

On Companion Animals

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With this text I will likely displease friends and students. I accept that. I prefer to speak within Greek thought, even if that is uncomfortable, rather than to be comfortably friendly. This text does not propose immediate political solutions nor does it ignore practical difficulties. It examines the issue exclusively as a problem of measure, nature, and way of life.

In what follows I will use the concepts of “form” and “actuality” of an animal in a loose, descriptive sense: by form I mean the recognisable set of characteristics that makes it what it is (e.g., a dog or a cat), and by actuality the characteristic mode of action and functioning of the animal in the world.

1 The confinement of animals

Confinement is not merely a matter of space. It is the replacement of the animal’s natural mode of existence with an artificial mode, designed for purposes foreign to it. Therefore, we must answer:

- what is the natural place,
- what is the actuality of the animal,
- and what is the purpose of moving it into an alien environment.

Every being has a place connatural to its nature. Historical coexistence with man alters the conditions of life, but not the basic powers that constitute the animal’s form. Movement and actuality are realised within their proper place. I am not speaking of wild animals nor of genetically altered species, but of animals with their basic natural powers preserved: movement, reproduction, sociability, exploration of space.

An animal does not “merely exist” in its environment, but is in the world through its natural actualities (movement, food, reproduction, sociability).

Thus, confinement in a flat does not merely remove space, but cancels actualities. It impedes the realisation of nature. Confinement is *contrary*

to nature not because it is “cramped”, but because it does not allow the animal to be what it *is*.

In Greek thought, the household includes humans, tools, animals, but not as equivalents. The animal in the household has a role (work, guarding, food), not mere emotional possession.

Modern confinement therefore removes the functional framework, retains only emotional utility. Thus we have a transition “from animal with a purpose” to “animal as a symbol”. The animal as symbol does not exist for the sake of acting, but for signifying: affection, care, kindness, the human’s emotional adequacy. The animal ceases to be a subject of actualities and becomes a bearer of projections.

This is philosophically problematic.

1.1 Confinement as “civilised violence”

This is not crude abuse. It is something more subtle: the transformation of violence into care. Food, cleanliness, medical attention, which however do not negate the removal of freedom, they merely make it painless *for the human*.

This is a typical feature of modernity: power is exercised not through punishment, but through care; that is, paternalism.¹

1.2 “But animals adapt”

Adaptation is not moral justification, it is a sign of biological resilience. The fact that a being survives does not mean it realises its nature. This holds equally for humans.

1.3 First conclusion

The confinement of animals in flats cannot be considered morally neutral, nor is it sufficiently grounded in Greek thought, unless we accept a purely anthropocentric model.

Therefore it is an act: exceptional, tragic, requiring justification and not self-evident acceptance.

1.4 “Companionship” as a moral alibi

Companionship does not describe a function of the animal, but a human need: emotional stability, reduction of loneliness, substitution of social

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paternalism>

bonds. The animal is not conceived as an animal with a work but as a bearer of experiences *for the human*.

In Greek thought the animal has a place in the world because it works, feeds, guards, participates in the economy of needs. Companionship does not constitute a work of the animal but is purely a psychological benefit for the human. Thus it does not ground a right to life and place for the animal, but functions as a rhetorically refined cover for a relationship of domination.

Here we have *hubris* because we transgress measure. We do not confine the animal for survival or for work or for participation in the production of food for all, but as a means of pleasure and relief.

Working animals are not detached from their nature but are integrated into a human economy compatible with their natural powers. We do not thereby negate their actuality but direct it. The animal's work is used, not abolished (this may be criticised by some on moral grounds, but not ontologically).

The confined animal does not exercise its natural actualities, does not participate in a natural cycle, has no work beyond its presence. It is one thing to integrate labour and another to confine as the disabling of the animal's nature.

1.5 “But even the horse is confined”

Yes, but that confinement is consistent with its nature, whereas the confinement of companion animals negates their nature. What matters is the realisation of form, not some abstract (often pretended) right to freedom.

Let us compare the Greek with the contemporary: The human in Greek thought is a political animal. That is, integrated into a community, regulated by measure, exposed to the gaze of others.

