theories and methodologies

Posthuman Compassions

ELISABETH ARNOULD-BLOOMFIELD

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I WATCH A CREATURE SUFFER OR WHEN I SHARE IN MY DOG'S JOY? WHAT IS THE POWER OF THESE EMOTIONS, WHAT DO they teach me about living with animals and engaging ethically with their differences? While these questions may still seem sentimental to some, they have become increasingly relevant to those who study animals. Emotions have made a remarkable comeback in recent animal literature and philosophy. Rehabilitated by a new wave of theorists, they have found their way into some of the most provocative contemporary reflections on animal ethics. Josephine Donovan, Jacques Derrida, Ralph Acampora, Donna Haraway, and others have all granted compassion theoretical pride of place. They share a critique of the rationalist bias of the justice-and-rights tradition and suggest that compassionate attention to animals is the "ground upon which theory about human treatment of animals should be constructed" (Donovan, "Attention" 174). For many such contemporary thinkers, then, compassion—a deeply affective way of sharing another's emotion—is the fundamental means of forging the ethical bond we have with nonhuman animals. Replacing the "calculable process" of current animal-rights theories with the emotional encounter of the other's living—and dying—reality, compassion offers a new understanding of responsibility and relationships (Wolfe, "Exposures" 19).

While these recent elaborations share a common rehabilitation of emotion over reason, they differ substantially in the gist of their critique and the nature of their sympathies. Contemporary theories of compassion are, like their precursors, largely heterogeneous, and there is little that can reconcile the sympathy theory of the feminist care tradition with Derrida's aporetic brand of compassion (or Mary Midgley's mix of affect and cognition with the purely embodied quality of Acampora's "symphysis").[1] It is equally difficult to gauge the respective importance of these different approaches and to explain why, for example, feminist sympathy theory has remained in the margin while much attention has been given to the handful of texts that Derrida and his readers have dedicated to compassion.

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Susan Fraiman interprets this marginalization—which she sees at work throughout the field of animal studies—as a consequence of the recent critical reassessment of animal scholarship under the authority of Derrida's posthumanist legacy. She notes that critics such as Cary Wolfe and Matthew Calarco have called for a deconstruction of the humanist assumptions still at work in the animal studies model. And she believes that blanket critiques of cultural studies' subjects and practices have allowed for a facile dismissal of the important role played by ecofeminists in the ongoing challenge to traditional epistemology and ethics.

Although I share Fraiman's uneasiness concerning the marginalization of feminist animal ethics, I am not sure it is as uniform or critically unwarranted as she lets on. For instance, the recent popularity of Haraway, a feminist historian of science, seems to indicate that some feminist thinking about animals enjoys wide readership.[2] One can also argue that Derrida's radical appeal is not merely due to critical fashion but stems from his critique of the residual humanism often present in contemporary iterations of sympathy. Many feminist sympathy theories, including Donovan's, remain close to the subjective and mimetic template of their enlightenment models. In spite of their affective charge, they propose an enduringly rational and unwittingly humanist version of the sympathetic human-animal relation.[3] Such a construct is implicitly questioned in Derrida's brand of posthumanism and in Haraway's radically "hybrid" version of interspecies compassion. Both thinkers are willing to liberate compassion from its dependence on traditional anthropocentric epistemologies and ethics. Aiming to free animal ethics from the calculations of the rights approach and from any reliance on residual enlightenment subjectivities, they propose new kinds of posthuman sympathy dedicated to radical otherness.[4]

If I turn, in this short essay, to a joint study of these two authors' interspecies compassions, it is because Derrida and Haraway are both willing to "make a mess" out of the categories at the center of contemporary affective ethics (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 19). Their approaches differ: Derrida advocates a "negative" compassion whose ethical power lies in the inability to identify with another's pain; Haraway argues that a renewed understanding of sympathy is also present in companion species' mundane "dance of relating" (25). But they are equally willing to deconstruct traditional understandings of sympathy, to render them powerless or mundane. And it is this common critical will, as well as the differences between the two authors' compassions, that I would like to explore briefly here.

