

# Judas Work: Four Modes of Sorrow

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*In this essay I examine four modes of thinking about the betrayals involved in the planned mass deaths of animals, specifically the wild donkeys of North Australia. I consider the wild, but in contrast to the positive valence this concept has acquired in environmental literature, I work with a set of negative connotations that I encountered in conversations with Aboriginal people in North Australia. I explore the wild as a form of narcissism, to use Hatley's terminology, and I engage with animal mass deaths as an outcome of processes of disconnection and catastrophe. My analysis examines how the colonising wild is the tearing apart of the fabric of life and death on earth.*

[In trying to destroy other groups] humans show the reprehensible capacity to turn their history, their remembrance of time across the aeons, the generations, into a sort of narcissistic mirror. One eliminates all the strangers, all the disruptions to one's own vision, so that history only articulates one's own concerns, one's own needs. One writes the past and the future as a mode of colonization.

—James Hatley, *Suffering Witness*

## **Introduction**

I cannot claim to have a special rapport with donkeys. Where they live in out-back Australia the flies breed up to an intolerable extent. In donkey country flies seek out every skerrick of bare skin; they dive into eyes, ears, and mouth. One waits impatiently for nightfall so as to be able to speak and breathe in a relaxed way. Of course, by dark one is so sick and tired of it all that sleep is all one really wants. But donkeys are sociable creatures. Many nights I've groaned in my swag when I heard them start up their conversation, knowing that they could go on for hours in their snuffling, chortling, rasping, gasping voices. And yet, donkeys are disarmingly sweet creatures too. A herd of wild donkeys may not have the elegance of wild horses or the exotic charisma of wild camels, but they lift the spirits just by looking so effortlessly free. And even if they had no charm, I still wouldn't want to see them hunted to extinction in the bush.

In this essay I examine four modes of thinking about the betrayals involved in the planned mass deaths of animals, specifically the wild donkeys of

North Australia. To think about the “more-than-(but including)-human world,” to quote Patrick Curry’s embellishment of David Abram’s inspired phrase,<sup>1</sup> is to invite consideration of wilderness and the wild, as many scholars in recent years have persuasively argued. Positive connotations of the “wild” speak to connections between humans and earth-others, and thus do important cultural work.<sup>2</sup> Attracted though I am to such discourse, my own thought keeps returning to the view put by some of my Australian Aboriginal teachers for whom “the wild” had a set of negative connotations. The wild they spoke of is a place and process of disconnection and catastrophe. Monological self sees itself surrounded by resources that promote the self. Anything else is an obstacle, and obstacles are to be transformed into use or eradicated.



I lived with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory communities of Yarralin and Lingara for many years. Out in the savannah country of North Australia the grasslands are golden for most of the year, only coming green in response to the short but often extreme rains of the wet season. The sky is large and blue, the soil is red like old blood, and transient life is held between these vivid presences. Living things are subtle in their colouring or fleet in their passing—the quiet agile wallabies, the parched or greening grass, the dusky, hazy eucalyptus trees with white bark and smoky leaves, their vivid flowers that come and go in a flash.

Yarralin and Lingara had been excised from large cattle properties, and among the many things that people taught me, I learned that White settlers had come into this country with their cattle and horses about 120 years ago, establishing broad acres cattle properties. They killed, and later effectively enslaved, the Aboriginal people whose homelands they were occupying.<sup>3</sup> Since the 1960s decolonizing legislation has been enacted to un-make many of the colonizing relations of power, and yet still today colonization, that relentlessly monological narcissism Hatley describes, remains alive and well.

On one of the many trips I made with my teachers between Yarralin and Lingara, we stopped to film some of the most serious erosion in our region. We looked at bare soil that was washing away down the gullies, at gullies that were cutting into the land, at dead trees, scald areas, and sickly cattle. I asked one of my teachers, Daly Pulkara, what he called this country, and he looked at it deeply and said in a heavy voice: “It’s the wild. It’s just the wild.”

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1. Patrick Curry, “Nature Post-Nature,” *New Formations* 26 (Spring 2008), 51–64, 59.  
2. David Abram’s website gives excellent insight into positive connotations of the wild: [www.wildethics.org](http://www.wildethics.org)  
3. Discussed in much greater detail in Deborah Rose, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River, and Wave Hill stations, North Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991).

