

Contributi/1

Ten theses on Animality

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Ten theses on animality are presented in order to delineate what the philosophical concept of “animality” really is. The ten theses are: Animality, Animality is different from anti-speciesism: Animality does not directly concern ethics; Homo sapiens has never been an animal; Animality and language; Animality and immanence; Animality beyond animals; Animality and the “mystical”; Becoming-animal.

1. Animality¹

Let us take the following famous case, a flock of starlings above the sky of Rome. This is a mobile living form, which lasts no more than a few seconds, because just after a new form will appear, and so on. What is more astonishing, in such a form, is that it is not planned. There is not such an entity like the master starling. The very form coincides with its own developing, the essence with the appearance, and the space with the time. From a human point of view, the moving flocks are marvelous. Nevertheless, do the starlings of the flock perceive such a wonder? Each starling of the flock takes into account just six or seven starlings that fly nearby². This means that every starling does perceive the movements of the starlings that are close to it only. That is, it does not perceive the whole of the flock. The beauty of such a phenomenon goes unnoticed by the starlings that give life to such a wonder. For this reason, it is a beauty full of grace, just because the biological reason, which explains its own existence – a flock defends better against avian predators – it is not relevant at all, in our perceiving its intrinsic beauty. A flock of starlings is an example of *animality*, that is, a living movement that is not explained by evolutionary reasons. Better, the evolutionary reasons do not explain the whole of the phenomenon. For human beings, a flock

¹ I thank Daniela Angelucci and Leonardo Caffo for their comments to an earlier version of this text.

² M. Ballerini, N. Cabibbo, R. Candelier, A. Cavagna, E. Cisbani, I. Giardina, V. Lecomte, A. Orlandi, G. Parisi, A. Procaccini, M. Viale, V. Zdravkovic, *Interaction ruling animal collective behavior depends on topological rather than metric distance: Evidence from a field study*, PNAS, 2008, vol. 105(4), pp. 1232–1237.

of starling is marvelous. A flock of starlings is gratuitous. Animality appears every time something appears which exceeds its own material or biological conditions. Animality is intrinsically free: «All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception»³.



Such a definition implies that the scope of animality is wider than the animal world. Animality means a life, which extends itself beyond the taxonomic boundaries Biology or Geology have fixed. Therefore, an animality event can be something which is not living. There is animality each time a life in this wider sense appears which is not forced into the limits of our classifications; a life, which runs away from all sides; a life, which is not worried by *our* ontological concerns. Take the case of the flock. We perceive the flock; we do not perceive the single starlings. Animality pertains to the flock. The flock somewhat lives by its own, even if 'its' life is very short and without goal or project. It simply lives. A life that aims to anything but to its own living, this is animality. Deleuze defines such a state «pure immanence», which «eludes all transcendence of the subject and of the object. Absolute immanence is in itself; it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject»⁴. Animality is the free and erratic movement of the flock. Animality *always* surprises us. We think that life is 'naturally' divided in genera and species, and we are not aware that such a classification help us more to defend ourselves from the mobile oddness of animality than to understand it. Animality is such a life that our language does not dispose of a label that can

³ S. Weil, *La Pesanteur et la grâce*, Paris 1947 (Eng. tr. *Gravity and Grace*, London 2003, p. 1).

⁴ G. Deleuze, *Immanence: une vie...*, in *Philosophie*, 1995, vol. 47, p. 4-7 (Eng. tr. *Pure Immanence. Essays on Life*, A. Boyman ed., New York 2001, p. 26).



contain it with no remains. Let us take the case of the limestone stones in the image.

The stone has an important philosophical history. According to a celebrated Heidegger proposition, «[1.] the stone (material object) is worldless; [2.] the animal is poor in world; [3.] man is world-forming»⁵. The

stone is such an entity that is

without world; it is a piece of the world, but as to itself it brings nothing into the world. The stone is nothing but a thing; it is apparent «the *living character of a living being*, as distinct from the non-living being which does not even have the possibility of dying. A stone cannot be dead because it is never alive»⁶. A limestone, for example, can be composed of skeletal fragments of marine organisms such as coral or foraminifera. That is, once limestone was somewhat alive, and maybe it will be alive again in the future, when 'its' material will be incorporated into another living organism. It is quite strange, limestone cannot die, however it can be alive. Heidegger seems to assume that quite a rigid demarcation exists between the stone, the animal and the human being, like if passages and transformations between them were impossible. However, the stone is without world:

Let us provisionally define world as those beings which are in each case accessible and may be dealt with, accessible in such a way that dealing with such beings is possible or necessary for the kind of being pertaining to a particular being. The stone is without world. The stone is lying on the path, for example. We can say that the stone is exerting a certain pressure upon the surface of the earth. It is 'touching' the earth. But what we call 'touching' here is not a form of touching at all in the stronger sense of the word. It is not at all like *that* relationship which the lizard has to the stone on which it lies basking in the sun. And the touching implied in both these cases is above all not the same as that touch which we experience when we rest our hand upon the head of another human being⁷.

