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***Geschlecht*, Speciesism, and Animal Rights in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch**

Author: Sean Kelly^{*}

Title: Associate Professor of Philosophy and Literature & Director of Honors Program

Affiliation: Florida Gulf Coast University

Location: Fort Myers, Florida

E-mail: skelly@fgcu.edu

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GESCHLECHT, SPECIESISM, AND ANIMAL RIGHTS IN LEOPOLD VON SACHER-MASOCH

Abstract

The term *Geschlecht* plays a central role in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's fiction, especially in relation to his thoughts on human/animal interaction. *Geschlecht* is most often translated into English as sex; however, in German it also means kind or species. According to Sacher-Masoch, any just ethical/political philosophy demands transcending the *Krieg der Geschlechter*, war of the sexes/species/kinds. Whereas scholars have often addressed Sacher-Masoch's "war of the sexes," this paper interrogates what it would mean to end a "war of the kinds." Via an exploration of the author's overt treatment of human/animal relationships, the article sketches a theory of animal rights from Sacher-Masoch's work.

^{*} Sean Kelly is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Literature and Director of the Honors Program at Florida Gulf Coast University. His current work explores how certain conceptual blindnesses encourage humans to overlook human and nonhuman animal interaction to their own detriment. His work is sponsored by Humane Society University. Sean can be reached at 155 Reed Hall; Florida Gulf Coast University; Fort Myers, FL 33965; (239) 590-7440; skelly@fgcu.edu

Introduction

Within literary circles, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch is most famous for lending his name to an essential component of Freudian ego formation, masochism. The term “masochism,” first coined by Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), refers less to the author’s works, which consistently employ plotlines wherein men willingly subjugate themselves to women for sexual satisfaction, than to the author’s own life. Sacher-Masoch was known, after all, for finding it erotic to be humiliated before the women he loved, and this sexual lifestyle, along with the moral and medical judgments that society makes about it, has contributed mightily to the ways in which his works have been read, disseminated, and translated.¹ “The readers who associate the writer’s name exclusively with the themes of erotic gratification linked to the experience of submission to the will of another person,” Vitaly Chernetsky warns, “might be surprised to learn that there were historical periods and national cultures that saw Sacher-Masoch very differently” (2008, p. 471). The sexual, to be sure, is the principle plotline for Sacher-Masoch; but readers focusing too narrowly on the war of the sexes risk underappreciating Sacher-Masoch’s wider scope of concern regarding difference. For Sacher-Masoch, to be alive is, in its most widely understood form, to engage in a constant struggle against other kinds. The word that I am loosely translating here as “kind” or “type” is *Geschlecht*, which Sacher-Masoch’s translators generally render as race or sex, depending upon context. Sacher-Masoch believes that all kinds, species, types of animals—*die Geschlechter*—“rely on the death of others” in order to live; that “existence is a kind of penance, a painful test, a sad pilgrimage; and that everything that lives, lives from death, from the exploitation of others” (Sacher-Masoch, 2003d, p. 5). The war of the sexes, which Sacher-Masoch describes as a war in which “each struggles to subjugate the other, to make the other into a slave” (Sacher-Masoch, 2003d, p. 7), is simply, for him, the cruelest manifestation of this “*Krieg der Geschlechter*”² (Sacher-Masoch, 1991, p. 12). Because Sacher-Masoch’s work, like most other literature, is thoroughly anthropo- and androcentric in its content and plotlines, it is no surprise that readers encounter the war between human sexes, classes, races, etc. far more often in his writing than they do the struggle between human and other “kinds” (animals, most notably). But this does not mean that the Galician author did not attend to the problems faced by animal kinds. On the contrary, and as this article contends, he was thoroughly concerned with the plight of animal *Geschlechter*. The article proceeds by first developing how his defining work, a series of stories and novellas that make up *The Legacy of Cain*, is prefaced by a story, “The Wanderer,” that defines *Geschlecht*

expansively. *Geschlecht*, and thus the *Krieg der Geschlechter* (war of the kinds/sexes), will explicitly include animals. I continue by explicating Sacher-Masoch's fairly complex and often schizophrenic (to borrow a term from Gary Francione's works on animal rights) stance on the ethical treatment of animals. I conclude with a brief sketch of the potential contributions that a philosophical system of animal rights derived from Sacher-Masoch's position should have for animal rights policies and activism today.

***Geschlecht* in Sacher-Masoch**

As one can glean from my introduction, this paper hinges on the meaning of the German word *Geschlecht*. Generally, *Geschlecht* is translated into English as sex. Thus, to write that Sacher-Masoch was concerned with relations between *die Geschlechter* seems like common sense. But *Geschlecht* also carries with it the meaning of "race" or "kind," and in many instances this is its primary sense. For example, the best translation of *das menschliche Geschlecht* is the human race/kind. In Sacher-Masoch's "The Wanderer," readers get a strong sense of how neatly the author knitted *Geschlecht*'s senses of sex and race into his philosophy of humankind. That this happens in "The Wanderer" is significant. This short piece acts as the prologue to Sacher-Masoch's major cycle of stories/novellas, *The Legacy of Cain*. Michael O'Pecko describes *Legacy* as "the ambitious, uncompleted cycle of Novellen [in which] Sacher-Masoch intended to portray 'all of mankind's greatest problems, all the dangers of existence, all of humanity's ills'" (2003, p. 181). Sacher-Masoch's plan for *Legacy* was for each of its six volumes of six novellas/stories to address one of humanity's major woes: love, property, the state, war, work, and death. "The Wanderer" serves as the prologue to this cycle, framing humanity's ills almost entirely within the context of the *Krieg der Geschlechter*. "The Wanderer" contextualizes this war not through an erotic man/woman relationship narrative, but through a hunting scene in which a man shoots an eagle.