I had read about the detrimental effects of cattle on country: how their hooves hammer soils that previously had only known padded feet, how their grazing differs from that of native herbivores, how they trample waterholes and batter pathways down to the rivers.<sup>4</sup> I imagined that the wild was caused by cattle. Not so, according to Daly and other teachers. Not so at all. It's the humans who brought them here and are failing to take proper care who are the problem. In the course of many conversations, Aboriginal people were explaining that settlers saw the world in terms of themselves and their cattle. They didn't think about anything else, not even the ecosystems that would have to thrive if they and their cattle were going to thrive. As another teacher, Riley Young, asked, "what's wrong with whitefellas, they crazy or what?" I came to understand that the wild, in Daly's terms, is a form of wilfulness gone crazy. It is easy to see the wild as a set of processes that are happening outside the human; in scientific terms the wild is a failure of functionality, an escalation of entropy, a landscape problem to be fixed. I will propose, in contrast that, the wild is the convergence of multiple monological betrayals. Had Daly known the words that James Hatley uses, I am sure he would have seen the connections: that the wild was the end result of whitefellas remaking the country, as well as the past and future, in their own narcissistic image. The "wild" is not a metaphor; it is a glimpse, a sudden flinch-making demonstration, that self without other is no self at all, in fact, is a bare gully where life washes away or bleeds out, where betrayal replaces connectivity, and less and less care remains.

### **Jennies and Jacks**

The story I focus on begins in the Victoria River District of the north-west section of the Territory and the adjacent Kimberley region of Western Australia. Donkeys were brought into the Victoria River District in the early years of the Twentieth century as beasts of burden. Loads of supplies were brought to the district by boat and unloaded at the Timber Creek jetty on the Victoria River. From there the loads were taken inland by donkey teams. In the 1930s, motorised transport began to replace donkeys, and they were let loose to join others that had gone feral over the years. Since being set free they have multiplied at an enormous rate. Donkeys survive well in the bush; they are versatile foragers and can tolerate extreme conditions. Like camels, they can reduce their evaporative water loss, and unlike cattle they can continue to eat when deprived of water. They are thus superbly able to live in the arid and semi-arid zones.<sup>5</sup>

Wild donkeys and wild horses have since the 1950s been classed as pests. The main "problem" posed by donkeys and other ferals and is that they com-

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4. Eric Rolls, *A Million Wild Acres* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1984 [1981]).

5. Farmnote 121/2000: Feral donkey (Western Australia), Agriculture, Western Australia, (reviewed 2007), <http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/content/pw/vp/fer/fl2100.pdf>

pete with cattle for grass.<sup>6</sup> Funding for eradication reflects the primary production benefits: 20% of the funding is from the pastoral industry, and the majority is from the Agriculture Protection Board.<sup>7</sup> From the 1950s on, the government has undertaken periodic efforts to eradicate or at least control ferals. The main method has been large-scale shoot-outs. Initially shooters travelled cross-country searching out and destroying donkeys. Some of the donkeys that have been killed have been used for pet meat, but for the most part there is inadequate economic incentive to make any use at all of the corpses.<sup>8</sup> Environmental historian Darrell Lewis does report one unexpected and bizarre benefit: in the extremely dry year of 1965 starving cattle were eating the stomach contents of donkeys that had previously been shot.<sup>9</sup>

Shooting from the ground is difficult in many areas because of the terrain, and in 1978 a more efficient program of eradication was initiated using broad-scale shooting from helicopters. In addition to government-sponsored killings, donkeys and other ferals (along with dingoes) are fair game for shooters because they are classed as pests. People pay to go on “safari” and shoot donkeys, goats, dingoes, and other creatures. This practice is called “cull hunting.”<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the face-to-face safari method that results in websites dedicated to photos of men with their trophy donkeys, wide-scale eradication increasingly depended on the use of helicopters, thus continuing the shoot-outs at a remove, and with no follow-up to make use of the corpses and very little visual documentation.

Defenders of the method are insistent that killing animals from helicopters constitutes a “humane cull”; in this context “humane” tends to mean avoiding unnecessary stress and suffering. According to the model code of practice for wild horse control, “There is a growing expectation that animal suffering associated with pest management be minimized. This should occur regardless of the status given to a particular pest species or the extent of damage or impact created by that pest.”<sup>11</sup>

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6. Farmnote 121/2000.

7. “Kimberley Collars Judas Donkeys,” *Savanna Links* 9 (1999). [http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/publications/savanna\\_links9/judas\\_donkeys.html](http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/publications/savanna_links9/judas_donkeys.html)

8. Farmnote 121/2000.

9. Darrell Lewis, *Slower Than the Eye Can See: Environmental Change in Northern Australia's Cattle Lands* (Darwin: Tropical Savannas CRC, 2002), 84.

