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Can a Species Be a Person?

A Trope and Its Entanglements in the Anthropocene Era

by Michael Carrithers, Louise J. Bracken, and Steven Emery

The notion that an animal species is comparable with a human person is unusual but significant in North Atlantic societies. We analyze this trope to make a case for rhetoric culture theory as a powerful form of anthropological analysis. The “species is person” trope has been woven with other tropes to make moral and cosmological arguments in the present geosocial era of environmental crisis. The trope stands against two others in North Atlantic societies, tropes that are themselves at odds: (1) other animal species are not persons but are means to our ends, and (2) each individual animal of a species is equivalent to an individual human person and so are ends in themselves. The “species is person” trope has been used to evoke the characteristically North Atlantic notion of sacred personhood to support action on behalf of human-distant species such as river-dwelling mollusks, species that unlike pandas or otters are not “charismatic.” The use of the trope both to alter understandings and to initiate commitments to action demonstrates its effectiveness as reasoning but also the importance of this style of analysis.

This essay follows the life story of an unusual idea in contemporary societies around the North Atlantic. The idea, that a biological species is analogous to a human person, has made a number of compelling public appearances in the last century and a half. It has been used “to teach” (Cicero’s word was *docere*) a particular understanding of situations but also “to move” (*movere*) people to particular action in situations. Our purpose is in part ethnographic—to display something of Our Society’s character—and in part theoretical—to argue the virtues of our explanatory style by demonstrating how it works.

That style has been called “tropology,” “pronominalism” (Fernandez 2009, 2010), or “social poetics” (Herzfeld 2005), but we will stick with the designation “rhetoric culture theory” suggested by Strecker and Tyler, founders of the recent Rhetoric Culture Project (Strecker and Tyler 2009a). Rhetoric culture theory is a “paradigm of understanding, a model of inquiry and a level of investigation in the human (social and cultural) sciences” that concentrates on “communicative interaction between persons and personified or typified or ste-

reotypified others . . . in ways transformative of identities” (Fernandez 2010:1). Thus—to coin an example using pronouns only—I may try to convince *you* to join *me* in a project, but when I start talking about *us* doing the project, I have transformed a separated *you* and *I* into an inclusive *we*; and you will be dragged into it unless you stop my sneaky rhetorical transformation and say, “what do you mean, *we*?” It is the constant play of designations—and not just by pronouns but also by naming, categorizing, describing, depicting, and narrating—that mark in social life both its constant constitutive rhetoric and its constant shifts and transformations: “You are a terrorist!” “No, I am a freedom fighter, you are the terrorist!” (For subtler examples, see Carrithers 2008, 2009b.)

Rhetoric culture theory understands human life to be conducted among constant change and transformation, a circumstance in which constantly adapting rhetorical effort is required. As Fernandez puts it, “investigative experience” suggests that we must “emphasize the motility and volatility of . . . interaction, that is to say its fundamentally inchoate and endlessly emergent quality” (Fernandez 2010:1). This endlessly emergent quality is reflected in our chief term of art, “trope.” The sense of “trope” is usually taken as a verbal and poetic figure, such as metaphor, metonym, allegory, or narrative. We stress, though, the active character of the concept as found in its etymological root, “a turn” or “turning”: in other words, a trope is an expressive action whether it is spoken, written, gestured, sung, enacted, drawn, photographed, etc. Tropes are “turnings” in the flow of events. They are responses to other actions, other events and happenings,

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and to situations that arise in the mutability and volatility of experience. Tropes exist not in airy mental timelessness but in the harried doings of people and are themselves events and actions aimed by people to call forth further actions and further tropes. Tropes are always addressed, always directed, to some other(s) and/or to oneself. And insofar as tropes succeed, they are transformative. As Kenneth Burke (1966) put it (we adapt his terms slightly), “even if any given trope is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a trope it must also be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality” (45). Once one interpretation of a situation out of all possible interpretations is selected and expressed, the situation itself is changed, deflected.

Others have recently written genealogies of these ideas and practices (Fernandez 1993, 2009, 2010; Strecker and Tyler 2009b) and theoretical arguments for them (Carrithers 2005a, 2005b, 2010; Rumsey 2009). Here we will address only two points that sometimes arise when rhetoric culture theory (or tropology or pronominalism or social poetics) is mentioned. First, though the emphasis may seem to some to lie on the shifting eventfulness of face-to-face interaction, in fact this eventfulness is always held in fruitful tension with a larger setting in keeping with anthropology’s project of showing how things go generally, routinely, in the taken-for-granted world of one society or another. In the current case the tension is with North Atlantic societies and our ways of dealing with animal species. Second, the concentration on tropes may to some seem narrowly belletristic or arty. But one of our apical ancestors is Eric Wolf, whose *Europe and the Peoples without History* (Wolf 1982) is far from belletristic. He posed a general challenge to anthropologists and other social theorists to face the reality that human societies are constantly disrupted by vicissitudes of history, including war, conquest or colonialism, or more quietly insidious transformations of trade or technological, political or ecological modification such that no culture can be represented as settled, timeless, or bounded. Wolf’s book is the most synoptic demonstration of this challenge, and subsequently a distinguished line of theorists (e.g., Fox 1985; Ortner 2006; Rosaldo 1989) have sought to find a workable general language to balance the habitually taken-for-granted of culture against such metamorphosis. Our current demonstration follows from *Why Humans Have Cultures* (Carrithers 1992), which argued in detail that we should regard sociocultural change not as an occasional interruption of a stability but rather as the constant and inevitable condition of human beings’ complex form of sociality. Here we extend that argument to show how, in the circumstance of human beings’ intense mutual awareness and interdependence, we work on one another to teach, to clarify, to persuade, and so to coordinate our perspectives and our activities. And indeed this is the reason we have wanted to use “rhetoric” in the name for this style of analysis: it evokes the sense of people working on one another.

The Trope

Our specimen trope is the unusual proposition that a biological species is equivalent to a human person. This is an idea that has had many uses, as we will see; and in each use, its meaning is subtly changed and adapted to circumstance. In order to keep alive this sense of flexibility, we will lift the symbol \approx out of its original place in mathematical notation, where it means “approximately equal to,” and use it here: species \approx person, to be read as an assertion or proposition: “a species is equivalent to a person.” We stress that we use this symbol not to import some spurious mathematical rigor into our argument but rather because it allows us to suggest the malleable, wiggly character of the trope and its consequent usefulness in many different settings.

We understand this trope as a problem-solving tool. We reason that (1) this analogy, species \approx person, is a resource for arguing, for identifying, and for understanding (for the centrality of analogy to human thought, see Brenneis 2005; Burke 1969 [1945]). (2) Depending on purpose and setting, the arguer can give the trope different weights or evaluations so that the final import of species \approx person varies flexibly. (3) In any argumentative setting, the trope leads to other tropes, identifications, and persons. Such associations between tropes—the evocations of connections and analogies that lead mind and heart to further understandings—is what we mean by “entanglements.” Tropes and their entanglements are to that extent plastic but not endlessly so, because (4) each trope exists among particular practices and in a particular history. We are concerned to stress the force of tropes, their pointed use in what the Greeks called *kairos*, the decisive moment, the strategic time and circumstance when a trope may be deployed effectively. For tropes are, like all tools, instruments of potential and possibility, and only in the variegated and unpredictable flow of events can we fully understand their significances, their entanglements, and their realizations (Carrithers 2005b).

Let us say something about our own rhetoric and its *kairos*. We are concerned here with personhood. In a more expansive present—one that takes our large moment as embracing a couple of generations, in any case hardly a century—ethnographers have become aware that societies differ on the question of who counts as a person and who does not and of which beings therefore belong within the circle of society and which do not. Some treat as persons a far smaller circle than we now do—societies have excluded women, infants, those regarded as disabled, and the uninitiated, for example (see cases in Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985). Or the circle of personhood may be cast more widely, including sacred animals, gods, apparently inanimate objects, and so forth. Here we are interested in personhood extending beyond the human species to other living beings. Some Buddhist forest monks in Sri Lanka, for example, not only observe with care the experiences and emotions they share with dangerous jungle

animals but also address them directly, calmly, in the second person when they come across them in the jungle. The monks speak of animals as friends and fellows in the cycle of existence and so recognize the animals' personhood and the moral dimension of the relationship between monk and animal (Carrithers 1983:290–293). Hallowell (1960) wrote of the Ojibwa sense of animal prey and hunters as persons mutually aware of one another and of animals as giving themselves to the hunter who responds with thankfulness. Subsequently many ethnographers have written of a wide range of societies for whom animals fall within the magic circle of personhood, and so within the morally imagined world of mutual gaze and mutual responsiveness, of reciprocity and/or relatedness (see, e.g., Bird-David 1999; Nelson 1983; Tanner 1979; and more recently Fausto 2007; Knight 2005; Kohn 2007; Nadasdy 2007).

Then—and here we come to a tighter present, one of only a couple of decades—ethnographer-theorists such as Ingold (2000), Descola (1996, 2005), Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004), and Latour (2004) have seized the moment, and by using such ethnographic materials they have offered not just a broad view across others' moral universes but also a sustained moral criticism of assumptions in our own society about the cosmos of living beings. Such Western assumptions include a deep divide between society and nature, between the agency of humans and the mere patiency of animals, between treating animals as objects or treating them as subjects, between humans' autonomous moral existence and animals' amoral existence for the use of humans, and so between human personhood and animal nonpersonhood. This set of Western assumptions has inspired and justified the technological prowess, and the heedlessness, that has brought about a dark new geological era, the Anthropocene (Chakrabarty 2009; Crutzen 2002), in which human activity catastrophically affects the destinies of all—plant, animal, and human—through global warming and mass extinction. The implied moral and cosmological bankruptcy of these assumptions was argued with special clarity by Ingold: we are “faced with an ecological crisis whose roots lie in this disengagement, in the separation of human agency and social responsibility from . . . our direct involvement with the non-human” (Ingold 2000:76). So, he continued, we should rewrite our relationship with animals as a moral one of “human *concern* with animals, insofar as this notion conveys a caring, attentive regard, a ‘being with’” (Ingold 2000:76). These ethnographer-theorists deploy what must be the anthropologist's master trope, anthropology's richest argumentative idea, that of a deep division between Our Society and The Others, and they do so in order to offer Us lessons from the deep well of the Others' philosophy to criticize Our own failures.

So we come down to this article. Our concern here is to explore a particular trope and its entanglements, but we write during the Anthropocene era and especially in the light of our theorist colleagues' subtle and compelling arguments. In that light, our “trope-ical” exploration has a particular point.

For, insofar as all our examples are drawn from Our Society and not from Others', we are looking at a native response to some of the consequences of the Anthropocene from among the very people, Us, whose thinking has done most to bring it about. We propose that the force of the rhetorical imagination can bend Our tropes or fashion new ones against what might seem Our grain in ways unforeseen and unforeseeable. What we offer here is one example of such bending and fashioning (for more substantial examples, see not only the ethnographer-theorists themselves but also Haraway 2008 and Milton 2002).

Our argument runs as follows. (1) The most direct supercharged argument on behalf of specific animals in Our Society is to equate an individual animal with an individual person. On these lines the powerful rhetoric that has been deployed so effectively to extend full autonomous moral personhood beyond well-to-do Northern European men to the poor, slaves, women, children, other races, and so forth can be, and has been, deployed for many animals. (2) But there are some species whose character seems, at least from the viewpoint of Our Society, resistant to such extension; the example we encountered in fieldwork is the freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera* L.), which is one among many candidates for conservation. (3) There are rhetorical resources to argue for such a species, especially the relatively less salient trope species \approx person. (4) The species \approx person trope can be made to implicate other tropes that entail the supercharged moral value of personhood without a direct equation of individual animal to individual human person. We find these resources applied in various domains in Our Society. (5) It is possible to make a strong argument for species such as the pearl mussel in Our Society based in moral values associated with personhood but without equating an individual pearl mussel to a person. In this respect Our Society's native imaginative resources can achieve “a caring, attentive regard, a ‘being with’” as Ingold (2000:76) put it, even for an apparently unpromising animal in an apparently constraining technocratic environment.