"The Wanderer" begins with an unnamed figure, who, one can presume, is the same unnamed protagonist who appears throughout the stories of *Legacy*, on a guided hunt in a Galician forest. The gamekeeper accompanying the protagonist sights an eagle, takes aim, and shoots it dead. When the bird's carcass hits the earth, a wandering holy man appears, calling the hunters "Cain!" in "a voice as stern and mighty as the Lord" (2003d, p. 2). This wanderer, with the appearance of a "creature of superhuman wildness and strangeness," has the following exchange with the hunting party:

“What have you profited by this Cain?” the wanderer turned to me and said after some time had passed, “Is your murderous lust stilled; are you satiated with the blood of your brother?”

“Isn’t the eagle a predator?” I quickly replied. “Doesn’t it murder the smaller and weaker members of its race [*Geschlechts*]? Isn’t it more a good work to kill him?”

“Yes, it is a murderer,” the peculiar old man sighed. “It spills blood like all creatures that live, but must we therefore do the same? I don’t murder, but you – yes – yes – you are of the race [*Geschlechter*] of Cain. I know you; you have the mark.” (2003d, p. 3)

In this exchange, the central question posed to the children of Cain is how to relate to other *Geschlechter*. In this case, *Geschlechter* clearly includes animal kinds.

The wanderer continues to use metaphors of animal exploitation (yokes and whips) to describe his own experience as a child of Cain:

[...] I have understood how to live at the expense of others, from the sweat of my brothers, whom I have degraded into being my slaves, my tools, and I have not hesitated to pay for my pleasures and entertainments with the blood of strangers. But I have worn the yoke more than once, felt the whip, labored for others (2003d, p. 3).

The killing of an animal incites the wanderer’s initial admonition. Is it merely figurative? If it is, then Sacher-Masoch’s thoughts on animals are perhaps not very interesting; perhaps he is merely emphasizing that he was “treated like an animal.”³ The yoke and the whip are often metaphors for oppression; but Sacher-Masoch is careful to qualify the problems involved with using these and like metaphors. He does so in order to remind readers that human/animal oppression is just as much a part of the legacy of Cain as intrahuman oppression is. For example, further on in “The Wanderer” Sacher-Masoch writes,

[A]s soon as the right to exploit lower organisms is permitted by necessity, by the drive for self-preservation, it’s not just restricted to man harnessing animals to the plow or killing them; it’s the stronger exploiting the weaker, the more talented the less talented, the stronger white race the colored races, the more capable, more educated, or by virtue of a benevolent fate, more developed peoples the less developed (2003d, p. 9).

In this instance it is clear that the harnessing of animals to the plow is really one of the first steps toward justifying the exploitation of one group of humans by another. So the yoke and the whip should not be read merely as harmless metaphors for intrahuman oppressions; instead they act in a synecdotal way: the whip and the yoke are parts of a real oppression, human/animal

oppression, that signify and even justify the entirety of oppression. Significantly for our understanding of Sacher-Masoch, the entirety of oppression begins with arguments justifying the exploitation of non-human animals by human ones. So although many thinkers support animal liberation as a subset of other liberation movements that target human liberation, Sacher-Masoch understands animal liberation as a necessary condition for building a society devoid of human oppression of other humans.

So at the beginning of “The Wanderer,” *Geschlecht*’s primary usage is in terms of race or kind, and there is some evidence to suggest that animal liberation is one of the topics foreshadowed by *Legacy*’s prefacing tale. Sacher-Masoch’s thoughts on relations between *die Geschlechter* develop as an assertion that Nature has instilled in each living thing an instinct to “propagate the race [*Geschlecht*]” (2003d, p. 6) at the expense of others. Only once the wanderer introduces this natural, violent drive does love between a man and woman enter the picture. He describes love as a transcendental illusion designed, by “Mother” Nature, to compel propagation of the species. Interestingly, during this discussion of men and women, Sacher-Masoch uses a synonym for *Geschlecht*: *Gattung*.

It is a shameful insight for us that nature has placed this yearning in us only to make of us its blind, willing tools, for what does it care about us? It wants to propagate the race [*Geschlecht*]! When we’ve done carrying out nature’s intention, provided for the immortality of the race [*Gattung*], we can go to ruin, and nature has equipped woman with so much charm only so that she can force us to put on her yoke and say to us: ‘Work for me and my children.’ (2003d, p. 6)

Here, readers discover that Sacher-Masoch’s *Geschlecht* is desensualized. In fact, one could argue that man’s eroticization and politicization of his relationship to other *Geschlechter* serves to blind him to the (sad) fact that Nature has no concern for any individual; all Nature cares about is propagation of the *Gattung* or type. The individual, especially the individual who wants to believe in personal freedom, eroticizes this relationship to escape the deterministic manner in which one is driven to serve the biological drive to reproduce one’s kind. This, I see as precisely Sacher-Masoch’s point throughout his “women-with-whips” stories—the erotic is a tool or illusion used to keep others from recognizing starkly oppressive relationships.⁴

In *The Man Who Re-Enlisted*, this philosophy is summarized by the narrator, Frinko Balaban, who speaks as the voice of Sacher-Masoch, attempting to demystify the erotic relationship:

These days, people are always talking about what humans have in common with animals, aren't they?