10. Hunting in Australia with Hunt Australia Safaris, <http://www.huntaust.com.au/photos/cullhunting1.html>

11. Trudy Sharp and Glen Saunders, “Model Code of Practice for the Humane Control of Feral Horses,” <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/humane-control/cop-feral-horses.pdf>

Rather obviously, the term “humane,” when translated into policy, does not query the nature of suffering, or the wider contexts of killing, or the empathy that is aroused in some people in the face of all this killing. Like many “weasel words,” it has the capacity to authorise that which it purports to refuse.

Estimates of feral population numbers vary enormously, and this seems to reflect the boom and bust demographics brought on by attempts at annihilation. It seems clear, however, that for decades eradication programs had little or no long-term success. In spite of the fact that tens of thousands of donkeys and wild horses were shot, donkey numbers remained over the 100,000 mark in Victoria River district as of 2001.<sup>12</sup> One report has it that in the East Kimberley the population was reduced by 87% between 1980 and 1988; a later report indicates that by the late 1990s the donkey population in the Kimberley ran to several millions.<sup>13</sup>

In 1994 authorities in the Kimberley started using the “Judas collar” technique for donkey eradication, and it was adopted in parts of the Victoria River district in 2000. This technique requires that a young female be fitted with a collar carrying a radio transmitter and then let loose. The animal rejoins its herd, and subsequently the shooters come in by helicopter and kill all but the Judas beast. The surviving donkey goes in search of another group, and in another month or so the shooters again arrive and kill all but the one. The benefit is strictly utilitarian, and the beneficiaries are the pastoralists. Donkey control aimed toward eradication is said to achieve “reduced grazing pressure,” with the further result of enabling “the pastoral business to use greater areas of country.”<sup>14</sup>

## 1. Countrymen

We are brothers and sisters of the world. Doesn't matter if you're bird, snake,  
fish, kangaroo: One Red Blood.

—David Gulpilil

Country is the Aboriginal Australian term for homeland: a country is large enough to support a group of people, small enough to be intimately known in every detail, and home to the living things whose lives come and go in that place. The origins of country are in creation. The Australian continent is criss-crossed with the tracks of the creator beings, called Dreamings in Aboriginal

12. Lewis, 84.

13. Farmnote 121/2000; Tim Low, *Feral Futures: The Untold Story of Australia's Exotic Invaders* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1999), 197–98.

14. Andrew Johnson, quoted in “Kimberley collars,” 1999. It is only fair to note that Judas collars are fitted to other feral animals including pigs and goats. The reports tend to be glowing. According to Boyd-Law of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (now part of DEC), “In one trial around Warra and Guy Fawkes River national parks we removed 14 pigs in two hours. And these are pigs that would have been nearly impossible to find by any other means” (“Judas pig trials”). It is worth remembering that in this context “removed” means “killed.” See “Judas pig trials in national parks show promise,” media release 12 November 2003, [http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/media\\_131103\\_feral\\_pigs](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/media_131103_feral_pigs)

English. Dreamings travelled, and as they went they were performing rituals, distributing plants and marking the zones of animal and plant distributions, making the landforms and water, and making the relationships between one country and another, one species and another. The result is not that everything is connected to everything else: quite the contrary, the living world is made up of differentiation, pattern and connection. Everything is connected to some things and not to others, but everything is connected and nothing is left stranded.

As they travelled, Dreamings shifted their shape from animal to human and back to animal again, becoming ancestral to life on Earth. Multi-species kin groups are the result of creation, and the term Dreaming applies to the ancestors of these groups. The kangaroo people and the kangaroo animals, for example, have become a series of families (clans) located along Dreaming tracks, all of whom are all descended from the kangaroo Dreaming ancestors. Most animals and many plants have their Dreaming ancestors, and their cross-species kin. Family members take care of each other, watch out for each others' interests, defend each other against outsiders, and generally seek to sustain both their connections with other families and the internal integrity of their own family. Within these country-based multi-species families, there is a moral proposition that is not so much a rule as a statement of how life works: a country and its living beings take care of their own. Care of country is a matter of both self-interest and interest for others. An understanding of connectivity promotes long-term purposefulness in life and long term commitments to country's varied life in all its life-and-death diversity.

This Dreaming or totemic way of being in the world is a form of animism, defined in a new and excellent study by Graham Harvey as the recognition "that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others."<sup>15</sup> Amongst Aboriginal Australians, the major context for relationships is country, and those who are in relationships of responsibility vis-a-vis each other are called countrymen (the term refers to women as well as men, and to animals and plants as well as humans). Ethics of love and care within this context do not, of course, exclude animals, and they do not exclude death. In a world of hunting and gathering, death and continuity are core aspects of the integrity of life and are always present in people's lives and minds. Ethical relationships do not hinge on killing or not killing. They hinge on taking responsibility for one's actions, and considering ramifications in both short and long terms. Responsibilities are complexly situated in time and place; most of all, they are up close—face-to-face in both life and death.

