

Animal farm: society in the eyes of twain and swift

Literature



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Human beings are supposed to be the ideals of civilization, held high by their gift of reasoning and hailed by religion to have a soul. This is what separates man from animals. “ The Damned Human Race” by Mark Twain and “ A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift both present a different view by comparing human behavior to that of animals, but while Swift has written an essay that sarcastically proposes a radical solution to Irish poverty, Twain presents human beings as less than animals instead of the other way around, which is the commonly accepted idea.

Both essays get their point across by the use of forceful images that tend to shock, and therefore create an impact on their readers. “ The Damned Human Race” by Mark Twain questions the notion of humans being the highest form of animal, with the rest considered as “ lower animals” (Twain). Twain begins his argument by saying that he does not use mere “ speculation” in his conclusions but uses “ what is commonly called the scientific method” (Twain). Through experiments that he claims to have performed, he deduces that man is cruel, foolish, indecent and greedy.

The characteristics are said to be absent in animals who are supposed to know less than human beings. It is the wisdom that man claims to make him higher than other animals which makes him more responsible for his actions; all that he has done wrong appears more calculated and can be judged as wrong or right. It is indeed true that what is done with full knowledge of its effect has a greater weight than what is done because of mere instinct. When the animals devour their prey, Twain says that they do not know better, just like when a “ cat plays with the frightened mouse...she does not know that the mouse is suffering” (Twain).

When humans hurt other human beings, they know what they are doing and are therefore, more responsible than the cat. Twain goes on to illustrate man's cruelty and indecency. He even provides details of experiments that prove the greed of humans as compared to animals' appetites which are easier to satisfy. Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" is rife with sarcasm. The main idea of the essay is Swift's proposal that babies of the poor should be sold just like any other meat, in order to provide profit to the impoverished families who do not contribute to the society's well-being.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled ... " (Swift 489) is a very striking suggestion made by Swift's satirical essay. The tone is very light, emphasizing the contrast of the dark idea Swift is presenting to his readers. Cannibalism is a metaphor for the ill treatment of the society's poor.

Having proposed selling babies as food, Swift declares that babies' meat is "somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children" (Swift 490). The use of the word "devour" as a description of the landlords' treatment of the poor must be noted. It is consistent with the cannibal metaphor used throughout the essay. Swift presents the benefits of his proposition, calling on the profit-conscious generation.

The benefits mentioned are additional supply of meat, profit and fewer mouths to feed for the babies' parents, and nutritious food for the rich who will buy the meat (Swift 494). Of course, Swift does not really mean that he

wants people to start eating children as if babies' flesh is equivalent to pork, chicken or beef. He means that people are being treated like animals, and sometimes living in a state worse than that of animals. For him, the only way for his audience to immediately grasp that is to present an obviously disgusting idea.

Swift wants the readers to understand that for a disturbing proposal to be the best alternative, nothing must have been done to improve the welfare of the Irish poor. The two essays "A Modest Proposal" and "The Damned Human Race" both establish tendency of human beings to become inhumane. Both Swift and Twain compare humans to animals. However, Twain uses a more direct approach. He explicitly compares humans to animals by giving examples from experiments he has conducted with animals and putting them side by side with observations of human behavior.

He finds humans inferior compared to what should be considered lower animals. On the other hand, Swift uses a metaphor instead of declaring directly that since poor humans are being treated like animals anyway, their babies may serve a better purpose as meat instead of growing up to add to increasing number of the criminals and beggars in Ireland (Swift 487). It can then be concluded that Twain and Swift both compare humans to animals, but their approaches and intentions have differences.

Twain uses direct comparison between humans and animals; they are competing for the position of superior animal. Meanwhile, Swift does not say that animals are superior or inferior; he just means that if the situation of the impoverished is not improved, they remain no better than animals. "A Modest Proposal" is a call for a change in the society's system while "The <https://assignbuster.com/animal-farm-society-in-the-eyes-of-twain-and-swift/>

Damned Human Race” may also be another call for a change, but it differs by being a call to change man’s individual behavior before human beings are labeled as the greediest and most sadistic form of animal.