Well, I'm telling you, relationships between men and women are about nothing but the struggle to survive, like everywhere else. (2003a, p. 109)

Here again, Sacher-Masoch frames the mark of Cain, the natural drive to oppress another being in the very act of embracing one's own life, in terms of human-nonhuman animal relationships. Like the murdered eagle of "The Wanderer," here the animal – or better, the concept "animality" or "the animal" – represents the unthinking desire to live at the expense of others. *Geschlecht* is a term that demystifies the man/woman relationship so that the individuals can see it for what it is—a fiercely combative, *brutal* relation. Further on in *The Man Who Re-Enlisted*, such a comparison reappears when Balaban describes the man who marries without honest love as an "animal." "The animal" world is then a world in which the starkness of the war amongst kinds is allowed to manifest itself either without the illusion ("honest love") that generally conceals it *or* when the human animal willfully ignores Nature's employment of these illusions (love, the state, death, etc.) to justify the oppressive relationships that a human is in or about to enter.

Human Exceptionalism

Sacher-Masoch's position that belief in everlasting bonds, like love or marriage,⁵ merely masks "the animal" is itself interesting, as these values are generally used to differentiate the human from the animal world. But what is more interesting is that because the human animal is the only animal biologically determined to create such ideals, humans become most "animal," most biologically human, at precisely the time that they let themselves be blinded by their own ideals. So human ability to see beyond the *Krieg der Geschlechter* does not oppose humans to animals; instead, it allows humans to see the political work performed by the phrase/concept "the animal" in its most "animalistic" form. What I mean by this, is that the speciesist use of the phrase "the animal," according to Sacher-Masoch, enables humans to justify their biological, (i.e. animalistic), drive to create concepts and use them to oppress others. So uttering "the animal" as a way of distinguishing oneself from other *Geschlechter* is perhaps the most "savage," "brutal," "animalistic" form of living off the blood of others.

It is not "the human" that makes the human exceptional in relation to the binary term "the animal." Instead, the human becomes exceptional only because it can recognize how one's love

of life and the ideals one holds in it produce the deaths of others. To Sacher-Masoch, the human does not gain special status in the cosmos because of this. Although human exceptionalism, especially since Descartes, is the principle most frequently invoked to justify human domination of animals, Sacher-Masoch asserts an alternative perspective. For Sacher-Masoch, the special human power of creating abstractions masquerading as timeless ideals is the human's most *animalistic* trait in that it functions to keep us in predator/prey relations. Only with this recognition can humans renounce fighting in the name of their kind and become distinct/ special in kind. This recognition, rather than making humans superior to other animals, prohibits oppression of other animals, positing them as our brothers and sisters, or "kin." In sum, humans become distinct/ special/ exceptional once they stop living through the deaths of other *Geschlechter*.

Sacher-Masoch often uses readers' sympathy for animals to indicate the problematic nature of Nature itself. In *Moonlight*, for example, Olga comes to understand the need to fully embrace her being as a child of Cain only after she kills five birds on a pleasure hunt. Further on, Olga expresses her freedom as a child of Cain by hosting a rabbit chase. Sacher-Masoch describes Olga during the hare's final moments:

She laughed like a child that watches a ball fly through the air when the greyhounds finally tossed the animal, screaming with the fear of death, into the air. In all eyes, there was admiration for the bold horsewoman. Her vanity celebrated a new orgy, and it was, of course, only a poor hare that breathed its last at her feet. (2003b, p. 147)

In *The Man Who Reinlisted*, Sacher-Masoch even uses the common Victorian image of the helplessly beaten horse to establish the morally superior position of Balaban, who steps in to end the beating (2003a, p. 99). So Sacher-Masoch has what appears to be a rather ambivalent relationship to "the animal." On the one hand it is "the animal" who lives heartlessly off the life, work, and death of others; on the other, the animal is the being through whom humans can come to understand something about moral goodness in the face of a blind, cruel Nature. Understanding the difference between the conceptual work of the term "animal" and animals themselves unwinds this ambivalence to demonstrate that Sacher-Masoch remains critical of the animalistic, brutal, etc. (all that "the animal" entails), opening a space for thinking of real, non-violent relationships with living animals.

Sacher-Masoch's animal is not, and I stress this, merely an emblem or a figure representing an idyllic relation between human and human. In short, the non-human animals of

his literature are not mere allegorical figures. Animals are in no uncertain terms real, living things for Sacher-Masoch, at least as real as other humans. Remember that Sacher-Masoch believed that the desire to justify the subjugation of another life form ultimately leads humans to rationalize that the stronger human could oppress the weaker or the richer the stronger. So if anything, humans' relationships with other humans constitute a romanticized construct based upon the human's real, and currently violent, relationships with animals. In Sacher-Masoch's work, learning to "do one's duty" or "rely upon the work of your own hands"—in short, the supreme virtues for Sacher-Masoch—begins with reassessing one's relationship to other animals, or even learning how to have such relationships. For example, Balaban, after fighting to liberate the people from feudal law, returns home to "do his duty." This includes setting up a bee garden (and studying bees' behavior), and raising two wolf half-breeds and a tomcat he pulled out of the water (2003a, p. 107). In a more overtly philosophical way, the conversation between Olga and Vladimir after the incident at the rabbit hunt forces reassessment. Immediately following Olga's rapture at the hare's death scene, Olga encounters the disapproving stare of Vladimir Podolev, *Moonlight's* voice of Sacher-Masoch. Vladimir accuses her of being "either completely heartless or completely unthinking" for delighting "in the death struggles of an animal" (2003b, p. 147). Olga, humiliated by the accusation of thoughtlessness, asks Vladimir to explain, by posing the following question, "Do you believe that man has no right to kill animals?" Vladimir's response is most telling:

I wasn't talking about killing, but about hounding and tormenting. In general one shouldn't talk about rights in this world; necessity is all that matters, for it rules everything. In the end, man must live and kill in order to live. If he lives off plants, he kills them, too, for even plants have life. He must kill animals, but he should do no more than is necessary, he shouldn't torment them, for animals have a will, feelings, and a mind like we do. They think, if not as sophisticatedly as we do, and to delight in their torment is not much better than slaughtering gladiators at the circus. (2003b, p. 148)

Olga's response to this chiding is to wrap "herself sullenly in her fur" and roll "up like a spider whose net has been torn" (2003b, p. 149).

The fur and spider analogy here is significant. Whose fur is it that she curls up within, and how did she acquire it? Having just read an admonishment to be thinking about animals, the reader can only regard these metaphors as harmless by asserting the logic of speciesism⁶ or by intellectually disconnecting fur from its source. The animalistic Olga's reactions to Vladimir

indicate that human cruelty is what is “animal” about humans. While Olga admittedly is an animal no longer bound within the cage of biological determinism, insofar as she rejects all illusions and decides for a nihilistic form of domination, she will become crueler than any “animal” can be. The narrator reveals that Olga’s response was to make Vladimir “her prey”; he would “be surrounded by nets and then pursued like a fox” (2003b, p. 149). So by donning furs, Olga literally becomes animal, not necessarily in Deleuze’s sense of this phrase, but in the sense that she is about to take on the mark of Cain as her own, to adopt all of the stereotypical meanings of “animal.” She will become “the animal” that she is: the cruel human huntress. These furs also indicate that neither she, nor the reader who reads them as symbolic objects, has gained the animal consciousness Vladimir tries to provoke. Instead, Vladimir’s comment in the name of animals elicits the response of the human-animal attacked, “the animal” whose web of ideals has been torn, whose flesh shows under her fur. Human *Geschlecht* is attacked by Vladimir’s statement; and Olga, in the name of her kind, becomes animal, readies herself to live off of another.

Sacher-Masoch’s position is clearly that animals are to be thought of as fellow travelers, perhaps even companions, in an otherwise cruel state of Nature. There might be some temptation to claim that the author’s use of the animal as a metaphor for savagery contradicts his own message that we should respect them, but as I have demonstrated, Sacher-Masoch explicitly claims that animals are not to be treated cruelly, that they can and should be viewed as companions, and that they possess a faculty akin to consciousness. In his own day, these positions would have placed him amongst the most progressive animal rights activists. In spite of this, there is no question that Sacher-Masoch does believe that human beings are exceptional. This human specialness is twofold. First, humankind manifests itself with special cruelty, and second, humans are the only kind of animal that can renounce *Geschlecht* altogether. Humans generally experience Nature’s cruelty as disappointment when certain transcendental ideals, like love and marriage, fail. In their failure, these uniquely human ideals disclose that they only exist to trick us into propagating the human race. The human is exceptional in its unique ability to renounce its defining trait, the ability to create ideals, a renunciation that begins, for Sacher-Masoch by disavowing allegiance to “kind,” whether understood as species or gender or clan. The old man from “The Wanderer,” Balaban of *The Man Who Reenlisted*, and Vladimir from *Moonlight* are exemplary characters who adopt this moral position. Unfortunately, because these

works are little read or commented upon outside the German-speaking world, these examples have been largely overlooked by animal rights proponents and activists.

Moral Responsibilities, Rights, and Animals

Human *Geschlecht*, insofar as it can renounce the moral relevancy of kinds or types, is exceptional and assumes special responsibilities as a result. To use Tom Regan's language, Sacher-Masoch's humans have a certain "agency" that most animals do not have—they can renounce their biology. Introducing language from animal rights discourses is helpful for illustrating Sacher-Masoch's argument. For him, most animals are moral patients. The argument the hunter of "The Wanderer" implicitly makes in calling the eagle a murderer is that the eagle, insofar as it does not respect moral law, deserves no moral consideration from the hunter. In *The Case for Animal Rights*, Regan formulates a response to this argument that resembles Sacher-Masoch's. Regan differentiates between moral agents and moral patients. A moral agent is capable of doing right or wrong because of its rational agency—its capacity to recognize and make rational choices. A moral patient, a being without rational agency, though capable of performing acts that, if performed by a moral agent, would be considered wrong or criminal is not strictly capable of doing right or wrong. Regan formulates his argument as follows:

Moral patients cannot do what is right or wrong, we have said, and in this respect they differ fundamentally from moral agents. But moral patients can be on the receiving end of right or wrong acts of moral agents, and so in this respect resemble moral agents. A brutal beating administered to a child, for example, is wrong, even if the child herself can do no wrong. [...] Unlike the case of the relationship that holds between moral agents, then, the relationship that holds between moral agents, on the one hand, and moral patients, on the other, is not reciprocal. (2004, p. 154)

Moreover, for Sacher-Masoch at least, moral patients are capable of acting in ways that are undesirable and would be wrong if performed by a moral agent. So the eagle can innocently carry out an act, such as killing, for which we would otherwise blame a moral agent, like the hunter. Moreover, the fact that the eagle must kill does not make killing any more or less desirable. Killing is wrong insofar as every moral agent who can deliberately avoid killing is required to do so. On this important point, the wanderer and Vladimir differ. The wanderer apparently knows how to live without killing (assuming that we can take him at his word); but Vladimir, who suggests that everything must kill in order to live, does not appear to know this.

