



**GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET**  
**INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER**

SPRÅKISKA

# **Dualities in the Mind of Pi Molitor Patel**

A Philosophical Approach to Truth in *Life of Pi*

Gustav Sandgren

**C-uppsats**  
**HT 12**

**Handledare: Fereshteh Zangenehpour**  
**Examiner: Ron Paul**

## Table of Contents

Abstract	p. 2
Introduction	p. 3
Chapter 1: Pi Breaks Down	p. 6
Chapter 2: The Better Story, the True Story or the Same Story?	p. 15
Conclusion	p. 23
Bibliography	p.25
Appendix 1	p.26

## Abstract

The aim of the essay is to analyze what happens to the protagonist Pi in Martel Yann's novel *Life of Pi*. The essay will focus on how he devolves as a sophisticated human being, how the extreme situation he is in triggers a duality in his mind and why he in the end has two versions of his story. It will point out that in extreme situation of great peril and desperation hope is necessary for the ability to continue the struggle to survive. The essay will also discuss the perception of truth based on choice and belief since this is what creates the two different versions of the story. It will bring up empiricism as a method for knowledge and point out some issues with it. Ultimately the essay concludes that choice is the deciding factor of what a person will view as truth and that perhaps there can never be any objective record of an external reality to the subjective minds of human beings. The protagonist in the novel has made a choice to believe in something that perhaps others will not accept as truth, but in the end that does not matter to him because he needs to believe in it.

Keywords: Martel Yann, *Life of Pi*, animals and humans, survival, catastrophe, hope, belief, dualities, truth, empiricism, objective or subjective reality, choice.

## Introduction

*Life of Pi* is an adventure novel written by Yann Martel and was published in 2001. It won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction the following year and has since then won several other awards internationally. The latest success for the novel is that it is being adapted to a film that will premier in cinemas November 2012.

To some people *Life of Pi* is nothing but a children's book, simply an adventurous tale of a boy's misfortune and struggle to survive. For others, including myself, it is so much more. It is a novel about religion, philosophy, science and above all the relationship between these things. Philosophy is an ever-present theme throughout the novel and that is why I have chosen a philosophical approach in this essay. I will argue that Yann Martel is not simply telling a story of a boy that survives a shipwreck. To me he portrays a duality to the human mind and a side that we do not normally identify with. My claim is that the novel can be read in separate ways. One can simply read the story as it is: a boy that struggles to survive and to not be eaten by the tiger and in the end prevails. The other option is to read it as an inner struggle in Pi's mind. I believe that Martel's intention is for us to read it as the second alternative. The tiger is not in fact an actual tiger but another side to Pi's mind. A side that he is confronted with in the extreme situation he finds himself in and can not identify with. Therefore, he chooses to view what happens to him in a certain way that an outsider can not understand. This is why Pi tells two different versions of the same story. Ultimately it is a question of choice, even the reader is forced to make a choice of which version to believe in.

*Life of Pi* tells the story of a boy named Piscine Molitor Patel or simply 'Pi'. His father is a zoo director, so from a very early age he learns everything there is to know about animal keeping and the respect you have to have for a wild animal. The fascination with all living things gives a young teenage Pi a new interest: Religion. He is so captured by it that he

becomes a practicing Hindu, Muslim and Christian, which to the world around him is very strange. At the age of fifteen Pi's family decides to emigrate to Canada due to political reasons. This is how Pi and a quite extensive collection of animals end up on a ship that for some unknown reason sinks in the Pacific Ocean. Pi survives and is stuck in the only functioning lifeboat together with the other surviving members of the ship, a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan and a Bengal tiger. In the end Pi survives an astonishing 227 days of drifting aimlessly in the Ocean. However, Pi is not the sole survivor of the story, the tiger also makes it but escapes and disappears without being seen as they finally come ashore in Mexico. When Pi later tells his incredible story to the officials who have come to question him on the possible reason for the sinking of the ship, they do not believe him. They say that the story is too extraordinary to be real and too many things do not add up. The interrogation quickly becomes a discussion about truth and in the end there are two different versions of Pi's story. The novel ends without reaching a conclusion of which story is the true one or why Pi would tell two different versions of the same story.