Animals that are not native to Australia can readily be imagined to pose ethical questions just by being there. There are no Dreaming stories, no tracks

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15. Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), xi.

or sites for the new animals. Are they countrymen? If they are countrymen, how does that happen, and what are the ethics of the relationship? If they are not countrymen, is there an ethical relationship? What about shooting them out? Do their lives matter, and if so, why?

There are two major studies of Aboriginal people's views on feral animals, both conducted in Central Australia: R. Nugent carried out a survey of Aboriginal attitudes to feral animals in 1988, and in 1995 Bruce Rose undertook a survey of land management issues that included investigation of people's views on feral animals and programs for their elimination. A more recent study, carried out in Kakadu National Park in North Australia in 2004, found similar views on eradication programs. My own research in the northern savannas is bracketed by the Central Australian and Kakadu studies both spatially and temporally. It is marked by exactly the same views.

The Central Australian studies are the most comprehensive, and while I cannot report on them in full detail, I will focus on the key issues that they address. For a start, the interviewees did not have a category of "feral" in their thinking. Bruce Rose explained:

The distinction between native animals and feral animals is difficult for Aboriginal people to accept. Most people said that so called feral animals belong to the country now that they have been introduced and have grown up and reproduced there. . . . The fact that these animals have come more recently to the lands does not necessarily mean that they should be managed differently from other species. It is generally held that they all have a right to live on the country now.<sup>16</sup>

The Whitefella perception that ferals are out-of-place was for the most part not matched by Aboriginal people. Rather, most of the people interviewed by both Nugent and Rose asserted that animals such as donkeys, camels, pussycats, and rabbits "belong" to the country. In Rose's words, "the worth of an animal lies in its ability to live and flourish in the environment, not in its claim to being an original component of the fauna" (B. Rose, 104).

Most of the interviewees opposed eradication programs altogether. While there was a diversity of views about whether donkeys, camels, and others were harmful or harmless to country, there was a profound underlying logic that Bruce Rose summarised particularly well:

killing some animals to look after others involves value judgements which are not necessarily part of the Aboriginal world view. . . . Ethics and value judgements which support playing favourites with some species over others do not fit easily into the Aboriginal world view (B. Rose, 91, 92).

People's antipathy toward playing favourites was expressed vigorously in relation to National Parks. Conservation Commission officers have a role that can

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16. Bruce Rose, *Land Management Issues: Attitudes and Perceptions Amongst Aboriginal People of Central Australia* (Alice Springs: Central Land Council, 1995).

readily be assumed to be oriented toward conserving life, and so people took them up on it. Nugent reported these statements:

Why do Conservation mob only love birds and plants and not these animals? [ferals]" "If white fellas don't want these animals then why don't they *all* move out?" "If they want to move all these animals out they might as well move out with them", "Rangers have their own tucker and horses have theirs, tell them rangers that these animals just eat their own grass—not from refrigerator—they just use their own country.<sup>17</sup>

One of the main issues was partnership. Many of the respondents referred to Christian stories to explain that donkeys had been partners with humans in the past, and that partnership should continue to be respected. One explanation was that the donkey carried Jesus. A similar argument was put in relation to camels: people spoke of the three camels that came to be with Jesus (B. Rose, 111). Some of my teachers added the point that the marks on donkeys' backs show the shape of a cross, thereby confirming their place in sacred history. These positions may also reflect an idea that a good way to influence Whitefellas might be to appeal to their sacred stories.

Along with sacred stories, people spoke of the animals' work in everyday life. One vigorous interviewee in the Victoria River district explained, "Kardiya [Whitefella] station manager, they worry about it, they don't like donkey, [but] they used to cart rations before, early days, but this time that donkey been work before when I was a little boy, carting all the loads from Timber Creek. I am talking different ways [in contrast to station managers], you can't shoot all those different animals." In this line of thinking, donkeys have helped humans in the past and it is not right to turn around and kill them. B. Rose concluded that in this part of the savanna country "feral animals are seen as now belonging to the land. They have worked for people in the past but now they are in a sort of retirement and can stay living quietly on their country" (B. Rose, 123).

