

The Human Question in Recent Social Thought

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1. Background

This paper comes out of my dissertation research. Originally, I had conceived of the dissertation as an investigation of the concept of ‘the human’ in relation to the concepts of ‘the savage’ and ‘the barbarian’ in seventeenth and eighteenth century social thought.¹ While it is the case that the opposition between the fully human and the almost-human (the savage, the barbarian, the woman) is present in much early modern social thought, I soon discovered that this opposition between human and nearly-human was itself underwritten by a more fundamental opposition: between the human and inhuman, of which the animal is a paradigm example. This draft chapter/presentation presents preliminary (in the sense that these thoughts are little more than a beginning) meta-theoretical thoughts on the concepts of ‘the human’ and ‘the animal’ in recent social thought.

2. Prelegomena

Recent social thought has repeatedly returned to one key epistemological insight: the relation between concepts, words, and things is neither fixed nor stable. Any particular arrangement between the three elements has a history. This can result in a great deal of messiness and confusion: at one point in time this concept refers to that thing and at another point in time the same concept refers to another thing. Or, this thing is named by two apparently different words. Worse, it is also the case that as one concept changes, so too do many other concepts; as the relation between one concept and its object changes, so too do the relations between that concept-object and other concept-objects.² The word ‘flesh’ is a case in point. The *Oxford English Dictionary* recognizes a

1. I use the vague term ‘recent social thought’ because a problem of this scope and complexity is not easily contained within disciplinary boundaries: it touches upon issues raised by most humanities and social science disciplines. This scope suggests that a new discipline is called for: ‘the inhumanities’ or ‘the animalities.’ Others have suggested ‘the post-humanities.’

2. This insight is ultimately traceable to the introduction of Ferdinand de Saussure’s structural linguistics into social thought via Claude Levi-Strauss’s structural anthropology. The historical dimension derives from thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida who inject a genealogical method of history derived from Friedrich Nietzsche into the insights provided by structuralism. The injection of history into structuralism is usually called “post-structuralism.” See, for instance, David Couzens Hoy (2005) *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to*

number of senses of flesh when used as a noun: the “soft substance,” especially of an “animal body,” that covers the bones and is enclosed by the skin; as a euphemistic reference to sex; “to go after strange flesh,” as in the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah; “the soft pulpy substance” of fruits and plants located between the rind and the core; the part of the animal that is eaten; in opposition to fish and fowl (“fish, flesh, fowl”), a meaning which has mostly been replaced with the ordinary usage of “meat”; to refer to one’s relatives (“flesh and blood”); to be present (“in the flesh”); as a reference to the body of Christ which is eaten by his faithful; the depraved and fallen nature of man (“sins of the flesh”); and even, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to refer to ejaculation (“flesh!” or “flesh and fire!”). But flesh is also used as a verb: as a reward for a hunting animal by giving it a piece of the game; but also to make an animal eager for prey with the taste of blood; to initiate into war and bloodshed; to plunge a weapon into a body; to fight one’s first fight (“to flesh one’s maiden sword”); to gratify; to fatten; to clothe (especially a skeleton); and to remove the hide or fur from an animal. The range of meanings encompasses food, family, theology, metaphysics, politics and more.³ Friedrich Nietzsche has summed up these complex sets of relations aptly: “only that which has no history is definable.”⁴

Nietzsche’s apparently simple maxim belies a great deal of complexity. To define (define ⇒ “to make finite”) is to impose limits or boundaries; it is to designate an “inside” (that which it is) and an “outside” (that which it is not).⁵ It is to separate the essential from the inessential; the necessary from the unnecessary; the alloy from the dross; the kernel from the shell. This process of separation entails a decision - upon that which is and that which is not essential. Decision shares a common root with incision: they both involve cutting, especially into flesh.⁶ *Decedere*, the Latin word from which the English word *decide* derives, has the etymological meaning of “to cut off.” Playing with words, one could say that a decision is always a decision on an incision; on where to cut, on when to cut, and on how much to cut: one pound of flesh and nothing more.⁷ These words all carry religious and theological significance: they are caught up in sacrificial rituals. A sacrifice is a ritual whereby something is made sacred. Sacred derives from *sanctum*: “to set apart” as in the setting apart of the sacred from the profane; the essential (the sacred) from the inessential (the profane). It makes no sense to “set apart” one thing from another if that separation is not going to be maintained over time. Here, the process of sacraliza-

Post-Critique. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

3. The range of meanings is even greater than I have indicated because “flesh” is a word of Germanic origin; English also draws upon the Latin equivalent “carnal,” especially in theological matters - but also preserved in “carnivorous” (one who eats meat or flesh). Flesh is likewise tangled up with another Germanic word, “meat” which did not always contain connotations of animal flesh. See, for instance, Gen. 1:29-30: “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of the tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat.”

4. Friedrich Nietzsche (1994[1887]) *The Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*. Oxford: Oxford UP, II, 13.