I will prove my claim by, as previously mentioned, taking a philosophical approach which means that the focus will be on abstract and complicated questions such as the distortion of truth through subjectivity, the mind's perception of a possible external reality, issues with empiricism and how choice will affect one's perception of the world. Works and theories of great philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and David Hume will be used to strengthen my arguments regarding these questions and the different possibilities that the novel offers will be discussed through philosophical reasoning. Zoological and psychological theories like the ones of Charles Darwin and Abraham Maslow will also be used to explain certain behaviors.

The essay is divided into two chapters. Chapter one will focus on Pi as a character and analyze his decline as a human being. I will describe why and how he declines and compare his character to other examples of people in situations of great danger and need, both real and

fictional. This is to show how Pi goes from human to animal and that the tiger and Pi are in fact the same. Chapter two will deal with what happens after Pi has been rescued and is safe. I will analyze the two stories he gives when questioned and why there are two stories. The question of which story is the true one will be discussed as well as the importance of truth and if truth really can be objective. I will tie the two chapters together by arguing that the reason for the two different versions of the story is the different viewpoints of Pi and the officials. Their experiences and choices differ and affect their perception of what is true, therefore, they can not agree. Finally I will give my view of what has happened to Pi and why he can not give a straight answer when questioned.

## Chapter 1: Pi Breaks Down

Because of the environment he grows up in, Pi is a very sophisticated boy from an early age. At the age of fifteen he has been strongly influenced by both science and religion, which are represented through the two Mr. Kumar who are good friends and role models for Pi. They both teach him different things, one science and the other religion. Already as a child he is concerned with the big questions of life. He is also very pragmatic in the way he sees and is taught two different views of the world (science and religion) and accepts them as two sides of the same coin. He has a thirst for knowledge and is fascinated by the different elements of the world, both spiritual and factual. Pi's growth as a person is possible because of the structure of modern society, a structure he will later lack.

If one applies Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs from his paper *A Theory of Human Motivation* on today's society one can see that we cover all the steps and are standing on the top of the pyramid (see appendix 1). The theory argues that a human being will move on to satisfying more abstract and complex needs only when having satisfied the more basic ones first. For example basic needs such as hunger and sleep needs to be taken care of before one can deal with things like self-esteem or belonging (373). That we stand on the top of the pyramid in today's modern society is possible because of the setting we live in. Society, created by humans for humans, provides the comfort of spare time, which means that we have time on our hands when we need nothing and have nothing to do. This means that we have to find things that can engage us in order to find a sense of purpose or merely keep ourselves entertained. We have this idea of self-realization that is very important in today's society and it goes right to the top of the pyramid of Maslow's theory. We have the luxury of time and with that the freedom of finding our own interests and make our own happiness. One could argue that this is on most people's minds most of the time whether they are aware of it or not.

Basically, the structure of society enables us to with fair ease satisfy the more fundamental needs such as eating, sleeping, safety and belonging, and frees us to spend conscious effort on creating our own happiness. We therefore naturally spend a lot of time on “esteem” and “self-actualization” (higher steps in the pyramid) and reflecting on whether we are happy, content and successful in what we try to achieve.

Pi is a perfect example of this. Although, perhaps more unaware than aware of what he is doing he completely engages in things that entertain, fascinate and give him purpose. He wonders, he learns, and finds meaning in this. Again, all this is possible because of the framework of the society in which he lives. He has both time and opportunity to devote his mind and spirit to interests that stimulate him and make him happy. In addition, one could say that Pi is in fact very concerned with finding meaning and realizing his inner self. Whereas most of us do find meaning in our lives in some way or another, we are not as energetic in our pursuit as Pi is. He adopts several religions and practices them all while also learning the scientific view of the world, usually separated from religion. Pi bundles all of this together and does not see why others (priests and parents) think that what he is doing is either wrong or incoherent. Pi as a human in his safe and comfortable society takes full advantage of the spare time and opportunities provided by the setting. He is concerned with the “why” of the world and seeks to fill his life with knowledge, faith and answers.

In extreme circumstances, like the one Pi finds himself in, the comfort provided by the structure of society is not present. Under pressure he reverts into a more basic state, a state where things like food, shelter, and survival become the most important (see Maslow’s pyramid). Pi goes through this kind of change and finds something within, another side of himself, an inner animal.

Sometimes he behaves exactly like a wild animal and he even realizes this himself.



