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Sherryl Vint

Becoming Other: Animals, Kinship, and Butler's *Clay's Ark*

Much recent political and philosophical thought has been focused on the figure of the animal in Western history, particularly the way in which the animal has been used to delineate the shifting boundaries of what it means to be human. Within science fiction, the cyborg has been a privileged figure for rethinking politics since Donna Haraway published "A Cyborg Manifesto" in 1984. While much attention has been paid to the android and other machine-human hybrids that help us rethink what it means to be human, we often overlook how Haraway calls for us to rethink our relationship not only to machines but also to animals, arguing that new meanings for human animality are part of our struggle to find new ways of theorizing political responsibility and new myths to help us escape from "the maze of dualism in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (181). Haraway notes that the cyborg is a figure of biopolitics; Giorgio Agamben's recent work on ethics in *Homo Sacer* (1998) and *The Open* (2004) also places the analysis of biopower at the center of ethical and political theory for the twenty-first century. Agamben argues that the centrality of biopolitics is inextricably connected to the boundary constructed between the human and the animal, and that "in our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man" (*The Open* 80).

In making this argument, Agamben draws upon a long tradition within philosophy that defines the human through an opposition to the animal, creating the animal as a category solely to allow what is "unique" or "essential" about humans to emerge. Jacques Derrida has also recently focused on this question of the animal in his scholarship, investigating the tradition running from Descartes through Heidegger to Levinas and Lacan of establishing what it means to be human and what it means to be ethical through the expulsion of what is called animal. Derrida focuses on the singularity of the word "animal," a word that creates a strict boundary between human and "*all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers" ("Animal that I Am" 402), a word that ignores the differences among all creatures within the category of non-human. Derrida also notes that thinking through the animal as a boundary-making term is essential for understanding the decentered subject and our concepts of democracy, legal and human rights, and morality, all of which are "less clear, less homogenous, and less of a given than we believe or claim to believe" and need to be "rethought, radicalized, and considered as a thing of the future" ("Eating Well"108).

Agamben, Derrida, and Haraway thus each call for a rethinking of the human subject's relationship to its animal other as part of a transformation of ethics and politics. Their scholarship also makes clear that the category of the animal is important to our philosophical heritage precisely for the ways in which

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it informs various discriminatory hierarchies established among humans to designate the Other and thereby used to exclude certain humans from the realm of ethics. Science fiction, also, has a history of theorizing otherness and of making literal what is figurative in other discourses. Octavia Butler's work is well known for its complex exploration of difference; she continually places her characters in situations that explore the anxieties humans feel when coping with difference and our seemingly inevitable desire to respond to that difference with hierarchy and discrimination. Although Butler frequently shows characters who can respond positively to difference in order to survive in her futures, she as frequently shows that living with such difference is not easy.

This paper situates Butler's novel *Clay's Ark* (1984) within the discourse on biopolitics and the human/animal boundary to demonstrate her exploration of difference. Understanding how the concept "animal" has been deployed over time in philosophical discourse will show how hierarchy and prejudice continue to function within human cultures. The persistence of this boundary as absolute marks a persistence of its exclusionary and hierarchical logic. Butler explores not only examples of racist and sexist stratifications in the futures she imagines, but also the structural constraints that produce such societies. Her work thereby works to challenge racism and sexism as well as the binary logic and Manichean thinking that provide support for racist and sexist discourses.

Butler's themes share with this recent philosophical consideration of the animal an interrogation and dismantling of boundaries as a way to structure our experience rather than simply as a challenge to the particular dimensions of specific boundaries. Looking at *Clay's Ark* through this philosophical tradition thus illuminates the wider thematic concerns about the structures of prejudice that Butler explores. This novel examines a new way of being human, a new kind of subjectivity that is constituted precisely via a new sense of kinship with our animal others. Butler interrogates the boundary between humans and animals, aware of how this boundary has been historically deployed against some *homo sapiens*, and she provides a new kind of hybrid human subjectivity as a vision of how we might begin to rethink our ethical and political structures in this age of biopolitics, suggesting a new model not constructed via the separation of human and animal. Before turning to the specifics of this argument and to my reading of *Clay's Ark* through the discourse of animal studies, I want first to discuss briefly the novel's place within the overarching themes of the PATTERNIST series.

Butler's PATTERNIST Series. The first novel in this series, *Patternmaster* (1976), tells the story of a struggle for power in a future world divided among the Patternists, those with telepathic abilities, ordinary (by our standards) humans called mutes, and Clayarks, about whom we learn little in this novel other than that they are "savage" and live apart from the communities established by Patternists and shared by mutes. In addition to these three divisions, the Patternist society itself is divided between those who are members of one of the houses (the central social unit) and those only associated with the house as an "outsider." Although the main action of the novel concerns a struggle for power

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between two ranking members of the Patternist society, Coransee and Teray, respectively a member of the house and an outsider, the background division of the world into three types of humans provides a situation typical of a Butler novel: the struggle to live with difference. Thus, in addition to his struggles with Coransee, Teray has moments when he struggles with the inferior position in society left to Clayarks (seemingly the natural enemies of the Patternists) and to mutes (who are enslaved and controlled by the Patternists).

As does much of Butler's work, this novel explores the intersections of power and difference, and posits "humanity" (meaning autonomy and full rights within the community) as something that has to be achieved, not something equally and equitably granted to all people. Many of the relationships in the novel explicitly explore slavery (a common motif in Butler's work), particularly in the relationship between the Patternists and the mutes. The mutes are treated like domestic animals, sometimes gently as pets are treated, but often cruelly as we treat work or game animals. Butler's language invokes the parallels between slavery and animal domestication that inform both her representations in the novel and the historical practice of slavery. The ancient past of Butler's world is said to have had far more technology and to have been created by the mutes, but characters within its present find that believing in this past "was like believing that horses and cattle once had mechanized societies" (121). The novel also uses the label "animal" to describe the Clayarks, who live outside the communities and raid them. The Clayarks are presented as wild rather than domesticated animals, and the indifferent manner in which they are slaughtered reminds one of the history of early North American colonization and the historical reality of how the concept of "animal" was used to justify similar treatment of Native people. Although the human/animal boundary is not as central to this novel as it is to *Clay's Ark*, Butler is clearly aware of its role in supporting the systems of prejudice she is trying to dismantle, and in perpetuating the lie that each side tells about the other: "Not people" (122).

