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HUMAN ETHICS AS VIOLENCE TOWARDS ANIMALS: THE DEMONIZED WOLF

Abstract

This essay discusses how our traditional ethics may harbor assumptions that place humans in a position in which overt violence towards animals is an almost inevitable outcome since their formulation involves violence towards ourselves and our animal fellows in our cutting our embodied ties with them. The essay explores Derrida's Animal that Therefore, I Am, in its detailing of the two discourses within European intellectual history of those who felt they were "above" animals and were not addressed by them versus those who could acknowledge that animals do address us. Derrida also cites the "lyconomy" of this tradition that brandishes the image of the "wolf" within us as a streak of rapacious violence that we can only fight with violence, thus projecting onto the wolf a false identity to justify our own demons of violence. Merleau-Ponty's notions of embodiment further this idea that we are enmeshed with animals in a basic affective, perceptual and visceral way and that to ignore this interweaving of lives is to do violence to ourselves as well as violence towards them. I then cite ethologists for evidence that wolves are one of the most social, non-violent animals on the planet and detail how two million were slaughtered in the name of eradicating an "evil" being. Such behavior on our part I call "speciocide," as heinous as genocide. Finally, phenomenology, as one particular philosophical approach, may have a critical edge in helping us to see (or literally perceive) our animal fellows more clearly, to understand them better, and discern our truer moral obligations to them.

1. Introduction

Unfortunately, one of the bonds that ties the United States to its European neighbors and forbears is a long tradition of unthinking violence against animals. Many acts of violence against animals are motivated by the pleasure in cruelty, the greed for profits, the fear of the unfamiliar, the need to feel powerful, and so on. The act of violence against animals that I find most disturbing is however the violence that is undertaken with a mistaken sense of moral obligation or at least with a sense of self-righteousness at the fact that one is doing some good in hurting, maiming, torturing or killing this animal. This kind of violence might even extend to a felt calling or an articulated rationale that we have an obligation or at least the right to eradicate an entire species, what I have named "speciocide" (Mazis 2008). I intend to discuss the human treatment of wolves in Europe and the United States as a painful example of the ways in which sometimes our sense of doing what we think is an ethically laudatory deed can be misleading, disastrously so, and actually can lead us to cruel

and even evil behavior. I also intend to address how our traditional ethics may harbor assumptions that lead to the misperception of animals and a misunderstanding of their behavior. Finally, I intend to show how phenomenology, as one specific philosophical approach, may have a critical edge in helping us to see (or literally *perceive*) our animal fellows more clearly, to understand them better, and discern our moral obligations to them.

2. Derrida, Traditional Philosophy, and the “Autopsic” Vision

Before turning to the European and American behavior towards wolves, there are a few general ideas about this theme that I would like to discuss as they are suggested by Jacques Derrida in his book, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. Such general points could lead us to the realization that our very way of conceiving ourselves in regard to the beings of nature and the way in which we formulate our ethics may be simultaneously a disregard for animals.

The European and American philosophical traditions as passed down from the Greeks and Romans are informed by a cosmology that puts the animal world on a hierarchical inferiority with respect to the human world as human beings are conceived of as the bearers of reason, speech, and agency. The animal is seen as unthinking, mute, and a being of *reactions*, rather than *responses*. Response is meant to indicate a conscious relationship with the world, whereas to react is a merely mechanical interaction with no awareness involved. Derrida points out that in the tradition of Western philosophy and intellectual discourse, there have been two discourses, and the one of them that has been dominant has been spoken by those who “have taken no account of the fact that what they call ‘animal’ could look at them, and address them from down there, from a wholly other origin” (Derrida 2008: 12). This detachment of those who consider themselves “above” the level of the animal is exemplified by the story Derrida narrates in *The Beast and the Sovereign* regarding the Sun King, who had the first zoological garden built, the Menagerie de Versailles, where for his pleasure, the Sun King could gaze upon the beasts and “where sovereignty is marked by the power to see, by being-able-to see without being seen” (Derrida 2009: 293). Derrida calls this sort of gaze “autopsic” and “de-vitalizing” (Derrida 2009: 296) — it is both self-enclosed and deadening. The Sun King may have externalized this sense of “existing above and beyond” the “brutes” into architectural structures, but philosophers and the common sense of the European and American culture have long regarded their consciousness as the same kind of fortress.

