

BABE: THE TALE OF THE SPEAKING MEAT

Val Plumwood

'You look a little shy: let me introduce you to that leg of mutton,' said the Red Queen. Alice-Mutton: Mutton-Alice'. The leg of mutton got up in the dish and made a little bow to Alice, and Alice returned the bow, not knowing whether to be frightened or amused.

'May I give you a slice?' she said, taking up the a slice?' she said, taking up the knife and fork, and looking from one Queen to the other.

'Certainly not,' the Red Queen said, very decidedly: 'it isn't etiquette to cut anyone you've been introduced to. Remove the joint!'

Alice Through the Looking Glass

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1 : The Unprejudiced Heart

I would like somebody somewhere to endow an annual prize for a work of art which takes a group of the most oppressed subjects and makes an effective and transformative representation of their situation. The work would make its audience care about what happens to those oppressed subjects and to understand something of the audience's own role in maintaining their oppression. It would foster recognition of the subjectivity and creativity of the oppressed group and consciousness of the need for redistribution of respect and of cultural and material goods. Above all, it would help to support and protect them. If these are subjects who are conventionally seen as radically excluded, for example as beyond the possibility of communication or as embodied in ways which

occasion aversion or anxiety, the prize work should attempt to disrupt those violence-prone perceptions.

One of my nominations for such a prize would be the film *Babe*. Before seeing the film, I would have doubted that it was possible to make a highly successful film for mass audiences that could do those things for one of the most oppressed subjects in our society, the meat pig. One feature that made this achievement possible was that the film successfully disrupted the adult/child boundary and created space for adults to share certain kinds of openness to and sympathy for animals, permitted to children but normally out of bounds for mature adults. This is one of the devices which enables the film, like Dick King-Smith's prize-winning book *The Sheep-Pig* on which it is based¹, to succeed to a remarkable degree in opening for the pig the 'unprejudiced heart' invoked in the narrator's opening sentence. It is not just the film's problematisation of the concept of meat that makes this film philosophically interesting; it also poses many ethico-political questions, analogous to questions in post-colonial theory, about the distinction between meat and non-meat animals and the role of the human contract with those special more privileged 'pet' animals who can never be 'meat'.

Because the main theme of *Babe* turns around the refusal of communicative status to animals, the film is of considerable interest for philosophical accounts of human-animal relations. The story provides a rich context for thinking about this communicative status, about the inadequacy of narrow rationalist accounts of communication, about representations of animal communication and the charge of anthropomorphism, and about the contradictions and paradoxes disclosed when we recognise the meat as a communicative subject. *Babe* repeatedly problematises the kind of prejudice that relegates the other that is our food to the category of 'meat', a sphere of radical otherness marked by rational deficiency, reduction to an impoverished, mechanistic concept of 'body', and exclusion from communicative status. The pig Babe soon talks his way smartly around the assumption that because he is a meat animal, he is 'too stupid to understand'; the storyline refutes the sheep-dog Fly's dismissal of sheep-talk as 'just so much rubbish, to which she never paid any attention'. The refusal of communicative status to animals is a crucial, formative arena where radical exclusion and silencing strategies which affect both humans and

animals are developed and perfected. *Babe* thus provides many insights into closure strategies as they affect both humans and nonhumans.

Babe also offers a recognition of communicative virtues and characteristics as central to both human and nonhuman forms of life, and offers a vision of the emergence of communicative forms of relationship as victorious alternatives to forms based on violence, domination and terror. The film does not explore the ethical and political ambiguities of communicative forms, which are potentially rather more compatible with oppression than it suggests, and are implicated in the replacement of repressive patriarchal models by hegemonic models based on the master subject, as in certain forms of liberal democratic politics for example. But as Dryzek² and Plumwood³ have argued, communicative models of relationships with nature and animals seem likely to offer us a better chance of survival in the difficult times ahead than dominant mechanistic models which promote insensitivity to the others' agency and denial of our dependency on them. *Babe* crystallises in a useful way a clash of models that is critical for our times.