By the end of my journey I was eating everything a turtle had to offer. [...] Whatever I found in a turtle's stomach became my turn to eat. [...] And my fingers were forever picking away at bits of dry fat and dry flesh that clung to the inner sides of the shells, rummaging for food in the automatic way of monkeys (Martel 213).

In examples like this it is almost as if the author is making fun of his main character. It is very ironic that Pi who has such an extensive knowledge of the behaviour and patterns of animals would suddenly realize that he is behaving exactly the same. There is a hint of critique in the text towards human beings thinking highly of themselves and maybe looking down on lesser evolved animals only to find that we behave in the same way.

However, there is one major difference between Pi and a wild animal. It is a difference that keeps him human in the direst moments; his faith. It keeps his inner animal in check and prevents him from completely succumbing to it. His faith is also his fuel in the fight to survive, it brings hope. A Pi without hope would not withstand the 227 days on the ocean. All living things have an internal survival instinct and will try to survive if threatened, but in order to endure such a long and outdrawn struggle as the one Pi faces that instinct alone would not be enough. In addition to the will to survive hope is necessary. As Sugandha S Singh puts it: "It is his [Pi] rationality that helps him to procure food and shelter for himself and manipulate Richard Parker and it is his faith that motivates him to keep fighting and instills hope in him" (*"The Other" In the Life of Pi* 2).

On several occasions Pi breaks down completely during his ordeal and in many of these situations he realizes just how much of an animal he is. "It came as an unmistakable indication to me of how low I had sunk the day I noticed, with a pinching of the heart, that I ate like an animal, that this noisy, frantic, unchewing wolfing-down of mine was exactly the way Richard Parker [the tiger] ate" (Martel 225). Examples like this show how dangerously

close he is to losing his human and sophisticated self, but his faith keeps this animalistic side in check and he clings on to his humanity through it.

Pi does not give up on God or belief because they give him hope and help him cope with the very challenging situation he is in. It is a sort of self perseverance that could be said to be inherent in human nature, we need something to believe in. Of course there are exceptions, like people who are atheists or nihilists, but I think the whole reason for the author making Pi very religious is because he needs hope in order to survive. An atheist could possibly survive the same ordeal but he/she would have to believe in something, if not a divine power at least something that will give him/her hope. It is not belief in a certain thing that gives strength, it is belief itself, it gives hope. Without hope Pi would not have made it; “Despair was a heavy blackness that let no light in or out. It was hell beyond expression. I thank God it always passed. [...] The blackness would stir and eventually go away, and God would remain, a shining point of light in my heart” (Martel 209). Therefore, the choice to make Pi a very religious boy is very reasonable because religion requires belief and, as mentioned, belief gives hope. Pi needs his faith, without it his already unbelievable feat of survival would be too farfetched and impossible.

An interesting parallel to draw here would be to the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. In this novel the boys have the company of each other but since they are trapped on an uninhabited island they, just like Pi, lack the structure and comfort of society. The result here is the same. They boys try to establish some sort of order but in the process they show another side of themselves and behave like wild animals. In both cases this animalistic behaviour disappears when the structure and safety of society is reinstalled. For the boys in Golding’s novel this is when they are rescued by a landing party from a passing naval vessel and for Pi it is when he drifts ashore and is found by Mexican villagers. This is when the tiger Richard Parker leaves him and escapes undetected into the woods.

There are other examples of real disasters that mirror the changes in the character of Pi. A famous example is that of a plane crash in the Andes in 1972 described in Piers Paul Read's novel *Alive*, where only 16 out of 45 passengers made it through alive. These passengers although not alone like Pi and only stranded for 70 days instead of 227 show the same decline but also the same will to survive as Pi does. The passengers of the plane crash and Pi are identical in two ways. First of all, they have hope. Hope is what keeps them going. It is hope that prevents them from giving up in the face of seemingly hopeless circumstances. It keeps them going and gives them energy to keep fighting for survival. In both cases their hope come through faith, but as previously mentioned it is not necessary to have faith in a divine power to have hope. Without the hope and belief that they were going to make it they would not have made it. Secondly, Pi and the airplane passengers share another side of themselves, a side not present or at least dormant in the comfort of society, a side that emerges when pressured and threatened. It is a side driven by basic needs and completely focused on survival leaving other things less important. If one again were to imagine Maslow's hierarchy of needs both Pi and the passengers from the plane take several steps down in the pyramid. Things like ethics, ideals and principles which people normally greatly concerned themselves with are, in this state, secondary. Impossible things like cannibalism become reality in order to survive and take place in both novels. They share this animalistic side and make good use of it to survive. However, they hang on to the hope that they will make it and at some point return to society and leave this inner wild animal behind and live like civilized people in society again. For them this state is only temporary and it is hope that keeps them from completely succumbing and become nothing but animals. Their animalistic side leaves them when the structure of society is reinstated. It is brought forth by need and when the need is gone so it once again becomes dormant.