Derrida extends this critique from the birth of modernity with Descartes and Kant to our contemporary thinkers and believes that the same is true of Heidegger, Lacan, and Levinas as of their predecessors, namely that “they made of the animal a theorem, something seen and not seeing” (Derrida 2008: 13). Derrida sums up this thought by stating that the relationship between these thinkers and animals is “as if the men of this configuration had seen without being seen, seen the animal without being seen by it.” It is the case that for most philosophers the animal as a fellow being, as a creature that could have differing ways of addressing itself to us, understanding the world, and communicating with others of its kind just does not exist. Descartes sees animals only as mechanisms and most other philosophers have agreed, even if not explicitly, but expressed nevertheless in an attitude of self-enclosure. The myriad animals that surround them are not seen as beings with which one enters into a dialogue, but as tools, objects to be used and disposed of, and as a source of profit. Derrida’s calling this way of addressing the world, as if there are no

others who address us back from within the animal world, “autopsic,” means that literally it is an “auto” seeing — a vision that sees only itself and is blind to the others, and so is also the vision that imposes death, that is to say, that takes the apparent fellow being’s appeal and reduces it to nothing. Many ethologists have pointed out the fallacy of judging other animals’ capacities by the measuring stick of humans’ capacities according to “anthropocentric” attitudes, instead of allowing the animals to demonstrate parallel, but different capacities.

The mistake of being deaf to the voices of animals and blind to the expressions on their faces is however more serious than this if Merleau-Ponty is right in his claim that humans are part of a “shared flesh of the world,” and that is why I want to call this regard and way of judgment an act of violence. To turn away from animals would be to allow the human and animal shared embodiment to be torn apart. Furthermore, this might lead us to see these practices as not only a form of violence towards animals, but also a self-laceration, a violence turned towards ourselves. In order to understand this charge, however, it is necessary to regard the body in a way that differs from the cultural tradition that self-identifies with the mind and sees the body as mere vessel or housing of the mind or spirit.

3. Merleau-Ponty’s “Lateral Union” of Humanity and Animality

The lifelong work of Merleau-Ponty details how human embodiment and perception are ways of entering the world, or rather, to be more accurate, they are the ways for which we are *of* the world, that is, the world in its fleshy, material dimension as the source of those meanings that we then expand and elaborate as rational, speaking beings. In opposition to the tradition of Descartes, Kant, and others, Merleau-Ponty describes how to see, to hear, to feel, and to perceive in general are to be understood as to be seen, to be heard, to be felt, and to be perceived so that in the end it might be better to say that as embodied, fleshy creatures we “co-perceive” with the world: “he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless ... he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them — he who is one of them” (Merleau-Ponty 1964b: 134). In other words, I can only see because as an embodying being,¹ I return to myself from the vantages of everything else with which I am in relation in my surround, as seeing through the things, creatures and others that are part of a dimension of visibility or what Merleau-Ponty calls [asymmetric] “reversibility.” Yet, it is as if the philosophers of the dominant tradition saw themselves as residing on some other plane of existence, a plane provided by the elevation of spirit and reason that fuels them, and as if their vision emanated from some other origin, so as to declare themselves seers who are not seen, agents before a passive and inert world. In opposition to this perspective, Merleau-Ponty asserts that “the visible can thus fill me and occupy me only because I who see it do not see it from the depths of a nothingness, but from the midst of itself: I the seer am also visible” (Merleau-Ponty 1964b: 113). To be in the midst of the visible and its interrelated creatures through fleshiness is to be called beyond oneself as the very way of returning to oneself.

This sense that “what is meant by that little verb ‘to see’ as being “present at the fission at whose termination and not before, I come back to myself” (Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 186) for Merleau-Ponty

¹ I use the term “embodying” being to emphasize that there is no substantial body in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical perspective. Rather “the body” is an ongoing dynamic process with the world in which it is embedded.

