# BOOK REVIEWS

## Philosophy of the Animal

*Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*
By Peter Atterton & Matthew Calarco (Eds.)
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*Review by Donald L. Turner*

Questions about the ontological and ethical status of non-human animals have been popular in the English-speaking philosophical world at least since Peter Singer's landmark utilitarian attack on the cruelties of factory farming and some scientific experimentation. The main opposition to pro-animal utilitarians has followed Kantian thinking, according to which animals were ethically negligible because they lacked "reason." As the debate matured, permutations have emerged, such as Tom Regan's renowned Kantian promotion of animal "rights" and Jan Narveson's utilitarian rejection of pro-animal arguments.[1] Such has been the scene in the world of analytic philosophy, with deontological and utilitarian premises dominating arguments about rationality and sentience—a debate that has reached an impasse.

The Continental tradition offers fresh perspectives on this debate, and in *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*, editors Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco collect some of the most germane writings on animals from a range of prominent Continental philosophers, including Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Foucault, Levinas, Derrida, Deleuze and Guatarri, Ferry, Cixious, and Irigaray, with commentarial essays following every piece but Irigaray's. The collection introduces novel approaches to lingering philosophical questions about animals' ontological and ethical status, but it also includes hermeneutic approaches to our deployment of animal symbols, phenomenological reflections on human encounters and relationships with animals, and deconstructive linguistic analyses of designations such as "animal." *Animal Philosophy* fills a gap in the literature, for while most of the works excerpted here have been available in translation for some time, no entire volume has been dedicated explicitly to how these writers address these questions.[2]

*Janus Head, 8(1), 335-339.* 

Of the thinkers included who address animals' ontological status, the most influential is Martin Heidegger. Here, the reader is given two of Heidegger's most significant points about animality: that animals are "poor in world" (compared with "world-forming" human beings) and that they are phenomenologically unable to relate to objects of their experience "as such." The Bataille piece similarly sets forth a vision of animal "immanence" and poetically describes the animal as "in the world like water in water" (34)—in contrast to "transcendent" humanity, capable of and bound by the gift and burden of objectifying thought.

Derrida's piece bridges the topics of the ontological and ethical status of animals, suggesting that their lack of language might be viewed as an ethical demand rather than a mere privation. Characteristically, he links the Western tradition's "subjection of the animal" with its use of general, sweeping statements about the difference between humans and all non-human animals, or "animality" itself. Derrida maintains that such facile generalizations about animals obscure the plethora of differences that he describes as an "immense" and "heterogeneous multiplicity of the living" (124), and following the trend in his later thought toward more explicitly ethical questions, he condemns various industrial, mechanical, and genetic "crimes against animals" (126).

The section devoted to Levinas also addresses ontological and ethical questions, containing selections that are contradictory in tone. In the first, human moral reprehensibility is juxtaposed with an anecdote about a seemingly moral animal. Here Levinas poignantly describes his time in a Nazi prison camp, where he his fellow inmates were viewed by their captors as "subhuman, a gang of apes" (48). Only a stray dog treated them respectfully, "jumping up and down and barking in delight" with their appearance at morning assembly. As Levinas says, "For him, there was no doubt that we were men" (49). Despite this characterization, Levinas' point is not to devalue humans and valorize animality; rather, the dog is admired because he displays respectful behavior one would like to see in all human beings—the only animals capable of true ethical thought or behavior. That this is Levinas's belief is clarified by the second piece, an interview in which Levinas is questioned directly about animals' ethical status. He argues that while "needless" animal suffering should be avoided, animals cannot truly consider the life of the "other," since their own struggle for live leaves no room for ethics.

The selection that treats ethical issues most directly is the piece from

Ferry, which describes an "absurd alternative" between (1) a bad Cartesian "metaphysics of subjectivity" that views animals as "mere raw material" and disregards their suffering, and (2) the belief "that it is necessary to 'deconstruct' humanism at all costs" (151). This latter approach is shared, argues Ferry, by thinkers such as Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, and certain radical ecologists. He believes this orientation ignores the relevance of human uniqueness and takes a "step backward" into "barbarity" (155); in response, he supports a non-anthropocentric humanism. This approach respects animal interests enough to prohibit their torture, while respecting humanity enough to recognize that such respect of others is only possible among human beings, the only animal who "lives by law" as Ferry puts it, linking his view to Kantian and Jewish thinking (154-155).