The second novel in the series, *Mind of My Mind* (1977), takes us back to a slightly earlier time in this world, the origins of the first Pattern. Here Butler is most concerned with the power struggle between the holder of the first Pattern—the human with telepathic abilities able to connect all the others into a community—and the founder of their new species of human. This founder, Doro, also has other extra-normal abilities although he does not know their origin. For instance, he can live forever (he was born in Ancient Egypt) through his ability to pass into another person's body and take it over. Doro had initially begun a breeding program to breed bodies that "tasted" best, although at some point this has evolved to become an experiment to breed a race of humans with telepathic and other mutant abilities. The situation Butler presents here again raises questions about the human/animal boundary and the way it has been deployed historically to exclude certain *homo sapiens* from achieving the status of human. Doro's people begin as livestock—his food—although his very method of consuming them shows how precarious the human/animal boundary is, since in eating them he becomes them. Further, the social situation of the novel clearly raises questions about boundaries and kinship since the people that

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had once been Doro's food are now his family, however brutally he dominates them.

The more explicit parallel here, however, is to slavery and Butler's concern that a difference between "kinds" of humans will inevitably lead to the exploitation of one by the other. The main struggle in this novel is between Doro and Mary, who eventually becomes the Pattern Master and turns on Doro to free herself and those in her Pattern from his domination. Equally present in this novel, however, is the emergence of the hierarchy between Patternists and mutes that was one of the central social divisions in *Patternmaster*, which takes place in the future of the world of *Mind of My Mind*. After Mary is able to form the Pattern and begins to bring together all those with psychic abilities, a clear distinction emerges between these people and the ordinary humans who cannot use telepathy. Some of the relationships between the two groups begin as relationships among equals (partners or family), but they quickly become unbalanced as the Patternists discover they can control the mutes' minds. Even when the motive seems well intentioned—to save someone from pain or to help tolerate a difficult situation, for example—the text registers a degree of discomfort with this removal of autonomy. Further, as the Patternist community grows in size and strength, Patternists also begin to manipulate mutes outside such personal relationships, to control schools or politicians, for example.

The emerging relationship between Patternists and mutes is clearly compared to slavery. The novel also demonstrates the complexity of Butler's engagement with questions of hierarchy and difference. Mary's community leadership, as the Pattern Master, is clearly superior to Doro's. While he has behind him a ruthless breeding program that has produced "an untold number of failures, dangerous or only pathetic, which he had destroyed as casually as other people slaughtered cattle" (9), Mary builds true community among those with telepathic abilities and saves many children abused by telepathic parents (inability to tolerate children is one of the apparent side effects of Doro's breeding program) and also many adults tormented by their inability to control their powers. While Mary treats all potential Patternists far more equitably than Doro had treated his people, she is also the one who enslaves the mutes to serve her own ends, essentially treating them no differently from how Doro had treated Mary's people. That Butler intends us to read this relationship between mutes and Patternists in terms of slavery is made clear in a conversation between Doro and Emma, someone who objects to the emerging hierarchy. Emma objects that the term mutes is not just convenient shorthand for "people without telepathic voices," arguing, "I know what it means, Doro. I knew the first time I heard Mary use it. It means niggers!" (155). This exchange makes clear how quickly the status of "people" can be stripped away from those who are different and without power. Animal discourse also lies in the background of this novel as the mutes are also frequently referred to as pets.

In *Wild Seed* (1980), the third novel in the series, however, Butler more explicitly develops animal discourse to reveal the structure of racism. As the series progresses, Butler moves further away from the characters at the center of the far future of the first novel (the Patternists) and focuses more attention

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on the various exclusions that occurred to produce this future. *Wild Seed* takes us further back into the past than any other novel in the series—from the late seventeenth to the mid-ninteenth century. It focuses on Emma—called by her original African name, Anyanwu, for most of this novel—and the long relationship between Doro and her as they build the community from which the Patternists eventually emerge. Like Doro, Anyanwu was born with special abilities, abilities whose origin is never explained: she seems not to age, although she is not as old as Doro and she does not switch bodies as he does; she has the power to shape-shift into any person or any animal, although she must consume its flesh to "truly" become the animal, and she can take its physical shape simply by observing it. Again Butler's main theme is hierarchy and difference and the ethics of treating people as property. Although Anyanwu and Doro work cooperatively for part of the novel, she also is in conflict with him and establishes her own rival community.

The conflict between Anyanwu and Doro is largely over his willingness to treat people as animals—as property, as expendable—and her desire that they should be treated as humans—respected and with autonomy. While Doro builds many communities of his people, sought out for their genetic predisposition for telepathy, he treats them as animals to be bred, ordering matings based on genetic traits and caring little for the many failures who have to be executed or for the suffering of his partial successes. Anyanwu, on the other hand, also gathers people who share these traits around her, but treats them like family and builds a community with them. She seeks them out because their telepathic powers often make them suffer and she is able to, almost needs to, heal them. Within her community she allows them to choose partners and produce children according to their own desires, not hers. The novel establishes a clear parallel between Doro's way of producing the new "species" of human and the practice of slavery in Western colonialism by setting the novel during the Antebellum south. Doro operates within the same circles and often with the same techniques as are used by other slave traders of the period. Anyanwu is taken from Africa by Doro, and although she herself is not purchased from a slave trader, one of her relatives is. The label "animal" is applied to certain humans, although most often by slave traders discussing their African chattel. The main theme in the novel concerns the tension between building a race through the techniques of animal husbandry and building it through family. By the end, Anyanwu has forced Doro to change some of his methods and stop executing his "breeders" once he has the offspring he desires.