My initial reason for going to the movie however had less to do with millennial models and more to do with being homesick -- I was away from Australia for a long period and the film had been shot in a shire near my home. I hoped to hear again the sounds of the bush -- those small but intensely evocative background calls -- especially the local birds and frogs which appear in the background on most soundtracks -- that creep up on you unawares to create powerful longings for a much-loved place. But when I took my seat in the darkened cinema, something else made me cry too, with sorrow and shame for my own complicity in the dominant cultural tradition of rational human mastery over animals and nature -- as well as everything else considered beneath the master realm of reason. These were the powerful opening scenes of *Babe* showing the terrible cruelty of the intensive pig farms in which the pig Babe, treated as living meat, is introduced to us as narrative subject.

These visions of hell took on special power and poignancy for me because at the time I saw the film, I was living in the second highest U.S. state for intensive hog production. The state of North Carolina was a place where one rarely saw farm animals out in the open and many of the rivers and estuaries were seriously degraded or under assault from the toxic run-off generated by the intensive factory farms. Many of the

huge pig 'slaughter facilities' in the U.S. employ largely prison labour. The work of those who labour on the killing floor of these massive facilities slaughtering up to 15,000 pigs a day is so terrible and poorly paid that only the slave-like workforce of the carceral system, or those coerced by other forms of desperation such as indentured immigrants, are available as workers. The concentration camps too employed some categories of prisoners to organise, imprison and execute others. The treatment of the pigs and that of the prisoners has much in common; in both cases, the intense segregation of the gulag ensures that the middle class rarely has to confront the hidden connection between its ugly and violent reality and their own comfortable and tidy lives. The speech of both pigs and prisoners is erased or delegitimated, and both are reduced to living meat. As C. Stone Brown argues, 'African Americans are the flesh that maintains a profitable "prison industry".'⁴ As disciplinary democracy normalises massive incarceration and more of us become either prisoners or keepers, the fate of nonhuman and human prisoners increasingly converges.

The nightmarish opening scenes of *Babe* showed an ugly gulag reality that was all around but which was banished from thought and sight, and generally treated, even by the animal liberation movement, as too well established for serious contest. In these circumstances, who could avoid being immediately caught up in the little pig's plight, or avoid comparing the misery of the incarcerated animals with the consumptive pleasures of the over-privileged humans the next shots cut to? The filmic technique at this point had us crossing that crucial animal/human subject boundary with dizzying speed, so fast that our usual distancing defences did not have time to cut in and tell us that these subjects are not at all comparable, that humans count and pigs don't. Who could avoid comparing the pigs' misery with the humans' pleasure, or avoid thoughts of concentration camps and gas chambers as the pig mothers were torn from their children and cattle-prodded into that terrible night journey from which there was no return?

The answer, of course, to this question is: 'quite a lot of people'. Many people didn't see animals or animal liberation as the topic of the film, and some reviewers seemed to think it was all about how you could cross gender and class boundaries and burst categories to make yourself anything you wanted to be, even a sheep-pig, if you had enough determination and willpower. For them it was a sophisticated

postmodern-neoliberal Animal Farm allegory about personal responsibility, individual merit rewarded, and trying harder. *Babe* does have valid things to say to a human audience about not staying in the boxes convention puts you into, but the message here is also relevant to breaking down hierarchies of considerability which serve to confine nonhumans. Some were open to such a metaphorical message about stereotyping and limitation in the human case, but closed to it in the nonhuman case. Their inability to see how animals themselves could be more than conceptual instruments for humans and could themselves be a topic for a 'serious' film points to their entrapment by a conceptual framework that assigns animals a status beneath subjectivity and seriousness. Both assignments are effective defences against hearing the story of the speaking meat that *Babe* articulates. The pig Babe speaks from the most delegitimated subject position possible in our society, that of the meat, and we have developed strategies for blocking out and not hearing the speech of those in that position. We could not continue the sorts of meat practices the pig-human gulag system is based upon without these kinds of strategies. One of the great strengths of the film is that it invites us to challenge some of these paradoxes, blocks and erasures.

