

ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF PUSS: THE CASE FOR A TRANSHUMANAL SOLIPSISM AND EXTRAPERSONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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Traditional interpretations of solipsism have previously held the view that the notion of the self and the locus of one's identity frame a part of the same experience, especially when the nature of this experience can be transpersonalised somehow. The only real consciousness that one has direct access to remains the self, or expressions of the selfsame contents. It is from this ideal perspective that everything else recedes into uncertainty. There are a number of variations to solipsism that contend as to what extent the world exists independent of the self which experiences it, and yet, there are next to no variations that contend as to what extent the locus of one's identity exists independent of the self which perceives itself as itself, nonanthropocentrically. Indeed, the very notion of the self represents its own egocentric predicament in that it can no longer distinguish itself from itself as the single possible or rational basis for philosophical evaluation. Its own solipsism keeps it from realising the true extent of its own solipsism, and so it goes.

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This paper reconsiders several key elements of solipsism and transpersonal solipsism in nonanthropocentric, albeit anthropomorphic, terms from the perspective of *Felis catus*, or the domestic cat. It also challenges the notion of the self as being the locus of one's identity, as well as the Cartesian concept of a God or agency by proxy, in response to Shaun Wilson's 'The Good, the Bad, and the Grumpy: Online Cat Pictures as Design Enigma in Digital Media' in the style of Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet: The Principles of Taoism*. The domestic cat, however, represents a kind of philosophical enigma with an

unassuming premise. If *Felis catus* constitutes a lower form of life by our own selfish standards, then it could be argued that the difference between *Felis catus* and *Homo sapiens*, not to mention other forms of life, depends on their own idea of selfishness. The more selfish they are, the more solipsistic they could be, which raises a number of questions about the role that selfishness plays in determining itself as itself solipsistically, and itself amongst itself transpersonally: firstly, whether or not the locus of one's identity is proportionate to the extent of one's selfishness; secondly, whether or not the extent of one's selfishness contributes to a lack of self-awareness, culminating in *Felis catus*, or something like *Felis catus*, as the basis for what this paper will refer to as a transhumanal solipsism; thirdly, whether or not this lack of self-awareness in the one enables the selfishness of the other, and vice versa, as the basis for what this paper will refer to as an extrapersonal consciousness; and finally, whether or not this lack of self-awareness contributes to a horseshoe theory of selflessness through selfishness as a result.

It is three o'clock in the morning, Monday, hot. I have the evaporative cooling on full. The air is thick and cold, but humid, and to keep things cold, and to stop my books from swelling, I need to leave the window to my bedroom open. My cat, Tig Tig, takes this as an opportunity to wake me up. If I leave the window open too much, he slides behind the glass and plucks his claws against the fly-screen. If I shut the window, he paws against the glass. If I leave the window open just enough, though, he mews. He mews regardless, and for no particular reason. I wake up, stumbling half-naked into the dark and wait by the front door. Nothing. No sign of Tig Tig. I kiss for him to come with a bilabial clicking sound that was never really taught to me, what a couple of armchair linguists have purported the Samoans to call *faamiti*, "a high-pitched squeaky noise that results when sucking in air against lightly pursed lips. We usually make this sound when trying to gain the attention of pets or even little children." (Sivasubramaniam 2017). Tig Tig gallops past me past the cat flap—yes, the cat flap, because that was never an option—straight into the laundry, while I wonder if the house, the evaporative cooling, the window, are just one big *faamiti*, forever calling him home. I feed him; sometimes he will only eat if I watch him eat; sometimes, he will try to coax me outside again, darting back and forth between the window and the door in some catvainglorious attempt to communicate the significance of the hour to me in ways that I do not understand.

I recall this series of events allegorically, and not just anecdotally, in so far as many anecdotes and allegories function ethnographically and autoethnographically in ways that could be considered solipsistic or transpersonal. Tig Tig has motivations, in other words, that are beyond my capacity to translate nonanthropocentrically, and yet, they frame a vital part of the object and the subject of this paper not unlike the use of self-reflection as a form of qualitative research, or the study of cultural phenomena from the point of view of the subject. So here we are, to paraphrase Hoff, about to try to explain Tig Tig, a domestic cat: "In the classic Taoist