Another issue concerns origins and belonging. Nugent and Rose both asked whether the fact that donkeys and other ferals came from elsewhere had a bearing on people's views on how they fit into country and whether they should be removed. Some interviewees implicitly addressed the fact that even though the animals are new to the country and are not part of Dreaming creation, they are still part of a wider creation. According to one of the people Nugent interviewed: "Even though white-fellas brought em in, they was all created" (Nugent, 5). The point was articulated theologically by another person: "God made all the animals so they fit in together okay" (B. Rose, 110). In my research this issue arose not only with respect to cattle, horses, donkeys, and other introduced animals, but with respect to Whitefellas as well. At the heart of stories that reach out beyond Australia, my teachers, like many other

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17. R. Nugent, *Aboriginal Attitudes to Feral Animals and Land Degradation* (Alice Springs: Report to the Central Land Council, 1988), 13.

Aboriginal people, respected the diversity of life, and at the same time sought underlying or universal foundations for the connectivity they understood to be always part of life. Australian Aboriginal actor, dancer, and philosopher David Gulpilil gave a beautifully succinct statement on the universality of kinship when he asserted that we are (all) brothers and sisters of the world.

To be created is one thing, to belong is another; Some people suggested that country itself expresses who belongs or fits and who does not. The fact that the animals did settle in and breed up was taken as proof that they fit in the country (B. Rose, 112). As one interviewee explained: “Yeah but they belong to this land now, we can’t push them out any of them. Camel, donkey, kangaroo, emu they belong to this country.” Similarly, Nugent reports people saying: “they were born on this country and they belong to this ground” (Nugent, 13).

Rose raised with people the issue of feral herbivores competing with cattle for grass, and received incredulous responses, as if herbivores would do anything but be herbivorous. One particularly vigorous respondent spoke to the issue of rabbits as competitors for grass:

they want to get rid of it because it’s not from Australia. That’s a stupid idea. Australian people eat them. Does that mean they should get rid of the bullock too. They have got bigger mouths than rabbits, they can eat more food. You should get rid of them too. If they kill all the bullock where would people get all their meat? (B. Rose, 116)

Another of the key issues was that people did not want to see animals killed “for nothing.”<sup>18</sup> There was near universal abhorrence of the practice of shooting animals and leaving them to rot in country. Two issues stand out: what kind of killing, and where it will take place. Interviewees were adamant in saying that if the animals were going to be killed wastefully, the “government” should take them away and do it somewhere else. This is not so much a desire to avoid the issue as it is a statement of responsibility to country. People have little control over the programs initiated by “government” but where they have control over their own lands, they do not want those wasteful programs implemented in country where they bear the responsibility for life and death. I have had the experience of going to visit a sacred site in a remote location and encountering one dead animal after another, animals shot because they were “pests,” their

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18. Nugent, 7, 17. Richard Nelson discusses Native Americans’ objections to the use of radio collars, and reports that: “Killing an animal for food is one thing; capturing, manipulation, and releasing it is another. As I understand it, these intrusions violate a creature’s inherent right to live with dignity. Both Koyukon and Inupiaq people objected most strenuously the use of radio collars, and some said they would try to kill such an animal so it wouldn’t have to go on living that way.” See Richard Nelson, “Searching for the Lost Arrow: Physical and Spiritual Ecology in the Hunter’s World,” in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, ed. Stephen Kellert and Edward Wilson (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 201–28, 217.

decaying bodies left willy nilly around the country, including the sacred site. I do not wish to write more about it.

The Kakadu study undertaken by Cathy Robinson and colleagues elicited similar, and in some ways even stronger, views. Donkeys were not a threat in that area, but wild horses were, and the comments people made about horses were very close to those expressed in Central Australia in earlier decades. People were concerned that the animals not be wasted, and that animals that had been in partnership with humans should be respected for their former relationships.

Elders in the Kakadu region said that horses “carry history” of the recent past. People were emotionally attached to individual animals and herds, and more generally people said: horses were “carrying our grandfather on his back,” and were “used to travel around the country.” They explained that horses:

look after the place while we are away;” they “keep stories alive,” and “watch country.” A central concern expressed was that if a herd connected to a given area is eliminated, the history and care of this location may be threatened and “special places on country could die.” . . . There was also concern that not only is widespread culling of horses disrespectful but also stories associated with these animals could be lost as a result.<sup>19</sup>

These interviewees bring to the fore the agency of animals and country. Animals too are taking care of country, and when humans are not there the country is not abandoned because the animals are there. These domesticated animals have a history of partnership that not only calls for reciprocity today, but that has situated them in country and in history as bearers of stories and as caretakers.

Rather than playing favourites, indigenous ethics embrace these partnership animals as countrymen. Indigenous ethics are not arguing for a basic right to life, or for a basic prevention of suffering (humane culling). Far more provocatively, their positions are founded in relational ethics that involve reciprocity and belonging, mutual care, shared care of country, mutual holding of stories and memory.