2: The Paradox of the Speaking Meat

In the opening scenes of the factory farm we are introduced to the piglet Babe as the film's main narrative subject (marked by the subject's theme on the soundtrack, among other marks of subjecthood). We open with a shot showing real piglets waking in expressive communication, and then see one of these meat-subjects expressing his/her⁵ sorrow at the loss of his mother, and his fear as he is seized by strangers and carried away to be raffled. As his mother is prodded into the truck, Babe utters his grief so fleetingly and naturally that we hardly notice that our usual assumptions have been turned on their heads. The meat animal is being presented to us as an expressive, narrative subject -- the meat is speaking. There are several disruptions here. What is disrupted immediately is the Cartesian stereotype of the machine-animal, the dominant model which enables the ontological presence, mindlike and communicative characteristics of animals to be so utterly denied in the factory farm, where their entire lives are defined and distorted by the function of serving human appetite. There is paradox in the concept of speaking meat Babe confronts us with, precisely because the concept of

meat totally erases that speaking position; there is no possibility of encountering the meat as expressive, narrative subject.

An inquiry into the concept of meat provides a useful route into understanding how 'taxonomy' connects ontology with ethics -- how certain strategies of representation normalise oppression by narrowing ethically relevant perception, erasing key ethical dimensions of situations, and sometimes even making the other complicit in their own oppression through internalising oppressive forms of identity. As Carol Adams has argued⁶, the concept of meat justifies oppression by hiding responsibility for death and the causal connection between the production of meat and the animal's death. The backgrounding, erasure or denial of these connections in the abstractly quantitative and commodified concept of meat Adams terms 'absent referent'. 'Absent referent' involves a complex process of splitting which renders unavailable not only the act of killing which makes meat available as a commodity⁶, but any recognition of connection between the meat and those who consume it. To achieve this the concept of meat must simultaneously establish several profound splits or radical exclusions, between process-product, mind-body, and us-them. The first of these is inherent in the commodity form and involves a radical dissociation which denies the connection between the processes set in motion by our intentions and the end product of commodified, quantitatively-specifiable flesh. The second radically dissociates the subjectivity which sets these processes in motion from that of its victim, denying their kinship as socially connected, purposive and communicative beings, and presenting the victim reductively as flesh. 'You looks at us' says King-Smith's wise old sheep Maa 'and you sees lamb chops'.

The third background assumption involved in modern industrial society's concept of meat as commodity denies the possibility of human consumers themselves ever taking the form of meat, by a background assumption of a hierarchy of use and considerability which is linked to an alleged hierarchy of mental and communicative capacities between species, with humans of course at the top. We may daily consume other animals in their billions, but we never position ourselves reciprocally as food for these others, not even worms. As consumers of meat who can never suppose ourselves be meat, we assume the god-position above the action, positioning our identity outside the framework of ecological

exchange. The conjunction 'human meat' becomes almost as unthinkable a possibility as the idea of being introduced to the speaking meat.

The concept of meat is a form of life⁷ in which taxonomy structures our moral vision via the ethical and epistemological possibilities it discloses or denies.⁸ These sets of background denials enable the presentation of the other in the instrumental terms that Marilyn Frye has identified as belonging to the arrogant perspective in which viewers 'organise everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interests',⁹ in this case, in terms of a strong instrumental reductionism which identifies the other with what is only a part of their being, the part that is of use to us as flesh. Since eurocentric culture identifies the human in radically contrasting terms which emphasise, rather than suppress or deny we, in contrast, are identified as humans in terms which emphasise, rather than suppress or deny, our subjectivity, and which tend to background our bodily aspects of identity, beings identified as meat become radically Other: not only can we never be included in the category of meat ourselves, we can never be introduced to the meat. These assumptions together involve a profound and multiple denial of kinship with meat.

There is injustice in each of these denials and reductive modes of conception. There is injustice for a communicative and ethical being in being conceived systematically in ways that refuse recognition of this status and these characteristics. There is injustice for such a being in being conceived reductively as body, first because such conception singles its referent out for treatment as radically less than it is, and second because such an instrumental reductionism defines the other in terms that assume the right of a 'higher' group supposedly above the process of exchange to treat them as a resource for their ends. Animals so conceived are subject to both radical exclusion (as having a radically different nature discontinuous from that of the human meat consumer) and extreme homogenisation -- replaceable and interchangeable, their individuality submerged, they 'drown in the anonymous collectivity' of the quantitative commodity form meat. The radical exclusion aspect of the meat concept denies kinship and generates a conceptual distance or boundary between humanity and its 'meat' which blocks sympathy, reduces the risk of identification with those so designated, and silences them as communicative beings. The reductiveness of the meat concept permits a conceptual strategy designed to block recognition of these

injustices, and its disruption in the concept of the speaking meat is one source of the flavour of paradox that lingers around that idea.