manner, we won't try too hard to explain too much, because that would only confuse things, and because it would leave the impression that it was all only an intellectual idea that could be left on the intellectual level and ignored. Then you could say, 'Well, this idea is all very nice, but what does it amount to?'" (p.18). There are designs upon my intellect that are not intended by myself, or for myself, but through myself, through Tig Tig, or something like Tig Tig, and that are similar in some respects to "one of the most important principles of Taoism... named after [*Winnie-the-Pooh*]" somewhat coincidentally, "*P'u*, [meaning] the Uncarved Block", according to Hoff, where "The essence of the principle of the Uncarved Block is that things in their original simplicity contain their own natural power, power that is easily spoiled and lost when that simplicity is changed" (p.18), or even translated. The very intellectualisation of this power as a power, furthermore, renders me powerless in comparison to Tig Tig, whose own power, or lack thereof, derives from not being able to express themselves as themselves in quite the same manner in which I intellectualise myself as myself, and thus, my own selfish standards are disempowered by my own selfish standards. I find myself, for example, led to a spot on the driveway on more than one occasion. It is here, and only here, that Tig Tig will show me the stripes on his stomach. I serve the penultimate task of bestowing some sort of executive function, as far as I can tell, in the form of pats. The pats feel good, they surely strengthen the bond between us, reinforcing the dogma of domestication on an intellectual level, but they are always on his terms. Always.

"Notwithstanding, the worshipping of the domestic cat throughout Egyptian times established a legacy of feline representations to that of an independent entity controlled by no other," according to Wilson, "contrasted with dogs being of service to humans as a means of security and tasked usability." (p.3). The very notion of a legacy, nevertheless, presupposes another, rather logocentric predicament in the vein of the Uncarved Block, in that humans can no longer authenticate the origins of these feline representations precisely because they can no longer intellectualise them. It has become tautological, self-referential, and self-affirming, in an almost codependent fashion, and so much so that it exists because it already exists, and cannot be proven or disproven otherwise, despite that 'Cats [apparently] Domesticated Themselves, Ancient DNA [now] Shows' (Smith 2021; Ottoni, et al. 2017). Schrödinger's cat suddenly takes on an altogether different meaning. Moreover, if things in their original simplicity contain their own natural power, power that is easily spoiled and lost if we think about it too hard, or too much, then the power of the domestic cat throughout Egyptian times helped to establish a legacy of feline representations to that of a God, or agency by proxy, of which an independent entity controlled by no other is often compared to, contrasted with a solipsistic entity that cannot be proven or disproven to exist. In doing so, the domestic cat has achieved through its own simplicity what humans continue to strive to comprehend through their own complexity: a perfect, selfish, organism, without the need for itself beyond itself as itself, and as the basis for what this paper will refer to as a transhumanal solipsism.

The use of the term transhumanal, in reference to transhumanism, which promotes the advancement of technology for the benefit of *Homo sapiens*, by *Homo sapiens*, and for *Homo sapiens* (Bostrom 2005), instead promotes the domestication of *Felis catus* at the expense of *Homo sapiens*, or something like *Homo sapiens*, while *Felis catus* employs *Homo sapiens*, and, by extension, their very own transhumanism, in order to improve upon their lives not unlike a transtranhumanism, as a transhumanal solipsism. *Toxoplasma gondii*, for example, is a protozoan parasite that has been shown to “render Toxoplasma-infected rats more susceptible to predation by domestic cats (the definitive host of Toxoplasma) and, as a side-effect, more susceptible to trapping and poisoning during pest control programmes.” (Webster et al., p.1). It also makes *Homo sapiens*, among other forms of life, more receptive to *Felis catus* (Flegr, et al. 2011), and for seemingly no other purpose than to perpetuate its own life cycle not unlike a paraparasitism. The path of the parasite, from rat to cat to human, behaves like a greater, internetworked entity—a solipsism by way of self- similarity, one that farms out its own complexity for the sake of its own simplicity through a series of transpersonal relationships, through worshipping, through domestication, through infection, through itself as itself as itself. These relationships, in turn, ensure that no other entity warrants comparative status, not even amongst itself as itself as itself. It can only be transpersonalised to the extent that anything other than itself remains servile, as expressions of the selfsame contents, as opposed to a series of interdependent agencies. Indeed, “because of their inability to be controlled and thus, to be feared or in reverse,” to recall Wilson, “illicit to our preoccupation with selfish creatures as a form of amusement and entertainment” (p.3), their own selfishness not only represents their own capacity for a selflessness through selfishness, but the extent to which our perceived agency diminishes proportionately to their codependency over a period of time.