Heidegger assumes that the stone does not have any 'living' relation with the «surface of the earth». It simply stays where it happened to stay. On the contrary, Darwin showed that what lies on the surface of the earth is continually transformed into «vegetable mould» by the action of worms (instead, according to Heidegger, «it lies upon the earth but does not touch it»⁸), which literally eat and digest the ground creating new fertile soil:

⁵ M. Heidegger, 1927, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude*, Translated by W. McNeill and N. Walker, Indiana University Press 1995, p. 177.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

so that the whole superficial bed of vegetable mould passes through their bodies in the course of every few years. From the collapsing of the old burrows the mould is in constant though slow movement, and the particles composing it are thus rubbed together. By these means fresh surfaces are continually exposed to the action of the carbonic acid in the soil, and of the humus-acids which appear to be still more efficient in the decomposition of rocks. The generation of the humus-acids is probably hastened during the digestion of the many half-decayed leaves which worms consume. Thus the particles of earth, forming the superficial mould, are subjected to conditions eminently favourable for their decomposition and disintegration. Moreover, the particles of the softer rocks suffer some amount of mechanical trituration in the muscular gizzards of worms, in which small stones serve as mill-stones⁹.

There is a continuous passage of material and energy between the soil and the living beings, and vice versa. Stones slowly take part of such a movement. Stones do not merely stay where it happened to befall. They interact with the world, they transform it at the same time the world transforms them. The very same living mechanism apply to the lizard, which transforms its own world when necessary¹⁰. For example, lizards (*Acanthodactylus beershebensis*) actively and quickly change their own diet when confronted with a mutated habitat with an increasing danger of predation¹¹. The lizard, like the stone, 'have' a world, even if the way and the scope the changes they can 'do' are much more slow and gradual than the changes human beings introduces into the world. When the stone 'does' something, there animality shows itself. The 'life' of things implies animality:

Patrols of vegetation once halted on stupefied rocks. Then thousands of tiny velvet rods sat themselves down cross-legged.

After that, ever since the apparent stiffening of the moss and its marshals against the rock, everything in the world — caught in inextricable confusion and fastened underneath — panics, stampedes, suffocates.

What's more, hairs have sprouted; with time, everything has grown more shadowed. Oh, hairy preoccupations growing ever hairier! Thick rugs, in prayer when one is sitting on them, rise up today with muddled aspirations. In this way not only suffocations, but drownings occur.

Now it is becoming possible to scalp the austere and solid old rock of these terrains of saturated terrycloth, these dripping bath mats¹².

Animality implies the inhumane attempt to look the world from the point of view of the world itself. Derrida places himself in the position of the object of the cat look¹³. This is the first move toward animality; in fact, what animality requires to us is assuming the position of being watched by a thing, a stone for

⁹ C. Darwin, 1881, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms with Observations on their Habits*, London 1881, pp. 305-306.

¹⁰ Cf. J. Odling-Smee, K. Laland, M. Feldman, *Niche Construction: The Neglected Process in Evolution*, Princeton 2003.

¹¹ D. Hawlena, V. Pérez-Mellado, *Change your diet or die: predator-induced shifts in insectivorous lizard feeding ecology*, in «Oecologia» 1999, vol. 161, pp. 411-419.

¹² F. Ponge, *The Voices of Things*, New York 1971, pp. 46-47.

¹³ J. Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, Paris 2006.

example. Heidegger describes the stone like something that is completely at our own disposal: «the earth is not given for the stone as an underlying support which bears it, let alone given as earth. Nor of course can the stone ever sense this earth as such, even as it lies upon it. The stone lies on the path. If we throw it into the meadow then it will lie wherever it falls. We can cast it into a ditch filled with water. It sinks and ends up lying on the bottom»¹⁴. The stone is the object, the man – Heidegger himself – the subject. What animality requires is to take into account what the stone ‘does’ even when it seems to be nothing but a mere thing. In a sense the patient stone ‘allows’ the man to throw itself into the ditch. It needs a lot of patience to be a stone. It needs to ‘realize’ that there is life at the bottom of the ditch too. Animality is such a slow patience: «love of God is pure when joy and suffering inspire an *equal* degree of gratitude»¹⁵.

2. Animality is different from anti-speciesism



Anti-speciesism argues against our – as *human* animals – more or less explicit «speciesism»¹⁶, the frequently unnoticed consideration that our point of view about life and world as the *unique* relevant, morally and philosophically, point of view. Taking into account the non-human animal point of view is the first goal of anti-speciesism: the basic point is the «equal consideration of

the interests of all animals»¹⁷. Therefore, anti-speciesism is mainly concerned with non-human animals, while animality has a wider scope. Take the following situation, a chimpanzee behind the bars of a cage:

An anti-speciesism activist will rightly try to free the chimpanzee, because it is very probable that the animal has the interest and the desire not to be encaged. Anti-speciesism takes into consideration the point of view of the non-human animal. Anti-speciesism is against anthropocentrism as a peculiar human form of speciesism: «a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species»¹⁸. The difference between anti-speciesism and animality show itself when one

¹⁴ M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude*, cit., p. 197.