5. Lexicography, one might say, is the secular counterpart to negative theology: one can know what something *is* only by knowing what something is *not* - the positive characteristics of a thing (dog: domestic, furry, playful, four-legged mammal) are never sufficient to distinguish it from other things (cat: domestic, furry, playful, four-legged mammal). Like God in negative theology, the difference between ‘dog’ and ‘cat’ is ineffable.

6. The Latin root is *cedere*, “to cut.” An incision is “a cut in to.”

7. Consequently, decisions and incisions are closely related to justice. See, William Ian Miller (2006) *Eye for an Eye*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

tion is quite literally the process of cutting up reality. Just as “inside” is incoherent without reference to “outside,” the sacred is incoherent without reference to the profane. An improper sacrifice - that is, a bad cut - will displease the gods while a proper sacrifice - that is, a good cut - will please the gods. The wound cut by the knife marks the threshold between the two pieces. The space of the cut that is neither one piece nor the other *is* the decision. This cutting is dangerous for both the sacrificer and the victim alike, both of whose lives are at stake.⁸ A definition is never innocent; it always entails this cutting, bleeding and separating.

Adding another layer to this, cuts can heal. The cut flesh can fill in with new flesh thus erasing the cut. But, at the same time, the healed flesh leaves a trace in the form of a scar - a physical mark of the cut remains even if the cut itself has disappeared. Hence, returning to Nietzsche, one definition carries with it the traces of previous definitions. Only that which cannot be cut can be defined - and what cannot be cut? The social theorist is, by necessity, a physiologist and a pathologist.

Not only are we, as academics, always cutting, we are also always turning (which, in turn, renders it rather dangerous to make a cut): the linguistic turn, the cultural turn, the spatial turn, the cognitive turn. Recently, it is possible to identify *yet another* turn, cleverly called “the animal turn.”⁹ “Turn,” in the sense of an “animal turn” or a “cultural turn,” has a number of interesting and important meanings. “Turn,” like “flesh,” can be used both as a noun and as a verb. “Turn” can have the sense of rotation, especially around a central axis (“turning”), but also in reference to a single revolution or rotation (“one turn of the wheel”), to the proper degree (“done to a turn” - as on a spit), to be twisted or convoluted. Another set of related meanings involve changes of directions and time: to face another way, a change of position, to deflect or deviate from a course, on every occasion or continually (“at every turn”), the point at which a road or river bends, a journey or tour or expedition (“tourn” leads to “tournament” and referred to the movements of circuit judges - coincidentally, it also sounds like “turn”), the act of walking about in a small area (“to take a turn about the room”); change in general; an event or occurrence; an occasion; a series of actions occurring in succession (“they had their turn, now it is my turn”) or a shift.

What, then, is *an* animal turn or *the* animal turn? (The proper preposition is even in question - is the animal turn a definite or an indefinite object?) In one way or another many - if not all - of these meanings appear to be applicable: the animal turn is a change in direction, deflection or deviation from the course of normal disciplinarity; it is an event and a continuous occurrence (animals are everywhere, we encounter them at every turn, and, yet, the social sciences and humanities have rarely paid attention); and, of course, confined to the institutional organization of the disciplines, the animal turn may be but a short walk in a very confined space; but also, perhaps we are circling, that is turning, about the animal as though it is our prey.

8. A sacrifice involves divine and magical powers. If the sacrificer is not careful, competent and sufficiently powerful enough, they could easily lose control of the forces they are attempting to summon and command. This is why Harry Potter was not supposed to use the Patronus Charm and why “getting off on a technicality” is essential to the proper functioning of modern legal systems: the only way to contain and control the sacred forces is through rigid application of procedure.

9. Harriet Ritvo (2007) “On the Animal Turn,” *Daedalus* 136(4): 118-22.

3. Human and Animal

Contemporary moral and political philosophy has been a productive site for the investigation of human/animal relations. Discussion has oscillated around two central questions: first, that of the relation between the theoretical constructs of “the human” and “the animal” and, second, the relation between the moral status animals and the human moral community.

The first relies upon a well-known deconstructive point: that which qualifies as “human” can only be known through reference to that which *does not* qualify as “human;” i.e., “the animal.”¹⁰ As a theoretical concept, “the human” does not refer to empirical, actually existing humans (that is, individual members of the species *homo sapiens sapiens*); likewise, “the animal” does not refer to empirical, actually existing animals (for instance, any particular raccoon, squid, or owl). Rather, “the human” is usually defined in reference to some specific characteristic that no other being is deemed to possess: reason, language, self-consciousness, and the like. These characteristics are positively valued and are seen as the primordial sources of law, reason, and morality. Consequently, any being that is deemed to be unreasonable, unable to speak, or merely conscious falls outside the scope of “the human” and into the category of “the animal.” Entire groups of empirical individuals falling into the species *homo sapiens sapiens* have been and continue to be excluded from the category of “the human” and delegated to the category of “the animal” - historically, these delegations have taken the forms of sexism and racism (“women or African-Americans are inherently unreasonable”) or ableism (a severely mentally retarded *homo sapiens sapiens* clearly does not qualify as a full human).¹¹ Politically, this distinction manifests

10. Other oppositions are, of course, possible and are functioning concurrently with the human/animal distinction: human/machine, human/divine, human/vegetable, etc. Significantly, in Cartesian philosophy, an animal was understood to be a particularly advanced machine made by God. Animals did not scream in pain when being dissected; their gears and springs were breaking down.