It is six o'clock in the morning, thereabouts, just after I get out of the shower. My other cat, Mi Mi, takes this as an opportunity to beg me for a brush. I use the term ‘beg’ in so far as Mi Mi cannot brush herself the same way that I can do so with a comb; something her late owner, my late aunt, used to do before she left for work, until, one day, she never came back. I inherited this ritual, which used to involve my aunt needlessly washing her face, too, another ritual inherited from her previous cat, Nasha, who had hereditary problems with her tear ducts. Mi Mi is the same breed as Nasha was, supposedly a Russian Blue (or British Shorthair), but much, much healthier. Nasha used to only eat Fancy Feast Flaked Tuna. I remember walls of the stuff blocked into the cupboard. Mi Mi only used to eat pet mince reserved specifically for racing dogs. I remember trays of the stuff packed into the freezer, until I eventually ran out, and had to improvise with Fussy Cat. Mi Mi is not as fussy as Nasha misled us both to believe. In fact, she eats just about anything I put in front of her, including the food I leave out for Tig Tig before Tig Tig comes home. Mi Mi never leaves the house, though, not unless I happen to

be going that way myself, but if I call her by her full name—Mia—she stretches through the cat flap, toddles down the steps, and always, always stops to smell the lavender. I like to think that she remembers how my aunt used to spray lavender oil on her pillow before they went to sleep together. Mia will sleep for most of the day, then, lumbering between the bed, the chair, the footstool, and sometimes, very quietly, very privately, has a sook behind the curtains. I know she has terrible nightmares for a cat, too, and that she will wake with a start all of a sudden disoriented, as if reacquainting herself with herself. I pat her reassuringly, and hope she does not grieve, or feels what grief feels like.

“... but no matter how [they] may seem to others, especially to those fooled by appearances... the Uncarved Block, is able to accomplish what [it] does because [it] *is* simpleminded. As any old Taoist walking out of the woods can tell you,” Hoff enunciates, “simpleminded does not necessarily mean *stupid*. It’s rather significant that the Taoist ideal is that of the still, calm, reflecting ‘mirror-mind’ of the Uncarved Block” (p.20). I will never really know, that is to say, what Mi Mi is thinking, or feeling, from her own point of view, but maybe, just maybe, this perspective, or lack thereof, is entirely the point of transhumanal solipsism. No matter how she may seem to me, Mi Mi does not grieve the same way that I grieve—not that she grieves any more or less than I do. This grief of ours exists between us in such a way that the one depends on the other, which characterises another, deeper, executive function more on my part than it does on hers, like a disembodied grief, or a grief on the behalf of grief, and as the basis for what this paper will refer to as an extrapersonal consciousness. If I am able to observe this grief for Mi Mi, I can give it substance, form, appreciation, in ways that heighten it by distilling this grief through myself as herself, and thus, through my own complexity, so that things in their original simplicity can maintain their own natural power at my expense. I am a part of the extension of a greater, internetworked, whole, like the organelles within the body of a cell, which are capable of a kind of autonomy without autonomy as expressions of the selfsame contents. These expressions retain their own power, however, power that Spinoza might refer to as the difference between *potentia* and *potestas*: a modal, or modular, form of power that is inherent within the organisation of the structure of a system as opposed to the power inherited from the organisation of a system within a structure, while the mirror- mind of the Uncarved Block constitutes both and neither, simultaneously, while empowering “the ability to enjoy the simple and the quiet, the natural and the plain.” (Hoff, p.29). I take the essence of the burden of consciousness away from being.

Wilson suggests, at least “from a design perspective, a cat picture or video has enough pre-existing attention en masse at a primal level from this fascination of cats we often experience, firmly embedded at an emotional level within our human ancestry to facilitate an entire design experience tapping into the closeness we might share with felines in a way that amplifies design from a ‘system’ to an integrated ‘feeling’ brought about by the subject