But from the injustice of industrial society's institution of meat as commodity, and the moral cowardice and evasion of the associated conceptual strategies of denial, we cannot conclude that there is no moral alternative to a universalised vegetarianism, that there are no other, less ethically problematic ways to resolve the tensions between conceiving nonhumans both as communicative others and as food. In the complex biological exchange which sustains all our lives, we must all gain sustenance at the expense of the other, 'the one living the other's death, and dying the other's life', in the words of Heraclitus. Shagbark Hickory outlines an alternative, non-reductive perspective on this exchange which does not refuse the moral complexities and perplexities involved:

For most or all American Indians food (plant as well as animal) is kin. Relationships to plants and animals as, on the one hand, food and, on the other hand, kin creates a tension which is dealt with mythically, ritually, and ceremonially, but which is never denied. It is this refusal to deny the dilemma in which we are implicated in this life, a refusal to take the way of bad faith, moral supremacy, or self-deception which constitutes a radical challenge to our relationships to our food. The American Indian view that considerability goes "all the way down" requires a response considerably more sophisticated than those we have seen in the West, which consist either in drawing lines of moral considerability in order to create an out-group, or in constructing hierarchies of considerability creating de facto out-groups in particular cases.¹⁰

As Shagbark Hickory notes, some forms of vegetarianism remain trapped in the Western strategies of denial and radical exclusion which create further out-groups, merely redrawing the boundary of otherness in a different place, at the border of animality rather than humanity. This comes about because, as we notice, the dominant Western view places humans above the systematic exchange processes in which all creatures become (eventually) food for others, privileging humans as eaters for whom all others are available as food but who are never themselves available as food. Some movements toward recognition of kinship between humans and animals thus take the misguided form of attempting to extend the privilege of this problematic positioning of humans above

the exchange process outward to other (selected) groups of animals. At the same time, such forms of recognition are of necessity highly limited in the class to which such recognition can be extended. They can only result in enlarging the class of the privileged, instead of a recognition of the kinship of all living things in the biological exchanges of food, and in a retention of the strategies of erasure and denial for the excluded groups.

In contrast, the indigenous recognition that the central philosophical problem of human life is that 'all our food is souls' points towards non-reductive practices and understandings of food that resolve the moral failings of 'bad faith, moral supremacy, [and] self-deception' Shagbark Hickory finds implicit in the dominant Western meat concept. However, to the extent that these alternative understandings of food form part of a different 'form of life', in Wittgenstein's sense¹¹, they are not readily available, either practically or conceptually, within the context of contemporary industrial life and its commodified food relationships. Conversely, the fact that vegetarianism may usually be the course which, in the context of such a commodity society, will best minimise our complicity in injustice towards others, does nothing to support the eurocentric conclusion that vegetarianism is a universal moral requirement for all people in all societies in all situations.¹²

In contexts where the multiple denials of kinship involved in meat cannot be successfully made, for example in the case where we have 'been introduced' and have intimate and individual knowledge of the particular animal to be eaten, we tend to experience powerful tensions and often profound discomforts over its inclusion in the category of meat. These tensions and discomforts find expression in traditional contexts such as New Guinea, where pigs that have been raised as part of a family are never slaughtered by that family but are exchanged. Alternative Westerners (for example, subsistence farmers) who aim to create 'spiritual' food practices in opposition to the dominant commodified ones sometimes argue that meat eating is ethically acceptable if you 'take responsibility'. This phrase I think indicates a search for alternative food practices that avoid the processes of ethical erasure I have identified in the practices of meat.