means that to be in a human body is not simply to extend to the skin; rather, to be in a human body means that I see the field in front of me from the vantage of the clouds floating by overhead, that I see the field from the vantage of the grasses blowing in the wind, that I also see from the vantage of the birds circling overhead and the tree in the distance, and all the while I am aware of myself seeing *as if* seeing myself through the points of view of the clouds, the grasses, birds, trees, and everything else around me with whom I am in relation. From this perspective of the “flesh of the world,” I can only perceive by having the sense of being perceived by and through all the inanimate objects around me in this circulation of sense and energies that is the life of perception. The case is even more so in relation with the fellow animate beings, who themselves perceive the world from a vantage that is like ours in its being embedded in this interplay. The rabbit looks up at a hawk and feels itself as being seen by the hawk, as well as by the other hawks circling nearby, and runs, for part of its fleshly vision is to be embedded in all these related visions within the matrix of its surround or as part of a dimension of Visibility, as Merleau-Ponty calls it. If the primordial human sense of ourselves and the world comes back to us from perceptual vectors emerging from the world, instead of emanating from a central source called “consciousness,” then there can be a folding over and enfolding among species of animals, including the human and animal species, so that our perceptions are enmeshed or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, “why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same ‘consciousness’ the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient” (Merleau-Ponty 1964b: 142). This insight about what human embodiment is and how we co-perceive with the world, especially with other animal perceivers, leads Merleau-Ponty to declare, “the human body is ... in a relationship of intercorporeity in the biosphere with all animality” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 268). There is so much about our lives that is an overlap with animals on the level of perception, whether it is a matter of this warm place where to find shelter from the cold and wind, or whether it is now time to rest, or whether it would be good to find other members of our group for affection or help. This leads Merleau-Ponty to point to that dimension of our lives on the perceptual, affective, imaginative, memorial, and immediate level before reflection that is our animal life, our shared life: “Animal life refers to what is sensible for us and to our carnal life” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 271). This is the lesson we gain once we realize that we are not a disembodied mind or spirit, but a fleshly creature enmeshed in the world, or as Merleau-Ponty sums up, “life teaches us not only the union of our soul and our body, but also the lateral union of animality and humanity” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 271).

4. *Ethics as a War on Animals*

Now, if we keep in mind Merleau-Ponty’s insights and return to Derrida’s discussion, it becomes evident why seeing ourselves as unseen by the creatures around us, as not addressed by the look of the animals around us may appear as a kind of spiritual and emotional violence that sets the stage for physical violence in exploitation: we are cutting off a tie, an ongoing and felt tie within our embodiment, with our linking with the world that is an inter-animal relationship, and this is like cutting off a part of our physically defined body. The earth not felt as seen through the eyes of birds or a wind not felt as through the soaring feelings

they have plying its eddies or a pond not felt with our extended sense through frogs, fish, and water lilies — these are all impoverished perceptions, that cut off as it were a portion of our sense organs, as well as they cut off these creatures' feature of being a part of an ongoing vitality among all animals.

However, this co-perceiving goes further than this level of shared perception because a vital part of the density or richness of perception is an affective sense, its lining of emotion, whether it is feeling the joy and frolic of the birds on the wind or the terror of the rabbit fleeing the diving hawk or the contentment of the wolf lying in the sun cuddling with its pups. This is why it is so important when Derrida asserts that questions such as whether animals can think, reason, have a language, mourn, deceive, have a sense of self, have an awareness of mortality, appreciate beauty, and so many others we often pose as topics of research divert us from the only question that really matters, the question to which we have an immediate answer. Derrida gives Jeremy Bentham credit for realizing that “the first and decisive question would rather be to know whether animals can suffer” (Derrida 2008: 27). I could cite the research results that have been found in answer to the first set of questions as discovered by ethologists in recent decades, and the answer to all such questions would be “yes”; yet such answers would still engender debate. However, as Derrida brings to our attention, “Can they suffer? leaves no room for doubt” (Derrida 2008: 28). As fellow creatures of the flesh, we can feel the suffering in the howling animal being experimented upon painfully or in wolves being eviscerated for pleasure or in animal atrocities perpetrated daily in places like the food industry. The question of animal suffering leaves no room for doubt because it asks about another ongoing, essential level of our being, and takes away the stance of those who practice the “detached observer” sort of discourse, as if they were beings above the level of animals. This is why ethologist Mark Bekoff calls the blindness to animal emotions “anthropodenial” (a term coined by Frans de Waal) throughout his book, *Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart*, because whether we choose to focus upon animal suffering or not or other animal emotions, we do feel them as enmeshed in the flesh of the world, and consequently we must deny these experiences, extirpate them from our awareness to prove ourselves different from them. In other words, like Merleau-Ponty, Bekoff thinks that we register animals' emotion in our own bodies and we feel the suffering of animals in an immediate way. The only way to deny this suffering is to “block out” or distract ourselves from their suffering that resounds within the human body.