through design.” (p.10). The more embedded I am at an emotional level, the more selfless I become, tapping into the closeness Mi Mi, or Tig Tig, or something like Tig Tig, or Mi Mi, might share at an extrapersonal level. If we example, rather than “return to the Grumpy Cat memes,” Wilson posits that “the animal’s aesthetic structuralism plays out a much different architecture for the subject due to the weighted multiplicity of [their] online agency once the copy of a copy premise is abandoned and re-interconnected with other ‘memes of memes’ thus disrupting the context to such an extent that all meaning in the original context of a copied image is lost due to the weighted burden of gigo-scale distribution.” (p.6). The essence of the burden of consciousness loses all meaning through layers and layers of these representations, which accumulate and build-up over a period of time at the same emotional level, but in ways that we might share with felines that amplifies the structure of a relationship from a ‘system’ to an integrated ‘feeling’ brought about by the subject through the object. It also doubles as form of camouflage, whereby “the proliferation of cat celebrities based on actual and digitally created animals all have similar traits to the Grumpy Cat phenomenon”, as Wilson puts it, “which are [then] pushed to social media distribution in order to maximise a wider audience in step with the virtues of genre cults.” (p.4). In this sense, the philosophisation of *Felis catus* is able to redistribute itself as itself, itself amongst itself, and itself through itself, as expressions of the selfsame affirmation, featuring different incarnations of the same solipsistic entity as a baseline template, the personalisations, personifications, and particularities of which contribute to a greater or lesser extent the same end result: idolisation, ritualisation, and worshipping, as a feedback loop.

The subject of this paper suddenly becomes the object of mimesis, where a self-awareness, or lack thereof, still contributes to a horseshoe theory of selflessness through selfishness as a result. It saturates the art, the language, with and without myself through myself, a self-absorbed, solipseostatic, pervasion and perversion of culture, capital, and colloquialism. “The first is that we witness the cat picture as a cat picture in the same way as what Baudrillard would prescribe the condition of an older simulation at the outset before its consideration of simulacra was approached;” Wilson asserts, while “the second occurrence is that we graft our own aesthetic context to the image in determining if we ‘like’ the image or not” (p. 6). The proverbial cat is out of the bag, looking like something the cat dragged in, tongue got, curiosity dead, and busier than a three-legged cat in a dry sandbox trying to herd itself as itself. The “third occurrence is placing the subject into a wider genre of internet cat pictures which holds the weight of every other cat image we either know or have seen before;” Wilson postulates, while “the fourth and final stage is what happens to this image at a macro level once the image achieves a sense of viraliability. At the fourth stage, the originality of the image ceases to exist in a multi-copied form” (p. 6), and this is the point at which the illusion of agency completely dissolves back into the selfsame entity, as a cat nap, or a copycat, or a

cat burglar, whereupon all cats look grey at night, despite that a cat may look at a king, as high as the hair on a cat's back, meowing, with a Cheshire grin from ear to ear.

There comes a knock at the door, one day, interruptive, unexpected. Nobody hears it but me, and when I go to answer it, somehow, somehow it is like I already know what to expect. I cannot quantify or qualify or justify this abject sinking falling feeling that emanates from this man about his wife who has just run over a cat I have to ask what colour it is—grey, they say—and go out to see for myself that it is Tig Tig, that Tig Tig is no longer alive, and can therefore no longer be real. I touch his fur, already coming away; as if the only thing holding on to his skin was holding on by the skin of my teeth. The rest of his body is whole, intact, perfect seeming, except for his tongue lolled out, and a tiny smear of blood behind his right ear. I pick him up and put him in a sheet, feeling the weight of every single muscle yield itself unto mine, without effort, without resistance, and after I bury him, deep in the backyard, I try to get back to whatever it was I forget that I was doing before Tig Tig, after Tig Tig. I am as if in a daze, lost like a dream without a dreamer. If I am the part of the mind of this creature, if I am the part of Tig Tig that reflects upon himself as himself, then his legacy endures, I guess, I have to reassure myself. He continues within me without himself, having impressed upon another the essence of a way of being without needing to exist, as, well, the closest thing that would seem to mean to me is memory, like the memory palaces of old. And this leftover consciousness that I am, vestigial cairn, landmark, mausoleum, ebbs on and on and on in a perfect state of grace, a supreme selfishness through selflessness not having to think or feel or worry about himself as himself anymore. He achieves through me something greater than he could ever hope to achieve by himself without even realising it: a kind of immortality through living memory, as well as through the transhumanal digitisation of words and the dissemination of this paper in the hearts and minds of those who read it, and feel, for brief moments at a time, for Tig Tig, as Tig Tig.

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