Understood within a frame of country and responsibility, mass killings betray kinship, connectivity, country, responsibility, history, and the agency of non-human others—animals that have learned to live there, country that has accepted them.

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19. Catherine Robinson, Dermot Smyth and Peter Whitehead, “Bush Tucker, Bush Pets, and Bush Threats: Cooperative Management of Feral Animals in Australia’s Kakadu National Park” *Conservation Biology* 19, no. 5 (October 2005) 1385–91, 1388–89.

## 2. Moral Friends

My reason for saying that no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others is this. Suppose a man were all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child.

—Mencius

Professor Lee of the National Central University, Taiwan, is one of the outstanding proponents of the New Confucian moral philosophy. His major article in English “The Reappraisal of the Foundations of Bioethics: A Confucian Perspective,” lays the foundations for resolving some of the problems of universalism and relativism that beset Enlightenment and postmodern thought. In doing so he also lays out a wonderfully challenging foundation for continuities between humans and the rest of the living earth.<sup>20</sup>

Lee draws on the Confucian concept of the ‘moral mind’, writing that ‘the moral mind is an expression of our unbearable concern with others’ suffering’.<sup>21</sup> Lee intends the moral mind to respond to all suffering, not just human, and in a more recent essay he considers the moral mind in relation to future generations.<sup>22</sup> He takes the argument back to Mencius (fourth century BCE) and the example of a person seeing a young child about to fall into a well and responding with concern and compassion.

There are several key points in Lee’s analysis. The first is the expression of the universal: “this original unbearable consciousness of another’s suffering.” The second is that this consciousness expresses itself in relation to actions and events: it particularises itself in context.<sup>23</sup> The third key point takes up the position articulated by Engelhardt concerning moral friends and moral strangers. Engelhardt defines moral friends as those who share enough cultural information to be able to understand each other’s moral positions without difficulty. In contrast, moral strangers are those with whom moral positions must be negotiated.<sup>24</sup> Lee argues to the contrary that from a Confucian perspective all humans are moral friends in the first instance because all share this foundational moral mind which empathetically responds to the suffering of

20. Shui-Chuen Lee, “The Reappraisal of the Foundations of Bioethics: A Confucian Perspective,” in *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the (Im)Possibility of Global Bioethics*, ed. Julia Tao Lai Po-Wah (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), 179–93.

21. Lee, “Reappraisal,” 186.

22. Shui-Chuen Lee, “Biotechnology and Responsibility to Future Generations: A Confucian Perspective,” in *Genomics in Asia: A Clash of Bioethical Interests?*, ed. Margaret Sleeboom (London: Kegan Paul, 2004), 145–58.

23. Lee, “Reappraisal,” 186, 187.

24. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr, *The Foundation of Bioethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

others.<sup>25</sup> He thus resolves the discomfort between Enlightenment universals and postmodern relativism in this interestingly Confucian way: the universal foundation of our being is that as humans we are possessed of a “moral mind” and are always already alert to the sufferings of others. The relativistic dimension is that as individuals we make our own responses to the moral issues we confront, and as members of social and cultural groups we do so in ways that are appropriate to our situatedness in history and culture.

The foundation of Lee’s argument is Mencius’s account of the compassion that arises in the face of potential harm, in this case the child on the edge of a well; this is compassion that has no utilitarian necessity and that seems to arise unbidden. Mencius does not suggest that the child calls out for help. As I understand the story, the emphasis is not on how a person is called into ethics, but rather on how a person’s existing humaneness spills out into action. Mencius insists that the response to peril or possible suffering is in-built. His exact analogy is with a fire that just starts or a spring that just bubbles up out of the ground.<sup>26</sup> In short, Mencius’s person is always already continuous with the world; the humaneness that bubbles up is actually part of the living world. Mencius’s teaching is designed to help people develop their capacities, but there is no doubt that the capacities exist already within people, and thus are there to be worked with.

Lee does not intend his work to be limited to humans.<sup>27</sup> Confucian scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries considered this question at length. Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529) writes (in *Inquiry on the Great Learning*): “the great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person.”<sup>28</sup> In this passage, Wang discusses first the case with respect to another human, then with birds and animals, then with plants, then with tiles and stones. Empathetic response to the whole of Heaven and Earth, he asserts, is in-built in humans because all parts of the world are also part each of the other.

