpkin. Thus, owls also prove a very fine sensitivity to magic. Their prudence usually makes them stay out of troubles, staying away from risks. Therefore, in spite of volunteering to help the children they quickly pass them to another guide, Puddleglum, the Marsh-wiggle.

Along with the birds there are also very heavily working and practical animal guiders, the beavers, which are perhaps those which better express the grief that was reigning in Narnia as a consequence of evil. In contrast to great part of the population they did not at all forget about Aslan and the old prophecies.

They became known for their hospitality, simplicity and willingness to help. During their pilgrimage to the stone table they assumed all the risks and pains of cold weather, the tiredness and the risk of being reached by the White Witch. Finally, they are those who better express their fear at the end of the discussion between the White Witch and Aslan, trying to interfere and holding paws. They also show great intelligence, sensitivity and strength, helping the children out of several complicated situations.

Another good representation of the pain of animals is the horse who appears in *The Horse and his Boy*, who lived imprisoned in Archland for a long time. He had to hide his speaking skills, since the calormene were in war against Narnia. Bree felt himself very much isolated and lonely, acquiring lots of human bad habits such as pride, egoism and self conceit.

During his pilgrimage to Narnia he became acquainted with a speaking female horse, called Hwin, as well as with Shasta. She passed him several lessons, helping him out of his self pity and dissatisfaction. Although she went through exactly the same painful situation, living as an exile in a foreign country, she is selfless and courteous. For instance, she prevented Aravis, her master lady, from committing suicide. In spite of her usual nervousness, she showed herself courageous and strong. Although Bree is always trying to lead the group, as he thinks himself more experienced, it is Hwin who actually guides them into

Narnia. And, although she was trembling all over her body, she nevertheless faced Aslan as soon He appeared. In contrast to Bree, who is always serious, showing concern with the most appropriate behaviour for a speaking horse, she loves to roll on her back in the grass.

In *The Last Battle*, likewise, there also appears a flying horse who is very helpful to the human characters. And one of the main characters is a donkey called Puzzle. He disguises himself as Aslan. His main fault is not to be a pretender, but to rely on the ape's intelligence, letting himself be used for his bad purposes. He even shows concern about the existence of a real Aslan. But he let himself be distracted from these "dangerous" ideas and be fooled by the ape, due to his naivety and short-sightedness. Since he is the first to recognize Aslan's signs and to show fear for Tash. He is preserved from being executed and mistreated. At the end of the story Aslan only whispers something into his ears, which apparently made him be a little bit ashamed, but soon made him happy again. Thus, the species seem to be redeemed, considering that in *The Horse and his Boy*, Aslan transforms Rabadsh into a donkey, as a kind of punishment, due to his refusal to recognize and apologize for his bad behavior.

His supposed "friend," the ape Shift, on the other hand, is depicted as a very old, ugly and smart character. The name is associated with manipulation and bad character. He has a fraudulent and bad intentioned personality. He inverted all truths about Aslan and Narnia, spreading lies and suspicions against him. He showed himself also self-addicted and corrupt, even when he was facing death at the hands of Tash. In contrast to Shift, he simulated friendship in order to use the donkey to provide for his own interests. In front of the other animals, he used to act as though he were a wise man, entitling himself nothing less than "Aslan's mouthpiece." Therefore, he became increasingly stupid and drunken in the story, coming to the point of calling himself Aslan. Like Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*, he becomes more and more self-alienated, ending in complete foolishness.

Another treacherous animal in the Chronicles are the wolves, although there are also good ones in the story. The most important of all is called Fenris Ulf, the captain of the secret police of the White Witch. The name comes from Scandinavian mythology, in which a wolf was the servant of an evil god, called Loki. In the later editions of the Chronicles, he is called Maugrim, recalling evil (*maugre*). He often metamorphoses into other animals and becomes easily bad tempered. Peter kills him with the sword which was used by Aslan to make him a knight.