In *Wild Seed* Butler also begins to branch out from her strong focus on racial boundaries and slavery to consider the species boundary as something that structurally supports all other constructions of hierarchy and difference. She does this through the character of Anyanwu, whose shape-shifting ability allows her to challenge the legitimacy of many boundaries. Through Anyanwu's experiences, Butler focuses our attention on the various ways that sexism and racism limit opportunity, something Anyanwu is able to transcend only through her ability to appear male or white. Although born an African woman, Anyanwu is able to live autonomously and even establish her own community

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and protect her people in southern United States in the early nineteenth century, but she is able to do this only by appearing to be a white, male slave owner. Anyanwu's challenges to the boundary system go beyond human hierarchies. She can become any animal, and is particularly affected by her experience of becoming a dolphin. After this experience, she refuses to consider dolphins as food, insisting that they are people. Her ability to be an animal allows Anyanwu to escape Doro (although he eventually finds her again), as he cannot sense her mind when she is in animal form. It is important to note that although this novel appeared third in publication, its setting is the earliest; Butler retroactively posits her challenge to the human/animal boundary at the foundation of her exploration of hierarchy and prejudice. The novel connects racism and the species boundary as Anyanwu reflects on her preference for the dolphins over some humans. Swimming with the dolphins and entering their social circle, she finds "it harder to think of them as animals. Swimming with them was like being with another people. A friendly people. No slaves with brands and chains here. No Doro with gentle, terrible threats to her children, to her" (80).

Thus, Butler uses various differences in the PATTERNIST series to explore themes present in her other work:[1] the human fear of difference, the need for greater openness toward the other, and the costs of social transformation. As she proceeds through the series, she takes as the beginning of one novel the perspective of a group marginalized by the social structure explored in the previous novel. As the series develops, Butler's engagement with otherness and difference becomes more complicated, and the simple binaries of us/them and good/evil are increasingly challenged and dismantled. Anyanwu makes clear that the species boundary itself is eventually implicated as another constructed hierarchy. In the final book of the series, *Clay's Ark*, Butler turns to explore the perspective of the most marginalized of all the groups she introduced in the original novel: the Clayarks, who live outside the society created by the Patternists. The Clayarks are also the characters in the series most closely associated with animal traits and thus the ones who might best be understood through an explicit engagement with the discourse of animal studies currently emerging in philosophy.

The rest of this paper explores this discourse in more detail as it informs *Clay's Ark*. Through a more direct engagement with the category of "the animal" in this novel, Butler augments the themes of difference and hierarchy that inform the entire series, here engaging most explicitly with the logic of categorizing or boundary-making that structurally informs racist thinking. Understanding *Clay's Ark* and the entire PATTERNIST series in these terms allows us to see more clearly that Butler's concern with racism and other prejudicial discourses has as much to do with how they function as with their specific content. The work of Deleuze and Guattari, in addition to Agamben and Derrida, similarly suggests that in order to change our ethics we must first address the structural aspect of prejudice ultimately rooted in the human/animal boundary.

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The Question of the Animal and *Clay's Ark*. *Clay's Ark* is set somewhere between the events of *Wild Seed* and those of *Mind of My Mind*. It is the twentieth century, but no Patternist culture is present in the novel. It tells the tale of a group of humans infected by a virus from Proxima Centauri and transformed by this virus into a hybrid species. The virus changes humans into something that we would recognize and label as animal. Their senses are more acute, their strength and reflexes are improved, they develop a craving for raw meat, and their need for sex becomes overwhelming and respects no human taboos. *Clay's Ark*, like all of Butler's fiction, simultaneously confronts us with both our need for a more equitable and heterogeneous culture and the barriers that prevent us from achieving it. The crucial concept of the human/animal boundary in both Western metaphysics and Butler's novel is that this boundary is constructed to mark the recognition or denial of kinship. Representations of animals thus indicate the logic of exclusion that persists in Western culture under the human/animal boundary. Cary Wolfe insists that so long as the humanist discourse of species persists, it "will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference" (*Animal Rites* 8; emphasis in original). Butler is concerned with new ways of being and new forms of social organization; and rethinking—"radicalizing" in Derrida's terms—the human/animal boundary offers her a way to explore this theme.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer the idea of becoming animal as a way to challenge the current ideological constructions of society and subjectivity and to embrace new identities. In their work, Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between molar identities—fixed in being, able to be grasped as a whole, recognized within the current social formation—and molecular identities. Molecular identities are always in flux, they are made up of capacities and tendencies, and they offer the possibility for transforming identity and society precisely because they refuse to follow fixed channels; they do not force desire into molar pathways. Molecular identities are becomings, and becoming animal is one of the key examples used by Deleuze and Guattari to articulate their transformative politics. They are careful to point out that becoming is not a relationship, "[b]ut neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification" (237). Becoming happens on the molecular, not the molar, level, and while "[i]t is clear that the human being does not 'really' become an animal any more than the animal 'really' becomes something else," the becoming is nonetheless real. What is real in becoming is a rejection of the false alternative between "imitate" and "are," in favor of the reality of the becoming itself, the refusal of "the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (238).

Thus, becoming animal does not mean changing from the molar or fixed identity of human into the molar identity of a specific animal. Rather, becoming remains on the molecular or fluctuating level, allowing for connections and affinities that reject the distinction between human and animal; it begins to sound very much like a cyborg politics in which the ruptured boundary between

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the two states signals not the loss of humanity but rather a "disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling" ("Cyborg Manifesto" 152). Butler's novel is an example of a text that offers a new mythology for imagining this moment of becoming, for being both and neither human and animal since that binary no longer holds. Butler does this by showing the process for characters who move through such a transformation, characters who initially feel that their identities are threatened by the transformations of becoming and who seek the security of molar identities. *Clay's Ark* provides a metaphor and model for becoming animal; the characters in the novel are initially horrified to find themselves crossing the line between humanity and animality. Butler ultimately shows us, however, that such a radical transformation is necessary if we hope to imagine another way to be human subjects.