Darwinists, believing in natural selection, would view the Pi in society as a very well adapted specimen of his species since he is only an adolescent boy but already very well adjusted to and suited for his time and surrounding. He is part of a functioning society that he benefits greatly from. He is in fact so well adjusted and comfortable that he almost exclusively devotes himself to abstract and complex interests. He is at the peak of the evolutionary tree and has time and energy to use on whatever stimulates him. One can see just how sophisticated he is when one considers what he actually focuses his mind on. John Stuart Mill writes in *Utilitarianism* about higher and lower pleasures, lower being pleasures of basic need such as eating, sleeping etc. and higher being pleasures that take more time and investment but pays off greatly in the end, for example self realization (8). Pi is very interested in these higher pleasures and devotes his mind to important and essential questions about the world both scientifically and religiously. If one were to compare this Pi with a wild animal it would seem that the differences would be of astronomical proportions. Therefore, it would be easy to argue that Pi and any wild animal are forever in every aspect separated. Mill writes: “The comparison of the Epicurean life [a life of seeking pleasure] to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast’s pleasures do not satisfy a human being’s conceptions of happiness” (8). However, it is not that simple. These differences, large as they may be, are not absolute and ever-present. Change the setting and the boy changes with it.

Mill of course ascribes the human being the highest of mental faculties and qualities and on this I can only agree. The human is the most mentally developed and cognitively sophisticated being that we know of. However, Mill seems to forget or just not mention the possible decline of this human sophistication which I am trying to highlight in this essay. Mill writes:

A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior

type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence (9).

Mill seems to express a point of view where humans think highly of themselves and look down on other species. He uses words like “highly” for human beings and “lower” for animals. *Life of Pi*, however, suggests that there is no absolute line of division. It goes against what Mill suggests and shows that, yes humans might think highly of themselves and they are very sophisticated in their safe and comfortable society, but pushed into the wild they are not so different from other animals. It may very well be that a human being will never want to sink to the level of “lower” animals, but it is exactly what happens to Pi.

As mentioned, it is very easy to think that human beings are completely separated from wild animals. That we are so much more evolved and sophisticated that we are fundamentally different from them. We are the stronger and more advanced race. We domesticate animals, take their natural habitats for ourselves and then shut them out from our society. Pi learns that he is not so different from an animal. When the framework of society collapses so does Pi’s sophisticated behavior and he shows a much more primitive side. Pi goes through a transformation from top to bottom. From sophisticated behavior and actions controlled by principle to a state controlled by basic needs in the fight for survival:

My determination was grim and blind. [...] I took hold of the knife, hoping to goad it, poked a front flipper. It only shrank further into its shell. I decided on a more direct approach. As confidently as if I had done it a thousand times, I jammed the knife just to the right of the turtle’s head, at an angle. I pushed the blade deep into the folds of skin and twisted it. The turtle retreated even further, favouring the side where the blade was, and suddenly shot its head forward, beak snapping at me viciously. I jumped back. [...] I took hold of a hatchet and brought it down on the turtle’s neck, gashing it. Bright red blood shot out. I grabbed the beaker and collected about three hundred milliliters, a pop

can's worth. [...] The blood I managed to collect gave of no particular smell. I took a sip. It tasted warm and animal, if my memory is right. It's hard to remember first impressions. I drank the blood to the last drop (Martel 201).

In this quote two animals, one human one a turtle, fight viciously for survival, animal and human none better than the other in the struggle. There are no ethics involved, no sophistication present, just the struggle to win and survive. Pi is in a dire situation where the structure, rules and security that society used to provide have disappeared. He finds himself shipwrecked and adrift in the ocean. There is no presence whatsoever of the society he used to live in and the comfort and security it provided. He is on his own and has to fend for himself and in doing so he finds that he is capable of things he never imagined.