In the last chapter of *Melancholia's Dog*, Alice Kuzniar reflects on Derrida's claim that "mortality [is] the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals" (Derrida 27). Casting doubt on the idea that "one can even share in mortality," she wonders what it might mean to "share the experience of this non power? . . . Would the temptation not be to delude oneself into an all too easy anthropomorphized specularity? . . . For how could we know what death means for a dog?" (173). Kuzniar's questions underscore the transformation that the conceptualizations of compassion have undergone in the works of Derrida (and Coetzee). They interrogate the possibility of a sympathy described as powerless participation in the vulnerability of animal existence. They also ponder what it might mean to share another's radically unknowable suffering and invite us to reflect on the paradoxes of powerless compassion. As such, I find these questions provocative. Yet, I also take issue with the suggestion that Derrida's shared mortality could still borrow from the specularity and anthropomorphism of traditional sympathies. I would like to propose, instead, that Derrida's insistence on mortality—on the passivity and powerlessness of suffering—changes the grammar

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as well as the "possibility" of compassion. It "strips away all the conventional justifications for kindness to animals, [which] are part of the rational, humanist culture that doesn't get to the heart of the matter" and proposes a version of sympathy that is ethical only because it is aporetic (Attridge 184).[5]

I am certainly not alone in suggesting that Derrida's reinterpretation of suffering has radical consequences for animal ethics. A number of critics have commented on the passage of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that Kuzniar quotes, in which Derrida reflects on the importance of animal suffering.[6] Most of them have noted that, for Derrida, Jeremy Bentham's famous query about animal pain ("can they suffer?") hides a more profound interrogation about the paradoxical "possibility" of suffering: "can they *not* suffer?" (Derrida 27). This new question suggests that the animals' ability to suffer is rather an inability not to suffer, not to be wounded in their bodies, their flesh:[7]

> Being able to suffer is no longer a power, it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish.

By focusing our attention on the embodied vulnerability that we share with animals, Derrida alters our understanding of compassion and of ethics. Traditional, anthropocentric ethics (like Peter Singer's utilitarianism) approaches the question of the moral standing of animals by evaluating the capacities they share with us, including the ability to suffer. It also relies on a version of sympathy whereby autonomous subjects may identify with the animal's predicament and use this knowledge to assess the value of their own pain and the extent of their own moral worth. In this version of sympathy, suffering is a measurable ability, which receives consideration because of its possible assimilation into the framework of human suffering. But Derrida's suggestion that all animal suffering—including humans'—is powerless challenges the epistemological and moral scheme of this traditional approach. If pain is an "incapacitated capacity" (Oliver 46), I cannot assess it in another or know how it feels (I may only let it *affect* me). More crucially, I cannot evaluate my own suffering, for it is never the self-sovereign and autonomous subject that suffers in me but my animal body. And because the experience of pain is always that of being affected by the otherness of my (or another's) body, it unsettles my humanity and opens me to the outside, to the animality of my death.

Derrida's suggestion that we suffer passively *as* animals—and not just *with* animals—implies a different sort of compassionate experience, one that radically challenges the humanist schemes of traditional sympathy theory. Because this experience "questions the structure of the 'auto-' (as autonomy, as agency, as authority over one's autobiography) of humanist subjectivity," it reminds us that "'we' are always radically other, already in- or ahuman in our very being" (Wolfe, "Human" 570–71). And this radical challenge to the subject turns inside out the kind of sympathetic experience that recent theoreticians of compassion still borrow from the mimetic (and extensionist) models of David Hume, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Philip Mercer. Donovan, for example, quotes Schopenhauer's description of an experience in which the compassionate subject "suffer[s] directly with" the victim: "I feel his woe just as I ordinarily feel my own. . . . But this requires that I am in some way *identified with him*" ("Attention" 182). Elsewhere she notes that "if one sees the other as a creature who suffers in a manner like oneself, then one can imagine

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oneself in that creature's situation and can thus imaginatively experience his pain. One thereby implicitly grants him moral status comparable to one's own" ("Feminism" 315). In this scheme—and even though they can lose themselves in their identification with the other's pain—sympathetic subjects remain the source of knowledge (the animal suffers like them) and the granters of rights. Such sympathy relies on the supposition that human and animal pains are ontologically different but that this difference can be reduced through the work of the imagination and brought to moral similitude. Derrida's compassion, on the other hand, depends on the suggestion that animal and human pains are ontologically identical but share only otherness and unknowability. In Derrida's version, compassionate subjects may continue to recognize the familiar otherness (powerlessness) of an animal's pain, but such recognition can no longer allow them to identify with its passivity and give it meaning or moral sense. They may only perceive, in the other's pain, the radical inability of their own. And if they wish, in compassion, to remain faithful to the opacity of such otherness, they can only do so in the wake of a failure to identify with the other—what Sam Durrant calls a "failure of the project of the sympathetic imagination" (120).