The animal is a privileged figure of subjectivity for Deleuze and Guattari precisely because it foregrounds how the subject is always already multiple. Their theory of subjectivity emphasizes how the person is formed through a selective narrowing process. The pre-individual is malleable, possessed of potential energy and capable of assuming any number of shapes. Through interactions with external milieus, certain aspects of this potential energy are reinforced while others are suppressed. Thus, the social codes create a stable individual out of the flux of desires, channelling desire into prescribed pathways. Such a channelling and restricting process never entirely succeeds, however. There are always more potentials than are expressed in a given formation, and both society and the individual are in a constant state of tension between those desires amplified by the social order and those muffled by it. One becomes a stable individual in this order by falling within one of the assigned categories in its grid of value judgements about appropriate and inappropriate desires and connections. Against this stability, Deleuze and Guattari argue for a continued sense of the subject as multiple and always-in-process, a becoming rather than a being. One way of achieving this state is to embrace a becoming of what one *is not* under this order. Further, they suggest that the tension between appropriate and excluded channels of desire is higher within those individuals disenfranchised by the existing order; thus, the marginalized are more likely to embrace becoming other since they have a greater need to transform the social formation.

The transformed humans in *Clay's Ark* exemplify precisely the kind of nomadic subject theorized by Deleuze and Guattari; Butler, too, suggests that becoming animal and rejecting the species boundary of otherness offer the only hope for a future that avoids more exploitation, more exclusion, more binaries, more of the same. The earlier novels in this series explore the consequences of animalizing the other; in this novel she moves toward rejecting the entire logic of binaries and categories, perhaps as a way to defeat such a propensity. Deleuze and Guattari argue that "the becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 238); science fiction has the tools to make this real becoming more accessible through its ability to narrate characters who are literally changed.[2] The literal becoming animal in *Clay's Ark* explores how the animal/human boundary in

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Western culture has been used to reinforce a system of hierarchy and othering, and argues for a greater recognition of kinship and connection. That Butler's concern about hierarchy and discrimination among humans is consistent with Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of becoming animal is not surprising: both are ultimately concerned with the way in which this structural boundary functions within human culture to exclude.

The story is told through alternating chapters, one stream labelled Past and the other Present. In the Past narrative, we learn about Asa Elias Doyle, or Eli, an astronaut who is the sole survivor of an expedition to Proxima Centauri, and his struggle to adapt to the virus he has brought back with him. In the Present narrative, we are told the story of Blake Maslin and his two daughters, Rane and Keira, who are kidnapped and infected by Eli and his group of animalized humans. The tension between these two narrative moments—Eli in the past struggling against the virus and trying to cling to his humanity versus Eli in the present adding to his community—reinforces the difficulty of social transformation on the one hand, and its necessity on the other. The tension between the two narratives allows Butler not only to explore the difference between humans as molecular, becoming-animal subjects and humans as fixed, molar individuals but further allows her to show the difficult struggle the subject must face in order to embrace becoming. The becoming in the novel is caused by an alien virus, something from outside the self that feels as if it is taking over and destroying one's identity; as the novel progresses, however, the characters are forced to recognize that they maintain their identities even within their changed selves. Butler shows that becoming, expressing channels of desire and potentialities disallowed by the current cultural formation, is a difficult and often painful process, involving losses of security and comfort as well as gains in options and new connections. Butler's novel may be read as a concrete and more accessible working through of Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical arguments about becoming, and her engagement with these themes demonstrates how painful it is to change a "sick" society, while still insisting that such change is necessary.

When we first meet Eli, he is described in terms that remind us of animals, catching and consuming prey "raw, splashing their blood," and able to "smell water the way a dog or a horse might." Even in his own mind, "his humanity had been in question for some time" (3); he is presented as a dangerous figure, fearing what might happen if he gives in to desire. In these Past sections, once Eli has infected a farm and decided to try to build a new life there with people like him, he struggles with the difference he has introduced. Eli tries to keep eating cooked food because "it was a human thing that he clung to" (73). He finds himself suspicious of "any feeling that would have been repugnant before his illness, but that was now attractive" (89) and insists that the community he builds must be "a human gathering, not a herd" (90). In this and other ways, the Past section of the narrative reinforces the use of human/animal boundaries in familiar ways. Being human is something desirable, worth clinging to.

The stability of this boundary is undermined almost immediately in the first Present chapter, the second chapter in the novel. Blake and his daughters are

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attacked by Eli's people and the transformed humans initially seem dangerous because of the preceding chapter, but the boundary between the "animal humans" and the "real humans" is almost immediately challenged. First, Blake notes his own capacity for "animal-like" violence when he thinks to himself that he would have "shot them [the changed humans] without a thought" (12) in order to protect his daughters. Further, he observes that these strange people act "as though they did not like what they were doing— almost as though they were under the gun themselves" (12-13), suggesting the possibility of sympathy and affinity across the boundary. As the novel continues and we learn more about the world of the present, the boundary between human and animal is increasingly compromised. While Eli's people are animal-like in terms of some of the associations of animality, the most "animal" behavior we see in this world—in the sense that we use the label to mean morally reprehensible, or the opposite of human or humane—is from other human characters.

This is a world divided between walled enclaves of people and the discarded or "stray" human animals outside. The descriptions, using terms such as "rat packs," "sewers," and "stray," recall how the category of the animal is used to mark the boundary between those people who "achieve" humanness and those who do not. The human animals are led by a man named Badger, a name that reinforces the tendency to associate the animal with all that is worst about humans. Badger and his people engage in many horrifying acts of violence and sexual predation, partly motivated by their poverty and outcast social status, but also by their own desire for sadistic pleasure. The level of violence is disturbing, including a teenage girl gang-raped to death while her even younger brother is castrated and bleeds to death. Badger and his group are animal in a molar or fixed way, animal by imitation (signalled by the adopted name among other things) and animal in a way that has little to do with "actual" animals and much to do with the construction of a category called animal to describe all that we don't want to admit to the category of human. Eli and his people, on the other hand, are animal in a molecular or fluctuating way, adopting certain behaviors and changes typically labelled as animal (eating raw meat, engaging in indiscriminate sexual activity) but not accepting with this change other aspects that are part of our cultural construction of molar animal identity, the vicious and amoral "animal" constructed solely as the opposite of the humanist human.