Today in our safe and comfortable society the idea to drink blood, like Pi does, is a source of entertainment in the popular culture of vampire and werewolves. It is an idea so distant to us and so surreal that we are thrilled to see it happen in movies and literature. We think of it as something completely improbable or even impossible. It is merely a fun twisted idea, however, for Pi it is reality and not at all funny. It is an enormous contrast to the Pi before the shipwreck. The Pi who was so comfortable and complacent in society has changed drastically. The luxury of principles and idealistic beliefs that he had in society is no longer possible. The choice that as a Hindu not eat meat is overcome by necessity and he savagely butchers the turtle and drinks its blood. Pi is broken down by desperate need and he cannot afford to behave or even think like he did when he was safe in the society he lived in. In order to survive he shows a completely different side, an animalistic side. When it is necessary this other side comes forth and Pi will do things he never would have done in his normal safe and comfortable state in society.

It is interesting that the tiger that is Pi's only company throughout his ordeal is named Richard Parker. He is the tiger that Pi's father bought for their zoo and through a clerical

error got the name Richard Parker. But, he is also the representation of a side to Pi's mind that is wild and unrestrained. In this way he is both a real physical tiger and not, but why would Pi's mind project the image of a tiger on this animalistic side of itself? I think it is because of the traumatic experience he had when seeing a tiger slaughter a goat as a young boy. The tiger could be a representation of something wild and unrestricted. This would show how Pi can not identify with this part of his mind and therefore has to project this image on it instead. He is the tiger, but his mind can not accept it as a part of him and therefore he tells the story with a real external tiger.

## Chapter 2: The Better Story, the True Story or the Same Story?

Pi confuses the reader with his different versions of the story. In the first version Pi tells the story just the way he perceived it, with all the details he can remember of his ordeal. This is the story that includes animals, where the zebra broke its leg in the chaos of the shipwreck and where, not before long, the hyena starts eating the injured zebra alive. He then tells about the fight between orangutan and hyena, how the orangutan is doomed to lose and eventually does so. At this point, the only ones left are: Pi himself, the hyena and the tiger Richard Parker, eventually, to Pi's relief, the Tiger kills the hyena. All this, he states very soberly and calmly like it is nothing but facts, and his manner annoys the two officials who have come to question him. They are frustrated because the boy in front of them is talking about incredible things; unbelievable things as if they were nothing but plain truth. The thing that they fail to understand is that it is truth to Pi. The reason for him telling the story so soberly and calmly is because he believes it to be true and accepts it as facts.

The second version refers to the story Pi gives the officials when they tell him that they can not accept his first one. They say that they can not believe and will not believe it, basically they ask him to tell them again what happened and this time they expect a different story. "Mr. Okamoto: But for the purposes of our investigation, we would like to know what really happened" (Martel 302). There is a difference of opinion of what a story really is. The officials think that the first story is just a story in the sense that it is made up, while Pi means that a story will always have an element of invention even if told as the truth. "[Pi:] Isn't telling about something – using words, English or Japanese – already something of an invention? Isn't just looking upon this world already something of an invention? (Martel 302). Pi tries to point out that the officials will never be able to obtain a perfectly objective record of what has happened since he can only give them his subjective interpretation of events. The



officials do not understand what he is trying to explain and in the end Pi gives them another simpler story which includes humans instead of animals and is much grimmer and more brutal. This story they agree is plausible and believable but less preferable because it is so grim.

This is where it becomes confusing. At first, it seems like the first story, although incredible, is true, but then after hearing the second story it seems more plausible than the first one. However, the second story was only told because the officials asked for it. They basically said to tell it again but in another, plausible, way. Therefore the reader can not be sure if Pi made up the first story and then told the truth when told to do so. Or if the first story is true and he just gives the officials what they want when telling the second story.

This becomes even more complicated when Pi brings up the question of the better story. The officials are confused because as far as they are concerned it is not relevant. Pi asks them: “So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can’t prove the question either way, which story do you prefer? Which is the better story, the story with the animals or the story without animals?” (Martel 317). The officials agree that the better story is the one with animals but they leave out the reason for why they think so. I think this is done deliberately by the author. As I have previously mentioned, the text seems to be made to make the readers think. It makes them think about something that most of us have forgotten or maybe never even experienced. With Pi the text shows how a normal human being, in spite of being extremely sophisticated, calm and collected, possesses another side that is much wilder and animalistic. It emphasizes this as a fact and the officials become an embodiment of the denial of a part of human nature that is a reality in the novel. Pi has been on the other side and knows that side as truth, while the officials have not and can not see it as truth. They like the animal story better and shy away from the other version because they do not want to face it. The same actually goes for Pi. He tells a story of animals instead of the realistic one with

humans. So in fact he also shies away from the grimmer version by doing so, but on the other hand he seems to at least be aware of the fact that he does so. He knows the truth (that he is the tiger) and knows it as a reality but he chooses to (or maybe his subconscious protects him) to view it differently.