¹⁵ S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, cit., p. 63.

¹⁶ P. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, New York 2002³, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

analyzes how the first movement defends its own thesis. According to Tom Regan animals have the right to have some rights because they are «subjects-of-a-life», therefore they are not mere things (like Heidegger's stone). If a living being is a «subject-of-a-life», it will have some form of subjectivity, therefore interests and feelings. That is, its life matters. In this sense, a «subject-of-a-life» is part of the «moral circle»¹⁹ which contains those sentient animals whose life is morally relevant:

Subjects-of-a-life not only are in the world, they are aware of it and aware, too, of what transpires “on the inside,” in the lives that goes on behind their eyes. As such, subjects-of-a-life are something more than animate matter, something different from plants that live and die; subjects-of-a-life are the experiencing center of *their* lives, individuals who have lives that fare experientially better or worse for themselves, logically independently of whether they are valued by others. At least in the case of mammals and birds, then, the conclusion we reach is simple: as a matter of fact, these animals, as is true in our case, are subjects-of-a-life²⁰.

The «subject-of-a-life» definition is not far from the way Heidegger defined man as «world-forming». The difference is that Heidegger narrowed down such a condition to *Homo sapiens* only, while Regan extends it to many other animals. However, the core definition is very similar: «subjects-of-a-life» are the «experiencing center of *their* lives». Here the model of animal life is *human* life. A «subject-of-a-life» is morally relevant because it actively does something of its own life. A «subject-of-a-life» has to have interests and feelings in order to survive because it has been thrown into life without any guarantees. The same occurs to the Heidegger «Dasein», the human being: «this Dasein, however, occurs in freedom. Possibility, change, and predicament are obscure. Dasein stands before possibilities it does not foresee. It is subject to a change it does not know. It constantly moves in a predicament it does not have power over»²¹. This definition similarly applies to a «subject-of-a-life». On the contrary, a plant, and a fortiori a stone, are not a «subject-of-a-life» or a «Dasein». Where Heidegger favors human species only, Regan favors (many) non-human species also; apart of this (in any case important) difference, both share the same somewhat 'humanistic' idea of nature and non-living world as something submissive to animal life. Animal life is modelled on human life: «sheep and hogs, mink and beavers, owls and ravens, for example, are psychologically present in and to the world, with mental lives that, while not as complex as ours, are not simple by any means. In particular, like us, they have both preference interests and welfare interests»²². The key point is such «like us»; they deserve moral consideration just because they are «like us», just because «they [are] like us in being subjects-of-

¹⁹ Id., *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology*, New York 1982.

²⁰ T. Regan, *Animal rights, human wrongs: an introduction to moral philosophy*, Ranham 2003, p. 93.

²¹ M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude*, cit., p. 19.

²² T. Regan, *Animal rights, human wrongs: an introduction to moral philosophy*, cit., p. 38.

a-life»²³. Even though its moral value, anti-speciesism essentially tries to extend the boundaries of the *human* «moral circle» to accommodate inside it *some* other animals. From this point of view, it really does not dismantle the anthropocentric 'humanistic' prejudice. If the chimpanzee in the cage has to be freed because it is somewhat «like us», we are not yet over anthropocentrism.

3. Animality does not directly concern ethics

Since «cows and pigs, coyotes and mink, robins and crows» are «subjects-of-a-life», therefore they «are our psychological kin. Like us, they bring to their lives the mystery of a unified psychological presence. Like us, they are *somebodies*, not *some things*. In these fundamental ways, they resemble us, and we, them»²⁴. The ontological ground of anti-speciesism is such a fundamental distinction between «somebody» and «something». Ethics – the doctrine of values and rights – applies to «somebody» only. The question of animal rights is exactly an ethical question. What it is worth keep in mind is that ethics always implies some reference to humanity. For example, the life of the chimpanzees deserve to be safeguarded because they are «like us». Everywhere ethics apply, where a *human* concern is implicitly or explicitly present. Take the case of the developing field of environmental ethics. In such a case also the reference point of view is the human one:

Adapting Life to space will require major biological changes, helped by designed evolution. Our designs will then become self-fulfilling, and we shall need to propagate life deliberately in order to secure our survival. Life centered ethics can motivate this quest, secure the future, and shape it with far-reaching, even cosmic, consequences. Therefore life-centered ethics themselves need always to be propagated²⁵.

The problem of environmental ethics is, as anthropomorphically usual, «our survival». Let us take another example, the concept of “sustainable development”; according to United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is a «development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs». The human «future generations» are at stake here, not the Heidegger stone. Therefore, if ethics implies a more or less hidden reference to humanity, animality does not matter ethics. Animality is the *inhuman* attempt to look at the world from the point of view of stones: «all existence is drawn through the sieve of humanity, the rich world of things discarded like chaff so thoroughly, so immediately, so efficiently that we don't even notice. How did it come to this, an era in which “things” means ideas so often, and stuff so seldom?»²⁶.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ M. Mautner, *Life-centered ethics, and the human future in space*, «Bioethics», 2009, vol. 23(8), pp. 433–440, p. 439.