If I apply Durrant's description of J. M. Coetzee's fictional handling of sympathy to Derrida's compassion, it is because compassion appears to be linked, in both authors, to a certain ignorance or aporia. Durrant shows that, in Coetzee's fiction, "ignorance would seem to constitute the ground for a noncoercive relation to the other," a relation in which "knowing not to know . . . undoes the logic of self-certainty" and lets otherness come forth (120–21).[8] One can see in Derrida's terse (and paradoxical) text a similar pull toward ignorance. Tellingly, Derrida chooses not to theorize at length about compassion. Contrary to most contemporary approaches that refer to sympathy's history and hypothesize its powers, Derrida's take is minimalist: he avoids elaborating on an experience he sees as mainly aporetic and therefore "interruptive."[9] And when Derrida defines compassion as the "possibility of sharing the possibility of [a] nonpower, the possibility of [an] impossibility," his tense formulation offers us a glimpse into the aporia at the heart of the experience. For such phrasing does not suggest that we understand this "nonpower" whose "possibility" we are sharing. It suggests, rather, that by sharing it we awaken to "impossibility": to the reality of the other's pain, which both calls and eludes us. This "missed experience" is what affects us so profoundly in compassion (Caruth 60): we are touched, perhaps as deeply, by the elusiveness of the other's pain as we are by its proximity. But the anguish we feel at missing the other's pain is, for Derrida, the condition of sympathy and the core of the experience's ethical response. If it wishes to remain attentive to the irreducible otherness of anyone's suffering, compassion has to endure this aporia. It has to remain an ordeal. And because Derrida never claims that sharing mortality is anything more than this impossible ordeal, I find Kuzniar's line of questioning slightly misleading. Kuzniar is right: we cannot know what it means to "share mortality," and we certainly cannot begin to surmise "what death means for a dog" (173). But for Derrida this is the point: in compassion, we never share the meaning of passion, only the passion of meaning: the ordeal of its aporia.

For Derrida, then, compassion's ordeal is the very condition of responsibility, of ethics.[10] In compassion, I only encounter the impossibility of the other's pain. "But it is paradoxically in just this impossibility," Wolfe explains, "that the possibility of justice resides: the (as it were) permanent call of the other in the face of which the subject arrives 'too late'" ("Exposures" 22–23). Such compassion is profoundly traumatic, since I only encounter the other's pain under erasure. And it proposes an experience that may seem powerless and

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devoid of practical value. Yet Derrida's compassionate encounter—and with it all the similar ecstatic encounters described in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Letters of Lord Chandos*, Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and many other texts[11]—is an important counterpart to traditional humanist sympathies. Insofar as it centers on the passivity of embodied suffering, this compassionate encounter gives us a "meta-ethics" that goes beyond the subjective recognition of moral standing (and the rational granting of rights). And because it focuses on the unknowability of animal suffering (not on its subjective assessment), it gives us an ethical experience that is truly attentive to the other.

Yet Derrida's model of compassion, if it conditions a new kind of ethical encounter, can also be seen as foreclosing its modalities and negating its impact. Critics have objected to what they see as the abstractness and negativity of this approach. Wolfe notes, for example, that Derrida's treatment of animal ethics seems more interested in the "derivation of a general economy or 'law' of 'heteronomy'" than it is in experiencing the force of the encounter with the actual animal ("Exposures" 34). Rosi Braidotti concurs when she criticizes the "aporetic loop of deconstructive thinking, which, in Derrida . . . , reduces animality to a general figuration of Alterity" (200). For Haraway, it is the negativity of Derrida's approach that is most problematic, since the exclusive emphasis it puts on suffering and death obfuscates the understanding of finitude and limits that of sympathy. Haraway, I believe, shares with Derrida the idea that true ethical encounters with animals put us face-to-face with the passions of finitude. But she objects to the idea that death and the passivity of suffering are the only tropes for these passions. Questioning Derrida's reading of Bentham's famous query, she contests the reduction of suffering to the pathos of pain and death: "'Can they suffer?' to my ear does not call for some weird reduction of all of us to an indulgent sort of lack or incapacity. Passion and skill, passion and accomplishment, passion and the vivid heat of love and rage—these do not exclude each other" ("Species Matter" 25). For Haraway, then, the passion of embodiment "is not just positive pain but the openness of being itself to the relentless finitude of becoming with" (25). It is a vulnerability that is also present in live bodies and positive practices and affects all aspects of our relationship with animals:

> [This] unnamable being/becoming with in copresence . . . is about suffering *and* expressive, relational vitality, in all the vulnerable mortality of both. I am (inadequately) calling that expressive, mortal, world-making vitality "play" or "work," not to designate a fixable capability in relation to which beings can be ranked, but to affirm a kind of "non-power at the heart of power" other than suffering. . . . Capability (play) and incapacity (suffering) are *both* all about mortality and finitude.
>
> (*When Species Meet* 311)

This other understanding of the passions of vulnerability commands a different type of compassion: one that does not simply experience the aporia of the traumatic encounter but endures and flourishes in the mundane practices of relating to companion species. Compassion, for Haraway, remains alert to the limits of finitude, but it embeds this alertness in quotidian relationships. Such a definition continues to commit to the radical otherness at the heart of the ethical relation, yet it locates this otherness in the ordinary becoming of animal-human relations. It regrounds Derrida's critical aporia in praxis, in the day-to-day relational experiment of becoming with and emphasizes a different part and meaning of the word *compassion*: the *com-* of relating rather than the ordeal of *passion*. But what does it mean to relocate compassion in the ordinary practice of caring and committed relations? How do we remain committed to the radical otherness at

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the heart of the compassionate relationship while engaging with others in the ordinary entanglements of becoming together?

To answer these questions, I would like to start with the two kinds of encounters Haraway recalls at the beginning of *When Species Meet*. The first one retells Derrida's difficult meeting with his female cat's gaze "in a particular bathroom on a real morning . . ." (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 19). The other recounts the puzzling experience of a bioanthropologist, Barbara Smuts, who discovers she has to forgo her scientific neutrality and become a social partner with the baboons she studies if she wants to carry on with her observations. Derrida's encounter, Haraway says, is provocative because it asks all the right (philosophical) questions about what it means to meet a singular, responsive animal and acknowledge its gaze. Recognizing in his cat the "absolute alterity of the neighbor," Derrida rejects the facile move of conceptualizing its existence (23).[12] He prefers instead to figure himself—and philosophy—as naked and ashamed before the critical power of the animal's gaze. But this response, as Haraway notes, is not sufficient. It may justly underline the inadequacy of thought before the other (as with compassion's aporia). But it misses the obligation to look back and to engage responsively with the cat's "bodily postures and visual entanglements" (21–22). And this want of curiosity and a lack of politeness—of the greetings and rituals that reaffirm the relationship—fail the cat as surely as philosophical discourse would. By keeping self and other, philosopher and cat, separate and untangled, Derrida's response keeps alive a conception of being and identity that the next tale efficiently subverts. For the next story, which elaborates on similar premises (the encounter with a real animal and the inability of discourse and science to grasp that reality), takes a different turn and suggests that building a relationship might be more productive than the isolating stance of philosophy and science. The story, as Smuts and Haraway tell it, shows how the bioanthropologist's neutral observation and unresponsive scientific stance disturbed the baboons she was studying and influenced their behavior. Only after Smuts began to share in the baboons' collective semiotics could she become a reliable social being. And only then could she carry on with her science.

Smuts's realization that her study of the baboons depends on her entering into a relationship with them is, for Haraway, profound. At stake here is the suggestion that Smuts (and the baboons) exist only inside the context and connection of their situated relationship. That relationship has precedence over the individuals it constructs. It is never simply the encounter or interaction between preconstituted subjects and objects. Rather, it is a fluid and dynamic location where "partners" cocreate each other in what Haraway calls, after Karen Barad, "intra-action"—that is, a process of internal mutual shaping (17). Beings, says Haraway, "become who they are in a dance of relating [where] all the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact" (25).

To grasp the full impact of Haraway's relational philosophy, we must understand its difference from the now familiar precept that we are our bonds. The notion that we are constructed subjects is essential to much contemporary thinking, and Haraway certainly shares with feminists the suggestion that we are "bound to each other by the fluidity of habits, language and culture" (Rudy 191). But she goes further. Her notion of cocreation does not merely imply that we are enmeshed beings, it also suggests that we are provisionally created. Incessantly redone by manifold connections, we are both constructed individuals and the ongoing products of a fluid world of multiple becoming. We are, like our worlds, "knots in motion" (Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto* 6).