11. The same is done within the category of the animal, of course: certain animals are excluded from the category of animals and placed into an entirely new category. Positively, this can be seen in animals *qua* pets, which are brought into the realm of the family and begin to acquire the rights and privileges accorded to full members of the family - a designated place to sleep, regular food, regular medical care, toys, a personality (in many cases, even a voice!), and so on. Negatively, this can be seen in animals *qua* research subjects and livestock, who are excluded from the category of animal and, thus, from the protection of animal welfare and cruelty laws. The American *Animal Welfare Act* is an especially clear case where birds, rats and mice bred for research, horses *not* bred for research (i.e., racing), and livestock are *excluded* from the definition of animal. (Hence, a cow bred for livestock is not an animal while a cow bred as a pet is an animal.)

The term ‘animal’ means any live or dead dog, cat, monkey (nonhuman primate mammal), guinea pig, hamster, rabbit, or such other warmblooded animal, as the Secretary may determine is being used, or is intended for use, for research, testing, experimentation, or exhibition purposes, or as a pet; **but such term excludes** (1) birds, rats of the genus *Rattus*, and mice of the genus *Mus*, bred for use in research, (2) horses not used for research purposes, and (3) other farm animals, such as, but not limited to livestock or poultry, used or intended for use as food or fiber, or livestock or poultry used or intended for use for improving animal nutrition, breeding, management, or production efficiency, or for improving the quality of food or fiber. With respect to a dog, the term means all dogs including those used for hunting, security, or breeding purposes (9CFR1.1 - emphasis added).

Generally, what one can legally do to the exact same empirical animal differs significantly whether that animal (Ricky the Rat or Maurice the Mouse or Bernice the Bird) is a research animal or a companion animal. Animal welfare law applies to the companion animal, but not to the research animal. Hence, it constitutes animal cruelty when a pet owner pours gasoline on their pet rat and sets it aflame, but it does not constitute animal cruelty when a

itself as “animalization,” the comparison of African-Americans to apes or the comparison of Jews to rats; the opposite movement, “humanization,” attempts to re-humanize already animalized beings (“No, you are mistaken, women and African-Americans are, in fact, reasonable”).

The entirety of living beings are categorized into either the category “the human” or the category “the animal,” each representing polar opposites. These poles are dichotomous: any particular empirical being is *either* a “human” *or* an “animal.” Conceptual problems, however, are easily identified at either pole. For instance, the differences *within* the category of “the animal” is infinitely greater than the difference between “the human” and “the animal.” The concept of “the animal” includes beings that range from single-cell organisms to bonobos and chimpanzees, who are thought to share roughly 96-98% of their genetic code with humans. Hence, genetically, a bonobo is potentially 98% human, but 100% animal. With respect to “the human,” it is marginal cases - for instance, children, the “unborn,” the comatose - that present problems of categorization: under *normal* circumstances, one would expect them to develop into a “full human,” but some event has prohibited that development (severe brain injury) or the being in question has not yet progressed from childhood to adulthood (immature) or the being was born with severe cognitive impairment (Down’s Syndrome).¹² The question, then, becomes what to do with these beings: does one treat them *as though* they are “human” or does one treat them *as though* they are “animal”? Can one “virtually” be “human,” but “actually” be “animal”? Can one go from membership in “the human” to membership in “the animal” on the basis of severe brain trauma that destroys the ability to speak or reason or be self-aware?¹³

4. A History of Animals?

Historian Richard W. Bulliet, in his *Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers*, has presented a four-stage model of the history of human-animal relationships.¹⁴ For Bulliet, how humans relate to animals is closely connected to the rest of the social, economic, intellectual, moral, and other characteristics of the communities in which they live. Roughly, the entirety of human history can be

researcher does the exact same to their research subject, which just happens to be a rat. Likewise, when animals *do* fall under the protection of cruelty laws, exceptions are usually granted on the basis of ‘generally accepted practices’ - if everyone does it or something like it, then it must not be cruel. Also see 11.1(2) of the *Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* (2008); animal cruelty is a property offense under the *Canadian Criminal Code*, Part XI.