Vladimir's comments imply that when killing is necessary, the human, who is usually a moral agent, reverts to becoming a moral patient, even when the thing killed has morally relevant traits like thoughts or feelings. This echoes Kant's famous "ought implies can" principle, which asserts that one can only be held morally responsible for acts that are practically possible (in Sacher-Masoch's case, biologically possible) to perform. So Sacher-Masoch's argument is that (1) killing⁷ is always undesirable, (2) killing is morally wrong when performed by a moral agent, (3) one is a moral agent whenever one deliberately chooses between killing or not killing (4) one who kills becomes a moral patient only when killing is necessary for life, and (5) the best moral state is living without killing. Sacher-Masoch's humans become exceptional precisely because they can recognize that (1) combined with their moral agency means they are morally responsible for killing whenever that killing is unnecessary. The truly exceptional human aspires to (5) because this allows for moral agency at all times.

One of the advantages of Sacher-Masoch's argument is that it accounts for what appears to be a selective blindness regarding animals in his work. As much as Sacher-Masoch is a proponent of animal welfare, at times he seems to abandon this position. Even his most noble characters are clothed in sheepskin and furs and regularly eat meat and utilize work animals. This appears to be an exemplary case of what Francione characterizes as humans' "moral schizophrenia" regarding animals. Of this, Francione writes, "There is a profound disparity between what we say we believe about animals, and how we actually treat them. On the one hand, we claim to take their interests seriously. [...] On the other hand, our actual treatment stands in stark contrast to our proclamations about our regard for their moral status" (2000, pp. xix-xx). Sacher-Masoch's argument about moral agency shields him against much of the force of Francione's charge, because the vast majority of his characters have no access to a historical position that would allow them to transcend their local cultural norms regarding how to dress, eat, and work. Moreover, few of them have access to the economic means to create the changes necessary to implement such lifestyle changes, even if they wanted to, and many of the means by which some people currently limit animal use and cruelty (meat substitutes, machines, etc.) were simply not available in 19th-century Galicia. The upshot is that most of Sacher-Masoch's characters become moral patients under premise (4) in his argument. Because they cannot live without exploiting or killing, they fall under the Vladimir clause: killing is allowed when it fulfills the basic needs of life, and then one is resigned to adopt the mark of Cain.

At this point, it is helpful to be reminded that the action of a moral patient may, when viewed from the perspective of agency, itself be wrong or undesirable even if it is performed by a moral patient. For example, if a toddler, who is a moral patient, tortures a frog, we allow that the toddler is not morally reprehensible. This however does not mean that we condone frog torture; nor does it mean that we should not try to keep this toddler away from frogs once we know that it is likely that he will torture them. This reconciles Vladimir's position with that of the wanderer, who claims that killing and exploitation are always wrong and that permitting them on the grounds of necessity is the first step toward permitting humans' oppressions of other humans. It would seem that Sacher-Masoch, if we are to create a functional position from his various mouthpieces, must never condone animal cruelty or killing even if the responsible actor cannot be accused of animal torture or murder on grounds of moral patient status. So he seems to have his cake and eat it too. He can at once say that killing is always wrong, while simultaneously allowing killing for the sake of survival. This position, though pessimistic, fits well with Sacher-Masoch's sentiments regarding existence as a whole, which he describes as a perpetual penance, leading Helen Zimmern to conclude that "his pessimism is resigned idealism" (1879, p. 201).

The New Job suggests that this reconciling of the wanderer's and Vladimir's positions is consistent with Sacher-Masoch's overarching view of animals. Published in 1878, *The New Job* recounts the life of the peasant Theofil Pisarenko. The reader follows Theofil's story from serfdom to his liberation and ascent to bourgeois freedom. Of importance in regard to animal rights, his story, as recounted by the narrator, is also bookended by his associations with animals. At the sounds of Theofil's birth, "the cow bellowed, the horse pawed and neighed and the cock lifted himself, flapped his wings, and crowed" (1891, p. 4) to herald Theofil's arrival in the world. Even as a child he showed great concern for animals and their welfare. He and his playmate Xenia

[...] looked at ants and bees who worked so indefatigably about them, or watched a drone who, with his little black head peeping out of his yellow fur jacket, his brown legs shimmering in the sun, would bury himself in a little calyx, suck the honey, then buzz over the flowers, sip from this one, flutter over that, all in the greatest hurry and confusion. [...] They would build houses in the water of the large stones, cover them with branches, and let the little fish which they caught live in them. They told each other stories about their pets; Xenia praised her lambs, Theofil his horses. (1891, p. 8)

The passage continues to describe how carefully Xenia and Theofil protected their pets from the sun and insects while they grazed in the fields. Toward the end of the novel, the narrator points out that Theofil and his wife, during their twilight years, “would sit under the large apple tree—a spot filled with bitter memories—and watch their grandson as he sits astride the wolf-dog” (1891, pp. 265-266). This description is important not only because it suggests that his posterity will have a unique relationship with animals, but also because it subtly reminds readers that Theofil never forgot that he buried his dog Brytan, a dog whom the narrator introduces as one of Theofil’s only three true friends (1891, pp. 201-204), beneath this very apple tree.

