

[blue] Inhumic morality and dwellers in the deep

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 02 Oct 1999

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Dan Rabin — 02 Oct 1999, 23:13

Alex David Grace wrote:

The intelligent blood idea does present the cruel vision of species that, in order to remain morally and intellectually aware, must do something morally repulsive. Essentially, to have any will, they must exercise their will in a malevolent way.

Morally repugnant to whom? My interpretation of Krait's "cattle" metaphor and his comment "I must eat" is that the inhumis drinking of blood is as matter-of-fact to them as eating fish is to Horn. When leatherskins kill humans, are they being immoral?

I don't detect any self-loathing or guilt in either Quetzal or Krait (or Jahlee for that matter). Inhumic morals could even be very similar to one prevalent human system (killing other species isn't particularly bad; needing to eat justifies the means, etc.) and still fit the story. But our planet only has one intelligent species, so we don't know which way we'd develop if cows could discuss philosophy with us.

Or maybe inhumis aren't moral agents at all.

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We don't (yet) have any idea of how inhumis reproduce. We know they have sexes, but do they care for their young? Do they have a larval stage? The secret could lie in this area, too.

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Alice Turner wrote:

Does anyone think that Seawrack's Mother is an undine? The description is not so undine-like, but it's very brief and Horn did not see her well. They can swim between the stars, so why not?

I speculate that the Mother is somehow connected with Erebus and Abaia. She has the right habitat, anyhow, and Jonas's aborted tale at the end of _Shadow of the Torturer_ seems to point to an origin on a planet far from Urth, visited by the human diaspora.

-- Dan Rabin

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

Alex David Groce — 03 Oct 1999, 15:50 · follows Dan Rabin

Dan Rabin asked:

Morally repugnant to whom? My interpretation of Krait's "cattle" metaphor and his comment "I must eat" is that the inhumi's drinking of blood is as matter-of-fact to them as eating fish is to Horn. When leatherskins kill humans, are they being immoral?

<snippage>

Or maybe inhumi aren't moral agents at all.

The last is possible, but with Wolfe I think it's always best to assume everything that looks intelligent and capable of willed action IS a moral agent. Wolfe seems to have a pretty broad definition of human (Horn, at least, goes on about this at some length in OBW)--Jonas, Dr. Talos, sort of Babbie, etc. After all, the moral framework Wolfe's presumably working in doesn't mean that just because the inhumi say "they're cattle--who cares?" they're right about it. I think the inhumi are clearly more likely to be moral agents than leatherskins. Anyway, the inhumi seem (A) capable of being a bit gleefully cruel--Jahlee and Krait show this at times, a kind of awareness of villainy that's at the least a parody of moral agency and (B) capable of acting quite in-inhuman--how do we explain Krait's actions on the lander (not that we know exactly what happens yet) otherwise? At least for now I'm giving Krait the benefit of the doubt--he betrayed his kind for Horn, which was (so it appears now) a good act.

It seems we're saying that Seawrack may be like an adopted Undine. The more I look at those sections (and the telling bit in the Dramatis Personae), the more I think "Mom" is an Erebus/Abaia type thing (whatever they are) and clearly Up To No Good, although maybe resulting in good--BOT<N,L,S>S all evince Wolfe's statement that (in the story of St. Brendan in PEACE, this quote is inexact) "the wicked do God's will also, they just don't like it."

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

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