If all parts of the living world participate in the continuities of life, then it is reasonable to imagine that that which bubbles up in humans as empathy or compassion also bubbles up in other life forms in a manner consistent with their own species-being. One does not need any special insight into donkey sociality to understand that the Judas collar is effective because donkey sociality exists. The eradication technique thus betrays the donkey’s own sociality as well as assaulting the basis of empathy between humans and donkeys.

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25. Lee, “Reappraisal,” 190.

26. *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Law (London: Penguin Classics, 1970), [2A6], 82–83.

27. Personal communication.

28. See Weiming Tu, “Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality,” in *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans*, ed. Mary Tucker and John Berthrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Centre for the Study of World Religions, 1998), 3–21, 18.

The mass shootings of donkeys and other ferals amply attest to the point made about genocide: that mass death “denotes a doubled action: one murders in the flesh what one has already rendered in one’s thought as morally inconsiderable.”<sup>29</sup> Zygmunt Bauman reminds us again and again that while we know a lot about prejudice in relation to violence, “we know little about how to stave off the threat of murder which masquerades as the routine and unemotional function of an orderly society.”<sup>30</sup> Humane culling draws on the rhetoric of order (animals in their rightful place), purity (only natives or domesticated animals), and techno-efficiency. The action that Aboriginal people find most wasteful and abhorrent—mass shootings from helicopters—is from the humane cull point of view most efficient and therefore most effective. It thus positions mass killings as “creative destruction, conceived as a *healing surgical operation*,” undertaken in the interest of better economies or environments (Baumann, 11). The surgical operation is a technology in the sado-dispassionate mode that Val Plumwood discusses in relation to science: it promotes the suppression or eradication of empathy.<sup>31</sup>

Understood within the context of moral friends, Judas work is a betrayal of donkeys in their capacity for sociality, of humans in their capacity for empathy, and of life itself. It betrays the bubbling up of life into empathy, and thus betrays the moral mind of the living earth.

### 3. Narratives and gifts

Nothing confirms our identity with other mortals and our mutual dependence as powerfully as death does. Death visits us with grief and pain, but it also highlights our connection with all other[s] . . . and the power we have to continue life in others.

—Alfred Killilea

“Humane culling” breaks up the dynamic synergies between life and death and in that process desecrates both. I will focus on two types of narrative—biological and polyvocal. Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, in their book *What is Life?*—also address the question “what is death?” In animals, including humans, death is programmed into the being at the cellular level: cells age and die as part of the life of the individual.<sup>32</sup> The difference between the parts that die

29. Hatley, *Suffering Witness: The Quandary of Responsibility after the Irreparable* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 55.

30. Zygmunt Bauman, “The Holocaust’s Life as a Ghost,” in *The Ghost of the Holocaust: Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, ed. F.C. Decoste and B. Schwartz (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2000), 3–15, 10.

31. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Erisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002), 22.

32. Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, *What Is Life?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000 [1995]), 156.

and the parts that do not die is the difference between the body (that dies) and the sex cells (germ plasm) that survive across the generations. There is indeed a kind of generosity here that is embedded in the nature and capacity of cells: death is the price we all pay for the ancient fact that cells cannot simultaneously live forever and maintain mobility. In animals, most cells are immobile, and divide, and die, but a few hold on to their mobility and, while not dividing, seem to live forever by physically moving across the generations. For animals, Margulis and Sagan tell us, “life is an extension of being into the next generation, the next species” (Margulis and Sagan, 144).

Similarly, James Hatley’s superb analysis of witnessing shows that the significance of death is located in the “death narrative”—a cross-generational gift. According to Hatley, the death narrative in human terms situates death and the dead within an historical community. He writes: “What is important about a death narrative is that one’s own passing away becomes a gift for those who follow, as well as an address to them. Death narratives are vocative; they call to one’s survivors for some mode of response” (Hatley, 212).

Hatley enlarges the death narrative concept beyond language to include gestures that cross from one generation to the next. He describes these gestures as polyvocate. They are “overburdened with meanings that cannot be disentangled from their having been given to oneself by others, meanings that exceed being rendered unambiguously in one’s own voice” (Hatley, 219). He also suggests that such gestures could be thought of as crossing over from species to species (Hatley, 63). This cross-generational and cross-species concept of death as gift situates death in dialogue with life and thus situates it as a participant in a dialogue of time and difference. It suggests an ethics of death such that one’s death is for one’s community and for the future, as well as in, of, and for one’s self.