In many ways, Theofil’s entire life is marked by his relationship to animals. This is explained in the final lines of the novel, where Theofil says that the Galician “peasants were treated worse than brutes” (1891, p. 270). In retrospect, many of *The New Job*’s uses of animals are meant to reinforce this sentiment. For example, in one scene the lord of the manor uses his riding whip to drive a young Theofil and the other children from the school house, then forces the schoolmaster to teach the lord’s hunting dogs “the famous tricks that wise dogs learn” (1891, p. 13) instead. The lord emphasizes the animal-like nature of the peasant children by asking, “What do these curs need to be taught?” (1891, p. 13). In another example, Sacher-Masoch recounts “the days when noblemen treated their servants like cattle, when Marina Tartakowska wished to hunt and, there being no game, she would have skins of bears, wolves, lynxes, and other animals put on her peasants and then set the dogs upon them to hunt them to death” (1891, p. 100).

Generally, when people say that they were treated like an animal they are claiming that they were treated cruelly; but almost never is this phrase intended to prompt the persons addressed to reconsider their treatment of animals. For Sacher-Masoch, however, as seen in the above examples, human characters are literally interchangeable with animals. There is almost too little distance between animals and peasants to warrant a claim that the relationship is merely metaphorical. In *The New Job*’s most overt comparison of the peasant to the brute, Theofil must actually bear the yoke and plow the lord’s field. Saborski, the lord of the manor, decided to “turn poor Pisarenko’s life into a living hell” (1891, p. 140) by forcing him to plow his fields day after day. Eventually, one of Theofil’s horses goes lame, leaving only one, who has fallen sick, to plow. Once Theofil recognizes that the remaining horse is too sick to work, he wonders to himself, “How should he who could be so cruel to his fellow-creatures [Saborski] have mercy for the brute?” (1891, p. 141). Theofil, who has empathy for the horse, seems to be applying the

ought-implies-can principle here. Since Saborski cannot understand why mercy is in order, Theofil surmises that the situation makes it impossible for him to unhitch the horse. The horse eventually becomes so sick that it can no longer work. Saborski then delivers “two heavy blows” to the horse as it dies and forces Theofil to harness himself to the plow to finish the job. It is at this point that rights are invoked: “‘You have no right to treat a man so,’ said an old peasant” (1891, p. 142). In spite of this protest, Theofil is forced to plow the field for five days. This treatment only ends when Saborski finds out that a committee is coming to town to investigate this mistreatment of his peasants. After being unyoked, Theofil returns home, immediately sets to caring for his lame horse, then stretches himself out in the hay of the stable.

There are several significant implications of this scene. At the level of plot, the investigating committee orders Saborski to pay Theofil two thousand gulden, which the pastor invests on Theofil’s behalf. Twenty years later, Theofil receives the money with the interest it has earned, and this effectively ends his life as a peasant. With his new wealth, he is able to transform the life of the local peasantry through thriftily taking advantage of two new inventions: the railroad (described by Sacher-Masoch as the “carriage that travels without horses” [1891, p. 235]) and the steam plow. It is notable that the consequence of Theofil’s taking the place of the horse, his wealth, puts him in a position in which he is able to relieve the horse of two of its most important and difficult duties: drawing carriages and cargo over long distances and plowing the field.⁸ So whereas the one who claims, metaphorically, to have been treated like an animal generally has no concern for animals, Theofil’s literally being treated like an animal seems to have encouraged him to welcome the technologies that make it possible for him to not treat animals “like animals.” In light of this, *The New Job*’s closing paragraph, which suggests that the days of peasants being treated like brutes is behind them, should be read to suggest the dawning of an age in which animals too might not be treated “as animals.”

The second major consequence of Theofil’s treatment like an animal is a glimpse into a way in which something like animal rights might be conceptualized by Sacher-Masoch. The peasant’s appeal to the concept of rights frames this scene by suggesting that the lord is unjustified in claiming a positive right to put Theofil into a situation that might compromise his dignity/interests. This echoes Vladimir’s argument against tormenting animals: “he [man] shouldn’t torment them, for animals have a will, feelings, and a mind like we do. They think, if not as sophisticatedly as we do, and to delight in their torment is not much better than slaughtering gladiators at the circus” (1891, p. 148). Animals should not be tormented because

they, like humans, have a subjective experience of events that needs to be acknowledged.⁹ This means that to Sacher-Masoch, animals have morally relevant characteristics, making them objects of concern for moral agents. As being tormented is never in one's interest, here is another instance in which one might be tempted to claim that no one has a "right" to torment animals. However, Vladimir's comment is prefaced by the caveat "one shouldn't talk about rights in this world." This casts animal rights in an interesting light, because "rights," as used by both the old peasant and Vladimir, refers to what Steven Wise (2004), following Wesley Hohfeld, calls a liberty right, or the right to do as one pleases. The peasant claims that Saborski is not at liberty to act as he does, just as Vladimir claims that humans should not appeal to a liberty right to excuse their killing of animals. In Vladimir's case, he believes that humans can simply claim the necessity of eating animals and leave rights out of the equation. Bringing to light the absence of this liberty right, moreover, underscores that there is something wrong with the action (in the one case, harnessing a man to a plow, in the other case, tormenting animals) that instigated the discussion. Like Steven Wise, one might be tempted to suggest that this sense of something wrong with these actions implies that the wronged has rights (such as immunity rights or autonomy rights). However, Sacher-Masoch does not go that far. He simply posits something problematic and morally reprehensible in claiming a right to treat another (human or animal) "like an animal." He gives rights to neither Theofil nor animals in the process.

