

The line between science and humanity in the island of dr moreau essay examples

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



H. G. Wells' 1896 science fiction novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* tells the tale of Edward Prendick, a man who becomes shipwrecked on an island run by the titular scientist, who uses the animals of the island to run his experiments. Making cruelly horrific sentient beings, Prendick becomes accustomed to this environment and has to deal with many hard questions about his morality along the way. The book itself touches on many unique and prescient themes, not the least of which is the line between science and humanity. Is it possible to lose what makes us human while we pursue the possibilities of technology and science? In this novel, the struggle between humanity and science is portrayed by the outlooks and events that surround the characters of Dr. Moreau, Montgomery, and Prendick, their character arcs each encompassing one end of that spectrum.

Dr. Moreau, a vivisectionist who has decided to place himself in seclusion so that he might conduct his experimental research, is the furthest from humanity of the three characters. By the time Prendick meets him, he is too far gone to come back from the God complex he has developed for himself. On the island, Dr. Moreau is cool, composed, and authoritative; having created his own little paradise for himself, he sees himself as above the fickle demands of humanity. He loves the process of creating his beast-like minions, but does not care about them after they are made. He has been isolated from other humans for so long, with only Montgomery to keep him company; as a result, he no longer identifies with people and communicates with them on a human level. He is a very intense man, and driven in his search for perfection and science. Constantly seeking perfection, despite

humans not being perfect, Dr. Moreau is the furthest from humanity one can get.

Dr. Moreau wishes to create his own little heaven, with his own army of creatures to do his bidding. Not feeling or caring for them in any way, he resorts to physical violence often to punish them and to keep them from following their animal instincts. "Some want to follow things that move, to watch and slink and wait and spring, to kill and bite, bite deep and rich, sucking the blood It is bad" (Wells, p. 44). In this way, Moreau is not part of the human community any longer; he is king of the beasts. His obsession with scientific research implies an abandonment of humanity and an embrace of all things animal and biology-related. Moreau relishes the power that he has over others: "Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say: this time I will burn out all the animal, this time I will make a rational creature of my own" (Wells, p 59).

The character of Montgomery falls somewhat in the middle of the spectrum between science and humanity. Despite the fact that he participates in Moreau's experiments, we see that there are traces of humanity that are left in him, but this dichotomy and this dilemma tear at his soul. Having a closer relationship with the Beast Men than Moreau, he understands them more and is very fond of them. Some tragic event happened in his past, as he "lost [his] head for ten minutes on a foggy night," forcing him to be ousted from human society not by will, but by choice (Wells, p. 11). As a result, he is just as ostracized as Moreau is, but while Moreau's separation from humanity is voluntary and wanted, Montgomery had no choice. His circumstances

drive Prendick to pity him, since Montgomery wants to rejoin humanity but cannot because of one tragic mistake.

Montgomery is a bit of a mediating force between Moreau and his creations. " There is a kind of travesty of humanity over there. Montgomery knows about it, for he interferes in their affairs. He has trained one or two of them to our service. He's ashamed of it, but I believe he half likes some of the beasts" (Wells, p. 59). This is done out of a sense of loyalty and compassion for the beast men, showing his ability to express his humanity in another form. This gives him purpose and community, but it is still hollow, as he is forced to follow Moreau's instructions and is driven to alcohol by his own agony.

Finally, there is Prendick, the shipwrecked man who is forced to endure the horrors of the island (and from whose perspective the story is told). From him, we have the most compassion and humanity, particularly at first; he is horrified at the creatures that he finds himself surrounded by, and finds Dr. Moreau and Montgomery's research abhorrent.

Prendick, at one point, states that " No doubt my discoverers thought me a madman. Neither the captain nor the mate would believe my story, judging that solitude and danger had made me mad. And fearing their opinion might be that of others, I refrained from telling my adventures further, and professed to recall nothing that had happened to me between the loss of the Lady Vain and the time that I was picked up again" (Wells, p. 102). As a result of his experiences on the island, Prendick finds himself at a further

distance from humanity, mostly as a result of his isolation and seeing what other humans, like Dr. Moreau, were capable of if they were given enough power.

Prendick's attitudes toward humanity change irrevocably as a result of his stay on the island. " I look about me at my fellow men. And I go in fear. I see faces keen and bright, others dull or dangerous, others unsteady, insincere; none that have the calm authority of a reasonable soul. I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale" (Wells, p. 103).

Prendick is the ultimate arbiter of humanity during his time on the island, but once he returns to civilization, he finds himself changed for the worse. He becomes a much more cynical man, believing that humanity has so many ugly things inside it.

In conclusion, the line between science and humanity is expressed by the relationships between the three main characters of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Dr. Moreau represents the capriciousness and cruelty of science over humanity, losing all sense of compassion and empathy in favor of acting as a god to an island of lost creatures. Montgomery provides a mediating force, being sympathetic towards the beasts while still being ostracized from humanity. Furthermore, Prendick, the most naive of them, finds his purer humanity failing him once he gets back to civilization. These three characters demonstrate the different sides of a person when they decide to forego their humanity.

Works Cited

Wells, H. G. *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. 1896. Print.