In addition to such contributions with regard to animals' ontological and ethical status, several selections present phenomenological analysis of the human—non-human animal relationship. For example, Derrida's text launches from reflections on the profound impact that the experience of being looked at by his cat made upon him and his thought. Bataille describes a process by which animals, in their paired similarity and unknowablility, reveal to humanity its own unfathomable depth. Irigaray presents a phenomenology of the human—bird relationship, portraying birdsong as consoling, healing, and spiritually transformative (197).

Other pieces focus on how animals operate as symbols. For example, the selections from Nietzsche display his characterization of morality itself as an "animal" phenomenon and his use of animals to symbolize human virtues.[3] The selection from Foucault treats the changing ways those deemed "mad" have been symbolically likened to non-human animals in their lack of "reason." Cixous' piece explores birds' capacity to evoke both joy and transgression, observing that certain birds in Western culture are often portrayed as 'unclean'—as are the outcast humans she venerates.

The commentary contains helpful measures of exegesis and critique. The essays offered by the editors are exceptionally valuable, especially because they follow two of the shortest selections. Calarco's essay nearly doubles the Heidegger selection by presenting quotations from early lectures on the Pre-Socratics through later essays on humanism and language. In addition to explaining several key points about animality in Heidegger's writings, Calarco shows how Heidegger's discourse on animals is open to conceptual and ethical criticism. Similarly, Atterton's essay on the place of animals in Levinas' thought covers a range of texts, skillfully pointing out how Levinas'

ethical model proves helpful in making the case for granting animals more respect than they are traditionally afforded, even by Levinas himself.

Elsewhere, Verena Conley accuses Ferry of failing to acknowledge the diversity of the animal realm and of unjustifiably lumping together diverse poststructuralist and ecological philosophers. Clare Palmer's insightful commentary on Foucault points the way toward a "genealogy of 'animality'" that recognizes the fact that discourses generating a "reason/animality split," including Foucault's, are determined by "power relations and effects" (83). David Wood suggests that the "special case" of Derrida's face-to-face encounter with his cat, like "mammalocentric" discourse in general, is unable to serve as a model for wider environmental concerns.[4]

A strength of this volume is also its great weakness: its scope. It is ambitious, incorporating ten selections of primary text and nine commentarial essays in a volume of only two hundred pages. But given these numbers, it is unavoidable that some of the selections are too short. The selection from Heidegger is two paragraphs long—less than a page, though Heidegger wrote more about the ontological status of animals, and offered more phenomenological speculation about their experience, than did any of the other thinkers covered in this volume, and his view changed significantly over the years. Similarly, readers could benefit by being presented with all six questions and answers about animals from the interview with Levinas that is excerpted here, of which only three are included. Furthermore, Levinas' writings, like Nietzsche's, often read more like poetry than does standard expository philosophy. The editors wisely chose to structure the Nietzsche section to take advantage of this, and they would have done well to structure the Levinas section similarly, choosing more short statements about animals from a broader range of the author's works. Only three and a half pages are allotted to the words of Nietzsche and Bataille, and while the follow-up essays are insightful and eloquent, they are relatively long. In general, the reader might have been served better with longer selections and shorter commentary, longer selections from fewer thinkers, or simply a longer book, obviating the unpleasant choice.

This book's agenda is to break "the thick silence" (xxv) about animals in Continental philosophy. Rather, it has isolated several of the most important voices on these topics from a cacophony of unfocused chatter, allowing them to be heard more clearly, and this is a major contribution to the philosophical discourse about animals in the English-speaking world. For readers interested in Continental philosophy, "the animal question," or both, this volume is a welcome arrival.

*Notes*

[1] See, e.g., Jan Narveson, Animal Rights," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 10 (1980): 463-471; Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

[2] While *Animal Philosophy* is the first to gather such pieces of primary text into a single volume, it is not, as its back cover claims, "the first text to look at the place and treatment of animals in Continental thought." This distinction belongs to *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, ed. H. Peter Steeves (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). This volume contains essays about the place of animality in the writings of, among others, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Derrida, and Bataille. Another volume that discusses the place of animals in Continental philosophy and predates *Animal Others* is *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

[3] Nietzsche also uses animals to describe the kind of behavior he despises; including his views about "herd" mentality would have been helpful here, though they are conspicuously absent. Lingis' commentary remedies this by discussing Nietzsche's negative portrayals of animality.

[4] This piece continues an ongoing discussion about animals between Derrida and Wood. In addition to these essays, see Derrida's "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Who Comes After the Subject*, ed. Eduardo Cadava et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); and Wood's response, "Comment ne pas manger: Deconstructionism and Humanism," in *Animal Others*.