As Blake and his family struggle in the present—and Eli in the past—to accept the changes they experience, Butler is careful to insist that they do not lose self as a consequence of these changes, but rather experience a new kind of self. The changes need not be seen as negative; for example, Keira is terminally ill before she is changed but healed through the transformation process. Another character, Ingraham, was one of the violent, criminal predators of this world before he was changed, but is now able to be part of a family and community. Nothing less than total transformation is sufficient, and the novel stresses again and again that the old associations, categories, and judgments must be entirely abandoned, that "[w]e don't care what he did before. He's one of us now" (21). The molecular becoming animal, then, promises a change not only in terms of specific affinities or abilities—animal

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traits—but also and more importantly in the very categories and grids of possible identity, in what the word animal means. Thus, this novel moves Butler's concern with hierarchy and prejudice beyond an engagement only with the unjust content of such discrimination and toward a critique and dismantling of the very logic of categories or boundaries that sustains it.

Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that this "real" of becoming is possible outside the tropes of science fiction, that the multiplicity of becoming is always a multiplicity "dwelling within us" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 240), an expression of our own unactualized potential. Becoming may be symbolized by beings who appear to occupy the boundary between two given categories—such as human and animal—but in practice all live in this zone of indeterminacy. The space in which the old boundaries and the molar identities they mark fall apart has room "for other becomings, 'other contemporaneous possibilities' that are not regressions but creative involutions bearing witness to '*an inhumanity immediately experienced in the body as such*'" (273; italics and quotation marks in original). While this inhumanity can be frightening, Butler takes care to show us that it is not evil or foreign. Only by giving up our notions of normal—and the human/animal boundary that has been structured around normalcy—can we begin to embrace "other contemporaneous possibilities" and transform ourselves and our societies. This question of transforming society—and adjusting to such change—is a motif present in all of Butler's work.

In *Clay's Ark*, however, not all are able to survive such a transformation; not all are sufficiently open to difference and change. One character, Zeriam, kills himself before the virus finishes transforming him. His suicide note explicitly identifies a fear that in becoming different he will be foreign to his old or "essential" self, expressing "his fear of losing himself, becoming someone or something else" (141). While this fear is understandable, Deleuze and Guattari would argue that it arises from a misunderstanding of what the self was in the first place. To take one set of connections and couplings, one channelling of desire, as more "normal" or "natural" than another, as more authentically one's "true" self, is radically to miss the point of a politics of becoming and of Butler's novel. Butler stresses, particularly through the focus on the two Elis, past and present, that such transformation is neither a loss of self nor a negative thing. The reality of becoming is a reality of continual transformation, an openness not only to other ways of being, but a permanent openness to the possibility of change. The molecular subjectivity of becoming refuses to be fixed into any molar identity, any grid of categories of inclusion or exclusion. All potentialities are equally "authentic" and "me," and only societal power structures determine how desire is channeled and which identities are fixed as molar.

The point, then, for Deleuze and Guattari and for Butler, is not simply to challenge the human/animal boundary as it has been specifically configured by Western culture, although this is indeed a part of the point. The wider point is to transform the political and social arrangements that have been erected on the ground of fixed and molar categories of identity and belonging. Deleuze and Guattari privilege supple, molecular individuals who have not lost the sense of

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multiplicity within unity. In contrast, being a person, a human, is hardening into a molar form, a being able to be "grasped" from the outside as a whole by social forces and thus fixed into a restricted social identity. The concept of refusing wholeness, for Deleuze and Guattari and for Butler, represents openness toward change and difference, a suppleness and flexibility that enable people to survive the difficult process of social transformation. And because becoming and molecular identities challenge not only particular molar identities but the very structural formations that have shaped those particular identities, the notion of becoming is very useful for understanding Butler's move from challenging *examples* of racism and other prejudice (seen earlier in the series) to challenging the *grounds* of such prejudice, the grid of categories.

In the climax of *Clay's Ark*, Blake and his family escape from Eli's farm only to be captured by another group of humans, a car family, who prey upon others. In contrast to the humaneness with which Eli and the changed humans treat Blake's family, this new group of unchanged humans treats Blake's family with a viciousness that makes us question the human/animal boundary. Although the car family has not literally become animal, they act in ways that are frequently described as animal-like, reminding us of how the term "animal" has been deployed to separate some human beings from the category of human. Butler makes clear her concern with human openness to difference through the varying responses of Blake's family to the contrast between Eli and the car people. Blake and his family had been refusing to accept the difference implied by viral infection until this event. His daughter Rane in particular is frightened by the idea of a non-human future. The younger[3] daughter Keira wants to call Eli for help in escaping the car family, but Rane strongly resists, arguing that "his kind ... aren't people anymore" and that "they're not human. Their children don't even look human" (152). Rane is so closed to difference that she prefers to stay with the car family, despite the violence and horror she has witnessed, rather than return to Eli's people and the inevitability of becoming-animal through the virus.

To be open to difference, to accept seductive new channels for desire and new modes of being, is essential for social transformation in both Butler and Deleuze and Guattari. Keira survives because she is able to accept the Other as merely unactualized potential desire in herself, as part of her own multiplicity, rather than as evil because different. Rane, in contrast, is emphatically not open to such difference. Through another difference between Keira and Rane, Butler emphasizes that the discourse of species in the novel stands in for other exclusions in human culture, particularly racial ones. While twins, Keira and Rane do not look alike; in fact, they are told that they "barely look like members of the same family—let alone twins" (16). Their chief physical difference is skin color; we are reminded on a number of occasions that Keira is darker than her sister. Racial difference and the limits it places on human bonds of kinship are also emphasized in the novel by the fact that Blake is white and thus not apparently the father of his children. Eli is black, a fact we learn in the Past narrative when he arrives at the white farm and an attraction develops between him and the daughter, Meda. One of her brothers says, "If

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that guy were white, I'd tell you to marry him" (60), but it is also clear that not being white entitles Eli only to the hospitality owed a stranger, not to kinship with the family.