In a Western context of individualised ethical choice, such alternatives would have to mean, for example, the eater taking personal responsibility

for the eaten animal's fate (which in the case of a domestic animal would include responsibility for the quality of its life as well as for its death), and bearing the blame for unnecessary suffering. That would mean finding ways to acknowledge fully the animal's 'soul' and its kinship, and to express gratitude and reciprocity, that is, to acknowledge a reciprocal availability as food for others. Such conditions, demanding even in the context of traditional communities, are very difficult to realise, both materially and psychologically, in the context of contemporary urban Western life. To the extent that they require establishing new shared cultural practices and meanings rather than just new individual practices, ethically sensitive carnivorous practices are not culturally available in that context.

The paradox of the speaking meat is both the product of a particular social context, and an indicator of some of the most significant moral failings of that context. The western solution to the moral dilemmas of food is the creation of a set of moral dualisms, involving a sharp discontinuity between those who deserve and those who are beyond ethical consideration. As we have seen, the speaking meat forces us to confront the way this moral dualism and discontinuity is based on reductionism, denial and silencing. Our civilisation's orientation to the creation of moral dualisms may be one reason for its technological dominance, since it removes any constraints of respect which might otherwise hold back development, but it remains an ever ready source of corruption of our ethical practices. The silencing solutions of moral dualism are always potentially capable of extension to selected groups of humans counted as lesser in their humanity, and we have seen this extension made many times in this century. Although this silencing possibility is present in any human society, it must be greatly reinforced by the entrenchment of the dualist model in the basic case of food.

3 : The Communicative Model

The overarching model which subsumes the commodity model of the animal and its specific modes of and motives for reduction is the Cartesian-mechanistic reduction of the non-human animal to its body, and the associated refusal to recognise non-human animals as akin to human ones in the possession of mind, intention and communication. Mary Midgley¹³ and Barbara Noske¹⁴ are two philosophers who have pointed out that the moral failings implicit in the modern, commodified concept of meat find their philosophical progenitor in Cartesian

rationalism and the mechanistic model. The rationalist-mechanistic model of the animal is a key part of the relation between modernity and the nonhuman world, and its rationality is expressed both in reductive concepts like meat and in the practices of the factory farm.¹⁴ The mechanistic model erases the possibility of communication by denying mindlike properties to non-humans; ideals of manipulation and instrumental rationality are at odds with communicative ideals and with the conception of the other as a communicative subject. *Babe* confronts us with the conflict between the mechanistic model of the factory farm, and the communicative model of human/animal relations the film ultimately vindicates. This alternative communicative model is located in the film in the romantically presented contrast space of the Hoggett's family farm, where it struggles to emerge in the unconventional role tolerated for the former meat animal Babe and Babe's communicative reformation of relationships with the sheep. But the farm itself is the site of conflict between the communicative and the Cartesian-reductive models, for it too contains the sinister meat house and the animal regimes based on fear and force. The conflict between these models is also represented in the form of the conflict within the taciturn farmer and between him and the more conventional farm wife.

Nevertheless, animal liberationists have some justification for viewing the film's major implicit contrast between the factory farm and the family farm with a sceptical eye. To say that the family farm setting of *Babe* is highly romanticised is an understatement. A cynic might say that the family farm parallels the family as the site of mystifying representations and idealisations. The contrasts of *Babe* hide the fact that the family farm model is compatible with, and normally involves, many oppressive animal husbandry practices; the destination of most of its animal food-producing units is ultimately the market, and all that has changed is the indoor setting. This would be, I think, to ignore the fact that moral differences of degree can be important; it would be like saying that there is no moral difference between being a worker on a production line and an inmate of a concentration camp, because both involve some degree of reduction and instrumentalisation. If there is a moral difference between the smaller scale farm and the animal gulag, however, there is also normally a lot more continuity than *Babe* makes visible.

But to dismiss the implicit contrast of *Babe* in this way would be to miss the point that *Babe* also makes visible a new possibility - the

possibility of replacing a dominant model of mechanistic relations by a communicative one which recognises the animal's status as a communicative and moral being and revolutionises the moral basis of relationships with domestic animals. Whether this is compatible with farming as we know it remains an open question, but one the film deserves credit for raising. *Babe* leaves us in no doubt that meat is violence, and it posits a model of communication in opposition to that violence, and hence a new vision of relations to domestic animals. It does not explore the puzzles in that vision, leaving us with various paradoxes to chew on. But its communicative model presents a final vision of some power, including the triumph of the communicative skills and ethic Babe has acquired from the maternal wisdom of the sheep and various other proxy mothers.