I have explored the cross-species dimensions of the death narrative and have suggested that Australian Aboriginal people bring an ecological perspective to the dialogue. Rather than “death narratives” emerging solely from inter-human engagements, my Aboriginal teachers would insist on the participation of other species, and of the larger entity known as country. In their context, the flourishing of life in country is the narrative of the whole ecosystem that preceded them—an ecosystem that included and was enhanced by their ancestors. So flourishing country is an ancestral death narrative, but equally, one would have to say, it is the narrative of all the living things that contributed to the life of the country. The ecological narrative embeds death in processes through which death is twisted back into life.<sup>33</sup>

My claim that Judas work is a desecration of death rests on both biological and polyvocal narratives. When death is twisted back into life, death works for continuity. Thus when donkeys settle in and breed up in country their

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33. Deborah Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004), Chapter 9.

deaths become gifts to new generations of donkeys. Under mass eradication programs, the donkey's deaths are being twisted into more deaths and more deaths. No longer a gift across donkey generations, the Judas collar enables a massive amplification of death work.

Those who design and implement eradication programs would probably not ask questions about donkey's death narratives; they are concerned with utility, not gifts. But a kind of answer, stated explicitly by Andrew Johnson of AGWEST, shows us the precise connection between narcissism and the anthropocentric twisting of death narratives. He says that the Judas donkey is assisting people: "Other donkeys then found with the Judas donkey are humanely culled, leaving the Judas donkey so that it can help locate and pinpoint other donkeys in the area."<sup>34</sup>

"Playing favourites with species" turns on human narcissism, as Johnson's statement indicates. He claims the donkey's action to be complicit in the human project of eradication ("it can help locate and pinpoint other donkeys"). It thus replaces a multitude of creatures working out their own unique life projects with a narcissistic and mono-centric project toward which all effort is directed. The Judas, we should never forget, may be the last one to die, but whether she is killed or dies of old age, or a broken heart, there will be no future generations of donkeys to whom her death is a gift.

Within an understanding of death narratives and gifts, Judas work betrays death twice over. First, mass animal deaths pervert the purpose of death, twisting them into amplified and amplifying processes that work against life. And second, the human appropriation of death steals the gifts of cross-generational life, and perverts the diversity of life to a narcissistic illusion of control.

#### 4. Being-for-others

*Finite selves, being self-realizing systems, maintain themselves through continuous exchange....[The self is] a being propelled by desire for others... To follow the promptings of its own conatus then is not to seek to overcome others, but rather to reach out to them.*

—Freya Mathews

My heart goes out to the little jenny who is knocked out with a tranquiliser gun and fitted with a Judas collar. The cumbersome device carries a VHF radio transmitter so that she can be located wherever she goes. She will be left to recover and to find her companions, and from then on the men with guns, helicopters, radios, and GPS equipment will follow her. With them comes death. Time and again she finds mates only to see them mown down. Time and again she is left lonely and bewildered.

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34. "Kimberley collars," 1999.

Judas work twists the jenny's being in the world away from her own companions and brings her into the domain of human deathwork. Her life and her death are appropriated by the killers. When she dies there will be no one for whom it will be a gift, not even, at this point, the humans who took all her life and death from her. If she dies at the end of the project her death will be superfluous. If she dies in advance of completion, her death will be a nuisance.

Recently some new and disturbing reports started coming from the out-back. Jennies learn that where they go, death follows. And so eventually they stop looking for others. They isolate themselves, avoiding others, seeking out the places where others will not find them. Earth's moral mind continues to bubble in the jenny. Her social nature longs for others, but now she must abjure others if they are to continue to live. Judas work poses for her a double-bind: either turn away from others in order to show her care for them, or join them and see them die. In refusing the call of her own social nature, she may come to seem "wild" in yet another dimension of this complex term. She becomes the creature without fellow creatures, the creature for whom being-with-others has lost its purchase. The jenny's options are devastating, and like a prism in the sun her choice continues to show the moral putrefaction of Judas work. Into the jenny's life an ontological split has been thrust: her capacity to be *for* others has been put at odds with her desire to be *with* others; in order to be *for* she must be *apart*. She embodies the bubbling spring of empathy, and she holds alive the moral mind of earth in a place where narcissistic madness is running wild.

No one foresaw or expressed the implications of the ramifying effects of mass death more eloquently than Walter Benjamin in his sixth thesis on history: "*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins."<sup>35</sup> Retrospectively, as Holocaust scholars have shown, neither the dead nor even death, itself is safe. In the context of animal mass deaths we learn that neither life nor death, nor connectivity nor kinship, nor earth's own empathy, nor a living creature's sweet desire to flourish with others is safe. Not safe at all when the wild monological will goes out to remake the world.<sup>36</sup>

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35. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.

36. My reflections on the wild have been sharpened through a number of deep conversations with David Abram. I thank him most sincerely for exploring with me a few facets of this wonderfully complex and challenging concept.