Implicit and sometimes explicit in our argument is the notion that *kairos* is not just a matter of timing—neither too soon nor too late—but also of appropriateness to an audience in their particular circumstance, which also means appropriate within a set of practices. For the freshwater pearl mussel here, those practices include informal exchanges between officers of government funded and legislated environmental bodies in the United Kingdom, more formal meetings between officers to establish a policy, and further meetings within each agency to certify the spending of money and time on one project or another; and the practices may be called “communicating,” “vetting,” “approving” or “rejecting,” “funding,” and so forth. We also meet, among other characters, the practices of “philosophizing” and “poetizing.” We are concerned chiefly with the repertoire of rhetorical tools, so we will give much less space to the practices, but it is important to bear in mind that the rhetoric only has purchase

and effect within such practices. As Karin Barber pointed out in a recent workshop, rhetoric only works when it occurs within a genre of performance: context makes sense possible.

Not Percy the Pearl Mussel

We draw our examples from across Our Society, but we begin with the conservation project that gave us the impetus for this essay, a relatively small-scale program in the United Kingdom to conserve and support a purely local population of the freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera* L. (1758). The pearl mussel is generally understood to be endangered across its range in subarctic Europe, North America, and Russia not only by indirect human action, such as diffuse pollution, but also by direct human action—they are, after all, pearl mussels, and hundreds must die before a single pearl is found. It is now illegal to fish them for pearls in the United Kingdom and many other countries, but nevertheless we observe strict anonymity not only of persons but also of agencies, regions, and rivers, all of which are given pseudonyms here.

The project, located in the catchment of the (pseudonymous) River Exx, was initiated by an officer of one environmental body who was aware of one or two similar projects elsewhere. But in the setting of neoliberal entrepreneurial bureaucracy of the United Kingdom, he had to persuade local partners in other agencies with no knowledge of the pearl mussel to match that funding with their own. It is important to understand that there was nothing automatic or routinely procedural about this, for compared with the time and resources available, there is an impossibly large number of species, habitats, and other responsibilities confronting each environmental agency and its officers. So a case still had to be made for choosing any one concern over others within one agency even before trying to persuade those in other agencies. The contingency of the pearl mussel project was expressed by one officer who said that “it had been on the agenda for a long time” but that “it just came together,” “it was an opportunity” rather than a necessity.

Moreover, the project required and still requires the continuing assent of the agencies. It still needs further research on the actual number of pearl mussels and on the conditions that cause them to decline. On the assumption that these conditions could indeed be identified and remedied, a number of mussels have been extracted and sent away to a captive breeding program, and they need continuous care (for a different view on such a project, see Callon 1986). The remedy itself requires publicizing the pearl mussel and its plight in part to inform the public at large and in part to enlist farmers in the Exx catchment to change their practices, especially those that involve the release of fine sediment and/or diffuse pollution into the river. These results, when and if they appear, must be monitored, and in fact the project as a whole is labor intensive, expensive, and prolonged. It envisions eventual success some years from now, when the river will have been cleaned up and made fit for the replacement of the (projected)

new population of mussels in the Exx even though there is no predictable funding stream available within the agencies to cover so long and ambitious a trajectory. So the project will require continual rhetorical and financial refreshment into the indefinite future.

Nor was it at all easy to get the project started in the first place, in part because the mussel is rhetorically disadvantaged. Many experienced anglers and conservationists in the region were unaware of its existence. In mature form it is 12–15 cm in length, and it lives partly buried among gravel and stones on the river bottom, filtering nourishment from the water. The mussel is dark gray brown to black. Its flesh is practically inedible. It possesses very limited mobility, burrowing beneath rocks or into gravel at an imperceptible rate. It does appear among the priority species of the United Kingdom’s 2007 Biodiversity Action Plan,¹ but there it is only one of 1,150 species. Moreover, it is down among the insects and spiders in the Biodiversity Action Plan’s “terrestrial invertebrates,” a categorization that leaves it far from the birds and mammals who receive the greatest attention both in absolute number of species and in number of species relative to the total existing species in their category (Clark and May 2002; Lorimer 2006). For not only people in general but also environmental officers and conservation ecologists tend to concentrate on “charismatic species,” species that have big eyes and fur, such as pandas or lemurs; big eyes and impressive movement, such as whales and otters; impressive movement and/or striking color, such as kingfishers or kites; striking colors, such as butterflies and orchids; or at least a widely known narrative of human contact, such as wolves and salmon (Clark and May 2002; Lorimer 2007).

But there is more to it than that; in the absence of eyes, whose glance we might interpret, or movement, whose significance we can know as a response to our own movement, any individual pearl mussel is difficult to encounter in the second person, as a *thou* to my *I*. The direct signal we receive from an individual mussel is faint (though perhaps among other societies it might be received more strongly; see Bird-David 1999; Hallowell 1960). This second-person disadvantage is reflected in the everyday rhetoric of what Fernandez (1986) and Carrithers (2008) call “inchoate pronouns.” Here the idea is not that there is a class of pronouns that are inchoate but rather that the work of rhetoric begins with matters that are unclear, unformed, and hence inchoate, and may therefore appear at first only as a “they,” perhaps, or as an “it,” hence “pronoun.” If we take the mussel to be the inchoate X, then there was a very definite grain in the officers’ rhetoric. We found that the conceptual language available to them offers roughly three resources, three possibilities, for designating *M. margaritifera*. (1) The first possibility is to refer to a species (“the pearl mussel”). (2) The second is to refer to a number of individuals (here a “population”). (3) The third is to refer to a particular individual. The first and second

1. <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/> (accessed August 27, 2009).

of these possibilities are contained in the following interview segment.

Officer A: You know there's only [a certain number of rivers] that've got it, er got pearl mussels, they're going, they're declining across Europe, so you're doing something that's internationally important, it's an internationally important species.

Interviewer: Mm, yeah.

Officer A: You know it ticks, it ticks all the right boxes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Officer A: Even though it isn't the most attractive looking creature [laugh].

So Officer A referred to *M. margaritifera* as a plural ("they're going, they're declining across Europe") and as a kind or species ("it's an internationally important species," "it isn't the most attractive looking creature"). There is nothing surprising here to one steeped in Our culture, and indeed we have been driven to writing of "the pearl mussel" ourselves.

The third possibility might seem the most promising. By far the greatest weight of contemporary ethical argumentation for animals in Our Society is founded in the comparing of animal individuals with human individuals. Thus Singer (1976), for example, begins from the utilitarianist proposition that human persons have interests, and in particular, an interest in avoiding pain, and so do animals. Regan (1983) begins from a richer proposition, namely that human persons/animals are "subjects of a life," and so their life matters to them in many ways: they have feelings, memories, intentions, and something like life projects, including an awareness such that these projects matter to them (Regan 1983:264; for a penetrating critique of current arguments, see Fellenz 2007). The method of these and many other arguments is to identify some traits in individual human beings that are not only generic to all human beings but also compel moral regard and moral evaluation of behavior such that they are regarded as persons rather than as mere organisms. These moral identifications are then attributed to individual animals with the immediate implication that they, too, should be the subject of such moral regard.

In these and other cases (e.g., DeGrazia 1996) the arguments reflect a larger and older movement in Our Society in which personhood has become sacred, a central guiding value—or, as we would wish to put it, a central argumentative resource. Durkheim observed that We have reached a condition in which the person is at once the worshipper and the worshipped (see Carrithers 1985:239; cf. Hunt 2007). Such sacred value can be applied positively but also negatively, as when we deplore slavery, whose evil lies in treating people for their labor alone; or genocide, whose evil lies in treating people merely as possessors of some adventitious trait, such as race or religion, rather than as possessors of subjectivity and therefore holy persons. This complex of sacred personhood offers the advocate of animal rights a rich set of tropes and arguments, as for example in the Great Ape Project, where

positively, liberty for the animal person is argued, and negatively, the specter of slavery is invoked (Cavaliere and Singer 1993).² Moreover, even where philosophical writers argue for a general ethical commitment to species, they tend to start from the presumably clearer argument, that of commitment to individual animals (Johnson 1991; Rolston 1985). Against this background the most compelling argument for the pearl mussel would be to assert that each mussel has the right to exist, prosper, and fulfill its life project, just as each human being has the right to do so.

But that is not what happened. The officers did not speak of individual mussels, still less of encounters with individual mussels or rights of individual mussels, in any argumentative context of which we are aware except one. For we did meet, if only for a moment, the identification individual animal \approx individual person, and that was when an education officer suggested, after the project was established, that it might be useful to author a pamphlet about Percy the Pearl Mussel for children. This illustrates how far the imagination might go, and of course, imagination has already gone at least that far: we have had, among so many others, cartoon characters that represent a sponge, Spongebob Squarepants, and a machine, Wall.E. On the other hand, the idea of Percy seals the pearl mussel securely away into the world of childhood and make-believe, which Our Society marks so clearly apart from adulthood (Forrest, Goldman, and Emmison 2005). To our knowledge the pamphlet remained only a passing idea, but even if it had been realized, it would have been understood as supernumerary and fantastic, rhetoric for a special audience after the main case had already been made.

To be sure, there were some arguments on behalf of the pearl mussel already in place. First, it was often implicit that work for the pearl mussel would also effect the "restoration" of the Exx to something like a pristine state, with clear running water and little pollution, a generally accepted vision of change that laid the groundwork for many conceivable projects but not especially for the pearl mussel. Then there were regulatory measures to support the pearl mussel: *M. margaritifera* is explicitly listed as a species of special concern by the United Kingdom's 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and subsequent regulations, by the European Union's 1992 Habitat and Species Directive, and by the Invertebrate Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The pearl mussel had also been listed internally by the lead officer's agency as their responsibility. These listings had the following rhetorical entailments (among others). (1) The pearl mussel is of international importance. As Officer A above stated, "you're doing something that's internationally important, it's an internationally important species." The pearl mussel was thereby promoted to the planetwide realm of concern laid out in the 1991 Rio Convention on Biological Diversity and so into the master narrative of the Anthropocene era. (2) The

2. <http://www.greatapeproject.org/en-US/oprojetogap/Missao> (accessed September 20, 2009).

pearl mussel is endangered. This categorization from the Red List is the central trope of the official logic from which all else follows. The trope of “endangerment” is a rich one, is in fact a “story seed” (Carrithers 2009a), that is, a more extensive narrative wrapped up in a brief allusion. Endangerment authorizes concern. It is close to the widely used narrative idea of “crisis.” Just offstage lies the story seed of “extinction,” and together these entangled tropes again invite placement of the pearl mussel into the overarching story line of the Anthropocene.

As we understand it, these arguments make up more or less the necessary “official rhetoric” of the pearl mussel, that is, the cogent argumentation that counted properly within the elaborate practices of application, decision making, and financial oversight of each of the relevant environmental agencies. This was the rhetoric that, as Officer A above put it, “ticks the right boxes.” Once these identifications and attributions were in place, funding was justifiable, as was the use of officers’ time on the project. Yet these arguments, however necessary, were not sufficient, for they did not in themselves provide the moral energy that the original officer, and then his colleagues in his and other agencies, required to initiate so ambitious and uncertain a project. For that we must look elsewhere.