The officials who come to question Pi are searching for truth. They want to know the true story of what happened. They want to know why the ship sank. Their attitude is very factual, either something is true or it is not. Therefore, they are both annoyed and perplexed when Pi can not give them a straight answer. For them, who have an investigation to perform which is supposed to give results and explain all the questions about why the accident occurred, truth is of outmost importance. As Florence Stratton so elegantly puts it: “Mr. Okamoto, the head of the investigation, exemplifies the positivist view of truth as an objective reality that can be uncovered and verified by the methods of science” (*Hollow at the core* 6). There is therefore a gap between their idea of how to solve the matter by simply getting the truth and Pi’s much more pragmatic way of talking about the incident as something that perhaps can not be explained.

They have such a hard time believing Pi’s first story that they in fact choose to not believe it. It is for them who seek an explanation, a reason, too incredible. Despite this, they are not strong enough to fully pursue what they would regard as the truth. It becomes too much for them and they do not want to face it. As I have already mentioned, they shy away from the second story and in doing so they also give up on their pursuit of the truth. In the end they leave without having completed their investigation. They get no clear answers to the questions they had, instead they leave with a tortuous view of the matter they set out to clarify. In the end the report is incomplete and can not determine the reason for the sinking of the ship. Pi’s assessment of the situation is described as “impressionistic and unreliable”, however, the

officials complement him on his “courage and endurance in the face of extraordinarily difficult and tragic circumstances” (Martel 319).

The whole questioning of Pi really ends up becoming a matter of whether truth is something objective or subjective or something in between. At the end it is more a discussion of empirical science than a hearing. An example of truth being subjective or as the old saying goes “seeing is believing” is when Pi tells about the floating algae island. A colossal net of unknown algae plants that is massive enough to be called an island. Pi tells how he actually steps ashore on this floating growing island and stays there for a while until he discovers that the island is in fact carnivorous and that he can not safely stay there any longer. The officials do not think such a thing can exist and do not believe his story. This is where it becomes interesting because the officials seem to argue that it is not true since they have never seen such a thing or even heard of it.

[Mr. Okamoto talking about the island and algae] “These things don’t exist”

[Pi:] “Only because you’ve never seen them.”

“That’s right. We believe what we see.”

“So did Columbus. What do you do when you’re in the dark?”

“Your island is botanically impossible.”

“Said the fly just before landing in the Venus flytrap” (Martel 294).

This reminds me of a popular example used when teaching new philosophy students. The example is adaptation of Karl Popper’s theory of falsification and deals with some of the issues with empiricism. It goes like this: A scientist draws the conclusion, based on observation, that all swans are white. He does this only because he has not seen a black yet. Then one day in his studies he comes across a black swan and his conclusion suddenly falls apart. Now he needs to do further research and has to adjust his hypothesis to state that swans are white or black. However, this will only be true as long as he does not come across a swan

of some other color. This example shows that the problem with empiricism is that it is only true until proven untrue and you never know when that might happen, it can therefore be a rather weak foundation to base science on. The officials work from an empirically point of view and do not believe Pi because they have not seen the things that he tells about, themselves or know anyone besides Pi who has.

David Hume points out, empiricism based on induction gives us no knowledge about tomorrow. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* he explains how the human mind's perception is divided into impressions and ideas and how through memory and imagination it constructs more complex impressions and through this ascribes an order and flow to the world that we call space and time. It is the same with causality, Hume argues that the law of causation is a work of mental association. We see the world around us and acquire knowledge about it through induction. When we see events transpire in the same way repeatedly we naturally get in the habit of thinking of it as a causal relationship between the events. One could for instance argue that there is no certainty that the sun will rise or that gravity will be a present force in tomorrow's world. This argument relies on the view that we only think so due to habit, not because of any absolute scientific proof. That the sun rose yesterday or today is never proof that it will do so tomorrow. The point of such reasoning is that one can not assume a consistency to the way of the world and nature due to habitual perception of them. It could be useful for the officials questioning Pi to consider this before disregarding his story as too unusual. They seem to disregard his first testimony because they fail to expand their minds to the possibility of less probable events, something Pi tries to point out.