I think that through these insights about our shared sensibility being denied, being cut asunder, we can better understand Derrida's statement that “[he] think[s] that Cartesianism belongs, beneath its mechanist indifference, to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition of a war against the animal, of a sacrificial war as old as Genesis” (Derrida 2008: 101). If we believe that we are being moral by listening to a tradition of religious and philosophical edicts that cut us out from our interconnectedness with the creatures around us, then this not a benevolent stance, but one that violates; if a level of our being is inseparable from the animality we ban, then this is also a self-violating stand. The most influential morality, Kantian ethics, demands that we cut off our affective life, cut off our perceptual life, and focus on pure rationality, and so, as Derrida asserts, “The Kantian has nothing but hate for the animality of the human” (Derrida 2008: 103). Thinking we are being moral, we may be violating parts of ourselves and the creatures of the world.

As pernicious as this violation in the name of ethics might be, even more pernicious is the fact that in feeling on some level our violence towards animals, in cutting them off our interrelatedness with them, we find this violence unbearable to our self-image as human. As a result, we project that violence upon animals. This projection, in turn, becomes the rationale for using overt violence against animals so as to uphold morality, since we claim that we need to fight their bestial violence that is really ours. Again, more autopsic

vision. This is Derrida's conclusion and one that I share with him: "One could say, first, that in the end such a bellicose hatred in the name of human rights, far from rescuing man from the animality that he claims to rise above, confirms the waging of a kind of species war and confirms that the man of practical reason remains bestial in his defensive and repressive aggressivity, in his exploiting the animal to death. One could also say, second, that bad will, even a perverse malice, inhabits and animates so-called good moral will" (Derrida 2008: 101). If our sense of the good means becoming detached from our sensual, embodied side, from the emotions that move us to compassion with others and with animals, then being ethical on a rational basis seems to imply turning against part of ourselves, against that part shared in interrelatedness with animals, allowing our lack of compassion towards animals, and violating them so as to be reasonable, but unfeeling.

Rather than continue to argue for this idea on an abstract level, I turn now to the case of wolves. Wolves are, I believe, a horrendous exemplification of this sort of phenomenon of demonization that occurred throughout Europe first and then was brought to the New World and pursued assiduously and with moral fervor until wolves became nearly extinct in America, as well as in Europe.

5. *The Case of Wolf Speciocide in the United States*

If an animal has been portrayed mistakenly as a depraved creature, then humans may try to rid the earth of this scourge and feel as if they are doing something morally laudatory. This is the case with the wolf, both in Europe and then even more savagely in the United States.

The image of bestiality represented by the wolf has been presented as far back as Aesop and appears throughout the history of European philosophy whether in Hobbes, Montaigne or Machiavelli, to name a few, as discussed at length by Derrida in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. The wolf is continually portrayed as the incarnation of a being that is rapacious, cruel, and given over to fits of unrestrained violence (Derrida 2009: 87-8). The wolf is persistently used as the image of the terror that men inflict upon one another. Derrida quotes several authors who see the untamable aggressor "to be the wolf for man," insofar as humans are rapacious and require the beast of a sovereign to inspire fear in them, to terrorize the terrorists. Derrida calls the Hobbesian and Machiavellian logic of the one outside and above the law who terrorizes for the good of the whole and the survival of the law a "lyconomy" — a response to the literal and figurative wolf that is a constant threat to man (Derrida 2009: 60-61, 88-89).

However, this "lyconomy" is not only the discourse of political philosophers; it is also the activity of the Europeans. Throughout Europe, bounties were offered by kings and governments to destroy wolves, so that they would be killed by any means. By 1560, wolves were extinct in England, in Scotland by 1691, in Ireland by 1770, and although they survived on the continent, their populations were greatly diminished. In Italy by 1980, there were only about 100 wolves left (now rebounded to somewhere between 500 and 1000, thanks to restorative efforts).

It seems that for much of prehistory and even recorded history, man and wolf co-existed, and helped one another as the two predators of large mammals: "Until about four hundred years ago the wolf was second only to man as the most successful and widespread mammal in North America. There is extensive evidence to show that far from being at enmity, the wolf and hunting man enjoyed globally something approaching symbiosis, whereby the existence of each benefited the existence of the other" (Mowat 1963:

vi). Wolves near human encampments were believed to serve as a warning system for humans with respect to the approach of adversaries due to the wolves' sensory acuity and tendency to communicate by howling. For many of the Native American peoples of North America, the wolf was an object of veneration because of its strong loyalty and affection for its family, its skills as a hunter, and its role in maintaining the health of its prey by culling the weak, sick and decrepit (Busch 2007: 110-111).