Arthur and the Snails

We turn now to examples in Our Society beyond the pearl mussel project. The next case was brought to us by a colleague doing research on the floods that recently struck the United Kingdom. Her research involved both rural residents living near the (pseudonymous) River Bee and the agencies who respond in one way or another to flooding. A large riverside meadow, vital to its owner as pasture, was left covered with gravel and cobbles, many larger than your head. In principle this could be remedied with earth moving equipment but for one snag: the field was designated as a special habitat for important rare or endangered species, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and so it was illegal to make any (so to speak) “unnatural” alterations to it even though it was now not much use as either habitat or pasture. Our colleague recounted this infuriating Catch-22 situation to an officer of an agency responsible for such environmental regulations. The officer responded by dropping out of his official role for the moment into a more sympathetic fellow human role. He said reflectively, “I suppose a person is more important than a snail or a butterfly.”

As our colleague understood it, this was a direct comparison between the person and the species affected by the river. Moreover—and this is a point on which we questioned our colleague closely—it was clear that when he spoke of “a person,” the officer was referring to an individual person, the person affected by the flood, whereas when the officer spoke of “a snail” or “a butterfly,” he was speaking of a species in

each case, the sort of species that might inhabit such a meadow.

This does not quite yet sound like good news for snails, butterflies, or pearl mussels, but there is more to be learned here. Let us treat the officer’s statement as an enthymeme, that is, as an argument offered not by linking statements into a fully explicit and formally deductive syllogism (quite rare in any case) but by calling on the audience implicitly to supply portions of an argument from common knowledge and sentiment (Bitzer 1959; Jasinski 2001; Walton 2001). There is no reason to regard an enthymeme as less rational or compelling than fully explicit argument, and indeed most of academic and natural scientific discourse proceeds by enthymeme (Crick 2004). In this case, the enthymeme can be analyzed into two rough propositions and a conclusion: (1) an animal species is comparable/equivalent to an individual human person, and (2) persons are more important (i.e., are to be valued more highly) than animals. Therefore, a person is more important than an animal species.

We presented this case to a selection of native speakers of English who were unlucky enough to cross our path along with our division of the enthymeme into these two constituent propositions. The second proposition, “persons are more important than animals,” was accepted as immediately intelligible and far from surprising. On the other hand, the first proposition, “An animal species is comparable to an individual human person,” was found to be intelligible but somewhat puzzling. In its raw form, the trope was unexpected, a more than everyday imaginative leap.

We got a stronger sense of its unusual but understandable character when another colleague, aware of our inquiries, brought us another example, its use in poetry. This was a line quoted in an *Observer* review of a collection of poems by Sharon Olds (2009) and quoted again in a BBC program in August 2009.³ It is a passage about the death of the poet’s mother:

now, if she goes,
when she goes, to me it is like the departure of a
whole small species of singing bird from the earth.

The most immediate echo of this passage is Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1963), with its suggestion of a threatening springtime without birdsong. In Olds’s poem the source of value is the “small species of singing bird,” whereas in the officer’s statement, the source of value is the person. The different directions of the rhetoric show how commonplace ingenuity can bend a trope to many purposes. But in both cases the somewhat unusual comparison species \approx person bears the weight of the argument.

We understand the “somewhat unusual” nature of the trope in line with the argument of Turner (1993), following Bicchieri’s essay (1988) on figurative thought in scientific the-

3. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/mar/08/one-secret-thing-sharon-olds>.

orizing. They argue that the usual distinction of literal versus poetical meaning, or denotation versus connotation, are not sharp distinctions or oppositions but points on a continuum of figurative language in which the comparison brings into being “a new sense, not reducible” to either of the items compared (Turner 1993:125; see also Brown 2003 for the use of metaphor in scientific thought). Some figures are so well worn that this “new sense” has lost its newness and so may seem routinely literal in meaning, but others, such as the species \approx person trope, still have power to surprise with a new(ish) insight.

In fact the trope has been more widespread in Our Society than its mildly surprising appearance in these contemporary examples would reveal. We have traced one appearance back to 1859, the year of the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. It was not Darwin, though, who developed the trope, but Arthur Schopenhauer, whose continual rewriting of his masterwork *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*World as Will and Representation*) culminated in the 1859 edition. Schopenhauer reflected to some degree the burgeoning of natural history that led to Darwin’s work, though Schopenhauer used little empirical material, and his purpose was entirely metaphysical. Both writers unified across a wide variety of phenomena, and in so unifying, both created a ground on which, at least eventually, animals and human beings might be thought of as comparable. But whereas Darwin wrote nothing explicitly to suggest the species \approx person trope in *On the Origin of Species*, Schopenhauer asserted the equivalence in some detail. He argued that the entire perceived phenomenal world is the outward expression of a single unseen dynamic force, the Will, which objectifies itself by steps into those entities and forces that we do perceive. His notion of these steps is not relevant here, but the outcome is. For Schopenhauer (1977 g[1859]) insisted that each animal’s character “is the same in the whole species” (207), whereas in the human being the character of “each individual is peculiar to him/herself” (208). Persons and species are thus comparable insofar as the character of “not only every person, but also of every animal species” (1977 [1859]:208) is to be regarded equally as an expression of that powerful underlying force, the Will.

If there is a clear evaluative grain in Schopenhauer’s argument, it is toward the valorization of the individual person as such (Carrithers 1985), with the implication—though not an implication explicitly argued—that a person is as valuable as an entire biological species. There is also an implicit effect of perspective such that human persons stand closer to the philosopher-observer and can be seen in individuating detail, whereas other species stand farther away and are distinguished only in their generic characteristics. Such a perspective is shared by many uses of the trope, though with very different evaluations drawn from it.

The trope appeared again in philosophical discourse in the twentieth century. Ghiselin (1974) and Hull (1976), writing as philosophers of biology, asserted that species are individuals

with the force of a much stronger and far more explicit identification than Schopenhauer’s: a species is an individual and not, say, a class or a set or a natural kind or any one of a number of other meticulously inflected terms, each of which has its own rules for use. The following are the relevant rules—in our language, the propositional tropes—that are entangled with the species-are-individuals proposition: species have proper names (such as *Margaritifera margaritifera* Linnaeus (1758), to give the pearl mussel’s full moniker), and species are particulars (i.e., unique individuals rather than sets, kinds, classes, etc.), and so a species can be the subject of a historical account (namely of its evolution).

This argument became a specially fertile and long-lasting source of dispute in that corner of the philosophy of science devoted to “the species problem,” the problem of giving an abstracting cogent argument for the rules and usage binding the concept “species”—an argument, in other words, for telling us what a species really is (for more recent treatments, see Coleman and Wiley 2001; Levine 2001; Rieppel 2007; for a view of the whole field, see especially Wilkins 2009; Wilson 1999).

In itself such argumentation is no better news for snails and pearl mussels than was Schopenhauer’s version. If this rhetoric is moving, it moves just toward agreement or disagreement with some argument rather than toward moral regard or action. Nor is the trope “a species is an individual” by any means necessarily entangled with the species \approx person trope; based on the argument of Ghiselin (1974), there are other kinds of individual, such as a country or a business firm, that could equally well fit with “a species is an individual.” Nevertheless, it is notable that each of the subtropes above fits well with the “a species is a person” proposition. Ghiselin himself repeatedly gives examples to connect “individual” with “person,” and Ghiselin’s argument is closely preceded by that of Strawson’s widely influential *Individuals* (1959), where the treatment of individuals as persons is pervasive. So if the concept “individual” here does not necessarily mean “person,” nevertheless the notion of the person is closely implicated with it.

Note, too, that in moving freely from Olds’s poetry to philosophy, we do not assume that poetry and philosophy are similar practices: they are not. In poetry, the reader is tasked with finding the implications and entanglements of the figure for herself, and much of the art of both reading and writing poetry lies in finding entanglements without spelling them out laboriously. In philosophy, especially Anglo-Saxon philosophy, the practice is to draw out implicated entanglements as explicitly as is humanly possible.

Roses and Loved Ones

Some, however, do mix philosophical and poetical practices. Schopenhauer was one, and now we turn to another, anthropology’s own philosopher, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Indeed, it seems to us likely that Schopenhauer echoed in Lévi-

Strauss's mind—he had been, after all, a teacher of philosophy—as he wrote this powerful passage from the 1962 work *La pensée sauvage*, a title poorly translated in 1966 as “the savage mind” (better: “wild thinking”):

All the members of the species *Homo sapiens* are logically comparable to the members of any other animal or plant species. However, social life effects a strange transformation in this system, for it encourages each biological individual [human being] to develop a personality. . . . What disappears with the death of a personality is a synthesis of ideas and modes of behaviour as unique and irreplaceable as the one a floral species develops out of the simple chemical substances common to all species. When the loss of someone dear to us or of some public personage such as a statesman, writer or artist moves us, we suffer much the same sense of irreparable privation that we should experience were *Rosa centifolia* to become extinct and its scent to disappear forever. From this point of view it seems not untrue to say that some modes of classing, arbitrarily isolated under the title of totemism, are universally employed: among ourselves this “totemism” has merely been humanized. Everything takes place as if in our civilization every individual's own personality were his totem: it is the signifier of his signified being. (Lévi-Strauss 1966:214)

It is characteristic of Lévi-Strauss's synoptic view of civilizations, Our Own and others, that he could, for his purposes of very serious play, knit together apparently widely divergent styles of thought. This is one of the most powerful argumentative effects of *La pensée sauvage*: we are constantly invited to find subterranean couplings between evidently disparate domains. Here he begins by showing us the human “biological individual” linked to individuals of other species, and then, through the “strange transformation” of social life, he gives us the development of a human trait, “personality.” Then, before we know it, we have glided across to Our contemporary Society and its notion of nearly sacred personhood (“totemism” [is merely] humanized . . . every individual's own personality [is] his totem”). He then expands this argument by further enthymematic play, now on the concept that we have rendered in English “unique.” The French is exclusive, which has the same rhetorical force and significance: it stresses the particularity and individuality of both person and species, and such uniqueness is lent weight and worth through an evocation of the consequences of its loss (“irreparable privation”). This is an important trope in itself: “to be unique is to be of irreplaceably great value.” This trope is tied to another: “the individual person is unique,” uniqueness being synonymous with particularity. That brings us back to “a person is of irreplaceably great value,” “a species is equivalent to a person,” and “a species is of irreplaceably great value.”

We set these out in schematic form in order to show the extended outline of the argument clearly, not to suggest that this is a sort of disguised syllogistic reasoning. These are

tropes, and so they, and their elements, may be applied flexibly. This becomes clear if we reflect on the key terms of Lévi-Strauss's tropes. Take particularity or uniqueness: as we gaze into the circular container beneath this desk, we find a composition of items that is indeed unique. There is even a discarded envelope there with a specific date and postmark whose presence makes the assemblage irreplaceable. But short of us fixing the contents in place and managing to sell the whole in an art gallery, it still lacks one thing, and that is memorable value. Similarly, in Our legal discourse, “person” must perforce refer not to a single particular individual but to all relevant “persons” who qualify under generalizing legislation. In the same sense, “individual” can just as well refer to one of a mass of otherwise indistinguishable individuals, as in Schopenhauer's myopic view of species. But here, to the contrary, Lévi-Strauss aims to evoke invaluable specificity, designated in this carefully wrought entanglement of tropes: “person—uniqueness—irreplaceably great value—species.”

Lévi-Strauss makes this connection convincing by the evocation of more or less intimate particulars. As Carrithers (2008) pointed out, such identifying rhetoric can work powerfully by moving back and forth between the generic/general and the particular/intimate. Thus Lévi-Strauss gives us species \approx *Rosa centifolia* (the especially fragrant Provence rose); person \approx someone dear to us or beloved writer/artist/statesman. In effect, this is an invitation to us, his readership, to fill in these still abstracted words with a specific image or images. The emotional charge is enhanced by the perfume of the rose and the affecting works of the writer, artist, or statesman and especially by the image—separate and particular to each of us, yet united in the similar bond of affection—of a beloved person. Such particularizing has three concomitants. First, it makes of any name something entirely specific and uniquely valuable. So we can add “name” to the shorthand list of our entangled tropes: “a person/species has a unique name/irreplaceably great value”: “person—name—uniqueness—irreplaceably great value—species.”

