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**Book Review**

***The Animal Inside:  
Essays at the Intersection of Philosophical Anthropology and Animal Studies***

**Geoffrey Dierckxsens, Rudmer Bijlsma, Michael Begun, and Thomas Kiefer  
(Eds.)**

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**Reviewed by  
Diego L. Forte  
University of Buenos Aires, Argentina  
E-mail: [dforte@filo.uba.ar](mailto:dforte@filo.uba.ar)**

Animals and their relationship with humans have always been subject of western thought. They have been defined by this connection. In the last decades we have seen a growing interest in Critical Animal Studies, mostly related to environmental topics, medical ethics and animal rights, involving disciplines such as sociology, political and cultural studies, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, etc. These studies have been, since their beginning, bounded by the human/nonhuman duality imposed by the classical thought. From the Pre-Socratics to Deleuze and Derrida, this perspective has always been a structuring one. According to Western philosophy, in order to understand what defines humanity as such, we have to start understanding what differentiates us from animals. This elaboration works both ways: defining us as humans but also defining *them* as nonhumans and, hence, “the others”. In this sense, *The Animal Inside* throws new light, immersing itself into the discussions that help building social thought about nonhuman animals as we conceive it today. The perspective of this work is not ethical or moral, but a philosophical-anthropological one, even though ethical and moral concern is always near when it comes to the link between species.

This book has two parts: the first one, chapters 1-6, addresses the animal and human relation through an existential perspective. The second part (chapters 7-12) focuses on what constitutes being human and the way in which being human is the same, similar or different from other animals.

Chapter 1, “Promethean Tricks and Thyestean Feasts: Bloody Sacrifice and Vegetarianism in Ancient Cultures”, by Giulia Sissa, focuses on classical thought and animals as food, applying Lévi-Strauss’s structural analysis. Adopting an anthropological perspective, the essay discusses the meaning of animal sacrifice in the narrative thinking of

archaic Greek poetry, the epics of Hesiod and Homer, and the opposed vision found in Pythagoras's philosophy of daily life. According to Sissa, Vegetarianism offers an explicit normative response to the euphoric and reassuring validation of a bloody diet. In Hesiod's narrative sacrifice celebrates the disjunction of humans and gods reactivating Prometheus's offence. The anatomy of the victim establishes some differences: certain tissues go to the gods and others are exclusively for humans, following the logic of "pensée mythique" as defined by Lévi-Strauss. On the other side, the violence of killing them for consumption came to be perceived as murderous. Hence, to eat meat is a criminal transgression. And since animal sacrifice did not exist in the Golden Age, the ritual is a human invention.

Chapter 2, "*Kata Phusin: Ancient and Contemporary Perspectives on the Hermeneutic of Animality*", by Thomas Kiefer, is dedicated to human animality and the activities that define humans as a specific kind of animal. Kiefer defines "hermeneutic of animality" in relation to *kata phusin* or living "according to nature". This hermeneutic, following Kiefer, constitutes a blueprint for human life, providing frameworks for human existence. Kiefer postulates that the philosophical confusion we live in these times is due to a lack of a coherent hermeneutic of animality to reconcile our experience of the world with what we call science. His proposal engages a positivistic vision that includes biological differences taking part in social processes as elements to be corrected in order to create a consistent blueprint for human life.

Rudmer Bijlsma, in chapter 3 ("The Animal in Early Modern Philosophical Anthropology"), focuses on the development of western thinking about nonhuman animals. Starting on Descartes's view of human beings as metaphysically exceptional, Bijlsma takes a trip through the works of Spinoza and Hume, to examine the development of mechanistic and naturalistic thought in the light of an ethical perspective. For Bijlsma, a more friendly perspective towards animals is advocated by Hume, and it is so due to a more deflationary account of theological nature, even though when his philosophy is radically mechanical.

Chapter 4, "An Insect Fallen on Its Back", by Jo Bogaerts, examines the use of animal-related metaphors and figures in Sartre's philosophy and Kafka's literary work. The essay postulates the inability of Sartre's ontology to account for animal existence, since it discriminates two differentiated modes of being: animals are an illustration of the meaningless of existence. The free and spontaneous consciousness designated by the *being-for-itself* is different from the mind that perceives it in that the object is, and can only be, identical to itself. Nonhuman animals, specifically higher species, are closer to the being-for-itself than they are to the being-in-itself. For Kafka too, animal is what we have, in Sartre's words, when we lost the man.

In chapter 5 ("What Is Distinctively Human? Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre on the Relation between Humans and Animals"), Michiel Meijer and Rob Compaijen bring a critical perspective to the human-animal relation in the works of Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre focusing on human agency. According to the authors, Taylor's view on animals differs from MacIntyre's in that he stresses the specifically human capacity of being

sensitive to moral standards by means of higher order evaluation, which animals lack. For MacIntyre, the human capacity for evaluation and reflection is overemphasized. Such overemphasis would result in glossing over the continuity between humans and animals. Though, Taylor and MacIntyre reach the same conclusion: the typical aspect of human beings is the capacity for higher evaluation.