Babe's status as a communicative subject has received so little attention in the monstrous regime of the gulag that he does not even have an individual name. But, as we soon discover when Babe is removed through the device of the raffle to the relatively enlightened world of the family farm, Babe's status as a communicative subject still has many obstacles to overcome to gain recognition. Before arrival at the farm, Babe is initially just a 'worthless little runt', an object to be weighed, raffled off and eaten. In the idealised world of the Hoggett's traditional farm, Babe's communicative capacities are initially dimly, then more clearly, recognised by Farmer Hoggett. But they are not initially recognised by his wife, who addresses him as 'you lucky little pork chop' and looks forward to Babe's transformation into the familiar commodity form of 'two nice hams, two sides of bacon, pork chops, kidneys, liver, chitterling, trotters etc'.

The film version of Mrs. Hoggett, unlike the book version, is made to represent the most closed, convention and consumer-bound side of the human character.¹⁵ Although this elaboration of conflicting perspectives adds some richness to the film's themes and characterisation, the linking of the conflict between the mechanistic and communicative perspectives in this way with gender introduces elements of androcentrism into the story, obscures the real connections between gender and consumerism and between gender and the mechanistic model,¹⁶ and generates contradictory messages about the affirmation of animality. This emerges in the film's derogatory representation of the farm wife in animalistic terms and in the implicit demeaning of women's understanding and tasks

as consumeristic and materialistic, in contrast to the more 'spiritual' orientation of the father/farmer. Babe's subjectivity is recognised by several animal foster mothers, the dog Fly and the sheep Maa, who develop Babe's communicative and social abilities in the best maternal traditions. But although Babe's unusual communicative abilities must ultimately derive from these various mothers (who must have included the original pig mother he missed so much), it is their completion and recognition by the father/farmer, represented as the 'unprejudiced heart', that are positioned in the movie as the key transformative elements for Babe and for the culture more generally.

The farmer is, for reasons the film leaves unexplored, open to certain possibilities of animal communication the others around him are closed to. By various communicative deeds, Babe gradually earns the farmer's recognition of his subjectivity, or so he believes, but is devastated by the final -- incredible -- discovery of his status as meat, revealed to him by the jealous cat. This apparent betrayal, (of almost biblical proportions) by the father, almost kills Babe, who, like the duck Ferdie, cannot bear to live as only meat. At this point in the story, as at the beginning and the end, Babe is positioned as a Christ figure, the feminised, dependent son who is affirmed and revived by the farmer/father's recognition and love, expressed in the dance of life. Together Babe and the farmer go on to accomplish the apparently impossible feat of opening closed minds and demonstrating Babe's unrecognised communicative ability to the world. We are invited to conclude that this revolutionises the treatment of pigs and of farming generally, reformulating it as an activity based on communication rather than force and violence. The communicative ethic is also strongly represented by the (female) sheep, whose persistent faith in and exemplification of the virtues and values of communication and non-violence is essential to their ultimate victory over the reductive violence of traditional relationships.

Communicative relationships open up new moral possibilities for organising life in ways that can negotiate conflicts of interests, build agreement, trust and mutuality, and avoid instrumentalism and the imposition of the will of one party on the other by force. Communicative relations don't necessarily follow out those possibilities however, and it is important not to romanticise the communicative model, which does not automatically eliminate the dynamic of power, either in terms of equality of access, of hierarchy in forms of communication, or of the

structuring of communication in hegemonic ways. There are various strategies for taking back the greater equality communicative models appear to offer. Rationalist models which treat communication as an exercise in pure, abstract, neutral and universal reason, and which delegitimize the more emotional and bodily forms and aspects of communication, operate to exclude nonhumans from full communicative status just as they exclude various human others accorded lower human status as further from the rational ideal. These rationalist models exclude the forms of communication associated with animals along with the forms of communication associated with women, with non-western cultures and with less 'educated' classes.¹⁷

Communicative models which allow us to overcome these exclusions for humans will also help us to recognise non-human animals in their denied aspects as communicative beings, but an excessive emphasis on communication and its use as a criterion of moral worth or value would remain problematic for nonhumans in basing itself on a capacity which may still be highly characteristic of humanity, and in biasing our valuations heavily towards those species most similar to ourselves. To overcome this implicit anthropocentrism, a communicative model would need to be part of plural set of grounds for valuation, rather than its unique and exclusive basis, and to be sensitive to communicative capacities within species as well as to their capacities for communication with humans.