As is commonly acknowledged, however, the state of affairs between wolves and humans changed in Europe during the Medieval Ages (although scapegoating wolves is more ancient as discussed by Derrida), and in North America with the arrival of European settlers: "Of the twenty-four wolf subspecies and races inhabiting North America at the beginning of the European invasion, seven are now extinct and most of the remainder are endangered. The wolf has been effectively exterminated in all of the south-central portions of Canada, in Mexico, and in almost all of the United States south of Alaska" (Mowat 1963: vii). To concentrate on North America, especially the United States, it is estimated that since the first settlers arrived, *two million wolves have been killed* (Dutcher and Dutcher 2005: 148).

Not only were wolves killed to the point of extinction, but they were also slaughtered with a vehemence that is shocking: "Wolves were shot, poisoned, trapped, bludgeoned, and tortured. Wolves were infected with mange and then released to spread the deadly disease across the plains. Wolves were staked down and torn apart by dogs. Wolves had their jaws shut so they could not eat, ensuring a long slow agonized death by starvation. Wolves were blown to bits by set guns or poisoned by wolf getters, devices that when bitten fired sodium cyanide into a wolf's mouth. Wolves were poisoned by the thousands by strychnine strewn carelessly across the prairies. Wolf pups were dragged from their dens and either beaten to death or shot" (Busch 2007: 114). Wolves were killed with a kind of zeal and self-righteousness by humans throughout European and American history waging a particular kind of war to which I have given a specific name, "speciocide" (see WW). The justification for this speciocide of the wolves was their savagery! Just as Derrida documents in *The Beast and the Sovereign* with respect to how the Europeans demonized the wolf, among all the wild creatures within the New World the wolf epitomized a peculiar threat seen as "the Devil, Red tongued, sulfur breathing and yellow eyed" (Lopez 1978: 145). The wolf's way of eating by tearing creatures limb from limb was seen as part of its depravity, as well as its attacks on the livestock the Europeans had brought with them, livestock that were regarded as innocent creatures. These domestic animals were innately good and the wolf was innately evil — a murderer (Lopez 1978: 146). That these discourses survive and wolf slaughter continues is a rather fantastic behavior on the part of humans who feel morally called upon to do this killing while humans are "the only animal that habitually preys upon prime, mature animals" (Mech 1970: 94).

6. *Scientific Observations of Wolves versus Cultural Tradition*

Yet, these cultural attitudes have been investigated by scientists within the past decades and discovered to be woefully at odds with the observations made of wolves by ethologists. It is interesting that ethologists find the social bonding, the care-giving, the need for community, the strength of cooperation among wolves to be very much like that of both humans and primates (Busch 2007: 47), and so there is a strong resemblance among these species. Yet there is a strange dissimilarity with respect to the lack, in wolves, of any concerted aggression whether among wolves or directed against other creatures. Adolf Murie is a

scientist who has spent several decades closely observing wolf behavior. The conclusion that he reaches about the species is the exact opposite of the way wolves have been characterized in the cultural traditions we have discussed. Murie sums up his research by stating that “a second characteristic of wolf personality is the animal’s basic aversion to fighting” (Mech 1970: 5). He relates an anecdote about a wolf that was “frantically upset” at a dog fight and broke it up by pulling the aggressor dog by the tail off the other dog. So averse to violent behavior are wolves that ethologists have tested situations when most animals would respond aggressively, and yet wolves fail to be aggressive. Ethologists took wolf pups from the den of a wolf pack, and the pack sat helplessly by and whimpered, but did not attack, although they could have obviously defended their pups with a violence that would have overwhelmed the ethologists. Also, the observers have interrupted packs while they were feeding, tearing apart their prey, and have taken the carcass from them: again, the wolves just responded by whimpering at them (Mech 1970: 292). As a matter of fact, Lee Smits, another ethologist who made a careful study of all the historical records of cases of animals against humans in the United States, came to the same conclusion with previous researchers who have done similar studies of the records: “no wolf, except a wolf with rabies, has been ever known to make a deliberate attack on a human being in North America” (Mech 1970: 292). Of course, the cultural tales often claim otherwise. However, each time a wolf was asserted to have attacked humans, it was discovered by the scientists who investigated the erroneous reports that it was not a wolf attack (except in the cases of rabid wolves). This is not true for countries in Europe, where it seems that other sorts of conditions had led to wolves attacking humans, but wolf attacks have been largely absent in the United States (Boitani and Mech 2003: 303). It was readily acknowledged in interviews with those who had to deal with wolves in the United States, such as trappers, that wolves were not considered “dangerous” (Boitani and Mech 2003). The strong bonds of affection, loyalty, care, concern, playfulness, cooperativeness, communicativeness, and trust that persist among the wolves of the pack are the most striking characteristics of group wolf behavior as noted by ethologists who have spent time in close proximity with wolves. Evidence of these traits is their shared care of the young, their year-long courtship and mating for life with continual displays of affection, their feeding injured members of the pack, their grieving for months when they lose a pack member, and their need for belonging in a pack.