Second, this particularizing brings with it a powerful and motivating moral imperative. In evoking known “loved ones,” Lévi-Strauss directs his readers to kin and through them to what Meyer Fortes called the “axiom of amity” (Fortes 1970): “axiom” because of its foundational nature, “amity” because of the care for one another that marks such relationships. In this respect the phrase “irreplaceably great value” invites not just an inclination to agree with the dear person but also to act in the dear person's interests. Third, this concatenation of tropes brings to the fore a sense of relationship. In the case of a beloved artist or statesman, that relationship may entail, say, loyalty or admiration; in the case of kin, love; and in either case, a sense that the person/species is familiar, inhabits the same world, and so is what Schütz (1967) called a *Mit-mensch*, a being with whom one “has grown old.”

Lévi-Strauss is working still among the practices of philosophy and makes his arguments to secure assent. Yet he

touches a source of moral and rhetorical energy, *energeia*, which would have the force to achieve not just assent but also action.

Baptize an Orchid

Patenschaften für biologische Vielfalt (BIOPAT) is a non-profit charitable organization founded in 1999 in Germany through the quasi-nongovernmental overseas development organization Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ; Society for Technical Cooperation) at the instigation of a small group of taxonomists and field biologists. BIOPAT works in cooperation with a range of museums, research institutes, and individuals in the German-speaking world as well as with a wide range of conservation/biological research organizations in the global South all in order to “raise funds for taxonomic research and the preservation of biological diversity.”⁴ The *kairos* for this eloquent and effective rhetorical institution, then, is the Anthropocene crisis and in particular the circumstance that while living species across the world are threatened or disappearing, only a small proportion of the total number of current species have actually been entered into the collective archival knowledge of biology—a summary estimate is that only 1.7–2 million living species have been identified against a putative total number of species lying somewhere between 5 and 30 million (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005:19). While most of the scarce resources for finding new species and so for learning more about biodiversity is found in the global North, by far the greatest number of species is found in the fecund tropics, the global South—whence the involvement of the development agency GTZ.

The practices thus supported by BIOPAT are those of field biologists and taxonomists: the discovery, describing, *naming*, and classifying of new species (n. 4; see also Tattersall 2007; Thalmann 2007). We italicize “naming” in order to stress its importance among the whole set of practices. On one hand, this act of naming is relatively conventional, governed by the rules formalized by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, and BIOPAT follows the strict practice of ensuring that any species they name and classify appears in a peer-reviewed publication, thus establishing the species within the distributed database of all so far known species (Bowker 2006). Yet the act of naming, however routinized, is pivotal, for with this powerful act the biologist makes the species available to other biologists and to intersubjective discourse generally (a point about the communicative significance of naming already made by John Locke; see Wilkins 2009:63–64). Naming makes possible not only further research but also intervention by, for example, NGOs or governments. Explicit in this practice is the trope “to have a name is to be unique,” while

implicit is the further trope “to be unique is to be of irreplaceably great value.”

It is the method of fund-raising, though, that mobilizes the full range of the species/person entanglement. In figure 1, we reproduce the main Web page of BIOPAT (fig. 2 shows the English language version). The full name of BIOPAT is Patenschaften für biologische Vielfalt, the most direct translation of which is “godparenthood for biological diversity.” *Patenschaften* can of course be understood in a secular sense, more or less as the English translation has it: “patrons for biodiversity.” However, our German-speaking informants note that *Patenschaft* nevertheless retains the distinct flavor of the original, that is, of a special kinlike relationship. This ghostly presence of the Christian ritual of kin creation is continued in the exhortation under the main photo of an orchid: “Taufen Sie einen Frosch oder eine Orchidee!” (baptize a frog or an orchid!). Against this, the English Web page’s “name a frog or an orchid!” is distinctly colorless.

Yet the real rhetorical vigor, the *energeia*, of address appears below the orchid photo (author’s translation from German):

Names are [nothing but] sound and smoke”? Not at all, for a name is an entirely personal characteristic. With a one-off donation of at least €2,600 to BIOPAT you can “eternalize” a name of your choice by having a newly discovered animal or plant species baptized.

Is there a more unique gift and a more individual dedication to honor, for example, a family member, a female or male friend?

This short electronic address to the public deserves close attention. First, “names are sound and smoke” is a well-known German tag, derived from Goethe’s *Faust I* and used here to create emphasis for its contrary in the following assertion: “a name is an entirely personal characteristic.” This latter statement falls well within our tangle of tropes, and note particularly that there is a shade of stressed value in the German *ganz persönlich*, “entirely personal,” that is reminiscent of the American speech of one of our aunts when she says of some person, as she often does, “X is really special.” Or put this another way: given that names are usually not unique, this rhetoric moves beyond the name itself to the sense of “irreplaceable” person value that it calls forth.

These propositions are preparatory to the Web site’s offer, namely, that the donor/godparent can “eternalize” that name/person value in the name of a species. So the name, and with it the irreplaceable person value of the namesake herself, will appear in what is in principle the worldwide archive of taxonomic knowledge with the implication not just of eternalization but also of fame. Such commemoration is itself a rhetorical act, an epideictic speech of praise of the honored person.

The following boldface question lends still further stress to these propositions, and not only typographically. Here we meet the notions that by implication there is nothing “more

4. http://www.biopat.de/deutsch/index_dt.htm (accessed January 12, 2010).

Patenschaften für
BIOPAT biologische Vielfalt e.V.

w w w . b i o p a t . d e

INFO-Tour
Artenkatalog

Allg. Infos
Über BIOPAT
Pate werden
Wiss. Info
Projekte / News
Kontakt

English

counted by
WebCounter
33090

Kefersteinia "Ihre Wahl"

**Taufen Sie einen Frosch
oder eine Orchidee !**

"Namen sind Schall und Rauch"? Keineswegs, denn ein Name ist ein ganz persönliches Merkmal. Mit einer einmaligen Spende von mindestens 2.600,- Euro an BIOPAT können Sie einen Namen Ihrer Wahl sogar "verewigen" indem Sie eine neu entdeckte Tier- oder Pflanzenart taufen lassen.

Gibt es ein einmaligeres Geschenk und eine individuellere Widmung, um beispielsweise ein Familienmitglied, eine Freundin oder einen Freund zu ehren?

Zu den Gründungsmitgliedern des gemeinnützigen Vereins BIOPAT e.V. zählen renommierte Institutionen wie die Deutschen Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit -GTZ in Eschborn, die Zoologische Staatssammlung München - ZSM, das Zoologische Forschungsinstitut und Museum Alexander Koenig - ZFMK in Bonn sowie das Naturmuseum und Forschungsinstitut Senckenberg -SMF in Frankfurt/Main. Weitere kompetente Institute, Museen und unabhängige Wissenschaftler arbeiten eng mit BIOPAT zusammen.

Figure 1. Main Web page for BIOPAT (http://www.biopat.de/deutsch/index_dt.htm (accessed January 12, 2010). Reproduced with permission.

unique" as a gift and no dedication "more individual" with which to honor a loved one. On one hand, the unacknowledged editor of the electronic thesaurus that came with our computer's operating system (Mac OS X) finds this use of "unique" to be "slovenly," and calm reflection suggests that the idea of being "more unique" or perhaps "less unique" does not make much sense: "unique" should mean the only one of its kind. Were that editor dead, as we devoutly hope she/he is not, he/she would surely turn over in her/his grave at the thought that the comparative of "unique" is found in German as well. On the other hand, this illogical usage has

an argumentative purpose, namely intensification, and the force of the argument is crystal clear: BIOPAT's author wishes us to know that there could be no better gift, no better dedication, than to baptize a species for a loved one and so to commemorate their individual, special, unique, and irreplaceable personhood. The fashioning of such a dedication is shown in figure 3, a page from the Web site's catalog of those species already baptized. This is a Bolivian tree frog of the genus *Hyla* now designated with the species name *joannae* in honor of someone's beloved Joanna. The frog, with the tag "a red-eyed tree frog from the Amazon Basin," is given a brief



"Names are meaningless"? Not at all since a name identifies individuals. With a single donation of at least 2.600,- Euro to BIOPAT e.V. you can eternalize a name of your choice by baptizing a newly discovered plant or animal species.

Can you think of a more unique gift and individual dedication to honour a friend or a close member of your family?

BIOPAT is an initiative launched in December 1999 by the GTZ Tropical Ecology Support Programme, in collaboration with the State Zoological Collection Munich (**Zoologische Staatssammlung München/ZSM**), the Alexander Koenig Zoological Research Institute and Museum, Bonn (**Zoologisches Forschungsinstitut und Museum Alexander Koenig/ZFMK**), and the Senckenberg Centre for Biodiversity Research, Frankfurt am Main (**Naturmuseum und Forschungsinstitut Senckenberg/SMF**).

Today BIOPAT is cooperating with a wide range of scientific institutions and individual scientist worldwide.

Figure 2. Main Web page for BIOPAT, English version (http://www.biopat.de/englisch/index_e.htm, accessed January 12, 2010). Reproduced with permission.

description, among which is the observation—here ratcheting up the uniqueness, if that is possible—that its red iris is its “most conspicuous feature,” which appears “very rarely” among South American tree frogs.

Consider this rhetoric, taken as intended, with its web of practices. First, there are the practices of taxonomic prospecting and conservation, including the practices of naming, classifying, and publishing. Then BIOPAT has grafted onto these a further set of practices, donating to charitable or non-profit organizations, sprinkled with a hint of baptismal imagery. These practices enable a gift—and here we are surely intended to find ourselves in the realm of the pure gift—in which the act of donation proliferates value richly, a fitting counterpart to the prolific ingenuity of the rhetoric. For the

donor amplifies the amity and/or love between him/herself and the person honored. Then the species receives promotion to the ranks of discussable and so protectable living kinds, a promotion enhanced by the publication of its name and form. Further, the irreplaceably valued person is analogically linked to the irreplaceable value of the species, a mutual reinforcement. And the donor creates an implied beneficial relationship, in part to the baptized species but in any case to further species and the people who study and/or conserve them (thus adding generalized to restricted exchange; for such effect, see Trivedi 2005). Here, for once, we can gauge clearly the power of this rhetoric among practices: in the first four years, BIOPAT raised US\$450,000 through the baptism of more than 100 species (Trivedi 2005).

Artenkatalog : vergebene Patenschaften

Seite 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11

Katalog Nr.: 13



"Ein rotäugiger Baumfrosch aus dem Amazonasbecken"

Gattung/Genus: *Hyla*
Zukünftiger Art-Name: *joannae*
Herkunft/Origin: Bolivien, Departamento Pando, Provincia N. Suárez, Cobija, 250 m ü.NN
Beschreiber/Describer: Jörn Köhler & Stefan Lötters, Januar 1998

Dieser kleine Laubfrosch (Körperlänge etwa 17-20 mm) kommt aus Nord-Bolivien, der Region immerfeuchter Amazonas-Regenwälder. Die Männchen rufen nachts an kleinen Pfützen, um die Weibchen, die etwas größer sind, anzulocken. In der Nacht sind die Tiere fast einheitlich gelb gefärbt, während sie am Tag ein braunes Fleckenmuster zeigen. Auffälligstes Merkmal dieser Art ist seine rote Irisfärbung, die bei südamerikanischen Baumfröschen extrem selten vorkommt.

Figure 3. Page from BIOPAT Web site (http://www.biopat.de/deutsch/index_dt.htm) (accessed January 12, 2010). Reproduced with permission.