If the film's communicative vision offers hope of moving on to a new stage beyond mechanism, it also leaves us with many tantalising questions about this new stage which arise from the ambivalence of communication. Will communication be on our terms or theirs? Will Babe's communicative abilities be used for the good of the animals or for that of the farmer? If the film's account of the moral development of the farmer (reaching its climax in the step-dance) offers a vision of the small farm as a putative future enterprise of love and communication with nature and animals, the film also casts little light on the question of what the communicative farm would be like. Will the new communicative paradigm be used to liberate the sheep and the other farm animals, or merely to oppress them in more subtle and self-complicit ways? Will the communicative animal farm stand to the mechanistic farm as the hegemonic communicative forms of liberal democracy stand to the more repressive forms of patriarchal-authoritarian governance

they replaced? The distinction between democracy and despotism is supposedly built on such a contrast, but as it becomes increasingly clear how little our own society resembles the democratic ideal of free and open dialogue to which all have access, it also becomes clear how our communicative abilities can be used to control and imprison us. A new communicative stage of human-nature relationships would need to place such questions at the centre of its critical thought: at this level, the tale of the speaking meat has only just begun.

Notes

1. Dick King-Smith, *The Sheep-Pig* (Puffin Books, Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1983).
2. John Dryzek, *Discursive Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990).
3. Val Plumwood *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Routledge, London., 1993).
4. C. Stone Brown, 'Prison Guards Fund Governor for Presidential Race' *Z Magazine* Sept /October (1995).
5. I have assumed the masculine pronoun here for Babe because this is used in King-Smith, *The Sheep-Pig*, but the film is more ambiguous on this point.
6. Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (Continuum, New York, 1994).
7. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1954).
8. This is one reason why the task of obtaining an adequate environmental and non-anthrocentric ethic should not be equated with that of enunciating abstract principles of equal treatment and extending them to nonhuman others. Anthrocentric taxonomy will always defeat abstract moral principles, however comprehensive.
9. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (The Crossing Press, New York, 1983), p.67.
10. Shagbark Hickory, 'Environmental Etiquette/Environmental Practice: American Indian Challenges to Mainstream Environmental Ethics' in Max Oelschlaeger ed., *The Company of Others : Essays in Celebration of Paul Shephard* (Kivaki Press, Durango, Colorado, 1995).
11. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.
12. Carol J. Adams, 'Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals', *Hypatia* 6, (1991), pp.125-145.
13. Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Penguin, London, 1983).
14. Barbara Noske, *Humans and Other Animals* (Pluto Press London, 1989).

15. In King-Smith, *The Sheep-Pig*, Mrs Hoggett is the first to fully recognise the value of Babe's contributions and to invite him into the house, explicitly admitting him to the contract class.

16. Especially since feminists have argued that the mechanistic models which deny communicative power to nature represent a masculinist worldview, among other things. See for example, Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*. (Wildwood House, London, 1981)

17. Iris Young, 'Communication and the Other : Beyond Deliberative Democracy' in Margaret Wilson and Anna Yeatman eds. *Antipodean Practices* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1995), 134-152.

Biography

Val Plumwood is the author of *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Routledge, London, 1993) and of over 80 papers in a wide range of areas including feminist philosophy, feminist ecology, feminist ethics, feminist logic, philosophical logic, environmental ethics and political philosophy. She is a research scholar at the University of Sydney, Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences. Val's home base is an area of mountain forest in southern N.S.W., Australia. She says that as the foster-mother of a wombat, she tends to look at other animals, especially dogs and cats, from a wombat's viewpoint. As the survivor of a drowning attempt by a Saltwater Crocodile, she also feels that she knows a bit about what it is like to be treated as someone else's meat.