This does not mean that wolves are not capable of fighting with members of other packs and injuring them, and at times even killing a trespassing nonmember of the pack in a particularly acute fight (Mech 1970: 93). Also, certainly a factor in the human sense of the wolf’s aggressiveness is engendered by wolves’ attacks on livestock. However, again this has never been an issue in the United States as it has been in Europe. Even though ranchers did at times pen their livestock right within former wolf territories, given the spaciousness of the United States’ western states only one percent of ranchers’ livestock loss at any time in the United States has been attributable to wolves poaching them (Mech 1970: 137, and Boitani and Mech 2003: 309). Nor does the lack of aggression in wolf behavior deny the fact that wolves are able hunters that excitedly rip the flesh from deer, caribou, moose or other prey animals, swallowing it in large gulps. Yet, the fact that they have jaws that allow them to swallow their prey in twenty pound chunks when the prey animal is in shock and no longer feeling anything does not mean that it is correct to interpret wolves as rapacious, cruel, and demonic because of the way they eat their prey. In order to understand wolves, it seems more significant to consider the way in which they treat the beings with which they share their lives — such a way is full of play and maintaining close bonds. Were how each being procures food to be used as the measure of a being’s moral worth, then we would note how wolves cull the herds of their prey of the

sick and elderly, which would otherwise threaten the existence of the herds if the wolves did not prevent the larger herd from starving because of too many mouths to feed. We would see how the wolf uses every part of its prey so that there are only a few hairs and bits of hide left after the eating is done, unlike wasteful humans. We would remark how there are no wolf killing rampages like those of humans. We might also realize how as humans, we now delegate a few of our species in the “slaughtering” industry (and their machines) the task of killing the animals that we eat, as well as of keeping these animals that are to be slaughtered in prolonged captivity in settings of psychic and physical suffering, then shocking them with high voltage, slitting their throats, and letting them hang upside to bleed to death, or condemning chickens to live a life of no exercise, with excrement raining down upon their stacked cages, and so on. We do not take this one aspect of our existence as defining our human essence. So, why should the proficiency of jaws and teeth of wolves be taken to characterize the way in which wolves enter into a relationship with the world around them?

I would like to end this essay by suggesting that we humans have projected the most troubling aspects of our own being onto our sense of wolves and also possibly of other animals that we feel ethically justified in killing. Farley Mowat starts his book, *Never Cry Wolf*, with the lament and warning, “So-called civilized man eventually succeeding in totally extirpating the real wolf from his collective mind and substituting for it a contrived image, replete with evil aspects that generated almost pathological fear and hatred” (Mowat 1963: vi-vii). If a kind of rapaciousness and an urge to destroy other species have been part of the human psyche, nevertheless we must be careful not to project these features onto wolves and other animals, where we can no longer take appropriate responsibility for our own demons and work through them creatively and courageously, and instead slaughter the supposed demons around us. That is why I find myself in agreement with the ethologist and expert on animal emotions Marc Bekoff’s use of the term “anthropodenial” (Bekoff 2002: 23) for describing the detached, scientific attitude that sees animals as objects and thinks that only rationalized, quantitative data about animals reveal any truth about them. When we can no longer feel our kinship as part of the flesh of the world and fail to feel in our embodiment the feelings of wolves that are so in evidence, whether the joy in playing with each other and their pups; the affection they feel for the members of their pack; the loyalty of caring for the injured and sick; the attunement to other species like the ravens they engage in play; or, the connection with the natural surround seen when they are frolicking, batting the snowflakes in a new snowfall; then, we obscure the truth and substitute a blank screen upon which we can project our worst fears and unrecognized failings. This projection, in turn, can either allow us to commit specicide in fear of the other, or even much worse, as this essay has claimed, commit the mistake of a seeming ethically justifiable attempt to obliterate this “evil” that has been “rationally” legislated.