"Poor Animals"

The rich skein of entangled tropes that Lévi-Strauss brought together so eloquently was invented anew by BIOPAT using much the same material but among a different set of practices with more practical effect. In both cases there is a rounded coherence, a fullness and polish, to the performance. That polish is achieved, as Pesmen (1993) might have pointed out, by conveying a strong realism based in an apparently coherent, consistent, taken-for-granted world—in these two cases, a world in which "person" is understood largely in the morally compelling idiom of familiar kin amity.

But there are further possibilities in the species \approx person trope, one of which we met in the pearl mussel project to which we now return. In interviews, officers depicted the process by which the pearl mussel's plight finally went from being merely a long-standing item on an agenda—an agenda that contained many duties and species for which neither

resources nor time were available—to the object of an actual joint undertaking. One officer, stressing the contingency of the occasion, said only "it just came together." But another described a key meeting and the consideration leading up to it in a great deal more detail. She spoke of the mussels as "poor souls," and recreated the occasion:

I think we weren't quite sure how to tackle it and it's one thing seeing a species decline, and it's another having a firm view as to what we need to do to improve things and I think we were all just a wee bit uncertain as to what we could do that would stop it. You know, you're sitting there rather depressed looking at the situation and thinking well what can we do about this, it's too big a job, actually was one of the concerns, . . . that's too big a task and we're just . . . the mussels may well be doomed, and we're just going to have to sit and watch it, which was very depressing but we weren't quite sure how to get past that but then again,

it was the [X agency's] initiative, that they said well, this is getting ridiculous, we can't just sit here and watch whilst this poor animal was declining . . . they said look, it's doing badly everywhere, we can't just let it disappear from the [Exx] and they managed to find money . . . and they've obviously involved us in this as well and we started thinking well we can't just send animals off for captive breeding if you've got nowhere for the progeny to come back to, that would be immoral, that's just not the right thing to do so we have to do something and so I suppose it was at that point that we felt, right, we're really going to have to try and get money to get something started.

This is not a highly premeditated polished performance in a practice of "publishing," like Lévi-Strauss's written work or BIOPAT's Web site, but rather a more or less spontaneous conversational performance in the genre of "being interviewed." The officer depicts a process of deliberation, and we may take it as read that the participants to the meeting were fully aware of the background to the argument, including those official designations that made the mussel eligible for such attention. In the foreground, though, it is a matter not of bureaucratic or indeed of ecological reasoning but rather of moral deliberation: "we can't just send animals off for captive breeding if you've got nowhere for the progeny to come back to, that would be immoral, that's just not the right thing to do."

This moral reasoning can be better understood if we contrast it with the official published reasoning of, for example, Natural England, the governmental body responsible for, among other things, most special conservation sites and the species within them. Here are some headline statements from Natural England's official Web site, stating its purpose:

We provide practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England's natural wealth for the benefit of everyone.⁵

And here are Natural England's justifications for its protective policies toward species and habitats:

England's natural environment matters to us all. The beauty of our landscapes and wildlife inspire and enrich our lives, and are an important part of our national identity.

Although we may not readily appreciate it, biodiversity provides us with many of the things that sustain our lives. Protecting our species and their habitats also improves our quality of life and our standard of living.⁶

This official rhetoric depends on a series of tropes that the ethnographer-theorists would predict: "species are wealth," "species belong to us," "species provide services to us." Even

nationalism gets a mention: "our species belong to our nation" and "our species are emblems of our nation." Where value is invoked, it is not the irreplaceable value of personhood but of a possession. The argument so well exemplified here—and explained more extensively elsewhere in this Web site and elsewhere—takes its justification from human instrumentality alone: "species exist as means to our ends."

The pivotal rhetoric that promoted the pearl mussel from an agenda item to the subject of a campaign was very different. The officer directed sympathy to the pearl mussel—"poor souls," "poor animals"—and so adumbrated a relationship to the animal as such. Its fate mattered closely to the officer—"the mussels may well be doomed, and we're just going to have to sit and watch it, which was very depressing"—suggesting Lévi-Strauss's "irreplaceable privation." This personalizing attitude then culminated in moral suasion: "we started thinking well we can't just send animals off for captive breeding if you've got nowhere for the progeny to come back to, that would be immoral, that's just not the right thing to do so we have to do something and so I suppose it was at that point that we felt, right, we're really going to have to try and get money to get something started." Here, again, the personlike character attributed to the mussel brings with it something of the axiom of amity with its implication not just of amicable regard but of necessary action. This is the key to the moral deliberation—"that would be immoral . . . so we have to do something"—that we have sought in our rhetorical inquiries. The reasoning led not just to a mental conclusion but to practical and physical action, the campaign to prepare the landscape for the pearl mussel's well-being.

This (almost) rounds our argument. We set out to show that though there is force in the ethnographer-theorist's criticism of Our Society, so well exemplified in Natural England's official rhetoric, nevertheless We possess imaginative resources to make radically different arguments (see also Degnen 2009). These arguments can arise even in a highly technocratic or natural scientific setting, and indeed the officers and of course the biologists we interviewed all have a natural scientific rather than philosophical or humanistic educational background. Moreover, the argumentative imagination involved may go well beyond charismatic species to encompass others, including the eyeless, furless pearl mussel. The consequent moral reasoning works by establishing some equivalence or comparison between a species as a whole and a human person such that we achieve "a caring, attentive regard, a 'being with'" the animal, to use Ingold's words (2000:76).

These conclusions need a little further nuancing. First, our trope species \approx person covers a range of equivalences. For Schopenhauer, the equivalence exists within his larger argument that persons and species are equally expressions of an underlying universal force, the Will. In Olds's poem, the equivalence is straightforwardly metaphorical and suggestive. By contrast, Ghiselin's philosophical argument depends on a meticulous and explicit delineation of the ways in which "individual" and "species" are similar, with "person" hovering

5. http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about_us/whatwedo/default.aspx (accessed October 10, 2009).

6. http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/why_is_biodiversity_important_/default.aspx (accessed 10 October 2009).

closely nearby. Lévi-Strauss might be said to depend on both rigor and suggestiveness, while BIOPAT draws out the equation species \approx person not only by argument and suggestion but also in the coinage of practices in biology and publicity. For other purposes or for a different argument we might wish to stress the differences between these uses of the analogy. But for our purposes here we insist that these cases all share the common trait that they begin from a single imagining, a single trope, a slightly unusual connection between individual person and species.

Again, different features of personhood come to the fore in the different arguments (Campbell 2005). The BIOPAT/Lévi-Strauss argument stresses a close kinlike interpretation of personhood producing, in the BIOPAT case, the moral suasion and practical action that connects the persons with the species. The motivating argument for the pearl mussel project shares an assumption of moral amity, but in this case, the officer's interpretation could just as well call on other versions of personhood in Our Society, such as the personhood of the fellow citizen, whether of one's own country or of the world. Such persons are not, in Schütz's terms, *Mitmenschen* with whom one might share an intimately known world but *Nebemmenschen* of whose existence as contemporaries one is aware but with little detailed knowledge (Schütz 1967). Our Society's moral imagination offers the possibility of feeling a moral connection to such strangers, as when we think about Our nation as a community in the style of Benedict Anderson, or about people in the global South whose plight is tied to a degree to Our own actions. Moreover—though we have no further evidence of it yet in the case of the pearl mussel—an analogous extension of sympathy and moral responsiveness from fellow citizen to animal may in fact engender a quite distinctive and finely differentiated moral responsiveness to the animal as vets or farmers, for example, have developed (Campbell 2005; Swabe 2005).

Coda

The theoretical and ethnographic practice we have undertaken here requires that we specify the tropes that people use but also the adaption of such resources to *kairos*, that is, to a specific time, audience, and circumstance (Carrithers 2005a). This ethnographic practice is guided by a view of experience that stresses its interactive nature, bound to unpredictable and complexly changing circumstances in the unceasing motility of social and animal life. In the effort to match the demand of *kairos*, the arguers we have discussed have used tropes flexibly, making them plastic and conformable to circumstance, and they have likewise drawn on plastic connections to other tropes to achieve effective argumentation. The tropes themselves remain plastic potentials, not stiff actualities, so that they can always open onto new arguments for new moments.

The next moment of the pearl mussel project has arrived, in which some national effort on its behalf across the United

Kingdom may be coordinated, joining the Exx project with those on some other rivers. As a preliminary to this, a study of the pearl mussel populations in each river has been carried out using (relatively) new and powerful methods of DNA sampling, which can show genetic similarities—and more important, differences—between populations of the United Kingdom rivers. These practices have already put new tools in the hands of officers of pearl mussel projects, though matters are at present very much in flux. The full report on the genetic study has not been submitted, at least at the time of this writing, but a preliminary sketch has been circulated. It argues that each river's population is “phylogenetically distinct.” The Exx population is found to be interesting in that it is a small population, but it demonstrates high and therefore healthy genetic diversity within it. Others have their own traits, such as the Emm, which has a high population as well as high genetic diversity. And so forth to the other rivers. The Zedd population is reported as perhaps “most significant” and “most distinct” because it is the “oldest population in the UK,” dating back to before the last glaciation. The officer circulating the preliminary results of the genetic study even suggests to the officer working in the Zedd catchment that “this may help you make a case for action!”

There is as yet little further action, whether argumentative or practical, to report, but even in this preliminary accounting of the DNA study we find new acts of naming and identification leading to finer-grained specification of value, now not in species but in a level of focus below species—populations. There is even a well-used designation for this level of naming: these are evolutionarily significant units (ESUs), a term coined in 1985 (Pennock and Dimmick 1997; Ryder 1986). And already the motivating implications of the pearl mussel ESUs is clear: these new “names” evoke “uniqueness” and therefore “irreplaceably great value” in the pearl mussels of each river. The morality of personhood has not yet reappeared, but this “name—uniqueness—irreplaceably great value” connection is already written into the preliminary argument with the possible implication that each river's pearl mussels could become a candidate for conservation.

But who knows where deliberations might go? In any case this is a splendid further example of how people may rise to the demands of each moment with new arguments, using materials to hand, seeking appropriate thought and action in the unstoppable flow of events.

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Comments

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This article traces an emergent trope in current environmental discourse: the equation between nonhuman species and individual human persons. This trope allows “rhetorically disadvantaged” species such as the unfortunate pearl mussel, who are individually poorly equipped to be recognized by humans as intersubjective partners, to emerge nevertheless as the collective recipients of what, quoting Tim Ingold, the authors term “a caring, attentive regard, a ‘being with’” (Ingold 2000:76). This account of rhetorics in motion challenges the static image of Westerners’ distancing, instrumental relations with a nature “out there,” which despite caveats and misgivings (see, e.g., Ingold 2000:63) is still used as a foil in anthropological descriptions of alternative ontological engagements with nonhumans. However, I will argue that while it exemplifies Westerners’ ability to achieve new unexpected modes of “being with” nonhuman animals, the article also paradoxically carries the seed of a reframing of the meaning of “being with” itself.

The revival of anthropological interest in nonhuman animals in the past decade has heralded a move away from treating animals as “good to think with” toward a view of animals as “here to live with” (Haraway 2003:5), as actual participants in human sociality. Against this background, this article might at first sight seem low on accounts of actual interaction, of sensorial, fleshly material, technologically mediated entanglements between humans and pearl mussels—of “being with,” in other words. Granted, pearl mussels have no face and will not play, but one could still imagine an ethnography of the encounter that shows how different “creatures, with all their perceptual grappling hooks, transplant rousing knowledge across species divides” (Hayward 2010:581; Hayward’s article focuses on cup corals). How have the officers of the pearl mussel project come to care for the animals in the first place? Has this changed at all through greater exposure to the animals themselves? In other words, seen from within the frames of the emergent “multispecies ethnography” (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), this article might seem to belong to an anthropological tradition concerned with humans thinking and talking about animals rather than with human-animal relations themselves.