²⁶ I. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing*, Minneapolis 2008, p. 3.

The issue of animality does not directly concern ethics because it radically endorses a post-humanistic world, that is, a world that is not centered on humanism: «posthumanism [...] is [...] posthumanist»²⁷. In such a world, there are no ethics in the humanistic sense, because there are no more beings, which claim to represent the reference standard (ethics for animality has to be invented from scratch). In such a world to be «like us» is no more a privileged status. There are no ethics in the way a thing interacts with another thing. Following a suggestion of Deleuze, animality implies ethology (a kind of topology of bodies), not ethics: «In a morality, you always have the following operation: you do something, you say something, you judge it yourself. It is the system of judgement. Morality is the system of judgement. Of double judgement, you judge yourself and you are judged. [...] Judging always implies an authority superior to Being, it always implies something superior to an ontology. It always implies one more than Being, the Good which makes Being and which makes action, it is the Good superior to Being, it is the One»²⁸. The world of animality is morally flat. There are neither the Good nor the Value, human and animal, animate and inanimate. There are bodies (animals, plants, stones and so on) that interact each other. The key question is not what a body is, rather what such a body can do:

Knowing what you are capable of. This is not at all a moral question, but above all a physical question, as a question to the body and to the soul. A body has something fundamentally hidden: we could speak of the human species, the human genera, but this won't tell us what is capable of affecting our body, what is capable of destroying it. The only question is the power of being affected. What distinguishes a frog from an ape? It's not the specific or generic characteristics, Spinoza says, rather it's the fact that they are not capable of the same affections²⁹.

However, there is a prospective where ethics still takes place in animality. It has to do with the power of each body to make connections with other bodies. For example, such a power implies that the body does not hide itself behind the distinctions Heidegger set up: the stone, the animal, the man. A body is nothing but its own capacity to make connections with other bodies:

My eye, for example, my eye and the relative constancy of my eye are defined by a certain relation of movement and rest through all the modifications of the diverse parts of my eye; but my eye itself, which already has an infinity of parts, is one part among the parts of my body, the eye in its turn is a part of the face and the face, in its turn, is a part of my body, etc. ... thus you have all sorts of relations which will be combined with one another to form an individuality of such and such degree³⁰.

²⁷ C. Wolfe, *What is posthumanism?*, Minneapolis 2010, p. XV: «posthumanism in my sense isn't posthuman [...] but is only posthumanist, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself [...]».

²⁸ Cf. G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris 1980 (Eng. tr. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translation of B. Massumi, Minneapolis 1987).

²⁹ Cfr. G. Deleuze, *Cours Vincennes: 1978-1981*, <http://www.webdeleuze.com>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*



The ethics of animality has nothing to do with values and norms. It is the power to move towards always new bodily connections, while at the same time to preserve the absolute singularity of such a body: «two tendencies with opposite extremes: to destroy the self for the sake of the universe, or to destroy the universe for the sake of the self. He who has not been

able to become nothing runs the risk of reaching a moment when everything other than himself ceases to exist»³¹. What is at stake is an ethics capable to pay attention to stones and trees, like this pine tree here below: maybe it is not sentient in the same sense as a frog is³², so what?

4. *Homo sapiens* has never been an “animal”

According to a standard zoological definition, an animal is a «multicellular, heterotrophic organism that develops from an embryo derived from gametes produced in specialized organs or surrounded by somatic cells. Typically, animals are motile – that is, capable of independent locomotion



– at least during some stage of the life cycle, and have sensory apparatus with which to detect changes in their immediate environment»³³. Let us take the case of the zebra in the image:

According to this definition, a zebra is an animal, because it cannot directly fix carbon for its own growth, therefore it uses organic carbon; its body develops from an embryo derived by two gametes: it is capable of independent locomotion; has a sensory apparatus with which it detects changes in its immediate environment. From a zoological point of view, an animal life develops itself around the body and its immediate surroundings. Animal life precisely takes place in the “where” and “when” of the body.

³¹ S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, cit., p. 142.

³² But see F. Baluška, S. Mancuso, D. Volkmann, (Eds.), *Communication in Plants. Neuronal Aspects of Plant Life*, Berlin 2006.

³³ M. Allaby ed., *A Dictionary of Zoology*, Oxford UK 1999², p. 28.