7. *The Role of Phenomenology in Living with Animal Others*

Phenomenology is still thought of by many as the philosophical approach made famous by Edmund Husserl that “brackets” the world and seeks to uncover the essences of beings as intended by the transcendental ego. This bracketing would exempt phenomenological insights from dealing with the empirical, and as a consequence such a philosophy would be at odds with scientific findings as mistaken insights of the “natural attitude” that takes the world as naively present in an encounter with the human.

However, throughout this essay, I have been relying upon the later kind of phenomenology as conceived and practiced by Merleau-Ponty. His *Phenomenology of Perception* begins with the insight that what we learn from the work of Husserl is that such bracketing is impossible, because perception is always a “dialogue” with the world, a “give and take” in which our ways of making sense of the world are remade by events that occur and as they solicit perception, the world’s surprising twists and turns alter the very ways we approach the world. As I outlined above while explaining his later notion of the “flesh of the world,” Merleau-Ponty comes to articulate the myriad ways in which we “co-perceive” with the world and through the world, since each of us is an ecstatic being that is beyond itself at the depths of the world and only returns to itself at the end of the process of taking in the world. This means that we must hearken to the indirect and silent voices of the world that add their sense to our own articulations. This leads Merleau-Ponty to a radically interdisciplinary approach — one that I have tried to practice in this essay — in which the work of science can be vital in breaking through the cultural paradigms that have become *mere impositions of meaning upon the world*, instead of that “give and take” with the world, instead of a dialogue. This is not to say that the critical edge towards science must not be wielded — as various sciences have also imposed reductive paradigms upon their objects of study, and especially in regard to many animal studies.

Here, I believe, is the power of the phenomenological perspective of Merleau-Ponty to help us from falling into such pitfalls in our relations with animals. In this phenomenological approach, we have to observe carefully the actual behaviors of animals, but refrain from interpreting them with ready-made frameworks that we bring from science, cultural traditions or religious customs. It is an integrative approach that says that ethologists’ findings are relevant and demand proper attention because, as Merleau-Ponty discovers in his lectures about nature at the *Collège de France* from 1956-1960, scientists at times can be more open than philosophers to new ontological insights since they are committed to the constant return to the phenomena to see them with fresh perspective that is the heart of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty’s lectures draw upon a host of scientific findings in biology, geology, embryology, ethology, cybernetics, and so on. Merleau-Ponty’s embodied approach to all inquiry also lets us find ways to be perceptually attuned to the world with a sensitivity that allows for shared feelings and imaginings to arise that are to be ever refined and altered by returning to being further experienced by oneself and with others. It means allowing our cultural stereotypes to encounter other cultures’ wisdom and see what emerges from this dialectical interplay. In this way, Merleau-Ponty also finds literary writings to be relevant to phenomenology at times. The novelist can express a sensitivity to the nuances of experience and its structures that can inform philosophy. Merleau-Ponty’s later work on time and memory owes a great debt to the novels of Proust, who has proven to be as fine an observer of the flow of time and its particular eddies than perhaps any philosopher or phenomenologist.

In the case of understanding our relations with animals, such as the wolf, but including all animals, phenomenology pursues dialogue on all levels. Derrida’s warning that we can no longer regard animals as beings incapable of addressing us had been heeded already by Merleau-Ponty and is being heeded by a more indirect and open approach to phenomenology. This approach to these issues of how we are to treat animals means hearkening to animal others in terms of what seems to matter to them and how it matters within the framework of their concerns and activities within their *Umwelt*, to hearken to human others in the variety of their responses and sensitivities, and to use the resources of poets and artists and those who have fine-tuned their perceptual, affective and imaginative sensitivities. It is not a simple matter of returning to what one perceives, since perceptions may be shaped and blinded by stereotypes and projections. It is a

matter of a never-ending returning to the encounter and always finding more depth. The rules of ethics are too simple to give us an ethical life. First, comes the diving into the complexities of situations. The lives of animals, like those of humans, are multi-faceted and deserve sensitive appreciation before we take any action.

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