But this would in an important sense be missing the point. This article prompts us to attend to the transformative effects of rhetorics on interspecies relationships themselves. By con-

trast, emphatic calls to study “human *interactions and relationships* with animals rather than simply human *representations of* animals” (Knight 2005:1, original emphasis), paradoxically risk amplifying the mysterious gap between mere representations and real relationships. The tropes identified here are not “simply representations” (is there such a thing?)—they fund research and intervention, they respond to DNA testing, they enable powerful affects and moral suasions. Changing tropologies of personhood and shifting languages of moral commitment must surely matter to (indeed, form part of) the texture of interspecies relationalities.⁷

Recognizing that modes of interspecies relation are informed by a shifting multiplicity of rhetorics of personhood unsettles the primacy of face-to-face intersubjectivity as the ground of authentic interspecies relations. For instance, Knight critiques Ingold’s equation of individual relationships between humans and animals with the “depersonalized” relations between an individual hunter and a prey species that are no more than “substitutable tokens in a class” (Knight 2005:4–5). Yet this article illustrates the easy slippage in practice between registers of individual and collective concern (“poor animals”) from population thinking through a loose sense of “fellow feeling” for one’s metaphorical *Nebennmenschen* all the way to linking a loved one’s name to that of a species.

One might ask—empirically—what biological, material, affective experience is needed to translate, say, *Nebennmensch* feeling into *Mitmensch* feeling, just as one could ask which day-to-day forms of disciplined practice might enable the “analogous extension of sympathy and moral responsiveness from fellow citizen to animal” to actually “engender a quite distinctive and finely differentiated moral responsiveness to the animal as vets or farmers, for example, have developed.” But as for a critical attempt to isolate a more authentic “being with” behind the rhetorical multiplication and interweaving of tropes, that attempt is already preemptively subverted here. Through its form of analysis as much as through its subject matter, the article reminds us that accounts of immediate, authentic, intersubjective relationality are themselves rhetorical while insisting there’s nothing “mere” about that.

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How might we think of our lives with animals as an ethical project? I take this splendid paper to make both a stimulating

7. It is true that the agency in this particular story lies squarely with the humans—no actor networks here. But the authors might reply that crafting new ways of registering nonhuman agencies (including through actor-network theory—inspired or multispecies ethnography) is itself a work of rhetoric. Chicken, meet egg.

contribution to this issue while also showing us how we might read important moments in the history of anthropology as a history of the tracks animals leave on anthropological texts. There are three significant claims made in the paper. First, a rhetorical analysis of a cultural trope and its entanglements reveals something significant about key values in a society. Second, a specimen trope such as “a biological species is equivalent to a human person” when analyzed in its movements across different social sites in English society can tell us something significant about the moral weight placed on the notion of personhood. Finally, in our life with animals, certain “unpromising” animals such as pearl mussels could become the objects of human attention without the semiotic dressing through which we bestow animals with “personality” because we can draw on reservoirs of emotion as we contemplate their loss as a scene in which some part of our world itself is extinguished. The poem by Sharon Olds—“now, if she goes,/when she goes, to me it is like the departure of a/whole small species of singing bird from the earth”—shows the powerful affective register on which the loss of one person is like the loss of a world, for some of our senses will become forever dulled with this loss.

Though Carrithers is more interested in the style of thought in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Savage Mind* (1966), we might instead look at the earlier analysis of totemism (Lévi-Strauss 1964) where he argued that totemism must be regarded as a picture of thought because it too evokes the relations human groups bear to a species rather than to individual animals. Lévi-Strauss contrasted this aspect of human animal relations with the metonymic connections made between a human individual and a particular animal in the realm of sacrifice, which he faulted for its vulnerability to human vicissitudes and improvisations as shown in the possibilities of substitution in sacrifice. Do then the relations carved at the level of two kinds of collectivities imply a different kind of moral regime in our lives with animals as compared with individual connections that we might forge? Sharon Olds’s poem suggests otherwise, showing the melancholy to which we might be subject when we contemplate the disappearance of a species. How does death and disappearance then shape our moral horizon in relation to the human practices that endanger animal life?

I submit that an important issue at stake here is what Cora Diamond has called “the difficulty of reality” (Diamond 2008). On the general question of how we should treat animals—that is, should we eat them, should we experiment on them, should we give them rights—Diamond says that philosophy tries to provide answers by a certain hardness of arguments. Yet she characterizes this whole mode of reasoning as a “deflection,” a term she borrows from Stanley Cavell, to suggest that this hardness of argument is not the hardness of trying to appreciate a difficulty of reality. An example of what she means by the difficulty of reality is to imagine one’s own death, that is, of having a genuinely embodied knowledge of being extinguished. Another example is of eating (in this case

animals) what some others imagine as their companions, a thought expressed through the literary figure of Mrs. Costello in J. M. Coetzee’s (1999) Tanner lectures.

Stanley Cavell (2008) puts the issue as follows. “Diamond’s paper,” he says, “takes up certain extremities of conflict associated with phenomena of what she calls the difficulty of reality . . . cases in which our human capacities to respond . . . are, for some, put to test, threatening to freeze or to overwhelm understanding and imagination, while, at the same time, for others, the phenomenon, or fact, fails to raise, or perhaps it succeeds only in raising, an eyebrow” (92). The claims that animals might have on our moral attention, then, point to a deeper question—how are we to come to terms with the human variation we encounter at the horror some individuals experience at the fact of, say, animal farms while others take it as an unremarkable fact of modern civilized life? Does this deep divide shoulder us out of our familiar sense of the moral as essentially entailing issues of personhood? I invite Carrithers to help us take these thoughts further, beyond Lévi-Strauss’s ideas of our relatedness to individual animals as following into the realm of desire and to whole species in the realm of thought.

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While reading this engaging account of the nimble work of rhetoric and tropes, I was reminded of Kuekuatsheu in accounts of Innu people of Labrador and Quebec. Kuekuatsheu is both a wolverine and a trickster and thus the sort of character well known throughout the anthropological canon. Kuekuatsheu is a canny figure, one that provokes, irritates, fascinates, and repulses (see Henriksen 2009). He is at once animal and human, impossible to pin down, and difficult to ignore. Perhaps he is then also a trope in the sense adopted by Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery: not simply an allegorical figure or a metaphor but also a transformative interpreter and interpretant of lived situations. Perhaps he too is a rhetorical device that permits humans (and nonhumans) to, as the authors say, “[work] on one another” while searching for ways to navigate the vagaries of experience. Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery tell us that tropes can be understood as tools that seek to mobilize and convince others in the face of a social world that is always shifting and mutating. Kuekuatsheu thus serves as a reminder that a crucial element of the power of both tropes and of tricksters stems in part from their own indeterminacy, their shape shifting, and their nonlinearity.

Personhood is a thought-provoking and key element of the argument put forth by the authors. I would like to consider the connection between rhetoric, relations, and intergenera-

tional personhood a little more closely here through a figure introduced by them: Percy the Pearl Mussel. Percy is mentioned in passing as an instance whereby the established rhetorical device of extending personhood (and associated rights to life) to endangered species via the trope of individuation did not occur, except in one brief instance when an education officer proposes creating a pamphlet for children about Percy. The authors conclude that such a move would effectively delineate the pearl mussel not as an individual (which might have helped make headway into convincing other audiences that it is necessary to protect pearl mussels) but instead denigrates both individual pearl mussels and the entire species via association with the fantastical made-up realm of childhood play.

Given the wider context of whether, when, and how personhood is demarcated in human and animal realms, this statement about Percy gave me pause for thought in regard to generational differences in perceptions of these relationships. Nonhuman animals occupy a remarkable place in Western childhood (“Our Society”), facilitated and promoted by adults. Pigs, cows, horses, sheep, chickens, frogs, cats, geese, bears, whales, wolves, squirrels, birds, fish, and dinosaurs (to name only a few) form a vivid cast of characters populating children’s literature, toys, songs, clothing, films, and television programs. Most often, these animals are highly personified. They are members of families; they speak, think, emote; they travel, go to work, have home lives; they engage in human forms of recreation (reading, drawing, sports, driving), and so on. Young children are thus encouraged daily to engage in the material world via representations of animals who are themselves portrayed as human. Attempting to analyze this dynamic, Tapper argues that “the stories are not about animals as such, but about the cultural rules, relationships and problems of human society . . . and explicitly, about *human* problems and power relations” (Tapper 1994:57, emphasis in original). So, enmeshed in the material culture of childhood, animal representations are used to transmit social lessons about human lives. And yet what also transpires is that young children are actively encouraged to invert Western naturalist ontology (whereby human beings and all other living beings are segregated into radically different domains) and invest their imagination in a cosmos where human and nonhuman animals are commensurate. It is perhaps not a coincidence that this occurs during (and is used in part to demarcate) a period of the life course when human beings are themselves not yet credited with full personhood. This dynamic thus rather complicates what Percy can be said to demonstrate: not simply a diminutive role by association with “just children’s play” but a rather more unsteady terrain whereby “Our Society” positively encourages the use of nonhuman animals as interpretants of lived situations but only for a discrete segment of the life course. Why that should be and how it might inflect the strategies of rhetoric and relationship that are put to work between human and nonhuman animals to assert value are part and parcel of the bigger issues at stake

in the issues around personhood that this insightful article discusses.

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Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery begin with what I have long thought of as an analytically fruitful ethnomethodological insight, that in daily life people are often telling each other who to be and what to do, that, as the authors put it, “we work on one another . . . to coordinate our perspectives and our activities.” Yet in this instance, the move is not ethnomethodological but rhetorical. This starting point has a political edge, rhetorical in part because the authors advocate intervening in others’ tellings. Given the analytical insight (now commonplace) that the ways people describe the world shape people’s practices, the authors suggest that this puts a political burden on analysts. It is not sufficient to uncover the assumptions underlying people’s accounts; social analysts should also offer potentially persuasive tropes that others can use, in this case to save aesthetically unappealing yet endangered species. The trope the authors recommend is equating a species with personhood.

How does one begin the political work of addressing as a person a species that lacks a cuddliness quotient? The authors toy with the possibility of personification through animation—Percy the Pearl Mussel—only to dismiss this as constructing too young a public. But perhaps the authors reject Percy’s potential too quickly. Animation at its core enacts precisely the kind of misrecognition that the authors recommend, as Teri Silvio has pointed out (Silvio 2010). Silvio argues that animation operates as a structuring trope for attributing human action beyond the confines of the human body (Silvio 2010:427). Read alongside Silvio’s argument, Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery’s call for anthropomorphizing species might be effective politically at this historical moment precisely because of the ubiquity of animated characters in societies surrounding the North Atlantic. Yet it is not only animation as a common trope that could be coming to the pearl mussel’s aid; it may be the very cuteness by which Percy the Pearl Mussel could endow a species with human qualities. After all, if we (we?) are turning a species into a person, we would defeat the purpose if the species was turned into the unpleasant uncle one always tried to avoid. Not every person, even among our relatives, elicits amity equally. Animated characters often allow audiences to attribute cuteness onto entities quite devoid of apparent cuteness—corporations, for example. Silvio analyzes the ways that vulnerability and cuteness go hand in hand with animated characters: “Cute brand characters are in a sense metabrands, for they are designed not only to symbolize and promote the abstract entities of

corporations, they embody the vulnerability of branding itself—their utter dependence on the unpredictable and unknowable hearts of anonymous, unstructured masses” (Silvio 2010:432). While the authors of this article never say this explicitly, presumably some of the political effectiveness of claiming a species to be a person is to inspire a sense of obligation caused by a species/person’s utter dependence on an unfortunately unpredictable and all too destructive mass of humanity.