The persistence of such attitudes compels the need for change on the structural level of the categories themselves, beginning perhaps with the category of human. In this world of mixed racial couples, a black man can be selected as an astronaut for an elite mission, yet racist judgments also continue. Such anxiety about race and difference is translated into anxiety about species in the text, but linked back to race through the different reactions of Keira and Rane to the new species. Each girl is introduced to the next generation of changed people, children who are animal-like in their morphology as well as in their behavior. Keira sees the children as "perfect," perfect examples of what they are, which is not human babies; she sees them as beautiful and sphinx-like (112). Rane on the other hand labels the children "All animals? All things?" (83) and confesses that this is because they "look different. Because [she is] afraid of [them]" (99). A fearful response to difference, particularly racial difference, is common in Butler's futures. The novel emphasizes that Keira's darkness has produced her greater openness to difference and change. Eli praises Keira's kindness to the children in contrast to the way new people often react to them, and Keira recalls, "She knew about ugly reactions ... walking down a city street between her mother and her father had taught her quite a bit" (119).

The difference between Keira and Rane is precisely the difference between a subjectivity open to becoming and a subjectivity trapped in being. A large part of Rane's anxiety is that she finds Eli's people attractive, seductive, suggesting that they represent unrecognized potentialities within her, but that she, like Zeriam, cannot face the reality of her own multiplicity, her own molecular becoming. Rane prefers the security of molar categories, an animality she can clearly resist and see as other to herself, rather than as the dangerous fusion of self and other that Eli's people represent. Although she is threatened with rape by the car family, she prefers rape to the possibility that the changes wrought by the virus would mean that she would soon embrace sex with any available man through her own "choice" (153) if she returned to the farm. Keira is more terrified by the car family, arguing that the seductive aspect of Eli's people means "that they weren't really bad people—not the way rat packs are bad. They're different and dangerous" (153). In contrast to Keira's openness, Rane's intolerance of difference demonstrates that becoming-animal actually is destructive of self for Rane because, like Badger, she becomes animal in a molar rather than a molecular way. Keira is able to make a place for herself as part of the new family of changed humans, even though her initial desire for a monogamous relationship with Eli cannot be fulfilled. Rane, on the other hand, feels as though she is "two people" in the midst of her transformed behaviour, one part "scream[ing] and soundlessly weeping" (184) while the other part of her comes to frighten even the car family with its desire for sex and raw meat.

Rane's transformation is molar, a complete loss of human self in order to become an animal self as she understands it. Because Rane is not open to

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difference and a fusion of the categories human and animal, she can reconcile her feelings and actions only through the belief that "part of her seemed to die" (184). Rane can only understand molar identity, and thus she feels that any animal behavior on her part must represent a complete loss of self, a total transformation into animal. Rane's transformation, however, is, like Badger's, not a becoming, but only an imitation or identification. Her allegiance to the fixed categories of human/animal renders Rane unsuitable for the new world of the novel. Deleuze and Guattari argue that becomings are molecular, never molar; that becoming-animal is the production of "the molecular animal (whereas the 'real' animal is trapped in its molar form and subjectivity)" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 275). Because Rane is not open to becoming, she cannot become animal, but can only imitate the animal and be trapped in its molar form, just like a "real" animal. The molar forms, those "we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit" (275) are ultimately what need to be transformed in order to truly rethink subjectivity and biopolitics.

Kinship, Ethics, and the Species Boundary. Deleuze and Guattari have argued that the tension between potential connections expressed or excluded in current identity formation is a question of social and political power. Subjects most disadvantaged by the current power grid are also the most open to alternative currents of desire and being, as suggested by the difference between Keira and Rane. Deleuze and Guattari insist that becomings are minority identities, but clarify that their concept of the opposite—majority—is not a majority based on number, but rather a majority in terms of relative social power. The majority is "the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc." (*A Thousand Plateaus* 291). Minority becomings are thus always articulated against the majority as "normal." Deleuze and Guattari further note that the power of the majority is expressed precisely "over those who do not [have it]" (291). Expressed in these terms, then, the majority is the position of the white, the male, and ultimately of the human over and against the animal. The majority "assumes as pregiven the right and power of man" (291).

This status of the majority aligns Deleuze and Guattari's position with Agamben's analysis that the "the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict" is the boundary between human and animal (*The Open* 80). To reconfigure what it means to be a human subject, to transform the social and political order, we need becomings, not molar human /animal. The PATTERNIST series suggests a very similar analysis in its trajectory from the least animalized to the most animalized of its disenfranchised subjects and in its insistence that the structure of prejudice must change as much as its content to make a better future. The category of animal and all the exclusions it represents must be changed if we are to become open to difference and a new order. The tension between the becoming animal of the infected people and the being animal of abject humans such as the car family further emphasizes the need to break down the logic of the species boundary. Most of the people taken by Eli seem to

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prefer the life they can have within the farm community; Lupe says she was "alone" on the outside, but that on the farm she is "part of something, and it feels good" (85). Ingraham was once like the car family, but now is something more: "Take away the gang and give him something better and he turns into a person. A man" (85). What we call "human" or "person," "man" in this context, is something that Ingraham can discover only through becoming animal. Ingraham's example reinforces why Deleuze and Guattari argue that it is necessary to become animal, to break out of the channeled lines of desire that have produced the current, limited configuration of the human.