If one accepts such a standard zoological definition – it seems quite uncontroversial – a typical member of the species *Homo sapiens* is not an “animal”. The key difference lies in the fact that a typical human life does not have to do with its «immediate environment». The zebra can be worried because it smells the odor of a hidden lion, or because it does not smell the flavor of its preferred flower. On the contrary, a woman can be worried by the rumors of a possible future reorganization of the factory where she is working; or she can remember her mother who died many years before. A typical human life extends itself well beyond its own body *hic et nunc*. While a typical animal life all develops itself where the body actually is, a typical human life develops itself forward and back in time and space. In human life, there is quite a deep separation between the body and what such a body can think to, hope for, remember and so on. The human body is right here, but ‘its’ thoughts can be very far – in space and time – from it. It is true that animals too are somewhat capable to detach themselves from their own «immediate environment»³⁴, but it seems quite indisputable that in the typical human life there is an enormous degree of detachment from it. Notwithstanding the dramatic anatomical and genetic similarities between *Homo sapiens* and all other living beings, human life is made of activities and thoughts that are not present in the rest of the zoological world. Such a statement obviously does not mean that human life is better or worse than zebra life, for example. The point is that human life is dramatically different from animal life.

If one takes into account such a typical characteristic of *human* life, therefore *Homo sapiens* is not an animal, at least not in the same sense, as a zebra is an animal. The main theoretical consequence of such statement is that so far human animality is completely unknown³⁵. “Animality” means a life that completely and radically coincides with itself. Animality means a life without detachment from the *hic et nunc* of the body. On the contrary, since actual human life is completely detached from the immediacy of the body, there is no animality in human life. Human life is a zoological life without animality. *Homo sapiens* is human just because s/he does not know her/his own animality.

5. Animality and language

It seems that no life is possible without some capacity of communication³⁶. Human language serves to communicate, but essentially, it is *not* a means of communication. Let us take the case of the zebra. Zebras react to alarm signals of antelopes that live nearby³⁷. This means that zebras understand a “signal” – even if conspecifics did not emit it – as a material entity, that stands for a particular entity in the world, in this case probably a predator. This a perfect

³⁴ Cf. D. Griffin, *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness*, Chicago 2001².

³⁵ See F. Cimatti, *Filosofia dell'animalità*, Roma-Bari 2013.

³⁶ Cf. D. Favareau ed., *Essential Readings in Biosemiotics. Anthology and Commentary*, Berlin 2010.

³⁷ Cf. B. Penzhorn, *A Long-term Study of Social Organisation and Behaviour of Cape Mountain Zebras* *Equus zebra zebra*, «Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie», 1984, vol. 64(2), pp. 97-146.

example of animal communication: a sender, a mutual (interspecific) code, a signal that 'means' something, a recipient, which understands the 'meaning' of such a signal. This is communication. The key structural point is that in animal communication each signal correspond to a determinate entity or action/situation in the world; there is no such a thing as a signal to whom nothing refers to, like the English word "nothing" or "empty". In animal communication, for example, there are no signals for negation³⁸. This means that an antelope cannot communicate the message "there are *no* lions". It can communicate, "There are lions" only. The absence of sign, in animal communication codes, which express the logical operation of negation, prevents nonhuman animals to think of what is not already contained in their «immediate environment». Therefore, an antelope – like a zebra – seems forced to think of what it perceives only. On the contrary, language allows human beings to detach themselves from their «immediate environment»³⁹. If a "means of communication" is a code, which connects signals to objects in the world, then human language is not mainly a means of communication, because the majority of human language signs do not refer to objects and/or events in the world.

The other main definitional character of human language is syntax. Take the case of the syntactic operator *merge*: «the computational mechanism that constructs new syntactic objects Z (e.g., 'ate the apples') from already-constructed syntactic objects X ('ate'), Y ('the apples')»⁴⁰. The interesting point is that *merge* is recursive, that is, it can be applied to a previous application of the very same computational mechanism. Therefore, from "ate the apples" is possible to construct a new sentence, by applying *merge* to this sentence and to another one already formed: "ate the apples" and "drank the water" → "ate the apple and drank the water", and so on. There is nothing similar to *merge* in nonhuman animal communication codes⁴¹. The combination of negation and *merge* allows human mind to detach itself from the «immediate environment»⁴².

The exemplar case of detachment is self-detachment. The personal pronoun "I" is not a simple synonymous of the word "body". In fact, "I" speaks of the body like "*her/his* own body". The "I" and the body are conceived as *two* entities – the latter anatomical, the first psychological – even if both are connected to the same material object. In fact, the "I" *has* a body; this means that the "I" thinks of itself like something separate from it. In this sense, human being has never been an animal, because such a self-separation seems not to exist in nonhuman animals. An antelope, like a zebra, or like any other (nonhuman) animal is the totality of the life it actually lives, nothing more, nothing less. A nonhuman animal coincides with its own life; a human being is detached from

³⁸ See M. Hauser, M. Konishi eds., *The Design of Animal Communication*, Boston 1999.

³⁹ See P. Virno, *Saggio sulla negazione*, Torino 2013.