It might look as though I want to defend Pi's first story in the previous paragraph, however, defend would be too strong a term. I merely wish to point out the possibility of truth that the officials are very quick to disregard. My opinion is that their approach is too empirical and based too much on inductive knowledge to really listen to what the boy tells them.

Since the questioning rather becomes a discussion about inductive knowledge and empirical science than a gainful interrogation, it is very hard to work out the meaning of the two different stories and then defend one or the other. However, there is one interesting element that appears to be in the novel for a reason. It is the cloth or “dream rag” that Pi uses to cure his boredom. He basically puts a wet piece of cloth over his face and through sheer asphyxiation he sees things, hallucinations. It makes him see things that are not real (Martel 236). The fact that Pi uses this rag to hallucinate, in order to pass time, lowers the credibility of this undiscovered botanical miracle that the floating island would be considered. It also further challenges the idea that Pi spent all the time together with a real tiger and even trained it. What the “dream rag” essentially does, is to further contradict Pi’s first story and in doing so giving more credibility and probability to the second one. It is because of this that I think Richard Parker is not a real physical tiger but a side of Pi’s mind. It is a manifestation of a side of his mind that Pi was previously unaware of and it takes its appearance from the real Richard Parker that they had at the zoo in India. It may be, as mentioned in chapter one, that this side takes the image of a tiger because of the memory of the feeding of the tiger that traumatized Pi as a child. In the following example Pi’s father takes his sons with him to feed their largest male tiger a living goat so they can see what wild tiger can do and that one must respect it.

“I’m going to show you how dangerous tigers are”, he continued. “I want you to remember this lesson for the rest of your lives”. [...] A streak of black and orange flowed from one cage to the next. [...] I don’t know if I saw blood before turning into Mother’s arms or if I daubed it on later, in my memory, with a big brush. But I heard. It was enough to scare the living vegetarian daylight out of me. Mother bundled us out. We were in hysterics. She was incensed. “How could you, Santosh? They’re children! They’ll be scared for the rest of their lives.” (Martel 34-36)

The idea that Richard Parker is not a physical reality does not, however, necessarily make him unreal, which Pi tries to explain to the officials. Richard Parker is very real but he is confined to Pi's mind and can therefore not be evaluated by people who do not have access to the same mind. The tiger is a reality to Pi's mind. Reality is not, if allowed to be seen subjectively, constituted to the physical world. The moment we try to describe reality or truth in discourse we have distorted it and destroyed it. Linda Hutcheon, in her chapter on historiography, explains how historians have come to view the idea of an objective reality differently: "There is not so much "a loss of belief in a significant external reality" [quote from Gerald Graff 1973, 403] as there is a loss of faith in our ability to (unproblematically) know that reality, and therefore to be able to represent it in language" (*A poetics of postmodernism* 119).

If we can not express and share reality through language, then what is true for one person might not be true for another because they inhabit different minds. If one complicates this further and questions how different minds will perceive the "reality", one will only reach an impasse due to the fact that I am confined to my mind and you to yours and we can not be one hundred percent sure that our views of the "reality" coincide and we can not discuss it objectively.

The view of the real is also a question of choice. If I chose to believe in something (like Pi in the tiger) it will be real to me. Scientists will argue that one must have proof but if one considers it, there are many things that do not concern themselves with proof and evidence. The biggest ones are faith and religion. To believe is a choice and if a person makes the choice, it will be real to him or her. In this way truth is very pragmatic and subjective, something the officials who interrogate Pi can not accept because they want to know what happened with the ship and why. They try to be something they can never be: objective. They get Pi's story but since it is so obviously subjective and they just do not understand parts of it

(because they do not share Pi's mind) they do not accept it and are not content with it. The choice to believe in something can then, if there can be no shared external truth, at best be based on probability. If something seems probable or plausible one has good grounds to believe in it, but as we can see in the novel with Pi's stories it is not so easy to discern what can be defined as probable or not.