I am also asking whether the way animation has become a structuring trope for the misrecognitions demanded by neoliberal capitalism is at play here as well. The labor underlying animation also contributes to the ways multiplicities can be conflated with an individual character (Silvio 2010:428). Many people contribute to the creation of an animated character—voice actors, colorists, and so on. Enjoying animated characters often requires misrecognizing the means of their production, interpreting the work of many as one. It is no accident that animated characters so often stand in for corporations, entities legally equivalent to persons.

So many current capitalist interactions revolve around a misrecognition in which complex social unities and individuals are taken to be equivalent, in which the goal of a transaction or contract is to distribute risk and responsibility equally among the legally constituted actors as though, say, a bank and a homeowner are equivalent entities. Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery are not the only ones asking whether this now rampant form of misrecognition present in animation and neoliberalism can be subverted to be used to protect those beings harmed by capitalism’s voraciousness (see also de Sousa Santos 2007 on taking Nature to be a legal entity). When neoliberal capitalists exercise this particular form of misrecognition, they require law’s ability to define entities as individuals. I wonder whether the authors tacitly require certain legal structures and capitalist fetishes for their trope to be persuasive. This article leaves me with a question of institutional context—if Percy the Pearl Mussel draws the wrong public, how does one locate the right public (and are certain forms of law and capitalism necessary in the background)? When, where, and for whom does making more nonpeople into people fix a problem that was caused by the unpalatability of people in the first place?

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Flexing Our Mussels

I appreciate this foray into the meeting ground of cognitive

and narrative-oriented anthropology. For years now, Michael Carrithers has been flying the flag of rhetoric culture theory that deals in just this oscillation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. This essay connects it convincingly with his long-standing work on personhood and narration: if people manage to literally turn even charismatically disadvantaged beings such as the pearl mussel into \approx socially relevant persons by way of reconfiguring tropes, great is the power of the rhetorical imagination indeed. My commentary visits two areas that I find insufficiently developed, one within the boundaries of the text, the second straying where the boundaries of the text might have been.

The first item is the step from \approx individual to \approx person, and, in parallel, the distinction between population and species. Both are crucial for the argument as stated, but it is here that Carrithers is not rigorous enough: the interesting tropical moment as the environmental officer ruminates that “I suppose a person is more important than a snail or a butterfly” is interpreted in an earnest but unsatisfying manner by accepting the reporting colleague’s *ex post facto* appraisal that a species was meant. That the officer was possibly thinking of a population rather than a species (plausible, as a specific habitat was under discussion) is disregarded. This underlines the limits of the data: the tropical language of claims is not put to the test beyond the immediate arena. While such instances of autopersuasion occurring during interviews are interesting and stimulate us to fill in the blanks, more methodological effort would have strengthened the relevance of the adduced utterances and texts. Tropes really come into their own as rivals in competition for resonance until one of them takes hold of our mind; a text concerned with addressivity could have addressed the question of reception by a wider audience better.

Regarding the trope that renders a particular \approx individual, most anthropologists will be familiar with similar transformations, as countries or companies are routinely turned into individual actors for the sake of narrative coherence. The hierarchically higher trope (particular \approx person), turning such defined agents and patients into social persons, is more sensitive and problematic because it (a) is a highly contested step on the ground, and (b) hardly yields to our methodological grasp. For Carrithers to state (discussing Ghiselin) that “person” is “closely implicated with [individual]” is disingenuous. It is precisely because all individuals are potential *Mitmenschen* or *Nebenmenschen* and because the attribution of personhood regularly incurs high affective and even material costs that the social border is so carefully policed. Thus, I stand only half convinced: while we can effectively valorize persons by \approx -ing them with unique and irreplaceable species, instances of this are no strong evidence for the reversibility of this trope.

My second concern is with Carrithers’s decision not to engage with Callon’s foundational text on the scallops of St. Brieuc Bay (1986). To wave it away as “a different view on such a project” seems too casual, especially given the reve-

latory potential of a first serious attempt to align rhetoric culture theory (see Carrithers 2009a; Gudeman 2009; Strecker and Tyler 2009a) with actor-network theory.⁸ Beyond the fact that both texts deal with human-mollusk relations, the projects resonate: similar to Callon, Carrithers basically follows the pearl mussel's role as actant in the *docere* and *movere* of our imagination for the better moving of our wills. But an engagement with the scallops of St. Brieuc would also have brought out the surplus in Carrithers's approach vis-à-vis Callon. The latter words his study in terms of "power" and shows little interest in motivations behind the translations that are rhetorically argued by his scientists, whereas Carrithers attends to the double-layered personification of the pearl mussels beyond agency attribution by highlighting the pertinent question of the moral *energeia*. This text could only have profited from a confrontation with Callon.

In conclusion, the case of personhood seems overstated: however we flex it, the pearl mussel species will not become "a person" or a companion species of significant otherness. While (like the scallops) it evokes action and reaction, the unique pearl mussel does not gaze back in mutuality. But as we magnanimously persuade ourselves to take pleasure in protecting this pathetic animal, and "through our ideologically loaded narratives" allow the pearl mussels to 'hail' us to account for the regimes in which they and we must live," as Haraway (2003:17) put it in another trope-bent text on human beings and animals, it can fall under our mantle of neofeudal panspecies generosity. This says more about the rhetorical construction of our personhood than theirs.

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This enjoyable essay highlights the centrality of "communicative acts" in everyday life and the power of rhetorical description in making and transforming identities. The extension of personhood to individual animals has indeed been effective in arguing for their protection. The notion of "species as person" (which resonates rather charmingly with Benedict's 1965 [1934] description of societies as *persona writ large*) may be similarly helpful for less charismatic species. The extended logic of this argument—if upholding biodiversity is the aim—is that *all* species are potentially persons with "irreplaceably great value." This implies an ideology of equality that, the authors say, "brings to the fore a sense of relationship." But isn't there an underlying contradiction between contemporary

8. Also "the sociology of translations" or "translation theory," the terminology under which a research cluster is currently being developed intensively at the University of Halle; see <http://www.exzellenznetzwerk-scm.uni-halle.de/research-in-preparation.php#ResearchField3> for a current mission statement (accessed January 23, 2011).

ideas about personhood and more egalitarian modes of "being with" other species (Ingold 2000)?

Many indigenous views of "personhood," like those cited here, rest on a collective view of identity in which individuation is seen as a conceit. This coexists readily with a comprehensive acceptance of other species as similarly collective "persons" and as equal partners in human-environmental engagements. But it is one thing to achieve this within the immediate context of place-based societies and quite another to do so in large-scale societies where the context is national and/or global and personhood has become intensely bounded and exclusive. More individuated ascriptions of personhood (or "character") underline the reality that the Anthropocene is truly anthropocentric. Durkheim's depiction of human being as "both worshipper and worshipped" (1961) suggests that extensions of personhood, whether to individual animals or whole species, is more a matter of club membership than an opening of doors to the *hoi polloi*. Personhood is thus a charmed circle in which "others" may or (as in most cases) may not be morally included and into which nonhumans can only earn membership through rarity, exoticism, aesthetic pleasure, charm, indicative function, impending extinction, and so forth. They may become "relations," but only charitably dependent "poor relations."

The issue of ownership is key. From a dominant anthropocentric stance, a Hegelian projection of personhood to other species such as the pearl mussel is possessive, as in quoting Natural England the authors observe, "to safeguard England's natural wealth for the benefit of everyone" (i.e., "everyone" who belongs). The naming of species, like that of places, is appropriative (see Strang and Busse 2010), and the positioning of namers as "godparents" or "patrons" further affirms human primacy. Thus, while seemingly challenged rhetorically by the collective personification of the pearl mussel, a fundamentally unsustainable status quo is actually maintained.

If the nature of personhood in "Our Society" is such that it can only be extended beyond humans in a piecemeal and limited fashion, then what prospect is there for a more egalitarian extension of personhood to all species? Can "caring attentive being with" (Ingold 2000:76) be expanded sufficiently to produce sustainable human-environmental relations on a global scale?

This implies that exclusive forms of personhood are the problem. Is it only feasible to establish a moral relationship between such persons? Certainly the categorization of other species as "mere organisms" (i.e., nonpersons) has allowed human societies to dispense with moral behavior toward them, but there are alternate tropes that, rather than lifting a few chosen species up into special relationships with godlike humans, present a more modest vision of human being. These offer highly diffuse forms of personhood and relationality based on a fuller appreciation of the interdependency of all species and their material environments.

For example, recent theoretical debates about human-

environmental relations (Chen, Macleod, and Neimanis, forthcoming; Strang, forthcoming) have reprised Vernadsky's (1989 [1929]) "Hypersea," which rhetorically positioned humankind within a dynamic sea of interconnections with all organic species. This interdependent vision was further developed by writers such as Margulis and Haraway (Haraway 2008; Margulis and McMenamin 1992; Margulis and Sagan 2007; see also McMenamin and McMenamin 1994). Lovelock rather tiresomely (though with Durkheimian predictability) anthropocentrized it by describing humanity as "the brains" of Gaia (1988, 2000 [1979]). But anthropological and philosophical renditions of the Hypersea bear a closer resemblance to indigenous cosmologies that democratically include all species in a cyclical flow of material, animal, and human processes over time. Avoiding Schopenhauer's (1977 [1859]) overarching "will," or the more conventional hidden hand of a divine patriarchal puppet master, this perspective envisions an implicitly egalitarian symbiotic system inhabited by diverse species with equally diverse forms of culture, consciousness, and agency.

The wider rhetorical employment of such a self-effacing trope would require a very different *kairos*, but given the parlous state of the status quo, perhaps it is time to consider expanding personhood not just to whole species but to the point where it dissolves in the Hypersea. Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery's essay travels some way in this direction, and its nuanced analysis of tropes and rhetorical devices enables us to see what can and cannot be achieved through the conferment of personhood.

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This elegant exposition of the workings of rhetoric culture theory requires no gloss. The authors show the power of their conceptual framing, springing as it does from Michael Carrithers's classic work, for demonstrating something of the malleability of the resources through which new definitions of being are created in societies "around the North Atlantic." This is no innocent culture area. They choose as their vehicle of demonstration reactions to consequences of a disaster that the same people have brought on themselves through other definitions. The result is a neat and very satisfying paper. My comments do no more than tug at one or two edges.

It is indeed interesting that the authors locate their tropic maneuvers in the catastrophic Anthropocene, the era in which human activity is seen to affect the destiny of life on the planet. It is the overactive activity or agency of human beings that is, as they say, the issue, and it is even more interesting, perhaps, that the analogy between species and persons hardly disturbs the location of agency from its position in the accounts of those who have brought this era into being. (The

pearl mussel example inevitably brings to mind actor-network theorizing, but in this account the pearl mussel just does not seem to be the kind of actant that the scallops of St. Brieuc Bay were.) Nor, might one add, does the identity of a "species" seem, in the discourses being considered, to modify what a "person" is: the values are not equally distributed between the two. The exception is in Sharon Olds's poem. Otherwise, the significant value seems to remain the human person or person as individual: in this sense the trope is still (as in Anthropocene thinking) human centered. (I understand the authors to take person not as an analytical category but as a cultural given, the depiction the human being as a social and moral being at once autonomous and open to persuasion, with greater or lesser emphasis on its individuality [uniqueness].)