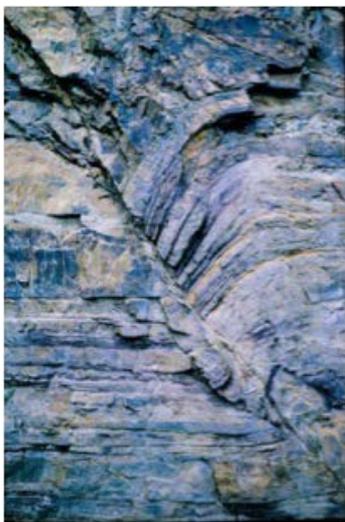
⁴⁰ R. Berwick, A; D. Friederici, N. Chomsky, J. Bolhuis, *Evolution, brain, and the nature of language*, «Trends in Cognitive Sciences» 2013, vol. 17(2), pp. 89–98, p. 89.

⁴¹ M. Hauser, M. Konishi eds., *The Design of Animal Communication*, cit.

⁴² F. Cimatti, *Il taglio. Linguaggio e pulsione di morte*, Roma-Macerata 2015.

its own body. Language is the «computational mechanism» that separates human being from its own life. The language dispositive breaks human animality off⁴³.

6. Animality and immanence



Animality is such a condition where life simply adheres to itself, without any self-reflexive margin, without doubts or desires, hopes or regrets. Animality is a life that simply lives the life it is actually living. From this point of view, animality is not restricted to animals or plants; a stone either stays where it happened to stay⁴⁴. Animality does not look for something else it already is. Animality is not motionless, because it favors the intrinsic movement of life. In this sense, animality coincides with immanence: «we will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is

the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is the complete power, complete bliss»⁴⁵.

Immanence is a difficult concept to think of. When one think of a concept “X” immediately defines it as “non Y”. That is, one of the main ways of thinking something consists in opposing it to another concept, its ‘contrary’, like if each concept had its own contrary. In this case it seems there is no contrary of immanence. Immanence is properly not the contrary of transcendence. If the two concepts were the one the opposite of the other, it would be a continuous transition of one into the other and vice versa, like between idealism and materialism. Immanence properly is such a condition where this never-ending transition stops. Immanence is the life, which lives the life it lives: «The plane of immanence is neither a concept nor the concept of all concepts. If one were to be confused with the other there would be nothing to stop concepts from forming a single one or becoming universals and losing their singularity, and the plane would also lose its openness»⁴⁶. Geology can offer a useful analogy. In the image here below, one can see the fault that diagonally cuts the geological strata; at the same time, one can see the extremely slow and inexorable continuous movement of the strata in respect of one another. The overall movement is unitary, but the different directions of such a movement can strongly diverge.

⁴³ G. Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*, Stanford 2011.

⁴⁴ F. Cimatti, *Linguaggio e immanenza. Kierkegaard e Deleuze sul “divenir-animale”*, in «Aut Aut», 363, 2014, pp. 189-208.

⁴⁵ G. Deleuze, 1995, *Immanence: une vie...*, «Philosophie», vol. 47, p. 4-7 (Eng. tr. *Pure Immanence. Essays on Life*, A. Boyman ed., Zone Books, New York 2001, p. 27).

⁴⁶ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *What is philosophy?*, H. Tomlinson G. Burchell eds., Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 35.

This image should show how immanence is not at all static, while at the same time, it is capable to sustain within itself divergent and violent thrusts. In this sense, immanence is not the contrary of something else, because it absorbs and neutralizes the distinctions between subject and object, presence and absence, space and time. Immanence is immanence: «concepts are like multiple waves, rising and falling, but the plane of immanence is the single wave that rolls them up and unrolls them. The plane envelops infinite movements that pass back and forth through it, but concepts are the infinite speeds of finite movements that, in each case, pass only through their own components»⁴⁷. Animality is the immanent movement of life.

7. Animality beyond animals



Animality is plenty of animals, but not only animals. Animality is beyond humanistic desire (or condemnation) to rule nature and animals. Animality is life, which has no more needs to be thought of by a human mind. Animality is a life, which remains the very same life while transforming from one mobile form to another one: «the plane of immanence has two facets as Thought and as Nature, as *Nous* and as *Physis*. That is why there are always many infinite movements caught within each other, each folded in the others, so that the return of one instantaneously relaunches another in such a way that the plane of immanence is ceaselessly being woven, like a gigantic shuttle. To turn toward does not imply merely to turn away but to confront, to lose one's way, to move aside»⁴⁸. Take the following examples: a school of fishes, a drawing of the flood by Leonardo, a galactic spiral. What they have in common is not the material they are made of: what is unchanged between them is the style of movement. A style, which is not transcendent in respect to them. It is a style completely immanent to such a movement. These are not three tokens of a unique type. It is like the situation we found in the geological strata: a *unitary* movement, which passes through different manifestations and force directions. It is always one and the same immanent life, which lives through these three styles of life, which seem to be three to our weak and afraid look only.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Diverse movements of the infinite are so mixed in with each other that, far from breaking up the One-All of the plane of immanence, they constitute its variable curvature, its concavities and convexities, its fractal nature as it were. It is this fractal nature that makes the phenomenon an infinite that is always different from any surface or volume determinable as a concept. Every movement passes through the whole of the plane by immediately turning back on and folding itself and also by folding other movements or allowing itself to be folded by them, giving rise to retroactions, connections, and proliferations in the fractalization of this infinitely folded up infinity (variable curvature of the plane)⁴⁹.