Within the Western philosophical tradition, the species boundary has been used most frequently to demarcate the lines of ethics. Humans are those to whom we owe an ethical duty, whom we recognize as kin in Derrida's terms, and animals are those outside this logic, able to be sacrificed as food, used as resource. In the Past sections of the novel, when Eli struggles to hold on to his humanity, he invokes this idea that ethics marks the species line. Eli insists, "We're changed, but we have ethics. We aren't animals" (39). Eli equates ethics with his humanity. In an argument over the ethics of kidnapping people to grow the colony, another character, Lorene, gleefully comments, "this is the kind of thing you always read about men doing to women—kidnapping them, then the women getting to like the idea. I think I'm going to enjoy reversing things" (108). Eli harshly reminds her that the man she is about to kidnap might die, that he has a family he is being taken away from. He refuses to ignore the wider context of what they are doing and what it means to the people they are doing it to, arguing "We've lost part of our humanity. We can't lose more without even realizing it" (109). Consistent with the gap between molar being and molecular becoming represented by the difference between Keira and Rane, simply reversing the power structures to privilege those who used to be excluded is not sufficient. Instead, the structures themselves must be changed.

The exchange between Eli and Lorene suggests that keeping one's humanity means keeping a sense of the Other as person, as someone to whom we owe an ethical duty. But, to remain ethical, one must keep the sense of the boundary alive, maintaining an ethical duty only toward other humans while acknowledging that there is a line beyond which no ethical duty is owed. Eli fights against putting unchanged humans on the other side of this line, but he doesn't challenge the existence of the line. There are, however, two important things to note here that undermine Eli's attempt to construct this boundary as stable. First, the situation that Lorene takes glee in subverting is one that commonly occurs among humans; she is just reversing the gender. Thus, the notion of ethics as particularly human is already undermined because we often fail to see kinship with different humans, fail to recognize our ethical duty. Second, Eli's insistence that they hold on to their humanity by not putting unchanged humans into the category of prey or animal reveals that this sort of category, this sort of sacrifice or reduction of the other, is precisely a human invention. In holding on to what he calls his humanity, Eli ironically preserves as much bad as good. The ethics that have been established on the ground of the excluded animal

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require a category of beings outside ethics. Rethinking identity and animality demands a new vision of ethics as well as a new vision of the human.

Derrida has explored the necessary connection between ethics and the category of the animal in his essay "The Animal that Therefore I Am" (2002). He notes a dishonesty or bad faith that lies at the heart of how we establish our subjectivity on the ground of the excluded animal and thereby refuse the status of ethics to our interactions with animals. He points out that within the philosophical tradition of talking about the animal, philosophers proceed "as if they themselves had never been looked at, and especially not naked by an animal that addressed them" (383). Derrida claims that this tradition is founded on a disavowal: as it is not possible that they lack the experience of being looked at, we must conclude that they cannot admit it into their philosophy. This disavowal that animals can look back, Derrida goes on, "institutes what is proper to man, the relation to itself of a humanity that is above all careful to guard, and jealous of, what is proper to it" (383). Thus, what it means to be ethical, to retain one's humanity in the old configuration that unites the human with the ethical, is paradoxically also to retain the space of exclusion. Derrida further suggests that literary or poetic traditions of discourse do "admit taking upon themselves the address of an animal that addresses them" (383) but claims that he can find no example of a subject who does this as "theoretical, philosophical, or juridical man, or even as citizen" (383). Thus, to be a citizen, to be a majority in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, is precisely to exclude the voice and gaze of the other, of the animal. Science fiction such as Butler's *Clay's Ark* can perhaps bridge the gap between a literary tradition that admits the address of animals and a philosophical and cultural discourse that addresses what is proper to human as subject and citizen.

Looked at in this light, we can see something more positive and less conventional in Eli's defense of the need to retain ethics even in a transformed state, something beyond reaffirming the boundary marked by animal/human even if its location has perhaps been shifted. The more radical implication, however, is that the ethics, too, must become other. The changed people of *Clay's Ark* never forget that the unchanged can "look back" at them. Their own subjectivity is not constructed on disavowal of the subjectivity of others. Derrida suggests that a similar transformation is required of contemporary humans, who need to develop a changed relationship to compassion as a consequence of our changed material relationship with animals, a material change that has increased the degree to which we exploit them in laboratory experiments and factory farms, among other locations. Such a change is required, Derrida argues, "in order to awaken us to our responsibilities and our obligations with respect to the living in general" ("The Animal" 395). Derrida's notion of a responsibility toward life in general is very similar to what Agamben has called "bare life" in his analysis of *homo sacer*: that is, an ethical responsibility toward living beings as such, not merely an ethical responsibility toward beings given a recognized place within the grid of juridico-political power. Both Agamben and Derrida recognize that rethinking the category of the animal is essential to revisioning ethics. In her exploration of difference, prejudice, and ethics in the

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PATTERNIST series, Butler shows how the human tendency to make "animals" of different humans is at the heart of these problems.

Thus, Derrida's and Agamben's recent work on the philosophical history of the category "animal" brings to light the structural problem with hierarchy and prejudice. Keeping the category of the animal retains its function of restricting some humans from full humanity, as in Deleuze and Guattari's majority, the "human" of this ethical, metaphysical schema is the privileged, unmarked, white male. In recognition of the importance of the human/animal boundary to this tradition, Derrida argues that the concept of the subject in Western metaphysics is elaborated according to the logic of "*carno-phallogocentrism*" ("Eating Well" 113), but further that since we have to eat (one other, carnivorously) the question should become how does one "eat well," eat as a way of being in the world, as a way of sharing perspective rather than destroying the consumed. Derrida suggests that a starting point is "respect for the other at the very moment when ... one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorized, understood ideally (something one can never do absolutely without *addressing oneself to the other* and without absolutely limiting understanding itself, the identifying appropriation)" ("Eating Well" 115). This notion of eating the other as a way of sharing the perspective of the other, of being in the world and relating to others in a way that is respectful instead of destructive of difference, is like what Butler imagines with the character of Anyanwu in *Wild Seed*, who in eating animals is able to share their being.