This rigorous priority of process over entities and of becoming over being is expressed

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clearly at the end of Haraway's commentary on Smuts's narrative. Haraway disagrees with Smuts's scientific conclusion that the baboons "remain in nature," unchanged by their encounter with her. Instead, Haraway believes that "having entangled their gaze with the clipboard-toting female" the primates have also been redone as Smuts's natural cultural partners. This reading is important not only because its interspecies egalitarianism challenges scientific prejudice but also because it undoes the foundational binary on which this prejudice is built. For science, animals are immutable elements of nature—"where change involves only the time of evolution"—while humans dwell in history, "where all other sorts of time come into play" (*When Species Meet* 25). But, for Haraway, there are no natural, unchangeable animals. Nature and culture are only "provisional and local categories" whose duality is a "potent consequence" of species relations, not a "preexisting foundation" (*Companion Species Manifesto* 6). And nature is no less subject to the becoming of material-semiotic relationships than culture. This correction, which places humans and baboons together in "situated nature-cultures," changes the story in more ways than one (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 25). By questioning the foundational notion of an immutable nature (and natural beings), it suggests a version of the world in which everything is constantly engaged in symbiotic and semiotic connections. And by giving us to understand that all of us, including baboons, are "hybrid" products of these connections, it tells us there are no individuals, only "becoming with in copresence" (310). Relationships are indeed, as Haraway states it, "the smallest *pattern* for analysis" (26; my emphasis).

It becomes easier to explain, in view of what Braidotti calls "process ontology," why Haraway grapples with Derrida's understanding of finitude and how she rethinks his aporetic treatment of interspecies encounters. For Haraway the priority of relationship over entities and of becoming over being changes the narrative of finitude as well as that of the encounter with the other. Contrary to Derrida's approach to suffering, which still focuses its passive becoming on the individual and its body, Haraway thinks finitude transindividually. It is the unnamable "becoming with in copresence," which is at the heart of all "world-making vitality" and ceaselessly transforms beings and relations (311). Finitude, in Haraway, *is* the relation. This, of course, does not imply that death and suffering are no longer individual ordeals or that individuals do not matter anymore in relationships. But it does suggest that pain is not the only trope for a "becoming with" that connects individuals (in love and work) as much as it fractures them (in pain). And it also suggests that an ethics based on relationality—on respecting the otherness of a common "becoming with"—may have to emphasize an entirely different way of looking at compassion in relationships.

What does it mean, then, to be compassionate, if the otherness to be embraced is no longer the sole passion of the other but the common "becoming with" of the relationship? Haraway provides a brief answer to this question when she indicates that Derrida should have responded to his cat and performed the rituals of greeting when it looked at him that morning in the bathroom. Greetings, according to Haraway, are not mere polite signals. As embodied signs devoid of denotative function, they are both an acknowledgment of the relationship—the affirmation that we are present to each other—and the performance of its change; each greeting "reshap[es the] relationship and so its enacters" (26). Greetings between Derrida and his cat, then, would have meant communicating together about the relationship, its status, and its change. It would have meant ritually making signs—not sense—about a common "becoming with." And if Haraway deplores the absence of greetings and the aporetic ending of the meeting, it is because she believes that abandoning the

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encounter is far more appropriative of the relationship (and therefore also of the other) than is the greeting. It ontologizes the impossibility of the encounter instead of leaving it to the difference of the relating.

Compassion, then, for Haraway, is the ability—for both humans and animals—to participate in a common becoming and to be present to "who and what are emerging in relationships" (Schneider 83). It is the capacity, not to know the other, but to pay attention to an otherness in common and to the commonality of otherness. This commitment to paying attention and remaining open to the fundamental heterogeneity of other and self in relationship is what constitutes the essence of affective relating in posthuman ethics. It ensures that compassion and caring do not remain stuck in the fictions of subjective sympathies, unconditional love, or radical unknowability but remain dedicated to historical, impure relationships and to finite, hybrid "becoming with." To be compassionate in relationship, I must continually be *affected* by the other's significant otherness, and I must also be *moved* by the ongoing strangeness of our "becoming with" in relation.