Chapter 6, “Better a Human than a Lion (!?) Age-Old Human Superiority Fights Reason”, by Lantz Miller, takes historical and contemporary prioritization of the human form of life above other animals. Miller argues that while *Homo sapiens* may not be superior to other species, that fact alone renders no moral judgement against our species. For Miller, evolutionary fate has left us in a role of stewardship which means that all life is in our hands; we can still, as species, be equal to those whose lives are in our hands.

Part II, *Aspects of Human and Animal Nature*, opens with the essay “The Imagination of Animals: Rilke, Kafka, and the Philosophy and Literature of Embodied Cognition”, by Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, which constitutes chapter 7. This work focuses on how literature challenges philosophy and science questioning their presumptions and limitations regarding human-animal distinctions. Analysing Rilke’s poems and Kafka’s animal stories, the author aims to demonstrate that narrative techniques are operating, in these two cases, as a tool to imagine the animal’s position. Perception, imagination, and mimesis become themes common to both literary and phenomenological reflection. Rilke and Kafka attempt to approach the animal interior through imagination.

In chapter 8, “Werewolves: A Reconsideration of Hobbes’s State of Nature from the Perspective of Biopolitics”, Herbert De Vriese focuses on Hobbes’s famous dictum *homo homini lupus*, as an illustration of a major paradigm shift in political philosophy. The classical doctrine of politics viewed man as essentially a social and political being. For that reason, classical approaches to politics remained within the boundaries of a civilized and distinctly human context, making no strict separation between politics and ethics. According to De Vriese, the biopolitical turn in the history of Western political thought can be illustrated and evaluated by Hobbes’s dictum. Moving from the lone wolf over the mad wolf to the werewolf, in physical appearance as well as in cultural imaginary, the animal finally came to symbolize a new political paradigm.

“The Genuine Problem of the Human Being: Nietzsche, Animality, and History” (chapter 9), by Michael Begun, concentrates on a problem posed by Nietzsche: animal forgetfulness and human history. According to Begun, the problem for Nietzsche consists of “raising an animal that may promise” in the form of a human being, which relates not only to the philosophical use of animals and animality through Nietzsche’s work but to a more specific way in which he sees the differences between human and nonhuman animals. Nietzsche envisions a more radical separation of human beings from their animality by means of a potentially transformational historical awareness. He sees “a great promise” emerging from the separation of mankind from its animality.

In chapter 10, “The Hermeneutical Animal: Making Sense of Animal Otherness ‘in the Flesh’”, Geoffrey Dierckxsens argues that Paul Ricoeur’s and Richard Kearney’s

hermeneutical anthropologies of the flesh demonstrate that our sense-relation with the world is mediated by texts and narratives in general. Narratives arbitrate the way we conceive animals as others that are part of this sense-relation, and therefore play a salient role in how we come to understand animals. The upside of a hermeneutical approach to the human-animal relation is that it not only views animals as other affective beings, but also searches for a (dia-) critical understanding/interpretation of this otherness. It is at this point that hermeneutics departs from both a deconstructionist and a purely phenomenological approach to the human-animal relation.

In chapter 11, Matthew Calarco argues that Gilles Deleuze provides “essential tools and concepts for the task of developing alternative ways of conceiving human-animal relations”. Deleuze’s concepts of “flesh” and “meat” allow approaching the human-animal relation along the line of other, nontraditional features that constitute our being human in relation to the animal. In analysing Francis Bacon’s painting of deformed bodies, Deleuze shows that, like animals, we are also affective flesh, vulnerable to suffering and at the permanent risk of becoming “dead meat”. This human feature of “being-toward-meat” implies an ethical responsibility. This responsibility lies in the experience that we are possibly meat, like the animal, which invites us to rethink the possibilities of our relation with animals.

In the final chapter, “On Laboratory Life for a Wired Object: Mirror Neurons and the New Red Peter”, Babette Babich considers the use and misuse of animals in the biological sciences to reflect upon the broader theme of philosophical objectivity. After a discussion of the accidental discovery of mirror neurons, and a reflection on the ethnography of laboratory research and reportings, as well as a review of the decimation of macaque monkeys both in their wild range and in their destruction as objects of laboratory research, Babich suggests that our aesthetic preferences determine our judgements and are not surprisingly tilted in favour of prejudice.

The division between general explorations (Part I) and aspects of human and animal nature (Part II) allows a discussion on concepts of wide range (hermeneutics and the human-nonhuman animals connections) with particular social practices involving animals (analytics of specific representations and uses of nonhuman animals). As a whole, this work offers a deep analysis over the most widespread western ideas on animals: although still dealing with human-nonhuman centrality as axis, it brings new thinking on longstanding problems. From Hesiod, Homer and Pythagoras to laboratory practices, the different approaches present in *The Animal Inside* keep always the eye on nonhuman as *the other* who is alive too. Even when sometimes the essays adopt stances that are conflicting with each other, they hold a unity in the discussion they pose, illustrating the processes by which today’s animal representations were constructed. In sum, it is a work than can be not only useful but influential in several disciplines that adopt nonhuman animals as research object.