Butler also explores the notion of "eating well" or relating to difference in positive ways in *Clay's Ark*. One of the changed children, Jacob, says that unchanged humans smell like food to him. This moment is perhaps the most horrifying in the novel, where accepting kinship with the animalized humans is most difficult. It is, however, also the moment at which the cultural logic that underlines the human/animal divide and the implications of this line are most apparent. In "Eating Well" Derrida argues that carno-phallogocentric discourses of Western culture "install the virile figure at the determinative center of the subject" (280) and abject others who don't have the same "appetites" as these "men" (281). The logic that equates subjecthood with appetite in this way also requires the sacrifice of animals in such a way that putting them to death is not considered killing (283). This logic of the subject is also the logic of ethics that respects only particular kinds of life rather than life in general. Derrida calls for us to awaken to "our responsibilities and our obligations with respect to the living in general" (282), to refuse to allow the comfort of a disavowal that the animal can look back, but requiring us instead to see ourselves through the eyes of someone who sees us the way we see animals, through carno-phallogocentrism: as food.

Reading the changed children as sympathetic characters demonstrates for us that a better future requires the acceptance rather than the elimination of difference, the requirement to live harmoniously with the Other rather than to dream of a homogenous utopia. Becoming-animal in the novel is thus a way to reconfigure what it means to be a subject and what it means to have an ethics.

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Keith Pearson has argued that Deleuze conceives of artists, writers, and film-makers as catalysts who, "in a condition where a people and the conditions for the expression of its revolutionary desire are missing," are able "to articulate potential forces of change and produce utterances that are like the germs or 'seeds of a people to come'" (*Germinal Life* 197-98).[4] Butler's Clayark people are just such a seed, living up to the implications of the novel's title. The name *Clay's Ark* is originally the name of the spaceship upon which Eli became infected, but ultimately the title comes also to signify the farm community as the ark of the new humanity to come.

Despite the darkness of the novel, with its exploration of infection and transformation, *Clay's Ark* ends on a positive note. Change will not be painless or quick, but the implications of the binary logic of human/animal, us/them are ultimately more pernicious than what replaces them. At the end, the virus does get off the farm and into the larger world, and the viciousness of human greed allows it to happen: a trucker is infected while attempting to rob Blake after deliberately running him down. Although they try to stop the disease, Eli's people accept the inevitability of wider infection—which is also wider social transformation—and begin to prepare themselves for the next stage: of helping those they can through the painful transition. They remind one another that the important thing is to "remember the kids" (210), the long-term future. That this future will be better is implied by the change we have already seen in the farm community. The white farm "infected" by Eli is transformed into a multiracial as well as an "animalized" community by the end of the novel, including Hispanic, black, and Asian as well as white characters. The Epilogue suggests that things get worse before they get better, but "a new order ... a new species" (212) will emerge. Butler's infected humans are thus ultimately ideal nomadic subjects, so resistant to the grid of channelled desire and identity-formation that even the limitation of species is transcended. This will also be a change for the entire planet, Butler suggests, given that there is "nothing on Earth that can penetrate [the changed human's] flesh and come away unchanged" (94).

At the end of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben calls for the need to theorize a politics that now includes bare life within sovereign power, a politics of all living things, not simply a politics of human as citizen. He continues his analysis of how the human/animal boundary is implicated in this new politics in *The Open*, and concludes that work by suggesting that rethinking a new subject for politics and a new world order will start with rejecting the anthropomorphic machine by which we have constructed our concept of humanity. The way to do this, he suggests, is "no longer to seek new—more effective or more authentic—articulations [of the separation of human and animal], but rather to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness" (92). The new space for politics will be constructed through notions of subjectivity based on subjects such as the werewolf, discussed by Agamben, or the transformed people of Butler's *Clay's Ark*. Both theorize a new relationship between humans and the rest of life, a subject that is becoming, not being, a subject that is a "deterritorialized variable of the majority" (Deleuze and Guattari 292), no longer connected to

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exclusionary molar categories of subjectivity, promising a politics of multiple perspectives and affinities.

NOTES

1. See Alaimo, Boulter, Green, Holden, Luckhurst, Peppers, Salvaggio, and Zaki for interpretations of other works by Butler that emphasizes human fear of difference and the need for greater openness toward the Other.

2. In *Perceiving Animals*, Erica Fudge reviews the historical malleability of the boundary between human and animal and the various criteria for "achieving" humanity that have changed since the Early Modern period. For example, the category of animal as pet, and therefore not food, emerged only in the sixteenth century when domestic livestock animals were being removed from homes. In the nineteenth century, pets received legal status as property and thus a degree of protection under the law. More recently, the notion that animals might have rights in and of themselves (rather than the status of property) structures much of the activism against laboratory testing and other uses of animals for human needs in our culture. Fudge also discusses responses to the perceived erosion of the boundary between human and animal. For instance, in 1633, William Prynne attacked the theater on the grounds of the immorality of both cross-dressing and animal costumes. Regarding the animal costumes, Pyrnne argued, "must it not then be man's sin and shame to act a beast, or bear his image ... what is this but to obliterate that most glorious image which God himself hath stamped on us" (qtd. in Fudge 61). The common concern with both animal costumes and cross-dressing suggests the ways in which concern about the human/animal boundary are irrevocably linked to concerns about boundaries among humans as well; thus the question of the animal becomes important for ethics.

3. Rane and Keira are twins, but Rane was born first. It is a family joke that Keira is the younger daughter, an identity reinforced by her frailty due to her illness.

4. The quotation within the quotation is from Deleuze's *Cinema 2*.

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores Octavia Butler's *Clay's Ark* as it articulates a parallel between the category of animality and a failure to recognize other humans as kin. Butler's work interrogates the idea of categorical exclusion implied by the human/animal boundary in order to challenge the very logic of discrimination rather than merely to challenge particular examples of discrimination as sexist, racist, etc. Using Deleuze and Guattari's model of subjectivity as becoming rather than being, I examine how Butler literalizes their example of becoming animal by imagining a virus that transforms humans into seeming human/animal hybrids. In the novel, humans who resist the change cannot survive, while those who embrace their new subjectivity represent a more humane future. The paper concludes with a discussion of the new kind of subject described in Butler's novel, one that recognizes boundaries of kinship usually disavowed by human culture, transforming not only what it means to be a subject but also our conception of ethics.

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