12. My own university is presently grappling with this issue. Apparently application was granted to a student meeting the required admissions criteria (as is proper). However, it turns out that the student has Down’s Syndrome and was only able to pass high school - albeit with honours - with significant help from his mother (it has been suggested that she did his homework) and from student assistants who coached him through exams. The university’s image has suffered greatly upon the media reporting the revocation of his privileges as a student on the grounds that a student with Down’s Syndrome is unable to perform competently in a university environment. Indeed, it was reported that the mother would attend all the classes, take her own notes, explain them to her son, and then he would write the notes down. Likewise, it was reported that the mother demanded assistants for her son at exams. (The university already has the reputation of being one of the most - if not the most - accommodating of student disabilities, be they emotional, psychological, physical or cognitive.) In my view, the university acted appropriately and correctly.

13. This, in essence, is the problem of “moral status” and “moral community” in contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophy.

14. Richard W. Bulliet (2008) *Hunters, Herders and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships*. New York: Columbia UP, chapter 2.

divided into four stages, what he calls “the separation,” “pre-domesticity,” “domesticity,” and “post-domesticity.”

In brief, the first phase, “separation,” is that period when humans (or ‘proto’ humans) are coming to distinguish and separate themselves from animals. This first phase is seen as encompassing the vast majority of the history of the human species: from the birth of the first *homo sapiens* up to the creation myths of *Genesis*. Thought in this period was most likely very rudimentary and involved dividing the world into humans (beings more or less like us) and animals (beings that are not like us).¹⁵ Given that these are pre-literate peoples, there is little evidence available enabling us to understand how these humans thought of themselves and their relation to the rest of the world. At most, animals would most likely have been classified into very simple groups: animals that we eat, animals that eat us, animals we have sex with, and, perhaps, a residual category for all other animals. More advanced thoughts may have been possible, perhaps organized around a very simple version of the totem: animals from which we are descended, animals from which others are descended from, animals I *may* eat, and animals I *may not* eat.¹⁶ It is entirely possible that these proto-humans and primitive humans had not even invented the individual/species relation.

The second phase, “pre-domesticity,” involves how humans, who now see themselves as more than animal, relate to the animals they hunt for food and fiber. However, whereas “separation” era humans may have seen themselves as superior to animals, “pre-domestic” era people come to imbue animals with spiritual, sacred and divine forces. The totem comes into its own as a means of structuring human societies.¹⁷ Thus, the gods may appear as part animal and part human; the boundaries between the world of humans and animals may be very porous allowing certain humans, such as shamans, to travel between these worlds; symbolic representations of animals become important in ritual with humans wearing masks and costumes in order to emulate sacred animals.¹⁸ The point of the “pre” in “pre-domesticity” is that humans have not yet domesticated wild animals; that is, wild animals have not yet been transformed into tame animals by humans. Consequently, the transformation of wild animals into tame animals marks the movement to the next phase, “domesticity.”¹⁹

Domestic societies display a number of characteristics relating to their having (unintentionally) tamed wild animals. Negatively, the movement from human ⇒ wild animal to human

15. At the very least, many *homo sapiens* were acquainted with *homo neanderthalensis* - not to mention a number of primates such as bonobos and chimpanzees. It has been speculated that up to 5% of the modern human genetic code derives from neanderthals and a presently unidentified African species.

16. “May” having a normative sense here.

17. Note: Bulliet does not discuss the totem.

18. One thinks of the aborigines who acted as though they were grubs during sacred rituals as reported by Emile Durkheim in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

19. Although it is the third stage and although many societies are presently moving into another era of history, domesticity structures the entirety of Bulliet’s theory. One should also note that the movement from pre-domesticity to domesticity was not intentional: at no point did someone wake up one morning and think to himself, “Wouldn’t it be great if we had cows living with us? We wouldn’t need to hunt them.” The transformation of a wild species into a domestic species can take many generations and, thus, many years. Permanent settlements, consistent surpluses of food, and the ability to keep written records would be essential to any purposive domestication.

⇒ domesticated animal entails a desacralization of earlier human/animal relationship. In domestic societies, animals once regarded as sacred become de-sacralized.²⁰ After all, it makes little sense to worship a bull as a god if there is an ox in your field pulling a yoke. Consequently, many previously sacred animals are recategorized: as pests, as predators, as benign, and so on. Likewise, the symbolic importance of animals would significantly decrease as animals are de-sacralized. While it would make sense in the context of a pre-domestic society to imbue salamanders with symbolic meanings (at least if you were a member of Clan Salamander!), in a domestic society it makes little sense but to consider a salamander a benign creature to be ignored because it is neither a source of food nor useful as a tool. The symbolic meanings associated with animals become analogical in domestic societies: he is like a lion (mighty, strong, proud), he is like a lamb (weak, meek, helpless), or he is like a dog (loyal, obedient, companionable). Rarely would it ever occur to anyone to compare another to a benign creature like a groundhog.²¹ Ultimately, domestic animals exist exclusively as means for humans: as food, as tools or as entertainment.²² As a result, animals are rarely romanticized. Animals are creatures who have sex, give birth, are slaughtered, and are entertainment. Killing and eating animals; seeing them have sex and give birth; and staging battles between them are all more or less daily occurrences for most domestic peoples. Further, these daily occurrences would provoke absolutely no moral questions or problems to domestic peoples.²³