## Conclusion

The outcome of the story heavily depends on if one chooses to take the perspective of Pi or of the officials questioning him. For one, the first story is the true one, and for the other, it is the second story that is true. For the officials the tiger is not real, it cannot be. For Pi it is very real, it is as real as his belief in science or religion. Choice plays a big part in the novel, the choice to believe or not believe. Martel actually comments on this, saying that to believe or not believe at least is a choice, but to remain agnostic, not making a choice and believing in that, is paradoxical. Pi: "To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation" (28). It seems that the novel wants the reader to make a choice, namely: which story do you choose to believe in, it is the choice that is important.

Martel's novel is very postmodern in the sense that it ultimately questions the idea of an objective truth. The text suggests that there is perhaps no such thing as objective truth and if there is we can not acquire it since our perceptions distort it and language distorts it even further, so we can never accurately express it. Truth is then not the most important thing. Of course it holds some importance but it seems to have more to do with probability, rather than actual objective factuality. Instead it is choice that is important. One has to choose, one has to believe. This choice will probably be based on probability but not necessarily. The choice is the fundament for belief and is therefore the source of one's perception. Once one has made the choice one will interpret events accordingly. Pi has made a choice and so have the officials. They have made different choices and therefore perceive the events differently. The only thing left is for the reader to make up his or her mind.

Pi can not be expected to remember everything that has happened, especially due to the dire situation and the bad condition he is in. When his memory fails him it is only natural that



he “fills in the gap” so to speak. However, by doing so he adds meaning to events that did not necessarily have meaning. The human brain needs structure and reason and creates them in things that might not possess them, basically, we need meaning and something to believe in. Because of this truth or reality can never really be objective to us. We are subjective beings and can not escape that. It is the choice that is the deciding factor of how we perceive perhaps meaningless events. A Christian sees God in things where an atheist does not, all because they have made different choices.

## Bibliography

Primary source:

Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2003.

Secondary sources:

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1998.

Golding, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber, 1997

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. New York: Dover Philosophical Classics, 2003.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Maslow, H. Abraham. "Psychological Review". *A Theory of Human Motivation* 50 (1943):  
370-396. Issue 4 July

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism: On liberty; Representative government; selections from  
Auguste Comte and positivism*. London: Everyman's Library, 1972. Edited by H.B. Acton

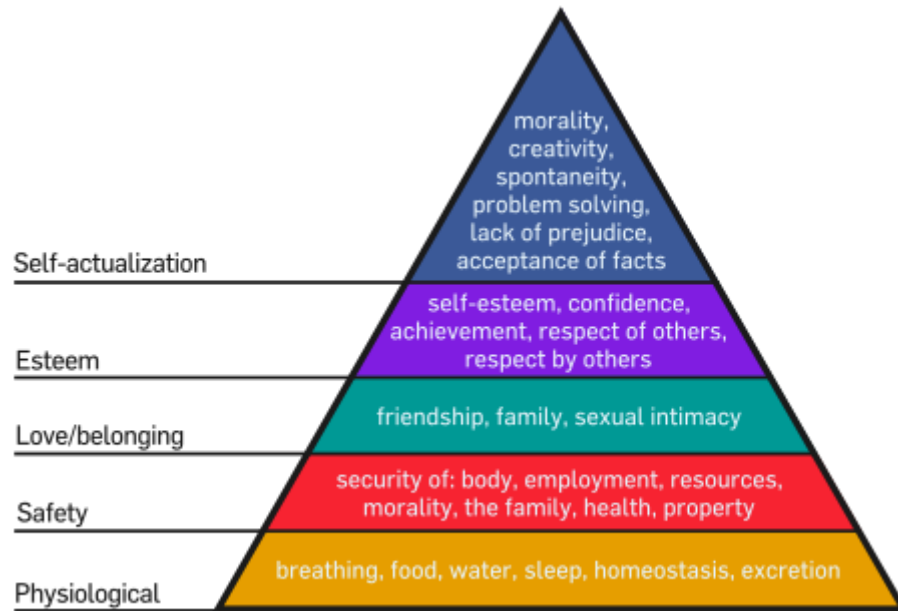
Piers, Paul Read. *Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivor*. New York: Avon Books, 1974.

Stratton, Florence. "Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne".  
*Hollow at the core* 29 (2004)

Sugandha, S. Singh. "The Criterion: An International Journal in English". "*The Other*" In  
*the Life of Pi* 3 (2012) Issue. II June

## Appendix 1

## Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Picture taken from Wikipedia.org