What happens when I watch a creature suffer or when I share in my dog's joy? Derrida and Haraway provide contrasting answers to that question. Derrida believes that compassion for the creature requires acknowledging that we share only in the impossibility of its suffering; Haraway suggests that sharing one's dog's joy demands a greeting that acknowledges our joint involvement in becoming. Beyond their common posthuman questioning of the subjective narratives of sympathy theory, there may seem to be little resemblance between "Derrida's celebration of undecidability" (Braidotti 200) and Haraway's regrounding of compassion in common relations. Yet Derrida and Haraway, I believe, need each other. (Haraway said the same thing about Smuts and Derrida). Derrida reminds Haraway that death is a part of becoming and that we need its figures in order to remain sympathetic to the opacity of the other's finitude. Haraway reminds Derrida that entering the dance of relating is also a way to be attuned to the unnamable being and "becoming with" of interspecies relationships.

Notes

1. "Symphysis" is the term Acampora uses to describe the interconnectivity of all flesh at the heart of his notion of compassion (76–79).

2. Haraway's popularity has grown exponentially in the past years, and her work is quoted in virtually every published study on animals.

3. For a critique of Donovan's sympathy theory, see Acampora (77) and Warkentin (106–09).

4. In spite of the long critical tradition of discriminating between *compassion* and *sympathy*, I will not, in this paper, distinguish between the two words. Such distinction is capricious and changes according to the theoretical context. It depends on criteria that belong to a humanist vocabulary foreign to the poststructuralist versions of compassion I am examining here. The distinction that the feminist care tradition makes, for example, between sympathy and compassion is based on attributing to sympathy a larger cognitive quotient. Because it is seen both as an affect and as knowledge, sympathy is presented as a bridge between emotion and reason, while compassion remains mostly intuitive and powerless. For Derrida, Haraway, and J. M. Coetzee, however, such distinction becomes moot. Because their understanding of the compassionate experience goes beyond the humanist template, it also displaces the kind of conceptual dualism mobilized by the opposition of emotion and reason, compassion and sympathy. And while authors may seem to favor one term over the other—Coetzee often speaks of "sympathy" when Derrida uses "compassion," and Haraway prefers to talk about "shared suffering"—they leave the terminology open.

5. Derek Attridge's comment is meant to describe the peculiar type of compassion displayed by David Lurie, the main character of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, but it applies as well to Derrida's approach.

6. Calarco; Lawlor; Oliver; Wolfe, "Exposures" and "Human."

7. Calarco writes that, in Derrida's text, "we are perhaps less moved, ethically and even emotively speaking, by the recognition of an animal's 'ability' or 'capacity' for suffering as by an encounter with an animal's *in*ability or *in*capacity to avoid pain" (118).

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8. This is particularly true in *Disgrace*, where David Lurie experiences compassion as a powerless engagement with the unknowability of the other's suffering—much like Derrida's compassionate subject.

9. As Calarco intimates when he describes Derrida's experience as an "interruptive encounter," such encounter is arresting. It suspends thought and leaves one profoundly affected, but it does not propose identification or knowledge (117).

10. In her book *Creaturely Poetics*, Anat Pick says, in the same vein, "Ethics discloses the presence of a crisis . . . whose source is the ordinary—yet extraordinary—living [and dying] encounter" (13).

11. Elisabeth de Fontenay mentions some of these texts in the last chapter of *Le silence des bêtes* (741–48). She alludes, for example, to the irrepressible and shattering sympathy felt by the central characters of Karl Philip Morris's *Anton Reiser* and Vassili Grossman's *Vie et destin* when they are confronted with the enigma of animal cruelty. But Coetzee's fictions *Disgrace* and *The Lives of Animals* offer the best illustrations of the powerless sympathy we have been studying here. If *Disgrace* has found its way into the margins of this study, it is because it stages the moments of dual breakdown characteristic of Derrida's negative compassion. David Lurie, the protagonist of this novel, confronts the horror of what we do to animals, but he also faces "a second kind of 'unspeakability' . . . the unspeakability of the limits of our own thinking in confronting such reality" (Wolfe, "Exposures" 3). They respond to the suffering encounter with an uncompromising willingness to withstand "the force of the blow" (Pick 13). And if, as Wolfe and Pick point out, Coetzee's version of this stance turns out to differ from what Derrida envisions—Coetzee preferring the ordinariness of literature to the philosopher's general system—they share a negative vision of the compassionate encounter.

12. Haraway is quoting Derrida, who quotes Levinas.

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