Lastly, the “post-domestic” stage returns to the problems inaugurated by “the separation,” specifically addressing the moral consequences of the separation of human from animal in light of the thousands of years - but especially in light of the previous “domestic” phase - of human use of animals.²⁴ While questions of *use* will rarely if ever be raised (post-domestic peoples like meat as much as domestic peoples), questions of *treatment* most certainly will be raised.²⁵ Thus

20. Strictly speaking, this is not necessarily the case. The distinction between the sacred and the profane is in large part a way symbolizing permissible relations between the things of the world. The distinction does not entail a division into “good vs. evil” or “good vs. bad.” Rather, evil or bad are just as sacred as good things because a sacred thing is something that has been “set apart and forbidden.” They are merely just different forms of the sacred: the “sacred pure” or the “sacred impure.” What happens in many cases is that a sacred pure animal, such as a wolf, is transformed into a sacred impure animal. One is worshipped because it sustains the community while the other is exterminated because it threatens the community - or its livestock. See E.P. Evans (1987[1906]) *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals: The Lost History of Europe’s Animal Trials*. London: Faber and Faber; Jen Girgen (2003) “The Historical and Contemporary Prosecution and Punishment of Animals,” *Animal Law* 9: 97-133.

21. Although in my view, a groundhog is a noble and industrious creature worthy of great respect.

22. A dog on a farm is there to guard or herd; chickens provide meat and eggs - and bloodsport.

23. However, and quite interestingly, domestic European societies between the Middle Ages and the early twentieth century developed the practice of holding animals legally accountable for crimes before courts as though they were human. A donkey or pig accused of murder (and many donkeys and pigs were accused of murder) would receive a fair trial complete with a lawyer and an advocate in 1730 France; a pitbull accused of biting a human in twenty-first century Ontario would be summarily executed without being given a trial.

24. Hence, this paper and ‘animal studies’ in general is itself an example of post-domesticity.

25. This is an important point. Simply, what is called “animal rights” questions the *use* of animals regardless of how well they are treated (i.e., “humanely”), while “animal welfare” does not question use, but seeks to address *treatment* (e.g., no experience of pain or suffering at time of slaughter). Put another way, animal rights says that animals should not be used regardless of how they are treated; animal welfare says that it is permissible to use animals so long as they are treated well. Of course, some uses are seen as worse than others - seals for fur versus cows for

arises a concern for the “welfare” of the animal; although that concern for the welfare of the animal is rarely aimed at the animal itself, but at the guilt the human feels as a result of consuming that animal: “My omelette was from organic, free-range eggs; the cheese was from grass fed, free-range, hand-milked dairy cows.” Bulliet identifies two significant characteristics of post-domestic peoples. First, they are geographically and psychologically distant from the animals they consume. Animal producers do not want consumers to know how the animal products are made and this is fine with consumers because they do not want to know how the animal products they consume are made.²⁶ Post-domestic people feel great degrees of anxiety, guilt and shame when they see videos or pictures of intensive farming, slaughterhouses, processing plants and the like. Second, because post-domestic people do not see agricultural operations first hand - that is, animal sex, animal birth, animal death and animal fights - exposure to sex, death and violence is delayed until about puberty rather than occurring at an earlier stage of life. For Bulliet, it is no coincidence that the hippies - the first identifiable post-domestic generation - were advocates of drugs, casual sex and witnessed the invention of modern hardcore pornography as well as ultra-violent modern horror movies.²⁷ Thus, the psychological and geographical distance between the farm animal and the consumer results in a ‘return of the repressed.’ While Bulliet does not argue that the transition from domesticity to post-domesticity *caused* this ‘return of the repressed,’ there is a strong correlation. Hence, this same period - through the late sixties to the early eighties - saw ever increasing crime rates, especially of violent crime, increasing graphic violence and explicit sexuality in movies, television programs, and other forms of entertainment. While post-domestic people tend not to watch bloodsports (cockfights, dogfights and the like are revolting to them), many post-domestic peoples watch “natural” bloodsports - such as the popular “shark weeks” on Animal Planet or National Geographic TV, and programs showing the handling of dangerous creatures by humans point to continued fascination with the violent death of animals, so long as those animals are wild and in a ‘natural’ setting, of course.²⁸

leather. The problem, then, for animal welfare is the meaning of “humane treatment.” For instance, take the case of battery cages used in egg production. A successful animal welfare measure in the EU has been the phased-out abolition of battery cages, which are to be replaced by what are called “enriched cages.” In an enriched cage, each hen must have 600cm² of “useable space” - roughly the size of a piece of letter paper. This is certainly an improvement over the traditional battery cage, which is also roughly the size of a piece of letter paper, except up ten hens may have been stuffed into that space. All the same, under no reasonable definition of “humane” can forcing an animal to live in a cage the size of a piece of paper be considered “humane” - and, yet, “enriched cages” of this sort are now the pinnacle of good and proper animal husbandry techniques!