But Theofil does seem to learn from this experience that there is significant value in creating a world in which education and scientific advancements make it no longer necessary to kill, debase, or torment. Here I would like to position something like animal rights in Sacher-Masoch's worldview. Once technology and economic progress make it possible for Theofil to replace the horse with steam, Theofil becomes a moral agent concerning the exploitation of animals for extremely difficult work. At that point, he can no longer appeal to "necessity," for it is no longer necessary to use the animal like an "animal." Indeed, it is as though Theofil's time in the harness has taught him to find a way to make such an act unnecessary, even for a horse. His money, along with technological ingenuity, makes it possible for him to transition from a moral patient to a moral agent. This recognition that one *can* change something that ought to be changed is precisely the point where moral duty enters the equation, and thus a moral duty toward animals is established.

This duty, however, does not grant animals universal protection. After all, Theofil can only act as a moral agent in relation to animals because of his education and wealth. Many

peasants of Galicia would have neither the imagination nor means to warrant the claim that they can live without exploiting nonhuman animals, and perhaps also human animals. Hence, they remain moral patients in regard to killing (at least) animals. How can Sacher-Masoch get around this? I would turn to the closing “moral” of *Venus in Furs* for a solution. There, Severin summarizes the upshot of his story:

The moral is that woman, as Nature has created her and as she is currently reared by man, is his enemy and can be only his slave or his despot, *but never his companion*. She will be able to become his companion only when she has the same rights as he, when she is his equal in education and work. (2003c, p. 119)

Here, Sacher-Masoch discloses that rights are positive protections designed to enable companionable relations. In the case of *Venus*, the rights to education and work are the necessary conditions by which woman can become man’s moral companion. This gives us the first hint at Sacher-Masoch’s theory of rights: They are legal instruments used to create the minimum conditions for companionship/equality. In the case of men and women, there is little question that Sacher-Masoch shares a theory of rights that is similar to that of a noted critic of animal rights, Richard A. Posner. Posner believes that, “Legal rights are instruments for securing the liberties that are necessary if a democratic system of government is to provide a workable framework for social order and prosperity” (2004, p. 57). Granted, Sacher-Masoch’s companionship goes slightly beyond Posner’s “social order and prosperity,” but the idea that rights are instruments designed to help moral agents (and patients) to prosper is something both would certainly agree upon. The reason that I bring in Posner here is that he pokes great fun at the notion of granting animals rights. He rightly asks questions such as, “When human and animal rights collide, do the former have any priority?” and “What is to be done when animal rights collide with each other, as they do with laws that by protecting wolves endanger sheep?” (2004, p. 57). These are important questions that, when rhetorically posed, create a real challenge for anyone who wants to acknowledge something like animal rights. But these are only problems if we think of animals as agents who employ their rights as moral agents do. For Sacher-Masoch, nonhuman animals are always moral patients, and moral patients, because they cannot act rightly or wrongly, are not able to exercise a right to their own ethical benefit or detriment. So to claim that Sacher-Masoch’s “animal rights” position demands that we legally protect an animal’s ability to act in a certain way might be misguided.

But what if we thought, as Tom Regan (2004) does, of giving animals rights as moral patients? There is no evidence that Sacher-Masoch believes we should do this in the sense that we currently do—as when the law provides certain legal protections to children, the mentally disabled, etc. However, there are other ways of thinking about these rights. Returning to the idea of work and education, the two rights named in *Venus*, what would it mean to allow something like work or education to be *devoted to* something rather than, or in addition to, *granted to it*? Above, I claimed that humans become moral agents in regard to animals precisely when they can no longer claim that they must eat them, kill them, be entertained by them, etc. (Even Theofil used his horses, one to the death, because he had no other feasible option but to work them so.) What if granting rights to education to the animal, as a moral patient, meant not teaching it how to build steam engines or to adopt alternative eating habits, but instead meant that we devoted education to them by teaching humans alternative ways of acting and working, ways that replaced humans' current habits of action and mind that exploit animals? What if it meant that those who know it is not necessary to kill animals for food or fight them as entertainment have an ethical responsibility to teach other humans how to eat without killing, how to be entertained without exploiting? What if it meant devoting significant research to finding new technologies to replace animal work or exploitation? Understood in this way, Sacher-Masoch's animals' right to education would morally justify humane education¹⁰ curricula; would allow researchers to devote research to making animals' lives better without worrying about the accusation that they should be devoting their time to less trivial matters; and would function to make education a far less anthropocentric endeavor. Most importantly, it would end the claim that animal rights is merely a Eurocentric discourse whose proponents have no more right to push on others than a whale- or cat-eating culture has to evangelize its beliefs about a proper diet. Animals would then have rights to education in that legally protected, and educationally sound pedagogical practice, would 1) emphasize respect for animals, even when others understand this as moral proselytizing, 2) teach that it is wrong to continue practices and habits that are exploitive of animals when alternative practices are possible, 3) design life-skills curricula that help those who cannot envision the feasibility of these alternative practices to do so (such as vegetarian cooking or the use of computer simulators to reduce the need for animals in research), 4) de-anthropocentrize the mission of educational institutions, and 5) discount any unnecessary piece of knowledge gained at the expense of animals' welfare (e.g., performing cruel experiments on

animals so that we can better understand maternal bonds or the effects of sleep deprivation) as unworthy of academic attention.