But, once again, similarly to *The Lord of the Rings*, the most heroic animals in Narnia are doubtless the smallest. Although Narnian mice were not created with

speaking skills, Aslan gave them this gift afterwards as a recognition for their releasing of Aslan from the cords used by the Witch and her ugly creatures to humiliate and kill him.

In *The Last Battle* they also helped to release Tirian and his horses, under the command of the most well-known of them, Reepicheep. He is the image of courage, which he proves in different situations, such as the large fight of Beruna. In *The Voyage of the Dawntrader* he offers himself to sail alone until the end of the world. And as he was almost arriving, he threw even his sword away, because he knew that he would not have to fight anymore when he got there. He will appear again in *The Last Battle* as the one who welcomes the children at the end of the world with the words “further up and further in,” which would become famous. He is even immediately willing to go back to earth in order to fight against Tash.

His braveness seems to make him fear nothing, even invisible powers. In the *The Voyage of the Dawntrader* he is the only one who does not lose his mind in the dark island, not being frightened by nightmares. Therefore Edmund calls him the most courageous of all speaking animals. Probably the bizarre mouse was Lewis's favourite, precisely because of his courage and division between his heroic mission on earth, on the one hand, and his longing after Aslan's country, on the other. He knows also how to make a strategic retreat, and truly made it as soon as necessary. His tail, which already was misused by Eustace, was lost in a fight, being only restored by Aslan himself at the end of the world.

Finally, we cannot forget to talk about Aslan himself. He is the creator of Narnia and king of all animals, as suggested by his “lionine” form. He always appears in the most terrible and hopeless situations. Although he seems very dangerous and wild, he shows himself mostly merry, kind and rightful. He always tries to encourage the Narnians to face their pains and leave them to him. But he does not protect them against all evils. He himself is the one who suffers most, and takes on all of their suffering, because of his unrestrained love for them. This behavior also comes along with the fact that he is free in his acting to do how he pleases and not what humans feel to be just. He also knows a kind of magic that is deeper than that of the White Witch, that comes from beyond time.

Due to this, it is possible for him not only to punish and let others suffer, but also to offer them a way to overcome all kinds of pains and evils, even death. In *The Last Battle* he transforms himself into a lamb, symbolizing the sacrifice of a sinless creature in the place of others. He thus confirms and stresses the archetype of the dying God.

Final considerations

There surely are many other Narnian animals and characters which we could analyze, regarding their pains, who have valuable lessons to teach us humans. It seems to me, however, that the above examples are more than sufficient to illustrate Lewis's ideas on the pain of animals. I contend that they also are enough to show the coherence between his theoretical arguments and the behavior of his animal characters.

Let us then conclude with some practical suggestions for educators on how to approach and discuss those ideas with their pupils:

1. Making them identify specific scenes and words of the above-mentioned animals, this may clarify the pain of animals;
2. Dramatizing those scenes, with a final discussion about the reason for their identification with the characters, as well as their feelings during the presentation.
3. There are several questions which may also be discussed in family or smaller circles, such as:
 - 3.1 Why had a specific animal to suffer? (specially Aslan)
 - 3.2 How was the pain made good?
 - 3.3 Why do some animals have the speaking skill and others not?
 - 3.4 Which animal did you love most? Why?
 - 3.5 Which scene do you think most moving?
 - 3.6 How would you have acted in that situation? Why?
 - 3.7 Which animal did you love the least? Why?
 - 3.8 Who has endured the greatest pain of all in the story? What may one learn out of that example?

One could also encourage interesting comparisons, for instance, between the animals of Narnia, and the animals and human beings or creatures extracted from other stories (fables, fairy tales, Bible stories, myths, etc.)

These are not intended to be closed prescriptions, but, on the contrary, nothing more than hints to stimulate the educators own creativity in order to develop new and even better ideas. For the most important, in our analysis, in Lewis's theology of animal's pain, as stressed before, is his admission that the love for animals always stimulated his own fantasy and thus also his search for answers to those theological questions. Probably, if there is any sense in the pain of animals Lewis's view on it is, in our perception, one of the most convincing of all.

Notes

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