26. An anecdote: recently I taught an “animals and society” course for advanced middle and high school students. One of the students in the class lived on a sheep hobby farm with roughly 150 head. While she had seen deformed or weak lambs euthanized and placed on the compost heap, she had never seen one of the animals slaughtered - even though she routinely ate animals raised on her farm. Similarly, while she had seen the birth of lambs and had participated in the birthing, she had never seen animals have reproductive sex because all of them were artificially inseminated.

27. *Night of the Living Dead* (1969) and *Deep Throat* (1972) were both mainstream, commercial successes.

28. Another symptom: “The Dog Whisperer” is the show with the highest ratings on National Geographic TV, yet a significant portion of its animal-related programming is more or less “when animals attack” and “the most lethal animal.” This sort of programming was popularized by Steve Irwin, the “Crocodile Hunter,” who was killed by a stingray while filming a program. However, post-domestic peoples seem fairly comfortable with human bloodsports, such as “mixed martial arts” or “ultimate fighting” competitions.

5. Anthropomorphism, Anthropocentrism and Speciesism

Most accounts of human/animal relations begin - and end - with the concepts of anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism, and speciesism. These concepts can be easily be defined. Anthropomorphism refers to the projection of human characteristics on to animals who do not actually possess those characteristics. Hence, animals speak in movies, they wear clothes, they have occupations; they are, in effect, human except that they are not biologically human. Anthropomorphism is not limited to the projection of human characteristics on to animals. It also includes projections on to inanimate objects, be they natural (rocks) or artificial (machines) or divine (gods, angels and demons). Anthropocentrism refers to placing humans at the centre of the world and, thus, placing the interests of humans at the core of all actions and decisions. Consequently, the interests of humans will always trump the interests of other beings, be they animate or inanimate. Anthropocentrism often, but not necessarily, goes along with a religious belief - humans are created in the image of God or the gods, humans have a divinely sanctioned mission to exercise dominion over the world, and the like. Most cosmologies - for instance, the 'Great Chain of Being' or secular evolutionism - places the human (if not *man*) at the pinnacle of earthly beings. Anthropocentrism is usually criticized along the same lines as ethnocentrism: it is unbecoming to judge one culture on the basis of your own culture or, alternatively, to prefer your culture because it is *your culture*. Lastly, speciesism is a concept that is analogous to sexism, racism, ableism, and the like - the preference of one species (human) over another (animals) because humans possess a particular arbitrary characteristic (for instance, language, self-consciousness, knowledge of death, etc) while other beings do not.²⁹ It is argued that ascribing moral significance to humans because they can use language and not to animals because they cannot is comparable to ascribing moral significance to men because they have one set of genitalia and not another or ascribing moral significance to whites because of the colour of their skin.

Moral theory, which has dominated much recent discussion of human/animal relations (perhaps for just and obvious reasons), generally takes its point of departure from a combination of a critique of anthropocentrism and speciesism filtered through the resources of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. The thrust of their argument is that humans and animals alike possess certain characteristics in common, such as the capacity to suffer or inherent value.³⁰ For instance, drawing upon scientific evidence, the criticism of speciesism will say that any being possessing a vertebrae (i.e., a spinal cord that connects the brain to nerve endings and serves to transfer signals from one extremity to the other) is able to feel pain. One of the evolutionary reasons why animals possess a nervous system able to experience pain is to ensure that it can properly identify threats and act accordingly. Many are willing to accept the general point of this argument: chimpanzees and bonobos are sufficiently like humans in that they most likely experience pain in more or less the same way as humans, likewise many humans have seen their pets in pain and thus agree that it is possible for those animals to experience pain much in the same way that they do. Consequently, the criticism of speciesism and its moral implications are

29. See Peter Singer (2002[1975]) *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. New York: HarperCollins, chapter 5; Paola Cavalieri (2002) *The Animal Question: Why Non-Human Animals Deserve Human Rights*. Oxford: Oxford UP, chapter 4.

30. Often those arguing for animal welfare take the suffering approach while those arguing for animal rights take the inherent value approach.

easy to swallow in easy cases. Hard cases, such as fish, snakes, frogs, and birds are accordingly much harder to swallow. *Even if* a frog can experience pain, it is still *a frog* and *even if* a snake can experience pain, it is still gross, icky and disgusting. To counter anti-speciesist arguments, opponents of animal welfare will often point to scientific evidence indicating that animals do not feel pain in the same way as humans (for instance, their brains are not sufficiently complex or that they do not possess self-consciousness and therefore cannot understand pain) and, thus, anti-speciesists are actually anthropocentric and anthropomorphizing (*we* don't like to feel pain, *we* don't like *our* dogs to feel pain and, so, *we* don't like animals to feel pain). The moral status of animals is then determined by the clash of expert opinions and entrenched interests in 'the marketplace of ideas.' To an extent, those who make these arguments are correct: a particular human capacity, in this case the ability to feel pain and suffer, is used as the benchmark in determining whether other beings have moral significance or not.³¹ Anti-speciesists remain anthropocentrists.