Of course, one should look at a list such as this with suspicion. Would this all not amount to a form of cultural or ethical imperialism? Wouldn't this fortify other unsound forms of cultural elitism and paternalism, especially amongst Europeanized cultures, that would in turn improperly justify other forms of exploitation? There is no question that many individuals view their ability to exploit animals less than others as a form of moral superiority, one that Harold Fromm characterizes as "a futile metaphysic of virtue and self-blamelessness" (2010). But this is not what I am suggesting about Sacher-Masoch's position. For him, those who view the use and exploitation of animals as necessary—whether that necessity is real, merely economic, or just strongly apparent does not matter—must be treated as moral patients in regards to animals. There is no question that this will lead to or at least be perceived as paternalism by those designated moral patients. Simultaneously though, the moral agent cannot claim moral superiority because the moral patient is simply acting in the realm of necessity. Blaming a peasant for continuing to use oxen instead of a tractor that he could nowise purchase nor maintain would be no different than blaming a cat for eating a wren. And while many would read this comparison of a peasant to a cat as degrading and dehumanizing, I would suggest that that is only so within a set of speciesist hierarchies that, as I demonstrated in the *Geschlecht* section of this paper, Sacher-Masoch's position would force one to reject. Unquestionably, criticism of this position as bordering upon imperialistic or paternalistic should not be taken lightly, for the position certainly opens the door for many other abuses; yet this possibility for animal rights should not be dismissed merely because it smacks of other historical indiscretions. As Sacher-Masoch sees it, animals do have significant, morally relevant interests. Intervening in the name of these is a far cry from arbitrarily imposing a set of one's own cultural norms upon another. And since he understands the arguments for the exploitation of one human group by another as logical consequences of arguments justifying one life form's domination by another, the claim that cultural imperialism is wrong, insofar as this *assumes* that one group of people should not dominate another, should only be taken seriously if it is uttered by one who is already willing to give up dominating other life forms wherever possible.

While I believe one could outline a similar list of moral responsibilities to animals in regard to the right to work, presenting only this justification for humane education is enough to demonstrate that Sacher-Masoch's position on animals, when expanded in systematic fashion,

offers us a unique way of thinking animal rights and our own responsibilities toward animals. Rather than offering animals rights as legal protections that we extend to them regardless of circumstances, Sacher-Masoch's (animal) rights would call us to focus on creating the conditions wherein we could identify unnecessary animal exploitation and eliminate it, work to change conditions such that animal exploitation becomes unnecessary where it is currently necessary (e.g., some forms of animal research), and force us to reassess many of our obviously exploitive practices, asking if they really are necessary for our continued existence. These rights would also, in a resignedly idealist way, allow for the continued "exploitation" of animals where it is necessary for individual humans' survival or where the conditions are such that humans cannot see the possibility of adopting alternative, non-exploitive practices. To the animal liberationist, it might be more expedient to simply give animals the same rights that we give to humans and be done with it. Yet I would argue that Sacher-Masoch's position ultimately has more argumentative applicability, primarily because of how well it coheres with moral orthodoxy¹¹ when compared the liberationist stance.

For those who read Sacher-Masoch in English, it is unfortunate that his most widely read English-language work, *Venus in Furs*, does not include many interactions between living human and nonhuman animals. However it does quite openly discuss the problem of *Geschlecht*, and a significant number of important interactions between humans are mediated by the skins of animals (furs and leather), their products (silk), and the implements of their torture and servitude (whips, yokes, ropes, etc.). With the expansive notion of *Geschlecht* detailed in the first part of this article, many new questions are opened regarding even *Venus*. If we read *Venus* only as addressing the war of the sexes, we may miss how the whips and the furs indicate not-so-invisible traces of real human oppressions, and fail to understand them as something more than fetish objects. Moreover, *Venus*' "moral" regarding the management of human relationships via rights to work and education may provide a unique model for thinking about animal rights, a model tentatively sketched in the final pages of this paper. And just as human domination of animals provides the justification for intrahuman oppression, perhaps *Venus*' answer to the question of how men and women can be companions might afford us new ways to think about animal rights and companionship. In short, Sacher-Masoch has much to teach us about animals, oppression, and exploitation. Unfortunately, many readers, primarily due to psychoanalysis' influence, focus attention too narrowly on the sexual side of *Geschlecht* in his work.

This article offers only a fraction of Sacher-Masoch's thoughts on the significance of this term, especially in regard to animals, calling attention to the consistent concern that Sacher-Masoch displayed for animals and the animal rights position that might be gleaned from his work. But there is much more to be thought regarding the animal in Sacher-Masoch. For example, his minor works provide much evidence of a fairly complex philosophy of companionship that begins with befriending animals. As naïve as this might sound, naïve because of our own speciesist attitudes, his model for interspecies relationships deserves full consideration as an ethico-political philosophy; for it certainly would represent a unique alternative to the psychoanalytic ethic of masochism that holds such firm sway in Sacher-Masoch scholarship.