8. Animality and nature

Animality is nature, if and only if nature is no more conceived like a benign and benevolent entity⁵⁰. Life is «immanence of immanence», therefore, it does not foresee any special consideration for human or for animal or vegetable life. Life carries out *its own* life, it does not admit any form of teleology (any teleology is a form of transcendence). There is nothing good in nature, like there is nothing evil in it. Life lives. Animality begins when one neither hopes in nature nor accuses it. Animality begins when humanism gives way to the life of immanence:

Man (and likewise the other animals) is not born to enjoy life, but only to perpetuate life, to communicate it to others who come after him, in order to preserve it. Neither he himself, nor life, nor anything in this world is properly for him, on the contrary his entire being is for life. — A terrifying, but a true proposition and conclusion of all metaphysics. Existence is not for the existent being, it is not directed towards the existent being, nor is interested in the good of the existent being; if there is any experience of good, it is purely by chance: the existent being is for existence, entirely for existence, this is its only real end. Existent beings exist so that existence exists, the individual existent being is born and exists so that existence continues and therefore existence may be preserved through it and after it. All this is clear considering that the true and only end of nature is the preservation of the species, and not the preservation or the happiness of individuals; a happiness which does not even exist at all in the world, not for individuals nor for the species⁵¹.

9. Animality and the “mystical”

It is clear, what anti-speciesism has to do, to free animals from the sufferings to whom human beings force them. For this reason, anti-speciesism is a form of ethical thinking, for better or worse. For better, because anti-speciesism can promote new laws and habits which will improve animal life. For worse, because anti-speciesism is still a form of humanism. Anti-speciesism saves the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁰ J. Foss, *Beyond environmentalism: a philosophy of nature*, New York 2009.

⁵¹ G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, M. Caesar and F. D'Intino eds., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2013, p. 1817.

animals at the price of considering them like (more or less developed) forms of humanity (the famous «like us»). Since animality is not an ethical position, it pushes us to do nothing. Animality is not a doctrine, is a way of living: «this irreducible 'I' which is the irreducible basis of my suffering — I have to make this 'I' universal»⁵². To make it «universal» does not mean an aspiration or a hope, because immanence hopes and dreams nothing. On the contrary, it means to remain well fixed on one's own foot. That is, it means to accept to live the life one is already living. To live one's own life, it completely means to disappear into it. Only such a life is «universal», which does not look for something else beyond the actual life it lives: «on the plane of immanence we are always and already on the absolute horizon»⁵³. To be the life one is living, and to be «already on the absolute horizon». Such a body still exists as an impersonal singularity⁵⁴, but it is also completely widespread into the world.

Wittgenstein had a similar idea, when he presented in the *Tractatus* his concept of 'subject': «For the form of the visual field is surely not like this»⁵⁵:



This is the *wrong* way to represent the visual field. Because presents if the subject (the eye) as detached from what she/he is seeing. This is the wrong way to represent the visual field because it presumes that there is a difference between the subject – who watches – and the object, the visual field. On the contrary, the visual field is a unitary scope of visibility. In it, there is light, movement, visibility, and nothing else. What once upon a time was the autonomous subject now coincides with the visual field. When such a condition is attained, it becomes apparent that «the world is independent of my will»⁵⁶: «even if all that we wish for were to happen, still this would only be a favour granted by fate, so to speak: for there is no *logical* connexion between the will and the world, which would guarantee it, and the supposed physical connexion itself is surely not something that we could will»⁵⁷. The subject only, thinks of itself to be a voluntary agent who acts on a passive object. However, when s/he realizes the intrinsic movement of life that drags her/him, then animality/immanence appears. At this point ethics is no more possible, nor useful:

⁵² S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, cit., p. 147.

⁵³ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *What is philosophy?*, cit., p. 38.

⁵⁴ R. Esposito, *Third Person*, Cambridge UK [2008] 2012.

⁵⁵ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D. Pears and B. McGuinness eds., Routledge, London and New York [1921] 2001, § 5.6331.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, § 6.373.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, § 6.374.

When an ethical law of the form, 'Thou shalt . . .', is laid down, one's first thought is, 'And what if I do not do it?' It is clear, however, that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the usual sense of the terms. So our question about the *consequences* of an action must be unimportant. — At least those consequences should not be events. For there must be something right about the question we posed. There must indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but they must reside in the action itself⁵⁸.