A similar problem arises in animal rights theory. For instance, Tom Regan, in his *The Case for Animal Rights*, develops the concept "subject-of-a-life."³² The basis of Regan's theory is that "some nonhuman animals resemble normal humans in morally relevant ways."³³ Regan admits that the cut-off point presents "challenges." But, as with the animal welfare position, the standard remains that of a "normal human" and it involves the extension of rights to animals held by comparable "normal humans." Regan's theory is anthropocentric in the strong sense. Likewise, Gary Francione's "abolitionist approach" to animal rights correctly argues that animals should not be used for trivial human purposes (e.g., food, fashion, entertainment, and in most cases, research), but his theory is grounded in the concept of inherent value: the life an animal has is inherently valuable to that animal. On the surface, this is not objectionable. However, a significant problem arises in Francione's analysis. The primary way to recognize that an animal's life is inherently valuable to that animal is to remove animals from the status of property. Self-ownership, then, becomes the minimal standard for moral status.³⁴ Thus, the institution of property itself is never questioned; only a particular form of property is questioned.³⁵ Even if the animal rights theory is *better for animals* than the animal welfare theory, the animal rights theory remains caught up in a liberal metaphysics of rights, which is also strongly anthropocentric.³⁶

6. Humanism, Anti-Humanism and Post-Humanism

The study of animals has been taken in directions than other the criticism of speciesism found in the animal welfare and animal rights literature. This body of thought, often called "post-humanist," is much in line with the discussion of human/animal presented above in the third section and usually takes recent European philosophy as its point of departure. This literature is also in line with my suggestion that the animal welfare and animal rights positions are significantly and sev-

31. This could also be taken to imply that trees, rocks, oceans, cultures and any other thing without a nervous system has no moral significance.

32. Tom Regan (2004[1983]) *The Case for Animal Rights*, 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

33. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, xvi.

34. Gary L. Francione (1995) *Animals Property, and the Law*. Philadelphia: Temple UP.

35. The animal rights position, then, is just as moderate and reformist as the animal welfare position.

36. Matthew Calarco (2008) *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal From Heidegger to Derrida*. New York: Columbia UP; Matthew Calarco (2009) "Toward an Agnostic Animal Ethics," pp. 73-84, in Paola Cavalieri, *The Death of the Animal*. New York: Columbia UP.

erely limited by their commitment to a liberal and anthropocentric rights metaphysic - that is to say, it remains a humanism. Much recent European philosophy has focused its attention on this metaphysics of rights and humanism, which are seen to depend upon a coherent, autonomous and sovereign subject called 'man.' This line of criticism has been called - and calls itself - 'anti-humanism' and 'post-humanism.'³⁷

The anti-humanist criticism of humanism is especially important to those working in the field of 'animal studies' because the disciplinary sources that 'animal studies' draws upon is thoroughly humanist; that is, the disciplines are based upon what Foucault calls a "historical a priori," the concept of "man" is the foundation of and condition for all of what the French call "the human sciences."³⁸ Being a historical concept, "man" has a birth and, accordingly, "man" has a death. Perhaps the proliferation of "so-and-so studies" points to the slow, painful death of man.³⁹ The "post-humanities" or "post-humanism" is what comes after the death of man.⁴⁰ Post-humanism attempts to reconstruct the possibility of the basis of human knowledge without privileging the perspective or position of the human.⁴¹ A significant transformation is implied in much post-humanist thought: rather than transforming the world (or nature or whatever) *for the human*, the human itself must be transformed *for the world*. This transformation of the human would mean not only leaving behind previous conceptions of 'the human' or 'humanity,' but also transforming the most basic and primordial ways in which humans encounter the world, thus accepting that the world was not created for humans anymore than it was created for porcupines or oaks or sandstone. This transformation would also mean leaving behind the distinction between human and animal, as well as between humanity and animality - and, thus, questions of where one begins and the other ends.⁴²

7. Concluding Thoughts

Roughly 53 billion animals worldwide are used for human purposes annually - but this number does not include fish. The vast majority of these uses involves significant degrees of pain, misery and suffering - not to mention death. In order for animals to be produced on this scale, it is absolutely necessary that production occur under industrial conditions. If humans want to eat pork,

37. Louis Althusser (2005[1969]) *For Marx*. London: Verso; Jacques Derrida (1982[1968]) "The Ends of Man," pp. 111-36, in *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Michel Foucault (1994[1966]) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage. For extensive criticism of anti-humanist thought, see Slavoj Žižek (1999) *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso. Anti-humanist and post-humanist criticism should not be confused with the closely related question of 'animality' versus 'humanity,' that is, the being of animals versus the being of humans. Giorgio Agamben (2004[2002]) *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: Stanford UP; and Jacques Derrida (2008[1997]) *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham UP.

38. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, chapter 10.

39. "As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of a recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end." Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

40. See, for instance, Cary Wolfe (2003) *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

41. See, for instance, Donna Haraway (1991[]) "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," pp. 149-81, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Routledge.

42. This is what Joey Tribbiani calls a "cow's opinion" because "it is moo."

then there is no other option but to have farms with tens of thousands of pigs, to transport animals on giant and dangerous rigs, to slaughter them at giant abattoirs able to process tens of thousands of animals per day. From another perspective, each living human is responsible for the pain, suffering, misery and death of about ten animals per year. But this does not quite capture what is going on. Extensive animal use correlates strongly with wealth: the richer the society, the more animals it needs. For instance, each Canadian is responsible for the use of roughly twenty-four animals per year.⁴³ Likewise, in the United States, over ten billion animals are slaughtered annually for food alone, which works out to roughly thirty-three and a third animals per American.⁴⁴ (And, yet, it is the poorer society that is called barbaric for its treatment of animals; societies that use relatively and absolutely fewer animals.) If international development goals continue to aspire to bring the third world to the same standard of living that is enjoyed in the richest countries, then the number of animals painfully exploited by humans will increase proportionately. By comparison, fewer than 180 million humans - civilian and military, including environmental and health consequences of war such as famine and influenza - died in the course of the ten most destructive wars of the past hundred and fifty years, which was by far the most lethal period of human history.⁴⁵ More positively, roughly half of Canadian households have either a dog, a cat or both. Thus, not all relationships with animals are entirely evil. However, in a generally post-domestic society such as Canada, this is the primary, if not exclusive, face-to-face relation humans have with animals. The number of pets in Canada is - by best guesses - only slightly greater than the number of animals used in research each year.⁴⁶ The subjective experience of

43. Numbers collected from a variety of sources, including livestock, research, and fur. These numbers do not include fish (numbers are calculated by the metric tonne and only include commercial use), eggs, pets, zoos, rodeos, and the like. Even without counting those animals, total annual animal use by Canadians tops 720 million - more than 98% for food purposes.

44. The same disclaimer applies to the United States: the human use of animals is far greater than a mere ten billion animals per year.

45. Another point of comparison: Auschwitz, the most efficient of the Nazi death camps could only kill about 20,000 humans per day; the Smithfield Packing Plant in North Carolina can slaughter, butcher and process over 32,000 animals per day, every day of the year - nearly 12 million animals per year. See Charles Patterson (2002) *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*. New York: Lantern Books, especially chapters three and five. A further point of comparison: high estimates of casualties (civilian and military) during World War II, the most destructive war ever fought, are in the range of 72 million people. The war lasted seventy-two months, thus averaging one million casualties per month - the same rate of death as found at the Smithfield Packing Plant.

46. Of which not an insignificant portion are dogs and cats. A good percentage of dogs and cats kept as pets ultimately come from what are called puppy mills - where animals are used under industrial conditions for the sole purpose of producing other animals for sale as pets. While "reputable breeders" who produce "well-bred" animals may not operate on the same scale, they operate in the exact same way: the production of young animals for sale. For "reputable breeders," what is important is maintaining control over the bloodline through managed in-breeding. Hence, potentially "high quality" dogs are kept as potential breeders and put on the dog show circuit in order to demonstrate and advertise the excellence of the bloodline while the rest of the animals are sold to consumers at exceptionally high prices, usually with the proviso that they be spayed or neutered. Sterilizing the animals is not demanded out of a concern for the plight of unwanted and unexpected puppies or kittens that ultimately end up at shelters (according to the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, nearly 49% of admitted animals are euthanized - nearly 73% of them being cats) or for any health benefits (dogs going in to heat significantly increases their risk of developing breast cancer) where they become someone else's problem and expense, but rather in controlling the genetic material of the sold animal and thus protecting the purity of the bloodline. Pure-breeding is what polite company calls in-breeding when there is a perceived need to 'protect' the bloodline, regardless of whether that

love and companionship humans have with their pets is but an ephemeral manifestation of the objective experience of violence, pain, suffering and death experienced by the vast majority of animals in our societies. Put in different words, our societies - all societies - are structured around the increasingly invisible exploitation of animals and, as time goes on, this exploitation will only become more intensive and more extensive, both relatively and absolutely. Our societies would not and could not exist without the current system of animal exploitation - no animals, no society. Unfortunately, we - inhumanists from the social sciences and humanities - have not yet begun to develop adequate concepts (although the assault on traditional animal welfare and animal rights by the so-called "post-humanists" is a step in the right direction) and, until we do, it is unlikely that the "question of the animal" will be adequately posed, let alone addressed.

bloodline is the British royal family or Irish Wolfhounds; however, in reality, this is little more than eugenics.