The Anthropocene era throws up lesser catastrophes too, and I think here of the excessive value given to agency in higher education rhetoric these days, at least in the United Kingdom. The academic has to demonstrate the power of his or her scholarship/research through evidence of its agentic effect. It must both be his or hers and have impact. Thus, what has for long been a sorry story for the arts, humanities, and social sciences is becoming evident in the attrition of basic research in natural science, including basic research in eminently "useful" subjects such as medicine. Translational research—that is, research where the "researcher" shows its demonstrable impact—is what counts. Taken to excess, such agency undermines the reproduction of what would otherwise be considered research skills. We probably need those skills in the world we have put at risk. (The ameliorative tenor of research shown to have an impact seriously risks in turn concealing the inexplicable and unexpected.) There have to be rules here, too, for understanding how we talk of impact. I wonder whether the authors might be nudged into thinking about the rhetoric of agency in our time.

Reply

We are grateful to these scholars for their demanding comments. We have found it difficult to respond swiftly to so diverse and stimulating a set of responses, and we cannot possibly do them justice here. Let us nevertheless begin by rephrasing our basic assertion: human beings are representing animals (Hacking 1983). Yes, we do in part meet our world directly, with hands and eyes, through smell and sound; we perceive, as Ingold insists. But perceiving is wreathed with representing: we remember, plan, and speculate; narrate, name and describe. Single persons do this alone, but the primal act of representing is representing to someone else. The term "rhetoric" captures this interactivity.

We thank Candea for revealing one implication of our argument, that the force of representing need not depend on

some original act of perceiving. This was evidenced in our ethnography. For example, those officers who supported the pearl mussel in the Exx were not field researchers who knew it intimately; rather, they knew it largely through descriptions, numbers, and illustrations—so not a perceptual “being with” but a represented one. The force of such representational informing came over clearly in the case of one resident near the Exx who attended an illustrated talk about the pearl mussel. She began the talk unaware of the mussel’s existence, but in a focus group following the talk she had become a passionate advocate. We do not reject the moral potentialities of perceiving as meeting what is “revealed” (Ingold 2000:22) but stress rather that revelation may occur in many ways. Thus, Sri Lankan Buddhists who become forest monks in a particular setting (Carrithers 1983:269 et seq.) ordinarily begin with powerful expectations of wild megafauna, say elephants, as hostile and terrifying. But through representations by their monastic teacher and through meditation, they (sometimes) come to perceive elephants more calmly as fellow sufferers. One might doubt how thoroughly the later perception replaces the earlier expectation, but some monks’ calm before a wild elephant reveals the potential of the re-presentation.

We are grateful to Das for bringing to our attention the intense conversation of *Philosophy and Animal Life* (Cavell et al. 2008). The book concerns what we, not the authors, would call encounters with a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, a numinous riveting presence, as confronted Job: “fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake” (Job 4:14). Ian Hacking reminds us of such a moment in J. M. Coetzee’s autobiographical *Boyhood*. The protagonist’s mother has been told that her hens will lay if she cuts out the horny layer under their tongues. “One after another his mother takes the hens between her knees, presses on their jowls till they open their beaks, and with the point of a paring knife picks at their tongues. The hens shriek and struggle, their eyes bulging. He shudders and turns away. He thinks of his mother slapping stewing-steak down on the counter and cutting it into cubes; he thinks of her bloody fingers” (quoted in Cavell et al. 2008:146).

Here again something is revealed, but its revelation leaves the recipient “wounded,” “haunted,” “raw,” to use Diamond’s words. For such a person, industrial animal farming is repellent savagery, while for others it is just a fact of life. Das first asks, “how are we to come to terms with” this variation? And then, does this variation “shoulder us out of our familiar sense of the moral as essentially entailing issues of personhood?”

It seems to us that this *mysterium tremendum* arrives from a realm beyond personhood and beyond the moral. The mystery is entirely this-worldly, a-religious, yet it irrupts into experience violently, viscerally, initially without thought or name; it is the inchoate incarnate (Carrithers 2008; Fernandez 1986). Like visceral nameless experiences of “the holy,” it has the potency to become a ground for morality through rhetorical metamorphosis without itself being moral. It may be

that at present in Our Society, such an experience could best, or perhaps only, be translated into a question of rights, say, or dignity, or suffering, and so a matter of personhood. But that is not the only human possibility. Godfrey Lienhardt, for example, introduced us to the Dinka *mysterium* he translated as *Flesh*, which itself is a rhetorical translation of inchoate experience: Flesh seizes a man and entrances him, Flesh is a man’s own flesh, Flesh requires things of a man. But Flesh is far from what we consider a person (Lienhardt 1961).

Das was asking, however, about the problem of variation between those who are seized by a horror of animal slaughter and those who are not, and here the source of the difficulty seems to us to be a suspicion that the horror felt at one end of the spectrum by some may seem to lay a moral claim on all.

In reply we might first offer this, from fieldwork among the Navajo. At one point it became compelling for the anthropologist to buy a sheep to feed his hosts. He did not wield the killing knife, but he did pin the sheep to the ground against its struggles and felt the juddering as the dull rusty blade sawed back and forth through the sheep’s neck. He would never have considered doing this at home in Colorado; he has done nothing like it since; he entered into the action calmly, joining, as he felt, the flow of Navajo practice at that moment. You might say he fell in with it.

This practical falling in with is a very ordinary human feat, extended by a second one, our ability to fall in with very varied persuasive representations—even in imagination—making us altogether an elastic, mutually conformable, and often internally contradictory species. Yet this very elasticity, though a source of the troubling variation, may also offer some way out of it. For the horror at animal killing might be replayed in the imagination of those who do not feel it in their gut so that the horror becomes a signal that there is a common problem. Thus, an in-principle difficulty in the sphere of philosophy might be transmuted into a practical problem, one of more-or-less eloquent deliberation in the public sphere, a form of “coming to terms with” that may never settle on a universally accepted view but may lead to changes in widely acceptable practice.

We were surprised that Percy the Pearl Mussel, a more than ordinarily insubstantial entity, should have received any attention at all, but two colleagues used the sadly nonexistent Percy to help us realize the importance of animation. Degnen introduces her reflections on Percy’s significance by mentioning the trickster wolverine Kuekuatsheu. Kuekuatsheu is an animation, an animation mediated orally, inviting the listener into an imagined world in which the trickster wolverine “possesses no values, moral or social, . . . yet through his actions all values come into being” (Radin 1972:viii). So Kuekuatsheu evokes the power of pure rhetorical play, which can reach into a far larger region of the inchoate than can moralizing rhetoric alone. We are grateful to Degnen for reminding us of this larger fecundity that surrounds the more homely world of rhetoric we have considered. Without the

ability to imagine other, amoral or immoral, possibilities, rhetoric could not be inventive enough to deal with the ambiguities and emergencies erupting into life.

Degnen shows how animation implicates another feature of Our Society, the hypertrophy of childhood representations, the huge array of cartoon figures in the commercial public sphere. Gershon diagnoses this as misrecognition, epitomized in cartoon figures that represent corporations, disguising corporate policies and complexities in a world of neoliberal capitalism. Some of the same style of analysis, though, might be applied to the proliferation of cartoon characters in general: even where such figures might have some moralizing message or seem to be harmlessly locked away in the Disney-like fantasy of childhood, they are nevertheless animated misrecognitions of often huge, lucrative, and expanding corporate projects. One by-product of the animated story industry, too, is the continual reinforcement of childhood as a separate realm of (mere) fantasy, as Degnen observes. But on the other hand—Kuekuatsheu to the rescue!—the industry also opens possibilities for critical commentary on neoliberal capitalism itself. Take for example the graphic novel *The Adventures of Unemployed Man* (Origen and Golen 2010); it is the product of a large team of illustrators and writers and of a substantial corporation in the book trade, yet it remains an acid indictment of the sociopolitical and ideological arrangements that gave us the present economic crisis.

Animation offers even wider possibilities as well. Girke suggests a more fruitful engagement with Callon's work on the scallops of St. Briec Bay, and that sent us back to reread Callon. And lo, there is animation at work! The scallops are "actors" in an animated world; their predators "want to attack and exterminate them"; the researchers conduct "long and difficult negotiations" with the scallops and want to "forge an alliance" with them; the scallops observed by the researchers are "representatives" of a "silent mass" who "lurk on the ocean floor," etc. Though low key and monochrome, this is still animation, and indeed animation as effective *energeia*, the rhetor's placing these subjects vividly before the reader's eyes. But this is not mere window dressing, for animation is intrinsic to Callon's argument. He lays down principles that demand that the human and the natural and the biological and the social scientific are neither bounded off from one another nor in any sense unequal. Callon's animation requires evenhandedness so that the researchers and the fishermen, too, are, so to speak, animated into that world alongside but not above the animated scallops. Girke observes that our treatment of the pearl mussel allows us to show where the moral *energeia*, the moral force, lies, whereas Callon's treatment of the scallop does not. Yet there is an implicit moral force in Callon's argument because the animation effectively promotes the scallops while it demotes the researchers, thus transforming both into equally empowered agents.

Callon's is one answer to a pathology identified in the comments by both Strang and Strathern: the exaggeration of human agents' powers in Our Society's moral world. Strang

suggests another remedy, namely to alter not the character of agents but rather the scene within which they operate. Strang proposes that we might better turn to a watery metamorphic cosmology, the world of Hypersea, in which humans' fluid existence is more realistically, and more ethically, imagined through the salty liquid that we share with both aquatic ancestors and coeval species. This radically revised worldview understands organisms as forming not only conduits for the constant flow of liquid between all, on sea or land, but also the liquefied ambience within which each being has its existence. Such a change from Agent to Scene, as Burke (1969 [1945]) might put it, has momentous moral implications for how we envision human existence. On this account it might even be inappropriate to ask, what should we do? For Agency would be dissolved in the fluid element. But, on the other hand, human existence may be so infused with Agency that it would be difficult to do anything that would not be a doing. We look forward to learning how Strang might reply to this question.

Strathern's comment leads in another direction, to hypertrophied agency in Our academic world. Though the symptoms may be found in any of Our societies, the immediate occasion for her remarks lies in the United Kingdom in a recent augmentation of an already baroque apparatus erected by government to evaluate research. This fresh annex requires researchers to show "impact" in the larger world, perhaps by patenting an invention or suggesting a successful policy initiative. Strathern (2000) has done much to alert us to one strand in such a policy, the audit culture itself, which operates on the assumption that any human activity can be adequately and exhaustively represented in written prose. A second strand is indeed that of exaggerated agency, conceived as competing individuals in a market (even though the rewards and penalties are distributed by bureaucracy). As Dumont (1970, 1977, 1986) argued, this hypertrophy of economistic individualism leads to a corresponding and pathological blindness to those concretely imagined senses of a collective, of a We, that also inevitably compose Our world. Were we rhetorically to retrieve a sober version of Our "holism," to use Dumont's word, then we would also retrieve a sense of value, not price, in research and in universities in general.

A third strand is Our Society's captivation with the new and the original, with invention. Cintron calls this the hyperbolic hypermodern, evidenced, for example, in the gargantuan World Trade Center and in the "*mythoi* of major corporations" (Cintron 2009:142): Verizon: "Make progress every day"; Boeing: "Forever new frontiers."

In a modest way, even workaday academics in the United Kingdom also promulgate the new by demanding or at least hoping to find "originality" in students' work. But if the model for singular inventiveness were, say, Thomas Edison and his lightbulb, then this concept assorts poorly with much of the academic world. The current piece, for example, composed of article, comments, and reply, contains many voices and many quotations and citations. It must lay claim to be

original, for this journal takes only contributions “at the forefront of present-day scholarship,” according to its online policy. Yet the originality of this current piece, its forefrontness, might in the end be nothing more than its being composed of those manifold components largely from one particular point of view. Of course anyone’s point of view might be fresh to some other somebody, but is it not an extra and unwarranted rhetorical move, a bit of Our merely local metaphysics, to bestow the glitter of “the new” on it?

—Michael Carrithers, Louise J. Bracken,
and Steven Emery

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