Today the human lives privately, detached from natural cycles and with mediated relationships. This has a direct consequence for animals. Humans do not coexist with animals but regard them as *private property*.

In this contemporary failure, the human does not fail because he is evil, but unfortunately because he lacks (from his education, i.e., not necessarily by his own choice) the relevant ethos. The Greek human coexisted with animals. Not as equals nor in a shared indoor space. There was distance, role, limit. Modern coexistence abolishes distance but not power. The modern human wants proximity without friction. This inevitably leads to sterilisation, confinement, and training that suppresses instincts.

2 On sterilisation

We have now reached the sharpest issue. Sterilisation is not a simple harm. It is the permanent removal of an essential power of the animal, without an immediate need for the realisation of its present work. The generative power of the animal is not accidental. It is part of the animal's form. Therefore, sterilisation is not merely an intervention, but a change in essence, even if it does not formally change the species.

2.1 “But even the ancients castrated”

Indeed. Oxen were castrated. But this was done to enhance a specific work (strength, endurance) of an animal that worked, moved, and participated in natural cycles. One power was removed to strengthen another **that is actualised according to its nature** (natural actuality).

Modern sterilisation neither enhances any work, nor aims at a natural function, but aims at human management:

- less desire,
- less movement,
- less aggression,
- fewer “problems”.

That is: power is removed not to strengthen the animal in some of its own existing capacity, but for the convenience of the human.

If this difference seems small to you, it is not. Sterilisation aims to prevent the natural expression of the animal. This is *hubris*.² Not because it is cruel but because it declares: “I cannot bear nature as it is”.

2.2 The atheist within Greek cosmology

If one is a materialist, he has no problem with sterilisation. For him the animal has no essence. But if one is an atheist within Greek cosmology, then he has a serious problem. Not a moral but an ontological one. For sterilisation ruptures the relationship between form and power and turns the animal into an imperfect being.

²*Hubris* throughout this text does not mean malice or intention to harm; it is not written accusatorily, but is understood as transgression of measure: intervention where the human cannot bear nature as it is and attempts to neutralise it.

2.3 Sterilisation or abandonment/death?

“But is it not better than allowing it to reproduce and its offspring to suffer abandonment, hunger, and death?”

Here there is a trap we must avoid. Who is the one that creates the dilemma? (Not who formulates it, but who creates it?) This must be answered first, and then which solution is the lesser evil.

Death is a natural end. It exists within nature. It is not “bad” but part of the order of the world. Sterilisation is not an end but an artificial deprivation of power in life. Death deprives all powers because the being ceases to *be*. Sterilisation deprives an essential power while the being continues to be. The “less pain”, “less discomfort”, “less shock” for the human gaze is foreign to Greek thought precisely because it is utilitarian. The question is not “how much it hurts” but whether it is “according to nature or contrary to nature”. Sterilisation is contrary to nature. Death and hunger are according to nature.

As for the argument from abandonment, abandonment is not a natural event but human negligence or action. Thus the human creates the problem, then invokes sterilisation as a solution, and to do so invokes hunger and death as an alternative evil. But this is called “shifting responsibility”, which is *hubris*; not because the animals die, but because the human **refuses to bear the cost of his own actions**.

Consider also this: if we accept that preventive removal of powers is justified because it reduces risk or pain, then this principle has no natural limit. It can be applied to every being that is deemed “incapable of managing” its own nature, and in that risk humans too may be included.

We cannot justify preventive violence.

3 Conclusions

Based on the above, the conclusion is very uncomfortable. Sterilisation is not a “bad act” but an admission of inability to coexist. The human says in practice:

- I cannot live with animals that desire,
- I cannot live with birth and death,
- I cannot bear the consequences.

Sterilisation therefore is a technical solution to an anthropological problem. Sterilisation is not morally neutral. It is a form of preventive violence *upon nature*. It is not a sin, not a crime.

But it is a **rupture with measure.**

And what is the solution? Equally uncomfortable is the answer:

The change of way of life.