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The Animals in Us – We in Animals



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EDITION

Introduction: Intellectual Motivation to Undertake the Subject of Animality

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At the opening of this collection of papers I would like to expound on the reasons why we have decided to make the effort to discuss in one volume the subject of animality in culture, ethics, philosophy, art and literature. My diagnosis today differs somehow from the one worked out over two years ago, when we were preparing for the conference *The Experience of Animality In Culture, Science And Daily Life* held between 11th and 13th October 2012 at Faculty of “Artes Liberales” at the University of Warsaw. I am now fully aware of the variety of questions to be raised in the presentations. I will therefore try to outline the cognitive interests, intellectual motivations, ethical reasons and practical effects that substantiate this volume.

The main axis of this volume is the recognition of a yet another turn in the humanities. After the linguistic turn (30s to 70s) and the pictorial turn (70s to 90s), what follows next is what we only tentatively refer to as the animal turn. Our main task here is to determine what precisely animal turn is and what its further development might be. Specifically, can we provide this turn with a meaning? Are we the lucky ones who can name and diagnose their times and consciously participate in the events to follow?

First of all we challenge the most important and most difficult question: animal policy. The presence or rather the absence of animals in politics, political and economic abuse of animals, and their widespread fetishization are a rather obvious part of our biopolitical reality. However, Nicole Shukin pervasively notices in her *Animal Capital*¹ that while the theorists of biopower, Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, have interrogated the increasingly total subsumption of the social and biological life of the *anthropos* to market logics; little attention has been given to what Shukin calls “animal capital.” Indeed, as Jacques Derrida remarks, the power to reduce humans to the bare life of their species’ body arguably presupposes the prior power to suspend other species in a state of exception within which they

1 Shukin, N. 2009. *Animal Capital. Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*. Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press.

can be noncriminally put to death.² For this reason, it is not enough to theorize biopower in relation to human life alone; the reproductive lives and labors of other species also become a matter of biopolitical calculation. Peter Sloterdijk writes that today life may depend only on itself. However, we have to ask: what is the life which depends only on itself? Is there a form of the *biophilia*? What is a critical project related to this life? Is it just a satirical act as suggested by Sloterdijk? I hope the section *The Animal Ethics and Philosophy* provides a basis for genuine discussions.

I have been long conscious of a need of a new philosophy of nature in which nature is not an externality subjugated and tamed by man, but is an equal partner in debates, so to speak, endowed with the gift of speech. If we are privileged to hear it, are we also capable of providing it with the ways to be heard aloud? The section *The Human-Animal Relationship* goes in this direction, that is, it explores the conditions of co-existence of humans and animals, animals and angels, and angels and monsters alike. The main question that organizes our work in this field is whether discourse ethics should now include entities that initially seemed mute and were excluded from discussions.

Equally so, I am convinced we need to establish a new ethic. By saying that I do not mean we only need to expand the concept of moral subject to include animals, or that we need to establish a legal basis for protecting animal rights. Even if the former and the latter are of practical importance and of political interest that what really awaits here is the revision of the project of ethics as such and the task of answering the question of non-anthropocentric ethics. We would like to consider the possibility of establishing a new ethic of life that would strive not so much to protect life, which would probably result in a new biopolitical regime, as it would strive to think over principles of co-existence and establish what is really common to all of the living.

Andrew Linzey in his book *Animal Theology* instigated a large debate with one anxious question:³ what in fact is theology if it is developed only thanks to a moral neglect of a group of creatures constituting the vast majority in the world of living organisms? Indeed. The question, however, is whether the modern animal rights movement needs theology at all? And if so: what sort of theology is in demand? What is the place of animals in the hierarchy of God's creation? The question is not limited to: whether the animals or the animal rights movement needs theology,

2 Derrida, J. 1991. "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida." Transl. Connor, P. and A. Ronell. In: Eds. Eduardo Cadava, E., P. Connor, J.-L. Nancy. *Who Comes after the Subject?* New York: Routledge, 112.

3 Linzey, A. 1994. *Animal Theology*. London: SCM Press; and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

but what theology needs animals? I hope to see the section *Animals, Religion and Theology* address these difficult and important issues and outline possible answers.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari wrote ecstatically:

“We think and write for animals themselves. We become animal so that the animal also becomes something else. The agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf remains present in thought not through pity but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other.”⁴

But what does it exactly mean to “become animal so that the animal also becomes something else”? What does the difference mean: being a rat and identifying with a rat? I believe the above questions shall accompany us when discussing the section on visual arts *Animals in Art and Culture*.

Since in the vast majority we are the representatives of the humanities, not natural science, we would like to consider the presence of animals in literature and philosophy, from Flaubert after Gombrowicz and from Thomas Aquinas to the Jean-Paul Sartre, to paraphrase the title of Mirosław Loba’s paper featured in this issue. The presence of animals in literature and philosophy is permanent, indelible and inescapable. There are animals of Nietzsche—a donkey, a camel, a lion. There are animals of Kafka—a mole, a worm, a mouse, and a butterfly. Perhaps every writer and every philosopher brings to existence their own animals. Kafka-Gnostic discovered by Harold Bloom joins Kafka-Taoist discovered by Elias Canetti. Kafka-mole is thus complemented with the figure of Kafka-butterfly. However, how should we understand the presence of animals in literature? Are they just metaphors of human characters, or do they reveal something more profound, a direction of human desires, or, in particular, a fantasy of transgressing humanity? We hope the section *Animals in Literature* will provide a basis for effective discussions.

We raise no claims to completeness nor we intend to fully explore the issues at hand; we only claim that animality as such has been overlooked far too long and can no longer escape our thinking.

This volume is to a large extent a result of the conference of 11–13 October 2012 at the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” at the University of Warsaw. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to its esteemed dean, Professor Jerzy Axer. I would like specially thank to the editor of the journal “Dialogue and Universalism. The Journal of the International Society for Universal Dialogue” for permission to reprint material to the book from the volume No. 1/2014 entitled “Experience of Animality”.

4 Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari. 1994. *What Is Philosophy?* Transl. Tomlinson, H., G. Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 109.