The key point is that the value of the action «must reside in the action itself». This is immanence. The perfect adherence to the life one is already living. At this point, the opposition between subject and object is completely vanished. It remains the continuous becoming of life only: «to view the world sub specie æterni is to view it as a whole — a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole — it is this that is mystical»⁵⁹. The «mystical» is not a norm of action, nor a rule or a law. The «mystical» is the condition one reaches when leaving off any desire of being elsewhere. This is the immanent condition of a body, which feels at home into the world: «the solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. (Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)»⁶⁰. The «vanishing of the problem» is the condition of someone who considers no more her/his life as a problem to solve; s/he simply accepts the life s/he lives. It is important to stress out that such an acceptance is not a humiliation or a waiver, because they are still acts of will (will means transcendence, separateness, humanism). The life of immanence is beyond will and desire. To 'becomes' world is the «vanishing of the problem».

10. Becoming-animal

Animality does not aim to any end-state, just because animality is immanence, and immanence is complete by itself. However, a human being has never been an animal. Human animality is less known. The only possibility humans have to live immanence is by «becoming-animal». For this reason, it is a «becoming» and not a «returning» animal. The becoming-animal presupposes a completely different experience of language, the «computational mechanism» which produces transcendence and separateness⁶¹. Only an animal that speaks can desire to get rid of language. Language, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is «the ability [...] to represent all the other strata and thus achieve a scientific conception of the world. The scientific world [...] is the translation of all of the flows, particles, codes, and territorialities of the other strata into a sufficiently

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, § 6.422.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, § 6.45.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, § 6.521.

⁶¹ G. Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*, Neri Pozza, Milano 2014; F. Cimatti, *Il taglio. Linguaggio e pulsione di morte*, cit.

deterritorialized system of signs, in other words, into an overcoding specific to language»⁶². Language is the ability to transform «all of the flows» of life into a «system of signs». No matter exists which language cannot transform into signs: therefore «this situation gives rise to certain imperialist pretensions on behalf of language»⁶³, because «language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience»⁶⁴. Becoming-animal is properly the attempt to find a way out of such a situation where language «compel obedience» to us. Becoming-animal is such a *human* way of living that tries to resemble animality:

For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not “really” become an animal any more than the animal “really” becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes⁶⁵.

«What is real» – this is the key point – «is the becoming itself, the block of becoming». Language transforms all flows into signs, into separate entities which each stands in isolation against each other. Language first stiffens then stops the flow. Finally, no more flow slides, and what remains is a series of separate entities, some of which say “I” (disembodied subjects), the others are transformed into motionless objects. Becoming-animal is the attempt to put in motion such a frozen field:

a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first [...] There is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend. There is a block of becoming that takes hold of the cat and baboon, the alliance between which is effected by a C virus. There is a block of becoming between young roots and certain microorganisms, the alliance between which is effected by the materials synthesized in the leaves (rhizosphere)⁶⁶.

What does the *human* «becoming-animal» become in the end? What is at stake here is the human organism. As long as the human being is an addition of mind and body, immanence is out of reach. In fact, «becoming-animal» is becoming a unitary corporeity. Deleuze and Guattari propose quite an unusual definition of what a body is. A body is the totality of connections (rhizomes) it can take part of: «on the plane of consistency, a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power

⁶² G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, cit., p. 62.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds»⁶⁷. «Longitude» is its own singularity; «latitude» are all the affective interactions it can participate in. Such a notion of body does not only apply to living objects, because in «the plane of consistency of Nature» this distinction is no longer useful. A completely new and richer world now shows itself, with plenty of strange and unusual individualities:

A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected⁶⁸.

We are so sadly accustomed to divide the world into subjects and objects; who speaks and what is spoken; animate and inanimate entities that we do not even realize how poor such an ontology is. «You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life (regardless of its duration) — a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity). Or, at least you can have it, you can reach it. A cloud of locusts carried in by the wind at five in the evening; a vampire who goes out at night, a werewolf at full moon»⁶⁹. If a fog is an individuality, this implies giving up such a special position we assign to ourselves in the world. Only a being that is able to participate in the flow of life can experience a fog as a form of individuality. Someone who feels no longer the conformist need to divide the world into things and places can position himself quietly beside a tree or a sunset, taking part to a unitary haecceity: «this should be read without a pause: the animal-stalks-at-five-o'clock. The becoming-evening, becoming-night of an animal, blood nuptials. Five o'clock is this animal! This animal is this place!»⁷⁰. Where is the animal, and where is the time, in the «the animal-stalks-at-five-o'clock»? Is it still possible to distinguish between the one who does something from the space where its action takes place? In fact a «haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome»⁷¹. Such a rhizome is an infinite field of haecceities:

there are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. Nothing develops, but things arrive late or early, and form this or that assemblage depending on their compositions of speed. Nothing subjectifies, but haecceities form according to compositions of nonsubjectified powers or affects. We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition (as opposed to the plan(e) of organization or development). It is necessarily a plane of immanence and univocality. We therefore call it the plane of Nature, although nature has nothing to do with it, since on this plane there is no distinction between the natural and the artificial. However many dimensions

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

it may have, it never has a supplementary dimension to that which transpires upon it. That alone makes it natural and immanent. The same goes for the principle of contradiction: this plane could also be called the plane of noncontradiction. The plane of consistency could be called the plane of nonconsistency⁷².

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 266.